

# **Transition planning for young people with severe learning disabilities: social positions and power relationships**

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**Transition planning for young people with severe learning disabilities:  
social positions and power relationships**

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A Participative Action Research methodology was used to investigate whether six young people with severe learning disabilities were able to express their views and aspirations during their transition planning meeting. Although the young people were able to make choices and communicate their views and aspirations in an often assertive manner, this did not guarantee that they were meaningfully included. Professionals and school staff were unaccustomed to including the young people which meant that they often used language that excluded them. The social positions of stakeholders and their associated power relationships were already well established, which meant that the professionals held the most privileged position during the transition meetings. It was unclear how the professionals would relinquish their power to ensure the young people were meaningfully included. This study proposes that the structure of transition planning should change if meaningful inclusion is to take place.

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# Chapter 1.

## Introduction

The transition from childhood to adulthood is a time of increased independence, important life decisions and greater responsibilities. While this transition may be daunting for most young people, the transition to adulthood for individuals with disabilities can provide greater challenges. Young people with disabilities often have fewer life opportunities and less autonomy than their non-disabled peers. To ensure that individuals with disabilities have a more positive transition, schools are required to follow a standardised procedure called ‘transition planning’. This is where key stakeholders meet to prepare for the educational and care needs of the young person once they leave school. In the UK, transition planning begins at fourteen years to ensure adequate preparation of services for the young people when they leave school at nineteen.

### 1.1. Background

I first became aware of transition planning whilst working as a speech and language therapist at a special school for people with severe and complex learning disabilities. In the two and a half years I was at the school, only three of the forty-five young people that I worked with attended their transition meetings, even though the inclusion of young people in their transition planning had been government policy since 1983 (Hendey & Pascall 2002) and law since the Education Act of 2003 (Department of Education 2003).

At first it did not occur to me that excluding young people from their planning was wrong. I had just finished university and was inexperienced. I participated in several meetings where I expressed my views as to what was best for the young people without involving them in the process.

As I spent time forming relationships with the young people, I came to realise that they had the skills and opinions necessary to participate in their transition planning. I began to question why they were not fully included in their meetings: if the young people attended, their involvement was often superficial and they had minimal opportunities to express their views. Furthermore, I doubted whether they understood what was being discussed, and its importance. I became very aware that the professionals at the meeting made no modification to the way they communicated when the young people were present.

Whilst working at the school, I was involved in implementing *Listen Up* (Mencap 2004). Listen Up is a programme that encourages and supports young people with learning disabilities to report abuse and make complaints (evaluated in Chapter 4). Young people of different ages and abilities produced books using pictures of things that they liked and disliked. The books were used to encourage staff to tailor services to the individual needs of the young people. All of the young people involved in the project were able to communicate their likes and dislikes with an appropriate level of visual support. This project demonstrated to me that young people could express their preferences, which convinced me that they could participate in their transition planning.

The exclusion of young people from transition planning was not unique to my school. The study of Ward et al. (2003) indicated that the exclusion of people with learning disabilities was widespread. Ward et al. reported that a quarter of the 272 young people in the study had no involvement in their transition planning. Furthermore, forty-two percent had a tokenistic involvement. This implies that one third of the young people were included meaningfully. However, the data was collected through questionnaires to families, who may have had limited expectations.

Whilst working for the National Health Service, it was clear to me that other schools in the area were also failing to include people with learning disabilities in transition planning. I decided to act to see if there was a way that I could meaningfully include young people with severe learning disabilities in their transition planning. Through studying for this thesis, I hope to learn more about how I can support young people to express their thoughts, feelings and aspirations, whilst encouraging professionals to change their practices and to become more inclusive.

## 1.2. Research questions

After an extensive literature search and observations of transition meetings I formulated the following research questions:

1. Were the young people able to exercise personal power during their transition planning meeting and their preparation sessions?
2. How did this compare to other contexts? Were they able to exercise personal power in the classroom?
3. Were the young people meaningfully included by other stakeholders in their transition planning meeting?
4. How did this compare to their inclusion by other stakeholders in the classroom?

These questions helped me to explore the social position of the young people and the associated power relationships that influenced their participation during their transition planning meeting.

## 1.3. Thesis organisation

**Chapter Two** The contrasting theories of power of Friere, Habermas, Foucault and Bourdieu are discussed. The literature demonstrates that power is an inherent part of all relationships, however young people with learning disabilities experience greater inequalities by virtue of their disability and child status. The chapter demonstrates there are many initiatives that aim to increase the participation of young people with learning disabilities, however they are not always translated into practice.

**Chapter Three** Existing literature exploring the inclusion of young people with severe learning disabilities is reviewed using the conceptual framework of Clegg et al. (2001). This framework identifies personal characteristics of the young people that may contribute to either their successful or unsuccessful inclusion in their transition planning as well as the views and attitudes of individuals that work with this client group. This chapter demonstrates that the learning disability population is a diverse group and that an individual's ability to make choices should be judged on a case by case basis.

**Chapter Four** I discuss the methodological approaches that were used in this study. The phenomenological approach of Participatory Action Research was used to facilitate the young people to express their views. The cycles of action and reflection allowed the researcher and collaborators to be flexible and responsive in the way that data was collected. A combination of Critical Discourse Analysis and thematic coding was used to analyse the data as it was predominately language based. The use of Critical Discourse Analysis complemented an action research methodology as both are concerned with social change. I also describe the research procedure and the tools used to assist the young people to express their views.

**Chapter Five** This chapter explores the ability of the young people to exercise personal power. The data shows that the young people had some understanding of self and the choices they made for their futures were influenced by their interests, strengths and support needs. Although the young people demonstrated they could communicate their views and exercise personal power, this did not automatically mean that they were able to meaningfully participate in their transition meeting.

**Chapter Six** For the young people to achieve communicative rationality, the other stakeholders at the transition meeting have to believe that the young people have a right to speak and to be listened to. This chapter demonstrates that the degree in which the young people were included in their transition meeting was dependent on the ability of stakeholders to modify their communication and provide support strategies. Many stakeholders found this challenging: as a result the language they used maintained their belief that the professionals were more dominant and held legitimate knowledge.

**Chapter Seven** Both the young person's ability to exercise personal power and their interactions with other stakeholders are investigated, but in alternative contexts to transition planning. This helps to draw comparisons across contexts and identify any issues that were unique to the transition planning process.

**Chapter Eight** The data presented in the previous three chapters is discussed with particular reference to the social position of the young people in relationship to other stakeholders. Important observations are made about the structure of transition planning meetings and how this prevents the meaningful inclusion of young people with severe learning disabilities.

**Chapter Nine** This thesis is concluded by summarising the main themes of this study.

## 1.4. Definitions

Throughout this thesis I refer to my collaborators as *individuals with learning disabilities* or *young people with learning disabilities*. In deciding what was the most appropriate terminology to use, I was faced with the paradox that these terms were labels themselves, which are potentially disempowering (in Chapter 3 I discuss the effects of labels on identity). However, advocacy researchers argue that the use of these terms is important as real change can only occur if people are represented as a collective.

In the study of Simons (1992), fifty-two self advocates were interviewed to identify how they wish to be defined. The majority of the self-advocates reported that if a label had to be used they preferred ‘people with learning disabilities’. Hastings & Remington (1993) also found that ‘learning disability’ was rated less negatively than other disability labels.

Other terminology that has been used in this thesis can be found in the glossary.

## **Chapter 2.**

### **Literature review: Theories of power**

The literature will be reviewed across two chapters. This chapter starts with a discussion of how learning disabilities are defined. This will help to demonstrate how power can be a powerful construct in the lives of people with learning disabilities. We then investigate some of the theoretical perspectives of power and the implications for individuals with learning disabilities. The chapter concludes with some specific examples of initiatives that aim to increase the participation of children and young people.

The following literature review chapter explores the process of transition planning for young people with learning disabilities. The transition process is conceptualised through the framework of Clegg et al. (2001). The challenges of transition are discussed with careful consideration to the power relationships at play.

#### **2.1. Defining learning disabilities**

There is some inconsistency worldwide in the way that learning disabilities are defined and classified. Whilst in the United Kingdom we use the term ‘learning disabilities’. In the United States the term ‘mental retardation’ is more common, while ‘learning difficulties’ is typically, but not always, used to define children who have a specific difficulty, such as dyslexia. Furthermore, in Australasia the preferred terminology is ‘intellectual impairment’. This at times can make it difficult to find appropriate literature concerning definition and classification of learning disabilities, especially when the majority of this literature comes from the United States.

There are a number of different classification systems that are used to describe individuals with learning disabilities (Sinason 1992, Luckasson et al. 1992, Gates 1997,

Emerson 1995). Most of these have become outdated, especially with the arrival of an updated classification system from The World Health Organisation (2001): this is accepted by most as the most “reliable and valid indicator of learning disability” (O’Brien 2001). This classification system aims to set out a common language for defining and classifying learning disability.

The classification systems consistently define learning disabilities as a period of either incomplete or arrested development, where consequently certain skills may become impaired, such as expressive or receptive language skills or self-care. Each classification provides a slightly different way of defining the possible impairments, but broadly they fit within “cognitive, language, motor and social abilities” (The World Health Organisation 2001). To be considered a true learning disability these difficulties must manifest before 18 years, whilst the brain is still developing. Difficulties that manifest after this time would be attributed to a different cause.

The classification systems of Luckasson et al., Emerson and The World Health Organisation also specify the level of intellectual functioning that is required before the diagnosis of a learning disability should be given. Individuals should achieve an IQ score below 70 and individuals with severe learning disabilities an IQ score below 50. The use of standardised intellectual testing is controversial, especially when historically IQ testing was used in isolation to diagnose learning disabilities. Its critics report performance problems due to fatiguing and lack of child motivation (Barnett 1986). Moreover, limitations have been found when IQ tests have been used with individuals from different cultural backgrounds, or those that have received inadequate schooling (O’Brien 2001). O’Brien does however argue that intelligence tests should be available, but only if the data is used within the wider context of the individual’s life, for example environmental and social factors should also be considered.

The classification system of Emerson begins to think beyond the impairment and suggests that with support an individual with severe learning disabilities can take part in everyday activities. However, this is developed much further in the classification system of The World Health Organisation. Unlike other classification systems, this also considers the social aspects that may influence a person’s disability and not only their impairment. The child is framed within the context of the family and wider society. The influence of family upbringing on child development is acknowledged as well as the effects of family support on the individual’s well-being. Furthermore, the classification system considers the factors that conciliate between an individual’s capacity to carry out an activity and their performance of that activity within their society. Within one context

the individual may demonstrate a skill, but in another there may be sufficient barriers which affect the execution of that same skill. These barriers can include accessibility of the environment as well as individual attitudes to disability.

The benefits of the WHO classification system are popularised in the main by professionals working with people with learning disabilities. O'Brien (2001) and Rosenbaum & Stewart (2004) discuss the influence of the system on service delivery and specific therapy interventions. In contrast disability researchers and theorists tend to favour ways of understanding disability that originated in activism and the experiences of disabled people: for example the medical and social models of disability, which are discussed in the following section. While the WHO system was produced by professionals in consultation with disabled people, the medical and social models were developed by disabled people trying to make sense of their lives. Although this distinction exists, subscription to either encourages individuals to think about the complex nature of disability.

## **2.2. Models of disability**

There is a wealth of literature that describes how people with learning disabilities are excluded or have unequal rights in many areas of their life (Beresford 1995, Shakespeare 1996, Walmsley & Downer 1997, Barnes et al. 1999, Kelly 2000, Copeland 2002). The medical and social models offer two contrasting ways of understanding how and why people with disabilities are excluded.

This section briefly discusses both of these models and subsequently suggests why both have become outdated. In isolation these models do not adequately address the complexities of disabled peoples lives (Shakespeare 2008). As Priestley (2003) argues learning disability is a complex phenomenon.

### **2.2.1. The medical and social models of disability**

Priestley (2003) argues that the medical model in the past has monopolised academic understanding of disability, especially in medically or therapeutically orientated research. However, the social model has become a stronger influence on contemporary disability studies and has been utilised as an important test for government policies. The distinction between these two conceptualisations of disability originated from the ideas of the

Union of Physically Impaired Against Segregation (UPIAS) in the 1970's, but was first published in an academic context by Oliver (1983).

Priestley (2003) provides a useful summary of the theoretical differences between these two models. The medical model can broadly be understood as a “biological and psychological” explanation of disability where the individuals physical and/or cognitive functioning is assessed alongside the level of adjustment. In contrast, the social model provides a “cultural and structural” explanation of disability where a combination of society's values and representations of culture, as well as the political economy and disabling environments contribute to our understanding of disability.

Oliver (1990) states that a medicalised explanation of disability fails to acknowledge that illness and disability are two separate entities, as disability is seen as a consequence of the physical condition. Instead he argues that disability is a product of society's attitudes and barriers, such as “individual prejudice to institutional discrimination, from inaccessible buildings to unusable transport systems, from segregated education to excluding work arrangements, and so on” rather than purely the impairment. As a consequence, society's attitudes and barriers oppress people with disabilities. This is reinforced by Oliver's colleague Finkelstein (2002), also an original member of UPIAS:

“Disability is something imposed on top of our impairments by the way we are unnecessarily isolated and excluded from participation in society.”

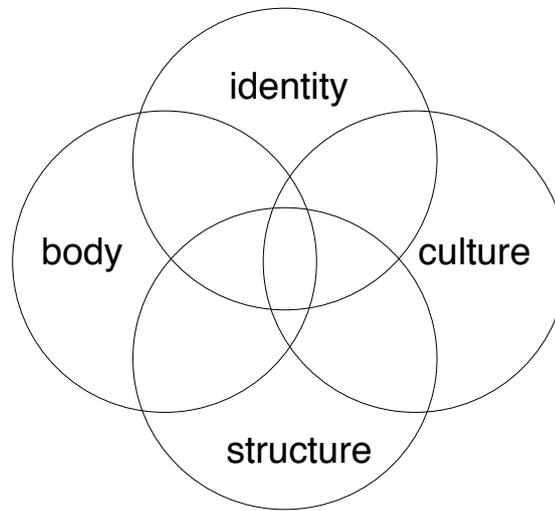
Kaplan (1999) argues that when adjustments are made to society, the barriers that disable people are removed. This suggests that “exclusion is neither necessary or inevitable” (Priestley 2003).

Shakespeare (2008) argues that this total rejection of the medical model of disability by social model activists creates a discourse which suggests that medicine is to be avoided, which is unfair:

“..it is not medicine, but inappropriate medicalisation which is the root of the problem.”

Shakespeare further argues that researchers of medical ethics and sociology have made equally valuable contributions to the understanding of disability.

French (1993), Morris (1993), Priestley (2003) and Shakespeare (2008) all agree that the social model in isolation fails to acknowledge the complexities of disabled peoples' lives. The experience of living with an impairment on a daily basis is neglected along



**Figure 2.1.:** Priestley’s model for conceptualising disability

with the value and importance of personal experience. All suggest that a more holistic view of disabilities is required.

Priestley (2003) argues that it would be useful to overlap the four theoretical approaches: identity, culture, structure and body as “overlapping areas of concern rather than as discreet conceptual boxes [that fit with either the social or medical model of disability]” (Figure 2.1). By doing this, the model shows that biology and environmental/social processes are all crucial for understanding disability. For instance, Abberley (1987) argues that the physical characteristics of our bodies are influenced by social processes, such as diet, accidents and the influence of cultural practices.

This conceptualisation of disability demonstrates the complex nature of disability and the challenges in defining it. Although Priestley (2003) suggests that this model is useful for understanding disability, he also suggests that it fails to provide explanations for the dynamic relationships between the theoretical concepts. This is a gap in the research and continues to be a difficulty for researchers who are trying to produce a more generalised social theory of disability.

## **Neurodiversity**

An alternative way of understanding disability is the concept of *neurodiversity*. This is the belief that atypical neurological development is a normal human variation and should be recognised as part of human diversity (Baron-Cohen & Cohen 1993, Baker

2006, Billington 2006). Neurodiversity is typically associated with people on the autistic spectrum, but is now more widely used by individuals with dyspraxia, dyslexia, ADHD and tourettes syndrome.

Like the social model of disability, the concept of neurodiversity was developed in resistance to medicalised ways of defining disability and too became a civil rights movement. Individuals disliked being categorised with a disability, when they believed that “diversity was not inherently collective” (Baker 2006).

Advocates of neurodiversity believe that individuality is something that should be valued. Fisher (2007) reports that many parents with children with disability come to value difference, rather than perceiving it as a problem or an abnormality. A parent is quoted as saying:

“I hate the word ‘normal’. It gets used so much — even therapists use it. And you think, ‘well why is he not normal because what is normal? There’s no definition’.”

Therefore, the presence of a condition is accepted rather than attempting to find a cure.

Research into neurodiversity does not consider individuals with learning disabilities. However, there are parallels with other aspects of disability studies: both value difference and identify individual strengths and needs rather than trying to fix the disability.

## Summary

Disability is defined either through classification systems or through models of disability depending on whether the context is therapeutic, academic or activism. The current thinking is that a holistic definition of disability is required, one that considers both the impairment and the social barriers to disability. Without this, there is a failure to convey the complex nature of the lives of people with disabilities.

A key theme of the varying definitions of disability is the presence of oppression through the isolation or exclusion of people with disabilities from participating in society. Shakespeare & Watson (2002) argue that the majority of individuals with a disability are likely to experience oppression at some point in their lives. The following section explores theories of power and their implications for people with learning disabilities.

## 2.3. Oppression: understanding power

Oppression is one of the primary methods for studying power (Di Terlizzi & Cambridge 1999) and is defined as:

“the (deliberate) abuse or (unwitting) misuse of power” (Thompson 2002)

Oppression manifests when power is either unfairly or unevenly distributed amongst individuals.

Shakespeare (2008) argues that individuals with disabilities are likely to experience oppression at some point in their lives. However, he points out that some mis-define disability as oppression, which is not appropriate, as people with disabilities may not experience oppression all of the time.

In order to understand oppression, one needs to understand power. Thompson (2002) states that power is a challenge to define, as it is a complex subject which is understood differently depending on the theoretical perspective taken. This section briefly explores some of these alternative perspectives of power by looking at the theories of four influential contributors to the field: Freire, Habermas, Foucault and Bourdieu. This section concludes with an explanation of how power inequalities manifest themselves in the lives of people with learning disabilities.

### 2.3.1. Freire: ‘a culture of silence’

Freire’s understanding of power is played out in his theory of ‘a culture of silence’ (Freire 1972). He argues that a ‘culture of silence’ exists as oppressed individuals are not listened to by the dominant members within their society. The dominant members prescribe the values, knowledge and language of the oppressed through schools and other institutions, which subsequently silences their voices. This imposed silencing by the dominant members does not mean that the oppressed have nothing to say, but suggests that they are not yet able to reflect upon their views and beliefs and take action.

The concept of a ‘culture of silence’ materialised from the effects of the Spanish and Portuguese colonising Latin America. The colonisation created unequal relations between land owners and peasants with the land owners becoming a dominant presence. The native people eventually accepted the domination of the settlers and the language

and values of the settlers became acculturated. The native people became both culturally and politically alienated. By acculturating the values of the settlers, the native people reinforced the status quo.

Freire (1973) argues that people who are dominated are not always conscious that they are being dominated. He suggests that there are three levels before an individual achieves critical consciousness and realise they have become oppressed.

The first level of consciousness is *semi-intransitive conscience*. In language when a verb does not act upon an object it is considered intransitive. Similarly, when an individual's consciousness fails to challenge their world, their consciousness can also be considered intransitive (Heaney 1995). During this stage of consciousness, the individual becomes inactive and averting and is unable to recognise the contradictions within their society. Heaney states that the individual is only concerned with surviving and is therefore impervious to difficulties outside of this.

Freire argues that individuals only progress to the second level of consciousness once they take some power and begin to question issues arising within their society. Individuals must then begin to talk with others about their thoughts. This shift in consciousness is now transitive, as the individual is beginning to react to problems.

The second level of consciousness is *naive transivity*. At this level of consciousness, individuals are now questioning problems within their society, however there is a tendency to oversimplify the issues, for example individuals may become nostalgic about how their life use to be, underestimate the skills of other people, or may just be disinterested in further investigation of the problem. Although the problem may be pertinent to the whole of the individual's society, the individual often believes that the problem is unique to himself. Freire argues that naive transivity is never completely surmounted: there may be some problems that we respond to more critically than others. Furthermore, the ability to become more critical requires a lifetime of learning.

The final level of consciousness is *critical transivity*. The individual is now able to deeply interpret problems by reflecting upon their views and values. Through reflection, they are then able to reconsider and possibly alter their beliefs. This level is characterised by action rather than passivity.

During times of transition, when the oppressed begin to take action, Freire (1972) argues that the dominant may use their power to form new types of action that ensure

that their dominance continues. Morrow & Torres (2002) states that these new types of action can consist of:

- taking power by force
- cultural invasion
- manipulation through communicative distortions

Cultural invasion is when the dominant group tries to infiltrate the “cultural context” (Morrow & Torres 2002) of a group and then impose their own world view. This course of action deprives the oppressed group of an understanding of alternative ways of being.

Distorted communication has its routes in psychoanalysis and involves the identification of distortions in an individual’s use of language, such as the use of inappropriate grammatical constructs, omissions, the use of faulty words, stereotyped language, slips and defences and so on. These distortions are then traced back to identify their origins within the individual’s life history with the aim of resolving them (Morrow & Torres 2002, Crossley 2004)

This suggests that individuals can be manipulated through communicative distortions in the following ways:

- the dominant may use language distortions to purposefully subordinate individuals
- the dominant may develop new language distortions that subordinate individuals
- the dominant may not listen to interpretations made about their communication distortions, so they are not eliminated

This view of the world is shared by Habermas (1984), particularly in his earlier definitions of critical theory (Crossley 2004). Habermas’ understanding of power is discussed in the following section. Freire’s understanding of power has received some criticisms. These criticisms are discussed in Section 2.3.3.

### **2.3.2. Habermas: the ‘ideal speech situation’**

Distorted communication was central to Habermas’ early understanding of power. Like Freire, he believed that distortions in communication created power inequalities in society. In order to combat distorted communication, Habermas (1984) developed a theory

of communicative action. This theory stated that “dialogue and democratic participation” were crucial for successful social transformation:

“The concept of communicative action presupposes the use of language as a medium for a kind of reaching understanding, in the course of which participants, through relating to a world, reciprocally raise validity claims that can be accepted or contested.” (Habermas 1984)

Habermas argues that unequal power relationships can be resolved through rational discourse. He believes that in theory people are similar enough and therefore should be able to come together in general agreement. Central to the concept of communicative action was the ‘ideal speech situation’, which is part of what he terms ‘rational discourse’. Habermas proposed that if communication partners wished for a communication exchange to be successful, they needed to follow the five basic principles of the ‘ideal speech situation’.

- Every subject with the competence to speak and act is allowed to take part in a discourse
- Everyone is allowed to question any assertion whatever
- Everyone is allowed to introduce any assertion whatever into the discourse
- Everyone is allowed to express his attitudes, desires and needs
- No speaker may be prevented, by internal or external coercion, from exercising his rights as laid down in 1–4

He believed that these principles were crucial as communication should be symmetrical and not influenced by internal or external pressures (Crossley 2004).

Habermas argues that through adhering to the principles of the ideal speech situation, individuals try to come to a mutual understanding on a particular course of action as they may have different interpretations of the same situation. Eriksen & Weigard (2003) state that in circumstances where communication partners hold alternative views, they will try and convince each other to alter their way of thinking. Once mutual understanding has been achieved, these same individuals can then co-ordinate their action plans and subsequently their actions. This ‘ideal speech situation’ has had many critics, especially Foucault (1988). These criticisms are discussed in the next section.

### 2.3.3. A Foucauldian view of power

Foucault (1977) has struggled to define power unambiguously like other philosophers, however his understanding of power is somewhat different (Hindess 1996). What we have come to understand as power from the definitions of other philosophers, such as Freire and Habermas, Foucault (1977) argues is really domination. Domination is a way of exercising power which is achieved through discourse and preference shaping. When power is exercised in the form of domination this can be harmful, as this asymmetrical relationship of power gives the subordinated individual limited opportunities to free themselves.

Foucault (2002) states that domination can be escaped through finding ‘liberty’. Liberty is achieved by individuals once they have mastered an understanding of self. Although Foucault (1988) is critical of the Freire (1972) concept of ‘critical consciousness’ (Section 2.3.1), there are parallels with liberty. Both concepts involve the individual developing an understanding of self through reflection before being able to take action against unequal power relations.

The mastery of self through reflection is an example of the important link Foucault (1981, 2002) identifies between power and knowledge. Foucault (1981) states that knowledge is gained through on-going experience. With this knowledge we are then able to defend ourselves against the desires of power. This can include resisting power from another or the desire to exert power over another. He therefore argues that the desire to have power, like domination, is bad.

Domination is a form of power that is harmful and should be avoided. However, power is not something that always should be avoided. Power can also have positive consequences and can do good. For example, Foucault (2002) states that there is nothing oppressive in a teacher/student relationship, where the teacher knows his subject well and passes on ‘truth’ to the student seeking instruction. This relationship can only be considered oppressive if the student is taught in a rigid a way that fails to allow the student to resist and question the teachers’ concept of truth. This would then constitute domination.

Foucault (2002) states that power relations only exist if there is a chance for resistance:

“we are responsible for our actions because freedom is not earned but always already present.” (Brown 2000)

This suggests that Foucault (1988) believes that no one is totally powerless to act. He argues that even the most oppressed people within society know that they have rights, although they are less likely to have thought about the ways in which they can take action and alter unequal power relations. This means that power is never totally one-sided:

“even though the relation of power may be completely unbalanced or when one can truly say that he has ‘all power’ over the other, as power can only be exercised over another to the extent that the latter still have the possibility of committing suicide, or jumping out of the window or of the killing the other” (Foucault 1988)

Unlike Habermas and Freire, Foucault (1988) argues that power is an inherent part of all relationships and is “omnipresent and productive”. This difference in belief is evident in his strong criticisms of the ‘ideal speech situation’ (Habermas 1984). He rejects the possibility of its existence:

“the thought that there could be a state of communication which would be such that the games of truth could circulate freely, without obstacles, without constraint and without coercive effects, seems to be utopia.”

Instead Foucault (1988) argues that one should:

“..give one’s self the rules of law, the techniques of management, and also the ethics, the ethos, the practice of self which would allow these games of power to be played with a minimum of domination.”

The theories of Foucault (1970, 1977, 1981) have transformed the way that we understand power, however some of his ideas are considered problematic. Hindess (1996) criticises Foucault for having a monolithic view of power:

“Power is not an institution, and not a structure; neither is it a certain strength we are endowed with; it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society.”

A particular problem is that he does not believe in the possibility of collective emancipation. This has been criticised by advocates of women’s rights as this belief fails to acknowledge what women have achieved towards reducing gender inequalities between men and women. This has serious implications for the politics of emancipation.

Furthermore, Merquior (1991) argues that Foucault (1988) fails to provide an explanation for how unequal power relations are conquered, exercised and subsequently held onto. Although the 'ideal speech situation' is considered unrealistic by many, including Foucault (1988) himself, Habermas (1984) has at least tried to answer some of these questions.

### 2.3.4. Bourdieu's understanding of power

Bourdieu is less known for his theories of power in comparison to Habermas and Foucault, however some argue that his theories may actually be more realistic (Crossley 2004, Grenfell 2008). Bourdieu's understanding of power incorporates some of the key ideas of Freire, Habermas and Foucault. He combines the concepts of distorted communication (Freire 1972, Habermas 1984), the ideal speech situation (Habermas 1984) and the omnipresence of power (Foucault 1977, 2002) to aid understanding.

Bourdieu (1992) argues that people's actions and the language they use show their position on a particular view. Therefore, to understand a person's views they must be understood within their structural context as the decisions people make and the views they hold are influenced by the structural context. An individual's outlook on life is deeply rooted historically, socially and culturally and is modified depending on events and structural practices which creates "a continuous dialectical reformulation of lived experience" (McNamara-Horvat 2010).

Bourdieu states that in some situations an individual's way of thinking may change and give way to an alternative standpoint, which in some circumstances may be considered more universally acceptable. He further states that an alternative standpoint should not be achieved through bribery, violence or threats, but instead through rational communication. Like distorted communication (Freire 1972, Habermas 1984), communication rationality is concerned with the exchange of views during interaction. This relies on "appeals to logic, evidence and shared beliefs or assumptions" (Crossley 2004).

Central to the theories of Bourdieu is the concept of "symbolic power". In society there are certain groups that may be represented as "universal values or judgements" (Crossley 2004). Examples are 'the middle classes' or certain professional groups such as doctors or judges. These groups are often associated with large institutions or by their level of education which causes their views to appear more believable and de-

pendable. (Gebauer & Marston-William 2000) argues that education and occupation define us greatly.

Jenkins (1992) states that education and large institutions serve to “reproduce symbolically and culturally the relations of power in a given society”. This means that the dominant power held by groups is exercised in a way that is accepted “unconsciously and uncritically” as part of societies natural order and therefore gets reproduced over and over again in people’s actions (McNamara-Horvat 2010). Through holding a privileged position within society, the group’s values achieve widespread acceptance. The position that an individual holds within their society will influence whether others believe their views should be listened to, whether they have the right to interject, to ask questions and to speak.

Bourdieu uses four key concepts to conceptualise his understanding of power:

- Habitus
- Capital
- Field
- Practice

Each of these concepts are now explained in turn.

Bourdieu (1977) defines habitus as:

“An acquired system of generative schema objectively adjusted to the particular conditions in which it is constituted.”

The habitus is moderated by every individual’s perceptions about their social position within a group. This can lead to a mis-recognition of power relationships as they are not recognised for what they objectively are, but instead in a manner which justifies them: for instance someone may behave in an authoritative and dominant manner as they believe that this is part of their job. The fact that they are paid to do the job legitimises their behaviour. McNamara-Horvat (2010) states that habitus provides a “common sense way of operating the world”. It guides individuals on acceptable courses of action as well as a generating possibilities for future action within existing social structures.

Bourdieu uses the term 'capital' to describe the resources that individuals have available to them. In essence he believes that all capital acts as a mechanism of power for individuals. He identifies three main types of capital. These are:

**Economic capital** The money and resources that a person has available to them.

**Social capital** The network of connections an individual has. The backing from a group of influential people may strengthen a person's social position and lead others to perceive them differently.

**Cultural capital** The cultural resources and education a person has available to them. For instance a person who has a knowledge of music and arts may be perceived by others as holding a higher social status to someone who has limited knowledge of these subjects.

Like Foucault (1977, 2002), Bourdieu believes that power is an inherent part of all relationships, especially as different individuals will have different levels of capital which will influence the way they perceive themselves and the way they are perceived by others. He argues that all interactions will always involve the coming together of different social positions, which have their own relationships of power (Crossley 2004). This system of structured social positions and the power relationships that exist between these positions is what Bourdieu refers to as 'Field'.

Within a field people will act to either maintain or improve their economic, social or cultural position. Wacquant (1989) states that:

"A field is simultaneously a space of conflict and competition in which participants vie to establish monopoly over the species of effective capital in it."

The position they choose to maintain or improve will depend upon how each type of capital is valued within a field, for example in some fields being wealthy may be valued more highly than a knowledge of music and arts. This will vary across fields as each field will have different priorities. Furthermore, McNamara-Horvat (2010) argues that the value placed upon different types of capital is also dependent on the individual's habitus and their strategies. The value of capital will change over time to fall in line with the values of the dominant groups within the field.

Whilst Bourdieu believes that power is always present, he also believes that power is essential. This means that if *Communicative Rationality* is to be achieved, then communication partners must constrain themselves and adhere to the rules (Bourdieu

1992). This is similar to the warning that Foucault (1977) gives: the desire for power is dangerous.

The concept of 'practice' is a synergy of Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, capital and field. Practice is the way that individuals act within a field to maximise their own social position through the acquisition of capital and their own habitus. Practice is therefore influenced by many forces, for instance practices in a school can be understood within the structures of the school, but should also be looked at in relation to the wider structures of the government and its policies (Hatcher 2005). Although Bourdieu provides a useful framework for thinking about social action, there are some limitations. Jenkins (1992) argues that Bourdieu fails to establish how individuals can surpass "situational frames of meaning" and resist becoming oppressed within a particular field.

### **2.3.5. Summary**

The theoretical perspective of Bourdieu offers a more complete understanding of power than Freire, Habermas and Foucault. Bourdieu's understanding of power is in essence Habermas' ideal speech situation, but without the suspension of power relations that it has been so strongly criticised for lacking. Furthermore, he ameliorates some of the tensions from Foucault's theories by including the structural dimensions of power, as well as trying to identify and explain the social conditions that either encourage or restrict the engagement of rationality between communication partners. Without this, collective emancipation would not be possible. The following section explores how Bourdieu's understanding of power plays out in the lives of people with learning disabilities.

### **2.3.6. Implications for people with learning disabilities**

People with learning disabilities are often affected by a number of different social conditions and their associated power structures. On a personal level, they may be perceived to lack the communication skills to communicate their views. On a cultural level, negative discourses of disability may influence the way that individuals interact with them and on a structural level, they may have access to limited capital. On top of this, they may experience prejudice due to their gender, race, religion, sexual identity and so on. The possibility of multiple levels of oppression makes people with learning disabilities very vulnerable. This section will briefly introduce some of the ways in which people

with learning difficulties may experience power inequalities. These themes will be fully explored in Chapter 3.

Society holds many universal judgements and values about people with learning disabilities. Firstly, difference is not always seen as something that is positive (Section 3.6.2) and secondly, the lives of people with learning disabilities are often devalued by the concept of the external child (Section 3.5.3). The belief in these concepts may lead society to think that people with learning disabilities do not have the right to speak or to be listened to. Instead they are believed to require protection (Section 3.6.4).

People with learning disabilities may also find it difficult to engage in rationality. It is likely that they will have a communication difficulty (Section 3.5.2), which may make it difficult for them to express their views, or persuade others to take an alternative standpoint. Furthermore, as society places such high value on education and employment this differentiates them from the dominant group.

To either maintain or progress one's social position one will need to acquire more capital. People with learning disabilities often will not have the opportunities to acquire more capital or may not have the knowledge of how to maximise their social position.

Repeated exposure to negative comments could also effect one's ability to engage in rationality through the development of 'learned helplessness' (Peterson et al. 1995). Learned helplessness is very common in people with learning difficulties: it arises when individuals fail to recognise that they have different levels of control over different parts of their lives. The problem arises when an individual generalises their experiences of lacking control to areas of their life where they do have control.

People with learning disabilities are agents within complex systems of power that will also include professionals, staff and family members. Each of these groups will be affected by different power structures which will influence the way that they interact with each other and the services that they may provide (this is on-going theme in Chapter 3). It is likely that certain professional group's views will instantly be perceived as more dependable and believable as the views of the institutions that they originate from have become so embodied within the dominant discourses of our society.

These complex and multiple levels of power relationships that are present in the lives of people with learning disabilities have lead to the development of many initiatives which aim to reduce power inequalities. Some of these initiatives are discussed in the following section.

### **2.3.7. Anti-oppressive possibilities: government and charity initiatives**

Government and charities have attempted to challenge oppression through the introduction of a number of practices. The practices are:

“a set of beliefs, knowledge, and practices aimed at reducing the impact of inequality on the lives of service users.” (Di Terlizzi & Cambridge 1999)

As Bourdieu (1992) explains, these are practices that will help people with learning disabilities engage in rationality and subsequently reduce some of the power inequalities which they may experience.

There are many examples of practices within our society which aim to bring about the participation of people with learning disabilities and offer the promise of empowerment. This section discusses the following examples:

- Valuing people
- Every child matters
- Initiatives from the Children’s Bureau
- The QCA curriculum
- The citizenship curriculum

Not all of these initiatives apply just to individuals with learning disabilities, but also children and young people without disabilities. They too may experience oppression in some areas of their life.

#### **Valuing People**

The first “Valuing People” (The Department of Health 2001) was a promising paper, as it was the first paper in thirty years to specifically address the needs of people with learning disabilities. Fyson & Simons (2003) argues that Valuing People was an ambitious paper that was not just concerned with improving services for people with learning disabilities, but was a whole government strategy for improving the quality of life of service users. The paper was a response to the dissatisfaction felt by families to the way that services were provided for their children. Families felt that:

- services were often poorly co-ordinated
- people with learning disabilities had less choices than their non-disabled peers
- services were rarely tailored to meet individual needs
- opportunities were restricted
- transition planning was poor
- health care needs were left unmet
- people from ethnic minorities were overlooked

Valuing People was the first paper where people with learning disabilities were consulted on which issues they felt should be included. It was developed with the ethos that service users and their families should be at the centre of the planning and delivery of services: for example choosing activities and making organisational decisions such as staff recruitment and strategic planning. In addition, the paper stated that service users should no longer be seen by organisations as purely recipients of services, but as active contributors or partners.

An important dimension of government policy is the inclusion of people with learning disabilities on committees that discuss issues that affect their lives. The Valuing People task force includes people with learning disabilities on their committee, along with academics, voluntary organisations, health and social care professionals and parents or carers. These groups work together to identify how the principles of Valuing People can be integrated into everyday practice. Furthermore, people with learning disabilities are co-chairing partnership boards. Notably, in 2007 the Public Administration Select Committee heard the views of service users on the services available to them.

Individuals with learning disabilities on these partnership boards felt that they were respected and that their views were listened to (Fyson & Simons 2003). However, their involvement in policy making was argued to be at times “passive and tokenistic” (Fyson & Simons 2003) and over-influenced by professionals. This suggests that the values and the judgements of the professionals were held in higher social regard than the individuals with learning disabilities. This reduces the ability of the individuals with learning disabilities to engage in rationality as the professionals are deciding what should be listened to and who should speak.

Since the introduction of Valuing People there have been improvements to services country-wide, but not all. Some services have not signed up to its principles: this has led to slow and uneven progress. Improvement to services has been dependent on the attitudes and commitment of service managers, staff and professionals to reducing power inequalities:

“We cannot overcome centuries of discrimination against disabled people in four short years. Despite good progress, more action is needed to encourage the ‘mainstream’ of society and services to be fully inclusive of learning disabled people.” (Greig 2004)

The original ‘Valuing People’ was criticised as no money was attached to help services to implement its recommendations. Many therefore considered the document as purely aspirational (Fyson & Simons 2003). This situation has not changed. The updated publication of ‘Valuing People’ (Department of Health 2009) has not altered much from the original white paper. Furthermore, no extra funds have been provided to make the recommendations’ reality.

### **Every Child Matters**

‘Every Child Matters’ (Ofsted 2004) (ECM) is a Government report that advocates the active participation of children and young people in the running of Children’s Trusts<sup>1</sup> and development of multi-agency services. The report acknowledges it can be challenging to translate policy into practice, so provides advice on integrating the principles of child involvement into the organisation’s ethos and practice. The report’s two main resources are ‘Participation works’ (Save the Children et al. n.d.) and ‘Hear by right’ (The National Youth Agency 2005). ‘Participation works’ is an on-line gateway where young people, practitioners and organisations can access information on how to effectively involve children and young people in decision making. ‘Hear by right’ is a standard framework that can be used by organisations to change their policies and practices to encourage greater child involvement. The on-line gateway includes case studies and templates of policies that demonstrate effective practices for increasing the involvement of children and young people. Both projects are in the process of being evaluated, so there is currently no evidence to demonstrate their effectiveness.

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<sup>1</sup>Children’s Trusts co-ordinate the collaboration of all child services in their geographical area. When services work together there are better outcomes for children

Abrahams (2009) reports that country-wide outcomes for ECM are uncommon. Different parts of the country have different experiences of ECM. ECM has generally been met with enthusiasm by organisations and their staff. However, like ‘Valuing People’, there are criticisms about the availability of resources for organisations to fully implement the policy: the children’s trusts have minimal control over their budgets and no money has been assigned from mainstream budgets to help ECM become a success.

The only part of ECM that has received a formal evaluation is the role of children’s trusts (Audit Commission 2008). The implementation of children’s trusts was found to encourage more interdisciplinary working. However, there are some professions that are still missing from discussions, such as GP’s and Connexions. Arguably, these are important professional groups which would have an important contribution to make to successful outcomes for children.

The inclusion of some professional groups over others would suggest that continued lack of child involvement in the planning of services is no surprise. Although increased child participation is an aim of ECM, children are still often excluded from discussions. This indicates the value that is placed upon their contributions by many professional groups.

### **The Children’s Bureau**

“The National Healthy School Standard” and “Pupil Participation” (Madge et al. 2003) are research projects carried out by the Children’s Bureau. The researchers sent surveys to 73 local child programmes and 3020 schools to gauge their level of student participation. This included both primary and secondary provision. Detailed case studies were then conducted with nine of the schools, including one special school. The research identified that schools interpreted student involvement very differently, which meant that student participation was variable depending on the school or programme. Student involvement depended on many factors, for example:

- commitment of staff, students and parents
- management styles of the senior management team
- the school’s ability to be creative
- the school’s ability to produce fun methods for involving students

Statistically there was no evidence to demonstrate that student participation increased attainment. However, teachers reported many qualitative effects; for example, students arriving at lessons on time and appearing happier.

Blenkinsop et al. (2004) reports that on the whole many schools have welcomed these two initiatives, as it has assisted them in increasing the amount of health related work carried out in their schools. However, like ECM, there is still a lack of student participation in the projects. Since the introduction of these initiatives, there has not been a significant difference in the levels of student participation. Blenkinsop et al. argue that if these initiatives are to be a continued success in the future, the schools need to involve their students more. Again, this suggests that the views of children and young people are not valued in the way they should be.

### **QCA Curriculum and the Citizenship Curriculum**

Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (2005*b*) and Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (2005*a*) produces learner centred programmes for 14 to 24 year olds. These programmes provide guidance to teachers on how to plan a curriculum for students who are below level one (entry level) of the *national qualifications framework*. The programme is underpinned with the values of: respect; self determination; inclusion; relationships; and interactions.

The QCA encourages teachers to plan a curriculum that fulfils the needs of individual learners, whilst integrating with existing institutional practices. The ethos of the programme is that planning should begin with the student's "aspirations, wishes and needs". This prevents teachers and service providers making judgements about what they think is best for the student; creating more learning opportunities for the young person and support in their preparation for adult life. This is a very recent adaptation to the curriculum and there has not yet been an evaluation to assess its outcomes. Furthermore, informal evidence of its success is scarce. It is not clear how and if this project has contributed to increased student participation.

A further curriculum that promotes the voice and participation of children and young people is the "Citizenship Curriculum" (Department of Education 2007). The Government has added a new dimension to the existing curriculum, so that students learn about diversity and identity. Students are taught about shared values and life in the United

Kingdom. The ethos of the programme is for students to be active participants in an inclusive democracy, where difference is understood and appreciated.

In an article in the 'Independent Education' (The Independent 2006), the author reports that students describe the new citizenship curriculum as a "boring add-on to the existing curriculum". This concerns some educators, as this may discourage young people from wanting to participate in a democratic society or taking an active role in shaping their own lives.

This article suggests that young people come to dislike citizenship lessons because schools do not take its teaching seriously. Furthermore, through an inadequate provision, students are sent the message that this lesson is not important, which in turn sends the message that their views are not important.

The citizenship curriculum has been further criticised for encouraging "compliance and good behaviour" (The Independent 2006) rather than challenging views. This decreases opportunities for developing independence and autonomy as the students' are taught to follow the judgements and values of their teachers instead of developing their own identity.

## **Summary**

There are many examples of how government have tried to increase the participation of children and young people in discussions about service development: many of which have not been discussed in this thesis. It is difficult to determine the success of initiatives, as often there is insufficient or no evaluative data.

In circumstances where projects have been evaluated some common issues have arisen. Many initiatives lack designated or sufficient funding to make them a reality. Furthermore, children and young people continue to have minimal involvement, in spite of this being an aim of the initiative. Organisations and their staff appear to set up projects with enthusiasm, but the inclusion of children and young people is a stumbling block.

## Conclusions

Power is an inherent part of all relationships, however children and young people with and without learning disabilities appear to be experiencing greater inequalities. Although there are many initiatives that aim to increase their participation, there is evidence to show that this is not always translated into practice. Why is this?

The following chapter looks at the practice of transition planning, specifically for people with learning disabilities. If young people without disabilities have difficulties making their voice heard, it is likely that this will be more so for young people with learning disabilities due to their cognitive impairment and the environments that they live in.

## Chapter 3.

# Literature review: Transition planning

The previous chapter demonstrated that people with learning disabilities often experience oppression at some time in their lives. Often, practices that aim to increase the participation of individuals with learning disabilities are under-funded or fail to significantly improve the participation rate.

This chapter examines the transition process, and considers how and why young people with disabilities are excluded from participation, as well as exploring how participation can be increased. It commences with an overview of transition planning for individuals with learning disabilities and discusses some of the challenges of the process. These challenges will then be explored in greater depth using the conceptual framework of Clegg et al. (2001).

### 3.1. Transition

Transition planning for people with disabilities first became government policy in the 1981 Education Act Department of Education (1981) and was further emphasised in the Special Educational Needs Code of Practice:

“The views of young people themselves should be recorded wherever possible in any assessment, reassessment or review during the years of transition.” (article 6.59, DFES 2002)

and ‘Removing Barriers to Achievement’, the government’s strategy for special education, states:

“All children regardless of how complex their needs are should be involved in their transition planning from child to adulthood” (article 3.39, DFES 2004)

Heslop et al. (2002) argue that these policies are the primary influence of current transition policy. The policies are directly relevant to educational settings, but also demonstrate the wider importance of transition planning; for example, the importance of self-advocacy and the development of independent living skills.

It was not until the year 2000 that transition planning for people with learning disabilities became a popular research topic. Beresford & Ward (2005) in a review of all transition literature in the last ten years in the United Kingdom demonstrated that there was little evidence for what constituted successful transition planning. The majority of the literature discussed the downfalls of the process. In the Ward et al. (2003) study of 272 young people and their families, it was identified that a quarter of the young people involved in the study had no involvement in the transition process. In addition, forty-two percent had minimal involvement. The exclusion of young people from the transition process was attributed to the difficulties faced by staff in facilitating meaningful involvement.

There was some evidence to show that transition planning could be successful, however these were small scale studies or limited in their quality. Beresford & Ward state that the majority of transition literature was ‘grey literature’, meaning it could not be found through a database search and therefore was not accessible to everyone. The literature also tended to focus on the views of people with moderate learning disabilities. Shevin & Klien (2004) in their review of transition literature argued that transition planning for people with severe learning disabilities continued to be ‘uncharted territory’.

The majority of data on transition planning has been collected using a family centred approach (Ward et al. 2003, Smart 2004). In this approach the views of the young people are sought through talking with parents rather than the young people themselves. Of course it is important to involve family in transition planning, as they are also affected by the decisions made and are an important support network for the young people. However, the young person’s opinions should be sought first, as the decisions made will have the greatest consequences for their lives.

Forbes et al. (2002) reported that transition planning was successful when the young people were included and their preferences took “centre stage”. Good practice included having staff that were dedicated and knowledgeable in transition and had good relationships with the young people and their families. Moreover, the provision of accessible

information was crucial. When the young people were not included, the literature described the transition from child to adult services as “a time of loneliness” (Beresford & Ward 2005) for young people with disabilities. There were fewer opportunities to develop skills and to enjoy worthwhile activities (O’Sullivan 1998, Morris 2002, Heslop et al. 2002, Ward et al. 2003).

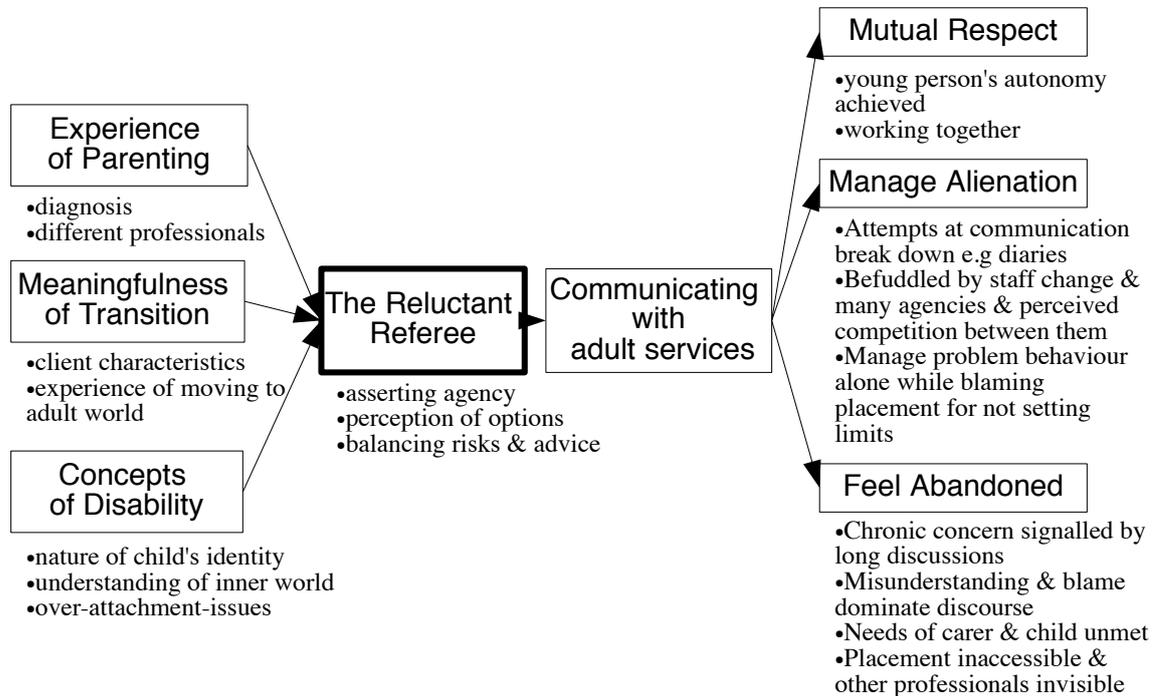
The most recent contribution to transition literature is the “Transition Guide” (DCSF & DoH 2007). This guide is aimed at professionals and advises how to make transition planning more successful. This document has come a long way from initial transition literature, as there are many examples of good practice and resources, for example the transition guide talks about: “All change transition into adult life” (Mallett et al. 2003); “Families leading planning: looking to the future” (National Development Team 2003) and the Mencap “Transactive project” (Mencap 2007).

However, the examples of good practice are illustrated through the views of parents and professionals rather than the young people themselves. Only five pages of the guide refer to the importance of student involvement in the process. In addition there is greater emphasis on advocacy rather than supporting the development of skills of self-advocates.

Despite there being many policies and resources to support transition planning for people with learning disabilities, there are few recommendations on how to translate policy into practice. For example, the Transition Guide reports good practice, but does not tell you how to implement this in your own organisation. Moreover, there is limited evidence to show which resources actually work and contribute to positive outcomes for people with learning disabilities. Dee (2006) looked at the transition process of twelve young people with moderate learning disabilities over a three year period to see how the decision making process developed and to find out from the young people themselves which practices worked and which were ineffective. In her book she provides practical advice for staff on how to improve the transition process to ensure the inclusion of young people with disabilities. However, there is no literature on how to improve transition planning for people with more severe and profound difficulties.

### **3.2. Clegg’s grounded theory model of transition**

The literature of transition planning for young people with learning disabilities is complex and rich in data. Furthermore, there are many different concepts which contribute



**Figure 3.1.:** Clegg's conceptual framework for transition

to our understanding of transition. The use of a conceptual framework is important as it helps to bring coherence to a topic by potentially joining together all the parts of an enquiry.

Clegg et al. (2001) have produced a useful conceptual framework (Figure 3.1) to aid understanding of the transition process, particularly for young people with severe learning disabilities and their families. Although this conceptual framework has several limitations, which I will discuss shortly, it is the only complete published conceptual framework available for transition.

Other conceptual frameworks, such as the conceptual framework of Harris (2003) for choice and empowerment of people with learning disabilities, only consider some of the concepts associated with transition rather than providing a complete picture. Although full choice-making is considered an important marker of adulthood, so are independence and responsibilities (Brannen & O'Brien 1995, Kay & Tisdall 2003, Christensen & Prout 2006).

The conceptual framework was informed by the study of Clegg et al. (2001), which revisited participants from an earlier study by Cromby et al. (1994). The research by Cromby et al. investigated challenging behaviour amongst young people with severe

learning disabilities and this emphasis is continued in the Clegg et al. study, as the presence of challenging behaviour further intensifies the difficulties during the adolescent transition.

When the young people were originally interviewed they were attending school, but in this recent study the majority had now left and were attending adult services. Forty-three of the original cohort consented to being included in the study of Clegg et al., however seven were excluded as they had never experienced challenging behaviour. From the thirty-six families remaining, ten were selected to be included in the study. The ten families were assigned to two groups depending on whether the young person had experienced challenging behaviour which had now improved or whether they had current and enduring difficulties. The researchers tried to match the groups as far as possible by comparing individual communication skills and the availability of a car as an indicator of the family's household resources.

The research was carried out in one city within the United Kingdom where there was a ten percent ethnic minority population. One of the ten families in the Clegg et al. study originally lived in the Indian subcontinent and their son was born in the United Kingdom. The inclusion of this young person and his family in the study was representative of the percentage of ethnic mix within the city. As this research was carried out in one city of the United Kingdom only, it is possible that variations in experiences of transition may vary depending on the area of the country.

Although only a small number of participants were involved in the research, the study generated a considerable amount of rich qualitative data. The data was generated through nine parent interviews. One parent chose not to be interviewed, but her child remained in the study. The research methodology also sought to include the perspectives of the young people themselves and five of the young people were deemed able to contribute their views. However, three of the young people were not interviewed as their parents felt that their behaviour was too challenging. This meant that the views and opinions were only sought from only two young people. The data was also generated from interviews with ten staff that worked with the young people.

As data was only collected from two of the young people, there was not enough data to present a representative view of transition from the perspective of young people. Furthermore, the two young people had difficulties remembering the transition process and so their contribution to the conceptual framework was limited. The research did not set out to exclude the views of the young people: unfortunately, events outside of

the researchers' control made their participation difficult. In spite of these difficulties, the researchers are very transparent about the research's limitations.

The methodology of this study is well constructed and the researchers are able to demonstrate both inter-rater and rater reliability. The research findings were validated by the research participants and by an external professional with learning disability experience. The findings were debated amongst policy makers to assess the implications for service delivery for this client group.

In the remainder of this chapter a modified version of the conceptual framework of Clegg et al. will be used to explore the literature of transition planning for people with learning disabilities, in particular individuals with severe learning disabilities. Alongside the concepts defined in the conceptual framework, the following questions will also be explored.

- How do people understand maturation in people with severe intellectual disability?
- How do parents and staff address the cultural differences that divide them?

The conceptual framework of Clegg et al. places the parent in the centre of the transition process where they are conceptualised as the 'reluctant referee'. Through extensive reading of the literature I believe that this conceptual framework can be used analogically to explore the experiences of young people during the transition planning process also. Although the young people would not be seen as a 'reluctant referee' the other parts of the framework are still relevant. Figure 3.2 demonstrates how the conceptual framework of Clegg et al. was used to explore the experiences of young people with learning disabilities during their transition planning process.

In addition, I have removed 'experiences of parenting', as a discreet section and included the influence of diagnosis upon the family (Section 3.6.2). There is a wealth of literature that demonstrates how parental feelings towards a disability label influence the way that their child constructs their identity (Davis & Watson 2001, Kelly 2005). Without this modification, the conceptual framework would still appear parent centred.

In order to contextualise the conceptual framework I will first critically analyse the constructs of childhood, adolescence and adulthood. Looking at these constructs for typically developing individuals will help to make sense of how people understand the maturation of people with severe learning disabilities.

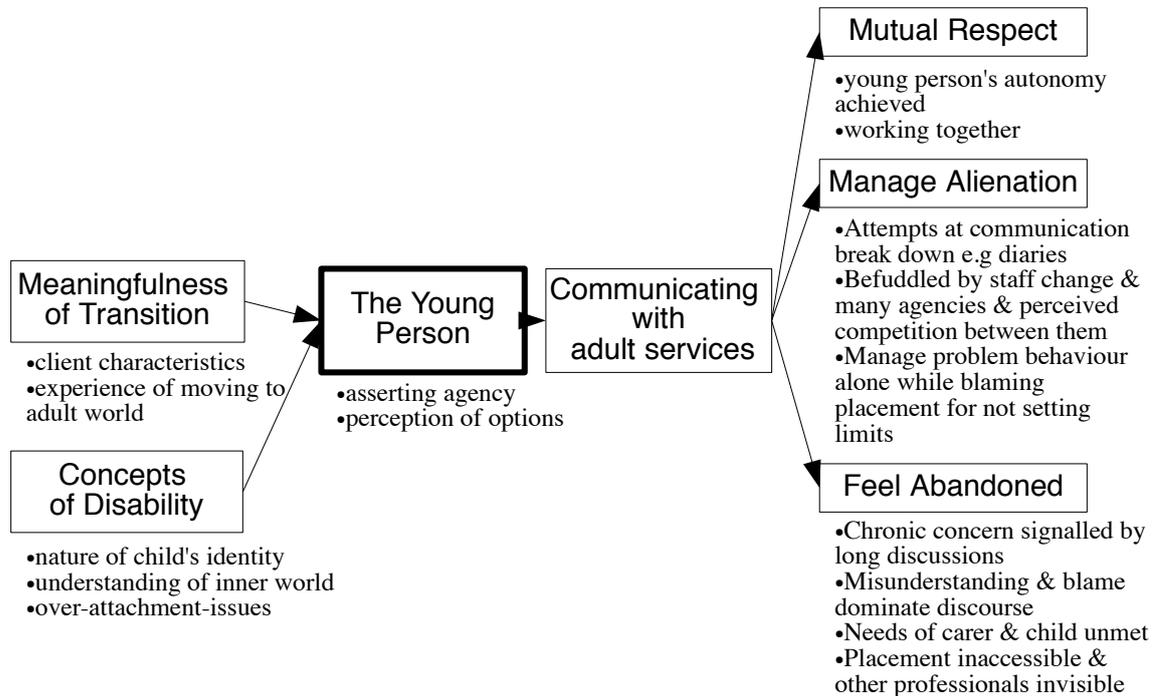


Figure 3.2.: An adapted version of Clegg's conceptual framework for transition

### 3.3. Negotiating adolescence: the transition to adulthood

The transition planning process coincides with the adolescent transition: the move from childhood to adulthood. Christensen & Prout (2006) describe childhood and adulthood as a continuum: the boundary between the two is “socially and culturally constructed” and one can only be understood in relation to the other. The adolescent transition is an important part of the life course and can be a challenging time for all young people.

I have already demonstrated in Section 3.1 that the adolescent transition is challenging for people with severe learning disabilities and that they are often excluded from participation. In order to understand why the adolescent transition fails for many individuals with learning disabilities there is an implicit understanding of ‘normal’ adolescent transitions influenced by cultural norms and rules (Priestley 2003). The adolescent transition is heavily influenced by commonly held assumptions made by adults about children. Through understanding what is considered a ‘normal’ adolescent transition, we are able to understand the difficulties that may occur for individuals that struggle to make the transition. Comparisons to typical adolescent transitions are made throughout

the chapter, but more specific questions about how individuals view the maturation of people with learning disabilities is considered in Section 3.5.3.

### 3.3.1. Childhood vs adulthood

Lewis & Lindsay (2000) argue that:

“Childhood is a social construction brought about through the influence of cultural mores and practiced values experienced by the community grouping in which children find themselves.”

Therefore, the level in which children feel they belong within their society depends on the value that society places upon them.

In western culture there is a commonly held belief that children are “made not born” (Christensen & Prout 2006). This means that for successful development into adulthood to take place the influence of one’s parents and education is crucial. Christensen & Prout argue that children are therefore seen as “becoming” rather than “being”.

Childhood is often defined as a period of development where children are prepared for adult life:

“Adulthood is regarded as the goal and the end point of individual development or perhaps even the very meaning of a person’s childhood..” (Qvortrup 1994)

Adulthood is characterised as a time of sexual maturity, independence, competence and responsibilities: such as getting a job, sexual relationships and marriage. Whereas Brannen & O’Brien (1995) and Kay & Tisdall (2003) suggest that children are perceived to have less maturity than adults and therefore, lack competence and responsibility. Children are essentially believed to be vulnerable.

Kay & Tisdall argue that the belief that children are incompetent and incapable was reinforced by the work of Piaget and until recently by British law, which presented children as property of their parents. Piaget’s work stated that children require protection and that parents should be able make decisions on behalf of their child if they believe that they are in their child’s best interests. Through placing the adult in a role of protector and enforcer of child’s rights, this further reinforces and confirms the belief that children are “naturally incompetent and incapable.” (Qvortrup 1994). Although adults

are perceived as more mature than children, Stables & Smith (1999) argue that there are many examples of children acting maturely, for example young carers. Furthermore, there are also examples of adults acting irresponsibly and irrationally.

Christensen & Prout argue that childhood is contextualised by the past and what the child may contribute in the future. Families therefore spend time ensuring that their child will have a successful future. This is achieved by adults caring for and protecting their child, so that they have the right to learn and play. This future-orientated perception of childhood fails to acknowledge the contributions children make in the present. Moreover, Qvortrup states that this may indicate “children are not members or at least not integrated members of society.” Christensen & Prout state many parents believe that the ability to earn money is the basis for having an integrated role within society. Therefore, until the child is able to work, some parents may question their child’s place within their society.

Grude Flekkoy & Hevener Kaufman (1997) and Christensen & Prout report that childhoods vary depending on gender, class, ethnicity and disability, for example different countries have different legal and cultural markers for when adulthood occurs. For instance, in some Indian families there are still instances of arranged marriages. Although the formation of close relationships and marriage in British society are seen as markers of independence and adulthood, in Indian families marriage is seen as something that is too important for young people to decide. It is the responsibility of the parents to find a suitable marital partner.

Lewis & Lindsay (2000) argue that children are now demanding to have their views and opinions heard, so they can be active in developing the society in which they live. This creates conflict in instances where adults continue to reinforce the belief that childhood is future orientated.

If children are to be meaningfully included within their society then childhood needs to be perceived as more than “a future goal” (Christensen & Prout 2006). Adults need to value the contributions that children can make to cultural knowledge. Corsaro (1997) states that:

“Children do not simply imitate or internalise the world around them. They strive to interpret or make sense of their culture and to participate in it. In attempting to make sense of the adult world, children come to collectively produce their own peer worlds and cultures.”

This understanding of childhood identifies that both children and adults have a valuable contribution to make to cultural knowledge. This perspective suggests that children have a voice and they have an active role in shaping their lives and their identity. Like adults, children have the right to be consulted in decision-making at the “economic, social, political and cultural level” (Lewis & Lindsay 2000), especially for decisions that will affect them. It is therefore essential that adults consider the views and opinion of children important enough to encourage them to speak out. Hodgkin & Newell (1996) argue:

“Our society is in some danger of infantilising children, of assuming an incapacity long past the date when they are more capable. It is a matter of common sense, and the instinctive good practice of many parents living with children and many professionals working with children, to listen to children and to encourage them to take responsibility for decisions wherever possible. The outcomes are usually better and, even if things go wrong, learning from mistakes is an essential part of development.”

Now the concept of adolescence is discussed.

### **3.3.2. Adolescence**

James (1986) and Thomson et al. (2004) argue that the transition to adulthood has become blurred by the period of adolescence or youth, which can span from 16 to 25 years of age. Adolescence is characterised as a time of experimentation, particularly with making choices and the beginning of romantic and sexual relationships (Griffiths 1994, Shepperdson 2000).

Adolescence is a crucial time for the development of self identity. Shepperdson suggests that young people move towards independence when they begin to separate from their parents. Through rejecting some of their parents’ beliefs, a conflict emerges in the parent/child relationship which enables the young person and parent to recognise their different and separate identities. This suggests that adolescence is also a time of transition for parents. Previously, their role was to support and provide for their dependent child, whereas now they need to encourage, support and accept the development of independence.

Priestley (2003) states that historically adolescence has been defined as a distinct developmental stage which is separate from childhood and adulthood. However, Shep-

perdson argues that evidence from longitudinal studies show that personality traits that were observed in childhood have also been observed during adolescence, thus invalidating the belief that adolescence is a “separate and distinct phase.”. This suggests that adolescence is actually a time of fluid, gradual, development.

Shepperdson also argues that many researchers believe that adolescence “bridges the gap” between childhood and adulthood, moving from being dependent on adults to being independent. Thomson et al. report that from a biological perspective it is unlikely that all individuals will reach independence at the same time, which makes it difficult to define at which age adolescence begins and ends.

The difficulty in defining adolescence has also been influenced by the changing patterns of the transition to adulthood. Thomson et al. state that adolescence has become extended, as many young people are financially dependent on their parents for longer than in the past. In Europe, many young people in their twenties are still economically dependent on their parents due to furthering their education or difficulties finding work. Furthermore, a culture has developed where young people do not want to “settle down” and travelling is seen as more exciting<sup>1</sup>.

Furthermore, James (1986) argues that adulthood has become “fragmented”: there are different ages attributed to different milestones of adulthood. In the UK, for example, one can consent to a sexual relationship at 16 years, but cannot drink alcohol until 18 years. Thomson et al. (2004) suggest that these milestones of adulthood have little meaning for many young people and that they create their own identities and beliefs about what constitutes adulthood. The young people in the study of Thomson et al. defined adulthood as a time of increased independence, choice-making and personal relationships.

## Summary

There are variations in the way that different societies understand the adolescent transition, but within each society the process is highly organised through legal and cultural practices. Priestley (2003) argues that considerable social investment is made to ensure the success of the adolescent transition.

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<sup>1</sup>As I write this sentence, I am sitting in my sleeping bag in a guesthouse in Ladakh

Priestley states the adolescent transition of individuals with learning disabilities is often researched as a parallel process. This means that the adolescent transition of people with learning disabilities is typically understood as a movement between services rather than by the theoretical ideas that have just been discussed.

The remainder of this chapter will investigate how maturation of people with learning disabilities is understood. This will become an ongoing theme throughout this chapter. It is an important subject to consider, as it helps to reveal some of the specific power inequalities that people with learning difficulties experience.

### 3.4. The young person

The young person's experience of transition planning will be affected by their ability to assert their views and by the perceptions of others. These in turn are influenced by the different social positions that individuals hold during the transition meeting and the relationships of power between them. To explore this further, the theoretical ideas of Bourdieu (1992) discussed in Chapter 2 will be drawn upon.

#### 3.4.1. Asserting agency

Transition planning meetings are an example of what Bourdieu refers to as *Field*. A transition planning meeting involves the coming together of different social positions, with their different relationships of power, to plan the futures of individuals with learning disabilities. It is possible that different stakeholders at the meeting will hold different ideas (*Habitus*) about what is appropriate for the young person's future.

Some stakeholders may hold a more privileged position than others and their view point may be considered more universally accepted (*Symbolic Power*). In this case the valued capital is a combination of social and cultural capital. The networks and connections the professionals have with outside services will be valued as will their educational credentials. This may lead to widespread acceptance between stakeholders of their way of thinking which will subsequently affect the practices within this field. The position held by the young person within the complex social hierarchies will influence whether they are considered to have the right to speak and the right to be listened to (*Communicative Rationality*).

Professionals are often at the top of social hierarchies where they hold the dominant position. This traditional approach to professionalism presents professional knowledge as the most important type of knowledge: professionals are believed to know best. This way of interacting is thought to breed resentment and encourage passivity and dependency (Beresford & Croft 2004).

Circumstances where professionals have a more equal relationship with other stakeholders is a new form of professionalism. This is discussed in Section 3.7 where practices that contribute to successful transition planning are discussed.

The young person's communication ability will also influence whether they are able to achieve communicative rationality or not. For instance, do they have the language skills to express their views? Or do they have the assertiveness to get their message across? The communicative ability of people with learning disabilities is discussed in Section 3.5.

### **3.4.2. Perception of options**

Evidence (Hirst & Baldwin 1994, Hendey & Pascall 2002, Beresford & Ward 2005) shows that people with learning disabilities often have limited aspirations for their futures. Ward (2000) stated that people with learning disabilities often have limited opportunities compared to their non-disabled peers, which means they make only choices within their limited set of experiences.

Transition planning policy stipulates that young people with learning disabilities should lead 'ordinary lives' (Clegg et al. 2008), so some options may be rejected as they are considered 'unordinary'. For instance, one individual may express a preference to stay at home with their parents once they finish school. At this is not what young people typically do, this choice is considered 'unordinary'. When these types of judgements are made, this can further restrict the choices that young people with disabilities and their families have available to them.

Individuals with learning disabilities may find it difficult to develop aspirations, as they are often provided with limited information about the possibilities for the future, or information is provided in an inaccessible format. Making information accessible for people with learning disabilities is important as it increases the likelihood of individuals having more power and control over their lives.

Foucault (2002) argued that power is not possible without knowledge. By providing people with learning difficulties with more information, they are more likely to be able to resist the influence of other people's power and make meaningful choices about their futures. Without increased knowledge, people with disabilities only consider a limited range of options and do not question that they have fewer choices than their non-disabled peers (Ward et al. 2003). This helps to trap people with learning disabilities in a subordinated social position. The young person's perception of the options available to them will also be influenced by their cognitive abilities (Section 3.5.1) and their identity (Section 3.6.2).

### 3.4.3. Summary

Transition planning is made complex by the interaction between different social positions and their associated power relationships. Even before any views are exchanged, judgements will have been formed about who has the right to speak, the right to be listened to and where the individuals fall within the social hierarchy.

Young people with disabilities may be perceived to hold a low position within the social hierarchy, as they may have limited knowledge about the options available to them. Moreover, they may not be considered to have the cognitive and communication abilities to achieve communicative rationality. This means that other stakeholders may withhold their right to speak and to be listened to. The cognitive and communicative abilities of individuals with learning disabilities is discussed in the following section.

## 3.5. The meaningfulness of transition

If one is going to be meaningfully included in the transition process, one "needs to see himself, and be seen by others, as a choice-maker." (Griffiths 1994). Some staff and caregivers fail to see people with learning disabilities as choice-makers and their voices are unheard. There is a belief that people with learning disabilities lack self awareness, the capacity to understand their situation, and have limited ability to talk about it Bogdan & Taylor (1982). This means that they are perceived to lack communicative rationality.

This section explores three personal characteristics that contribute to the meaningful inclusion of young people with learning disabilities during transition planning. These are:

**Capacity to make choices** Does the young person have the cognitive ability to make choices?

**Communication skills** Does the young person have the communication skills to be able to express their views and feelings?

**Experience of moving to an adult world** How is the maturation of young people with learning disabilities understood by their families and professionals?

The exclusion of young people due to the attitudes of staff and caregivers is discussed later in the chapter.

### 3.5.1. Capacity to make choices

Mann (1989) reports that an important characteristic of a mature adolescent is the ability to make sensible choices. The choices that are made during adolescence typically have life-long consequences, for example educational choices will influence the type of employment that is possible in the future. Moreover, Jenkinson (1993) argues that through making choices one learns how to take control over one's life. The achievement of this is believed to be an important contributor to the successful transition from childhood to adulthood.

Choice is:

“a corollary of the proposition of free will, i.e., the ability voluntarily to decide to perform one of several possible acts or to avoid action entirely. An ethical choice involves ascribing qualities such as right or wrong, good or bad, better or worse to alternatives.” (Britannica 2010)

Mann states that the process of making a choice involves the interaction of a number of cognitive processes or executive functions:

- collection and processing of information about the options available
- problem solving skills
- judgement about the credibility of the information collected

- the realisation that choices have consequences, where some are not easily reversed
- the ability to recall information from previous experiences and apply to the current choice making situation

Therefore, the ability of the individual to make choices will depend upon their cognitive abilities and their knowledge within certain choice-making areas.

This section defines two alternative models for understanding the process of making a choice and then explores how and when the relevant skills for choice-making develop. The literature is then presented to show how choice-making is a contentious issue for people with learning disabilities.

### **Models of choice-making**

Jenkinson (1993) describes two alternative models that illustrate the process of making a choice:

- Normative models of choice-making
- Descriptive models of choice-making

The normative model of choice-making describes choice-making that has a desired outcome and assists the choice-maker in achieving their goals. When the choice-maker is faced with a choice they evaluate the information and the possible consequences of that choice to assess whether it achieves their goals. For example, if an individual was buying a new car the engine capacity may be more important to the choice-maker than the number of seats, so a choice is made based on the availability of their preferred attribute.

Halford et al. (1998) state that when an individual has a greater number of attributes to choose between this can make choice-making more difficult, as it increases the cognitive load. Halford et al. propose four different strategies that individuals use when they have a greater number of attributes to choose between:

**Random choice** The individual chooses an option at random without considering the information and possible consequences.

**The lexicographic strategy** The individual decides what attribute is most important to them and decides which alternative matches most highly to that attribute (Payne et al. 1988, Tversky 1969).

**Equal weighting** the individual weighs up all attributes in an equal way.

**Weighted additive compensatory process** the individual multiplies the value of each possible attribute by the level of its importance. This process happens for each attribute with the alternative with the highest score is chosen.

Halford et al. report that choice-makers often use a combination of these strategies when making a choice. The strategies they select will be influenced by their personality, their level of education and also their previous experiences of making choices.

The normative model of choice-making is associated with “rationality and coherence” (Jenkinson 1993). However, Jenkinson criticises the model as individuals rarely conform to this choice-making model in everyday life. She argues that the model fails to recognise an individual’s cognitive limitations, changing values and how disappointments are dealt with.

The descriptive model of choice-making examines how people behave whilst making choices and is useful in situations when choice-making breaks down. Jenkinson suggests that the model acknowledges that individuals may be biased in certain choice-making situations, especially when the choice may evoke an emotional response. An emotional response is likely to occur in situations where there are a large number of options to choose between or when a choice may have potentially risky or unpredictable consequences.

### **The development of choice-making skills**

The executive functions required for choice-making are found in the pre-frontal cortex of the brain. The pre-frontal cortex is one of the later areas of the brain to develop and suggests why choice-making skills improve through maturation (De Luca & Wood 2003, Paus 2005).

Grude Flekkoy & Hevener Kaufman (1997) argue that the first signs of early capacity and problem solving in children become apparent when the child begins to crawl. The child is no longer completely reliant on their care-givers and is able to experience much more of their environment. A further burst comes when the child's expressive and receptive language skills increase, so they are able to make requests and articulate their wishes. Through making requests, the child begins to learn what choices are possible and how best to influence their caregivers to achieve the desired outcome. Choice-making is still immature, as the child finds it difficult to articulate their experiences and feelings.

The second year of childhood is characterised by "self-assertion, the drive towards self-determination, self-control and independence" (Grude Flekkoy & Hevener Kaufman 1997). These behaviours tend to dominate the child's behaviour. The child and caregiver often engage in a battle for power, as the child makes it clear that they want to make decisions. They are not yet able to participate in mature choice-making as they do not yet understand that other people may hold different views, feelings and beliefs from themselves. This is referred to as the 'Theory of Mind' (Baron-Cohen 1991). Understanding other people's views and feelings is important as it allows one to make compromises, which is an important part of choice-making.

Piaget (1926) believed that children were unable to understand the views, feelings and beliefs of others until around their 6th birthday. However, Grude Flekkoy & Hevener Kaufman have found that children begin appreciate other people's perspectives much earlier, as early as three or four years of age in perspective taking experiments, such as the 'Sally-Anne test' (Wimmer & Perner 1983).

Once the child attends pre-school there is another increase in the child's ability to make choices. With the experience of participating in a wider social circle, the child gains more confidence and responsibility in choice-making. Cognitively, the child is now able to think in terms of more abstract concepts, such as time, and cause and effect. For example, if it is raining outside the child will be able to identify the appropriate clothes and shoes for the weather. Once a child can identify that actions have a cause and effect, they will begin to identify the risks and possible benefits of different choices (Mann 1989). Moreover, Steinberg & Cauffman (1996) argue that individuals that show confidence are more likely to be more effective choice-makers, as there is an increased likelihood that they will be able to identify their strengths and weaknesses.

From the ages of six through to adolescence, the choice-making skills of the child forcontinue to develop as they experience greater opportunities to make choices and

their social circles widen further. Mann states that in adolescence choice-making often fluctuates depending on the young person's mood and as they experiment with alternative identities. During adolescence peer pressure can strongly influence the choices that some young people make. Young people are considered to have mature choice-making abilities once they start to show consistency in their choices.

During adolescence the young person may enter a further power struggle with their caregivers as they again try to assert their independence and the desire to make choices for themselves. In the study of Geller et al. (2003) the researchers report a tension between the views of young people and their parents about responsibility for making choices. The parents believed that they should maintain choice-making responsibility until the young person was eighteen and an adult. Until then the young person was not considered competent even though the cognitive abilities required for mature choice-making are believed to be developed.

The process in which choice-making ability develops suggests that capacity and knowledge increase through "instruction, learning, school experiences and home and work settings" (Mann 1989). In addition, the motivation to make a particular decision influences choice-making competence. For example, if one choice is far more desirable than the other then this is not a proper choice. The same effect is seen if all choices are undesirable.

Developing mature choice-making skills is clearly a complex process. Typically developing young people often experience difficulties asserting themselves as mature choice-makers, which suggests that the choice-making abilities of young people with learning disabilities is likely to be questioned. The following section explores how choice-making may be challenging for people with learning disabilities.

### **The challenges for people with learning disabilities**

Jenkinson (1993) argues that the majority of literature about choice-making competence ignores the skills and needs of people with learning difficulties. The limited research that does exist tends to look at the competence of those with mild to moderate learning disabilities. In addition, competence is researched through vignettes rather than in real life choice-making situations.

There are two contrasting arguments for why choice-making is challenging for individuals with learning disabilities. Firstly, some researchers believe that people with

learning disabilities can make choices with the right level of support, however the actions of others prevent this happening. For example West & Parent (1992) argue that the limited opportunities for individuals with learning disabilities to make choices indicates more about the attitudes of staff and caregivers than the ability of the individuals themselves. Secondly, some researchers believe that people with learning disabilities cannot make choices or struggle to make choices due to their impairment. However, Jenkinson (1993) argues that a combination of the two provides a more plausible argument. Staff and caregiver attitudes to the choice-making abilities of people with learning disabilities are discussed later (Sections 3.6.4, 3.8). This section is primarily concerned with the characteristics of the young people themselves

People with learning disabilities may find it difficult to make choices due to the way that their brain, in particular their pre-frontal cortex, has developed. Magnetic Resonance Imaging shows that our brains are very complex and different developmental conditions may manifest through an individual's brain being wired differently. This may cause differences in synaptic connections. Huttenlocher (1990) reports that in early childhood the normally developing brain has an abundance of synaptic connections that are gradually reduced later in childhood. The increased prevalence of synaptic connections coincides with the rapid development of cognitive skills in the early years. If there is decreased synaptic activity at this time, early learning will be affected. In individuals with Autism, it is possible that during early development some of the synaptic connections in the pre-frontal cortex may be partially disconnected which contributes to difficulties with social functioning (Gerchwind & Levitt 2007). Others believe that the synaptic connections are still working, however they are much weaker than in people without Autism (Washington Autism Centre 2008). Patterns in brain development have also been found in other conditions, for example Williams syndrome and Prada Willi.

If there are differences in the way that the pre-frontal cortex is wired, it suggests that people with learning disabilities may have difficulties mastering some of the executive skills required for competent choice-making, such as understanding time, cause and effect and other people's emotions. Bauminger et al. (2005) found that people with learning disabilities have particular difficulties understanding complex emotions. Individuals found it difficult to discriminate between two opposite emotions, such as love and hate, which is problematic in certain situations where it was possible to experience two contrasting emotions at the same time and when trying to articulate how you feel about a particular situation, person or object. Socio-emotional difficulties create problems for individuals when they are trying to pursue socially orientated goals or find themselves

needing to negotiate or make a compromise, all of which are essential skills for competent choice-making.

Although there is evidence that some people with learning disabilities cannot make choices because of the poor development of executive skills, Jenkinson (1993) argues that some individuals can, but choose not to. This lack of motivation may have contributed to a sense of learned helplessness: the individual may have experienced failure in making choices in the past which had affected their confidence, may not be used to being asked their opinion or choices may not have been honoured which has caused the individual to feel that they have no control over their life:

“When others take over your life they strip your power away from you. You don’t get to make any decisions that are important to you. You lose your confidence. You get used to others deciding everything for you.” (Martin 2006)

This is supported by the ‘Passivity Model’ of Good (1981) which examines the behaviours of ‘low achievers’ in the classroom. The model demonstrates that such individuals become less involved in classroom activities over time because of the way the classroom environment is structured. Good reported that staff paid more attention to the more able students; giving less able students less time to respond. In addition, the teachers gave the less able students the answers rather than trying to help them to develop their responses. To avoid failing, the ‘low achievers’ remained passive and chose not to join in with classroom activities.

Something similar to the ‘Passivity Model’ could be applied to choice-making. If young people have tried to make choices in the past and these choices had been missed or overruled they may stop trying. They may have developed the belief that no one will listen to them, so do not see the point. Moreover, if such individuals were unused to making choices and were suddenly presented with a choice-making opportunity, they may remain passive out of fear of making the wrong choice, or through not knowing what to do.

Jenkinson (1993) and Shevin & Klien (2004) state that although people with learning disabilities may have some difficulties making choices, with teaching and increased opportunities to practice making choices these skills can develop. Shevin & Klien (2004) further argue that staff and caregivers cannot assume that these skills will develop naturally, but instead require the same urgency in teaching as other skills. This same belief is apparent in the Mental Capacity Act (Department of Constitutional Affairs 2005).

## The Mental Capacity Act

The Mental Capacity Act (Department of Constitutional Affairs 2005) gives protection to individuals who have been wrongly identified as not being able to make decisions for themselves due to a learning disability, dementia, brain injury or mental health difficulties. The Act states that mental capacity cannot be judged on the person's condition or any aspect of their behaviour alone: this leads to wrong assumptions about their ability to make their own decisions. A person can only be deemed to lack capacity if they are unable to "understand, retain and evaluate" (Wong et al. 2000) the information required to make a decision.

An individual's capacity to make decisions must be assessed on a case-by-case basis. It is possible that they are able to make decisions in some circumstances, but not others. For example, a person may be able to manage his or her money on a daily basis, but struggle with larger financial decisions. A lack of capacity in one situation should not be generalised to all cases. It is also possible that an individual's ability to make decisions can fluctuate due to mental illness: at certain times they may have full capacity whilst at other times they may require support.

The Act states that some individuals may never have the ability to make their own decisions. The example that is provided is a person with a severe learning disability. In my opinion this example is poorly chosen, as the category of severe learning disability can incorporate many degrees of strengths and support needs. It should not be assumed that the presence of a severe learning disability means a lack of decision making skills.

The Act covers a range of decision-making tasks: from what to wear to consenting to medical treatment. However, the Act does not allow decisions to be made on behalf of another that involves:

- Consenting to marriage
- Divorce
- Placing a child for adoption
- Taking away parental responsibility for a child
- Consenting to treatment for a mental disorder
- Giving consent under the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act

The exclusion of these decisions helps to protect the rights of the individual and reduce the potential for abuse. There are certain decisions that no one has the right to make on behalf of another.

The Act states that making a decision on someone else's behalf should be a last resort. Individuals should be given the appropriate level of support so that they can make their own decisions. This may include: using visual support to explain important information; providing an alternative means for the individual to express his or her views if they do not use speech; or introducing a structured programme to help the individual learn the skills needed to make choices. Furthermore, the Code of Practice (Department of Constitutional Affairs 2007) that supports the Act emphasises that the people providing support should have good communication skills.

A key theme of the act concerns individuals who have been deemed to be unable to make decisions for themselves. In such cases, decisions made on their behalf should be made in their best interests. Working in the best interests of another can be difficult as there is the potential for one's own views and beliefs to influence the decisions made.

In some situations an individual may have no one other than paid staff to provide them with support to make decisions. These individuals are provided with an *independent mental capacity advocate*. The advocate instructs, consults and supports an individual to make their own decisions. They also support and represent the individual and challenge any decisions made on their behalf which they feel are not in their best interests.

Although the Act is not research, it was created through extensive consultation with learning disability groups. This means that the authors must have considered the feasibility and morality of its procedures. The Act is important as it does not disregard people because of their disability, but advocates that everyone should be given the opportunity to make their own decisions. Decisions made on behalf of an individual should be the last resort.

The Code of Practice, which supports the Act, is a useful document. It provides relevant scenarios and practical strategies for supporting an individual to make their own decisions. This is especially useful for staff who had previously struggled to support their clients to make decisions.

## Summary

Choice-making is complex and takes many years to develop through brain maturation and experience. Successful choice-making is dependent on the integration of numerous cognitive skills which has caused many to question the choice-making abilities of individuals with learning disabilities.

Research into the choice-making abilities of individuals with severe learning disabilities is limited. From the literature that is available, it can be assumed that the severity of the impairment and the way in which the brain is wired will influence the level of choice-making ability an individual has. This does not mean that people with a severe degree of learning disabilities cannot make choices. Choice-making skills vary depending on the type of choice and the choice-making context. Furthermore, with teaching, choice-making skills can be improved.

Communication is one of the most crucial executive skills required for effective choice-making and a common area of difficulty for people with learning disabilities. The communicative ability of individuals with learning disabilities is discussed in the following section.

### 3.5.2. Communication skills

Communication is a process which must include two or more people (Cogher 2005) and involves the sending and receiving of information (Kelly 2000) which must be correctly interpreted by the communication partner. Crystal (2003) states that communication is important for the:

- the exchange of ideas and information
- emotional expression
- social interaction
- control of reality
- recording facts
- thinking
- expressing identity

When we communicate we use a range of verbal and non-verbal behaviours to express our views and feelings.

Communication is one of the key characteristics of transition planning meetings. Staff, professionals, caregivers and possibly the young people come together to share their views and feelings about the future. All stakeholders have to be able to:

- attend to and process the information given in order to make a choice
- express their views and feelings
- ask for more information or help to make a choice
- understand the social rules of the meeting, such as turn taking and how long they get to talk for.

Cogher states that communication is not always successful and communication partners have to work hard to maintain conversation and avoid misunderstandings. For either communication partner to interpret what the other is communicating, there needs to be a shared “code or culture” which everyone in the conversation understands. This can be challenging when everybody’s experience of the world and knowledge is likely to be different. Some similarities may occur if individuals have been raised within the same type of environment.

This section explores whether individuals with learning disabilities have the communicative competence to express their views and feelings.

### **Communication development**

Cogher states that childhood is the critical time for “acquiring, developing and practising communication skills.”. Lenneberg (1969) argues that everyone has the capacity for language, but in some cases there is something present that interferes with its development.

In order to acquire language skills the child needs to be within an environment where they have access to hearing language, as a lot is learned through listening and learning from other peoples’ interactions. If a child does not have opportunities to listen to language, then their language learning opportunities are reduced. In addition, this suggests that the child requires the attention and listening skills to be able to attend to the language around him in the first place.

For the child's communication skills to develop further, they must also be able to process language. Through processing language, we extract the meaning of what is being said and then work out the most appropriate way to respond. Once we have decided what we want to say to our communication partner, we then apply the appropriate linguistic rules, such as syntax, intonation and prosody. Motor planning then allows us to organise how our mouth moves to correctly articulate what we want to say. The expression of views is not restricted to verbal output, but can also include; objects, photographs, symbols, gestures and communication aids.

Communication is largely a social act, so the child in the process of learning language needs to understand how language is used socially, for example knowing which social style to adopt depending on the situation: is it an informal or formal situation; and what relationship do they hold with the speaker. Social communication skills, such as asking questions and settling arguments, are learned mainly through practice in communicating with a wide range of communication partners.

By adolescence, most young people have acquired basic communication skills and can then begin to master some of the more complex language skills, such as communicating using longer sentences, making inferences, and telling jokes.

The complex interaction between all the different skills required for effective communication suggests why communication is difficult for people with learning disabilities. The following section explores some of the communication difficulties that people with learning difficulties experience.

### **Challenges for people with learning disabilities**

People with learning difficulties often have difficulties expressing their views and feelings, as well as understanding the language used by their communication partner (Abur-darham & Hurd 2000). Individuals with learning disabilities will have some level of receptive difficulties, which will vary in severity, depending on the level of cognitive impairment (Lenneberg 1969). Often, they many only understand single words or short phrases containing 2–3 key words. It is often difficult to assess exactly how much is understood, which often leads to staff and caregivers over-estimating or under-estimating the receptive abilities of the young person (discussed in Section 3.8.2).

Specific vocabulary can be difficult for individuals with learning disabilities to understand. Many words within the English language hold multiple meanings or are used

metaphorically, which can cause confusion. The young person may only understand the word within one context. Furthermore, abstract concepts such as time are difficult to learn and understand.

Expressive communication is also impaired in this client group. Individuals may be non-verbal, have limited verbal communication, use alternative methods of communication or have expressive skills that appear more advanced than they actually are. When communication appears more advanced, individuals often speak using learnt phrases rather than spontaneous communication. This leads staff and caregivers to believe that expressive and receptive skills are of a similar level, when in fact the repeating of learnt phrases is often symptomatic of a receptive difficulty (Kelly 2000).

Cogher (2005) argues that young people with learning disabilities often have restricted social relationships compared to their typically developing peers, which means they have fewer opportunities to practice their communication skills. Communication is further restricted, as many communicate using an alternative means of communication. This means there are fewer people that share the same communication code.

During adolescence, most young people have mastered basic communication skills, however this is unlikely to be the case for individuals with learning disabilities. Cogher argues that the mastery of communication is also related to one's ability to achieve autonomy and independence, in particular being able to communicate one's views and feelings and communicate choices. Without this ability, other people may question the young person's potential for being independent and autonomous.

Harris (2003) states that people with learning disabilities may struggle to make choices as their difficulties will make it hard for them to obtain and make sense of the information required to make an effective choice. The presence of an expressive difficulty may also make it challenging for the young person to ask for help, which may be beneficial if the young person has to make a difficult choice to make. Furthermore, Rawlings et al. (1995) and Morris (1999) argue that if the young person is unable to express a choice in a way that was understood by others then choice-making would be limited.

Despite these difficulties, there is evidence to demonstrate that the communication skills of individuals with learning disabilities can be improved, especially when staff and caregivers modify how they communicate:

“Even children with severe learning disabilities or very limited expressive language can communicate preference if they are asked in the right way by people who understand their needs and have the relevant skills to listen” (DoH 1991)

The receptive skills of this client group can be enhanced when staff and caregivers adopt a total communication approach by supporting verbal communication with visual cues such as signs, objects, photographs, symbols and gestures. This same method can also be introduced to the person with learning disabilities to help augment their communication if they find it difficult to express themselves. The strategies which increase the communicative competence and the subsequent inclusion of young people with learning disabilities are discussed further in Section 3.7

Communication skills can also be enhanced through increasing the social opportunities of people with learning disabilities. Through increased social interactions, the individual will have opportunities to practice and learn new communication skills. Access to self-advocacy and opportunities to share life histories have also contributed to the increase in communicative competence of individuals with learning disabilities. Furthermore, participation in both these activities demonstrates that despite having communication difficulties, people with learning disabilities have something important to contribute to the way their lives are shaped and can influence the way that others think (Atkinson 2004).

### **Life histories and narratives**

There is a long tradition in research of the use of biographical methods, such as life histories and narratives, as they are a useful method for individuals to record their opinions and feelings. Narrative or biographical methods involve the collection of individual stories, whilst life history research frames a story within a historical context. Multiple stories can then be brought together to compare experiences of a similar situation or social context. Turner (1980) stated that historically researchers failed to use life history and narrative methods with people with disabilities, as it was assumed that they lacked the skills to express their views and feelings.

The use of life history approaches with people with learning disabilities became popular in the 1990's. With deinstitutionalisation, there was a shift towards more participative and inclusive research practices, where people with learning disabilities were seen as equal participants or in some instances co-researchers. This shift occurred as researchers

became interested in comparing the experiences of community and institutional living. People with learning disabilities were now seen as more than a source of data, but as having their own voice (Atkinson 2000).

Atkinson & Walmsley (1999) state that through life histories people with learning disabilities define themselves as individuals with a “personal history, a culture, a class, a gender, as well as an impairment.” rather than purely victims of oppression. Furthermore, the act of sharing their story helps them to make sense of their lives by exploring what has happened in their past, what is happening in the present and what might happen in the future. Davis (2000) argues that this is important for the development of self-identity (Section 3.6.2) and self-expression.

Encouraging individuals with learning disabilities to share their experiences with others can assist in altering some of the misconceptions that society may have about disability. Furthermore, Atkinson (2004) and Susinos (2007) argue that through sharing experiences, the discourse can be changed from that of victims to individuals taking some power back. This change in power relationships is possible as the process of reflecting on their experiences and sharing their stories would have given individuals the knowledge to empower themselves.

Although the original life histories data came from people with mild learning disabilities, Atkinson argues that this approach would also be beneficial to individuals who have fewer communication skills. She further states that the presence of more severe communication difficulties is not a reason to exclude them from this approach and that instead researchers should be more creative to account for individual needs, such as using photographs and taking individuals to key landmarks in their lives.

## Summary

All people with learning disabilities will have some level of communication impairment of their expressive, receptive and pragmatic skills. The degree of the communication impairment may affect their ability to meaningfully participate in transition planning, especially if they are unable to communicate in a way that is understood by others or do not understand the options available to them.

People with mild learning disabilities have been shown able to successfully share their views and feelings through self-advocacy and life history research. However there is less evidence for this with those who have severe communication difficulties.

The communication of individuals with all degrees of learning disability has been shown to improve with increased social opportunities. This helps to widen the individual's language exposure and also to provide them with more opportunities to practice communicating with different partners. Communication can be improved further when staff modify the way they communicate with individuals with learning disabilities. This is discussed later in the chapter.

### **3.5.3. Experience of moving to an adult world**

Clegg et al. (2008) state that for some young people with learning disabilities the adolescent transition fails to happen. Instead of having more independence and increased opportunities for making choices, they are just moved from one service to another with no change. They become stuck in a transitional stage between childhood and adulthood. Young people with learning disabilities may not be perceived to have adult status as they are unlikely to reach many of the benchmarks that society holds for adulthood, such as employment and independence.

As discussed in section 3.3, sexual experimentation and expression are also markers of the transition to adulthood. Taleporos & McCabe (2001) argue that there have been many powerful discourses that have portrayed the sexuality of individuals with disabilities. Priestley (1999) states that individuals with disabilities have been described as "asexual, sexually threatening or unquestioningly heterosexual.". Furthermore, Milligan & Neufeldt (2001) argue that the presence of a learning disability meant that individuals were believed not to have the level of social judgement required to form responsible sexual relationships. This has led to the restriction of sexual relationships, sexual segregation, adult surveillance and the withholding of adequate sex education (Priestley 1999, Shakespeare 2000, Shepperdson 2000). The experience of moving into the adult world may be restricted through the care and protection of those in the individual's life or through discrimination. The attitudes of others towards disability are discussed later in the chapter.

Personal attributes also play an important role in the success of adolescent transitions. Baker (1991) argues that when individuals with learning disabilities fail to make the adolescent transition, or reach independence much later than their non-disabled peers this can be attributed purely to their personal attributes.

Shepperdson argues that people with learning disabilities often do not have the level of assertiveness required to take control. This increases the likelihood that the young person may be kept in a “child-like dependent state” (Shepperdson 2000). Assertiveness is needed if the young people are to assert themselves as a separate identity from their parents. Independence can only occur once the young person is able to reject certain parts of their parents identities and recognise themselves as a separate person.

Self-confidence, the ability to perform self-help skills and an understanding of danger are also considered important attributes for a successful adolescent transition. Shepperdson states that it is difficult for young people with learning disabilities to develop self-confidence due to the stigma attached to having a learning disability. This means that the individual develops a negative self-identity (Section 3.6.2).

Shepperdson (2000) argues that the mastery of self help skills is also required for independence. People with learning disabilities often have difficulties carrying out self-help skills and require help from others. This means that they are unable to be totally independent. Heyman & Huckle (1993) and Shepperdson state that those individuals who lived in environments where they were encouraged to do more for themselves and were more risk tolerant developed greater independent living skills than those who lived in more protective environments.

Fisher (2007) and Clegg et al. do however argue that it is possible to be autonomous, but dependent on others. Advocates of interdependence argue that:

“Interdependence is a dynamic of being mutually responsible to and sharing a common set of principles with others. This concept differs distinctly from ‘dependence’ in that an interdependent relationship implies that all participants are emotionally, economically, and or morally ‘interdependent’.”

This means that even with the support of staff, individuals with learning disabilities could still be perceived as independent. Interdependence is challenging for individuals with learning disabilities, as it relies on staff and family members seeing the young person as an active and vital part of the care relationship rather than a passive recipient (Watson et al. 2004).

## 3.6. Concepts of disability

Clegg et al. (2001) found that people held “nebulous concepts of disability”. Different understandings and attitudes towards disability will influence the way that staff, professionals and family members interact with the young persons and the opportunities they provide, as well as influencing the way that the young persons see themselves. A negative self-image may inhibit the young persons from being assertive, may restrict their aspirations and ultimately stop them from making steps in reducing unequal power relations. This section explores some of the different concepts of disability held by professionals, staff, family members and the young people themselves. The following concepts will be discussed:

- labelling
- identity
- understanding of inner world
- over-attachment issues

### 3.6.1. Labelling

“Few groups have been so completely subject to medicalisation in our society as people with learning difficulties. A key component in their historic and continued oppression is the medical profession’s assumption of the powers of definition, classification and diagnosis on the basis of criteria such as IQ, adaptive behaviour and bio-genetic profiles or syndromes” (Goble 1998)

Labelling is often associated with the *medical model of disability* (Section 2.2), where professionals discover and interpret people’s difficulties (White 1997, Gillman et al. 2000, Powell 2003, Ho 2004). However, Norwich (1999) and Kenworthy & Whittaker (2000) argued that the use of the title ‘special education’ or *special educational needs* are labels themselves and are legislated in the 1981 Education Act (Department of Education 1981) and 2002 Code of Practice (DFES 2002). Young people are given labels if they are perceived to have greater difficulties learning than their peers or if they cannot make use of the school’s education facilities. If a young person is given the label of ‘special educational needs’ there is the potential for stigmatisation, but without labelling, there is the risk that they will not receive the services they need (Norwich 1999).

Ho presents contrasting perspectives for the benefits and disadvantages of labelling people by their disability. Ho reported that labelling/diagnosis could be beneficial to young people and their families as it established eligibility for services and offered them protection through civil rights legislation. All young people who are identified as having significant special educational needs during a statutory assessment often are issued with a statement and are eligible for Government funds.

Ho (2004) and Gillman et al. (2000) argued that having a label could help young people and their families understand their disability, identify their strengths and weaknesses in different parts of their lives and benefit from Individual Education Plans to help them experience success. Furthermore, Ho argued that looking at differences was not always a negative action. Through identifying difference, teachers were more likely to develop a way of teaching that could accommodate different developmental patterns and learning styles.

However, Ho also argues the opposite, that labelling can also be damaging, as there is a risk that young people will not be seen as individuals. This is supported by Billington (2000) and Ball (1993) who report that labelling instantly distinguishes young people from their peers and defines them by their disability. They are no longer seen as individuals with “unique abilities, learning styles, circumstances and aspirations.” (Ho 2004). Moreover, Ho argued that the use of labels could establish social walls between groups of people. This is supported by Sutcliffe & Simons (1993) who said:

“Language can be used to control people. The existence of a label is often used as a justification for treating a person in a way that would not be acceptable to others without the label.”

In the opinion of Ho, labelling and subsequent segregation is a practice teachers use to make their lives easier. It is easier to teach a homogeneous class than to accommodate a wide range of learning needs. Teachers worry that they lack the time to provide support to young people who work at different speeds, especially when they often have large class sizes. In addition, Ho argued that teachers could use labels to explain academic under-achievement rather than looking at their skills in teaching groups of young people with diverse learning needs.

### 3.6.2. Identity

The concept of identity is concerned with identifying how people define themselves and what groups that they identify with (Putnam 2005). Giddens (1991) argues that:

“Self identity is not a distinctive trait, or even a collection of traits, possessed by the individual. It is the self as reflexively understood by the person in terms of his or her biography”

Identity is continuously evolving. As one gets older, one's role within society may change, which may alter the way that individuals view themselves. Furthermore, different experiences and attitudes over time also contribute to its development. This can include experiences of discrimination.

It is possible for individuals to hold multiple identities based on religion, disability, gender, race, ethnicity and so on. Burns (2000) reports that disability has become such a powerful identity that it often transcends all others including gender. Walmsley & Downer (1997) argue that professionals forget that individuals may hold other identities that may be more important to them than a disability identity. Shakespeare (1996) states that it is possible for a black disabled person to identify more with other black people rather than other disabled people, as their black identity is more dominant.

(Beart et al. 2005) argues that learning disability is a stigmatising identity:

“Having intellectual disabilities is not a peripheral or neutral social identity, but is a powerful and often dominant identifying label as well as a stigmatising one.”

For this reason some individuals may choose not to incorporate disability into their identity, or if they do it may adversely effect their self esteem and their self-image.

Before an individual can incorporate disability into their identity, they must understand what disability is. Cunningham et al. (2000) interviewed seventy-seven young people with Downs syndrome and their families to identify what factors played a role in the young people understanding their disability. The researchers found that forty-one percent of the young people did not understand what it meant to have a disability. Similar results were also found in the study of Finlay & Lyons (1998).

Cunningham et al. argue that the young people failed to understand what disability was because they did not have the cognitive function and self awareness to understand.

This suggests that one is not able to understand what disability is until a certain level of cognitive functioning is achieved. If a young person is unable to identify their strengths and needs then they would struggle to make realistic choices for the future. Furthermore, it would be unlikely that they would have the cognitive skills to make choices.

Cunningham's interpretation of the findings is not shared by Finlay & Lyons, who argue that the lack of acknowledgement of a disability is caused by denial rather than a cognitive difficulty. This belief is also shared by Edgerton (1967), Sinason (1992) and Harris (1995). In the opinion of Edgerton, denial is present as the individual is trying to come to terms with the pain of having this social identity.

In contrast, Todd & Shearn (1997) argue that unawareness of one's disability comes from the protection of others. They found that the young people had no concerns about their social environment because they had no comprehension of the social stigma that they could experience. They did not have the awareness that people could treat them differently, so they saw "the wider world as both promising and inviting."

Todd & Shearn state that the young people hold these beliefs as staff and families shelter them from experiencing negativity. For example, the young people may not be taken to places where there is a risk that they might get stared at or called names. Furthermore, Todd & Shearn argue there is often a disagreement between school and home about who should talk about impairment with the young person, which may lead to neither taking responsibility.

Kelly (2005) and Davis & Watson (2001) report that parental interpretation of disability greatly influences their child's identity development. As Thomas (1999) argues, children learn most about impairment from their parents. If parents described disability positively or negatively, their children formed similar beliefs. Kelly found that when parents choose not to discuss disability with their child, the child began to collect information from other people. This meant that they could form an altogether more negative understanding of disability.

Todd & Shearn report that teachers often choose not to talk about disability at school, as they wanted their students to have a positive self-image. The teachers stated that if they were to discuss with the young person their impairment it may create a loss in their identity. This meant that they were willing to encourage their students' aspirations, even when they thought they were totally unrealistic. If children are not supported to make realistic and meaningful choices, in choice-making situations such as transition planning, they may not be perceived to be able to meaningfully contribute.

In contrast, Davis & Watson (2001) found that even when disability was not directly talked about, people with learning disabilities did still incorporate disability into their identity. Davis & Watson looked at the discourses of sixty young people who were making the transition into adulthood. They found that young people with disabilities had an awareness of disability and impairment, even though they often did not have the language to articulate it.

The young people showed an awareness of other people's attitudes to disability, which was formed by parental language and language used in social context (usually derogatory). Flynn & Russell (2005) state that bullying provides "unsought information about the attitudes and values of others". This led to the majority of the young people understanding difference as a negative concept. As Freire (1972) argues:

"Self-depreciation is another characteristic of the oppressed, which derives from the internalisation of the opinions the oppressors hold of them. So often do they hear that they are good for nothing, know nothing, and are incapable of learning anything- that they are sick, lazy and unproductive- that in the end they become convinced of their own unfitness."

If this were to happen, this might affect the young person's ability to assert their agency during transition planning or influence their perception of the options available to them (Section 3.4)

In contrast Crocker & Major (1989) state that people with learning disabilities can understand the stigma associated with having a learning disability, but still have a positive self-identity. They argue that the individual may attach more importance to things they are good at and lesser importance to personal characteristics that are stigmatising.

### **3.6.3. Understanding of inner world**

Research described parental and professional concern that people with learning disabilities had unrealistic expectations about their futures, such as choosing activities in which they did not have the skills to participate (Clegg et al. 2008). However, research into target setting skills of people with SLD (Rose et al. 1999) describe evidence to the contrary.

Rose et al. involved all children aged between twelve and nineteen years old at a school for children with SLD in a study to see if they could set their own learning targets.

This study only accesses the views of teachers and therefore is anecdotal. However, the teachers demonstrated that people with SLD were able to set their own learning targets.

To set their learning targets, the young people had to understand their strengths and weaknesses and had to suggest strategies to help them. This suggested that the young people had realistic expectations of what they could achieve. Target setting has some similarities with choice-making, as some of the same skills were required: notably the concept of time and an understanding of strengths and weaknesses. If the young people could demonstrate having realistic expectations in this context, there is an increased likelihood that they could generalise these skills to other circumstances.

#### **3.6.4. Over-attachment issues**

This section explores how the over-protection of people with learning disabilities can inhibit the development of some of the skills required for effective choice-making and independence which are both markers of adulthood. Over-protection is not always a consequence of negative attitudes to disability. Protection can come from love, as well as the belief that the individual is incompetent and needs protecting from themselves. Protection can be useful, but only if it is balanced with opportunities to develop the skills required for independence.

Goward & Gething (2005) report that disability is often portrayed as a family tragedy, as the parents' image of parenthood can be destroyed with the birth of a child with disabilities. This can lead to the parents seeing their child as a tragedy, which results in the child being treated differently. In this instance difference is perceived as a negative concept characterised by "passivity, helplessness and incompetence." (Goward & Gething 2005). In such cases it is likely that people will end up doing more for the child, rather than helping them to develop the skills for themselves.

The belief that the child is a family tragedy may be resolved if the parents are able to come to terms with their child's disability:

"He's great... so those are the vent tubes. He's got very limited physical ability... but he's so active and so vital and he's still Ian... Whilst we embrace and love and cherish the Ian that we have, there was a point when we knew we'd lost the Ian that we thought we had." (A parent, Fisher 2007)

Shepperdson (2000) argues that once parents have accepted their child's disability they may come to see the needs of their child to be similar to the needs of all children.

Parents often have to go through a second stage of readjustment once their child approaches adulthood where they may start to question the uncertainties of their child's future. Shepperdson states that if parents have become used to the role of looking after a dependent child they experience a void in their lives if the child leaves home. Grude Flekkoy & Hevener Kaufman (1997) argue that some caregivers experience 'separation-attachment conflict'. Some caregivers have a strong need to be needed by their child and this contributes to their difficulty accepting that their children also has rights. This denial, potentially keeps the child closer for longer and helps the caregiver to avoid the anxiety of separation.

Shepperdson believes that if young people receive too much protection they are likely to be unprepared for the world outside their family environment. People with learning disabilities often live in protective environments, where their choice-making opportunities are reduced in comparison to their non-disabled peers (Ward et al. 2003). Jenkinson (1993) reports that choices are often over-ruled if it is believed that the consequences of that choice may be too risky or if they disrupt planned activities or existing routines. This means that the young people are unable to become better choice-makers through learning from their mistakes and furthermore, they have fewer life experiences to draw from when they are making choices. Making lots of smaller choices helps us to develop the skills to make bigger choices. This keeps the young people dependent on the guidance of others.

The balance between protection and developing choice-making skills can place parents in an 'ambiguous moral position' (Clegg et al. 2008). On one hand parents are accountable for the safety and welfare of their child and on the over hand they are criticised if they are seen to be holding their child back.

A further way in which people with learning disabilities may experience over protection is through the limited provision of opportunities to socialise compared to their non-disabled peers. In the study of Clegg et al., the researchers found that school based friendships were not developed outside of the school environment, for example the young people would not visit each other's houses to play. Furthermore, the young people's friendships were restricted to socialising with other school members rather than other young people in their community. Clegg et al. suggests that social interaction was seen as a incidental part of being at school.

Staff and family members preferred to take their young people with learning disabilities to “tried and tested places” (Todd & Shearn 1997), rather than new places, as the young person may get stared at. Although staff and family members are trying to ensure that the young people are not unnecessarily upset, they are limiting the development of some of the skills required for effective choice-making and independence.

An understanding of emotions is especially important for developing effective choice-making skills (Section 3.5). This understanding develops through social interactions and experience. If the young people have more opportunities to experience a wide range of social relationships, not all of which may be positive, then there is the potential for them to develop a wider understanding of emotions.

Shepperdson (2000) argues that the parents of children with learning disabilities are more likely to be in a position where they can control the lives of their children and protect them from making mistakes. This is a consequence of some of the natural concerns of parents that have already been discussed and the lack of assertiveness of the young people themselves. This increases the risk of the young person being held within the transitional stage of adolescence for longer than can be considered fair. Parents need to be able to create a balance between encouraging the development of the skills required for independence and protecting their child from harm. If the child does make mistakes this should not lead to increased protection, but should be taken as a natural dimension of growing up.

### **3.6.5. Summary**

People hold different perceptions about the nature of disability. Some interpret difference as a negative concept whereas other do not. Parental and staff perceptions have a powerful influence over the way that children and young people with disabilities feel about themselves and contribute to whether the young person forms a positive or negative self-identity. If the young person forms a negative self-identity they may dismiss their views as being unimportant or not have the confidence to speak up about what they would like for their future.

Staff and family members may communicate their attitudes to disability in their level of protection towards the young person, however overprotectiveness is not indicative of a negative attitude towards disability, but can also come from love. If staff and family

members are over-protective this can inhibit the development of crucial skills needed for effective choice-making and independence.

The following two sections look at other practices that communicate the attitudes of staff and family members towards disability. Section 3.7 introduces some of the practices used that increase the participation of young people with learning disabilities, whereas section 3.8 explores some of the practices that reduce or even exclude the young people from participation.

## 3.7. Mutual respect

Clegg et al. (2001) found that the transition process was not always problematic. In spite of parental concerns, many of the young people settled into their placement after some initial adjustment. This section explores some of the practices that contributed to the success of the adolescent transition for some young people with learning disabilities. The achievement of autonomy and the benefits of stakeholders working together will be discussed.

### 3.7.1. The achievement of autonomy

There is limited evidence demonstrating the ability of individuals with severe learning disabilities to live autonomously. However, Perry et al. (2006) found that people with learning disabilities who had less staff support were able to live more independently. This counter-intuitive result was explained by the restrictive influence of their staff rather than their own capabilities.

#### Direct payments

Research into autonomy of people with learning disabilities states that autonomy can be achieved through increased opportunities to make choices (Section 3.5) and having more financial control (Weymeyer & Palmer 2003). The government has tried to increase the financial control and choice-making of individuals with disabilities through the introduction of *direct payments* (Department of Health 2004).

“If you receive direct payments, you can decide how your needs are met, by whom and at what time. You are in control. You may make arrangements directly, so that any staff you employ report directly to you. If you have a contract with an agency, the agency will be accountable to you, not the local council.” (Department of Health 2004)

Direct payments are a mechanism where local authorities give money to people with disabilities, so that they can purchase their own services (Maglajlic et al. 2000). Clare & Cox (2003) report that in order for people to have more power and control over their lives, there needs to be a shift in how financial resources are controlled and direct payments are a way of achieving this.

Stainton & Boyce (2004) conducted a study between April 1999 and June 2001 to access the views of people with disabilities about direct payments. Twenty five participants, across two Welsh local authorities, were interviewed along with their social workers about their experiences. Individuals who chose not to access direct payments were also interviewed to find out why direct payments were not suitable for them.

The study concluded that direct payments gave more control and autonomy to individuals accessing services:

“I’ve got freedom now which I felt for years I didn’t have. I have got control. I can control my own life now. I have got the biggest say in it as I used to have before, and that is all so positive.” (Stainton & Boyce 2004)

I have some reservations about their conclusions. Firstly, both local authorities had set up organisations to help support people use direct payments. The support provided by these organisations was said to be instrumental in individuals taking up direct payments: they were the main source of information and support. This suggests that the local authorities were pro-active, as Beadle-Brown (2006) argued that support schemes were not required by law. Furthermore, in 2002, a year after the research phase of the Stainton & Boyce study, Beadle-Brown reported that forty councils were still not operating direct payments and only one tenth of disabled people countrywide were accessing the scheme.

In the methodology of Stainton & Boyce there is no reference to the type of disabilities the participants had. However, to make sense of the findings and to determine how generalisable they are, more information is needed on individual participants. From further reading I deduced that the research participants mainly had physical difficulties. In the research results it was mentioned and then glossed over that two people were

excluded from accessing direct payments because of a learning disability. It was decided that they could not consent to and then manage direct payments. No explanation was provided.

### **3.7.2. Working together: a new form of professionalism**

Clegg et al. (2001) and Smart (2004) found that transition is more likely to have successful outcomes when stakeholders work together. Marsh & Fisher (1992) argue that this is more likely to be achieved once professionals adopt a new form of professionalism. Marsh & Fisher state that the new form of professionalism still perceives professional knowledge to be important, but only in the sense that it can contribute to a partnership. The professional is no longer perceived to be ‘all-knowing’, but still has an important contribution to make to the identification of difficulties and some potential solutions. In this model the client has a much stronger influence over the way they are managed. For example, they may reject some of the professional’s suggestions as they do not fit with their way in which they live their life.

This process can be seen as being much more democratic as the client and professional are working to achieve mutually agreed goals. This means that the professional has relinquished some of their power to ensure that there is less inequality in the relationship.

The new form of professionalism also sees a change in the type of goals that clients and professionals choose. Goals become more concerned with self-help and client growth and development rather than being medically driven.

Marsh & Fisher argue that this approach has better outcomes for both the client and the professional. Whilst the client is likely to have strategies and support that fit in with their life, the professional is likely to be provided with opportunities to learn and improve their practice.

## **3.8. Managing alienation**

The management of the adolescent transition for individuals with learning disabilities is not always a success. This section explores some of the challenges experienced by people with learning disabilities that contribute to their exclusion from meaningful participation. The following issues are discussed:

- resource limitations
- staff communication
- understanding of communication needs of individuals with learning disabilities.
- communication and power

### 3.8.1. Resource limitations

People with learning disabilities are affected by multiple levels of resource limitations. At a government and national level the majority of the initiatives that aim to increase the participation of individuals with learning disabilities are either under-funded or have no funding, such as ‘Valuing people’ (Department of Health 2009) (Section 2.3.7). Hence initiatives become purely aspirational or are implemented in a limited way that does not really benefit anyone.

The money allocated by governments for the delivery of services for individuals with learning disabilities affects the type and quality of services provided. Kishi et al. (1988) reports that people with learning disabilities often live in shared homes where staff have to meet the diverse needs of each individual. There are often resource limitations which affect the choices that can be offered to clients.

Clare & Cox (2003) argue that staff are a valuable resource, but through “institutional context, poor pay and inadequate support” they are undervalued. Staff spend more time on practical care than spending time with their clients and developing a meaningful relationship. This is supported by Hile & Walbran (1991) and Cullen et al. (1995), who found that when staff did not spend enough time with their clients, it resulted in staff mis-interpreting their communication skills. Furthermore, Thompson (2002) argues that staff and professionals are often unable to make enough commitment to ensure that initiatives are properly implemented. Many staff and professionals feel that their case loads are too large for them to ensure that each of their clients are meaningfully included.

In care professions there is often a high turn-over of staff. This can affect the development of meaningful relationships: staff may not be in the job long enough to build relationships with their clients and service users may frequently lose staff with whom they had developed a rapport. This can be problematic, as close staff members may have been crucial in the interpretation of the client’s communication attempts. Without

their support the client may struggle to express their views in a way that is understood by others.

Through inadequate resource provision for individuals with learning disabilities, a clear message is being sent to the individuals themselves as well as the rest of society. It could lead individuals to believe that learning disability services are not important and not valued because they are not financially supported.

### 3.8.2. Staff communication

“...by far the greater part of our disability is caused by the ‘speaking’ people not having the experience, time or commitment to try and understand us or to include us in everyday life” (Rabiee et al. 2005)

Rosenberg & Abbeduto (1993) reported that programmes to improve the communication skills of people with learning disabilities had demonstrated little success. Authur et al. (1998) suggested that more effective communication with people with learning disabilities was more likely to happen once communication partners adapted their communication style.

Many professionals (Hile & Walbran 1991, Clarke-Kehoe & Harris 1992, Kerr et al. 1996, Bartlett & Bunning 1997, McConkey et al. 1999, Bradshaw 2001, Kelly 2005) reported that communication was a barrier to accessing the views of young people with learning disabilities. This had led to a reliance by professionals on “proxy communicators” (Kelly 2005) who could translate the views of people with disabilities rather than the professionals developing the skills themselves:

“I’m not very good at working with people with severe learning disabilities. I don’t have enough experience and there is a tendency then to work with the family and not the child... You feel that if you could use different ways to communicate with them maybe you could provide a better service for them and find out what they feel their needs are.” (Kelly 2005)

This was supported by Kerr et al., who reported that doctors were provided with limited training on specific strategies that they could use to support people with communication difficulties during their consultations. Furthermore, Clare & Cox (2003) reported that professionals should not underestimate “the skills required to support, and sometimes interpret, the communication of people with severe communication difficulties..”

McConkey et al. conducted a study looking at the communication of staff when interacting with their clients with learning disabilities and a similar study was also carried out by Bradshaw. These were both small scale, methodologically robust studies and reported similar findings.

McConkey et al. and Bradshaw reported that there was often a mis-match in the way that staff communicated with people with learning disabilities and what they were able to understand. This mis-match was seen in the mode of communication they chose to use, for example speech, sign or symbols and the complexity of the language they used.

McConkey et al. and Bradshaw stated that staff over-estimated the number of adaptive methods that they used when communicating with their clients with learning disabilities. In Bradshaw's study staff used sign during only five percent of their communication acts with clients. Gesture was more frequently used, but was only observed in thirty percent of interactions. Furthermore, they underestimated how much speech they used and how much they actually relied on verbal communication. In Bradshaw's study over half of the participants used only speech when communicating with their clients. In addition, sign was used as a mode of communication during only five percent of communication acts.

Hile & Walbran (1991), Bartlett & Bunning (1997), Bradshaw (2001) all argued that staff/carers often over-estimated the level of understanding of their clients. Bradshaw demonstrated that when staff were communicating with their clients, forty-one percent of the communication acts contained language too complex for their level of understanding, such as using too many information carrying words in their utterances. In Hile & Walbran (1991), a study of twelve staff and their clients, staff especially over-estimated their client's understanding of higher level language commands, such as those that contain negatives and positional language. The complex commands were often quite short, so staff thought that they would be understood. They did not consider the presence of complex grammatical structures. Moreover, the experience and level of training of staff did not influence their understanding of their client's communication skills. Clarke-Kehoe & Harris suggested that an over-estimation of clients communication skills could lead to a breakdown in the interaction and increase the possibility of challenging behaviours.

### 3.8.3. Understanding of communication needs

McConkey et al. (1999) reported that staff failed to adapt their communication style with their clients as they perceived that they were already communicating at the correct level. When the staff were asked to describe their client's difficulties only eighteen percent noticed their client had communication difficulties.

Individuals with learning disabilities may use a variety of means to express choice, such as body movements, facial expressions and gestures. Staff need to be sensitive to the different ways their client communicates, so that expression of choice is not missed or misinterpreted. March (1992) reports that pointing to an object or picture does not necessarily constitute an expression of choice, the individual may have just recognised the object or picture. Moreover, if two choices are presented in a sequence, it is likely that the second choice will be selected due to the influence of the primacy recency effect (Sigelman & Budd 1986).

Researchers (Rawlings et al. 1995, Morgan 2000, Dee & Byers 2003, Rabiee et al. 2005) have also found that people who were non-verbal were often perceived as unable to make choices because they could not talk. This subsequently led to their exclusion from choice-making opportunities. McConkey et al. found that staff asked their non-verbal clients questions that only allowed for a limited response. It was thought that this tactic was used to reduce the risks of misinterpreting their clients response and to save time. Communication with people who are non-verbal can take more time, as alternative methods of communication need to be used in order for the client to be able to express themselves.

In contrast Van der Gaag & Dormandy (1993) and Zilber et al. (1994) reported that staff increased communication with those who had greater communication needs. Van der Gaag & Dormandy speculated this was because staff were attempting to repair any breakdown in the interaction and ensure that they were making themselves understood.

### 3.8.4. Staff communication and power

If staff, professionals, and family members use language that is too complex for the young person then it would be difficult for that young person to meaningfully participate in their transition meeting. For instance, they would struggle to make sense of the

information needed for making an informed choice. The use of complex language may be unwittingly or intentionally used, either way, they both act as a means of exerting power over individuals with learning disabilities and subordinating them.

Stakeholders at the transition meeting may want to include the young person, but do not have the skills or experience to alter their communication in a way that is understood by the young person. In spite of being good intentioned, they are unwittingly excluding the young person from participating.

Complex language may be used intentionally during transition meetings as other stakeholders may believe that the young person does not have the 'communicative rationality' (Bourdieu 1992) to share their views. They may believe that the young person does not have the right to speak or be listened to, so they see no purpose in altering the way that they communicate. As Bourdieu (1977) argues:

“Speech always owes a major part of its value to the value of the person that utters it.”

The use of complex language also limits the young persons access to information and the subsequent development of knowledge. Foucault (2002) argued that knowledge was essential for individuals to free themselves from power inequalities. This suggests that stakeholders may either be making a conscious choice to ensure that the young people do not have the information they require to free themselves and wish to maintain their dominant position, or they do not believe that the young person has the skills to make a choice, so does not require the information. Moreover, they may be unaware that they are not providing the information the young person needs in an accessible format.

If staff, professionals or family members have an advocacy role at the transition meeting where they either interpret or facilitate communication, there is a possibility that they may alter the meaning of language to fit in more with their own beliefs or values. For advocacy to be effective it is crucial that advocacy users have access to the right people. Clare & Cox (2003) and Knight & Oliver (2007) argued that without proper training advocates could project their views onto their client, especially when they did not agree with the client's choices. This was also supported by Von Tetzchner & Jenson (1999), who said that when someone was talking on behalf of another there could be problems with power relationships and honesty. Moreover, in instances where the young people had little verbal communication there was a risk that advocates could work in what they perceive to be the 'best interests' of the young person rather than listening to their voice. Dalrymple (2005) described this as taking a 'crusader role'.

Knight & Oliver suggested that advocacy had the potential to challenge adult-child power relations, but there was also the risk of strengthening them. Dalrymple (2005) argued that there was the potential for advocates to see themselves as experts, much like professionals. There was the danger that they would construct their role as an expert in the young person's communication needs or an expert in deciding if someone could communicate for themselves. Many advocates talked about being "sucked into professional chat" (Dalrymple 2005). This could lead to an imbalance in the power relationship between an advocate and young person. Both Dalrymple and Knight & Oliver suggested that this relationship should be based on more equal power relations.

### **3.9. Transition: a summary of the relationship with theories of oppression**

Bourdieu (1992), Servian (1996) and Foucault (2002) argue that power does always oppress people, but instead can be used to help them. They state that staff and professionals are meant to support their clients and can use their power to ensure that the young person has their say. However, this is not always inevitable and instead some staff and professionals may use their power over the young person. These differences can be seen during transition meetings: some staff and professionals may use their power for the young person and some over the young person.

During the transition meeting, the young person may not have the skills and knowledge to fight against unequal power relations which may make them powerless. For instance, they may not have the cognitive skills to make choices, a means of communicating their choices or the required assertiveness to make sure they have the opportunity to share their views.

Furthermore, people with learning disabilities experience high levels of internalised oppression. If they have experienced negative attitudes or limited control in other parts of their life this can effect their ability to participate in transition planning. They may feel that there is no point communicating their views as they question whether they will actually be considered.

In contrast, the young people may actually have these skills, but other stakeholders may not want to listen. This may be the case if certain stakeholders do not share a common means of communicating with the young person, or they hold values that

question the communicative rationality of individuals with learning disabilities. For stakeholders to listen, they need to be prepared to relinquish some of their power, which they may not wish to do.

Other stakeholders will also be affected by their own social contexts and their associated power relationships. Professionals are given legitimate knowledge through government policies and programmes. During transition planning, it is professionals that have control over providing resources and the power to withhold them. For example, Knight & Oliver (2007) note that social workers are meant to explore the young people's choices and future aspirations during the transition planning process. However, Dalrymple (2005) argued that because of the structures that social workers work within, they have too much of a vested interest. Budget restrictions, for example, might mean that social workers are unable to offer free choice, so limited information is given.

### 3.9.1. Conclusions

“The Archaeology of Knowledge” (Foucault 2002) said the judges of normality are present everywhere. “We are in the society of the teacher-judge, the doctor-judge, the educator-judge, and the social-worker-judge.” The literature about choice-making shows compelling evidence for the abilities of people with learning disabilities to make choices. However, their opportunities are restricted based on the judgements of others. Our society has strong beliefs about what is ‘normal’ and defines people by difference: young people with learning disabilities are doubly disadvantaged by virtue of their child status and their learning disability. People with learning disabilities are often perceived as perpetual children, as they are not seen to fulfil society's benchmarks for adulthood and therefore are seen to need protecting from themselves. This has implications for the value that society places upon the contributions made by people with learning disabilities. Ultimately, the young people's contributions are not valued, so their voices are silenced.

Learning disability research demonstrates that the learning disability population is a diverse group. It is especially difficult to define the competency of people with learning difficulties to make choices. Individuals need different degrees of information provided using different methods to make informed choices. What is considered accessible for one person may be inaccessible for another. As the Mental Capacity Act (Department of Constitutional Affairs 2005) states, it is crucial that decisions are addressed on a case-by-case basis and that individuals should be given the support they need to make their

own decisions. It is true that there may be individuals with severe learning disabilities who lack the capacity to make choices, but this should not be generalised to the whole population.

# Chapter 4.

## Methodology

### 4.1. Research method

Historically people with severe learning disabilities have been excluded from transition planning. The literature identifies two contrasting explanations for why they are excluded. Firstly, there is some debate whether individuals with learning disabilities have the communication and choice-making skills to take part in transition planning and secondly, the exclusion of the young people can be attributed to the attitudes and behaviour of others.

These alternative explanations demonstrate some of the complex power relations at play during transition planning. If the young person has difficulties expressing their views they may feel that they lack in personal power and the skills to influence others and meaningfully contribute. If other stakeholders do not believe that people with disabilities have the right to speak and the right to be listened to this can also exclude them from meaningful participation.

My research explores whether the young people in this study have the communicative rationality and choice-making capabilities to meaningfully contribute to transition planning. Furthermore, I will also explore the power relations between the young people and other stakeholders to see what influence this has on the young person's ability to participate in their transition planning.

Data was also collected from a wider context, as I was aware that the transition planning meeting was a new context for both the young people and many of the stakeholders. Looking at the interactions between the young people and some of these stakeholders

prior to the meeting would help me to identify whether the communication was typical of their interactions or a dimension of the transition planning context. If the young people were able to meaningfully contribute in the classroom, but not during their transition meeting, this may provide me a greater understanding of some of the power relationships at play.

In order to explore the social position of the young person and the associated power relations the following questions emerged through my study of the literature:

1. Were the young people able to exercise personal power during their transition planning meeting and preparation sessions?
2. How did this compare to other contexts? Were they able to exercise personal power in the classroom?
3. Were the young people meaningfully included by other stakeholders in their transition planning meeting?
4. How did this compare to their inclusion by other stakeholders in the classroom?

The preparation meetings include my sessions with the young person and their initial meeting with the Connexions staff. When looking at the power relationships between the young people and stakeholders, I was particularly interested in how one's use of verbal and non-verbal communication can reveal some of the power relationships at play.

If the young people are excluded from meaningful participation during their transition meeting, these research questions will help me explore why as well as proposing some potential solutions. Previous research has tended to focus on the problems, without identifying how the process can be improved.

This research is informed by a 'transcendental ontology' (Bourdieu 1977) and came about to ameliorate the antinomy between objectivism and subjectivism. This ontology is particularly relevant to this study as I am interested in the multidimensionality of transition planning, the social positions and their associated power relationships. This standpoint is useful for identifying subtle mechanisms of power.

Like critical theory ontology, a transcendental ontology believes that one's values influence the way they perceive the world. It is likely that my values will influence the way that I conduct this research, for example I have a standpoint which believes that young people with learning disabilities should be included in transition planning. This standpoint is evident in the participatory nature of this research. A transcendental

ontology acknowledges that no individual can be totally objective or subjective, as we are all located within particular cultural or historical contexts which will influence our values and beliefs.

A transcendental ontology is different to other ontologies as it looks at the outcomes of dialectic relationships (when two opposing ideas are compared and then negotiated to find a solution that includes them both) in terms of structure and agency. This ontology recognises the multidimensionality of social contexts and that different people hold different positions within that context. Furthermore, different people will have greater resources to yield power than others. Within each social context individuals, groups and organisations will all exist in structural relationship to each other. All social positions have their associated power relationships. Those that have more resources to yield power may try to use this power to subordinate others.

As I hold a standpoint that believes that young people with learning disabilities should be included in transition planning and research, it was sensible to adopt a research methodology that was participatory in nature. Furthermore, including the young people in the research could help ensure that I was not wielding too much power over the young people in my position as the researcher (Section 4.3.2). A Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach was decided to be the most appropriate method for achieving these aims (Section 4.1.2).

#### **4.1.1. Research collaborators**

In this study I worked with six young people with severe learning disabilities. Learning disabilities are difficult to define due to the heterogeneity within these classifications. 'Learning difficulties' is made up of a heterogeneous group of different conditions with diverse levels of cognitive impairment. Furthermore, learning disabilities are classified and diagnosed using a range of different classification systems and diagnostic tools, which have varying content.

In table 4.1 I have collated diagnostic criteria from psychological (Weiner et al. 2003) and educational (QCA 2007) assessments of learning disabilities. This table shows the different levels of impairment required to be diagnosed with either a moderate (MLD), severe (SLD) or profound and multiple learning disability (PMLD). I had no information on the IQ of each of the young people in this study, so the young person's level of educational functioning, their communication skills and the support they required was

MLD	SLD	PMLD
IQ 50–70	IQ 20–50	IQ < 20
normal differentiation of the curriculum	Effects ability to participate in the curriculum: need support	high level of adult support
Difficulties with numeracy and literacy	P levels p4–p8	P levels p1–p4
Speech and language delay	Communicate using signs, symbols and verbal communication	Great difficulty communicating as well as additional complex health needs

**Table 4.1.:** Classification of learning disabilities

used to gauge their level of intellectual impairment. Furthermore, the young people all attended schools for children and young people with severe learning disabilities and PMLD, which suggested that earlier assessment had identified this as the most suitable educational provision for them.

The six young people were aged fourteen and just about to commence their transition planning process from child to adult services. The young people attended two different day schools both for severe learning disabilities and PMLD. Springfield and Glendale schools were located in the same area of the country and were the only SLD and PMLD provision within that district. Glendale school had a greater number of students than Springfield school. This difference is represented by the imbalance of participants between the two schools. All young people, who were fourteen and about to begin transition planning were invited to take part in this study. I did not want to exclude Springfield school from the research due to their small numbers.

Across the two schools there were seven young people who were eligible for this study. Sadly, one young person was excluded on health grounds. Both the young man's parents and school staff decided that it would be inappropriate for him to take part in the research. The home school relationship was also highly fraught with a complaint procedure in progress.

Glendale and Springfield schools were selected to take part in this study because at the time I was working as a speech and language therapist in the same district. The schools had a good relationship with the health trust with which I was working and my colleagues felt that the schools would benefit from taking part.

A brief synopsis of each of my collaborators is provided below. A more detailed discussion of the young people's strengths and needs occurs as part of the analysis of the data in Chapter 5 whilst appendix L lists their scores on the P scales.

### **Springfield school**

#### **Adam:**

- enjoys playing on his computer and trampolining
- is on the autistic spectrum and is elective mute. He chooses to communicate in some contexts but not others.
- mainly communicates through makaton signs, but will use a voice output communication aid and some verbal communication
- has a very low receptive skills and requires lots of visual support to make sense of language. He has strong visual skills
- achieves between P5 and P6 of the P scales for his receptive skills and P5 for his expressive skills.
- is a very good artist
- is able to carry out some basic self-help skills, however these skills require a lot of initial teaching

### **Glendale school**

#### **Anna:**

- is very musical. She enjoys playing her keyboard and dancing
- has Wagner's syndrome, which is a very rare connective tissue disorder. She has a distinctive facial appearance as well as a visual impairment and joint problems. She is also on the autistic spectrum
- communicates verbally. In certain contexts she is echolalic: repeating back phrases that she has heard others use

- benefits from the use of symbols if they are enlarged up a suitable size and she is positioned with sunlight behind her, otherwise she has to rely solely on verbal communication alone to make sense of what is happening around her. She is able to follow instructions that contain two to three key words
- fulfils the criteria for P7 of the P scales for her receptive skills and P6 for her expressive skills.
- likes to be as independent as possible and will try to perform many self-help skills herself rather than seek help

**Naresh:**

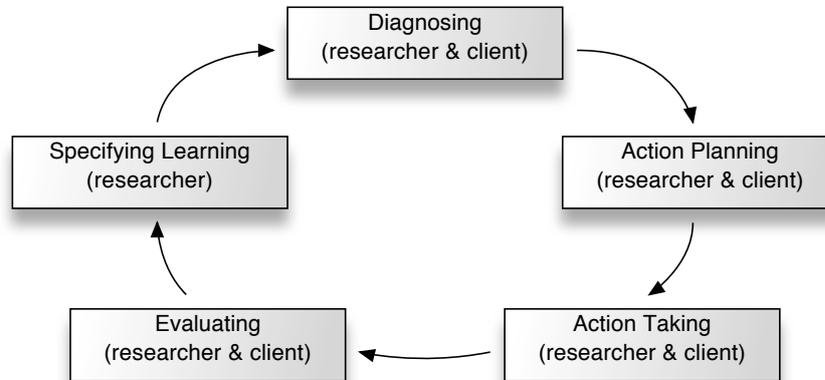
- loves spending time with his father and visiting car boot sales
- is elective mute
- communicates verbally when he feels comfortable communicating with others. If he wants to communicate with you, he uses some spontaneous language and learnt phrases
- benefits from the use of visual support to help him make sense of language. It sometimes can be difficult to identify what he has understood due to his reluctance to participate in activities
- has a tendency to make stories up. For example he may tell you about something that he did the night before, which never actually happened
- has low self esteem and this effects his ability to participate in lessons
- achieves between P6 and P7 of the P scales for receptive skills and P7 for his expressive skills.
- is able to carry out some basic self-help skills independently, however his low self-esteem means that he often prefers staff and family members to do things for him
- always has an interesting assortment of objects in his pocket, such as a plastic fish or a pretend mobile phone

**Sabal:**

- enjoys swimming
- has no additional difficulties other than a severe learning disability
- speaks a little Punjabi as well as English
- communicates verbally using short sentences when he is feeling confident, otherwise he communicates using a combination of single words and makaton signs
- is able to understand spoken language when used in short phrases, but receptive skills are improved further with visual support. The researcher believes that he is able to understand instructions that contain two to three key words, however this can be difficult to assess due to his reluctance to participate in activities
- achieves between P levels 6 and 7 for his receptive skills and P7 for his expressive skills.

**Tarak:**

- loves using the computer to find pictures of his favourite Power Ranger – Hunter, and photographs of people wrestling
- has challenging behaviour. Amongst other behaviours, he strips off if he does not want to participate, shows aggressive behaviour and defecates on the floor (only at home if he is not allowed to watch the television programme that he wants to watch)
- communicates verbally using short sentences. Some of these consist of learnt phrases
- is able to understand instructions that contain two to three key words
- fulfils mainly level 6 of the P scales for his receptive skills, however there is some evidence of emerging P7 skills. Expressively, he achieves level 6 of the P scales.



**Figure 4.1.:** Action Research Cycle: Elden & Chrisholm (1993)

**Terri:**

- enjoys cooking
- has cerebral palsy. She is able to walk, but her mobility is effected. She can be very unstable on her feet
- has minimal verbal communication: only a few single words. She mainly communicates using makaton signs and sometimes with a voice output communication aid
- uses intonation to help convey a message
- is very sociable. She enjoys meeting new people and group work
- has difficulties understanding spoken language and needs visual support to help her make sense of what is happening around her. It can be difficult to assess how much she does understand as she takes a lot of cues from the environment and is able to give the impression that she has understood something when she has not through facial expression or saying 'yes'
- achieves the criteria of P6 of the P scales for her receptive skills and P4 for her expressive skills.

### 4.1.2. Participatory Action Research

In this study I adopted a *Participatory Action Research* (PAR) approach. PAR is a phenomenological approach to research: it is qualitative, experimental and requires the researcher and collaborators to be interpretive and reflective. PAR has evolved since the mid twentieth century and has been used in a range of research fields where there are individuals that encounter a problem within their work-place and want to solve it (Lewin 1946, Gramsci 1971, Freire 1972, Carr & Kemmis 1986).

The approach follows a cyclical process as illustrated in Figure 4.1. The cycle can be repeated as many times as necessary until the desired outcome is achieved. Each action cycle is made up of five stages:

**The diagnosing stage** Identification of the client group/community problem

**The action planning stage** Planning of possible paths of action that may solve the problem

**The action taking stage** Choosing a path of action and realising it

**The evaluating stage** Observing the effect of the action and reflecting upon what has occurred.

**The specifying learning stage** Building and disseminating the knowledge from the outcomes

The research process is discussed in section 4.5.2, while figure 4.5 demonstrates how the action research cycles applied to this study.

One of the most compelling reasons for using a PAR approach is the presence of action cycles. Action cycles allow the researcher to adapt his study based on new ideas that arise during the research process; it is responsive. It allows the researcher to handle the unseen and ultimately ensures positive outcomes for the collaborators. This is particularly useful considering that I have no existing knowledge of their communication styles and needs.

PAR can be easily integrated into everyday work practices. There is increased pressure for practitioners to demonstrate evidence based practice. However, practitioners have high work loads and research is considered an additional commitment and pressure. PAR can ameliorate this tension. Shaw (1996) stated that PAR is a useful method that practitioners can use to reflect upon and modify their everyday work practices to ensure

better client care. Research in everyday work settings is a way of bridging the divide between academics and practitioners: each is informed by the other. Practitioners are likely to have superior knowledge of the field in which they work. This increases the relevance and reliability of the research.

Carr & Kemmis argued that PAR encourages collaboration between practitioner and client throughout the research process. Emancipatory research enables the collaborators to have full control over the research design and process. The concept of involving people equally in research originates from the theory 'Ideal Speech Situation' (Habermas 1979) and is further exemplified in the theories of Bourdieu. The premise is that everyone has equal rights to participate and communicate their views. Individuals should not be excluded because of difference. Furthermore, any claims that are made during the research process should be reached by a consensus. However, there is some debate as to whether research can be truly emancipatory, as Lewis & Porter (2004) states, the linguistic and cognitive demands of designing research are too great. In addition, Walmsley (2001) questions the ability of people with learning disabilities to produce theoretical arguments. However, Heron (1998) reports that excluding people with learning disabilities from research design is like being "liberated on the ground floor while being excluded from participating on the upper floor."

I would have preferred to take an emancipatory approach to this study, but this was impractical within the constraints of a PhD. To be accepted on a PhD programme the researcher has to have identified a research problem, but this is not emancipatory as the problem has to be identified by people with learning disabilities. Furthermore, there may be some doubts over the ownership of the research if the researcher is less involved in the methodological design. The researcher is also constricted by time and her university procedures for conducting research. This means the researcher has to maintain some level of control over the research procedure to ensure that the requirements of a PhD are fulfilled.

I therefore had to adopt a participatory approach, with which I felt a little uncomfortable. Fortunately, I believe that I have identified a research and practice topic that is important to people with learning disabilities (Ward et al. 2003). Although they were not involved in the initial research design, during the action cycles there were opportunities for emancipation. The young people's views shaped the research process. Issues arose that were important to them and so warranted further exploration.

An important issue when conducting practitioner-based research is the inherent relationship between the practitioner and client. Foucault (2002) states that the patient sees the doctor as someone who is qualified in his or her field, which has its associated prestige. This can lead to the misconception that everything the doctor says is true. In my opinion this phenomenon also manifests in other health professional to client relationships. This can reduce an individual's confidence to contribute ideas to the research process. He or she may feel that their ideas are not valid, as they do not have the same level of qualification, or perceived knowledge. Such effects would reduce the reliability and validity of the research results. Issues of power and control are discussed in more detail in Section 4.3.2.

In this study, I had no pre-existing relationship with the young people. I was able to build a relationship that was not influenced by existing knowledge and expectations. I had no preconceived ideas about what would work for each young person, so I had to listen to their voices to understand their personality and their support needs. As both Foucault and Bourdieu argue, power is inherent in all relationships, so in Section 4.3.2 I describe techniques used to try to equalise the power between the young people and myself.

### 4.1.3. Ensuring good research design

Researchers (Kock Jr et al. 1995, Silverman 2005, Burns 2005) have criticised PAR due to its difficulties with *standardisation*, *generalisability* and *rigour*. *Standardisation* is the practice of keeping the procedure and the methods of a study consistent. *Generalisability* is the taking of data from one study and relating it to similar situations. *Rigour* is achieved by using a methodological approach that can be replicated by others: someone should be able to analyse the data and reach the same conclusions. In this section I present the criticisms of PAR and how they can be overcome.

#### Standardisation and Generalisation

Standardisation is thought to defeat the purpose of action research, which is responsive and cyclic in nature. If any feature of a study is not having a positive effect on the participants, this must be reflected upon and the plan changed. This ensures positive outcomes for those involved in the study. PAR allows cycles of change as a result of new knowledge. In conventional research methods, if the procedure is changed half way

through the experiment, it would be difficult to identify the probability of the results occurring due to chance.

Kock Jr et al. stated that PAR has low control over the environment, as all variables are observed. Although this may be true, the isolation of variables does not assist the aim of observing a person holistically. In this study I used a range of resources to facilitate the communication of the collaborators. A single resource may not have a significant effect on the young person, but there may be a synergy when several resources are used. It will therefore be difficult to identify what is the causal influence in the study and whether it is having a positive or negative effect. This means that it can be inappropriate to produce strong theories from PAR. However, my research questions do not require the development of a strong theory: the questions are open-ended individualistic problems that need to be explored.

Generalisability is not always the main aim of PAR. Many use this approach to solve a problem they encountered at work rather than making widespread change. Bloor (2004) states that practitioners use PAR to re-examine their practices and modify the way that they work depending on their findings.

Action research can also be used to influence widespread change. However, in such a case large numbers of participants would need to be included in the study. I deemed this inappropriate for this study. I worked with six young people with SLD, which was a small sample size and was inadequate for making generalisations to the whole SLD population (Bogdan & Biklen 2003, Silverman 2005). Hulley et al. (2006) argues that making generalisations with such a diverse group of individuals is risky. People with learning disabilities often have additional complex needs such as: a dual diagnosis; challenging behaviour; or additional health needs which create even greater diversity in their strengths and needs. By making general recommendations there is a risk that professionals, staff and families will use a 'one size fits all' approach rather than identifying individual needs.

In the majority of action research studies, the likelihood of widespread change depends on the way researchers disseminate their findings. The dissemination of the study findings is an integral part of the action cycle. By increasing access to examples of good practice there is a greater chance that individuals will integrate new knowledge into their practices. In this study I disseminated examples of good practice that could be replicated by:

- School staff: teachers and the senior management team
- Speech and language therapy colleagues at a district meeting
- The transition working group in the district where this research was conducted
- Second year students on the learning disability course at Birmingham University

I chose to disseminate to these groups because:

- School staff would be instrumental in sustaining change
- The speech and language therapists who worked in both schools could encourage staff to sustain change and transfer good practices into other schools for young people with learning disabilities
- The transition working group had a top down influence over the schools and could encourage them to sustain change through policy
- University students could utilise any good practice in their schools in different areas of the country

## **Rigour**

Silverman (2005), Huberman & Miles (2002), Searle (1999) all state that qualitative methodologies are sometimes criticised for their lack of rigour. Rigour is part of the validity and reliability of a study. Oquist (1978) reported that empiricalists, logical positivists and structuralists believe that scientific research should be 'value free' in order to be rigorous. Willig (2004) argued that positivist paradigms particularly discuss the importance of checking the objectivity of data in order to judge the quality of the research. Willig went on to question whether this was an appropriate measure for qualitative research and argued that there were more effective methods for achieving clarity and transparency in the research data.

When using an action research methodology, the research is shaped by individual personalities, experiences and perspectives. Mason (2002) reported that the data could not be analysed independently of the practitioner and collaborators, as their practices are deeply ingrained in the research process. Freire (1972) states that everyone carries 'archives of knowledge' within them and previous knowledge shapes our view of reality. The knowledge we hold will be based upon circumstances of our day-to-day lives.

Therefore, there is some doubt whether research can be ‘value free’ (Guba & Lincoln 1981, Willig 2004, Mason 2002, Bloor 2004). Having previous knowledge of a subject can be problematic if a person’s preconceptions influence the direction of the research process. PAR encourages the honest identification and exploration of personal views and beliefs with the purpose of making the researcher more aware of any prejudices that he or she may hold. This will enable the researchers to identify when their views and beliefs are affecting their judgement. Morse et al. (2002) argued that lack of researcher responsiveness was the single greatest threat to the validity of research.

Guba & Lincoln (1981), Mishler (1990), Anderson & Herr (1999), Morse et al. (2002), Furlong & Oancea (2006) all argue that when evaluating action research, studies should be evaluated only on their *quality* and their *trustworthiness* rather than the empirical criteria of validity and reliability. Guba & Lincoln argued that trustworthiness was parallel to reliability and validity, but was more appropriate for a qualitative enquiry. Anderson & Herr proposed criteria for evaluating the quality of action research:

**Outcome validity** The influence that the study has on practice. Has the researcher been able to resolve the research problem, or do they have a greater understanding of the problem as a result of new knowledge?

**Process validity** Was the research methodology suitable for what was being researched?

**Democratic validity** The extent that stakeholders are included in the research process.

**Catalytic validity** The power of the study to create change.

**Dialogic validity** The process of critical review of research techniques and findings. This originates from the work of Stenhouse (1975) on the inter-subjectivity of the researcher.

*Outcome validity* was achieved in this study by including the views and aspirations of six young people who had previously been excluded from their annual reviews and transition meetings. This study directly influenced practice by enabling the young people to express their views at their transition planning meeting. The study enabled me to reflect upon my communication style with people with learning disabilities and gave me a greater understanding of effective ways of communicating.

*Process validity* and *democratic validity* was achieved through utilising a PAR approach (discussed in Section 4.1.2). This study had *catalytic validity* as the research created change for the young people involved. Easy to implement strategies based on

the findings of this study were disseminated which increased the likelihood of widespread change.

*Dialogic validity* was ensured in part through using a *critical friend* (Costa & Kallick 1993) to verify that no unfair assumptions had been made. Furthermore, field notes, interview transcripts and parts of the data analysis were corroborated by research contributors. These techniques are discussed shortly.

Mishler (1990) and Furlong & Oancea (2006) describe trustworthiness as the ongoing communication between all those involved in the study. Guba & Lincoln (1981) reported that *trustworthiness* refers to the: credibility; transferability; dependability; and confirmability of research.

Issues of *credibility*, *transferability* and *dependability* have already been tackled when discussing standardisation, generalisation and rigour. Credibility is comparable to standardisation. Transferability is the same as generalisability, and dependability is similar to rigour. *Confirmability* can be achieved through systematic research that is carefully interpreted and communicated to others. Moreover, looking at data with analytical depth allows the researcher to strengthen conceptual frameworks of discourses used in health and social care. This includes evidence deriving from wider learning disability discourses of the medical model of disability, inclusion, and power and control. PAR is systematic and thorough if the researchers are diligent in the way that they carry out their research.

Morse et al. (2002) argued that an important part of confirmability is the verification of data. This study verified that I had taken an accurate account of the data by showing the research collaborators what I had recorded. My interpretations of the data were validated by the research collaborators, parents, teachers and my critical friend (Costa & Kallick 1993). Both were achieved by asking individuals to read through field notes; repeating back collaborator's responses using an accessible format, such as speech, signs, symbols or photographs; and sending individuals draft interpretations of research findings.

Costa & Kallick describe a critical friend as someone who examines the researchers' work and critiques it. The researcher provides a description of his work and the critical friend listens and provides questioning feedback. The feedback can be supportive or it can raise questions and concerns about the researcher's practices. The feedback provided by the critical friend can offer a fresh and different perspective on the researcher's

work. This is especially beneficial as the critical friend may hold different values to the researcher.

McNiff et al. (1996) argue that if the critical friendship is to work, the critical friend must understand the context in which the researcher is working and should be able to support the researcher in challenging their assumptions. A critical friend should ultimately support the researcher in achieving success. My critical friend has many years experience of working with young people with severe learning disabilities and has the knowledge to engage with the research. Extracts from discussions with my critical friend are found in Chapters 5, 6, 7, 8 and Appendix H.

The process of working with my critical friend involved five key stages and is based upon the process recommended by the research of Costa & Kallick:

1. Describing the issue
2. Clarification of issue
3. Setting of goals
4. Questioning
5. Reflection

During the first stage, I described to my critical friend the issue in which I wished to discuss, for instance the way in which Peter interacted with the young people during their transition meeting. In stage two my critical friend then asked any questions that may have clarified the issue further, for example “How did you come to that interpretation of Peter’s behaviour?”. During the third stage, I then set out some goals with my critical friend about what I was hoping to achieve from the meeting. This helped to give the meeting structure and ensure that we stayed on task.

The fourth stage of the process was extremely useful as my critical friend guided me towards looking at the issue raised from different perspectives. This was achieved through my critical friend asking me a series of reflective questions that helped to bring out any additional perspectives on the issue, such as “Is it possible that they have always had the confidence to speak out, but you were unlucky not to observe this?”. My critical friend was not there to solve the problems that had arisen, but was there to guide me to my own conclusions. I decided this was crucial in this study as I was aware that the more I was to become involved with the young people, the harder it may become to stay objective and look at all the possibilities.

It is possible that in some critical friend relationships the critical friend may offer his or her own ideas and perspectives about the issue Costa & Kallick. However, in this study it was decided that the role of the critical friend was to facilitate, challenge and motivate. I wanted to ensure that the ideas presented in this thesis were my own work.

The fifth stage of the process happened outside of the meeting. This was a chance for me to go away and reflect upon the discussion that happened with my critical friend. Notes were then made about any pertinent issues/ideas that had come about during the discussion.

Research can also be made more rigorous through *triangulation* (Silverman 2005): In triangulation, three or more types of data are used to study one research finding. In this study multiple methods were used to collect the data, including interviews, observations and field notes. The data was obtained through my reflections of the research process, as well as the reflections of the collaborators. If the outcomes from the young people and myself were to correspond, then they were more likely to be seen as true. For example, the young people were interviewed about their perceptions of the transition meeting. Their ideas and feelings corresponded with my thoughts and feelings.

As an individual researcher I am the ‘bottleneck’ for all data. I record my own thoughts, record interviews and decide if views correspond. There is a chance that some subjectivity may creep in. Short of presenting all the raw data, which is still recorded by the researcher, it would be difficult for an individual researcher to remain completely objective. To try and reduce subjectivity and incorrect assumptions, I recorded all interactions with the young people and discussed my interpretations with my critical friend.

Qualitative research methods are criticised using quantitative definitions of what makes good research. The choice of my research questions; my priority for inclusiveness; the necessity for all six young people to benefit; and reducing power imbalances means establishing a formal procedure from the outset would not be just. I came to a joint decision with the young people about how the research should progress.

## 4.2. Collaboration Comics

Collaboration comics are my own contribution to the study. They are discussed early in this chapter as they are an integral part of this study and were used frequently during the

initial stages of the methodology. Collaboration comics are comic books that express an individual's thoughts, feelings and ideas. There are two different types of collaborative comic used in this study:

**Research Comic** : This assisted me to collaborate with the young people. I used the comic to introduce myself, the research process and for gaining consent (Section 4.3.3).

**Transition Comic** : A comic book was produced collaboratively by each of the young people and myself. The comic was used so that the young people could express their ideas to others, particularly at their transition meeting. This meant that the young people could be included in a collaborative decision-making process.

Section 4.6.1 explains how the comics were made.

Collaboration comics are different from communication books and passports, as these resources are often made by staff for the individual with learning disabilities. *Comic Life* (Plasq 2006), the computer programme that was used to produce collaboration comics, is easy to use and allowed the young people to produce their own comics with minimal support. This meant that they were in control of which pictures were used and how they were represented to others. This is more empowering than other methods as the comics encourage the development of self-identity and self-expression. The limitations of collaboration comics are discussed in Chapter 8.

### 4.3. Research ethics

Sternberg (2002) argued that research is a balancing act. The researcher has to consider: his own interests; the interests of the research participants; and the interests of the community in which the research is being conducted. Without careful consideration there is the potential for harm.

Groundwater-Smith & Mockler (2007) argued that the researcher must design a high quality study to ensure that it was ethical. Essential characteristics are the transparency of the research process and the opportunities for collaboration between the researcher and study participants. Furthermore, the researcher should ensure that the findings are triangulated and verified (Section 4.1.3). Groundwater-Smith & Mockler also argued that research must benefit: the individuals involved; the wider community; as well as

transforming the practices of the practitioner. If this is unachievable then there is no justification for investigating that part of practice.

Morrow & Richards (1996) stated that designing research that includes children is challenging. Not all researchers recognise that children often have different views to adults. Research with children should be considerate of their rights and opinions, which adults do not always respect (Chapter 3).

In research studies involving children there are three key ethical considerations. These are:

1. Confidentiality
2. Issues of power and control
3. Informed consent

Each will be explored in this section.

### **4.3.1. Confidentiality**

The researcher must be careful to preserve confidentiality and sensitivity in their management of *disclosure* when working with children. Mishna et al. (2004) suggested that children may communicate very personal information to the researcher as they are seen as a visitor rather than as a part of their community. The researcher has to decide what to do with the information, in particular, how it will be disseminated and its ownership. This is especially crucial in instances where the children or young people disclose abuse, as the researcher will have to breach the child's confidentiality.

In this study any incidences of disclosure will be followed up using the school's protocol. Each school has a senior member of staff who is responsible for child protection. Concerns and disclosures will be discussed with the designated individual.

The names of the young people in this study have been changed to ensure anonymity, except for Terri. All the young people were important collaborators in the research process and were given the choice whether they wanted their real name to be used in order to have more ownership over the research. Terri and her family requested that her real name was used. They were proud of the contribution that she made to the research process and the way that she communicated at her transition planning meeting. They wanted to ensure that she received credit for the part she played. The other young

people and their families chose to have their names anonymised, which was respected. The young people's opinion was paramount in this decision and was obtained through a Talking Mat (Section 4.6.2).

To further ensure anonymity all pictures of the children and any pictures that might identify the school in which the children attend will be distorted. Although Terri and her family decided that they would like Terri to be identifiable, doing so it may cause the other collaborators to be identified. This would jeopardise their right to anonymity.

### 4.3.2. Power and control

To be consistent with my epistemological and ontological position I must be aware of the power inequalities that may exist between myself and the young people. Mishna et al. (2004) argued that qualitative methodologies aim to reduce the power inequalities between the researcher and collaborators. Reinharz (1979), Magolda & Weems (2002) and Mishna et al. stated that qualitative researchers choose not to observe collaborators from a "dispassionate distance" (Mishna et al. 2004): they engage in order to become insiders. Although qualitative research aims to reduce power imbalances, Foucault (2002) stated that this was impossible as power is an intrinsic part of all relationships. Morrow & Richards (1996) argued that power differences are especially prevalent in research as the role of the researcher automatically puts them in a position of advantage over the participants. Clearly, the researcher must design research in a way that minimises power inequalities.

Magolda & Weems stated that there are three levels of power difference in research. These are:

- Power differences due to individual personalities and upbringing, such as race, class, education and life chances.
- Power differences created by research process through the definition of roles and unbalanced exchanges between the researcher and participants.
- Power differences created by the way that participants are represented in the analysis and dissemination of research findings.

Reinharz (1979), Schwandt (1997), Fetterman (1998), Magolda & Weems (2002) stated that power differences can be reduced, but not eliminated, through:

- Remembering that participants are humans
- Seeking the views of the participants in order to develop a reciprocal understanding of social situations
- Triangulation of data (as discussed in Section 4.1.3).

I will now discuss each of the three power differences in turn and suggest how I attempted to resolve them in this study.

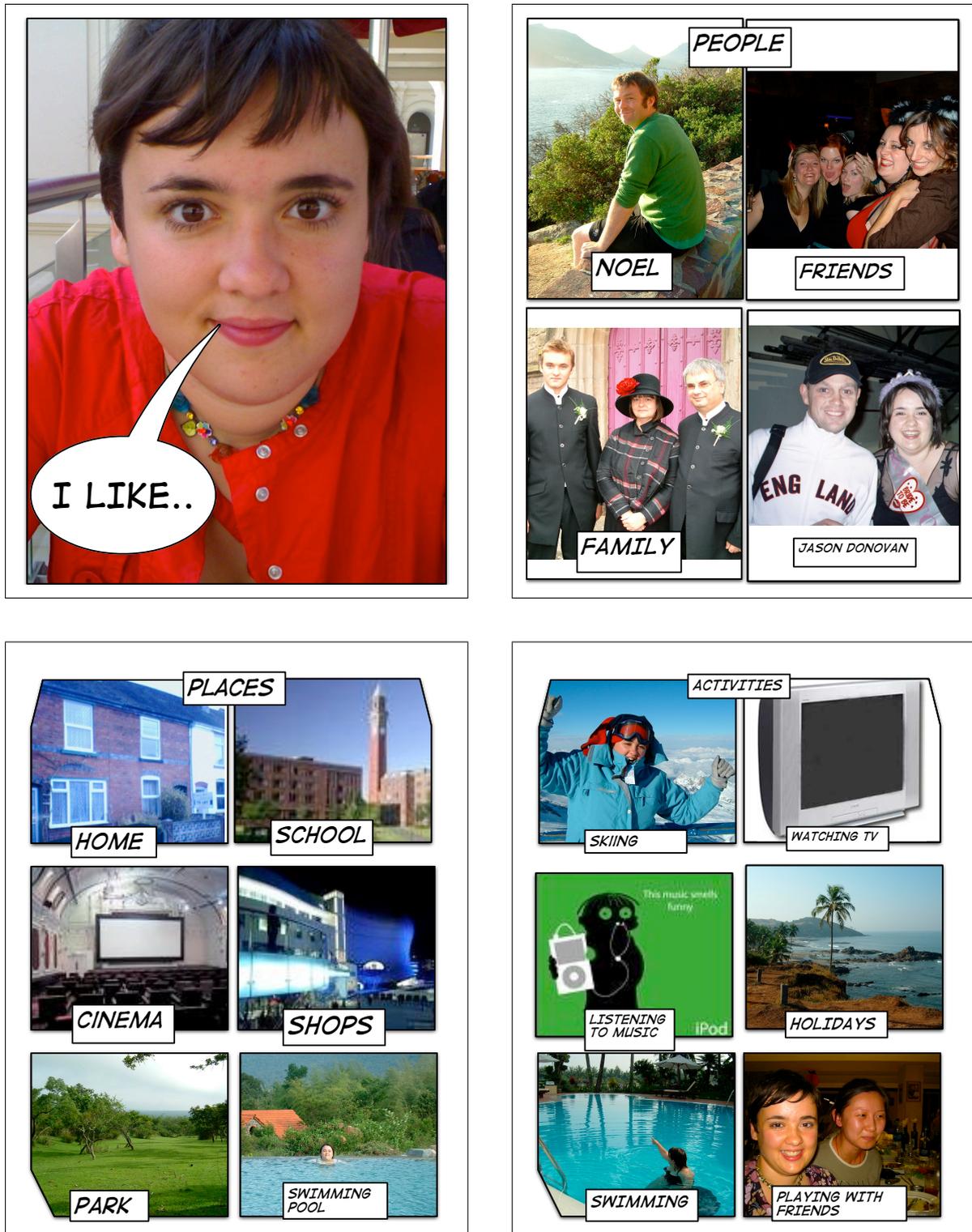
Sternberg (2002) argued that when an individual is considered an authority on a subject he can be perceived to have “superhuman abilities”. This can encourage participants to become involved in *groupthink*. The participants want to support the researcher whom they perceive to be in authority, therefore they communicate what they think the researcher wants to hear rather than their own ideas. Furthermore, if the researcher perceives himself to be the expert he is less likely to listen to the views of the research participants. The research collaborators may perceive me as an expert as I am studying for a post graduate degree.

Prior to starting the fieldwork I spent time building a rapport with the research collaborators. In both schools the students refer to all adults by their title and surname. I felt this was too formal and defined me as an authority figure. I asked to be introduced by my first name.

Unlike the teachers, I told the young people about myself, my likes and dislikes. Figure 4.2 shows four pages from a research comic that I produced to introduce myself to the research collaborators. The design and production of the research comic is discussed in Section 4.6.1. The use of the research comic helped the collaborators to perceive me as human, rather than an authority figure.

Lincoln & Guba (2000) argued that the relationship between researcher and participants is a priority and should come before the “quest for truth”. There is a risk that researchers can become absorbed in their own success at the expense of the participants. When introducing the research process to the collaborators I was honest about how I would benefit from the study as well as how they could benefit. I was explicit about needing their help.

Figure 4.2.: Sharing my interests



Unlike teachers, I also had the flexibility to structure sessions around the young peoples' interests rather than having to fulfil the national curriculum. This too ensured that the young people were a priority. During the field work I was so immersed in working with the young people that my own success was secondary.

Magolda & Weems (2002), like Foucault and Bourdieu argued that power imbalances are difficult to equalise. However, to ensure the ethicality of a study the researcher should be aware of these differences and reflect upon how they may have influenced their study.

The research methodology was designed to include the views of the study collaborators (Section 4.1.2). The collaborators were interviewed to gain their views and these were disseminated in their own words.

### **My relationship to the schools**

The two schools were aware that I was a speech and language therapist (SLT) by profession. Both schools knew of me through colleagues who worked at the schools, however, I had not worked there myself. As I did not have an existing relationship with the staff, I had no prior opinions about the individuals, which might have interfered with the research.

Previously, I had worked with the social worker who attended the transition meetings. This may have contributed to her supportiveness during the research process. Furthermore, we had both worked in similar backgrounds where there was a strong ethos of inclusiveness.

During the research process it was difficult to remain a neutral inquirer as both schools held SLTs in high regard. The senior management team felt that it was a bonus to have a researcher in their school who was also an SLT. I had to be assertive about the aims of the research and my role within the school. I was not there to provide therapy to the students.

I felt more at ease in Glendale school as the staff had an increased understanding of why I was there. The senior management team had taken time explaining my research to staff prior to my first visit. This meant that staff created more opportunities for me to visit the school and were instantly more welcoming. In contrast, in Springfield school they were more suspicious of me and it took more time to gain trust from the class staff. They were given less explanation than Glendale school about why I was spending time

in the classroom. Once this rapport was established, they found more opportunities for me to spend time in the classroom.

### 4.3.3. Consent

The ability of a child to give informed consent to involvement in research has troubled researchers for some time. Dee & Byers (2003) state that for informed consent the child must:

- Appreciate the current situation;
- Have enough information and understand it;
- Weigh up the pros and cons of being involved; and
- Have the ability to communicate choice freely.

If the child is seven years or over, researchers have a legal obligation to gain consent from both the child and parents.

The study of Ondrusek et al. (1998) found that all children under nine years old were unable to give informed consent, as they demonstrated a poor understanding of what the study required. This contradicts the age in which consent has to be obtained from children by law. These findings are inconsequential as researchers need to ensure that they follow the law when designing and conducting research. Ondrusek et al. also identified that all the children in the study, regardless of age, had difficulties understanding the research procedure. These results should be approached with caution, as the data may have demonstrated the difficulties of making the research information accessible rather than the children's lack of understanding.

Ondrusek et al. also found that the children in their study had a generalised perception that if they chose not to be involved in the research that this would make the researchers angry. This was supported by Mishna et al. (2004), who said that children fear the consequences of withdrawal from research, especially as the researcher is often seen as an expert or authority figure. Moreover, they argued that children often did not know how to withdraw from research.

Kay et al. (2002) reported that researchers needed to be aware of the subtle, non-verbal ways that children demonstrate that they want to withdraw from the study. This

might be noticed if, for example, a previously talkative child became silent or moved away to another part of the room.

Despite these findings, other researchers (Abramovitch et al. 1991, McCabe 1996, Fundudis 2003) have found that children aged seven and above are able to give informed consent.

Whether people with learning disabilities can give informed consent is still an open question. Iacono & Murray (2003), Swain et al. (1998), Stalker (1998) all presented evidence for both sides of the debate. Dye et al. (2007) argued that there was minimal empirical evidence to show that people with learning disabilities could consent to being involved in research. They suggested that the majority of the literature discussed the importance of including individuals rather than addressing the practicalities.

The Mental Capacity Act (Department of Constitutional Affairs 2005) (discussed in Chapter 3) states that people with learning disabilities do have the capacity to make decisions. The Act emphasises the importance of judging capacity on a situational basis and presenting information in a way that is accessible for the individual. Unlike research, the code of practice, which supports the Act does address some of the practicalities of involving people with disabilities in decision-making.

Dye et al. examined the abilities of 102 people with mild to moderate learning difficulties to see if they could give informed consent. The researchers found no consensus. However, unlike the recommendations of the Mental Capacity Act, they did not design the consent procedure to the individual communication needs of the research participants. It is possible that they would have been able to give consent if information was presented in an accessible format. Cameron & Murphy (2006) found that researchers should not rely solely on speech, but use a variety of communication tools or methods to gain informed consent.

Cameron & Murphy found that people with learning disabilities could give informed consent. They accepted that gaining consent from individuals who had communication difficulties was challenging. Providing individuals were able to follow *three information carrying words*, when given time and modified resources, they were able to give informed consent. In my study, the schools' speech and language therapist confirmed that the majority of the young people were able to follow commands that contained three information carrying words if presented in an accessible way.

In this study, consent was gained from two different groups: the young people themselves and their parents. As the young people were minors parental consent was required. Both schools had good relationships with their parents and thought that they would be more comfortable being approached by someone familiar. Therefore, parental consent was gained by a staff member. If consent was not given by the young person and their parents, the young people were not included in the study.

To gain consent from the young people I used my research comic (Section 4.6.1), which acted as a visual aid. The book was supported by their preferred individualised communication style, for example sign, speech, symbols or augmentative aids.

Figure 4.3 shows the pages of the research comic that were used to gain consent. The pages were used in the following ways (the pictures are described top left to bottom right):

**What I want to know** To gain informed consent it is important that the young people have enough information about what the study will involve. This page explains to the young people what information they will need to provide.

**What the young people will do in this study** This page tells the young people that they will be taking photographs of people, places and activities that they like and dislike

**How the young people will benefit from the study** This page explains the benefits of taking part in this study, so they could decide whether it was worthwhile participating.

**Video consent** This page was used to inform the young people how the video data would be used in this study and that they had the right to access the video recordings. The young people could choose not to be videoed, but still be included in the study.

Several of the young people had staff and family members who had a tendency to speak on their behalf. When gaining consent I met with the young people on their own, as I did not want them to be pressurised into being involved when they did not want to be. As Freedman (2001) stated “the power relationship that exists can threaten the voluntary nature of the decision.” If the young person needed the support of a familiar adult I would have briefed them about their role. In this study all the young people were able to make a decision without this support.

Figure 4.3.: Pages used for gaining consent



Morris (1998) argued that consent should also be an ongoing process and not just happen at the start of the research process. At the start of each session I ensured that the young people still wanted to be involved in the study by going through the research comic. Consent was given verbally as the young people did not have the literacy skills to give written consent.

There were occasions when the young person still wanted to be involved in the research, but did not want to be involved that day. This was respected and an alternative time was arranged to visit the class. During the following visit the young people were not asked if they wanted to work with me as I did not want them to feel pressured to continue. In all circumstances the young people initiated continuing with the research.

## 4.4. Data collection

Holloway & Jefferson (2002) argued that using multiple methods of data collection enables the researcher to identify themes more easily and ensures rigour (Section 4.1.3). Moreover, it encouraged the researcher to look at the data in context, which they argue could be ignored in studies with a more quantitative methodology.

In this study there were eight types of data. The data types are shown in Table 4.2.

Data was collected from two other contexts as well as the transition meeting, as the transition meeting was a new context for the young people and it was thought this may affect their ability to communicate their views. Moreover, it was thought that the presence of the young people at the transition meeting may also alter the way that the stakeholders interact, as they would not be used to having the young people attend. Looking at the interaction between the young people and the stakeholders would help me to understand their social position and the power relations that exist between them. It is possible that the young people in more familiar contexts are able to express their views, but during transition planning this may be more challenging. Without seeing the young people in an alternative context, I would not know that there was any change or difference in their abilities.

The classroom context was chosen as it was a familiar environment for the young people. The young people had been taught by the same teacher for a number of years and they too would be attending the young person's transition meeting. I felt that it would be useful to observe interactions between the young people and their teacher as it is likely

Data number	Data type	Method of collection	Quantity	Research question
One	Mrs Wilson teaching English and Circle time	Video recording then transcribed	30 minute circle time and 45 minute English lesson	2 and 4
Two	Researcher observations during study	Researcher's field notes	Data collected over 4 months from 2 schools	2 and 4
Three	Researcher observations from transition meetings	Researcher's field notes	Each transition meeting lasted 1 hour	1 and 3
Four	Interviews with young people about transition meetings	Transcribed by researcher	Each interview lasted 15 minutes	1 and 3
Five	Discussion with two parents about transition planning	Transcribed by researcher	2 interviews lasting 1 hour	1 and 3
Six	Interview of Transition Social Worker and two parents about transition meetings	Transcribed by researcher	20 minute interview	1 and 3
Seven	Researcher's impressions of interviews	Written notes by researcher	Throughout all interviews	1-4
Eight	Discussion with critical friend	Transcribed by researcher	Throughout study	1-4

Table 4.2.: Data Types

that they would have a good idea about the young people's strengths and needs and would have developed useful strategies for encouraging meaningful participation. Data is also included from several young people that were not involved in the transition meetings in order to provide more information on the communication context. Furthermore, some of the young people are not included in the classroom footage, as they were 'off sick' on the day that I was given permission to video the class.

Data was also included from the preparation sessions with the researcher and staff from Connexions. Like the transition meeting, this was a new context for the young people and would therefore give me some indication of whether they would be able to express their views and meaningfully participate in their transition meeting. It also gave me an idea about the Connexions staff's attitudes towards the young people and whether they believed that the young people could communicate their views prior to the meeting.

The views of the young people were collected on an on-going basis throughout the research during informal conversations, producing their transition comics and during interviews. Observational data was also important for supplementing the data collected from the young people themselves. Although I hold a standpoint that young people with learning disabilities should be included in transition planning, I acknowledge that the young people due to their cognitive and language impairment may find it difficult to express their views all of the time. This meant that I could not rely solely on data collected from the young people, but also needed to make use of naturalistic observations. The interpretations of these findings were discussed with a critical friend as I was aware of the potential of bias and misinterpretations from this data source.

The use of naturalistic observations also allowed me to take a 'fly on the wall' approach in some situations. Through observing the interactions between the young people and stakeholders at the transition meeting I was able to identify some of the subtle ways that power is exercised. These methods may not be so apparent to those that are involved in the interaction, even though they may be influencing their interaction rules.

The interview data was useful in revealing how the young people felt they communicated and whether their views were being listened to. Furthermore, the interview data from the parents and social worker were useful for understanding their social position and their attitudes towards the participation of the young person.

#### **4.4.1. Type one data: video recordings**

The type one data was collected from two different kinds of lesson, as it was envisaged that the kind of lesson may influence the way that it was taught. In particular, circle time has its origins in a person centred pedagogy, whereas English is a more traditional curriculum area that is often more teacher led. The ethos of the lesson has the potential to influence the way that power is distributed between the young person and the teacher, such as the opportunities the young person has to speak and to be listened to.

The data was recorded using a video camera and then transcribed verbatim, including the verbal and non-verbal communication of the teachers and young people. This allowed me to collect a large amount of data that I may have missed using other recording methods. Audio recording the lesson would not allow me to analyse non-verbal communication and researcher recording would be too slow and inaccurate.

Permission to use the video camera was sought from the headteacher, the class teachers, parents and more importantly, the young people themselves. All gave permission to be recorded. Afterwards, the class teacher, young people, and their families were offered a copy of the video. A copy was requested by the teacher as she was keen to see how she interacted with her class. No other requests were made.

The presence of a video camera can cause some disadvantages. For example, it can cause people to alter their responses from what they would usually say. The video recorder was not hidden and could be seen by everyone during the lesson. However, over time the class teacher and young people became less aware that they were being recorded. Furthermore, as Holloway & Jefferson (2002) recommended, the video recorder was only used once the young people and teacher had got to know me well.

#### **4.4.2. Type two/three/seven data: researcher observations**

The type two, three and seven data were all collected through researcher observations and written field notes. Potter & Wetherall (2004) stated that researcher observations add richness and variety to the research findings. The research notes centred on practices that excluded or included the young people and consisted of a commentary of my thoughts and feelings about the research process. They also included discussions about direct quotes which were taken from the field notes. Examples of researcher observations are in Appendix C.

Observation was a useful method of data collection, but was used with some caution during this study. Observations can be flexible, as the researcher can observe the young people and staff in a variety of situations rather than at one moment in their lives. However, a purely observational study puts the power in the hands of the researcher, as they make judgements about what they are observing and what they choose to record. The researcher could potentially misinterpret the young person's communicative attempts and make unjustified assumptions.

Taking notes in the classroom made some of the staff anxious. Springfield had just been inspected by OFSTED, and my note-taking was an unpleasant reminder of this. In order to remain transparent, all stakeholders were offered access to my field notes at any point during the research process. This offer was declined by all.

The observations made in the classroom and during the interviews were checked for their quality. My critical friend verified my observations through reading my field notes and then discussing the observations I made to ensure I had captured information in the way it was intended.

### **Field notes**

Field notes consisted of verbatim accounts of interactions between individuals in the study. These accounts were written in a notebook during visits to the schools. The field notes included:

- date, time and the place in which the observations occurred
- specific facts
- verbatim transcriptions of specific words, phrases and conversations

After the visit, the notes were immediately typed into a computer document that followed a diary format. Each young person had their own file, which contained dated field notes from each of my visits as well as researcher observations. Whilst typing up the field notes, I made extra notes in the diary entry of any ideas or questions that emerged. An example of the my field notes is in Appendix M.

During the transition meetings the conversations were recorded verbatim in the field notes. I would have preferred to either audio or video record the transition meetings, however this was not possible due to legal reasons. Although audio or video recording

is the most accurate way of recording data, I considered myself to have enough rigour to record the data myself. When transcribing the video data I had good reliability of transcription, so I was able to make the assumption that I would also have reliable transcription skills in other contexts.

#### **4.4.3. Type four/five/six data: the interviews**

Holloway & Jefferson (2002) argued that interviews were a useful way of investigating how individuals convey their experiences contextually. The interviews were held in the school library, as this was an environment that the young people were familiar with and in all cases enjoyed going to. As the interviews were held in the school library there was the potential for distractions and interruptions. Although this was not ideal, there was no other suitable accommodation available. This may have affected their responses.

The young people were interviewed after their transition planning meetings to see how they felt the process went: what aspects they would change and what worked well. There was no time limit placed upon the interviews. The interviews only ended once the young people had discussed all the issues they wanted to communicate. It was important to ensure that the young people had as much time as they needed to respond to questions and discuss their experiences of the transition meeting. The young people's perceptions of their transition meeting were very important to this study and influenced the types of good practice that were disseminated. The questions asked during the interview with the young people are found in Appendix D.

The interviews with parents about their views of the transition process took place at the family homes. The location and duration of the interviews was set by the parents. It is possible the parents found it empowering to have the interviews at home and me as a guest in a safe comfortable environment. The interview proforma is found in Appendix E.

The transition social worker chose to meet at the school, which ensured that we were on neutral territory, which helped to reduce any power inequalities between us. The social worker decided how long the interview could run for, as she had a full afternoon of meetings to attend after the interview. The interview proforma is found in Appendix E.

To explore the participants' views I used a semi-structured interview. This approach was chosen because it supported my epistemological position: it allowed the participants to voice their ideas and have more freedom to discuss topics that were important to them. An interview allowed a deeper exploration of issues and ideas generated. The

participants could suggest ideas that I have not previously thought of. Duckett & Fryer (1998) stated that an interview can be more empowering than other data collection methods.

I decided to use a semi-structured interview, as it was important to have some firm ideas about what I wanted to achieve. The research goals acted as an informal structure to the interview. Blackemore (1992) argued that people with learning disabilities have a greater understanding of language within an explicit context. In unstructured interviews there is the potential to collect data that does not answer your research question, as the interviewees have no boundaries. In contrast if the interview is too structured it will restrict changes in the delivery of questions or to follow up interesting ideas.

By having face-to-face contact with the young people, I could be flexible and adapt to the way I asked questions if I was not making myself understood. I was able to increase the comprehensibility of the question by including more symbols or signs in my explanation. Questionnaires, though often used, are not suitable for this study because they do not permit this same level of flexibility. I would have to rely on someone else to facilitate the data collection process, as the young people do not have the literacy skills to read and write a response. The facilitators may misinterpret what I am asking, or contribute their own ideas rather than the views of the young person.

Whilst interviewing the young people, I needed to be prepared for all the different ways they could respond. They may respond verbally, through gesture or sign, or they may draw. I had to ensure that there was a range of tools available to illustrate a question or idea in case I had to alter the question delivery. This often took the form of a picture, photograph or object to represent the same idea. If I had selected an unstructured interview it would have been more difficult to be prepared for every eventuality: the young person may have felt excluded if communication was not at a level they understood.

The interviews were conducted on an individual basis rather than in a group. The individuals' communication needs were very different and required different levels of language modification. In a group, I would find it difficult to adequately meet everyone's needs. In addition, from experience of running groups, I found that people with SLD have a tendency to copy a peer rather than express their own views. Another reason why group interviews are inappropriate for people with SLD is because they often have problems with attention and listening and are only able to focus on tasks for short periods of time (Aburdarham & Hurd 2000).

Year	Action
9/2003 to 9/2004	Conducted an extensive literature search into choice-making and empowerment for people with learning disabilities. This included selecting an appropriate methodology for including people with learning disabilities
9/2004 to 9/2005	Development of research questions and further reading and refinement of methodological approach
9/2005 to 9/2006	Design of study: the research procedure and tools to be used
9/2006 to 9/2007	Data collection and analysis
9/2007 to 9/2008	Further data analysis and writing up study
9/2008 to 9/2009	Further data analysis and writing up study

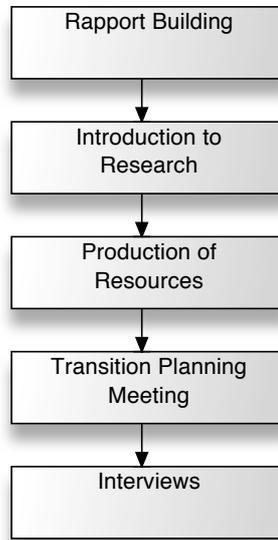
**Table 4.3.:** Research timetable

## 4.5. Research Procedure

Initially, I wrote to Glendale and Springfield schools with a brief research proposal and requested to meet with the head teachers. I did not receive any response. A colleague who worked at both schools volunteered to speak with the senior management about my research as she felt it would benefit the students. My colleague informed me that both schools were interested, but I should make arrangements through the deputy head teachers.

I then met with the deputy head teachers to explain my research proposal and meet possible research collaborators. Once they had accepted my research proposal, my timetable at the school was negotiated with individual class teachers. I allocated more of my time to Glendale school as they had a greater number of students beginning the transition process. Both schools were very accommodating and were flexible about how much time I spent in the classroom and working one-to-one with their students.

On occasions, in both schools, there were difficulties with communication. The senior management teams and teachers had been well informed of the research process. However, the teachers had not informed the classroom assistants, therefore some were wary of me. In Glendale school, I discovered the existence of a transition co-ordinator several weeks into the research process. He was also unaware of my presence. This presented



**Figure 4.4.:** The research process

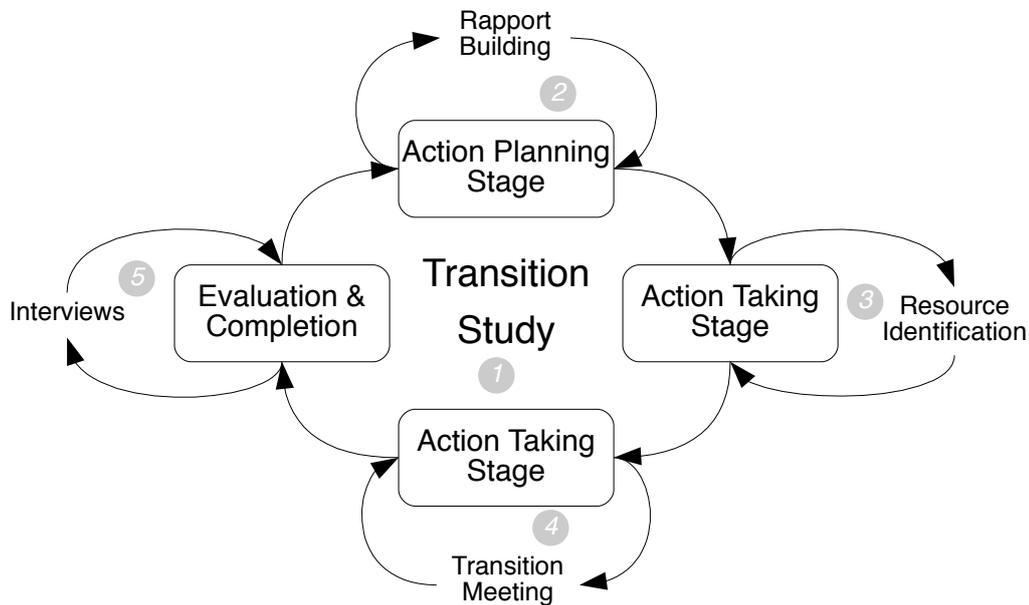
some initial challenges as we had both independently made plans for the same transition meeting. Careful negotiation was needed to fit my research into his existing plans. Once the co-ordinator realised that my research would save staff time, I was able to conduct the research with minimal constraints.

#### **4.5.1. Research timetable**

Table 4.3 shows the research timetable for this study. The study was carried out over six years. During the first four years the research was carried out part-time. In the final two years I worked on this study full-time.

#### **4.5.2. The process**

The research process has five stages, as shown in Figure 4.4. Although there was a set procedure it was broad, non-prescriptive and complemented the action research cycle (Figure 4.1). The identification of the research question has been excluded from the process model, as the research question had been identified prior to meeting the young people involved in this study.



**Figure 4.5.:** Transition study action cycles

Figure 4.5 demonstrates how my research process (Figure 4.4) corresponds to the action research cycle in Figure 4.1. Action cycle one shows the action cycle of the entire study, which is made up of four stages:

**Action planning stage** Whilst getting to know the young people I was able to plan possible paths of action to answer the research question. For example, based on the observations I had made on their levels of communication, I was able to identify some resources that would be appropriate for their level understanding. These resources were introduced at the action taking stage.

**Action taking stage** This stage contained two levels, which were dependent upon each other. The first action task was for the young people to identify which resource they would like to use at their transition meeting. The second was the young people's participation at the transition meeting.

**Evaluating stage** Interviews were conducted to access the views of the young people, some of the parents, and the transition social worker on how they felt the transition planning meeting went. The findings from these interviews and my field notes helped me to evaluate the process in relationship to my research questions.

**Specific learning stage** The findings were disseminated to relevant stakeholders (Section 4.5.6).

Within each of these four stages was a further action cycle:

**Action cycle Two** The process of getting to know the young people also took on a problem solving approach. In order to build a rapport with the young people, I had to identify the most suitable method of communication, which took some trial and error. Moreover, some of the young people were initially reluctant to work with me, so I had to work to gain their trust.

**Action cycle Three** Through working together, we were able to work out how much and what type of support the young people needed to produce their transition comics. The young people were largely responsible for deciding how much help they required.

**Action cycle Four** We did not know exactly how much support the young people would require during their transition meeting. Throughout the meeting different strategies were tried to ensure that the young people understood what was happening. Some strategies did not work and were substituted with an alternative approach.

**Action cycle Five** Different strategies were used to ensure that the young person understood the questions during the interview and that they had the opportunity to share their views. These strategies were identified from previous action cycles and through trial and error.

There were opportunities for reflection during each stage of the research process. Furthermore, each stage influenced what happened in the following stage and this was different for each young person. There were smaller action research cycles within each of the five stages.

### 4.5.3. Rapport building and introduction to research

This section covers the first two stages of the research process (Figure 4.4). Lewis & Porter (2004) and Cameron & Murphy (2006) reported that the development of relationships was the first stage in eliciting the opinions of people with disabilities. As discussed in Chapter 2, Grove et al. (2002) argued that a pre-existing relationship is beneficial when identifying the subtleties of communication. To compensate for not having a pre-existing relationship I had to ensure that the research process allowed me to get to know the young people.

To help develop a rapport I spent time in the classroom joining in with class activities and playing games. Whenever possible I visited the young people at home and spent time with their families or social network. As mentioned previously, the research comic was used to help the young people get to know me.

As part of the rapport building process, I asked the young people what their preferred methods of communication were. The knowledge gained was then used to inform the way that I communicated with the young people and helped to ensure that I was using an appropriate communication style from the start of the study.

Once a rapport had been established I explained to each collaborator what the research process would entail (Stage 2 of Figure 4.4) whilst verifying that they still consented to participate. My research comic was used to explain:

- Why I was doing research and how the research study would benefit me (Page 1 in Figure 4.6)
- What I want to know: what information the young people will need to provide (in Figure 4.3)
- How the young people will benefit from the study (in Figure 4.3)
- What transition planning meetings are (Pages 2, 3 and 4 in Figure 4.6)
- How they could be involved in their transition meeting, for example speaking for themselves, or using me as an advocate (Pages 5 and 6 in Figure 4.6)

The comic was also used as an aid for gaining informed consent for participation in the study. This has already been discussed in Section 4.3.3.

Figure 4.6.: The research comic



#### 4.5.4. Production of resources

The third stage of the research process involved the production of resources. My research comic was used to demonstrate to the young people the choices they had for communication at their transition meeting, if they chose to attend. These included:

- A collaboration comic like mine using “*Comic Life*” (Plasq 2006) (Section 4.6.1).
- A computer based presentation based on Mencap’s “*Transactive Project*” (Section 4.6.6)
- A poster presentation based on Mencap’s “*Listen up*” programme (Section 4.6.5)
- A spoken or signed presentation
- The researcher acting as an advocate

Each young person was supported to make their chosen resource if required. The topics covered in this resource were based on the work of the “Transition Pathway Project” (Sholl & Dancyger 2005*b*), which was used by both schools. The two schools were already using this resource, as they belonged to a transition working group that was trying to improve transition planning in the district. Other members of the transition working group included: social services; Connexions; special educational needs team and local Further Education colleges. The young people in this study were the first to use the new resources in a district-wide initiative to improve transition planning.

#### The transition topics

The Transition Pathway is a set of resources to help support young people during the transition planning process. It includes “The Big Picture” (Sholl & Dancyger 2005*a*), which is a guide to transition planning, and ideas for making the process more person centred. It includes a transition plan that can be completed by the young people to communicate what they want for their future. The worksheets contain 14 comprehensive sections with written examples for what should be included. Some of these sections are:

**Who I am** Your gifts; what you are good at; good things people say about you; illustrated with a photograph of the young person

**My hopes and dreams for the future** What you want to happen now and in the future; get a job, get married; go to the pub with friends; share a house with friends

**School or college** Curriculum needs; where I am now; what do I need to learn; either local, specialist or residential colleges; which courses; any support needs; travel; any funding issues

The resources have been produced in an accessible format using symbols. However, it is not accessible for people with severe learning disabilities. The language used is too complex, is mainly in text and uses very little visual support. To make it accessible, substantial modifications will be needed; for example, extra symbols or photographs to support each concept.

I had to use these headings from the Transition Pathway Project to fit in with existing practices at both schools. However, the worksheets were extensively modified to ensure that they were accessible for people with severe learning disabilities.

In my study the young people talked about:

- things they are good at
- school versus college versus a job
- where they would like to live
- activities they like at home and school
- activities that they do not like
- people they like

These are subjects that I have discussed previously with people with severe learning disabilities with success.

#### **4.5.5. The transition planning meeting**

The transition meeting was the crucial part of the research process, where the young people were able to express their views to their family and professionals. Transition meetings follow a formal set procedure and it was necessary to prepare the young people for what was involved. Talking in front of unfamiliar faces may feel intimidating, especially when the young people may have limited experience of expressing their views to adults.

My research comic was used to explain to the young people what a transition planning meeting involves (Section 4.5.3). It was made clear that many people would attend the meeting and would be talking about them. The comic was also used to explain my role at the meeting. The first choice the young people made was whether they wanted me to be at the meeting. If they wanted me to attend, they chose whether I spoke on their behalf or supported them to communicate their views.

Prior to the meeting, all staff, professionals and family members were briefed of my role at the meeting. They were informed that I would only speak on behalf of the young person if they requested me to do so. Furthermore, I would not share my opinions about what was best for the young person. This was because I had known them for a limited time and could potentially misrepresent their views.

In preparation for the transition meeting, the young people met with their Connections adviser. The purpose of the meeting was for the young person to become familiar with their adviser and so reduce the number of unfamiliar faces at the meeting. By this point, I had established a relationship with the young person, so they could choose if I supported their communication at the meeting.

It was difficult to predict what support each young person would require at their transition planning meeting. This was a new experience for everyone (including myself) as it was unusual for the young people to attend their transition meeting. I was unsure about how the dynamics would work. It was impossible to prepare for some of the difficulties that might occur. For instance, the language used at the meeting might be too complex for the young people to understand. However, it would not be feasible to produce symbols in advance, as I would not be able to foresee all vocabulary that might be used.

When I attended the meetings, I ensured that I had a pen and paper, so I could attempt to draw pictures to represent any language that had not been understood. If the young people understand sign, this was used to further support their understanding of some of the language at the meeting. The young people's transition comic also contained useful vocabulary in a form that they understood. This was referred to throughout the meeting.

### 4.5.6. Evaluation and completion

Interviewing stakeholders was an important part of the evaluation and completion of this study. The use of interviews was discussed in Section 4.4.3.

Northway (2000) states that some researchers forget that research is a process and leave relationships with participants unresolved. In participatory research it is important to plan how you will end the research as “by its very nature, the process of involvement compels the researcher to become part of their lives too.” (Booth 1998). Moreover, Booth states that people with learning disabilities often have small social networks and may see the researcher as a friend.

I used a visual timetable to show how the research process would progress and finish. The timetable was personalised to each young person’s communication skills. The timetable included the transition meeting and debrief interview. The interviews coincided with the end of the spring term, which created a natural finish.

The young people had a colour copy of their transition resource to keep. A copy was also given to the school in order to sustain change: they could support the young people to add to the book for their next transition meeting.

The dissemination of knowledge is a crucial aspect of action research and distinguishes it from other research methods. The importance of dissemination was discussed as part of the research design in Section 4.1.2. In this study I disseminated my findings to:

- the young people and their families;
- the senior management teams at both schools;
- the transition planning working group;
- my speech and language therapy colleagues; and
- Birmingham University students on the learning disabilities course.

The young people and families were given an accessible handout that explained my observations (Appendix A) and whom I was going to disseminate this knowledge to whom. This handout was explained to the young people using their preferred method of communication. They were then able to keep the handout, as a visual reminder about the research process. The other groups received a computer presentation of the research

findings. This included examples of practices that were successful and unsuccessful during the research process.

## 4.6. Research Tools

There are many tools for ascertaining the views of people with disabilities. Lewis & Porter (2002) and Cameron & Murphy (2006) stated that researchers should use a range of techniques and be creative in the way they work. In addition, people with disabilities may not have one preferred method of communication and benefit from a *total communication approach*.

A combination of these innovative methods was used for facilitating the views of people with learning disabilities in this study:

- Collaboration Comics;
- Talking Mats;
- Puppets;
- Photography;
- “Listen Up”
- Mencap’s Trans-Active Project.

In this section, I will explore each of these methods in turn.

### 4.6.1. Collaboration Comics

“The potency of the picture story is not a matter of modern theory but of anciently established truth. Before man thought in words, he felt in pictures. . . It’s too bad for us ‘literary’ enthusiasts, but it’s the truth nevertheless, pictures tell any story more effectively than words.” (Sonnes 1944)

Collaboration comics are my own contribution to this study. Haugaard (1973) reports that young people have a natural attraction to comic books. Furthermore, the use of comic books increases people’s motivation to learn and participate in activities. Sonnes used comics with young people to support his teaching of the curriculum. He found

that young people with low intelligence levels responded well to this form of teaching, as they were helped by the comics' visual qualities. There is no research to show how comics may benefit people with learning disabilities. However, there is plenty of evidence demonstrating the benefits of the visual presentation of information (Lewis & Porter 2004, Porter et al. 2005, Cameron & Murphy 2006).

Collaboration comics are made up of colour symbols and photographs. A maximum of six pictures are put on a page to ensure that people with visual impairments can see each picture. This also ensures that only the most vital information is included which makes the comic more accessible for everyone.

The photographs used in my research comic were carefully selected to ensure that they were not ambiguous. The photograph of myself was selected as people had commented that I looked friendly and open. Each picture was annotated with a single written word or short phrase to reinforce the pictures meaning in case any of the young people were able to access the written word.

The photographs used in the transition comics came from the internet or were taken with a digital camera by the young people. The use of photography in this study is discussed in Section 4.6.4. It was crucial that the young people selected their own vocabulary as this gave them control over how they represented themselves in their transition comic. The process of choosing their own vocabulary was empowering and encouraged the development of self-identity and self-expression. If the researcher provided the vocabulary this would restrict the young people's decision-making opportunities. The young people would only be able to make decisions within a limited range of options.

Collaboration comics can be used in many circumstances, not just transition planning. Table 4.4 shows in what situations and how collaboration comics can be used. However, the use of comics in these situations has not been evaluated as part of this study.

### **Comic Life**

My research comic was produced using a computer program called "Comic Life" (Plasq 2006) that allows you to make comics, story books and brochures. Comic Life is available for Apple computers, but is being developed for use on Windows. Comic Life has an easy to use interface, which is shown in Figure 4.7. The young people can select from a range of different templates that change the appearance of the way the page looks. Photographs

When comics can be used	How comics can be used
To make friends	Sharing thoughts and feelings is an important part of developing friendships. The young person could show their comic to peers to help identify shared interests
To strengthen existing relationships	The young people could show the comic to people who have previously found it difficult to interact. The comic can stimulate discussion and interaction
All review meetings	The young people can use the comic to express their likes and dislikes at home and school to stakeholders. Staff can work collaboratively to set targets for the academic year and these can be expressed in their comic. The comic can then be reviewed during their next review meeting to see if targets have been met
Complaining about services	The comic can be produced so the young people can express their feelings about a service they may be accessing
As a class activity	The young people could be supported to use a collaborative comic to explore their thoughts and feelings about a book they are reading in class. The comic could also be used as teaching aid for exploring individual identity, including difference
For fun	The comics can encourage creativity. The young people could make comics about anything they like and share them with their peers
Explaining appropriate behaviour	Staff and families could produce comics to explain how individuals should behave in new or difficult situations. This is like a <i>social story</i> , but is more accessible for people with severe learning disabilities as the comic is picture based rather than textual
Introducing new situations	Staff and families could produce a comic to explain new situations, such as, moving house

**Table 4.4.:** When collaboration comics can be used

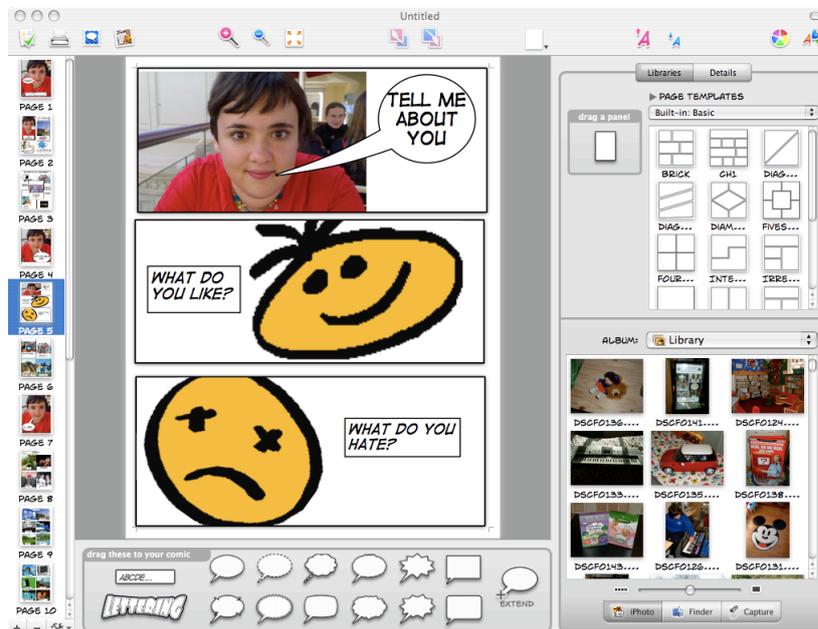


Figure 4.7.: Screen shot of Comic Life



Figure 4.8.: An Example of a completed Talking Mat

can be imported into the program and view them on the right side of the screen. The photographs can then be dragged and dropped into the comic template. Speech bubbles or caption boxes can be added into the template to annotate the photographs. In my book, I used single words or simple phrases to explain what the photographs depicted. This program gave the young people more control in making their resource as they were able to operate the program themselves.

#### 4.6.2. Talking Mats

Talking Mats (Cameron & Murphy 2002) is a low-tech communication aid that can be used with people with learning disabilities to facilitate the expression of their ideas, opinions and views. Figure 4.8 shows an example of a Talking Mat. To use a Talking Mat the young person places symbols of activities, people or places under a visual scale of

emotions ranging from ‘really like’ through to ‘really dislike’. This scale can be reduced to show fewer emotions depending on ability. Cameron & Murphy have found that using symbols is the most effective way of presenting concepts. However, I have used photographs and *objects of reference* (Parks 2003) with success.

A Talking Mat is useful in any situation where the voice of the young person is important. The use of Talking Mats is well grounded in research (Watson et al. 2003, Cameron & Murphy 2002, Brown et al. 2000, Murphy 1998) and reports benefits for those who have difficulties expressing their views verbally. I have been involved in two studies (Whitehurst 2006, Logan et al. 2005) where Talking Mats were used to ascertain the views of people. Whitehurst’s study used Talking Mats to interview young people with learning disabilities about their experiences of working with mainstream pupils in a drama production. In Logan et al., Talking Mats were used during counselling sessions to help the young people express their feelings. The mat helped the counsellor develop accessible resources for counselling sessions. It helped reduce the communication barriers when talking about difficult issues. Furthermore, it meant that people who were non verbal could also access counselling: traditionally a talking therapy.

The young people may have had no previous experience of Talking Mats, so I taught them its use before discussing complex ideas. It is recommended that the tool is taught by completing a test mat on the topic of food. Cameron & Murphy suggested that talking about food was a motivating topic for people with disabilities. To ensure the young people were able to distinguish between the emotions on the visual scale, I introduced items that I would not expect them to eat, for example slugs and worms.

At the end of the conversation the Talking Mat can be photographed to record what has been said. The participants can keep the photograph to give them ownership of the data collected. Lewis & Porter (2002) argued that it’s important to check the authenticity of the data collected. The photograph can be used to check if the young person’s choices were a fair and true representation. I also used the photograph to check that my interpretations of the young person’s beliefs were correct.

### 4.6.3. Puppets

There is limited research on the benefits of using puppets with people with severe learning disabilities. Most studies that discuss the use of puppets are health related, for example,

teaching sex education (Cambridge et al. 2003, Craft et al. 1996). The puppets can demonstrate visually aspects of sex education that staff would not be willing to.

There is some valuable research on the use of puppets with mainstream pupils that could be transferred to the learning disabilities population. Downing et al. (2006) used puppets with children aged 5 to 11 in science lessons. The researchers reported that the puppets were useful in engaging children, especially those who were reluctant communicators. Moreover, the puppets helped to increase concentration in the lessons, as they were visually motivating. They also found that when the class was discussing difficult topics, the children spoke freely to the puppets, as they did not feel they were talking to the teacher.

People with learning disabilities often have reduced attention and listening skills and the use of a puppet may help increase their concentration. This would be especially useful during interviews, as it would be easier to identify whether they had understood the questions asked. Two people in my study were elective mute. The use of the puppet could give them confidence to communicate with me as they would be communicating through an object rather than having to communicate directly. Furthermore, the young people may feel freer to criticise aspects of the research if they were talking to the puppet rather than me.

#### 4.6.4. Photography

“Photographs are a wonderful channel for starting dialogue about the things that are important to you” (Woolrych 2003)

In this study, the young people were given the use of a digital camera for a week, so that they could take photographs of activities, people and places that they like and dislike. Brewster (2004) stated that it was important to involve young people in vocabulary selection and by taking photographs they were generating the research vocabulary. The data collected does not rely on an existing relationship with the researcher. The photographs can help stimulate discussion.

Using photographs in research switches some of the control. Booth & Booth (2003) reported that giving young people a camera “lets them choose how they depict themselves.” A Talking Mat can then be used to sort the photographs into likes and dislikes. This helps the researcher to learn more about the young person. Furthermore, Germain (2004) stated that photographs can reduce some of the language barriers encountered:

the photograph is a visual aid to support understanding and helps stimulate expressive skills.

In this study digital cameras were used for immediate feedback: the young people could check whether their photographs captured their opinions. It enabled us to talk about the photographs sooner rather than waiting for developing.

A camera may be too difficult for some of the young people to operate. Before being given a digital camera, the young people were shown how the camera worked. I encouraged them to show me places and people that they like at school and I supported them to take photographs. The young people could then decide whether they needed help from an adult. The parents were given written instructions on how to operate the camera. In addition, they were advised that the young people should have responsibility for taking the photographs themselves unless the young person asked for help. If the young people did not want to take photographs, they found pictures on the internet to represent their interests.

Photographs can be misinterpreted: parts of a photograph have different importance between people. In order to reduce misinterpretation, I checked responses with the young people over several weeks to ensure they were meaningful and that I have understood their opinions. I also verified responses with class staff and family where possible for further triangulation.

#### **4.6.5. Listen Up**

Listen Up (Mencap 2004) is a lottery funded multimedia resource from Mencap. It is especially designed for people with learning disabilities to support making complaints about service delivery. The resource is for children and young people aged between 5 to 19 years old. Listen Up supports the ethos that children and young people with disabilities have a voice and have opinions and feelings about the services they access. Mencap argue that the key to making complaints is realising that you have choices and by experiencing opportunities you are able to exercise choice and be listened to.

The programme was developed and tested in collaboration with children and young people with learning disabilities. The collaborators came from different backgrounds, were different ages and had varying support needs. This helped to ensure that the resource was accessible to many individuals. Mencap also consulted with parents and professionals. However, the young people themselves were at the centre of the process.

The resources can be easily adapted depending on the ability of the child or young person, for example using a special box to store objects of reference that represent likes and dislikes, or using photographs or symbols representing likes and dislikes in the 'this is me' book. This book contains pictures of people, places and activities the young person likes and dislikes.

Listen Up is clearly an innovative resource, but there is little evidence to show its effectiveness, or measurable outcomes for people with learning disabilities. Watson et al. (2007) reported that Listen Up was an effective tool for enabling children with complex health needs to have a say, as they too are often excluded from choice-making.

#### **4.6.6. Trans-active Project**

Trans-active (*Trans Active Website* 2007) is a multimedia project where young people with severe learning disabilities work alongside peers with no disabilities to explore the choices available to them when they leave school. The project was developed with 60 pupils attending seven different schools in Lichfield and Birmingham between May 2001 and July 2002. There are currently 100 schools in England and Wales using this package. The young people without disabilities learn how to become good communicators and support the young people with disabilities in learning how to make choices and express them to others.

The young people in the Trans-active project made web pages about themselves. They used digital cameras to take pictures of objects and activities that they like and dislike and then downloaded them onto their website. The websites are then used as communication passports to support the young people to talk to others about themselves and develop an understanding of identity. These passports can be used at their transition planning meetings.

The high take up of the package indicates its popularity, but there is currently no research demonstrating how it has meaningfully increased the choice making of people with learning disabilities and its effectiveness during the transition planning process. Moreover, the process of uploading information onto the web suggests a high level of support would be required to produce the communication passports.

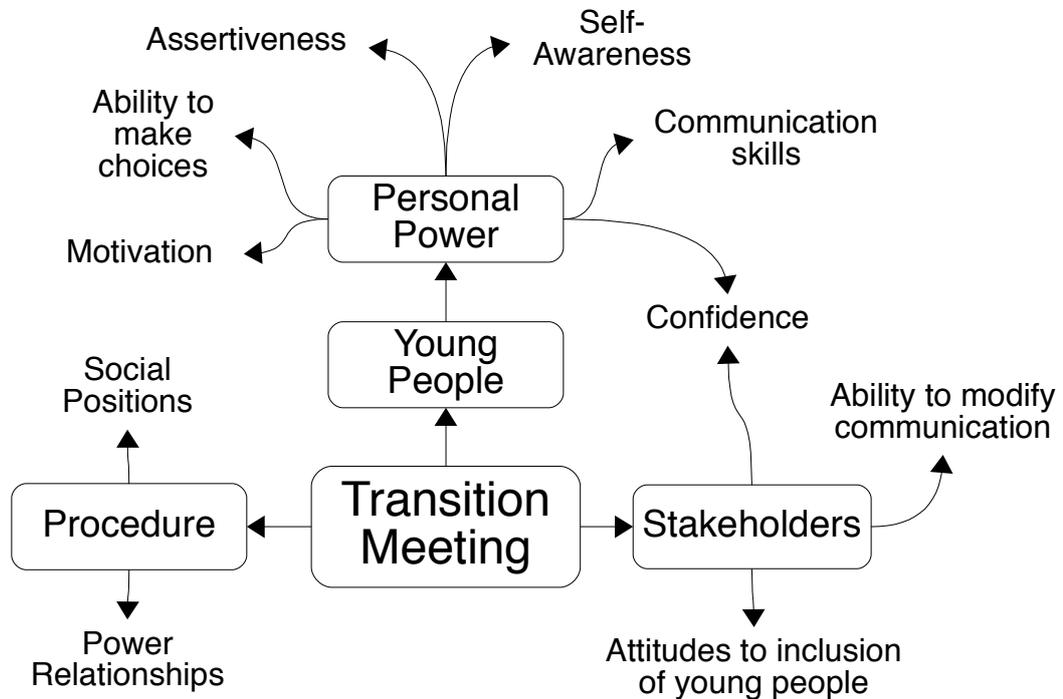


Figure 4.9.: Key themes in the study

## 4.7. Data analysis

The data collected consists of field notes, video recordings and their transcripts, as well as interview transcripts. This has already been discussed in Section 4.4. All of the data collected was coded to identify emerging themes as well as CDA conventions.

### 4.7.1. Coding

Coding is when a researcher assigns codes to themes within a text. For example the theme of participation may be encoded as 'part'. Each time the theme of participation emerges in the text, the code 'part' is written. The researcher can then refer back to the occasions when 'part' is written and identify any relationships in the way the theme is represented.

In this study, the data collected was coded and recoded to identify emerging themes as recommended by Miles & Huberman (1994). They suggest that each type of data

should initially be analysed individually and then collectively, to identify common themes (Figure 4.9).

The type of coding that was used was ‘open coding’. This is where themes are established in advance and then the data is analysed in relation to those themes. The data coding procedure in this study consisted of five stages:

**Stage one** The broad themes were identified in the data. Examples of the young people demonstrating personal power or not were found. The ways in which stakeholders interacted with the young people which either excluded or included them was also identified as a broad theme, however this data was not analysed until stage four of the process. This ensured a methodical approach to the data analysis. These two broad themes were chosen as they were crucial if I was to answer the research questions set out in this study.

**Stage two** The broad themes outlined in stage one were then refined, for instance how did the young people show personal power or not? These themes were developed as I became more familiar with the research data and are shown in Figure 4.9. The stage two themes were generated through the review of the literature. The themes relating to the procedure of transition planning specifically came from the theories of Bourdieu (Chapter 2) whereas the remaining themes originated from the conceptual framework of Clegg (Chapter 3). In Appendix K there is a full directory of all the codes used in this study. They are cross-referenced with the literature presented earlier in the thesis and structured to show how they relate to each stage of this procedure.

**Stage three** Several of the themes generated in stage two were refined further, for example if the young person asked a question, what type of question did they ask?

**Stage four** The broad theme of ‘The ways in which stakeholders interacted with the young people which either excluded or included them’ was identified in the data.

**Stage five** The themes from stage four were then refined like in stage two of the procedure. Instead the themes were influenced by the literature on Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) in Section 4.7.5

Appendix F is a coded example of the data.

Miles & Huberman state that there is an acceptance that people interpret data in different ways, as they see different themes and ideas emerge depending on their

experiences of the world. The coding system I used could not be considered objective, as it was influenced by my experiences, beliefs and values. This would make it difficult for researchers to replicate the exact interpretations of the data. However, as mentioned in Section 4.1.3 there was some doubt whether any research could be truly value free.

To ensure the reliability of coding during the early stages of the data analysis my critical friend observed me coding some of the data. This helped to ensure that I was identifying themes and coding them in an unprejudiced manner. These categories were used in the final coding of the findings. Later on in the coding process, if further codes emerged through my analysis of the data, these codes were discussed with my critical friend to ensure that they were reliable. However, there were minimal changes during the different stages of coding.

#### **4.7.2. Transcription of video footage**

The transcription of the video footage was a time consuming process, as the footage was transcribed on multiple levels. First I transcribed what was being communicated verbally and then the footage was transcribed again, but this time only non-verbal communication was noted. Both the non-verbal and verbal transcriptions were contained in the same document to show the complete interaction (examples in Appendix G).

Non-verbal communication was not just seen as supporting the meaning of verbal communication. Some of the non-verbal communication stood alone and had its own meaning. It was important to transcribe the non-verbal communication as some of the young people had limited verbal communication and used alternative methods of communication, such as gestures and signing.

Some parts of non-verbal communication are idiosyncratic. This means that for more correct identification to occur the researcher needs to understand the context in which that communication is happening. I felt that I had a good understanding of the context of the communication, as I had spent a significant amount of time in the environment prior to working directly with the young people. Furthermore, my critical friend was the head of speech and language therapy for special schools and she too knew the research context well.

The video footage was transcribed using conventions from conversational analysis. Not only was the spoken word recorded, so were other elements of naturalistic conversation, such as gaps, pauses and laughter (Sacks et al. 1974). Wood & Kroger (2000) argue

that conversational analysis allows the researcher to obtain a “complete, consistent and accurate representation of the spoken word.” The conventions I used to transcribe the video footage are in Appendix G.

As I was transcribing the video footage, I made unstructured notes of any ideas that occurred to me. This data was then combined with my field notes, which gave me more information about the context of the interaction. The video footage was not representative of all my interactions with the young people, as well as the interactions with other stakeholders. However, this data was useful in identifying any differences in interactions during the transition meetings compared to other contexts.

The transcriptions had a natural start and finish. The whole of the lesson was videoed and then transcribed. I had not been selective about which lessons I videoed: the two lessons were ones that I was allowed access to. Once the video footage had been transcribed it was coded using the same methods that were used with the field notes.

As there was a large amount of video footage, I could not expect my critical friend to check the reliability of all the transcriptions. Instead, she transcribed a five minute sample from one of my videos and we compared the transcriptions that me made. We then watched back the five minute sample together to negotiate and differences in transcription that we may have had. In Appendix I, I have included both are transcriptions of the same five minutes of footage and provided a summary of the discussion we had about the transcriptions.

### **4.7.3. Transcription of interviews**

The interviews with parents and transition social worker were audio recorded and then transcribed verbatim using the same conventions as the transcriptions of the video footage. The transcriptions were coded in the same way as the video footage transcriptions and the field notes. Transcriptions were then supplemented with field notes I had made during the interviews.

The young people’s interviews were conducted using Talking Mats. At the end of each interview a photograph was taken of the finished mat. I also made field notes in which any verbal and non-verbal communication was documented. The interview transcriptions were discussed with my critical friend. Any emerging ideas were discussed which reduced the chance of misinterpretation of the data. An example of a discussion with my critical friend can be found in Appendix H.

#### 4.7.4. Discourse analysis

The data collected in this study was language based: data was obtained from video transcripts; interview transcripts; and field notes (Section 4.4). When studying language based data, researchers often use discourse analysis. Discourse analysis is the identification of patterns in the way that individuals use language: the meaning of words. The language that people use varies depending on the individual. There are subtle differences in the way that people communicate with each other. Individuals may use different communication tools or use language differently in different social situations. Researchers choose to study discourse as the study of language looks only at the systematic ways of communicating a set of sounds and symbols in order to convey a message.

Although discourse analysis reveals the ways in which people use language, Van Leeuwen (2005) argues that this approach does not provide explanations for why these patterns occur. In order to answer the research questions, I need to understand how and why language patterns occur. Therefore, *Critical Discourse Analysis* (CDA) was deemed more appropriate for this study, as this tool seeks to find explanations for the ways in which people use language.

#### 4.7.5. Critical Discourse Analysis

Fairclough defines Critical Discourse Analysis as:

“discourse analysis which aims to systematically explore often opaque relationships of causality and determination between (a) discursive practices, events and texts, and (b) wider social and cultural structures, relations and processes; to investigate how such practices, events and texts arise out of and are ideologically shaped by relations of power and struggles over power; and to explore how the opacity of these relationships between discourse and society is itself a factor securing power and hegemony.” (Fairclough 2003, page 135)

The process of looking at language in context is also known as *semiosis*. CDA not only describes the structures of discourse, but tries to explain why they occur. Van Dijk (2001) and Fairclough state that CDA is predominately used by researchers to analyse the use of social power, control and dominance, and power inequalities in texts and communication.

### Macro versus Micro

An important aim of CDA is to analyse the use of social power, control, dominance and power inequalities. One method for achieving this is to reduce the gap between micro and macro levels of social order. Van Dijk describes the *Micro* level of social order as: communication; an individual's use of language; and a conversation, whereas issues of power, dominance and inequality are examples of the *Macro* level.

As an example of this, we might consider that during a conversation an individual may use language that is considered racist or prejudiced. The conversation is at the micro level of social order. However, the views expressed during the conversation may reflect some of the ideas held by the individual's wider community. This is the macro level of social order.

Van Dijk suggests four ways of analysing the micro and macro levels of social order. His approach to analysing social order has many similarities with the way that Bourdieu conceptualises his understanding of power (Chapter 2). Each of Van Dijk's four ways to analyse the social order are now discussed, with reference being made to the work of Bourdieu (1992):

**Members-Groups** When individuals from different social groups or organisations meet, they have their own discourses that they reproduce. They will also reproduce the discourse of the group to which they belong. For instance the discourse of teachers, typically known as 'teacher speak'. At a transition meeting individuals will be meeting from different social groups or organisations. Each of these groups will have a slightly different discourse and a different way of approaching transition planning. The way that they define the needs of the young person may depend on the discourse of the social group or organisation that they belong to. This system of structured social positions and the power relationships that manifest from these social positions are comparable with Bourdieu's concept of 'Field'.

**Action-Process** An individual's actions or social acts may be consistent with the social group or organisation that they belong to. Speech and language therapists, for instance, may alter their practices to be consistent with professional guidelines. This is what Bourdieu refers to as 'Habitus'. The individual is adjusting their 'generative schema' to conform to the particular conditions of the group to which they belong.

**Content-Social Structure** Organisations or social groups may change the way that they communicate their ideas depending on the communication context. There may be more freedom to express their views locally, but adaptation is needed in a global context. This has parallels with Bourdieu's concept of 'Practice' (Chapter 2). Through the concept of 'Practice', Bourdieu acknowledges that individuals can be influenced by many different forces and on many different levels.

**Personal and Social Cognition** Everyone has their own beliefs and ideas, as well as beliefs that they may share with the social group or organisation that they belong to. Van Dijk argues that a person's individual beliefs and ideas can mediate between the micro and macro levels of social order. For example, an organisation or social group could advocate the empowerment of people with disabilities, but demonstrate behaviour that is not congruent with this belief. Bourdieu, like Van Dijk, suggests that an individual's beliefs can moderate their perceptions of the social group that they belong to.

### Other criteria of Critical Discourse Analysis

In order to analyse the macro and micro levels of social order, the communication between individuals needs to be analysed. By looking specifically at an individual's communication one can begin to identify what their personal beliefs are, the discourse of the group they belong to and the social order of the group in comparison with other groups. Van Dijk and Fairclough state that the following criteria are also useful for analysing semiosis:

- *Style (within CDA)*
- *Genres (within CDA)*
- *Contextuality (within CDA)*
- *Modality (within CDA)*
- *Topics (within CDA)*
- *Orders of discourse (within CDA)*

When Fairclough describes *style*, Van Dijk refers to *Lexical and semantic structures*. Both are concerned with the way in which individuals change the words and communication structures they use depending on the context of the communication exchange. A speaker's use of pronouns is an example of style in CDA. The use of the personal pronoun

‘we’ shows membership of a group whereas ‘I’ signifies an individual belief. The use of pronouns can also show one’s distance from the object of discussion, for example when a speaker uses ‘I’ or ‘you’ rather than ‘we’ this shows that they are more distant from the speaker. Furthermore, when ‘those’ is used instead of ‘these’ this also communicates distance from the subject (Wiener & Mehrabian 1968).

An individual’s choice of vocabulary is also an important example of style. The type of vocabulary that they choose to use may reveal their personal position on a subject. For example, in political speeches there is a high prevalence of ‘biased’ words which are used to influence the way in which people think (Seidel 1985). There also may be patterns in the choice of words, with some types of vocabulary being over-used and some under-used. More abstract and complex language is often associated with formal settings and with “power and prestige” (Fowler 1985). In order to gauge the complexity of the language used the researcher can examine the type of clauses and phrases that are used in the discourse as well as the syntactic complexity.

Fowler argues that discourse that has a high level of subordinate clauses per sentence implies a high level of complexity. An example of a subordinate clause is:

“Even though the cauliflower was covered in cheese, the child still refused to eat it.”

Moreover, there is an assumption that the speaker has the ability to carry out complex cognitive tasks as the speaker must be able to produce logical relationships between clauses. When co-ordination is used more frequently than the formation of subordinate clauses; for example:

“The cauliflower was covered in cheese and the child refused to eat it.”

this shows that the speaker is more frequently showing ideas as a sequence of separate statements, rather than finding logical relationships between the statements.

The individual’s use of syntax can also contribute to one’s understanding of the style of discourse. The object that is placed first in an utterance is likely to be given the most importance, for example:

The French soldiers fought against the British soldiers

or

The British soldiers fought against the French soldiers

Furthermore, when parts of an utterance are missed out this can imply that the speakers have a shared knowledge or intimacy.

*Genres* are the different ways of interacting, such as how an interaction is organised and the modes of communication used. Van Dijk argues that different genres have their own *schema*: in certain situations there are rules on how one is expected to act. Bourdieu refers to this as ‘Habitus’. Members of more powerful social groups or organisations often decide what is the appropriate schema or discourse for certain situations. For example, in the classroom the teacher may decide to ask a specific student a question. Transition meetings also have their own genres and there are expectations about the way that individuals should act. For instance the transition social worker is likely to be perceived as the decision maker as he or she is responsible for the transition budget.

Fowler describes two methods which are used to assess the genre of the interactions in this study. These are the transitivity of verbs and the relationships between active and passive clauses. The relationship between an active and a passive clause can show the level of importance attributed to the subject by the speaker. For example:

“my mother has told me that...”

Mother is placed in the first position of the sentence, which shows that they are the active agent of the utterance and that they are important. When the same message is conveyed in a different way:

I have been told by my mother that...”

This places the mother in a passive position, whereas the person that signifies themselves as ‘I’ puts themselves in a more important position. The use of transactive or non-transactive verbs can also show who is the agent of action.

Genres are linked closely to *Contextuality* (Van Dijk 2001). Different contexts can influence an individual’s use of language. People can be influenced by different speakers or writers depending on their perceived authority or power. Students may choose to read one textbook over another as the writer is perceived to have greater authority in the field of study. Furthermore, an individual may change their beliefs to be in line with the beliefs of someone that they perceive to have greater power and authority. The communication environment, the time, and the circumstances of the communication exchange can also influence the language that people use.

Fowler (1985) defines modality as the identification of the speaker's attitudes towards what they are saying. When a speaker uses a greater number of auxiliary verbs, such as: 'may', 'shall', 'must' and 'need': this demonstrates that they are confident of what they are saying. This also applies to the use of the adverbs 'probably', 'certainly' and 'regrettably' and some verbs such as: 'permit', 'predict', 'prove', 'obligation', 'likelihood', 'desirability' and 'authority'.

In contrast, when a speaker lacks confidence in what they are saying they may use softeners: 'like'; 'sort' of and 'you know'. Furthermore, they may have an indecisive and unconfident use of the past tense, such as: "I was wondering if..". The speaker may also use tag questions, for example:

"The bus will arrive in ten minutes, won't it?"

Lastly, the speaker's discourse is also characterised by high levels of acquiescence.

Van Dijk argues that *Topics* are also an important part of discourse. The control of topic during all conversation and discourse is a form of discourse control or dominance. For example, in the classroom the teacher controls the topics that students are taught.

An *Order of discourse* is the relationship between social practices and individual identities. This includes genres, style, and contextuality. Fairclough (2003) states that an individual's discourse cannot be explored in isolation, but must be explained in relation to its origin. It is likely that one discourse has been influenced by multiple discourses.

### **Criticisms of Critical Discourse Analysis**

Hammersley (1997) and Toolan (1997) doubt whether critical discourse analysis can be considered critical. They argue that the absence of any conceptual or theoretical framework undermines the approach. However, many researchers (Habermas 1979, Foucault 1970, Fairclough & Wodak 1997, Van Dijk 2001) argue the contrary.

CDA is considered 'critical' as it allows the researcher to make connections between language and social practices. Van Dijk argues that CDA is particularly useful for identifying the way that power relations are constructed, as, for example the language people choose to use when communicating with each other. The language that someone uses can provide an insight into their views and perspectives. Foucault argues that the language people use reveals the social practices that occur within the community that

they belong to. Furthermore, Foucault states that the language used by powerful groups has a function of promoting and protecting their own interests.

Habermas and Fairclough & Wodak also argued that CDA was critical as this method was effective for instigating social change. CDA can uncover the damaging effects that language has on social order and encourages the researcher to develop strategies to address this. In my opinion, CDA complements an action research methodology: they both have similar epistemological positions and are concerned with promoting social change.

Frosh & Emerson (2005) argue that researchers should be cautious when identifying how social practices are constructed in language. Individuals interpret language in different ways depending on their own opinions and values. This will be guarded against in this study by utilising a critical friend (Section 4.1.3). Furthermore, Connelly & Clandinin (2000) argue that if the researcher has key questions that need answers when analysing the discourse, misjudgements are then less likely to be made. In this study I was specifically looking at practices that either encouraged or discouraged the participation of the young people.

Fairclough argues that CDA cannot be completed in isolation. CDA must be used in collaboration with other types of qualitative data analysis methods. In this study I also identify themes within the data and code them.

### **The use of CDA with individuals with severe learning disabilities**

Critical discourse analysis is rarely used to analyse the discourses produced by individuals with learning disabilities. The only study that has used CDA with this client group is the doctoral study of Brewster (2007). Here CDA was used to analyse the interactions between service users, who had severe learning disabilities, and their staff. Brewster found CDA difficult to use with this client group as the discourses were fragmented and lacked depth. However, she only analysed verbal communication; yet many individuals with learning disabilities communicate non-verbally and idiosyncratically.

Fairclough (2003) does state that non-verbal communication should be analysed as part of CDA, however he only considers non-verbal communication supplementary to verbal communication. Poyatos (1976) argues that non-verbal communication should not be seen as supplementary to verbal communication, as verbal communication is shaped by non-verbal components:

“...in everyday, face-to-face interactions, we do more than just speak...the voice is but one component of a larger system of bodily expression. Non verbal behaviours add important information to a communicators speech.”

Poyatos states that total communication includes language, paralanguage (verbal and non-verbal communication) and kinesics (communication through gesture, manners and posture). He also states that total communication is influenced by proxemics and chronemics (the use of space and time in communication). Hence non-verbal behaviours are crucial in revealing a speaker's intentions and provide an important link between verbal communication and context.

Poyatos argues that traditional linguists pay less attention to non-verbal communication as they believe that it is not predisposed to rigorous investigation. Furthermore, researchers often believe that non-verbal communication is universal rather than being shaped by its cultural context.

People with learning disabilities use many non-verbal and often idiosyncratic methods to communicate their views, which are just as valid as verbal communication and also provide evidence for influence of cultural context on non-verbal communication. If this attitude is taken then there should be enough data to make CDA effective and useful. In this study I have chosen to analyse both non-verbal and verbal communication, as I believe that this will ensure that the collaborators discourses are less fragmented and have the depth to benefit from CDA. Moreover, by using the scales of Guerrero (2005), the analysis of the non-verbal communication will be made more rigorous. This is discussed in the following section.

#### **4.7.6. Analysis of non-verbal communication**

Mehrabian (1981) and Tiedens & Fragale (2003) state that the subtle behaviours that people exhibit when interacting with each other can reveal a great deal about their relationship. Mehrabian (1969) found that ninety-three percent of people's feelings and attitudes are communicated through non-verbal communication alone. Observing non-verbal communication is therefore a useful means of collecting data in this study as I am interested in stakeholders' social positions and their associated power relationships during transition planning. To identify stakeholder's social positions and their associated power relationships, I would need to understand their feelings and attitudes. Argyle (1988) suggested that there were five main functions of non-verbal behaviours in communication:

- To express emotions
- To express personal beliefs and attitudes
- To support a speaker's use of verbal cues that are used to manage the interaction
- To reflect one's personality
- To engage in rituals, such as greetings.

Reggio (2005) states that observing non-verbal communication can also provide important information about "cues of status and dominance".

There are many different tools available for accessing non-verbal communication, however Reggio reports that many of them are dominated by functions and processes. For example a tool may specifically look at the function of facial expression alone rather than looking more broadly at a person's non-verbal communication.

I decided not to produce my own scales for observing non-verbal communication in this study as Reggio reports that to develop effective scales is expensive, time consuming, and difficult to get right. This can be attributed to the time required to ensure the reliability and validity of the scales as well as the difficulty in ensuring that the scales collect the exact data that you require. I decided that this would warrant a study in itself. In this study I wanted to look more broadly at the non-verbal communication used in interactions. Guerrero (2005) provides a useful scale for looking at the immediacy and involvement of people in interactions.

Mehrabian (1969), Mehrabian (1981) defines immediacy as behaviours that communicate the intensity of an interaction and the attentiveness of the communication partners. By observing these behaviours it is possible to determine whether: two individuals like or dislike each other; whether there is a shared interest in the conversation; or whether there are any breakdowns in the interaction. It is expected that an individual would exhibit positive affect if they understand what is being communicated to them and they felt comfortable during the interaction. The behaviours that communicate a positive affect are:

- Smiling
- Touch
- Nodding
- Body orientation: body lean and distance between communication partners
- Use of voice: variations in pitch, volume, and tone

Although there are several scales available that report perceptions of immediacy and involvement (Anderson et al. 1979, Thomas 1994, Rodriguez 1996), the scales of Guerrero (2005) differ as they gauge immediacy and involvement of people in interactions through direct observation. Other scales require the people in the interactions to report their own perceptions of immediacy and involvement. Through the researcher recording the non-verbal communication, I aimed to reduce the risk of creating a ‘social desirability bias’ (Crowne 1960). This is when individuals place themselves in a more favourable position than what has been observed.

When selecting the scales to use in this study, a further consideration was given to the background of the individual who developed the scales. The scales of Guerrero were developed at a university that has an excellent reputation for its work on non verbal communication. Guerrero has an extensive publication history and her scales have been used by other researchers as a basis for their studies of immediacy and involvement in interactions Burgoon (1999), Chamberlin (2000), Weisel & King (2007), Umphrey (2008).

The immediacy and involvement scales of Guerrero were used to observe the non-verbal communication between the class teacher and her students (data type one) and between myself and two of the young people in the study (data type two). There were also used during the transition meeting to access the level of intimacy between the young people and other stakeholders to see if this revealed anything about their social position and the power relations between them.

Non-verbal communication can be difficult to accurately measure as the coder is required to make judgements about an individual’s behaviour. This can lead to misinterpretation. However, the coding sheet of Guerrero (2005) was developed during a series of experiments and inter-rater reliability was established for the majority of the behaviours.

<b>Behaviour</b>	<b>Reliability measure</b>
Touch frequency measure	86 and 96
Touch duration measure	82 and 91
Body proximity measure	76 and 92
Body orientation measure	no data and 97
Eye gaze measure	64 and 87
Kinesic animation	87 and 98
Vocal animation	76 and 83
Attentiveness	57 and 81
Nods	99 and 99
Bodily relaxation	41 and 87
Smiling	82 and 89
Lack of random movement	no data and 75
Facial pleasantness	no data and 75
Vocal pleasantness	74 and 81

**Table 4.5.:** Inter-rater reliability scores for the immediacy and involvement scales of Guerrero.

The immediacy and involvement scales of Guerrero have good inter-rater reliability. The reliability of their data was checked using intraclass correlation (Ebel 1951). Intraclass correlation looks at the consistency of data when produced by more than one individual. The correlation score is high when there is little disagreement between the scorers and they provide similar ratings of the data. This approach to testing the inter-rater reliability of studies is believed to be a development from other correlation coefficients, as it allows the researcher to look at the scores for individual parts (in this experiment individual behaviours) as well as look at agreement between raters (Shrout & Fleiss 1979). Table 4.5 shows the inter-rater reliability measures for each of the behaviours that communicate positive affect. The study was conducted twice, so there are two scores for each data type. The second set of data had greater inter-rater reliability, as the rating scales were improved based on the findings of the initial study. The guidelines from the most recent study were used to rate the data in my study. As well as having good inter-rater reliability, Guerrero also found that her scales were validated by other measures of non-verbal immediacy and involvement (Anderson et al. 1979, Thomas 1994, Rodriguez 1996).

Before using the scales in the study, I practiced coding interactions to become familiar with the coding criteria. During the study each video was coded twice to check for the rater reliability of observations. As it was I that completed both assessments it is possible that the knowledges gained from the initial coding could contaminate subsequent ratings. To reduce the effect of this a two week interval was left before the second rating was carried out. I did find that my score did not change between ratings, however changes did occur once I discussed my ratings with my critical friend.

I did not only rely on intra-rater reliability. Reliability was also determined through comparing my rating of the data to the ratings of my critical friend (Inter-rater reliability). We both practiced using the coding scale at the same time and then carried out the actual ratings simultaneously. After we had finished rating the behaviours, we compared our ratings and negotiated any discrepancies. In Appendix J I have included both my rating and my critical friend's rating of the same person's non-verbal communication, as well as a summary of the conversation we had about our ratings. All the rated data can be found in Appendix B and Appendix C.

Each non-verbal behaviour was assessed in turn to ensure that it had been properly observed. All behaviours, except the use of voice, were observed with the volume off. This ensured that no cues were taken from the verbal communication, or that the verbal communication affected the way that we interpreted the non-verbal communication.

The behaviours were rated using a seven point Likert-type scale (Likert 1932). A score of seven meant that there was high agreement and a score of one for no agreement. For example, if a score of seven was given for 'always smiled' this means that the individual smiled continuously through the interaction. In contrast, if a score of one was given this suggests that the individual did not smile during the interaction. A middle score of four, was given if there was observed to be a fifty-fifty balance of smiling and not smiling. Likert and Dawes (2008) state there is a general agreement that seven is the greatest number that is acceptable on a Likert scale and any larger would become problematic.

The use of Likert scales can be problematic as there is a high risk of bias. The three types of bias that may be observed are:

1. Central tendency bias
2. Acquiescence bias
3. Social desirability bias

‘Central tendency bias’ (Babbie 2005) is when an individual fails to select the extremes of the Likert scale, for example one/two and six/seven, instead they select a central number. ‘Acquiescence bias’ (Semon 2000) is when an individual agrees with the statements presented even if they differ from their views and beliefs as they believe they are giving the response that the researcher is looking for. Social desirability bias is when a person rates themselves in a more favourable position than was observed.

The risk of central tendency bias was reduced through the process of intra- and inter-rater reliability, as well as the non-verbal communication being recorded by the researcher who was not directly involved in the interactions that were being scored. The scales themselves already consider the risk of acquiescence bias by repeating the same question but in different ways as well as ensuring that there is an equal amount of positive and negative statements. For example facial pleasantness and smiling are in essence the same behaviour. Lastly, social desirability bias was controlled through the use of my critical friend. She was able to ensure that I was recording fairly and not placing people in an unfavourable or favourable position depending on my own views and beliefs. The specific non-verbal behaviours outlined in the scales are now discussed.

### **Smiling, Touch and Nodding**

During each interaction in this study the frequency of smiling, touch and nodding were recorded using a tally. Touch used in a communication context can include: handshakes; a pat on the shoulder and high-fives. When an individual uses touch during an interaction it can reveal their intentions and feelings towards the person they are talking to. The meaning of touch varies greatly depending on the context of the interaction, the relationship between individuals, and the type of touch that is used. It would be considered inappropriate to stroke the arm of a person that you have just met.

In this study, whenever the use of touch was observed, the coder used a stop watch to assess the duration of the touch. It was then possible to identify the percentage of time that touch was used during an interaction.

Guerrero (2005) defines a nod as the discreet up and down movement of the head. Mehrabian (2007) states that nodding is often observed during an interaction when one individual is encouraging the other to speak. Nodding can also be used to show agreement or understanding of what an individual is saying.

Guerrero uses ‘smile’ to define all facial expression that conveys pleasure. Any smiling that is sarcastic or inappropriate is not recorded. Depending on the frequency of smiling, the coder decides, using a scale, whether the communication partners always smiled to never smiled. Miles & Johnston (2007) argued that individuals are highly sensitive to whether their communication partner smiles, They considered smiling one of the most accessible forms of information for the regulation of social interactions. Miles & Johnston found that when there were increased occurrences of smiling during an interaction, the communication partners were able to identify more positive words and subsequently the interaction was more successful.

### **Body orientation**

When assessing an individual’s body orientation during an interaction the coder observes:

- The distance between communication partners
- Body lean
- Body positioning
- Eye gaze
- Kinesic animation

Mehrabian (2007) argues that the proximity and positioning of speakers can be useful information when deciding whether two people like each other. Felipe & Sommer (1966) state that if an individual stands too far away from their communication partner when talking it can lead to an avoidance reaction or negativity due to the lack of intimacy. In contrast, if an individual stands too close to a stranger when talking, this can appear threatening. The proximity of communication partners is measured by assessing the distance between their faces and their bodies. A close conversational distance is six inches or less, whereas a person sitting a metre or more away is a more distant conversation.

Body positioning is defined by how an individual is seated in relation to their communication partner. For example whether the individual is sitting face-to-face or next to their communication partner. When an individual is sitting face-to-face with their communication partner they appear more involved in the interaction compared to those sitting side-by-side.

Body lean is a measure of how much a person leans towards or away from their communication partner during an interaction. An individual is considered to be leaning forward if they are bent at the waist whereas a person leaning against their chair is leaning away. When an individual is leaning against their chair the coder needs to record the direction in which they are leaning. For example, are they sitting with their head to the side looking away from their communication partner or is their head tilted backwards increasing the conversational distance? Smith (2000) and Mehrabian (2007) argue that if an individual leans away from their communication partner this creates the impression of a negative attitude whereas leaning forward suggests that an individual is liked.

Eye gaze is the extent to which an individual makes eye contact during an interaction. The frequency in which someone makes eye contact with their communication partner suggests how interested and involved they are in the interaction. Using a scale the coder decides whether the communication partners never make eye contact to always make eye contact during the interaction. The coder then assesses the duration of the eye gaze: whether the gaze held is held for long periods or is fleeting. To accurately record eye gaze the interaction needs to be video recorded. Guerrero found, during the development of the checklist, that when they were assessing eye gaze, they missed other parts of the interaction.

Guerrero states that kinesic animation is the extent that an interaction gives the impression of “dynamism and animation”. This includes the use of facial expressions that convey both positive and negative emotions and gestures. Sato & Yoshikawa (2007) found that when individuals used more dynamic facial expressions during conversations, communication partners reported a more positive emotional experience compared to when individuals were more expressionless.

The use of gesture can be used to support speech and is helpful in emphasising what the individual is verbally communicating. Some gestures, such as waving, have their own meaning and do not require a verbal explanation. It is important to look at gesture as often this can reveal contradictions between what is said verbally and a person’s non-verbal behaviour.

When analysing gesture, the coder records the frequency and type of gestures used, such as nervous or random movements and body posture. Random movements include behaviours that individuals exhibit when they are feeling nervous or bored. Some people, when they are nervous fiddle with objects, tap their fingers or may twist their hair.

### **Use of voice**

As with kinesic animation, voice also gives an impression of how dynamic and animated an individual is during an interaction. The coder assesses whether a person's voice appears inexpressive or animated. For example, if a person speaks with a monotone voice, the coder would record that the voice appeared inexpressive. The coder will also assess what mood the voice conveys and whether the individual sounds friendly or not.

It is also possible to assess whether a person is feeling calm from the way in which he or she speaks. The presence of awkward silences and lots of pauses can suggest that an individual is feeling nervous or uncomfortable during the interaction.

When coding the use of voice, the voices of the participants were listened to without looking at the video screen. This ensured that the coder is listening only to the voice and not making a decision based on other aspects of the person's body language.

Once all the behaviours have been observed it is possible to make decisions about the attentiveness and interest of the communication partners in the interaction as a whole. For example, did the communication partners appear distracted, interested, bored, detached or involved when they were talking to each other.

After completing profiles of both communication partner's non-verbal communication, it is then possible to assess the co-ordination between the pair. For example, whether both people were showing the same level of interest or boredom during the interaction.

### **Power and Control**

Many researchers (Knutson 1996, Tiedens & Fragale 2003, Mehrabian 2007) have reported that power relations are represented in interpersonal relationships in subtle ways. There is some consensus that power relations can be analysed by observing the eye gaze and posture of individuals during a conversation. They argue that those who look at their conversation partners more when they are speaking, rather than when they are listening, are more dominant.

Tiedens & Fragale state that small changes in body posture can alter the perception of how dominant an individual appears. An individual who has a wide body posture and occupies more space is often perceived as being more dominant. In comparison,

an individual who has a constricted body posture is considered to be more submissive. Tiedens & Fragale argue that dominant behaviour encourages submissive behaviour in others and vice versa.

Chen et al. (2001) argue that power is not merely represented through bodily behaviour, but is also influenced by the environment in which the conversation is taking place. They found that individuals who sat in a larger chair to their communication partners were perceived to have greater power. Furthermore, an individual's height and size also contributed to how they were perceived.

## Summary

In this chapter I have demonstrated how the phenomenological approach of participatory action research is an effective method for facilitating the views of people with severe learning disabilities. The cycles of action and reflection allow the researchers and collaborators to be flexible and responsive in their data collection.

The data collected was predominately language based and was analysed using a combination of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and thematic coding. The use of CDA complements the research methodology as both are concerned with social change.

To be consistent with my epistemological and ontological position I was especially aware of power imbalances created by the researcher/collaborator relationship. One method of alleviating any power imbalances was the use of collaboration comics: an integral part of my research methodology. My research comic helped me to build a rapport with the young people and explain the research process, both crucial for gaining consent. The transition comics were produced by the young people with minimal support. This meant that they had control over of what pictures they used and how they were represented in their comic. This is more empowering than other approaches and was useful in encouraging the development of self-identity and self-expression.

The use of creative tools, like the collaborative comics, allowed the collaborators to take more control during the study and ultimately move towards a more emancipatory approach to research.

<b>Data type</b>	<b>Data 1</b>	<b>Data 2</b>	<b>Data 3</b>
Field notes	55	25	21
Researcher observations	22	15	12
Interviews	7	7	0
Video	1	0	15
Critical friend	1	1	0

**Table 4.6.:** Proportion of data from each data set

## Findings

The research findings are presented in Chapters 5, 6 and 7. I will begin by demonstrating situations where the young people were able to exercise personal power.

The data analysed in the following three chapters originated from field notes, researcher observations, video transcription and discussions with my critical friend. Table 4.6 summarises what proportion of the data originated from each of these data sets as well as the proportions of data used in each of the data analysis chapters. Appendix N provides a more detailed breakdown of the data.

The data that was selected for the data analysis chapters was considered to be the most interesting and succinct examples. Some of the data collected was not used as there was a better example which demonstrated the same point. It was not possible to include all the data as so much was collected. None of the data collected was counterfactual to the data presented, so an alternative interpretation of the evidence was not possible. I ensured that there was a reasonable balance in the distribution of evidence, so that all the young people were equally represented in this study (Appendix N).

# Chapter 5.

## Personal power

The data collected from this study is presented in three parts. Part one explores the ability of the young people to exercise power while part two looks at the way that other stakeholders interacted with the young people during the transition planning meetings. In part three both personal power and interactions with other stakeholders are investigated, but in alternative contexts to transition planning. The data presented in part three will allow me to make some valuable observations about the social positions of individuals during transition planning and the power relationships between them. A new context could alter the behaviour of all stakeholders compared to more familiar contexts. First I will describe the transition meeting context.

The conventions used in the transcription of the data are described Table 5.1.

...	a short pause
.....	a long pause
>	incomplete phrase that finishes on a rising intonation
<b>Bold</b>	this word is also signed
<i>Italics</i>	this word is only signed
<u>Underlined</u>	nother form of visual support is used
*starred*	said with an emphasised or exaggerated pronunciation

**Table 5.1.:** Data transcription conventions

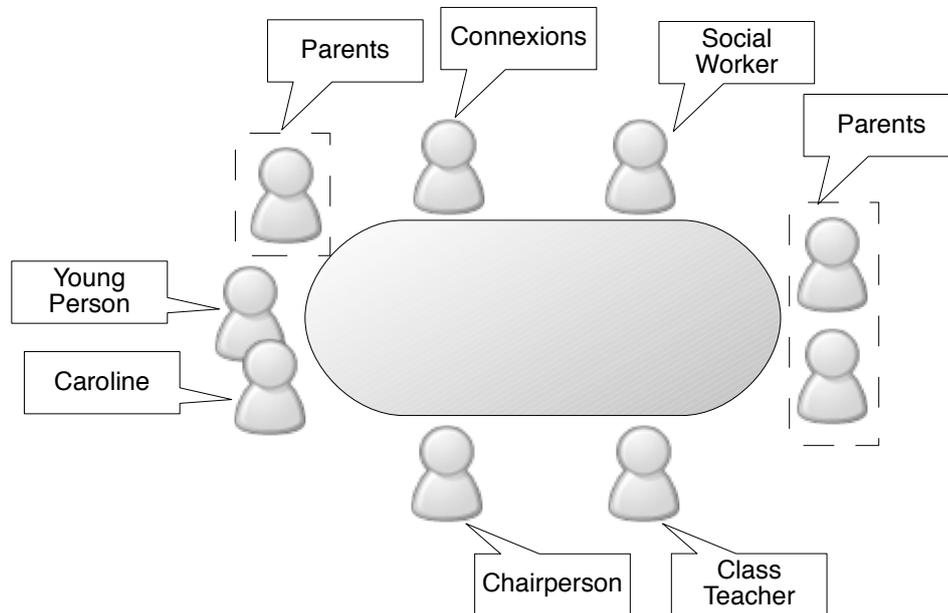


Figure 5.1.: Layout of the transition meeting

## 5.1. Transition meeting context

The Glendale transition meetings were all held on the fifth of March 2007. The meetings were held in the staff room of the school and lasted for one hour. The transition meetings were chaired by two different members of staff from Glendale school: Mary, the deputy head teacher and Peter, a teacher and member of the senior management team.

At each of the young people's transition meetings, there was a representative from Connexions, a transition social worker and the classroom teacher. All of the young people, except Tarak, had the support of a parent during the transition meeting. Tarak's parents failed to attend and no explanation was provided. Sabal's father was supported during the transition meeting by the school liaison officer, as he had limited English and required translation. A teacher for the visually impaired also attended Anna's meeting.

The senior management team of Glendale school decided to combine the young people's transition meetings with their annual review. This meant that the first part of the meeting was centred around checking the current level of appropriateness of the statement of special educational, In the second half of the meeting targets were set for the rest of the academic year, such as work experience.

The stakeholders at the meeting were sat around a large oval shaped table. Figure 5.1 shows the layout of the meeting room. The position of the chairperson, Connexions representative, transition social worker, class teacher and my position have been included in this figure, as these positions did not change between meetings.

Adam attended Springfield school. Adam's transition meeting was also held on the fifth of March 2007, however attendance was poor due to a failure to send out invitations to the meeting. I was not notified of the date and time of the meeting, which meant that without my presence, Adam was not included. This is discussed in Section 6.3.

## **5.2. Evidence of personal power during the research process**

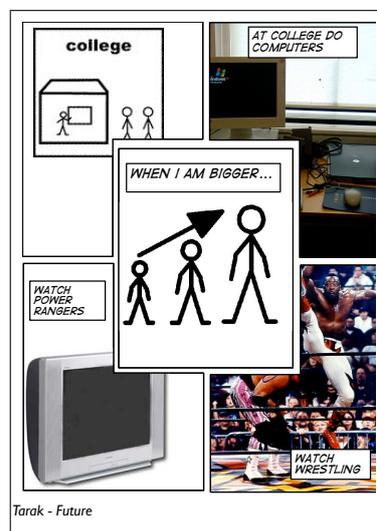
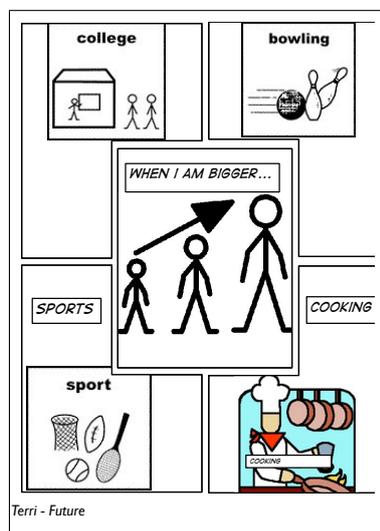
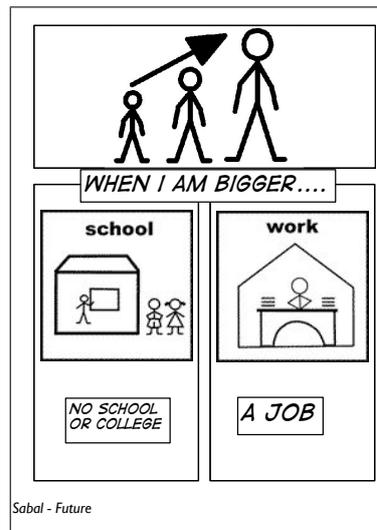
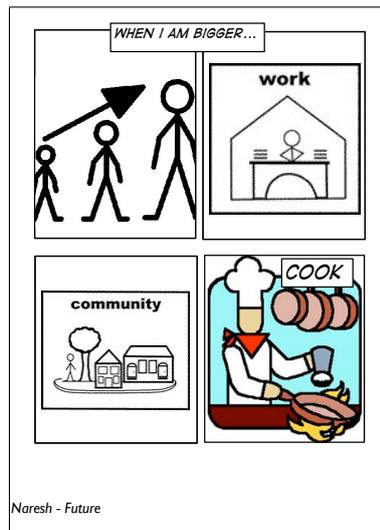
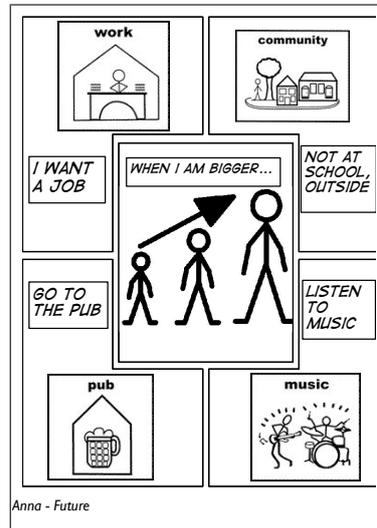
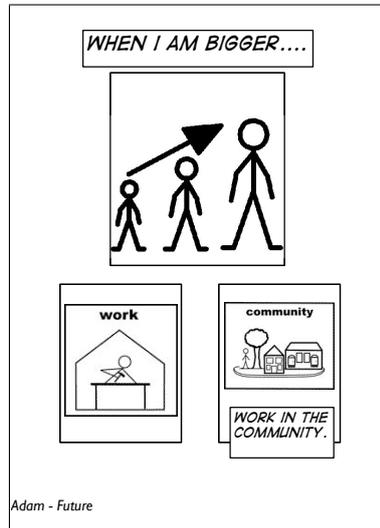
Both Bourdieu (1992) and Foucault (2002) argue that power is omnipresent and essential. However, individuals should be constrained and follow rules or individuals can become unfairly subordinated. The ability to exhibit personal power is necessary if an individual is to be able to achieve communicative rationality (Chapter 2).

This section presents examples of how the young people in this study demonstrated personal power. The data has been collated from a range of contexts observed in this study to gain a full profile of how personal power was exercised. The areas that will be discussed are:

- Capacity to make choices
- Communication skills, including assertiveness
- Identity

My decision to include these areas was informed by my study of the literature in Chapter 3.

Figure 5.2.: Aspirations for the future



### 5.3. Capacity to make choices

The literature in Chapter 3 demonstrated that choice-making was an indicator of independence and autonomy. This section explores whether the young people in this study had the capacity to make choices, which may be considered indicative of having personal power.

The young people were able to make meaningful choices from the start of the research process: no initial teaching was required. I knew that their choices were meaningful as they were consistent over a period; were often confirmed by a parent or member of staff and were consistent with how the young people chose to spend their time (Extract 5.1).

---

**Extract 5.1** Meaningful choice-making

Researcher observations 07/02/2007

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Today I talked to Adam about activities that he likes and dislikes. Adam selected a picture of Lego when we were talking about activities that he liked. I feel this is a meaningful choice as on previous visits: 04/10/2006, 23/11/2006, 09/01/2007 when Adam was given free choice he selected Lego to play with.

---

All the young people's aspirations were realistic and the social workers felt that their choices were all possible:

---

**Extract 5.2** Interview with transition social worker

Interview 10/03/2007

---

"I was really impressed. I thought that the activities that they chose were all possible."

---

Moreover, the choices that the young people made showed self-awareness, by consistently playing to their own strengths. The young people's future aspirations are shown in Figure 5.2.

Terri and Tarak both communicated that they wanted to go to college to study their interests: Tarak to study computers and Terri to study cookery. The conventions used in the transcription of the data are in Table 5.1.

---

**Extract 5.3** Terri's future aspirations

Field notes 21/02/2007

---

CAROLINE: **what** do you **want** to do at **college**?TERRI: [*looks through the symbols and selects cooking and sports*]

---

---

**Extract 5.4** Tarak's future aspirations

Field notes 21/02/2007

---

CAROLINE: **what** do you **want** to do at **college**?TARAK: Computers [*looks through the symbols and selects the picture of the computer*]

---

Adam, Anna, Naresh and Sabal all wanted some type of job in the community. They were adamant that they wished to leave school, as they did not enjoy it. Anna was asked during her Connexions meeting and her transition meeting if she liked school:

---

**Extract 5.5** Conversation between Anna and Connexions staff

Field notes 23/02/2007

---

CONNEXIONS STAFF: Anna do you **like** school?ANNA: No! [*said loudly and sounded adamant*]

---

This was supported by her mother:

---

**Extract 5.6** Interview with Anna's mother

Interview 14/02/2007

---

"sometimes I struggle to get Anna to school. We miss the school bus and I'm then late for work 'cos I have to take her in the car."

---

The young people's understanding of what a job involves would need to be explored further. It is possible that Adam, Anna, Sabal and Naresh stated they would like a job as they saw this as the only alternative to school. When Adam, Anna and Sabal were asked what type of job they would like, they were unable to answer. This suggested that they either did not know what a job was or they did not know what jobs were possible. Of course, they might of been undecided about what type of job they wanted.

Naresh appeared to have a greater understanding of what a job involved and what type of job he wanted than the other young people. He was keen to be like his dad and go to work:

---

**Extract 5.7** Naresh's future aspirationsField notes 22/02/2007

---

NARESH: Me job... dad taxi

CAROLINE: **You want** to be a Taxi **driver**?NARESH: No ... cooking

---

This example also demonstrates that Naresh had an understanding of other people's jobs.

The young people were also asked where they would like to live in the future. These choices are shown in Figure 5.7

All the young people had strong ideas about where and with whom they wanted to live with when they were older. Terri, Anna and Naresh wanted to stay at home with their parents and this was consistent with their parents' hopes. Sabal communicated that he wanted to live with his brother Asif and some friends (Extract 5.8), whilst Adam wanted to live in a shared house with other people.

---

**Extract 5.8** Sabal's views about future housing optionsField notes 21/02/2007

---

CAROLINE: **Want** to live with mum and dad or friends?

SABAL: Asif

CAROLINE: **who** is Asif?SABAL: [*no response*]CAROLINE: is Asif mum, dad, friend?SABAL: brother

---

Adam's accommodation choice was consistent with his behaviour in social situations. He often preferred activities that he could complete on his own. However, there were occasions where he wanted the company of others, but this was initiated on his terms. In a shared house, he would have his own space, but would also have opportunities to interact when desired.

Tarak communicated he wanted to live on his own:

---

**Extract 5.9** Tarak's views on future housing options

Field notes 21/02/2007

---

CAROLINE: When **you** are bigger **where** would **you like to live?**

TARAK: [*selects the symbol of living alone and places it below the like symbol on the talking mat*]

---

This did not surprise his parents or teachers. They reported that he did not like to share the living room at home with his family and would not allow anyone else to choose what to watch on television. They felt that he would be happier in an environment where he could have more control and choices.

## 5.4. Communication skills

This section explores how the young people demonstrated personal power through their communication skills. If the young person is unable to communicate their views they will find it difficult to achieve communicative rationality, especially as communicative rationality is characterised by the exchange of views and attempts to persuade others to change their beliefs and assumptions (Bourdieu 1992).

The following aspects of the young people's communication skills are discussed:

- The young people's knowledge of their communication skills
- Their ability to articulate their views and feelings
- The young people's level of assertiveness
- The young people's motivation to communicate

### 5.4.1. Knowledge of individual communication skills

In this study, the young people were all able to express which were their preferred methods of communication: such as sign; speech; symbols; or alternative augmentative communication (AAC), that is, low and high tech communication aids. This is shown in Figure 5.3 (from top left to bottom right: Adam, Anna, Sabal, Terri and Tarak).

Figure 5.3.: Preferred methods of communication



Naresh chose not to include a page about his preferred methods of communication in his transition comic. Naresh was a reluctant communicator. Through the use of a talking mat, he communicated that he disliked talking and signing:

---

**Extract 5.10** Naresh's communication preferences

Field notes 21/02/2007

---

CAROLINE: Do **like talking?**

NARESH: [*shakes his head and puts the talking symbol under the hate symbol on the talking mat*]

CAROLINE: **You hate talking** [*points to the corresponding symbols on his talking mat*]

NARESH: [*nods his head*]

CAROLINE: Do **like signing?**

NARESH: [*shakes his head and puts the signing symbol under the hate symbol on the talking mat*]

CAROLINE: **you like signing?** [*opposite response said to check understanding*]

NARESH: [*shakes his head*]

---

This was also supported by his behaviour in social situations. If Naresh was asked a direct question, he would walk away from his communication partner, or ignore what they had said (Extract 5.11). He appeared happier communicating through a talking mat, as there was no pressure to verbally communicate.

---

**Extract 5.11** Naresh's response to direct questions

Researcher observations 17/01/2007

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Naresh picked a toy mobile phone from his pocket and pretended to have a conversation with someone on the phone. Naresh walked in front of me in the corridor to break. I tried to initiate an interaction with him, but he did not respond and walked ahead.

---

Adam, Terri, Tarak and Sabal all reported that they liked to use sign and speech to communicate with others. Sabal elaborated his response through the use of a talking mat and speech:

---

**Extract 5.12** Sabal's communication preferencesField notes 21/02/2007

---

CAROLINE: Do **you like talking?**SABAL: Yes [*nods head and places the talking symbol under the like symbol on his talking mat*]CAROLINE: **you like talking**

SABAL: like talking

CAROLINE: Do **you like signing?**SABAL: Like signing [*places the picture of signing under the like symbol on the talking mat*]CAROLINE: Sabal **likes signing**SABAL: **Yeah**

---

He explained through a talking mat that his parents did not use sign at home:

---

**Extract 5.13** Discussion with Sabal about communication preferencesField notes 07/02/2007

---

CAROLINE: Do **you like** or **hate signing?**SABAL: like [*places the symbol of signing under like on talking mat*]CAROLINE: you like signing. . . signing **help** you?SABAL: yes [*nods head*]CAROLINE: you sign at **home?**

SABAL: No

CAROLINE: **you like to sign** at **home?**SABAL: yes [*nods head*]

---

This demonstrates an ability to generalise self-knowledge, which is a difficult skill. Sabal understands what helps him in one situation and wants this strategy to be generalised to other situations where he finds communication difficult.

Sabal put dislike for 'communication aid' as he knew that he did not have one.

With the exception of Tarak, the young people all said that they liked it when people used symbols when communicating with them:

---

**Extract 5.14** Tarak's communication preferences

Field notes 21/02/2007

---

CAROLINE: Tarak do **you like** using symbols?TARAK: No [*places the symbols picture under the hate symbol on the talking mat*]

---

The like of symbols could be attributed to them experiencing an increase in their understanding of what was being said. Tarak was unable to articulate why he disliked symbols. However, I felt that his dislike was due to an association with class work. Tarak's class teacher consistently used symbols to explain activities. Tarak frequently chose not to participate in class activities and articulated that he disliked work. It was also likely that I had communicated with him in a manner which he did not understand and he did not comprehend what I was asking him about symbols.

All of the young people were able to identify which communication methods they did not use when communicating with others. Tarak communicated through a talking mat that he had no communication aid:

---

**Extract 5.15** Tarak's communication preferences

Field notes 21/02/2007

---

CAROLINE: Do **you have** a talking aid?TARAK: No [*places the picture of the communication aid under the no symbol*]

---

The young people were also able to express which communication methods they chose not to use, or they did not like people using with them. Terri reported that she disliked using her communication aid:

---

**Extract 5.16** Terri's communication preferences

Field notes 17/01/2007

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CAROLINE: **Like** computer?TERRI: No [*gives a thumbs down at the same time and shakes her head*]

Anna communicated that she disliked it when people signed to her:

---

**Extract 5.17** Anna's communication preferences

Field notes 21/02/2007

---

CAROLINE: Do **you like** people signing?

ANNA: No [*places the signing picture under the hate symbol on the talking mat*]

CAROLINE: Oh! You hate signing?

---

Similarly Tarak said that he did not like using symbols. Moreover, Naresh communicated through the use of a talking mat that he disliked both talking and signing.

Anna and Terri in their chosen methods of communication showed specific awareness of their strengths, weaknesses and an understanding of their disability. This supports Davis & Watson (2001) findings that people with disabilities incorporate their disability into their identity. Anna indicated that she disliked signing. In a different situation, she demonstrated that she found it difficult to see people's hands. This suggested why she disliked signing.

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**Extract 5.18** Anna demonstrating self awareness

Researcher observations 07/02/2007

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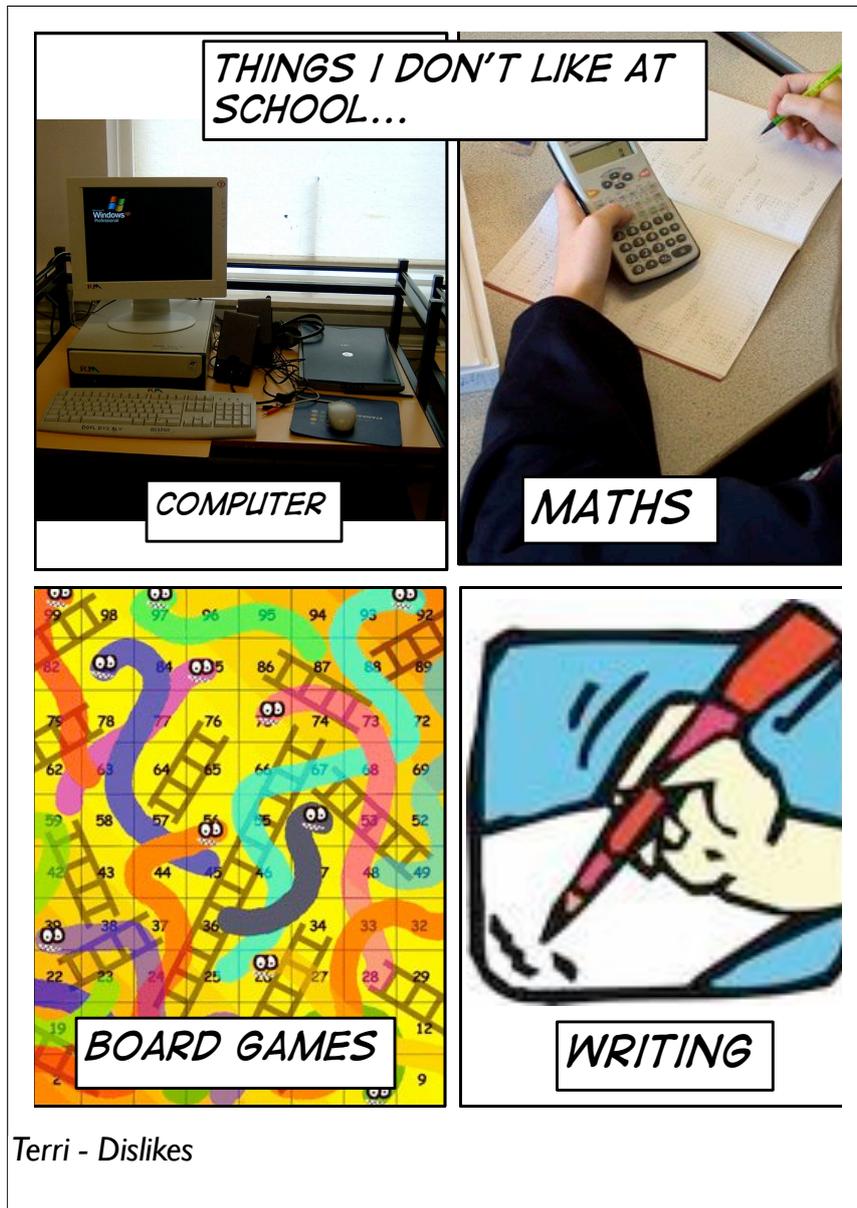
We set the keyboard up and Anna sat at the keyboard. She then verbally told me to sit next to her: addressing me by my first name. At various points, Anna asked me to alter the way that I was sitting, as she could not see my hands or not see the keyboard. She did this clearly using short phrases and physically moving my chair to the best position for her.

---

She was aware of the limitations of her sight because of her visual impairment.

Terri disliked her communication aid. This dislike was generalised to all activities that required fine motor co-ordination. For example, Terri also communicated that she disliked writing, board games and computers (Figure 5.4). Fine motor control is an area of specific difficulty for Terri because she has Cerebral Palsy.

Figure 5.4.: Terri's dislikes taken from her transition comic



Terri - Dislikes

Sabal demonstrated a more advanced understanding of communication than the other young people in the study. He was able to identify that he could speak using different volumes of voice. He said:

---

**Extract 5.19** Pragmatic skills

Field notes 07/02/2007

---

“I talk loudly”

---

in a loud voice and laughed. He then returned to speaking with a quieter volume of voice. This demonstrated some knowledge of *pragmatics*: he had established the link between raising his voice and the language concept ‘loudly’. Gleason (1985) reported that pragmatics is the use of language to express intention and “get things done in the world”. By demonstrating some knowledge of pragmatics, it suggests there is an increased likelihood that Sabal will be able to express his views and aspirations in a way that will be listened to.

### 5.4.2. Articulation of views and feelings

The young people were able to communicate their views by using a combination of methods (Table 5.2).

During the one-to-one sessions and transition meetings, the young people were able to express their views to others. Terri, Anna, Sabal and Tarak, using a talking mat at their post transition meeting interviews, said they liked talking at their meetings and talking made them happy. The following example is taken from Anna’s interview:

---

**Extract 5.20** Post transition meeting interview with Anna

Field notes 07/03/3007

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CAROLINE: Anna like or hate meeting?

ANNA: like meeting [*simultaneously placed the meeting symbol under like on the talking mat*]

CAROLINE: How did you feel? [*I already knew that Anna had a reasonable understanding of emotions. I showed her symbols representing happy, sad, angry, worried and frightened*]

ANNA: Happy [*simultaneously selected the happy symbol*]

---

Young person	Communication style
Terri	A few single words, intonation and makaton signs
Sabal	Speech and makaton signs
Adam	Speech and makaton signs
Naresh	Speech and some makaton signs
Tarak	Speech
Anna	Speech

**Table 5.2.:** The young people's preferred methods of communication

Furthermore, Tarak expressed:

---

**Extract 5.21** Tarak's opinion of his transition meeting

Interview data 07/03/2007

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"meeting lovely"

---

Naresh communicated that he disliked talking at his meeting, which is discussed shortly.

Rawlings et al. (1995) stated that it was crucial that an individual communicated in a way that was understood by others when communicating choices. In this study, the majority of the young people communicated in a way that was understood by others. Terri was understood by staff and professionals who had an existing relationship with her. Those with no previous relationship found her difficult to understand:

---

**Extract 5.22** Terri's communication skills during her transition meeting

Researcher observations 05/03/2007

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During the transition meeting, I observed that some of the other stakeholders initially asked Terri some direct questions about her interests. However, once they realised that she had limited verbal communication and found it difficult to respond to some of their questions they appeared to ask her fewer questions. I felt that if some of the stakeholders had spent time getting to know Terri prior to the transition meeting they would have found communication easier. There are some non-speech vocalisations that she uses consistently to signify meaning. It took me several visits before I was able to identify their meaning. Terri's mother and class teacher had no difficulties communicating with Terri. However, they have a previous relationship and experiences of how Terri communicates.

---

Even though several stakeholders found Terri difficult to understand, she made many attempts to express her views and aspirations. During the transition meeting, Terri turned the pages of her communication book, pointed to pictures and said:

---

**Extract 5.23** Quote from Terri's transition meeting

Field notes 05/03/2007

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"look"

---

This was used to direct people at the meeting to look at specific pictures of interest. She tried to verbalise what the pictures were; however, this was difficult for her. When she was unable to name a picture verbally she used a combination of sign and gesture to convey her message. For example:

---

**Extract 5.24** Terri communicating her interests during her transition meeting

Researcher observations 05/03/2007

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When she was showing the picture of 'X-Factor', her favourite television programme, she crossed her arms in front of her chest as on the programme advertisement.

---

Naresh's teachers reported that he was prone to acquiesce: he would say what he thought his teacher wanted to hear, as he was worried about failing. When a teacher looked at him with an expressionless face when asking him a yes/no question, he would alternate between the two possible responses. He could not read what the teacher was thinking, so he felt unsafe to respond. The only occasion I found that Naresh switched his responses was when we were discussing emotions:

---

**Extract 5.25** Possible acquiescenceResearcher observations 22/02/2007

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I had symbols that represent both like and hate: signed and verbalised what the symbols represented. I then showed Naresh lots of pictures of activities that he might do at school. Naresh said hate for all the pictures that I had showed him including things that he had previously said that he liked. I was confused as I was sure that he knew the difference between like and hate. I asked him to name the pictures: he pointed to like and said hate and vice versa. I then tried to use symbols for happy and sad to see if that made any difference. He correctly identified happy and sad, however once we incorporated this vocabulary into the activity I felt that the initial identification may have been a guess. He communicated that all activities made him happy, even though he just communicated that he hated them. This may be acquiescence: he feels that I want to hear that he liked everything. However, this is not clear cut. I am not sure that he yet understands the vocabulary used. Further investigation is required.

---

Even though Naresh's class teacher reported that acquiescence was a problem, I observed many situations where Naresh communicated his own views confidently:

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**Extract 5.26** Naresh communicating his views confidentlyResearcher observations 22/02/2007

---

Today Naresh talked about lots of different things spontaneously; from this I could gauge some further things that he likes. He talked about eating out with his dad, going to the park and car boot sales. Throughout this he made good eye contact with me.

---

During the research process, Naresh frequently approached me and initiated conversation. In the playground, he would say "hello" and tell me what he had been doing at home the night before and his plans for the weekend. He would ask me questions about my car, my evening or about some topic that was of interest to him that day, for example:

---

**Extract 5.27** Naresh talking about his interestsResearcher observations 31/01/2007

---

I was in the playground during break time and Naresh independently approached me with a catalogue of wide screen televisions. He pointed to the pictures of the televisions he liked and asked me which ones I liked.

---

Naresh was able to talk in full sentences; however, when he was asked a question he preferred to speak using mainly single words and short phrases. If Naresh was talking to a communication partner with whom he felt comfortable, there were instances when he would respond to direct questions using short sentences:

---

**Extract 5.28** Naresh talking using sentencesField notes 23/02/2007

---

CAROLINE: **what** did **you** do at the **weekend**?

NARESH: went car

CAROLINE: did **you** go to a car boot sale?

NARESH: No. Ride in car

---

This demonstrated a good understanding of what had been asked of him and moreover, demonstrated an emerging ability to communicate using short sentences.

Naresh, despite his dislike of talking, spoke during our one-to-one sessions and during his transition meeting. During the transition meeting, Naresh smiled and turned through the pages of his transition comic, pointing to and naming activities that he liked and disliked. Naresh also felt comfortable enough to answer several questions from the transition social worker:

---

**Extract 5.29** Naresh communicating at his transition meetingField notes 05/03/2007

---

TRANSITION SOCIAL WORKER: Do you like writing?

NARESH: No

NARESH'S FATHER: It's true. I can't get him to do any writing at home or even pick up a pencil and do some drawing.

---

The father's response supported Naresh's views. I was very surprised and impressed with how verbal Naresh was during the meeting. Mary, the deputy head was also surprised:

---

**Extract 5.30** Mary's views Naresh's communication during his transition meeting

Field notes 06/03/2007

---

"I was amazed and very impressed. Naresh was the last person I thought would speak during the meeting."

---

However, in Naresh's post transition interview he was less positive about talking. Through a talking mat, he reported that he only liked talking to me and his dad.

Tarak mainly communicated using single words; however, there were occasions when he spoke using short phrases:

---

**Extract 5.31** Tarak's communication

Field notes 23/02/2007

---

"Caroline, you're fired"

---

These tended to be familiar phrases that he had heard staff and family say, or that he heard on the television. Extract 5.31 had come from the television programme 'The Apprentice'. When I asked Tarak to tell me about his interests, he asked me whether he could use the computer. Tarak then verbally asked me to search the web for pictures of Hunter, his favourite Power Ranger:

---

**Extract 5.32** Interaction with Tarak

Field notes 21/02/2007

---

TARAK: Hunter [*computer screen has Google home page. Tarak puts my hands on the computer keys*]

CAROLINE: Is this Hunter? [*points to power rangers character from Google search*]

TARAK: No [*points to a picture of Hunter*]

TARAK: Print [*points to a picture of Hunter that he wants to keep*]

---

He then did the same for his favourite WWF wrestlers.

During the transition meeting, Tarak verbally named the pictures in his transition comic:

---

**Extract 5.33** Tarak communicating at his transition meeting

Field notes 05/03/2007

---

"Hunter... wrestling... like computers"

---

He spent more time showing the pictures of most interest to him, for example the picture of Hunter and the picture of the computer that he likes to use at school. His interests were apparent in his aspirations for the future:

---

**Extract 5.34** Tarak expressing his aspirations at his transition meeting

Field notes 05/03/2007

---

TRANSITION SOCIAL WORKER: What would you **like** to do when you finish school?

TARAK: computers

---

The first time I met Sabal, he requested I take a tour of the school in order for him to show me people and places that he liked. He had seen Naresh take me around the school and wanted to do the same. Sabal told me verbally where he wanted to go, for example:

---

**Extract 5.35** Sabal communicating places that he likes at school

Field notes 31/01/2007

---

“toilet” and “like cook”

---

He then took me to the toilet and the cookery room with no prompting. I also asked Sabal who his friends were:

---

**Extract 5.36** Interaction with Sabal

Field notes 31/01/2007

---

CAROLINE: **Who** are **your** friends?

SABAL: Like Anthony . . . like Craig

---

He then took me to meet two of his friends and through gesture indicated that he wanted to take photographs of them with my camera. Furthermore, he was extremely assertive about what I should call him:

---

**Extract 5.37** Sabal demonstrating self awareness

Field notes 22/02/2007

---

SABAL: Not Squib, me Sabal [*points to himself*]

---

His class teacher explained to me that some of the staff and his peers had given him the nickname Squib. However, this was the first time that he had communicated that he did not like what they had chosen.

During Sabal's transition meeting he verbally talked about all the pictures in his transition comic. He confidently answered questions from professionals whom he had never met before:

---

**Extract 5.38** Sabal communicating his interests during his transition meeting  
Field notes 05/03/2007

---

TRANSITION SOCIAL WORKER: What do you **like**?

SABAL: Like swimming... like football

---

Whilst he was answering their questions, he made eye contact with the person who was communicating with him. Moreover, he spoke clearly and with appropriate volume for the situation.

Anna was able to communicate her opinions using short sentences:

---

**Extract 5.39** Anna speaking using sentences  
Field notes 07/02/2007

---

ANNA: Caroline you play

---

If she was feeling less confident, she would speak using single words and some short phrases; however, she was still able to get her message across (Extract 5.5). Anna's mother reported that on occasions when Anna did not have the language to explain what had happened at school, she would act out novel situations:

---

**Extract 5.40** Extract from interview with Anna's mother  
Interview 14/02/2007

---

"When I ask Anna what she has done at school she often won't tell me. Sometimes if something really different has happened she may act it out for me. She is great at impressions. I think it might have been Tom getting told off at school. She came home and did an impression of Lorna telling him off. She did a really good impersonation of Lorna."

---

Adam's class teacher reported that he had only started talking in the last eighteen months:

---

**Extract 5.41** Class teacher's observations of Adam's communication  
Field notes 11/10/2006

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"It must have been September time that he was regularly talking with me verbally. He started talking earlier than that though. I remember it really clearly. We were on a school trip to the Black Country Museum. We took the kids in to see the Charlie Chaplin film. It was in black and white and was one of his old silent movies. It was great. Adam really loved the slap stick humour. He kept laughing when funny things happened to Charlie Chaplin. I know that was only laughter, but I had never heard him make a single sound until then. I'll have to try and get hold of some more Charlie Chaplin films for him to watch."

---

The class teacher reported that there was a history of staff and family doing everything for Adam rather than encouraging independence. This meant that he knew that he did not need to communicate, as staff and family would pre-empt his needs and they would eventually be met. In addition, she reported that he tended to be more verbal when she had forgotten to give him an alternative means of communicating:

---

**Extract 5.42** Class teacher's observations of Adam's communication 2  
Field notes 11/10/2006

---

"He will verbally communicate what he wants if someone has forgotten to give him a chance to say what he wants".

---

The teacher's use of pronouns is interesting. The use of 'someone' rather than 'we' suggests that she does not necessarily see herself as part of the group that fails to provide Adam with opportunities to communicate. However, I later provide examples to the contrary.

Adam preferred to communicate using single words or not to communicate at all. However, he was able to construct simple sentences:

---

**Extract 5.43** Adam communicating using sentences  
Field notes 06/12/2006

---

ADAM: Hey Furby dance [*we were playing with a Furby toy*]

---

If Adam did not know how to verbally say a word he would use sign, or the occasional gesture:

---

**Extract 5.44** Adam using gesture to communicate

Researcher observations 07/02/2007

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Adam verbalised what was in each picture, except for trampolining (he got the puppet and made the puppet jump up and down and laughed).

---

Adam's class teacher reported that he, like Naresh, was prone to acquiesce:

---

**Extract 5.45** Class teachers observations of Adam's communication

Field notes 11/10/2006

---

"You have to be careful. He often just goes along with things rather than saying what he wants."

---

During the research process there were occasions when I felt that he was giving answers that he thought I wanted to hear. With further investigation, it was evident that they were his own choices, as he consistently made the same selections despite changes in context and the way that the information was presented. I also ensured that when I asked him a question I remained expressionless.

The teachers use of 'you' suggests that she does not feel that she has a difficulty with identifying acquiescence. She is almost distancing herself from the issue, but whilst doing this she is suggesting that acquiescence may be a problem for me. It is possible this is a way of the class teacher trying to exert power over me.

During the transition meetings, if the young people did not have the language to articulate their opinion using sign or speech, they used their transition comic, a visual or communication aid. They used their transition book to show their family, staff and professionals what they wanted to communicate by pointing to pictures in response to their questions.

### 5.4.3. Assertiveness

When I first began this study, I assumed that part of the research process would include helping the young people to become confident and assertive in expressing their views. Previous studies had reported the high levels of acquiescence in people with SLD (Finlay

& Lyons 1998), so I envisaged that there would be a tendency to take other people's views rather than express their own. I suspected that this may be a considerable barrier to effective person-centred transition planning. I quickly found that this was a misconception. During my sessions, I observed that the young people were already capable of being assertive and were able to take more control independently. This was in addition to the evidence of assertiveness presented throughout the previous sections, such as, the young people developing their own strategies for alleviating difficulties with communication 5.4.1 and taking control of the pacing of the sessions 5.4.3 discussed later in this chapter. This section provides further examples of assertiveness.

All of the young people at Glendale school decided that they would attend their transition meeting and stay for its duration even when some staff and parents did not want them to. Terri's mother reported that she felt inhibited talking about her concerns in front of Terri during the transition meeting:

---

**Extract 5.46** Terri's mother's views on the transition meeting

Interview 07/03/2007

---

"I was not keen having Terri there for the whole meeting ... er ... I felt a bit inhibited ... There were some parts of the meeting I weren't happy about, but I didn't want to get angry in front of my daughter."

---

Terri's mother had conflicting views. Although she found it hard having her daughter at the meeting, she was also annoyed that her daughter was not included more:

---

**Extract 5.47** Terri's mother's views on the transition meeting

Interview 07/03/2007

---

"I would have liked Terri to have more of a chance to talk: after she had done her bit she was not asked anything else. You're the one that communicated the most with Terri even Mr James didn't."

---

Two teachers also commented that they did not feel they could discuss their concerns with Tarak's behaviour whilst he was present at the meeting:

---

**Extract 5.48** Class teachers concerns discussing Tarak's behaviour

Field notes 05/03/2007

---

"I know Tarak's mother is having some difficulties at home, but I don't think that this is the right time to discuss this. We need to call another meeting."

---

They asked him to return to class, however, he insisted that he wanted to stay. Adam did not attend his transition meeting. The reasons for this are discussed in Section 6.3

Terri had the most difficulties expressing herself out of the six young people in the study, although she was the most assertive. Terri's mother believes Terri has become assertive to ensure that she does not get ignored. Terri is very sociable and likes spending time with people. Through being assertive, she ensures that she receives the attention she wants.

At the start of the transition meeting, everyone was asked to introduce themselves to the rest of the group. The chair of the meeting failed to ask Terri to introduce herself:

---

**Extract 5.49** Terri being assertive at her transition meeting

Researcher observations 05/03/2007

---

Everyone at the meeting was given a chance to introduce themselves except Terri. Terri made sure that she was included by spontaneously going through the pages of her transition comic and signing the pictures that she could. If she did not know a sign for a picture she pointed to the picture in order to draw attention to it. Understanding was checked on several occasions by different professionals in the room and she gave the same answer as in her book, especially when it came to the communication aid. She put her thumbs down and said no.

---

During the transition meeting Terri spoke out when staff made suggestions that she did not agree with:

---

**Extract 5.50** Terri being assertive at her transition meeting

Field notes 05/03/3007

---

PETER: What if Terri was to work with the smaller children for work experience?

TERRI: No [*shakes her head*]

CLASS TEACHER: Terri said she liked cooking. What about helping in the kitchen?

TERRI: Yes [*becomes very excited*]

TRANSITION SOCIAL WORKER: That would be great

PETER: I'll try and organise that

---

Working in the kitchen was more consistent with her interests, as she enjoyed cooking.

Terri also shouted “no” and gave a ‘thumbs down’ (Extract 5.49) when her class teacher reported that Terri liked computers. Terri had identified that using the computer was a support need and an activity that she disliked. As Terri was able to interject when staff made comments that she disagreed with, it showed that Terri also had reasonable listening skills. Moreover, it demonstrated some understanding of what was being said.

During Sabal’s transition meeting, he took the initiative to share his interests before anyone else had an opportunity to speak:

---

**Extract 5.51** Sabal being assertive at his transition meeting

Researcher observations 05/03/2007

---

After everyone had introduced themselves, Sabal went straight to his transition comic and started turning the pages. He pointed at pictures and named them. If there was a particular activity that he really enjoyed, like swimming, he looked at that page for longer. Some stakeholders then asked questions about that picture.

---

Sabal did not wait to be given permission to speak and spoke about his interests confidently. He stopped when he had finished what he wanted to say rather than working to any time allocations. This meant that he spoke for a third of the meeting – twenty minutes, including time for other stakeholders to ask him questions about his interests.

Anna also took the same initiative:

---

**Extract 5.52** Anna being assertive at her transition meeting

Researcher observations 05/03/2007

---

Once Anna entered the meeting, she immediately opened her transition comic and talked about some of the pictures that were most important to her, especially music.

---

Despite Adam not attending his transition meeting, he demonstrated during a play activity that he could take control of a situation and enjoyed influencing the behaviour of others. During one of the first occasions I met Adam, I took along a Furby toy for him to play with. Furbies are voice activated toys that respond to pre-set verbal commands. When you give Furby one of a set of pre-defined commands it will follow your request:

---

**Extract 5.53** Adam taking controlField notes 01/11/2006

---

CAROLINE: Hey Furby

FURBY: Yeah

CAROLINE: Sing me a song

FURBY: [*sings a song*]ADAM: [*laughs*]

ADAM: Hey Furby

FURBY: [*no response*]ADAM: Hey Furby [*louder voice*]

FURBY: Yeah

ADAM: sing song

FURBY: [*no response*]ADAM: sing song [*louder voice*]FURBY: [*sings a song*]

---

Initially Adam did not speak loudly enough for the Furby to register his voice, but once he realised that the Furby was not responding to him, he spoke louder.

Whilst this example demonstrated that Adam could be assertive, it also demonstrated self-awareness. Adam often spoke with a quiet voice that was difficult to hear. Whilst playing with the Furby, Adam identified that he had to increase the volume of his voice for Furby to respond. When the Furby responded in the way he wanted he was very happy. After this occasion, Adam was observed to be able to generalise this skill when I prompted him to speak louder.

All of the young people, in certain situations, demonstrated the ability to be assertive. Their ability to be assertive was further evidence for the young people exercising personal power. They were communicating their views in such a way that it encouraged others to listen.

**Ability to control the pacing of the preparation sessions**

The ability of the young people to determine the pacing of the sessions was another way in which they demonstrated self-knowledge, assertiveness and personal power. All the young people took control over the pacing of their sessions. Examples of these were:

when they would like to work with me; how long we talked before they needed a break; when they wanted to return to class; or if they did not want to talk that day. In the classroom, they have to work to the structure and pace defined by the class teacher. When encouraged to develop their own pace and structure during our sessions, they demonstrated a good understanding of their concentration span and their limitations. Whenever they were finding it difficult to pay attention to what was happening, they would take a break or return to class.

Adam showed me that he wanted to have a break by putting away my research comic or the symbols and photographs that we were looking at. He would then resume the activity once he was rested by returning to my research comic:

---

**Extract 5.54** Adam controlling the pacing of a session

Field notes 09/01/2007

---

We are looking through my research comic and talking about some of the activities that Adam likes.

ADAM: Book [*points to a book on the shelf*]

CAROLINE: You **like books?**

ADAM: **Yes**

CAROLINE: [*turns the page of the comic to continue*]

ADAM: Book [*gets up and fetches the book*]

CAROLINE: You **want to look at book?**

ADAM: **Yes**

Once we had read the book Adam picked up the transition comic and began turning the pages again

---

If he was bored with an activity he would also put it away, but would then select an activity that he found more interesting. I would know he was bored, as he would not resume the previous activity spontaneously. He structured our sessions so that he would talk to me, have a break, and then resume talking. When Adam wanted to return to class, he would indicate this verbally:

---

**Extract 5.55** Adam communicating that he wants to finish the session

Researcher observations 17/01/2007

---

ADAM: back [*points to the door*]

---

During one session Adam indicated that he did not want to talk to me today:

---

**Extract 5.56** Adam communicating that he did not wish to work with me today

Researcher observations 17/01/2007

---

He immediately moved all the photographs of people that he had taken and placed them under a hate symbol, even though he had previously said they were his friends. He also put his Christian Birmingham book in the hate pile, which was a book that he really liked. He then picked up a book and sat in the corner and ignored anyone that spoke to him.

---

Adam's class teacher reported that he had been in an unusual mood all day and would not sit with his peers. Moreover, he verbally refused to join in with class activities, which was very uncharacteristic of him. By placing the pictures of people under the hate symbol, I felt he was communicating that he did not want to interact with anyone and wanted to be given space.

Naresh found social situations very stressful, so I only met with him when he asked to spend time with me. Naresh would indicate that he wanted to spend time with me by approaching me. Naresh would stop talking when he wanted to finish and get up and independently walk back to his classroom. If he was bored with talking about a specific topic, he would change the subject to something that he found more motivating:

---

**Extract 5.57** Naresh changing the subject

Field notes 23/02/2007

---

CAROLINE: you **like writing?**

NARESH: I go car boot

---

This is discussed in more detail in Section 5.4.4. Naresh only changed the subject during adult directed topics, when they were unimportant to him.

Tarak would also tell me when he wanted to work with me or finish a session:

---

**Extract 5.58** Tarak communicating when he wanted to work or finish working

Field notes 21/02/2007, 22/02/2007 and 23/02/2007

---

“Work with Caroline”

“Caroline finish”

“Caroline you're fired”

---

Anna controlled how long we spent on activities such as looking at symbols, photographs and my communication book:

---

**Extract 5.59** Anna controlling the pacing of a session

Researcher observations 07/02/2007

---

Anna took responsibility for the positioning of the research comic. She made sure that she sat with the light behind her and she would not allow me to turn the pages of the comic.

---

When Terri no longer wanted to participate in an activity she would:

---

**Extract 5.60** Terri communicating that she wanted to finish a session

Researcher observations 17/01/2007

---

...lead me back to class by the arm. She then sat down with peers and spontaneously joined in with what they were doing.

---

This happened infrequently as Terri liked many different activities and enjoyed being out of the classroom.

Sabal would also non-verbally indicate when he wanted to finish the session and return to class:

---

**Extract 5.61** Sabal communicating that he wanted to finish the session

Researcher observations 07/02/2007

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Sabal started to become restless. I interpreted that he wanted to finish the session as he moved the resources away and stood up.

---

#### 5.4.4. Motivation to communicate

Cunningham (1988) argued that individuals are more motivated to communicate when they are talking about a subject that interests them. In my study, the young people were also more communicative during activities they enjoyed. Choice-making can also be a motivating activity as it can consequently lead to participating in an activity that is enjoyable or following aspirations. Furthermore, it can increase the feeling of control or autonomy one has over one's life.

When the young people were motivated, a greater number of spontaneous interactions with peers and adults were observed. This included more initiation of interactions and

interactions that lasted longer. Furthermore, the young people used more language to express their views. For instance, several of the young people spoke mainly with single words, but when speaking about a subject of interest they spoke using short phrases/sentences. The following examples show how the young people's communicative ability increased in situations that they find motivating.

Adam especially liked playing with Lego. During one visit we were building Lego cars together. Adam initiated an interaction with me by crashing his car into mine. He said:

---

**Extract 5.62** Adam's motivation for a task  
Field notes 01/11/2006

---

“oh no . . .oops” and then laughed.

---

During another visit the class were using sensory equipment, such as fibre optic cables, a projector and music equipment. I made shadow puppets with my hands in front of the projector and made silly faces, so they were silhouetted against the projector screen. Whilst I had initiated the activity, Adam thought it looked fun and joined in. He imitated some of the shadow puppets and pulled his own silly faces. This made him laugh.

Anna was motivated by activities that involved dance and music. During one music session, her teacher reported that she independently initiated performing a concert to her peers using her keyboard. She instructed her peers to clap along to the music and cheer. Sabal, Terri and Tarak's motivation also varied depending on the activity. They were passive during the more academic lessons, but enjoyed cookery and sports. Sabal especially liked swimming.

During cookery lessons, Tarak was very co-operative and made positive contributions to the class discussions. He answered many of the teacher's questions:

---

**Extract 5.63** Tarak making a positive contribution to class discussion  
Field notes 09/01/2007

---

CLASS TEACHER: Why do we **wash** our hands?

TARAK: Germs

---

He was also able to identify what was wrong when one of his peers could not get any chocolate mousse out of the pot:

---

**Extract 5.64** Tarak making a positive contribution to class discussion

Field notes 09/01/2007

---

CLASS TEACHER: What is wrong?

TARAK: Open

---

In Finn & Cox (1992), when staff wanted to increase participation in an activity they would offer incentives and rewards. When Tarak was offered rewards and incentives to participate, he too became more engaged in activities. However, when Tarak was participating in an activity that he found highly motivating, for example computers, Power Rangers or wrestling, he would become so engaged in the activity that he could not interact with anyone and would not follow any adult direction:

---

**Extract 5.65** Tarak finding it difficult to interact because he was too motivated by a task

Researcher observations 07/02/2007

---

I was unable to explore other things that he might like or hate using the computer, as he kept pushing me away: he only wanted to look at pictures of power rangers and wrestling. I respected his choice, as he was making it very clear that this was all he wanted to look at. There was a potential there for him to become aggressive, as he was very physical in pushing me away.

---

The young people's motivation to talk about their interests may have contributed to their ability to communicate at their transition meeting. All of the young people had the opportunity to share their views and aspirations with others and they were listened to.

## 5.5. Identity

In Chapter 3, the literature demonstrated that for an individual to make realistic choices for their future it was important that they understand their strengths and weaknesses. The ability to identify one's strengths and weaknesses is an important part of the development of self identity. If others believe that an individual has self awareness, it is more likely that their choices will be listened to and subsequently fulfilled.

The following aspects of identity are discussed in this section:

- Interests
- Strengths
- Support needs

### 5.5.1. Interests

Test et al. (2005) argued that there is evidence for the development of self identity when individuals are able to express their interests. In this study, the young people were all able to communicate their interests with minimal support. In Figure 5.5 I have included pages from the young people's transition comics which demonstrate some of their interests.

When I first asked the young people what they liked and disliked, I felt that they were unsure what I was asking them to do:

---

**Extract 5.66** Conversation with critical friend about initial difficulties making choicesConversation transcripts 20/03/2008

---

CAROLINE: When I first asked the young people what they liked . . . there were not any exceptions . . . they all looked at me and just smiled. I first thought maybe the language I was using was too complex, so I altered my language and included more visual support.

CRITICAL FRIEND: That surprises me . . . I have met all the young people that you are working with and I believe that their language is good enough to understand 'like'. Could there be any other reasons why they did not understand?

CAROLINE: Well, after trying different types of visual support I tried a different approach. I wondered maybe if they had just not got used to working with me yet. I showed them my research comic and told them about the things that I like. I thought maybe this would break the ice or give them a clue about the sorts of answers they could give when we were talking about their likes.

CRITICAL FRIEND: Did you find that helped?

CAROLINE: It did help, but I'm not totally sure why. I think maybe a combination of things. By showing them my likes, I think this helped to build a rapport and I was modelling types of answers they could give. I also think that maybe the young people were not used to being asked what they liked. Once they started talking about their likes there was no stopping them really. Their confidence grew.

---

The pages of the research comic that were used to share my interests are shown in Figure 4.2 in Chapter 4.

On my computer I had a library of symbols and pictures of some of the basic concepts I thought may occur in discussions. The majority of the young people's interests were not present in this library. However, this did not affect the young people's ability to express their interests. Several of the young people were able to spontaneously communicate their interests by: using their preferred method of communication, taking a photograph, or finding a picture on the internet (Extract 5.26). Tarak was particularly good at using a computer. He accessed the internet and then instructed me to type in 'Power Rangers' and 'WWF Wrestling' in to the search engine (Extract 5.32). These are his

favourite programmes to watch on television (Page 6 of Figure 5.5). During a session, Sabal spontaneously told me that he liked ‘PC Plum’ (Page 4 of Figure 5.5):

---

**Extract 5.67** Sabal spontaneously sharing his interests:

Field notes 22/02/2007

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SABAL: like PC Plum... Balamory

CAROLINE: You **watch** on television?

SABAL: funny [*laughs*]

---

If I was responsible for providing the picture materials for the young people’s transition comics, I would not have uncovered these interests.

Sabal enjoyed talking about his interests. There were several occasions where he was observed to initiate discussion with a communication partner about what he liked, usually swimming or football. He would also change the topic of conversation to his interests if the communication partner was discussing a topic that did not interest him:

---

**Extract 5.68** Sabal changing discussion to talk about his interests:

Video transcription 07/02/2007

---

CAROLINE: So you **like talking**?

SABAL: **Swimming**

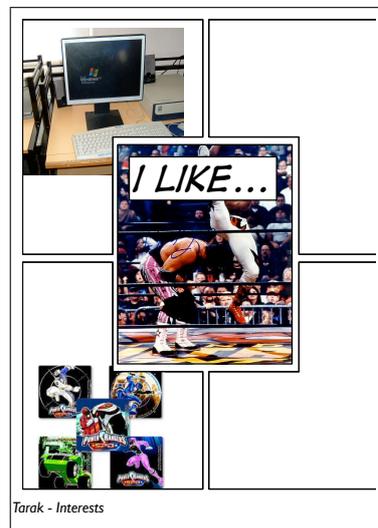
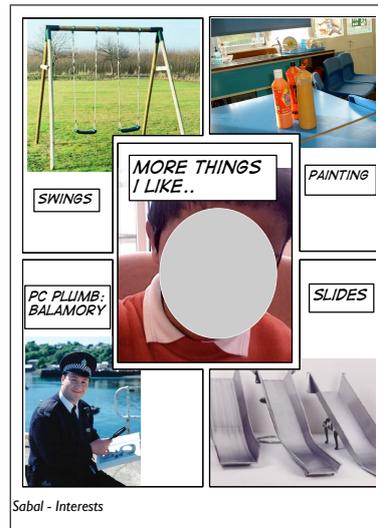
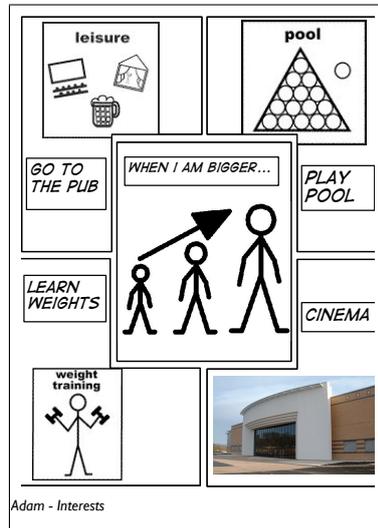
---

This demonstrated considerable self-awareness as he knew when he was bored or could not contribute to a conversation. Furthermore, his initiation of conversation suggested that ‘chatting’ was an interest in itself.

Adam’s interests illustrated his feelings towards social interaction. He preferred activities that he could do on his own. For example, he enjoyed playing on the computer and trampolining. Furthermore, when he selected activities that he would like to try in the future (Page 1 of Figure 5.5), they too were solitary activities that he could do on his own, such as weight-lifting and going to the cinema.

In contrast, Naresh preferred activities that involved being with other people (page 3 of Figure 5.5). He especially liked participating in activities with his father, such as going to car boot sales or the park.

Figure 5.5.: The young people's interests



Terri, Tarak and Anna's interests followed a consistent theme throughout their transition comics. Terri enjoys spending her time cooking (page 5 of Figure 5.5). Tarak liked spending time on the computer whilst Anna enjoyed activities that involved music and dance (page 2 of Figure 5.5).

The young people had a diverse range of interests and were able to identify activities that they preferred over others. They were able to make the distinction between activities that they enjoyed at home and at school, even when the research was conducted within the school context (Figure 5.6). The top two pages are taken from Anna's transition comic and the bottom two pages from Terri's.

The young people showed preference for activities that they may participate in on a daily basis as well as activities they may participate in infrequently. This demonstrates that the young people were not just living for the moment. Anna selected a photograph of her favourite shopping centre and Terri selected a bowling symbol:

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**Extract 5.69** An Extract from an interview with Terri's mother which reinforces one of Terri's choices  
Interview 14/02/2007

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"Terri picked bowling... we haven't been bowling for ages... she did really enjoy it though"

---

Several of the young people were also able to select activities that they would like to try in the future. These were new activities that they had never tried before, so were out of their range of experience. For instance, Anna reported that she would like to go to concerts when she was older:

---

**Extract 5.70** Anna selecting a new activity to try in the future  
Field notes 21/02/2007

---

"listen music" (pointed to the concert symbol)

---

and Naresh reported he would like to go to London and look around art galleries:

---

**Extract 5.71** Naresh selecting a new activity to try in the future  
Field notes 23/02/2007

---

"Go London" (pointed to the photograph of an art gallery) "see"

---

Figure 5.6.: The young people's interests at school

**WHAT I LIKE AT SCHOOL....**

<b>swimming</b> 	 <b>THE PIANO</b>
 <b>GOING ON THE BUS</b> <b>TRIPS</b>	 <b>GOING TO MERRYHILL</b>

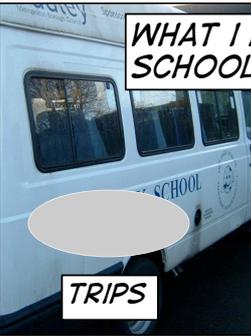
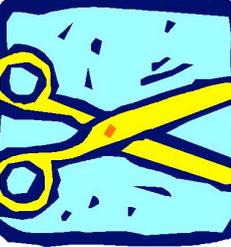
Anna - Interests

**WHAT I LIKE AT SCHOOL...**

 <b>ASSEMBLY</b>	 <b>KEYBOARD</b>
 <b>COOKING</b>	 <b>ENGLISH LESSONS</b>

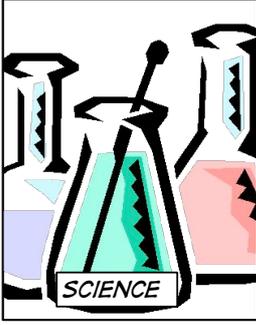
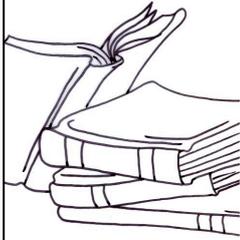
Anna - Interests

**WHAT I LIKE AT SCHOOL....**

 <b>TRIPS</b>	<b>dance</b> 
 <b>COOKING</b>	 <b>CLIPPING</b>

Terri - Interests

**MORE THINGS I LIKE AT SCHOOL...**

 <b>PAINTING</b>	 <b>SINGING</b>
 <b>SCIENCE</b>	 <b>ENGLISH</b>

Terri - Interests

This is a contrast to previous research (Hirst & Baldwin 1994, Hendey & Pascall 2002, Beresford & Ward 2005) which stated that people with learning disabilities had limited aspirations for their future.

### 5.5.2. Strengths

Young person	Strengths
Adam	Physical activities, such as trampolining and activities on the computer (page 1 of Figure 5.8)
Anna	Music and dancing (page 2 of Figure 5.8)
Sabal	Swimming and football (page 3 of Figure 5.8)
Terri	Cooking (page 4 of Figure 5.8)
Tarak	Computers (page 5 of Figure 5.8)
Naresh	Was unable to express his strengths

**Table 5.3.:** The young people's strengths

In Section 5.3 I argued that the young people all had aspirations which would take advantage of their strengths. Their understanding of strengths is discussed in more detail in this section. Figure 5.8 shows pages from the young people's transition comics that illustrate their perceived strengths. Table 5.3 is a summary of the activities the young people identified as their strengths.

When Sabal talked about being good at swimming, he found his swimming certificate to show me his achievements. Anna and Adam's strengths were consistent with their interests and in Terri and Tarak's case with their future aspirations.

Figure 5.7.: Future accommodation choices

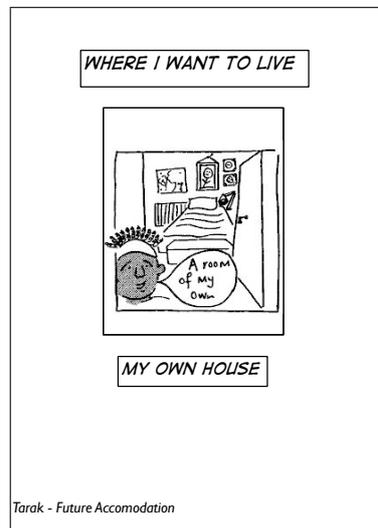
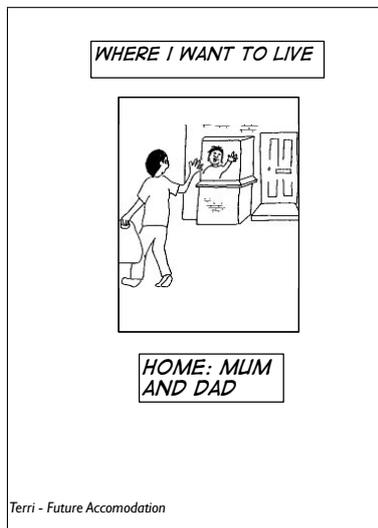
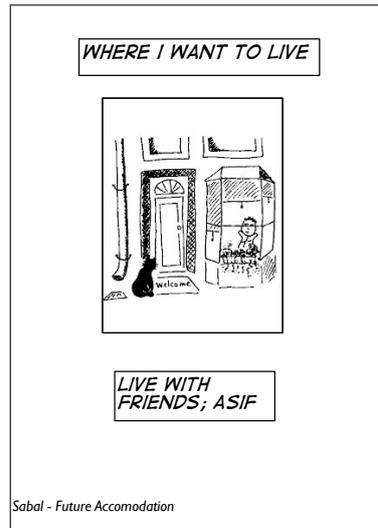
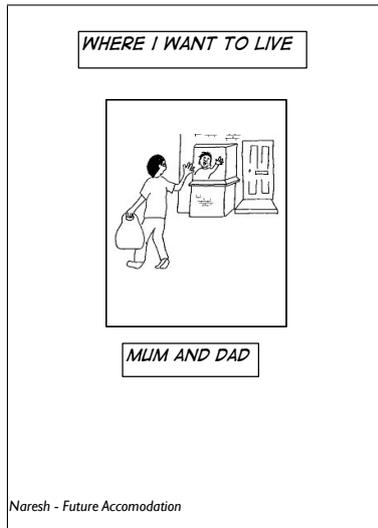
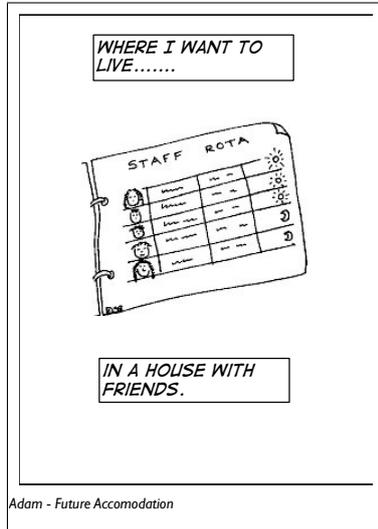


Figure 5.8.: The young people's strengths



Naresh became very quiet when he was asked about activities that he was good at:

---

**Extract 5.72** Naresh finding it difficult to identify his strengths

Field notes 23/02/2007

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CAROLINE: **What** are **you good at?**

NARESH: [*no response, looks down at the floor*]

CAROLINE: **I think** you are **good** at **cooking**

NARESH: [*no response*]

NARESH: [*takes some objects from his pocket*] look

---

Initially, I thought I had failed to explain myself in a way that was accessible to him. However, after discussing this with his class teacher I felt that his reluctance to talk about his strengths was due to a lack of self confidence instead. His teachers report that he becomes anxious during class activities as he worries about getting his work wrong. Naresh may not believe that he has any strengths because of his reduced self confidence. The choices he does make are, however, consistent with his interests. Below are a few examples:

The young people's strengths were confirmed by their parents and staff:

---

**Extract 5.73** Confirmation of Adam's strengths by his class teacher

Field notes 07/02/2007

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"I agree . . . Adam is really good at physical activities. This is why we decided that he should be integrated into the local MLD school for PE lessons."

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**Extract 5.74** Confirmation of Anna's strengths by her class teacher

Field notes 22/02/2007

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"In music lessons she comes alive. She will dance to the music . . . you would not believe it . . . she is so light on her feet."

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**Extract 5.75** Confirmation of Tarak's strengths by his previous class teacher

Field notes 05/03/2007

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"Tarak is good on the computer . . . the problem is we can't get him off."

---

Rawlings et al. (1995) states that the ability to ask for help is also considered an important strength and requirement of choice-making. Furthermore, the ability to ask

for help demonstrates self-knowledge, as one is acknowledging one's limitations. Anna, Tarak and Terri demonstrated that they were able to ask for help in certain circumstances.

The young people were observed to ask for help during activities that they enjoyed, but not in activities they did not care for. It was likely they wanted to be fully involved in the activities they enjoyed. By not asking for help they might miss out on part of the activity. In contrast they may not be concerned about missing out on part of an activity they did not care for.

When Anna was making her transition comic, she was eager to be as independent as possible. She verbally asked me to show her how to use my laptop computer and 'Comic Life' programme and then operated it herself. She initially found the mouse-pad difficult to use, but after a demonstration of how it worked, she was able to use it with no difficulties. Anna would then ask for further help if she needed it, otherwise I just observed. Moreover, Anna was able to ask for clarification:

---

**Extract 5.76** Anna asking for clarification

Field notes 23/02/2007

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CAROLINE: You move the mouse like this [*demonstrates*]

ANNA: What?

---

Terri was able to ask for help when she was participating in an activity that interested her:

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**Extract 5.77** Terri asking for help

Researcher observations 09/01/2007

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Terri approached me with an apron in her hand. She held out the apron to me and attempted to verbally say help.

---

She was quick to ask for help, as she was not allowed to start cooking until her apron was on. She was very involved in the activity and gestured to everyone what she required to be fully involved.

Tarak also asked for help during activities that he enjoyed, for example if he needed help to find a picture on the internet (Extract 5.32). This showed self-awareness. Despite liking his independence, he was aware that there were certain goals he could not achieve without adult help. He was willing to compromise in order to achieve a desired outcome.

For instance, he was able to operate a computer, but did not have the literacy skills to type in words into a search engine.

Adam found it difficult to ask for help:

---

**Extract 5.78** Adam having difficulties asking for help

Researcher observations 11/10/2006

---

Adam was given an activity which involved making a mosaic. Adam started the activity, but appeared to be having some difficulties. He stopped what he was doing and looked around the room trying to make eye contact with one of his teachers. He waited until one of the staff noticed that he was not working and the member of staff had to interpret that he required help.

---

The fact that he stopped showed that he did have some awareness of his limitations: some students would just continue with an activity despite not knowing what to do. He either did not yet have the confidence to express that he needed help, or did not have the language to ask for help.

The ability to ask for help provided further evidence that several of the young people had an understanding of their disability. From evidence into organisational behaviour Lee (1997) argued that people generally like to solve problems by themselves and do not like to ask for help. When someone asks for help it shows that they have an understanding of their limitations. Accepting one's limitations is a strength rather than a weakness.

### 5.5.3. Support needs

Anna, Adam, Naresh and Terri demonstrated an understanding of their support needs. However, with Tarak and Sabal it was less clear. I have already demonstrated that Tarak was able to acknowledge his support needs in activities where the outcome was motivating for him. However, he was not observed to ask for help in activities that were less appealing:

---

**Extract 5.79** A teaching assistant's observations of Tarak's behaviour in class

Field notes 09/01/2007

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"It is hard to get Tarak involved in class activities. He will walk out the room if we put him under pressure to work. If we do put him under too much pressure he can become aggressive."

---

His decision not to participate in activities may be through a lack of motivation towards the task. An alternative explanation could be that he chooses not to participate in activities that he finds difficult.

Sabal was able to talk about many activities that he liked and he was good at. When he was asked what activities he disliked, or found difficult he changed the subject to a topic of his choice (Extract 5.68). After further investigation, it was clear that Sabal was able to distinguish between the concepts of like and dislike:

---

**Extract 5.80** Sabal distinguishing between like and hate

Researcher observations 07/02/2007

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Sabal had some initial difficulties understanding the vocabulary like and hate. Sabal did not respond to me when I used this vocabulary. After some experimentation, I found that Sabal responded to the vocabulary good and bad. When I asked him if an activity was good or bad, he responded to my questions more frequently. When he was talking about activities that he liked, he used the word good more frequently than similar words.

---

He talked about what other people dislike, but would not talk about himself:

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**Extract 5.81** Sabal talking about someone else's dislikes

Field notes 22/02/2007

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SABAL: Asif bad school

CAROLINE: **He is naughty?**

SABAL: Nah

CAROLINE: dislikes school?

SABAL: Yeah

---

It is possible that Sabal perceives that he has no support needs, which may suggest a lack of self-awareness, or he may be choosing not to incorporate his support needs into his identity. At his transition meeting, he became upset when his dad made negative comments about his academic achievements. He was very aware of what was being said:

---

**Extract 5.82** Sabal's response to his dad's comments at his transition meeting  
Researcher observations 05/03/2007

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Sabal sat facing his dad, while his dad sat with his back to him. Sabal was crying. The start of the meeting had been very positive. The class staff had given Sabal lots of praise for his work at school, which had made Sabal smile. Sabal became upset once his dad has arrived and expressed his opinion about Sabal's progress. Was Sabal confused why his dad was at school? Sabal's dad reported that he was unhappy with Sabal's progress and felt by now he should be able to read and write. His dad said that the school were not doing enough and that we was considering getting a home tutor. Sabal was crying and shaking. I feel that he understands that his dad is unhappy with him as he previously responded well to praise: lots of smiles and increasing confidence in sharing his views. It is possible that Sabal was reacting to the change in mood of the meeting rather than to what was actually being said.

---

If he had not understood the distinction between criticism and praise, then the comments would not have affected him so strongly. If he did not understand what was being said it is possible that he understood some of his father's body language, such as his father sitting with his back to him or the anger in his voice.

Terri communicated that she wanted her transition comic created on the computer like mine. Even though she wanted a computerised version, she was clear that she did not want to use the computer herself:

---

**Extract 5.83** Terri communicating how she wanted her transition comic to be produced  
Researcher observations 21/02/2007

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Terri placed my hands on the computer keyboard and gave the computer a thumbs down. She then spontaneously pointed to pictures on the screen that she wanted to include in her book.

---

Anna asked me to play the keyboard with her. We experimented with different sounds on the keyboard and Anna played some simple tunes:

---

**Extract 5.84** Anna giving Caroline instructionsField notes 07/02/2007

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ANNA: Caroline play

CAROLINE: [*plays some notes on the keyboard*]ANNA: Play slow [*attempts to play the same tune*]

---

Anna wanted to copy what I was doing. I felt Anna was aware of her visual impairment and that it made it difficult for her to interpret fast movements.

Anna also has a good understanding of where to position people so that she could see them. During our music session the sunlight in the room kept changing, which affected Anna's ability to see me. Whenever the sunlight changed she altered my seating position by asking me to stand whilst she repositioned my chair. I was then instructed to sit back down (Extract 5.59).

Naresh and Adam were both reluctant communicators. During the research process they developed their own strategies for reducing the pressure to talk in social situations. This also indicated that they understood their difficulties. However, like Anna and Terri, they had developed ways to compensate for their difficulties. During the transition meeting, Naresh chose to sit next to me:

---

**Extract 5.85** Naresh's choice of seating position during his transition meetingResearcher observations 05/03/2007

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Naresh stays next to me during the meeting: he sat facing me (my side) and his back to the professionals visiting. He could see his school staff out of the corner of his eye. This was his choice of seating arrangement.

---

This strategy was also observed during his meeting with the Connexions representatives:

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**Extract 5.86** Naresh's choice of seating position during his Connexions meetingResearcher observations 23/02/2007

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Naresh sat and turned his head away from the connexions people and was very quiet. Occasionally he answered their questions, but only with a 'yes' or 'no' answer and he directed his answer at me.

---

This strategy meant that he did not have to make eye contact or communicate with these unfamiliar people.

During Naresh's post-transition meeting interview, he communicated that he found it useful when people used signs and symbols when communicating with him. They helped him understand what people were saying:

---

**Extract 5.87** Naresh communicating his like of signing

Interview 07/03/2007

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CAROLINE: Did **signing help**?

NARESH: Signing good [*picks up the help symbol at same time from many others on the table*]

---

This insight also demonstrates self-awareness as he is able to propose strategies that others can use to help him feel more included.

Adam was motivated to take part in the study. He indicated that he wanted to spend time with me by:

---

**Extract 5.88** Adam communicating that he wanted to spend time with me

Field notes 31/01/2007

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CAROLINE: [*enters the classroom*]

CLASS TEACHER: Look who is here Adam

ADAM: [*looks up, smiles, gets up and walks over to Caroline*]

CAROLINE: Can **I work** with **you**?

ADAM: *yes* [*smiles*]

---

Despite his motivation, on occasions Adam felt uncomfortable talking to me, especially if I used direct questions. To alleviate his anxiety, Adam introduced his own strategies for communicating with me:

---

**Extract 5.89** Adam introducing his own strategies to make communication easier

Researcher observations 09/01/2007

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After I had explained about my school, Adam noticed three huge puppets in the room. Aaron signalled through gesture that he would like a puppet. I then said “shall I have a puppet”: he nodded his head. We continued looking at the book; however the puppets turned the pages and did the signing (you can put your hands in their hands like gloves) The rest of the interactions happened through the puppets. Puppets were only introduced once I started to ask him a lot of questions.

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Adam also used the puppets to initiate interactions with me:

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**Extract 5.90** Adam using the puppet to initiate an interaction

Researcher observations 09/01/2007

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Nice interaction also happened between the puppets: he hugged, tickled, pulled faces at my puppet. Puppets played clapping games. The puppets were also used to initiate interactions, such as his puppet tickling my puppet. He would have physical contact with me if it was through the puppet otherwise, he did not like to have adults and majority of peers in close proximity to him. After the session, when we were back in class, he put his head on my shoulder and signalled through sign for me to read the book to him again. I feel that the puppets helped trust to develop between us to a degree in which he felt safe initiating physical proximity with me.

---

Adam was reluctant to verbally communicate and when he did speak he spoke in a very quiet voice that was difficult to hear. It was really difficult to engage him in a conversation. Like the puppet research (Downing et al. 2006), Adam confirmed that the use of puppets was useful in engaging someone who was a reluctant communicator.

The majority of the young people were able to provide their own strategies for ensuring that they were more included. By introducing their own strategies, they were empowering themselves and taking more control during the interaction. Moreover, they were able to equalise some of the inherent power imbalances, as they were demonstrating that they were the experts in choosing of what strategies worked best for them.

## Summary

All of the young people to some degree demonstrated an understanding of self. The choices they made for their future were influenced by their interests, strengths and support needs. The young people had a diverse range of aspirations, which were all considered to be realistic and achievable.

Several of the young people demonstrated some understanding of past and future, which are complex and abstract concepts. Interests did not just reflect the present: they all selected activities that they had completed in the past and enjoyed. Furthermore, several of the young people communicated activities that they would like to try when they were older, which were outside their current experiences, such as going to concerts and the pub.

The young people also demonstrated they were attempting to empower themselves. This was observed when the young people introduced their own strategies for making communication easier and when they spontaneously took control over the pacing of the research sessions.

Although the young people demonstrated that they could communicate their views and did have the ability to exercise personal power, this does not automatically mean that they were able to participate meaningfully in their transition meeting. For the young people to achieve communicative rationality, the other stakeholders at the transition meeting have to believe that the young people have a right to speak and to be listened to. In the following chapter, I will look at the young people's interactions with other stakeholders during their transition meeting. A more detailed discussion of the power relationships that exist between the meeting participants is given in Chapter 8.

## **Chapter 6.**

### **Interactions with other stakeholders**

Chapter 5 demonstrated that the young people were able to communicate their views and exercise personal power. However, Bourdieu (1986) states that communication rationality is not the property of isolated individuals, but instead an effect of the interaction between them. Communication will always be a meeting of social positions, with their associated power relationships. Although the young people may have been able to communicate their views in the transition meeting, it does not follow that other stakeholders believed that they had the right to speak or to be listened to.

This chapter explores some of the ways that power was exercised by other stakeholders at the transition meeting and the effect this had on the young people: in particular the stakeholders' concept of disability; and stakeholder communication. I will be making reference to the language used and what this revealed about power relationships. The choice of topics examined are informed by the literature in Chapters 3 and 4. This chapter concludes with a discussion into the possible reasons for Adam's exclusion from his transition planning meeting.

A detailed discussion of the power relationships at play during the transition planning can be found in Chapter 8. In this chapter, I use the term 'professionals'. When I use this term, I am referring to the transition social worker and the Connexions staff.

#### **6.1. Stakeholder concepts of disability**

Chapter 5 demonstrated that the young people were developing a self-identity. They were able to express their interests and showed an understanding of their strengths and support needs. Furthermore, the choices that they made took into consideration

these individual characteristics which showed some understanding of their inner world. Chapter 3 showed that issues of over-attachment and a culture of labelling contributed to the way that individuals conceptualise disability. These issues are discussed first.

### 6.1.1. Over-attachment issues

In this study there were no obvious signs that the young people's parents were trying to over-protect them. Even though some of the young people held views that were different to their parents, the parents were willing to help their children to follow their aspirations by collecting relevant information on their behalf or by not disconfirming their views during the transition meeting. During the transition meetings, none of the parents contradicted the choices expressed by their child.

Terri's mother reported that she had some concerns about Terri's future:

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**Extract 6.1** Terri's mothers concerns for her daughters future

Interview 14/02/2007

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"I don't want her sitting on her bum watching TV all day. I want her to have something to do with her time."

---

I felt that these concerns were natural and were likely to be held by many parents regardless of disability. She was anxious for her daughter to have lots of opportunities. She made no statements that suggested that she was trying to hold Terri back.

Several of the parents reported that they would like their son or daughter to continue living at home once they have left school:

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**Extract 6.2** Parental hopes for Terri

Interview 14/02/2007

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"We love having Terri at home. We'd prefer her to stay living with us. My husband would find it difficult if she were to move out ...er ...but I guess if Terri really wanted to leave we would support her choice."

---

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**Extract 6.3** Parental hopes for Anna

Interview 14/02/2007

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"I want Anna to stay living at home as long as possible ... well as long as she wants to stay at home."

---

I felt that this was a sign of the affection that Terri's parents have for their daughter. They were also keen for their other daughter, who had no developmental difficulties, to stay at home as long as possible. This suggests that their hopes may say more about their attitudes to parenthood rather than a response to their child's difficulties.

Both Anna's and Terri's mothers stated that they would prefer for their daughters to stay in school as long as possible. However, once Anna's mother discovered that Anna disliked attending school she began to investigate other options:

---

**Extract 6.4** Parental hopes for Anna

Interview 14/02/2007

---

"I knew Anna was not keen on school, but I did not realise that she disliked it so much. I guess we should start looking for other options post-sixteen."

---

After the transition meeting, all the families were invited to attend a post-sixteen open evening, which demonstrated all the possible options for the young people once they have left school. Terri's family responded positively and actively to the choices that Terri communicated during the transition meeting:

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**Extract 6.5** Observations of Terri's family during the post 16 options evening at school

Researcher observations 25/03/2007

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Terri's parents visited all the college stands and were asking which colleges offered cookery courses. This was one of Terri's aspirations. Terri's mother told me that she was pleased that Terri knew how she would like to spend her time. Her mother was happier if she wanted to leave school before 19 if that meant she could do her cookery course.

---

During the transition meetings, the transition social worker, some of the class staff, and Mary discussed ways that they could provide work experience which would help to fulfil the young people's aspirations. They were eager to encourage the development of the skills that the young people may require:

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**Extract 6.6** Naresh work experience optionsField notes 05/03/2007

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TRANSITION SOCIAL WORKER: What work experience are you able to provide? [*directed to the school staff*]

CLASS TEACHER: I don't think that Naresh has enough confidence for work experience.

TRANSITION SOCIAL WORKER: Could we provide an activity that will help build his confidence then?

MARY: What about a week away on our activity holiday this year? We offer lots of confidence building activities there.

---

Although the class teacher provides a negative and almost dismissive response to the transition social worker's question, Mary is able to turn the teacher's response into something positive and practical to help Naresh. Possibly the teacher does not see employment as a future option for Naresh, as she is unable to consider a work experience option. However, it is possible that her attitude could change over time if she felt that Naresh's confidence had developed. Other stakeholders may not have been so proactive if they felt that the young people's choices were unrealistic.

### 6.1.2. A culture of labelling

In this study, there were several examples of the teacher describing the young person's skills in a way that was stereotypical of their diagnosis rather than an accurate description of their skills. MacMaster et al. (2002) found that the presence of a disability label biased the way that teachers described the skills of their students. MacMaster et al. reported that when a teacher knew that a student had a diagnosis, they identified more characteristic difficulties compared to teachers who were unaware of the label.

Adam has a diagnosis of Autism. His diagnosis influences how others perceive him and their expectations of him (Ho 2004). Adam was described by his class teacher as:

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**Extract 6.7** Class teacher's description of Adam's communication skillsField notes 11/10/2006

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"Adam is very passive. He will only talk to one of us once we have initiated an interaction with him."

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However, during every visit, I observed Adam initiating interactions with both adults and peers spontaneously and independently.

The following example demonstrates that Adam was able to initiate interactions with both his staff and peers:

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**Extract 6.8** Adam initiating an interaction with both staff and peers

Researcher observations 11/10/2006

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Adam was in the splash pool at school which resembles a bath tub when foam is added. Adam put on his goggles and went under the water pretending to be a shark: his hand was the fin. He swam up behind one of his class mates and splashed him gently, which made his peer laugh. This became a reciprocal interaction where they took turns to splash each other. Adam then included a classroom assistant in the activity. He sneaked up on her from under the bubbles and splashed her.

---

Adam's class teacher had a son who was also on the Autistic spectrum and she often talked about her son's strengths and support needs. Her understanding of Autism had naturally been constructed through her understanding of her son. This meant that she had a tendency to over-generalise her son's difficulties and her experiences of interacting with her son to other people with Autism:

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**Extract 6.9** Adam's class teacher drawing comparisons between Adam and her son

Field notes 11/10/2006

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"Autism makes you passive. My son also has Autism. He is a lot older than Adam, but he is passive too. Not as much as Adam. My son likes to go around my pub talking to the customers, sometimes we talk far too much and we have to take him out back."

---

Adam does have difficulties with socialisation. However, they are hugely different from her son's reported difficulties. The class teacher no longer saw Adam, as a young person with "unique abilities, learning styles, circumstances and aspirations" (Ho 2004). He was defined by his diagnosis and compared to another who has decidedly different skills and needs.

The way the class teacher described Adam to me created a "symbolic social boundary" (Powell 2003). Her description stigmatised Adam as the person who has difficulties

with socialisation and does not talk. Initially, I allowed myself to be influenced by her description and the practice of a culture of labelling. I convinced myself that Adam would be extremely difficult to work with. I was soon proved wrong.

Anna also had a diagnosis of Autism and was described by her class teacher as:

---

**Extract 6.10** Class teacher description Anna's interaction skills

Field notes 09/01/2007

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“Anna is a very solitary person. She only interacts with her peers occasionally.”

---

This surprised me. During the one-to-one sessions, I observed that Anna initiated many of the interactions between us. Furthermore, in this context she was able to take turns, share and was considerate of my needs (Extract 5.84). The majority of her interests and activities planned for the future were socially orientated and involved being with others (Extract 5.70). This made me question the accuracy of her diagnosis. Undoubtedly, Anna appeared passive and withdrawn in class (Section 7.1). However, unlike the teachers, I felt that this behaviour could not be attributed to Autism alone. It suggested that practices in the classroom may also be contributing to Anna's reduced participation in lessons; or that Anna was unmotivated by the lessons themselves. It is likely that her passivity in the classroom could be attributed to a combination of these two explanations.

Like Adam and Anna, Naresh was also defined by his diagnosis. The first time I met Naresh, his class teacher announced in front of him and the class that he was elective mute and what this meant. Apparently, he did not join in with class activities and elected not to talk to anyone. However, I had already seen him talk to a peer in the playground. Naresh understood what the teacher had said about him. The following extract shows Naresh's response to his teacher's comments:

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**Extract 6.11** Class staff defining Naresh by his diagnosis

Researcher observations 17/01/2007

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Naresh then turned and face the whole class and said that his dad's car was in the garage as it had a broken radio. He was able to talk in a lot of detail about his dad's car. He also said that next week his dad was going to pick him up from school and take him into Stanton to buy a new bike. He told the class he wanted a black bike.

---

This showed significant self-awareness and should have demonstrated to the teacher the weakness of using labels to define an individual. Moreover, it was an excellent example of Naresh being assertive. He was not afraid to stand up for himself and correct his teacher.

The use of labels is so well ingrained in education (White 1997, Gillman et al. 2000, Powell 2003, Ho 2004), that I believe that this practice has become well integrated into the practices of the teachers. When labels were used, I felt that the teachers were trying to help me understand the young people's needs rather than trying to reduce the young people's individuality. However, in this section I have demonstrated that the labelling of individuals can be unsafe. Labels can affect the way that individuals are perceived and how others interact with them. The young people in this study challenged the ways in which they were described by demonstrating behaviour that contradicted their diagnosis or by outwardly confronting faulty descriptions.

## 6.2. Stakeholder communication

Chapter 3 demonstrated that the way that individuals communicate with people with learning disabilities can either include or exclude them from equal participation. This section explores the way that stakeholders at the transition planning meeting communicated with the young people and whether this helped to include or exclude the young people from meaningful participation. I will also explore what their language use reveals about the power relationships that exist between the young people and stakeholders.

The areas discussed in this section are:

- provision of information
- evidence of stakeholders supporting communication exchange
- inter-personal conflict
- power through discourse

This section concludes with a discussion of how other stakeholders viewed my position during the transition planning meeting.

### **6.2.1. Provision of information**

The transition meeting had no published agenda, which meant that the young people and their parents had no prior knowledge of what would be taking place at the transition meeting. The transition meeting was a new experience for both parties, which meant that they could not apply previous knowledge to guide their understanding of what might happen.

The young people were more disadvantaged than their parents, as their parents had experienced attending annual reviews, whereas the young people had always been excluded. This meant that the parents had experienced how meetings with professionals worked and could apply some of this knowledge to a new context. The other stakeholders had attended transition meetings for other students, so they knew what was expected of them and the types of discussions that may occur.

The structure of the meeting was communicated by the chairperson as and when different landmarks were reached. This meant that the young people and their parents had to rely on the chairperson to know what was happening next. This placed the chairperson in a powerful position. The other stakeholders, from previous experience, knew what would be happening next as transition meetings tend to follow a similar format, so were less reliant on the chair person.

The distribution of information was further controlled by the professionals at the meeting. It was the professionals that had knowledge of the services available to the young person and whether their choices were financially viable. This meant that the professionals could exercise power in their choices about what information they shared with the young people and other stakeholders. This control of information helps to maintain the stratified relationships between stakeholders (Cuff & Sharrock 1985). Explanations for why information was restricted is discussed in Chapter 8.

### **6.2.2. Evidence of professionals and class staff supporting communication exchange**

This section explores how the stakeholders modified the way that they communicated to support the communication exchange between the young person and themselves. Communication can be supported through:

- prompts
- specific attempts to elicit responses from the young people
- confirmation of the young people's communication attempts

When I use the term 'stakeholders' in this section, I am referring to both professionals and class staff. The young people and their families are also stakeholders, however their communication is not discussed in this chapter.

When stakeholders supported the communication exchange between the young person and themselves, it suggested that they held the belief that the young person had the right to speak and to be listened to. This assumption could be made as their support of the communication exchange would assist the young person's participation and achievement of communicative rationality.

### Use of prompts

None of the stakeholders used prompting as a support strategy during the transition meetings. Prompts tend to be used when the young person does not know what type of response is required for a specific question. Prompts can also be used to encourage a response to stimuli (O'Reilly & Lancioni 2005). In this study, the young people were all motivated and able to communicate their views during their transition meeting, which meant that they did not require extrinsic encouragement to communicate their views. Furthermore, when the language was sufficiently modified to match their level of receptive ability, the young people were able to respond independently without the need for prompts. This is discussed in more detail later in the chapter.

### Eliciting responses

Mary (the deputy head teacher) and the transition social worker elicited the young people's responses by asking them direct questions about their transition comics and their aspirations for the future. (The conventions used in the transcription of the data are described in Table 5.1)

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**Extract 6.12** Mary eliciting a response

Field notes 05/03/2007

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**“What is your name?” “What do you like at school?” “What do you like?”**

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**Extract 6.13** The transition social worker eliciting a response

Field notes 05/03/2007

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“Do you want to go to college?” “What do you **like**?” “Would you **like** to do that?”

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Terri was in a vulnerable position during her transition meeting. Terri’s expressive skills were extremely limited and this deterred people from asking her questions:

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**Extract 6.14** Observations of stakeholders behaviour towards Terri

Researcher observations 05/03/2007

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I felt that she was not as included as the other young people. Felt that stakeholders did not know how to respond to her. This was possibly because she has less verbal communication. I observed at the start of the meeting they asked the same sort of questions that they asked the other young people, unfortunately over the course of the meeting this decreased. She got asked very few questions in comparison to the other young people.

---

This is a contrast to the studies of Zilber et al. (1994) and Van der Gaag & Dormandy (1993), who found that staff increased communication with individuals with greater communication needs. These studies found that staff wanted to ensure that the interaction did not break down, so over-compensated by the amount they communicated. In my study, teachers and professionals avoided communication when they did not know how to make themselves understood, or had previously been unsuccessful in repairing a breakdown, in interaction with Terri. Terri’s mother also observed this (Extract 5.47).

Several of the stakeholders did not communicate directly with the young people at any point during their transition meeting:

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**Extract 6.15** Observations of stakeholder behaviour during the transition meetings

Researcher observations 05/03/2007

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Peter (the school transition co-ordinator) had a tendency to ask me a question rather than directing it to the young person. This was particularly apparent during Terri’s transition meeting. Peter frequently asked me questions about Terri rather than trying to communicate directly with her.

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Ochs (1982) states that when adults fail to ask children questions this is a sign of their unwillingness to treat children as equals. However, this could also be a sign of

the uncertainty that stakeholders may hold about modifying their communication to the appropriate level for the young person, especially if this was the first time that they had met the young person. Peter had met Terri before, but he had never taught her. This meant that he did not have any specific knowledge of her communication needs, which may explain why he failed to communicate with her directly.

### 6.2.3. Inter-personal conflict

When conflict behaviour is observed it can reveal that an individual may hold negative attitudes of another person, or that they disagree with what that person is saying. The only evidence of inter-personal conflict between the young person and another stakeholder was observed between Terri and her class teacher:

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**Extract 6.16** Inter-personal conflict

Field notes 05/03/2007

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TERRI: *Mr James pig* [verbally attempted to say Mr James and pointed to him]

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Terri's mother and the class teacher were surprised by Terri's outburst. They both reported that this was uncharacteristic of Terri. Looking at Terri's comment in context, it was unclear why she had made this comment:

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**Extract 6.17** Inter-personal conflict in context

Field notes 05/03/2007

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TRANSITION SOCIAL WORKER: How can we encourage Terri to use her communication aid?

PETER: We really need to get advice from her speech and language therapist and see what she recommends.

TERRI: *Mr James pig* [verbally attempted to say Mr James and pointed to him]

---

The class teacher was not involved in the discussion when it occurred. Furthermore, the class teacher had not yet contributed his views to the meeting. Possible explanations for the behaviour may have been boredom or to gain attention, as she was not currently being included in the meeting or she heard the words communication aid, which is something that she dislikes. As you would expect, the class teacher did not respond to Terri's comment, so no conflict evolved.

Inter-personal conflict was also observed between Sabal's father and school staff. Sabal's father was angry with the school as he felt that by this point in his son's education, Sabal should be able to read and write. The school staff were able to deal with the criticisms, however the comments may have had a negative affect on Sabal. He became inconsolable and during his post transition interview demonstrated some awareness of what his father had been saying:

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**Extract 6.18** Sabal demonstrating awareness of his father's comments at transition meeting

Interview 07/03/2007

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SABAL: Like talking... people good

SABAL: Dad me sad

CAROLINE: **Dad make you sad?**

SABAL: yes

---

The following sections demonstrate examples of stakeholders either agreeing or disagreeing with the young people. Rogers & Farace (1975) state that the level of agreement and disagreement between individuals can reveal the nature of their relationship. Frequent instances of agreement suggest that stakeholders are trying to avoid conflict and maintain a positive relationship whereas frequent disagreements show a more conflict ridden relationship.

### **Agreement**

During the transition meeting there were several examples of stakeholders agreeing with the views expressed by the young people. This was particularly evident when stakeholders were planning work experience for the young people. In the majority of instances, the young people's views informed the options available to them. The following extracts illustrate this:

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**Extract 6.19** The transition social worker agreeing with Tarak

Field notes 05/03/2007

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TRANSITION SOCIAL WORKER: So Tarak wants to do computers at college? [*directed to the group*]

TARAK: yes [*smiles*]

TRANSITION SOCIAL WORKER: That should not be a problem . . . would Tarak be able to go the taster college sessions as part of his work experience?

PETER: We will be able to consider this when he gets to post-sixteen

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**Extract 6.20** Class teacher agreeing with Terri

Field notes 05/03/2007

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CLASS TEACHER: Terri said she liked cooking. What about helping in the kitchen?

TERRI: Yeh [*becomes very excited*]

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## Disagreement

Terri's transition meeting was the only case where stakeholders disagreed with Terri and vice versa. Terri's views were quick to be dismissed. Like Morgan (2000) and Dee & Byers (2003), I believe that teachers and professionals perceived that Terri was unable to make choices because she had difficulty expressing herself. In Terri's transition comic there was a reoccurring theme of liking cookery. She wanted to study cookery at college and this would have been an obvious choice for work experience. Peter suggested that she could work in the lower part of the school helping with the younger children for her work experience. This did not correlate with any of Terri's interests. Terri was extremely assertive and said 'no' when this was suggested. When an choice was presented that correlated better with Terri's interests she agreed (Extract 5.50).

A further example of Terri disagreeing with stakeholders was when her class teacher reported that Terri enjoyed using computers (Extract 5.49). In Terri's communication book, she had said that she disliked computers. This was supported by her mother, who said that she refuses to use the computer at home.

### 6.2.4. Power through discourse

This section explores the language used by stakeholders when communicating with and about the young people. Through looking at the structures of discourse, I will be able to identify the power relationships that exist between stakeholders, in particular any power inequalities.

The following structures of discourse are discussed:

- active versus passive clauses
- lexical processes
- syntax
- complexity
- modality
- turn taking

These structures of discourse were introduced in Chapter 4.

#### Active versus passive clauses

The following extracts are used to explore the way that Peter used active and passive clauses in his discourse at the transition meeting. I then identify what this suggests about the level of significance applied to different stakeholders.

When stakeholders are described in the active clause, this frames them as the agents of action.

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**Extract 6.21** Peter's use of the active and passive clause

Field notes 05/03/2007

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“This transition meeting is a valuable chance for you, the parents, to be able to ask the professionals here about their work and what they can do to help your daughter in the future. Use this meeting to collect information and asks lots of questions as these will be the main people that you will be dealing with, not the school.”

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**Extract 6.22** Peter's use of the active and passive clauseField notes 05/03/2007

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“The professionals have lots of information that about the options available to your son once he leaves school.”

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These extracts identify how Peter viewed the social positions of different stakeholders at the meeting. There are definite hierarchies of importance that are noticeable through the discourse structures that he uses.

Extract 6.21 shows that the young people's parents and the professionals are given greater importance than the young person. The young person holds a passive position within the discourse whereas the professionals and parents are described in the active clause. There are no examples of Peter describing the young people in the active clause.

The young people's parents are described passively in relationship to the transition meeting. This implies that the transition meeting has been attributed greater importance than the parents. It can be extrapolated that the professional's views holds greater importance than the parent's: as the transition meeting is where one asks professionals about their work. Although the parents are attributed an active role of collecting information, the information is to be collected from the professionals, the holders of legitimate knowledge.

The professionals are given greater significance than the school, as the professionals are described in the active clause, whereas the school is described in the passive clause. This also implies that Peter believes that professional knowledge is more highly rated than his own knowledge as he is part of the school. However, his discourse suggests that he believes that he holds a more superior position than the parents, as he gives them instructions about what they should be doing during the transition meeting.

Extract 6.22 is a further example of the professionals being described in the active clause. Furthermore, they are framed as the agents of action, as they hold the information; and control whom is given access to that information and to what extent.

Bourdieu (1977) argues that social institutions reproduce specific ways of talking about particular parts of social life which relate to the place and the nature of the institution. The way that Peter describes professionals in the active clause suggests that professionalism is a key discourse within this particular institution.

In contrast Mary described the young people in the active clause:

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**Extract 6.23** Mary's use of the active and passive clause

Field notes 05/03/2007

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“Naresh is going to tell us about what he wants to do when he leaves school.”

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However, it is important to note that Naresh is spoken about in the third person.

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**Extract 6.24** Mary's use of the active and passive clause

Field notes 05/03/2007

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“Sabal can you tell us some of the things you **like?**”

---

There were no examples of Mary describing the young people in the passive clause. However, on occasions Mary spoke about the young people in a manner which suggested that the speaker was separated from the young people. Furthermore, Mary occasionally talked about the young people rather than to them. This is discussed later in this section.

Fowler (1985) states that the manner in which professional groups are referred to also indicates their perceived level of importance. When stakeholders referred to the professionals at the meeting, they referred to them by precise occupational labels rather than by their names:

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**Extract 6.25** Occupational labels used to address stakeholders

Field notes 05/03/2007

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Transition worker

Teacher for the blind

Class teacher

Connexions

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Stakeholders may have used precise labels because they believed that the professionals held a privileged position. Alternately, they may have been using conventions of formality that they felt were appropriate for the meeting. For example, Peter is happy to refer to the professionals by their first name outside of the meeting context, which suggests that he was making a conscious decision to alter the way that he referred to the professionals in the meeting.

### Lexical processes

All stakeholders at some point during the transition meetings used technical language when communicating their views. This was particularly evident when stakeholders were reading from the statement of educational needs:

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**Extract 6.26** Technical use of language during the transition meetings  
Researcher observations 05/03/2007

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When Sabal's class teacher read the statement of educational needs she read the statement word for word rather than summarising the main points. This meant that complicated or technical vocabulary was not substituted for vocabulary that was accessible to all participants. The process took much longer than was anticipated and it was evident that Sabal was finding it difficult to attend.

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The use of technical or turgid language can confuse people:

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**Extract 6.27** Terri's mothers comments about the language used during the transition meeting  
Interview 07/03/2007

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"I thought the meeting was supposed to be for the kids. I did not understand a lot of it so how was my Terri meant to."

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Using technical language helps to maintain the ideology that professionals are dominant and have legitimate knowledge. Cicourel (1985) argues that when individuals use technical language it can show a lack of personal rapport with their communication partner. This could be a valid explanation, as several of the stakeholders had not met or had minimal contact with the young people prior to the transition meeting. Peter, for example, had not taught any of the young people in this study, nor did he know what their communication needs were.

Cicourel (1985) proposes some alternative explanations. The use of technical language can suggest that the speaker lacks empathy for their communication partner. However, I feel that this explanation is the least likely. Extract 6.28 is a discussion with my critical friend debating this point:

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**Extract 6.28** Discussion with critical friend about the use of technical language  
Discussion transcripts 02/04/2007

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CAROLINE: I don't think that Peter lacks empathy for the young people even though he does have a tendency to use too complex, technical language. He has been doing the job for many years. Why would he choose this job if he lacked empathy for the people that he was working with?

CRITICAL FRIEND: A job can just be a job. Not everyone feels passionately about what they do.

CAROLINE: I think he is passionate about his job. I know that I have not observed him interacting with his class, but the way he talks about his students suggests enjoyment of his job and passion for what he does. He sounds proud when he talks about his students. I think that his use of complex language is more insecurity about his own role. I think the complex language was more to show his positioning amongst the professionals at the meeting. Also, I don't know how well he knows the young people. Maybe he did not have any previous knowledge of the ways that they communicated.

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It is also possible that stakeholders had forgotten that the young people were present. In previous transition meetings, they would have been able to use more technical language without consideration of their audience, as the young people were not present. Stakeholders may have slipped into previous schemas of interaction even though the context of the meeting had changed. Even if the young people had not been present at their meeting, the language would still have been too technical for their parents.

As well as the use of technical language, stakeholders often used language that separated them from the subject that they were talking about. For example, when they were talking about a young person's skills, comments were made such as "Sabal is good at..." or "Sabal has improved at..." rather than "Sabal, you are good at..." or "Sabal, you have improved at...". At times, it felt like the stakeholders were talking about someone that was not present at the meeting.

The separation of the speaker from the subject of speech was also evident in several of the stakeholder's use of pronouns. When the speaker uses 'you' and 'I', for example:

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**Extract 6.29** Separation of speaker from the subject of conversationField notes 05/03/2007

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“You should listen to these professionals as they have very important and valuable information to tell you” (Peter during Anna’s transition meeting)

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it suggests that the speaker is more distant from the subject of conversation. Whereas the use of ‘we’ or ‘us’ suggests there is less separation between speaker and subject (Extract 6.23 and Extract 6.24).

**Syntax**

Stakeholders tended to speak using full sentences (Extracts 6.6, 6.17, 6.19, 6.20, 6.21, 6.22, 6.23, 6.24). When conversation partners know each other well, they may delete part of their utterance as the meaning of what is being said can be inferred from the remainder of the utterance. This implies intimacy and the presence of shared knowledge. The fact that stakeholders spoke using full sentences could be considered appropriate for this context as the stakeholders did not know each other particularly well. Furthermore, this may have been a conscious choice, as stakeholders knew that the young people would find it difficult to infer meaning due to their communication difficulties. The use of full sentences also reflected the formality of the meeting.

The way that stakeholders sequenced their utterances helped to maintain the ideology that professionals are dominant and have legitimate knowledge. Peter frequently puts the professionals at the start of his utterance (Extracts 6.21, 6.22). Fowler (1985) argues that people who are put first in an utterance are likely to be attributed the most importance. When Mary spoke, she often put the young people first in the utterance (Extracts 6.23, 6.24). This suggests that she attributes greater importance to the views of the young people.

The young people spoke at the transition meeting using single words or short phrases, whereas the other stakeholders were able to use more complex language and syntactical structures. Fowler (1985) states that the discrepancy the young people’s use of language and syntactical structures singles them out because it is likely that other stakeholders have a similar level of language and a shared understanding of language.

## Complexity

Other than myself, Mary and the transition social worker were the only two stakeholders that modified their language to include the young people. Mary included the young people by modifying the complexity and length of her utterances and using visual support to support the communication exchange.

She modified her language to match the level of understanding of the young people and used sign to support what she was saying. For example, when she was telling everyone that Sabal was working well and had been achieving his targets she said:

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**Extract 6.30** Language modification

Field notes 05/03/2007

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MARY: Sabal has done **good work**

SABAL: [*smiles*]

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Mary also tried to guide others at the meeting to modify the way they were communicating. When the class teacher phrased a comment in an inaccessible way Mary would repeat the comment using modified language and sign:

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**Extract 6.31** Mary modifying the class teacher's language

Field notes 05/03/2007

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CLASS TEACHER: Sabal is participating well in class activities. His fine motor control is improving and he is now able to hold a pencil and draw in art. He really enjoys swimming and he has achieved his first swimming badge.

MARY: You have done **good work**. You are **good** at **drawing** and **swimming** (directed to Sabal)

---

I was surprised that the class teacher had not modified her language, as she does this instinctively in the classroom. A change in context can also affect the communication skills of adults as well as children and young people (Chapter 8).

The class teacher may have chosen in this situation not to modify her language as she was trying to convey more subtle information than 'done good work'. She was quantifying Sabal's actual attainment. The language that she used could have been

modified, but she may have felt that it would have taken too long to convey her thoughts if she was to make modifications.

Mary had no previous experience of teaching the young people in this study, however she demonstrated that she could be responsive and adapt her communication to meet their needs. This suggests that she is a skilled communicator with much experience of working with this client group.

Peter's frequent use of complex language may have been attributed to a misinterpretation of the young people's skills. Furthermore, Peter had not previously taught any of the young people, so he would have less knowledge about their communication skills than those stakeholders that had more frequent contact with the young people. Peter also had a lot of experience of working with this client group, but may have found it difficult to be as responsive as Mary. This also applied to other stakeholders at the meeting.

In Peter's explanations there was a frequent use of 'empty words': words that do not contribute to the overall meaning of what he was saying. This meant that it was difficult for the young people and me to isolate the important information-carrying words, as there was too much language to process quickly (Extracts 6.21, 6.22). Fowler (1985) states that when speakers use a larger number of words than is necessary, the speaker is trying to assert their authority and promote their knowledge as being the most legitimate.

Peter did not use any sign or visual aids to support what he was saying. This was disappointing, as Peter is a very competent signer. McConkey et al. (1999) and Bradshaw (2001) found that staff relied too much on verbal communication when communicating with people with learning disabilities. I talked with Peter several weeks after the meeting about his views on signing:

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**Extract 6.32** Discussion with Peter about signingInterview 19/03/2007

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CAROLINE: I found sign particularly effective when communicating with Terri and Tarak

PETER: From experience I've found that sign does not work with people with learning disabilities . . . I think there are better strategies to use. I think that you should just speak to them differently . . . treat them like any other person.

CAROLINE: I agree that people with learning disabilities should be treated equally, but I believe that part of being treated equally is having the same opportunities to access language. Modifying language alone may not be enough to include someone. Some people find sign immensely helpful. I mean in the interviews with the young people several of the young people said that signing helped them.

PETER: I'm still to be convinced that signing is useful. I worked with a young man who did not take to sign.

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The quantity of language used at the meeting and the pace in which it was delivered made it extremely difficult for me to translate it into meaningful terms for the young people. Many of the words could not be conveyed through sign, for example:

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**Extract 6.33** Some words that I was unable to sign during the transition meetingsField notes 05/03/2007

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Transition . . . aspirations . . . future . . . professionals . . . report . . . planning

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Moreover, some of the language concepts he used I had not anticipated and therefore did not have any visual aids to support the young peoples' understanding of the vocabulary. This was difficult for Tarak, Terri and Anna, who all have attention and listening difficulties that make it challenging to concentrate for longer than ten minutes at a time. Information should have been given in short bursts, presented in varying ways to maintain their interest. Terri became disruptive when she could not follow what was happening, which led to her signing to her class teacher that he was a pig (Extract 6.16).

During Sabal's transition meeting, his class teacher was responsible for reading the statement of educational needs. This was the class teacher's first experience of doing

this and so she read the statement verbatim rather than summarising or simplifying the terminology. The teacher's inexperience may have contributed to her use of complex language which was too difficult for Sabal to follow.

Sabal's transition meeting was especially difficult and this further influenced the way that the class teacher communicated. Sabal's father was very negative about what the school had done for his son and what he had achieved. He felt that his son should now be able to read and write, which is unrealistic for someone with his intellectual difficulties. Naturally, the class teacher felt she needed to justify to the parents and professionals what she had achieved for Sabal. The class teacher therefore spoke in long, complex sentences (Extract 6.34) to convey to the father that she was working in the best interests of his son. This excluded Sabal and unwittingly contributed to his anxiety and upset him about what was being said about him.

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**Extract 6.34** The class teachers use of language during Sabal's transition meeting

Field notes 05/03/2007

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"Sabal is on review from outside agencies at this time... The speech and language therapist feels that Sabal has made...er...good progress...and therefore does not...um...require regular sessions. She feels that the school are...er...um...meeting his needs sufficiently in terms of...his communication goals."

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## Modality

All stakeholders, except Sabal's class teacher, appeared confident in what they were saying. In their speech there was no evidence of softeners, a tentative use of the past tense, or tag questions. Sabal's class teacher appears under-confident: she paused frequently when she was talking and used many fillers, such as 'er' and 'um'. This made her appear unsure of what she was saying (Extract 6.34). The stakeholders' confidence was also evident in their non-verbal communication. This is discussed later in the chapter.

Although the majority of discourse suggested that Peter was confident in what he was saying, there were several examples of acquiescence. For example, Peter altered his recommendation for Terri's work experience once other stakeholders (the professionals) intervened and suggested options that were more consistent with her interests (Extract 5.50). Of course, it is possible that Peter had not considered Terri working in the kitchen, however given the frequency of occasions where Terri's enjoyment of cookery

was discussed I would have thought this would have been an obvious solution. Peter did not stick to his original suggestion once it had been rejected by other stakeholders. This could suggest that Peter considers the professionals to hold legitimate knowledge and therefore transcended to their way of thinking.

### Turn taking

Once everybody had introduced themselves, Peter talked for twenty minutes about the transition planning process and what each professional's role was during the process. Mary chose not to do this during the meetings she chaired, as the information had already been provided by Connexions in a parent manual and an accessible manual for the young people several weeks prior to the meeting. Instead, she asked if anyone had any questions about the materials they had received. The following extract demonstrates how Peter communicated at the transition meeting:

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**Extract 6.35** Peter's turn taking during the transition meetings

Researcher observations 05/03/2007

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When Peter was addressing the other stakeholders he stood up from his chair and spoke. This was not necessary as his seating position during the meeting meant that he was able to make eye contact with all stakeholders. Furthermore, the meetings were small and there was not the necessity to make his voice carry. None of the other stakeholders choose to stand whilst they were talking. Peter did not assume any previous knowledge and went over material that had been sent home in a lot of detail, which left very little time for stakeholders to talk with each other.

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Dunbar (2005) reported that when individuals stand during their communication turn, it is a sign that they are attempting to exert their power and dominate the group. However, West & Zimmerman (1985) state that most men's discourse tends to concentrate more on instrumental matters, in this instance the ins and outs of the transition process, whereas women more often concentrate on people and their lives. This could therefore suggest that Peter's approach to chairing the transition meeting was typical of male discourse rather than necessarily trying to exert power.

The Connexions staff and transition social workers were then given time to describe their roles to the parents, duplicating what Peter had already said. This process took the majority of the meeting and meant that the young people had a short amount of time

to share their interests and aspirations. In addition, the group had only five minutes to plan targets and opportunities, such as work experience or residential trips, for the academic year.

Peter was both verbally and non-verbally a dominant communicator. In his role of chair, Peter controlled who took a turn and when. He also assigned himself the greater number of turns. He spoke for approximately two thirds of each transition meeting. Dunbar (2005) reported that when individuals took a greater number of turns in a conversation they were exerting their dominance over their communication partners. By taking the greater number of turns, Peter was exerting his dominance over the group.

The professionals were assigned the second greatest number of conversation turns during the meeting. This demonstrated the importance that Peter placed upon professional knowledge rather than the knowledge the young people could contribute. Terri's mother was aware of the inequality of turn-taking (Extract 5.47).

Having a designated person to decide who gets a turn and how long for can be useful: it can ensure that individuals who lack in confidence have a chance to talk and that turns are evening distributed (Cuff & Sharrock 1985). Peter did not enforce the principles of fair turn distribution which meant that the young people had fewer opportunities to talk than other stakeholders.

Peter may have been more dominant in the number and duration of turns that he took because there were less males in the group than females. Shaw & Sadler (1965) found that in mixed groups males tend to show dominance through talking more. An alternative explanation may be that he was taking his role seriously: he was inadvertently dominant because he had certain expectations of the information that he needed to share with the group.

During the meetings that Mary chaired, in contrast, Mary ensured that the young people had as much time as they needed to communicate their views:

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**Extract 6.36** Mary chairing the transition meetingsResearcher observations 05/03/2007

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Approximately 30 minutes of the hour transition meeting was dedicated to the young people sharing their views and aspirations. This encouraged stakeholders to talk in more detail about the young people's interests. Mary appeared to understand that the young people needed time to respond to any questions that they were asked. She gave them enough time to think and then respond to questions.

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Mary was more equitable in the way that she distributed turns amongst stakeholders. It is possible that in her role as deputy head teacher, which involved attending a lot of meetings, Mary had developed her chairing skills and was more knowledgeable in ensuring equity in turn taking.

### 6.2.5. Non-verbal communication with young people

When Mary communicated with Sabal and Naresh, she demonstrated some of the indicators of involvement and immediacy proposed by Guerrero (2005) (described in Chapter 4). Firstly, Mary altered her seating position:

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**Extract 6.37** Mary's seating position during the transition meetings:Researcher observations 05/03/2007

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Mary ensured that she was facing the young people when she spoke. This included moving herself away from the table, so that there was no barrier between them. Mary then leaned forward, with an open relaxed posture and smiled. As she spoke, she demonstrated variation in her voice by; changing the pitch, volume and intonation of her voice. Her voice had a sing-song quality and was particularly animated. Her voice appeared more animated when she was taking with the young people compared to when she was talking with stakeholders. Her voice appeared animated as she was very enthusiastic in the way that she communicated with the young people.

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By facing the young people when she spoke and moving herself away from the table, Mary's body language was suggesting that she perceived the young people to be equal contributors to the meeting. However, Snow & Ferguson (1977) argue that when individuals use a sing-song voice or marked intonation patterns this can indicate that the

speaker is trying to protect someone that they perceive to be weaker than themselves. They also propose an alternative explanation: that the use of a sing-song voice can also be a sign of affection. In this instance, I believe it is a combination of the two. I believe that Mary would naturally want to protect the young people in this new situation, but also that her other behaviours suggest affection towards the young people.

When she spoke to Sabal and Naresh she had animation in her voice, more so than when she was talking with the teachers and professionals at the meeting. She told the young people that she was pleased they were able to attend. This was supported by the way she communicated with them.

When Mary spoke to the young people, she made eye contact with them, especially when she was discussing their school reports. She emphasised parts of the report that were praised the young person praise and ensured that the young person knew that she was happy with them. Naresh responded well to this:

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**Extract 6.38** Naresh responding positively to praise during his transition meeting

Field notes 05/03/2007

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MARY: Naresh you have done **good work**

NARESH: [*smiles and blushes*]

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When Peter was communicating with the young people he did not show the same level of involvement:

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**Extract 6.39** Peter's body language during the transition meetings

Researcher observations 05/03/2007

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Peter avoided communicating directly with the young people. Instead, he would ask me questions about the young people's views and aspirations. This happened frequently during Terri and Anna's transition meetings. When this happened, I explained to Peter that I was unable to answer and he should ask the young person directly. He would then repeat the question addressing the young person by their name whilst still making eye contact with me.

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By continuing to make eye contact with me, it suggests that he was still communicating with me rather than the young person. Peter may not have been purposefully excluding the young person, but instead felt that the young person may not have had the skills to answer the question. An alternative explanation is that he was unsure of

the most appropriate way to ask the young person the question directly, being unsure of their communication needs.

Peter did not alter his seating position whilst talking to the young person or myself:

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**Extract 6.40** Peter's seating position during the transition meetings

Researcher observations 05/03/2007

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Peter maintained a side-by-side seating position when talking to either myself or the young people. He did not adjust his chair to make face-to-face contact. He sat in an upright position and did not lean forward to show that he was involved in what was being said.

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As Guerrero (2005) reported, his non-verbal communication suggested that he was not fully involved in what either myself or the young person had to contribute. Peter might have been unused to including the young people in transition planning, so forgot to involve them, or he may have believed that the young people did not have anything valuable to contribute.

My observations of Peter's communication style:

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**Extract 6.41** Peter's communication style during the transition meetings

Researcher observations 05/03/2007

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Peter was dynamic and animated in the way that he spoke. He was extremely enthusiastic in the way that he described the transition process and the roles of the different professionals. When he was enthusiastic about the subject matter he also used his arms a lot when communicating. Throughout the meeting, he appeared relaxed and confident as he was sitting in an open position (none of his limbs were crossed) and he was slightly leaning back in his chair.

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Peter's communication style suggested that he was truly passionate about transition planning and that he felt confident in what he was talking about.

Peter altered his seating position when talking to the professionals at the meeting:

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**Extract 6.42** Peter's seating position when talking with the professionals at the transition meeting

Researcher observations 05/03/2007

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When Peter listened and spoke to the professionals at the meeting, he adjusted his seating position so that he was face-to-face with them. He sat with a very open and relaxed body position (no limbs were crossed and there was no obvious tension in his body). When the professionals spoke he leaned forward making eye contact with them.

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Guerrero (2005) reported that these examples of non-verbal communication showed the communication partner's involvement in what his conversational partner was saying. The contrast in his non-verbal communication when talking to the professionals compared to the young people suggested that he was more involved in what the professionals were communicating. This may be further evidence for the importance Peter places upon professional knowledge or may show the difficulties that stakeholders have shifting towards a more person-centred approach to transition planning (Chapter 8)

Mr James was Tarak, Anna and Terri's class teacher. He was surprisingly quiet during the transition meetings:

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**Extract 6.43** Mr James non-verbal communication during the transition meetings

Researcher observations 05/03/2007

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Mr James spoke very little during the transition meetings. This surprised me as in class he is an extremely talkative extrovert character who is especially adept at modifying his language to meet different communication needs. On the occasions that Mr James spoke he sometimes modified his language and used sign support, but this was not consistent. When he spoke he had a quiet voice and there was very little animation in the way that he communicated. His voice at times sounded very monotone. Furthermore, throughout the meeting he fiddled with his pen.

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Mr James' non-verbal communication was attributed to nervousness, but could also imply boredom. After the transition meeting, Mr James confided that he found talking in front of groups challenging:

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**Extract 6.44** Mr James' feelings towards talking in front of groups of people  
Field notes 05/03/2007

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“Talking in front of a class of kids, no problem. . . give me a group of adults and I don't know what to say. I really dislike talking at meetings.”

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Sabal's class teacher appeared nervous during the meeting:

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**Extract 6.45** Mrs Walters non-verbal communication during the transition meetings

Researcher observations 05/03/2007

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Mrs Walters spoke with a quiet mainly monotone voice. In class, she is very varied and animated in the way that she communicates with her class, for example she uses lots of hand gestures and facial expression and alters the pitch of her voice. Throughout the meeting, she kept hold of the statement of special needs in her hand and fiddled with it, such as flicking through the pages or flicking the corners of the pages.

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This fiddling behaviour is an indicator of nervous (Guerrero 2005), which is natural as this was her first transition meeting and also the first time in which she was given the responsibility of reading the statement of special educational needs.

This study demonstrated that good special-needs teachers are not always naturally good public speakers. If the meeting was more centred around the young person, then this may reduce the pressure felt by the teacher and also increase their involvement.

### 6.2.6. Understanding of my role at the meeting

Mary understood my role at the meeting and treated me purely as a facilitator. She introduced me by saying:

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**Extract 6.46** How I was introduced by Mary at the transition meetings  
Field notes 05/03/2007

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“This is Caroline. She is here to help Sabal communicate his views at the meeting.”

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Mary questioned the young people directly and did not look to me to advocate. This implied that she believed that the young people could communicate their views

independently, or that she felt that she had the skills to facilitate their communication without having to look for assistance.

Peter frequently directed questions to me about the views of the young people. Even though the young people communicated their choices themselves and with minimal support, he still saw me as an advocate (Extract 6.39). He expected me to speak on their behalf. This suggested that he did not value the contributions that the young people had made or that he found it difficult to listen to the views of the young people as he was not used to including them. Moreover, it demonstrated that he did not understand the role of an advocate. The role of an advocate is to communicate on behalf of the young people, not communicate their own views about what is best for the young people.

Peter may have been directing question to me rather than the young people as he was showing the same amount of respect that he was showing to other professionals. Although other professionals would hold a more valued position than myself, as they have access to economic and social capital.

Like Dalrymple (2005), I found that Peter attempted to involve me in professional dialogue despite telling all those at the meeting that I was there to support the young people and that I would not be communicating my opinions about any of the issues discussed. In the absence of a speech and language therapist, Peter asked me specific questions about the young people's communication skills:

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**Extract 6.47** A question asked by Peter during Terri's transition meeting  
Field notes 05/03/2007

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“What strategies would you use to increase Terri's use of her communication aid?”

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This was professionally compromising, as I was not their speech and language therapist and I was not at the meeting to provide my views. I was there solely for the young people.

### 6.3. Adam

Sadly, Adam did not attend his transition meeting. The meeting happened without my attendance and many key professionals were also absent as they had not received any

notification. Adam's class teacher was evasive with me as to when the transition meeting would be held and said that no date had been confirmed when asked.

The class teacher decided not to take Adam to his transition meeting. The deputy head teacher informed me that the class teacher presented a profile about Adam's likes, dislikes and aspirations for the future that did not resemble the information that Adam had shared during our sessions. The teacher had a copy of Adam's transition comic, but decided not to use it. The views she presented were her own perceptions of what Adam wanted for his future rather than Adam's own views. He was not consulted about what was included in his profile.

The class teacher frequently said that she could not believe how quickly Adam had built a relationship with me:

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**Extract 6.48** The class teachers observations of my relationship with Adam  
Field notes 06/12/2006

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"I can't believe how well Adam has responded to you. It took these staff nearly a full academic term before Adam would verbally communicate with them."

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Interestingly, the language used in the above quote suggests detachment from the subject matter, for example the use of 'these' and 'them'. She does not include herself with the rest of the class staff, even though previously she had reported that Adam only recently began to verbally communicate (Extract 5.41). It is possible that the teacher felt slightly envious that Adam and I had developed a rapport so quickly. However, this is not to say that if I had met Adam when he was non-verbal that he would have chosen to verbally communicate with me.

Although the class teacher had been working with Adam for three years, Adam's transition comic introduced her to new interests. Furthermore, the comic contradicted decisions that she had made on Adam's behalf. In particular, Adam communicated that he liked his communication aid (Figure 5.3), however the deputy head teacher reported that at his transition meeting stakeholders were told that Adam dislikes his aid. The transition comic demonstrated otherwise.

## Summary

The amount that the young people were included in their transition meeting was dependent on who chaired their meeting. Mary frequently used strategies, such as language modification, to ensure that the young people were included. Furthermore, some of the structures in her discourse suggested that she valued the views of the young people. Peter, as well as some of the other stakeholders, was unable to ensure that the young people were meaningfully included in their transition meeting. Their discourse suggested that the professionals held the most important position at the meeting. Their language helped to maintain the ideology that professionals are dominant and have legitimate knowledge. This is discussed further in Chapter 8.

The following chapter explores interactions between the young people and several of the stakeholders in alternative contexts. This will allow me to identify any differences that occurred during transition planning and understand why these differences exist.

## Chapter 7.

### Comparisons with other contexts

In Chapter 5 I demonstrated that, during their transition meetings and preparation sessions, the young people were able to exert personal power, despite the difficulties that professionals and class staff had in including them (Chapter 6). The young people's level of contribution to their meeting surprised me. During earlier observations, I noticed that there were many examples of the young people appearing passive and withdrawn which was a contrast to their level of participation during their transition meeting. I had anticipated that this passivity would also be observed at their meeting. The transition meeting would be a new context for the young people: the young people would be exposed to some new faces and experience an unfamiliar room.

In order to make sense of some of the observations made at the transition meeting, this chapter provides examples that demonstrate circumstances where the young people found it difficult to exert personal power. I go on to provide some explanations for this and then some examples of specific strategies that increased opportunities for meaningful inclusion in other contexts. Through doing this, in Chapter 8 I will be able to identify if there were certain aspects of the transition meeting that contributed to the young people exerting personal power. Furthermore, if there are practices occurring in these other contexts that prevented or increased meaningful inclusion it is possible that these practices will also occur during the transition meetings.

In this chapter, I will firstly explore the characteristics of the young people and staff practices which may contribute to difficulties in exerting personal power. I then explore some of the strategies that staff used that helped increase the young people's participation.

## 7.1. Characteristics of the young people

Chapter 5 demonstrated that the young people had the skills to communicate their views during the research sessions and transition meetings. However, when the young people were observed in class, there was a diminishment in their level of participation and their ability to express themselves. They appeared more passive and withdrawn.

The young people's passivity could often be attributed to their level of motivation for the task. When the young people were not motivated by an activity, their active participation was observably diminished: for instance, they were observed to communicate less with both adults and their peers.

Adam was motivated by activities where he could work independently without frequent adult intervention:

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**Extract 7.1** Adam declining adult intervention

Researcher observations 01/11/2006

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Adam was making a mosaic pattern on a pot with gum paper squares. He was clearly having some difficulty sticking some of the squares onto the pot. One of the class assistants attempted to intervene and help him stick some of the squares. Adam pushed her hand away and carried on trying to stick the squares independently.

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Adam's class teacher reported that morning lessons were more structured than afternoons, which enabled Adam to work more autonomously:

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**Extract 7.2** Class teacher's observations of Adam's participation in class activities

Field notes 11/10/2006

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"It's a shame you come in the afternoons. Morning sessions are much more structured. You should see Adam, he finishes lots of tasks in the morning. He sits at his work station and works through all the tasks we give him and he doesn't need much help from us. He even talks with his class mates more in the morning. Mind you we do tend to use a lot more visual support in the mornings."

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In the afternoons, Adam was required to participate in unstructured activities that needed considerable adult explanation and support. In contrast to his class teachers'

observations of his participation during the morning lessons, Adam appeared more passive and withdrawn in the afternoons. During an afternoon art lesson, he had to make a Roman soldier from papier-mache. The process was extremely complicated for the students and classroom assistants. Adam required constant adult intervention to participate, which he disliked. The necessity for frequent adult intervention contributed to Adam's withdrawal from the task:

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**Extract 7.3** Adam withdrawing from a task as it was too complex

Researcher observations 20/11/2006

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The frame of the papier-mache soldier was very small which meant the stuck paper kept falling off. Adam became frustrated when the paper fell off. Adam persevered with the task for some time. Eventually, Adam put down the papier-mache. He had an angry look on his face. He went to the other side of the room, selected the box of Lego and went and played in the corner.

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Anna disliked school and often refused to go. Her feelings towards school were evident in her behaviour in class:

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**Extract 7.4** Anna's behaviour during an English lesson

Researcher observations 09/01/2007

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During circle time and science Anna came across as very passive. She was unusually quiet and did not make any spontaneous contributions to discussions. She would respond to a direct question, but not always. When she did respond to questions, she replied mainly using single words and there were a number of instances of immediate echolalia. In the science lesson, she sat there for the majority of the time with her face in her hands.

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Initially, I thought these behaviours were symptomatic of a person who has difficulties accessing the language used in the classroom. After working individually with Anna, I discovered that she had a reasonable level of understanding and was enthusiastic about a range of activities (Chapter 5). Her behaviour suggested that there was something about the class environment that demotivated her, or made it difficult for her to access.

When Tarak disliked the lesson he would stop working and make inappropriate comments at the teacher:

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**Extract 7.5** Negative comments made by TarakField notes 22/02/2007

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“Mr James you smell”

“Naughty Mr James”

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When Tarak used inappropriate language, his comments were ignored by staff, which was the recommended strategy. By ignoring his comments, the teachers were not giving him the attention that he desired and according to the theory this behaviour should stop. However, by ignoring his inappropriate comments, the teachers inadvertently were also ignoring his lack of participation in the class activity. Tarak achieved the desired outcome: he did not have to work.

When Sabal, like Anna, was not motivated by a lesson he would speak using mainly single words and there were fewer instances of spontaneous communication. His attention and listening skills were also diminished for the task. The conventions used in the transcription of the data are shown in Table 5.1.

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**Extract 7.6** Sabal lacking in motivation during an activity:Video 07/02/2007

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CAROLINE: Do **you have** a talking aid?SABAL: Yeah [*nods his head and turns away*]

CAROLINE: You do? Do you press buttons on a talking aid like Terri?

[*acts out pressing buttons and points to the corresponding picture, but Sabal is not watching*]SABAL: Yeah [*looking out the window and fiddling with the table*]

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The language that I used during this interaction with Sabal was clearly too complex for him to understand. Therefore, it would be understandable that he would lack motivation as he had difficulties accessing what was being said to him. A reduction in attention and listening skills was observed in all the young people in situations where they were not motivated. This is a common behaviour in all people: it is difficult to remain attentive when one is bored.

When observing Naresh, it was difficult to differentiate between a lack of motivation and instances where the communication demands were too great. In both situations Naresh demonstrated similar behaviours:

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**Extract 7.7** Naresh's lack of motivation for tasks  
Researcher observations 22/02/2007

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During some interactions, Naresh would change the subject or stop verbally communicating. When he changed the topic, he would talk about one of his interests, usually going to a car boot sale. Naresh may have changed the subject because the previous subject was of no interest or he had not understood what had been said. It is difficult to tell which.

---

The evidence shows that motivation can affect participation. However, the underlying reasons for the young people's lack of motivation could be attributed to the social practices within the classroom. In this study, the young people's motivation was reduced when activities were: unstructured; too difficult; not centred around the young people's interests; or involved language that was too difficult to understand.

### 7.1.1. Staff practices

I chose to observe staff practices in the classroom as well as the transition meeting, as I anticipated that if certain practices occurred in the classroom then it was likely that they would also occur during the transition meetings. For example, if a stakeholder uses inclusive practices in the class room he or she is likely to generalise these practices to other situations. If generalisation does not occur, this may reveal practices that are unique to transition planning, or provide important insights into the social positions of stakeholders and their associated power relationships.

In this study, staff used practices that both excluded and included the young people from participation. The following practices were observed during the research process and were considered disempowering:

- misinterpretation of skills
- restricting choice
- complexity of staff language
- inadequate visual support
- difficulties with AAC.
- non-verbal communication

These practices are now discussed in turn. Practices that encouraged participation are discussed later in the chapter.

### **Misinterpretation of skills**

McConkey et al. (1999) found that staff often possessed the techniques to modify the way they communicated with their clients. However, a break-down in communication often occurred as the communicative competence of their clients was misinterpreted. The skills of the client were either over-estimated or under-estimated, which meant that although the language was modified it was still inaccessible. If staff are either over-estimating or under-estimating the skills of the young people, it is likely that this will also be observed during the transition meetings. I now show examples of under- and over-estimation of the young people's skills.

### **Under-estimation of communication skills**

Naresh and Sabal's class teachers thought that they had a lower understanding of language than they actually did. Naresh and Sabal were both reluctant communicators: Naresh was elective mute and Sabal was only confident to communicate in certain contexts:

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**Extract 7.8** Staff misinterpreting Naresh's level of understanding

Field notes 17/01/2007

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"Naresh has very limited understanding of language and he only communicates using single words. Most of the time he doesn't communicate with us. He doesn't really join in with class activities."

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**Extract 7.9** Staff misinterpreting Sabal's level of understanding

Field notes 17/01/2007

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"Sabal is very quiet. He comes across as passive as he often only communicates if we have initiated an interaction with him and then he typically only talks using single words. I think there is a lot that he is not understanding and that's why he doesn't communicate much."

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Morgan (2000) and Dee & Byers (2003) found that staff perceived students that were less verbal as having a lower understanding of language, and less ability to make

choices, than more verbal students. The student's reluctance to communicate was also misinterpreted as an inability to communicate. This is understandable as it would be logical that when an individual fails to answer a question they may not have understood. However, the staff were aware that both Naresh and Sabal were reluctant communicators, so I believe the answer would be less obvious.

As a consequence, staff provided limited opportunities for Sabal and Naresh to communicate. For example, they would ask questions that required a limited response or avoid asking questions at all:

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**Extract 7.10** Class teacher's interaction with Naresh during an English lesson  
Researcher observations 17/01/2007

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I observed Naresh during an English lesson. Naresh was in a class with five other young people with PMLD. The class were being read a story about a shoe maker. The class teacher asked the class basic questions about the story. Most of the questions were too hard for the class. The class teacher asked questions directly to the young people. It was noticeable that Naresh was only asked one question when the rest of the students were asked at least three questions. Naresh was able to answer his question and did respond to the class teacher, but was not encouraged to participate any further.

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**Extract 7.11** Class teacher's interaction with Sabal  
Researcher observations 17/01/2007

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During a cooking lesson the class were asked basic questions about food hygiene, for example why do we wash our hands? And why do we wear an apron? Some of the questions were directed to individual students. When the class teacher asked Sabal questions, she tended to ask questions that required either a yes or no answer. However, Sabal was observed to spontaneously answer questions that required a response that was not included the question. The class teacher's expectations of Sabal appeared to be less than what he was actually able to achieve.

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This finding is supported by McConkey et al. (1999), who found that when staff were communicating with people with reduced expressive skills, they asked questions that confined the type of answer required. This strategy may have been used to reduce the risk of misinterpretation. It is also possible that the class teacher wanted to reduce

the amount of pressure that she was placing upon Sabal and so asked a more restrictive type of question.

The teachers' under-estimation of Naresh's skills meant that he was taught in a class with students of a much lower ability. He was taught with students with profound and multiple difficulties rather than severe learning disabilities. Naresh's understanding was at three key word level and comparable with his peers in higher sets. In addition, Naresh's language skills were beyond the content of the lessons and he found it difficult to interact with his peers. Notably, these were not the people that he chose to play with in the playground.

As previously demonstrated in Chapter 5, Naresh was extremely self-aware and being segregated from his friends had contributed to his low self-esteem. Being in a class with students that have far greater support needs than himself may have led him to believe that he has more needs than he actually does. Moreover, he may have felt that he was not good enough to be in a class with his friends, when really he was.

### Over-estimation of communication skills

Adam and Terri were both described by their teachers as having a good understanding of spoken language:

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**Extract 7.12** Class teacher's description of Terri's understanding of language  
Field notes 09/01/2007

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"Terri has a pretty good level of understanding. I think she understands most things."

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**Extract 7.13** Class teacher's description of Adam's understanding of language  
Field notes 11/10/2006

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"Adam has a very good understanding of language. I feel that he understands everything we say to him."

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However, during the research process it became evident that their understanding was more limited than the other young people in this study. Service et al. (1989) reported that the over-estimation of language skills was common when working with young people with disabilities.

The following example demonstrates how Adam's class teacher over-estimated his understanding of language. When class staff asked Adam a question which he did not understand he would smile and not respond. His smiles were interpreted as a sign of agreement rather than a failure to understand. Early in the research process, Adam was told that he could use a camera to take photographs of activities, people and places he liked:

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**Extract 7.14** Adam's class teacher misinterpreting his level of understanding  
 Researcher observations 08/11/2006

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To aid communication, symbols showing 'like' and symbols showing different interests were used. Adam took the symbol that showed 'like' (a smiling face) and put a tick next to it. This initially made me think he understood the 'like' symbol as being positive. When I asked him what he liked, he smiled and nodded his head. His class teacher interpreted this as Adam showing that he was happy about using the camera, as he enjoyed using the class digital camera. I was concerned that the language that I had used was possibly too complex and I did not feel as certain as the class teacher about his response, as I did not know Adam as well as her. I questioned whether he had understood what I had asked him, or whether he was choosing not to communicate with me. After setting up a talking mat, to reduce the pressure for him to verbally communicate, he was still unable to show me what he liked. Through further modification of the language, such as shorter instructions and less complex vocabulary, he was then able to communicate, using a combination of symbols and speech, some of his interests.

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Terri had limited expressive skills. She had low face tone, which made sound articulation difficult. The majority of her words were unintelligible; however she was able to use intonation and some gestures or sign to express herself. Terri used one consistent intonation pattern when she was showing agreement. On the majority of occasions, Terri would accompany the intonation pattern with sign or gesture, which made it easier to interpret whether she had understood what had been asked of her:

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**Extract 7.15** Terri making herself understood  
 Field notes 09/01/2007

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CLASS TEACHER: Do you need help?

TERRI: [*signs help and point to her shoes*]

CLASS TEACHER: Good job Terri

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Terri always received a positive response when she used this intonation pattern, so also used it in situations where she did not understand:

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**Extract 7.16** Terri giving the impression that she has understood  
Field notes 09/01/2007

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CLASS TEACHER: **Draw** a picture of the people in your **family**. Do you understand?

TERRI: Yeah [*with raised intonation pattern*]

CLASS TEACHER: Good job Terri

TERRI: [*looks around at what her classmates are doing*]

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This masked her difficulties, as staff interpreted this response as indicating that Terri understood. Terri relied on context to make sense of new situations and difficult language:

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**Extract 7.17** Terri relying on context to make sense of an instruction  
Researcher observations 09/01/2007

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During a science lesson, the class were verbally instructed how to complete the activity. Terri remained looking at her teacher throughout the instructions. She nodded her head and made some non-word vocalisations which gave the impression that she was listening and had understood the task. However, once Terri got back to the table she did not start the task. Instead, she was watching what her peers were doing. This lasted for approximately half of the lesson. Eventually Terri then attempted the task. She was the last person to carry out the activity.

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Whilst this was a good strategy to develop, it further masked her difficulties. For example, she would follow her peers when they had been asked to sit at the table after the teachers had explained what activity they were going to do. The teachers then left her to independently achieve the task as she had followed her peers to the table. It was assumed that she knew what she had to do next.

The teacher's language was on occasions more complex than the young people could comprehend. This was compounded when less visual support was used. The effects of using complex language and insufficient visual support is discussed later in the chapter. Bradshaw (2001) found that in circumstances where staff incorrectly perceived the young people to have a greater understanding of language, more complex language was used.

Whilst Sabal's class teacher believed that Sabal had a lower level of understanding than he actually did, his parents reported that his language skills were greater than what had been observed:

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**Extract 7.18** The school liaison officers reports her discussion with Sabal's parents

Field notes 21/02/2007

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“At home Sabal's mother says he speaks excellent Punjabi. I give Sabal homework for his Punjabi. One day he forgot his homework . . . I asked him where it was. He told me in Punjabi it was his mother's fault and that she had forgotten his book because she is mad. His mother also told me that one day he got kicked by a boy on the way home and he managed to tell his mother”

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Sabal's speech and language therapist was unable to confirm what his mother had reported as when his Punjabi had been assessed he was not demonstrating these language skills. The speech and language therapist's opinion should be treated with some caution, as the context of the assessment may have had reduced his expressive communication.

The contrasting opinions of the young people's communication skills demonstrates the risk of relying on single opinion. Sayal & Taylor (2005) found that teachers often gave descriptions of their student's skills based solely on their behaviour in school, rather than acknowledging different behaviour in different contexts: whereas parents had a tendency to either over-estimate their child's skills or to over-diagnose. It is likely that Sabal's parents over-estimated his skills. This is supported by behaviour during the transition meeting, when Sabal's father asked his class teacher why she had not yet taught Sabal to read and write.

Sayal & Taylor also suggested that what parents reported indicated the parent's level of mental health and the level of acceptance of their child's difficulties. Sabal's father, by suggesting that Sabal should be able to read and write, demonstrated that he had not yet come to terms with his son's difficulties. Sabal was the youngest of four children, all of whom had severe or profound learning disabilities. The school liaison officer reported that his parents hoped that their last child would have no difficulties.

### Restricting choice

During a circle time lesson, the class were asked to make a choice about what they would like to eat for dinner. The class teacher read from the menu the choices that were available:

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**Extract 7.19** Class teacher presenting dinner time choices

Video transcription 23/03/2007

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“We have got fish fingers and chips, lasagna, jacket potatoes or pizza”

---

Anna was asked her choice:

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**Extract 7.20** Anna expressing her dinner time choice

Video transcription 23/03/2007

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CLASS TEACHER: What does Anna think she'd like?

ANNA: Chips

CLASS TEACHER: You are going to have a sandwich are you? With a bit of \*salad do you think?\*

ANNA: Yes

CLASS TEACHER: That's \*good\*, that's good to hear

---

Anna is on a restricted diet, so the class teacher was offering her choices that were not actually available to her. However, I do think that this choice was offered by accident. When Anna makes her choice, her choice was ignored and she was encouraged to give what the class teacher perceives to be a more favourable response. Rather than explaining the error, this could leave Anna feeling like she had not been listened to and that her choices were not valid.

### Complexity of language

In situations where teachers failed to modify their language, the participation of the young people was reduced. Davis et al. (1988) and Tannock et al. (1992) reported that communication styles that used short, simple language enhanced a child's use of language. If over-complex language was used, the child does not know what is expected of them and therefore, find it difficult to participate spontaneously or independently in an activity.

The following example was observed at Springfield school. It demonstrates how Adam was excluded by the language used by his teacher. The class teacher gave the following instruction without the use of visual support:

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**Extract 7.21** The use of complex language in the classroom

Field notes 01/11/2006

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“You need to make a selection from one of these six cereal boxes and then you are going to copy the design onto our paper.”

---

This sentence uses twenty-five words and contains two clauses. The young people in the study typically had an understanding of three key words: this sentence was much too long for them to process. Both clauses stand alone: they are two separate instructions and could have been said independently of each other. Two shorter instructions are easier to understand than one longer instruction. This supports the findings of Bradshaw (2001). She found that staff tended to use conversational length utterances rather than modifying their language because they talked with their clients “as you would talk to anyone else”. This is understandable, given their desire not to ‘talk down’ to their clients. However, it is more likely that the client will not understand what is being asked and the interaction will break down.

Fowler (1985) states that when individuals use a large number of words in a sentence, this is an example of them distinguishing their power and prestige. Furthermore, the high ratio of subordinate clauses in this utterance is typically the property of the discourse of knowledge and authority, as complexity comes through the formation of logical relationships amongst clauses. This means that the class teacher, through her use of language, is putting herself in a position of authority and prestige.

The vocabulary used in these instructions is too complex for the young people to understand. Words such as ‘selection’, ‘copy’ and ‘design’ were not in the young people’s vocabulary. Words such as ‘choose’ and ‘draw’ would have been more accessible. The language used was more typical of a mainstream classroom. The use of abstract and complex vocabulary is often associated with institutional power: the speaker is maintaining the ideology that they are dominant and have legitimate knowledge (Fowler 1985).

During the same lesson the teacher also said:

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**Extract 7.22** The use of complex language in the classroom

Field notes 01/11/2007

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“Are those letters on the box in upper case or lower case? They are lower case. You must write in lower case.”

---

Adam continued to write in capitals as the terms ‘lower case’ and ‘upper case’ were meaningless to him.

Extracts 7.21 and 7.22 also contain ‘empty words’. These are words that can be removed without altering the overall meaning of the instruction. The first quote could have simply been expressed as:

“choose one box” ... “draw box”

When the teacher’s instructions were not understood, she repeated them using the same language. The only modification was a louder voice:

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**Extract 7.23** The teacher’s response when her instruction was not understood

Field notes 01/11/2007

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CLASS TEACHER: Are those letters on the box in upper case or lower case?

They are lower case. You must write in lower case.

ADAM: [*continues to write in upper case*]

CLASS TEACHER: [*louder voice*] They are upper case. They are lower case.

You must write in lower case

---

This was reminiscent of studies of ‘Foreigner Talk’ (Lipski 2008), which found that repetition and volume modification were used with non-native speakers, as a way of showing their inferiority of the language. This is unpleasant for the recipient and may contribute to the young people ‘turning off’ and developing a dislike for school.

In conversation, intonation is also used to contribute to the meaning of what is being said:

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**Extract 7.24** The use of intonation to contribute to meaning

Field notes 09/01/2007

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CLASS TEACHER: Finished? [*rising intonation to signal it was a question*]

ADAM: [*puts away his work*]

CLASS TEACHER: I did not mean you had to finish . . .you can do more if  
you want. Come back to the table.

ADAM: [*comes back to the table looking confused*]

---

To an individual with an understanding of pragmatics, a rising intonation pattern signals a question – “finished?”. However, without that distinction, “finished” can also be interpreted as a command. Adam was unable to distinguish the subtle intonation pattern, so he put his work away. The teacher did not want him to stop his work if he had not finished, so redirected him back to the table. This confused and upset Adam because he did not understand why he was being sent back to the table. Adam only understood the word “finished” in the context of a command.

The effect of using over-complex language with an individual can become a vicious circle. The young person may withdraw from an activity because they do not understand. The teacher perceives the withdrawal as passivity, or an unwillingness to participate in the task. Depending on the management of the young person, they may receive a sanction for non-participation, or be left to complete an activity of their choice. They may either become anxious about participating in future as they connect the sanction with their lack of understanding of the task, or learn that refusing to do an activity is a good way of avoiding a situation that they might not understand.

### 7.1.2. Visual support

Visual aids can be a powerful tool for people with learning disabilities, as they increase access to language. They are especially useful in situations where the young people find it difficult to access speech alone. Both schools in the study had a strong ethos of providing visual support to assist their students’ understanding of language and the structure of the school day. Techniques used included: visual timetables; makaton signing; and widget symbols alongside spoken language. The teachers at Glendale school were more consistent in using visual support with the teachers at Springfield school.

In Glendale school the use of a visual timetable was consistently integrated into class routines. At the end of each lesson, the students were asked what was happening next:

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**Extract 7.25** Visual timetables at Glendale school  
Video 23/03/2007

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CLASS TEACHER: It's time [*points to her watch*]

ALEX: Time

SHONA: Break

CLASS TEACHER: For, that's wishful thinking Shona... it's time for English [*points to the English symbol on the visual timetable*]

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In contrast, Springfield school students were verbally told the structure of the day rather than being directed to look at the visual timetable on the whiteboard:

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**Extract 7.26** Visual timetables at Springfield school  
Field notes 11/10/2006

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"Lunch is finished so it's now time to brush your teeth."

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Unlike Glendale school, the visual timetable was not referred to. This meant that the likelihood of the young people following the daily routine independently was reduced.

In Glendale school, most teachers signed and used symbols to support their use of language. Interactive whiteboards were frequently used as teaching aids: teachers would quickly generate symbols or photographs when they were having difficulties in explaining a concept. This meant that the majority of young people were able to meaningfully contribute to lessons. There were, however, occasions when staff had a tendency to over-generalise strategies to all pupils even when they were not beneficial. They consistently used all of the strategies rather than tailoring communication to individual needs:

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**Extract 7.27** Over-generalisation of strategies  
Field notes 09/01/2007

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"Anna, **who** is in your family?"

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Anna had very limited vision and was unable to see people's hands if they were moving. She told me that she disliked sign and it did not help her (Extract 5.17). Staff thought that they were providing visual support, yet it was not accessible: Anna was having to make sense of purely spoken language.

In Springfield school, Adam was one of the most able students in his class. He was able to use and understand some basic makaton signs, and symbols were helpful in increasing his understanding of language. In the classroom, the teacher rarely signed to Adam, but he was encouraged to sign to her:

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**Extract 7.28** Sign as a form of expression rather than an aid to understandingField notes 13/12/2006

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CLASS TEACHER: what would you like to eat?

ADAM: [*no response*]

CLASS TEACHER: Would you like biscuit or cake?

ADAM: biscuit

CLASS TEACHER: Adam sign biscuit

ADAM: [*signs biscuit*]

---

Signing was seen solely as a way of expressing yourself rather than being an aid to understanding. Symbols were also infrequently used. Without signs or symbols, Adam had to make sense of purely spoken language. This meant there were greater instances of misunderstandings.

Staff reported that they used adaptive visual methods more frequently than was observed in the classroom:

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**Extract 7.29** Observations on the use of visual aids in the classroomResearcher observations 31/01/2007

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Adam's class teacher reported that the class staff used visual aids to explain all class tasks and that they had a visual timetable that helped the young people learn the structure of the day. Although there was a visual timetable on the wall and a box full of symbols, I did not see either being used during any of my visits to the classroom.

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The availability of visual aids is not enough: they need to be used. This was supported by Bradshaw (2001), who found that staff often overestimated the frequency they used adaptive methods and underestimated how much they relied on speech when talking to people with learning disabilities.

### 7.1.3. Alternative Augmentative Communication

Some people with learning disabilities use Alternative Argumentative Communication (AAC), as they are unable to express their views through another mode, such as verbally or sign. Terri and Adam both used a voice output communication aid. Terri used her aid because sound articulation was difficult and Adam because he was a reluctant communicator. He only began to verbally communicate at the age of thirteen. Disturbingly, Adam's communication aid was kept on the top shelf of the staff cupboard, which the students had restricted access to. Adam's teacher instructed him when it was time to use his communication aid and when to put it away. This was usually twice a day during snack times: a time when Adam felt more confident talking anyway as he knew the routine.

Adam was confident during snack time as he spontaneously communicated his choice using his communication aid before the class teacher had the opportunity to ask him what he wanted:

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**Extract 7.30** Adam spontaneously communicating his snack choices using his communication aid  
Field notes 04/10/2006

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ADAM: I want drink please . . . I want biscuit please [*using communication aid*]

CLASSROOM ASSISTANT: Blimey, we have not even put the drinks and snacks out yet, you're too quick for us

ADAM: I want orange please [*using communication aid*]

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During the same snack time, the screen on his communication aid froze, so he was unable to use the aid to communicate with staff. However, he was verbally able to make his needs known:

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**Extract 7.31** Adam verbally communicating his snack choices  
Researcher observations 04/11/2006

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On the third helping he was asked to verbalise what he wanted, as there was some problems with his communication aid: the screen had locked. He was able to verbalise "biscuit". He was not reluctant to communicate verbally as he really wanted the biscuit.

---

This would be more difficult for him in circumstances when he was less sure of the routine.

Although Adam was instructed to use his communication aid during this visit, he usually verbally communicated his choices during snacktime as his aid was not available. Therefore, staff concluded that because Adam could communicate his snack choices verbally he did not like using his communication aid. Moreover, they created limited opportunities for him to use it:

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**Extract 7.32** Class teacher's opinion about Adam's attitude towards his communication aid<sup>6</sup>

Field notes 11/10/2000

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"It's easier for Adam to just verbally communicate with us... we don't always remember to give him another way to communicate. Anyway I don't think he's very interested in his communication aid... he can happily tell us verbally what he wants for snack."

---

However, this contradicted Adam's opinion of his communication aid. Furthermore, this suggests that the staff believe that snack time is the only occasion in which Adam may wish to communicate with them.

Adam may have been a more active communicator if he had been given unrestricted access to his communication aid. He may have participated in more activities and discussions if he felt there was less pressure to verbally communicate. This was certainly the case when we used puppets to communicate with each other. Adam initiated more interactions and was engaged in conversations.

The communication aid was Adam's way of expressing himself. Through the teacher choosing when he could use his communication aid, she was inadvertently restricting his right to communicate. This was unintentional and caused by her anxieties around computer use. She confided:

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**Extract 7.33** The class teachers concerns about Adam's communication aid

Field notes 11/10/2006

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"It's ever so expensive and really difficult to run... I don't have the time to keep it updated and what would happen if it got broken? All that money."

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To avoid the risk of something happening to the aid, she restricted its use. She had not recognised the implications of her actions and the affect that it was having on Adam's behaviour. This was not rectified even when this was brought to her attention: Adam's access to his communication continued to be restricted.

#### 7.1.4. Non-verbal communication

As previously stated in Chapters 5 and 6, an individual's use of non verbal communication can encourage or discourage the participation of their communication partners. Non verbal communication is an important indicator of the distribution of power between people and their level of intimacy and interest.

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**Extract 7.34** Observations of the positioning of students and teachers during lessons

Researcher observations 23/03/2007

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During lessons where the key curriculum areas were taught, such as Maths, Science and English, the teacher stood at the front of the class behind the desk and the class were sat behind their desks facing the teacher. During circle time or citizenship lessons, the chairs were placed in a circle with the teacher sitting in the circle with the students.

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When a teacher stands in front of the class they appear more dominant. Furthermore, the distance that is created between student and teacher decreases the intimacy between them. It makes it harder a teacher to have an individual interaction with a student. The teacher may have chosen to position herself in that way during core curriculum lessons as it was construed that the lesson was important and the students needed to listen. The differences in seating during circle time and citizenship lessons are discussed later in the chapter.

During key curriculum lessons it was observed that the class teacher allocated herself the larger number of turns:

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**Extract 7.35** Observations about allocation of turns during key curriculum lessons

Researcher observations 23/03/2007

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The class teacher spent a substantial part of the lesson explaining the task. The students were asked questions when the class teacher wanted them to contribute to the lesson. None of the young people spontaneously contributed their ideas.

---

Cuff & Sharrock (1985) state that those individuals that allocate themselves the greater number of turns are distinguishing themselves as being in a position of authority and holding privileged knowledge.

## 7.2. Evidence of participation

Chapter 5 demonstrates that the young people had personal power and that in some circumstances they were able to ensure that their views were heard. However, there were also instances where the young people's ability to exercise personal power was enhanced by the way that the conversation partner interacted with them, such as the use of practices that increase participation.

The main techniques used by teachers to encourage the participation of the people were modification of language and the use of visual support. In this section, I will describe some of the practices that were observed in the classroom.

It was useful to observe how some of the stakeholders communicated with the young people prior to the meeting in order to see whether their communication at the transition meeting was typical of their interactions. If atypical, this could provide valuable information about the social positions of individuals at the transition meeting and their associated power relationships.

### 7.2.1. Complexity of language

During an observation of *group time* at Glendale school, the class teacher, Mrs Wilson used a range of techniques to ensure that the young people were fully involved in the activities:

**Sentence completion** Omitting the final word of a sentence, so that the student is encouraged to fill it in

**Phonological cues** The first sound of a word is given to provide a clue for the word that the teacher is trying to elicit

**Sign support** Used alongside speech to help the student understand

**Visual aids** Objects, signs, photographs and symbols to support the student's understanding of spoken language

**Emphasis of important words using her voice** Directs the student to what they should be listening to

**Short sentences** Ensures that the student has less language to process

**Concise, familiar vocabulary** Increases the likelihood of the student understanding what has been said

**Non verbal communication** Encourages involvement

These techniques are now demonstrated through practical examples. Appendix H gives the full data source of the following interaction.

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**Extract 7.36** Sentence completion

Video transcription 23/03/2007

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“We are going to do some good si>” [*simultaneously signed sitting*]

---

Mrs Wilson omitted the final word of the sentence for the young people to complete. She wanted the young people to say “sitting”. This strategy encouraged the young people to stay focused on what she were saying, as they would be unable to complete the sentence without the full context.

To help prompt the young people to say the correct word she used *phonological cue*. This is when the first sound of the word is provided to assist the young people to identify the word themselves. In this instance she said “si”. To further ensure that the young person generated the correct verb she signed “sitting”.

The young people were familiar with the instruction “good sitting”. This was an instruction that was used during all group activities and was frequently reinforced. The same applied to “good listening” and “good looking”. These instructions were also used to prompt the young people to listen or look at the teacher:

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**Extract 7.37** Gaining a student’s attention

Video transcription 23/03/2007

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“Mark \*good looking\* please”

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The teacher consistently ensured that the young people were listening to what she was saying. If their attention was distracted she refocused them back to her voice before continuing the activity. Whenever she was redirecting someone’s attention she called them by their first name, so that they knew that she was speaking to them.

If a student demonstrated any of these skills the teacher praised the student:

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**Extract 7.38** Praising a studentVideo transcription 23/03/2007

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“\*Good morning, good morning to you, that was good looking then\*”

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In the class, student’s difficulties ranged from moderate learning disabilities to profound and multiple difficulties (PMLD). All pupils were provided with opportunities to receive praise. The above quote was an example of praise given to Laura, who had PMLD. She responded by smiling and laughing.

Mark was a reluctant communicator and early in circle time he was given praise for contributing:

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**Extract 7.39** Praising a reluctant communicatorVideo transcription 23/03/2007

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“\*That’s a big word there Mark, thank you.\*” [*said really enthusiastically*]

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Mark smiled and continued to verbally contribute to the discussions. The praise had given him confidence to share his ideas when usually he would choose not to talk.

When Mrs Wilson explained a new activity to the young people, she modelled the expected response:

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**Extract 7.40** Modelling the response to a questionVideo transcription 23/03/2007

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“I’m going to say, do you want a **\*dinner\*** and you are going to say **\*yes please\*** or **\*no\*** thank you.”

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Whilst giving this instruction, Mrs Wilson signed the key words; ‘dinner’, ‘yes’ and ‘no’. These are the words that she wanted the young people to sign, or say. She further emphasised the important words by slightly pausing before saying them. Furthermore, she exaggerated the pronunciation of the word by elongating the sounds, using a rising intonation pattern and speaking with a slightly raised volume. Important words and phrases were repeated several times for further emphasis:

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**Extract 7.41** Repeating words for emphasisVideo transcription 23/03/2007

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“\*The dinner register . . . the dinner register\*.”

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The young people with more advanced verbal or signing skills were encouraged to respond using a full sentence:

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**Extract 7.42** Encouragement to speak using a full sentence

Video transcription 23/03/2007

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CLASS TEACHER: Shona, **good morning**

SHONA: **Orning**

CLASS TEACHER: **Good morning** Mrs. . . . Wilson [*signed good morning sign*]

SHONA: Wilson

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Laura was only able to say yes and no and due to mobility difficulties could not sign. The task was differentiated, so she only had to respond with ‘yes’ or ‘no’:

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**Extract 7.43** Differentiating a question to suit different abilities

Video transcription 23/03/2007

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CLASS TEACHER: And \*Laura\*, would Laura like a **\*dinner?\***

LAURA: **yes**

CLASS TEACHER: **\*yes\***, that was **\*good signing\*** Laura, **\*thank you\***,  
yes

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Other students were asked:

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**Extract 7.44** Differentiating a question to suit different abilities

Video transcription 23/03/2007

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CLASS TEACHER: \*Christina\* what would you like for **dinner?**

CHRISTINA: Ugh

CLASS TEACHER: What do you think?

CHRISTINA: Beef burgers

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Mrs Wilson asked the young people a number of questions to keep them involved in the activity:

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**Extract 7.45** Maintaining student involvement

Video transcription 23/03/2007

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“What do you think you fancy?” (The young people were shown the lunch menu)

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This extended the activity beyond ‘yes’ and ‘no’ answers and worked on choice making skills. The young people were encouraged to say more if they were able to. When a student responded to her question, she leaned her body slightly forward and made eye contact. This showed that she was being attentive and wanted to hear what the young person had to say (Appendix B).

This kind of question is known as a facilitative question. Mirenda & Donnellan (1986) found that when facilitative questions were used instead of directive questions (which only require a ‘yes’ or ‘no’ response) the young people were more engaged in the interaction. The use of facilitative questions also helped increase the number of instances of spontaneous communication.

Mrs Wilson mainly used short sentences when communicating with her students, for example:

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**Extract 7.46** Communicating using short sentences

Video transcription 23/03/2007

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“\*Laura look at Mrs Wilson\*”

“\*James\* would you like a **dinner**?”

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These sentences included familiar vocabulary and were often sign supported. This meant that instructions were accessible to the majority of the students.

Visual aids were also used to help engage the young people. Mrs Wilson held up the different registers to show what they were doing next. In addition, the dinner register had an associated theme song:

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**Extract 7.47** Novel use of prompts

Video transcription 23/03/2007

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“Dinner, dinner, Batman”

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This meant that when the young people heard the song, they knew it was time to complete the dinner register. Furthermore, visual aids were used as a way of repairing an interaction if the young people had not understood what she had asked them (Extract 7.25).

Mrs Wilson tried to make taking the register as motivating as possible for her students. Once she had said “good morning” to each student she gave them a ‘high five’.

Some of the young people found this so motivating that they initiated the 'high five' instead of the teacher:

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**Extract 7.48** Student initiating a high five

Video transcription 23/03/2007

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CLASS TEACHER: Anna, **good morning**

ANNA: Good morning to you Mrs Wilson [*initiates a high five with Mrs Wilson and they high five*]

CLASS TEACHER: Good morning to you Anna, good to see you

---

### 7.2.2. Non-verbal communication

Mrs Wilson not only modified her verbal language when talking with her students. Her non-verbal communication also helped to increase the participation of her students. To assess Mrs Wilson's non-verbal communication the involvement scales of Guerrero (2005) were used (described in Chapter 4). The scales were used to assess the involvement of teacher and students in the lesson. The following involvement behaviour will be discussed in this section:

- Body orientation
- Touch
- Smiling
- Use of voice

The raw data is presented in Appendix B.

It is important to look at an individual's non-verbal communication, as there may be occasions when words contradict actions. An individual's non-verbal communication can help determine how a person is really feeling and uncover their attitudes towards others.

During group time, Mrs Wilson's non-verbal communication suggested that she was interested in what the young people had to say, which increased their motivation to communicate with her. This is supported by Shatz & Gelman (1973), who found that the participation of children increased when adults demonstrated an interest in what they were saying.

Mrs Wilson sat in a circle with the young people whilst she was taking group time. The remaining class staff were assigned positions, so they could support students that had the most difficulties with communication. The seating structure ensured that everyone could see Mrs Wilson and that Mrs Wilson could see all the students. This meant that there was more face-to-face contact than side-by-side interaction.

Staff and students were seated on the same size chairs in the circle, so everyone was of a similar height. Teachers often teach from a position of greater height than their students, which is an indicator of power and dominance. In this interaction, the seating position ensured a more equal relationship between staff and students. O’Kane (2000) argued that when the power relationship was equalised between adults and children, children were more likely to contribute their ideas.

When Mrs Wilson was speaking to an individual student rather than the whole class, she leaned towards the person she was talking to. She leaned forward to a greater degree when the student was further away from her in the circle. When Mrs Wilson was talking to Andrew, she did not lean forward, as he was already sitting close to her. She always maintained a distance of approximately thirty centimetres between herself and her communication partner. This demonstrated that she had a close relationship with her students (Appendix B).

Mrs Wilson ensured that she was facing the person with whom she was talking, even if this meant adjusting her seating position. She swivelled on the chair to place herself at a better angle to see the face of the student. The young people also adjusted their position, so that when they were talking to Mrs Wilson they were facing her. Guerrero (2005) argues that such behaviour demonstrates a reciprocal level of involvement and interest in the interaction. Jason<sup>1</sup>, one of the students, did not sit with the group during circle time, instead he paced around the room. When Mrs Wilson called his name he stopped pacing and come closer to her and faced her as she spoke to him (Appendix B).

Mrs Wilson also used touch to involve her students in an interaction. Guerrero (2005) argued that touch was an important tool for showing interest and involvement in an interaction. As mentioned in Chapter 4, teachers often do not use touch as a form of involvement, as class sizes makes this impractical and also there are legal issues. In this lesson, the class size was much smaller than a ‘mainstream’ school and so there was a higher staff to pupil ratio. Mrs Wilson greeted each of the students using a

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<sup>1</sup>Jason has severe Autism and finds social interaction difficult. He initiates limited interactions with staff, but dislikes interacting with his peers.

high five, which they found very motivating. Each of the young people experienced the same amount of physical involvement from Mrs Wilson, which ensured an equal level of participation amongst all of the students. In several instances, the young people anticipated the high five by standing up and smiling at Mrs Wilson. Jason pulled away from the high five with Mrs Wilson more quickly than his peers, but this was indicative of his feelings towards social interaction, in particular physical proximity with others. Jason will initiate some physical interaction with a few chosen adults, on his terms and for short periods of time.

Guerrero reported that smiling was another important indicator of the level of a person's involvement in an interaction. Mrs Wilson smiled at some of the students, but this varied depending on whom she was talking to. When Mrs Wilson was communicating with Louise, she always smiled. Louise had the most severe difficulties in the group and did not often contribute to class activities. During this group time, Louise was very bright and communicative and made several spontaneous contributions to the discussion, so Mrs Wilson acknowledged this by smiling more. Mrs Wilson's smiling acted as an extra form of praise for the contribution that Louise made. This encouraged Louise to communicate more. Throughout the circle time, Louise and Mrs Wilson's involvement scores were evenly matched when they were interacting with each other. This demonstrated a reciprocal warmth towards each other (Appendix B).

Mrs Wilson was vocally enthusiastic and animated when she was communicating with Louise. She altered her pitch, so that it had a 'sing song' quality and used a raised intonation pattern. Snow & Ferguson (1977) state that a 'sing song' voice and raised intonation can indicate a person's affection towards another or it can be a way of distinguishing someone's power, for example these voice patterns are also associated with protection of the weak. As mentioned previously, Louise has limited expressive skills and finds communication difficult. During this activity, she was very animated herself, so Mrs Wilson encouraged and reinforced this by showing high levels of involvement in what Louise was communicating. Mrs Wilson also showed more enthusiasm and animation in her voice when any of the students that found communication more challenging made a positive contribution. All of the young people demonstrated less vocal variation and animation than Mrs Wilson. However, this was influenced by their communication difficulties rather than an active choice. Despite Louise mainly using non word vocalisations, she showed increased animation in her voice through pitch, volume and intonation (Appendix B).

Several of the students did not smile very often during this activity and this was matched by the occasions Mrs Wilson smiled at them. During the lesson, Anna showed little variation in her facial expression (Appendix B and Appendix J). Furthermore, due to her visual impairment she is unable to see when people are smiling at her, as faces appear blurred. This means that she finds it difficult to distinguish between different facial expressions. Therefore Mrs Wilson did not smile, as Anna would be unable to process this and concentrated on showing warmth and involvement through her voice (Appendix B and Extract 7.48).

Tim and Andrew are the strongest communicators in the group and can talk about a range of subjects in full sentences. Tim and Andrew both smiled at Mrs Williams more than it was reciprocated. On occasions, Mrs Wilson appeared slightly ambivalent towards them in the way she interacted with them, as her facial expression stayed very neutral. Mrs Wilson may have felt that Tim and Andrew required less reinforcement and encouragement to be involved, as they were more able, or it is possible she did not have such a strong relationship with them (Appendix B). Moreover, she may not have wanted to over-encourage them so as to leave space and time for the other students to interact with her.

## Summary

This chapter demonstrates some of the challenges of including young people with learning disabilities and some practices that are well integrated and increase the participation of the young people. In the following chapter, as part of the discussion, I will explore which existing practices transferred into the transition planning meetings and what new practices or issues arose through interactions in a new context.

# Chapter 8.

## Discussion

This chapter explores some of the pertinent issues that arose from the research data presented in Chapters 5, 6 and 7. I begin by considering the research findings in comparison with existing transition literature.

This is followed by a detailed analysis of power relationships using the theories of Bourdieu (1977) (discussed in Chapter 2). In particular, I will consider the social positions of the different stakeholders within the ‘field’ of transition planning and the power relationships that exist between them.

I go on to suggest that the structure of transition planning meetings must change to ensure meaningful inclusion of young people with learning disabilities. I conclude with an analysis of the research methodology and suggest possible alterations.

### **8.1. Comparison of findings with transition literature**

Chapter 3 demonstrated the important contributions that Clegg et al. (2008) have made to the field of transition planning for people with learning disabilities. My findings had several similarities with the findings of Clegg et al., and some important differences. The two main areas I shall examine are: the tension faced by parents between ensuring their child’s welfare and promoting their independence; and the balance between independence and quality of life.

### 8.1.1. Tensions

Clegg et al. (2008) found that parents of children with special needs felt a tension between considering the welfare of their child and promoting their child's independence. This tension was also evident in my study. Both Terri's and Anna's mothers discussed their conflict about their daughters' futures. Terri's mother was keen that Terri should remain living at home, but then wanted to respect Terri's choice if she wanted to live independently.

Despite this tension, unlike the study of Clegg et al., there did not appear to be a mismatch in the parent's and young people's expectations. Indeed, there were shared expectations of where the young people would live once they left school. It is difficult to know whether the expectations expressed by the young people in my study were independent beliefs; or whether they were acquiescing to the beliefs of their parents because they did not feel that there was any other options available. This is an issue that would require further exploration.

In the study of Clegg et al. (2008), the choices and the expectations of the young people were considered unrealistic. In my study, the choices expressed by the young people were considered realistic, yet there were concerns about the availability of services to fulfil the young people's choices. In the area of the UK where this study was conducted, many services were being closed because they did not match up to inclusion policy. Instead, day centres were generally catering for older adults. The closures would ultimately affect the options available to the young people.

A further consequence of the young people making realistic choices was that there was no need for stakeholders to protect the young people from making risky decisions. However, this could change in the future if the young people express choices that are considered risky. There was no evidence to suggest that parents were trying to keep their children in a 'child-like state'. Instead, they supported their child's choices. For instance, Terri's mother took Terri to a careers evening to collect information about college cookery courses, after Terri had communicated that this was what she would like to do once she left school.

Like Clegg et al., I found that parents were continually looking forwards to their child's future. Both Terri's and Anna's mothers talked about the importance of their daughter being occupied and having social relationships. Terri's mother was considering setting up who own cleaning business, so that Terri could help out and not be stuck

watching television all day if other options did not work out. The transition social worker was also very forward thinking and communicated similar ideas to the parents. The transition social worker came from a background of being a carer for young people with severe learning disabilities and autism and this may have influenced her thinking.

### **8.1.2. Independence versus quality of life**

Like Clegg et al., I found that transition meetings concentrated on employment and independent living rather than quality of life and self-satisfaction. When the young people contributed to their transition meeting they chose to talk about “valued activities” (Clegg et al. 2008) such as going bowling, going to the pub or going to concerts. In contrast, the other stakeholders chose to discuss employment, education and living options. Clegg et al. found that the young people and families in her study also put meaningful activities in a position of greater importance than “traditional markers of inclusion” Clegg et al. (2008).

Although the young people chose to talk more about ‘valued activities’, several of the young people did have strong opinions about jobs and where they would like to live. However, these subjects did not dominate their discourse. Sabal and Naresh had very specific aspirations about what type of employment that would like once they leave school: Naresh wanted to have a job that involved cooking. Anna also wanted a job, but had less specific aspirations. Harper & Lawson (2003) suggest that it is “culturally normative” for young men to value paid employment compared to women. In this instance, I felt that Anna chose employment over school as she had a strong dislike for school and may have seen employment as the only alternative.

When parents talked about employment and college, it was more with the desire for their children to be occupied rather than looking to increase their independence. This finding is also supported by the study of Clegg et al. (2008), who found that when professionals discussed employment and education they were thinking more about promoting independence in line with inclusion policy, rather than self-satisfaction.

Several of the young people in my study rejected independence. Inclusion policy strongly advocates the importance of independent living, however several of the young people indicated that wanted to remain living at home once they have left school. Unlike the study of Clegg et al., this point of view was not outwardly criticised at the transition meeting and this choice appeared to be respected. However, this could change as the

young people draw closer to leaving school. At the moment, the young people are fourteen and it may be seen as natural that they could not imagine leaving the family home.

The activities that the young people chose for their futures demonstrated the importance of 'interdependence'. Activities such as bowling, going to the pub and going to concerts would need to be facilitated by others: the young people may need help getting to the location of activities or help handling payment. Furthermore, some activities require a group and may just be more enjoyable with company.

Social relationships were not discussed at all in the transition meeting. Discussions concentrated on employment and future living options. As in the study of Clegg et al., the young people talked about friendships that they have in school. These friendships did not continue outside school and social opportunities were generally limited. Several parents talked about the fears they their child may get teased if they were exposed to other children that did not understand their disability. Although social relationships are crucial in developing choice-making and communication skills, they were not given any importance at the transition meetings.

## 8.2. Power

Bourdieu (1992) believes that power is an inherent part of all relationships. He argues that all interactions will involve the coming together of different social positions, which will have their own relationships of power. This section explores the different social positions held by the participants at the transition meeting and the relationships of power between them. The following concepts will each be discussed:

- Habitus
- Social positions
- Capital
- Practices

### 8.2.1. Habitus

The transition planning process has a system of “generative schema” Bourdieu (1977) which are outlined in government policies of how transition planning should be conducted. Although the policies describe which components should be incorporated in the transition planning process, different institutions meet the requirements with varying levels of creativity. The schema is ultimately adjusted depending on the attitudes and knowledge of the individuals involved.

Traditionally, young people with learning disabilities have been excluded from their transition planning meetings, so the existing generative schema was very professional centred. The presence of the young people at the meeting possibly challenged several of the participants as they were unused to including the young people (Section 6.2.4). The attendance of the young people clearly altered the dynamics of the meeting. Some of the teachers and professionals were able to make adjustments to the way they interacted. However, others found it difficult to be responsive (Excerpt 6.14 and Sections 6.2.4, 6.2.4).

The majority of the teachers and professionals were experienced at attending transition meetings. The meetings followed a set procedure which the teachers and professionals followed instinctively. Like many contexts, the transition meeting has its own schema: the chairperson opens the meeting; the statement of special needs is assessed for its relevancy; the teacher speaks; the professionals speak; and finally there is a discussion about the future. This is what Bourdieu (1992) refers to as ‘field’: a structured system of social positions and the power relationships that exist between these positions.

The chairperson knew what they wanted to achieve from the transition meeting and teachers and professionals were aware of the associated schema of transition meetings, so they knew what to expect. Even those professionals that had not previously attended a transition meeting had attended similar meetings that gave them the knowledge to anticipate what might happen. In contrast, the young people had never attended a meeting before, so had no previous knowledge of what was expected of them. Wodak (1985) argues that when individuals are not provided with adequate information it may reinforce any prejudices and stereotypes about them.

Although the existing transition schema is very professional-centred, the district of the UK where this study was carried out were very pro-active in improving transition services. There were specially designated transition social workers and resources to im-

prove the transition planning process. Furthermore, regular meetings were held between child and adult services to help co-ordinate the process and identify more effective ways of working. One of their key objectives was to find practical ways of including the young people successfully in their transition meetings. However, the ideas discussed during the transition project meetings had not yet affected the practices at Glendale and Springfield schools. Although both schools contributed to discussions on including the young people in the transition planning process, they had not yet considered the practicalities of doing so.

During this study, none of the teachers or professionals verbally expressed a belief that the young people could not or should not be included in their transition planning meeting. In fact several participants showed a genuine interest in hearing their views and modified their own communication to ensure that the young people were included.

Whilst several stakeholders were able to use practices that encouraged the participation of the young people in the meeting, some expressed a reluctance to continue these practices once the study had finished. Two of the teachers commented that the transition comics created too much extra work for them to cope. It is difficult to determine whether this was an excuse for not continuing with practices or a genuine problem. However, it should be noted that these objections were raised by the same two staff that consistently demonstrated practices that excluded the young people during this study.

It is possible that by conducting this study I was forcing the schools to move too quickly. They may have preferred to have more time to work out for themselves the practicalities of including the young people in the transition process. Hutchinson (1996) states that it is difficult for researchers to bring about change in others and that change is more likely to occur if the solution comes from the individuals themselves rather than an 'outsider'. It was unfortunate that the members of staff that expressed their concerns about the practicality of transition comics had the most influence over transition practices.

If the school were left to work out the practicalities of including the young people in their own time, the young people in this study may have never been included in their transition planning. Involving the young people in their meeting was beneficial and lead to better decision making. On several occasions, professionals and class staff made recommendations that contradicted the views of the young people. For instance, if Terri had not been included in her transition meeting, she may have ended up working with younger students. This may have made her unhappy, or may not have engaged her.

### 8.2.2. Social positions

Literature discussing the social positions of different groups in society suggests that people with learning disabilities are in a weak social position. Brewster (2007) argues that people with learning disabilities struggle to reject the roles assigned to them and find it difficult to challenge power exercised upon them by professionals. However in this study, I found that this was not entirely the case.

Chapter 5 demonstrated that the young people were able to communicate their views during their transition meeting. The young people demonstrated that they already had the skills and the intrinsic motivation to communicate their thoughts, feelings and aspirations. Within the research context, they were assertive and demonstrated that they had the ability and desire to empower themselves, through the introduction of topics and their control over the pacing of the sessions. Moreover, Cunningham et al. (2000) states that if an individual is able to identify their strengths and support needs this suggests that they have the cognitive abilities to make choices.

The young people's level of participation during their meetings suggested that they were not experiencing high levels of internalised oppression within this context. There was no evidence of passivity and furthermore, the young people did not demonstrate any behaviour that implied that they had given up trying to communicate. Moreover, the young people demonstrated that they could be adaptable. Whilst the transition meeting was a new context, this did not alter their ability to communicate their views and feelings.

The young people were meaningfully included in their transition meeting when stakeholders modified their communication by: reducing the number of words in an utterance; using less complex vocabulary; or used visual support (Section 6.2.2). These same strategies were observed during lessons where the young people were more participative (Chapter 7). This supports the findings of many researchers (Hile & Walbran 1991, Clarke-Kehoe & Harris 1992, Kerr et al. 1996, Bartlett & Bunning 1997, McConkey et al. 1999, Bradshaw 2001, Kelly 2005) who state that the way that people communicate with individuals with learning disabilities is crucial if they are to be meaningfully included (Chapter 3)

When the stakeholders modified their communication it increased the likelihood of the young people achieving communicative rationality. The young people understood what was being communicated which meant they were able to contribute to the discus-

sion (Excerpts 5.29, 5.34, 5.38, 5.50). However, this maintains the power that stakeholders hold: there will always be a reliance on others to aid inclusion and decide whether communicative rationality is possible.

Even though the young people challenged their social position during their transition meeting, it was evident that the transition social worker maintained the most privileged social position. The transition social worker had the most valued capital (discussed in Section 8.2.3) and her beliefs and views were acquiesced to the most during the course of the transition meeting. If other staff are used to acquiescing to the views of the professionals then it is likely that new people to that context will also acquiesce their views and follow the group's lead (Adler 2001).

The transition social worker did however take steps to share power. Despite the discrepancy in knowledge, the transition social worker showed that she trusted the views and beliefs of the young people by stating that their choices for the future were realistic and achievable (Excerpt 5.2).

The study's findings suggest that particularly Glendale school were progressing towards a new form of professionalism (Chapter 3). Although several school staff demonstrated the belief that professionals were 'all knowing' (Marsh & Fisher 1992) (Excerpts 6.21, 6.22, 6.42 and Sections 6.2.4, 6.2.4), the professionals themselves were showing evidence of adopting new practices. The transition social worker's suggestions during the meeting suggested that she more concerned with the growth of the young people rather than medicalising them (Excerpt 6.6).

This new form of professionalism acknowledges the important contributions that professionals make to the transition process. For instance, professionals are often able to access information that is not easily accessible to the young people and their families. They are also responsible for the allocation of funds: this is unlikely to change. Even though the young people may not have 'expert' knowledge on the transition process, they do hold 'expert' knowledge about themselves. This is just as crucial if transition planning is to be successful.

Even though the transition social worker was moving towards a new form of professionalism, the chairperson held the belief that the professionals knew best. This undoubtedly influenced the tone of the meetings and the way that participants interacted with each other. If professionals are portrayed as having the most valued social position then this will not only affect how the young people perceive their social position, but also how parents and teachers perceive themselves.

If teachers are feeling anxious or uncomfortable about their role at the transition meeting this will affect how they interact with others at the meeting. In the classroom, practices are mainly centred around the young people: they are teachers who are there to teach their students. They can be as informal, flexible and creative as the school ethos allows. In contrast, a transition meeting is more formal. The meeting has more of a managerial feel, as critical choices are made with financial consequences. The school and professionals have budgets which they have to manage. Discussions about money may have contributed to the observed anxiety of the class teachers. Teachers on a day-to-day basis are not involved in budget decisions and may not perceive or desire this to be a part of their role.

If teachers are feeling anxious this may reduce their ability to include the young people in the meeting. Modifying one's language to meet everyone's needs is difficult. The speaker has to be quick-thinking when planning what to say and how to say it. Furthermore, with the young people in attendance there may have been some reluctance to say 'no'. Although at this meeting no decisions were made, in the future the school and professionals may be unable to fulfil the young person's choices. It is easier to say no indirectly rather than having to explain to the young person face-to-face why their choices cannot be delivered. Furthermore, the teachers have regular contact with the young people and so if they are perceived to be negative it could affect their student-teacher relationship.

### **Other contexts**

The young people demonstrated that they could challenge the roles assigned to them during their transition meeting. However this was less evident in other contexts. The young people appeared more passive and there were less examples of them sharing their views.

It is understandable that during circle-time the young people will be more participative than other lessons, as this particular lesson was designed to increase student participation. Even though lessons such as Maths and English are more traditional and are likely to be more teacher led, I still anticipated that the young people would be more participative than was observed. From experience, I have found that individuals with learning disabilities communicate more effectively within familiar environments. Furthermore, special schools that I had visited in the past had been creative in the

way that they adapted the curriculum: making learning more fun and meaningful also increased student participation.

I did not anticipate the the young people would be more participative during their transition planning than in more familiar environments. This counterintuitive result could be attributed to the way that transition planning was introduced to the young people. From the start of the process the young people were encouraged to share their views, so when they attended their meeting they may have assumed that this was still the expectation. Furthermore, if one is communicating in a new environment there may be fewer preconceptions about how events may proceed. In a more familiar environment, patterns may develop in the way that individuals communicate with each other, which may cause the young people to stop expressing their views. For instance, if one becomes accustomed to having one's views dismissed then there is little motivation to continue trying to get one's views heard.

### **8.2.3. Capital**

The transition social worker held the most privileged social position at the transition meeting as she was considered by other stakeholders as having the most 'valued capital'. The transition social worker has access to the funding to provide services for the young people (economic capital) and also the network of contacts for available services (social capital). Furthermore, she also had the educational credentials (cultural capital) associated with a 'professional' degree. Even if other stakeholders took steps to improve their social position, they would be unable to gain such a valued position. Other stakeholders may be able to develop their social networks and make contact with learning disability services, but they are unlikely to be in a situation where they would be in charge of transition funding.

Direct payments have the potential to help individuals with learning disabilities and their families to improve their social position. Through direct payments they would have the economic capital to access services for themselves. However, the decision of who accesses direct payments is made by the transition social worker: and the direct payments system is monitored by the transition social worker, which maintains their power.

Hayes James (2000) provides a further explanation for why some individuals are perceived to have a lower social position than others. She argues that in order to

promote one's social position one must have good social skills, as social positions are developed through social networks (social capital). It is likely that the young people in this study would have some degree of difficulty forming social relationships due to: their communication difficulties; and restricted opportunities for interacting with others. This would make promoting their social position more challenging. Moreover, the other stakeholders at the transition meeting had greater social networks than the young people. The professionals and school staff had an existing relationship which had developed over a number of years, whereas the transition meeting was the first occasion where the young people had met the transition social worker and only the second time in which they had met the connexions representatives.

In essence, the young people were entering a context where stakeholder's social positions and hierarchies were already well established. This could suggest that the young people would have great difficulty in attaining an equal social position. It is unlikely that this could be developed during the first meeting, but suggests over time the young people could develop a stronger social position and greater social capital.

#### **8.2.4. Practices**

The generative schema of transition planning is incredibly professional-centred. Government policies on transition planning make much more reference to the role of the professional than to the inclusion of the young person in the process. Considering professionals also often hold more valued capital than other stakeholders, this reproduces and maintains the belief that professionals hold the most privileged social position.

The young people attempted to maximise their social position by communicating their views and being assertive. Through attending their transition meeting, the young people were acquiring more social capital: they were making contact with stakeholders that they may otherwise had not contact with. However, the young people were unable to acquire greater economic and cultural capital.

Capital aside, I believe the greatest influence on the young people's social position was the element of surprise. Several stakeholders commented on how surprised they were by how well the young people contributed to their transition meeting. This increased their expectation's of the young people's communication and choice-making skills. It would be interesting to see how stakeholders perceive the young people's communication

skills during their next transition meeting. The element of surprise will have gone and stakeholders may be left expecting more from the young people.

Although several stakeholders had a greater appreciation of the young people's skills, the majority used practices that excluded the young people from having equal participation. Stakeholders may have unintentionally used practices that excluded the young people, but by doing so they were limiting participation. When stakeholders failed to modify their communication they were decreasing the opportunities for the young people to participate and therefore challenge the stakeholder's social position.

During the transition meetings there were examples of other stakeholders trying to maximise their social position. Peter, one of the chairpersons, tried to improve his social position by aligning himself with the transition social worker. He frequently acquiesced to her views and ensured that she had the most communication turns. It appeared that he was trying to strengthen his relationship with her in order to increase his own social capital.

The transition social worker did not relinquish any of her valued capital. However, she was observed to play by the rules and ensured that the young people had opportunities to share their views. It would be difficult for the social worker to relinquish her power as her position as fund-holder is stipulated through organisational and governmental policy. Moreover, her job requires her to build social networks in order to increase the availability of services. Service managers are more likely to want to form relationships with her than the families themselves as they know that the social worker is the fund-holder and ultimate decision maker. In order for the families and other stakeholders to achieve their goals it makes sense that they would want to align themselves with the transition social worker to ensure that they got the best possible service.

### **8.2.5. Rethinking practices**

The previous sections have demonstrated how existing transition planning procedures preserve the belief that professionals hold the most privileged social position. Therefore, if transition planning is to become more young person centred and social positions more equal (I appreciate that it is not possible to completely equalise all power relationships), then the existing procedures must change. Firstly, there would need to be changes to the way that funds are managed and allocated; secondly, there needs to be greater

collaboration in the identification of appropriate services. Currently one key professional has control over all parts of the transition procedure.

Ensuring that the young people are equally included creates some tensions. The transition meetings were not a positive experience for all the young people. Naresh left his comfort zone to verbally communicate and Sabal became upset when his father made negative comments about his academic progress (Excerpt 6.18). Even though the young people should be included in their transition meeting, this suggested there needed to be safeguards to ensure that the transition meetings did not become an unpleasant experience.

In court there are safeguards to protect children. Although it is likely that a courtroom would be more stressful than a transition meeting, there are some similarities. In both situations, the young people are vulnerable, as they have to interact with adults who may ask difficult questions and may have intimidating behaviour.

Even though I believe that the young people should be included in decision-making, I question the ethicality of exposing the young people to negative comments. Due to the difficulties experienced by stakeholders in modifying their communication, there is the potential for the young people to misunderstand what is being said. This creates an ethical dilemma, with three choices:

- Difficult topics are discussed at the end of the meeting once the young person has been asked to leave.
- The young person is asked to leave, and an advocate or a trusted adult explains what is happening during the rest of the meeting and why.
- Free choice is given as to whether to stay or leave the meeting once the other stakeholders have explained what will be discussed. The consequences of what is then said are dealt with after the meeting.

I would not choose first alternative, as it contradicts my values. The second and third choices are both feasible. The second choice may be more compassionate, as the young person does not have to experience the negative comments first hand, but is still informed of what is happening in a more sensitive and thoughtful manner. However, is it fair to exclude the young people from discussions that concern them? It is possible that the young person may want to challenge views. Several of the research collaborators challenged staff when participation in activities that they disliked was suggested. If they were excluded this would not have been possible.

Although it may be upsetting to hear negative comments about one's self, it is not uncommon for young people to be exposed to criticism. Often children are invited to attend parent-teacher evenings, where they may hear criticisms about their work or their behaviour. By excluding young people with learning disabilities from their transition meeting, it would be suggesting that they require protection and further differentiate them from their non-disabled peers.

In the third case, there is a risk that other stakeholders may discuss their concerns in a way that is difficult for the young people to understand or that lacks diplomacy. The comments may have serious affect on the young person's self-identity and self-esteem, which may be difficult to repair. This also appears unfair. If this option was chosen, the chairperson should be responsible for ending or redirecting conversation if the situation becomes too stressful.

As well as considering the potential harm to the young people, stakeholders should also consider the communication context and the way that this may dominate or control the young people. The meeting was held in an unfamiliar room. This disadvantaged the young people, as all the other stakeholders were accustomed to attending meetings here. Furthermore, the room was very adult-orientated: it was very plainly decorated and it was the teacher's staff room. This may have contributed to a feeling of unease. This suggests that during preparation for the meeting, time should have been spent familiarising the young people to the new environment.

The young people either entered the meeting room after the other stakeholders, or at the same time. The young person may have felt more empowered to enter the room before other stakeholders: it may reduce the possible intimidation created on entering a room already full of people.

I have some concerns as to whether transition planning can become truly client-centred for every client. The existing social practices during transition are professional centred. Professionals need to reflect upon the way that they interact at transition meetings to ensure the young people are included. This have to be willing to relinquish some of their power. It is doubtful that all stakeholders will be willing to do this: especially if greater choice-making will make their job more challenging. Furthermore, if the young people hold more unusual aspirations this may place pressure upon budgets, and there may not be the services available to meet their needs.

For the young people to be successfully included in their transition meeting, this study has identified that teachers, professionals and families require preparation also.

This might include: setting guidelines for appropriate topics of discussion; or suggesting techniques for successfully including the young person. Transition planning has an existing schema, which is professional-centred and limits the participation of the young people. Ground rules are needed, to ensure that stakeholders adopt practices that include the young people. This is an area for further research.

### **8.3. Research methodology**

This section explores the study's research methodology and considers what changes could be made if this study was to be repeated. Moreover, any unique contributions that were made through the design of this study will also be discussed.

#### **8.3.1. Action research**

In the early stages of designing this study, my reading of possible research methodologies convinced me that action research was the most appropriate method for answering my research questions. However, as the study evolved different possibilities emerged.

Figure 4.5 demonstrated how my study fitted into an action research methodology. However, once the study had finished it was more apparent that the research had developed into a more linear approach. I originally anticipated that the main action cycle, of including the young people in their transition meeting, would complete with the school continuing with the transition comics and further improving their use. The action cycle would then start again. However, there was a reluctance to continue with the study once the transition meetings had finished. Therefore I cannot satisfy myself that the action cycle is complete. Although I know that I have learnt some important lessons from this experience, I have not yet had the opportunity to put them into practice. Furthermore, during dissemination I received much positive feedback about how I had used collaboration comics: however, I do not know for certain how the comics have influenced others' practices.

Despite the main action cycle becoming more linear, smaller action research cycles did still occur. I originally anticipated that the 'resource identification' action cycle would be more complex, however the young people all choose the same way of presenting their interests at their transition meeting. Although I presented the possible resources equally,

the fact that I had chosen to present the research to the young people using the comic book format obviously appealed to them. They could tangibly see how the comic book would work.

In hindsight a grounded theory methodology may have been more appropriate for this study, especially as the original theoretical framework of this study evolved once the data had been collected. I only truly understood what was happening in my study and the different roles stakeholders played once the data had been collected and the data coding had commenced. Furthermore, my research questions are not really a hypothesis to test, but instead required themes and ideas to emerge from the data.

### **8.3.2. Critical discourse analysis**

In Chapter 4 I stated that non-verbal communication is often seen as an ‘add on’ to verbal communication, where as I believe that non-verbal communication and verbal communication are much more intertwined.

In this study I treated both non-verbal communication and verbal communication with equal importance. I acknowledged that individuals with severe learning disabilities often use idiosyncratic and non-verbal communication to express their views and aspirations. If one were to analyse only verbal communication then there is a likelihood that many meaningful communication attempts would be missed or discounted. If I had used CDA in the way that Fairclough (2003) had originally intended, then like Brewster (2007), I would have found that my data would have been fragmented and lacked the depth required for effective analysis.

I felt that combining both verbal and non-verbal communication gave a richness to my data whilst allowing me to take a critical viewpoint. Other approaches, such as discourse analysis and conversational analysis, do not examine language critically and therefore would not have allowed me to identify how people’s use of language reproduced and maintained their social position; or assisted me in identifying the power relationships that existed between different social positions.

### 8.3.3. Collaboration comics

All of the young people gave positive feedback when they were interviewed about the use of the transition comics during their meeting. Terri's mother's opinion of the transition comic was:

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**Extract 8.1** Terri's mother's views on the transition comic  
Interview transcript

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"this is the single best resource that Terri has ever had."

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Terri took her comic everywhere with her, including when they were visiting family and friends. The comic had been instrumental in helping Terri develop a relationship with her aunt. Previously, the aunt had found it very difficult to communicate with Terri, but found the book helped her to generate a discussion.

The transition social workers and Connexions representatives said that they found the comics useful, as they felt they were able to leave the meeting with a greater understanding of the individual personalities. The transition workers had not met the young people prior to the meeting, as their time was restricted due to enormous case-loads. They reported that they had time only to attend the transition meetings and to fulfil decisions made at the meetings, even though they saw their role as assessing the views and feelings of the young people themselves. The same applied to the Connexions representatives: they were given a designated time allocation each year for each student, which was absorbed by one transition meeting.

The transition social workers said that it was beneficial to have a record of what the young people looked like and their interests in preparation for the next time they met:

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**Extract 8.2** Transition social worker's opinion of the transition comics  
Interview 10/03/2007

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"The comic is really useful. . . it will let me put names to faces when I meet the young people again in the future. I feel like I know them a little better. You tend to remember young people when their case has been difficult. I'd rather have a more positive recollection of people."

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They confided that as they saw so many people it was often like seeing someone for the first time each meeting, even when they had met before. They remembered cases that were contentious, or when the young people were making the transition into adult

services, as they had a more regular involvement. When the young people were just beginning the process they had less time to be involved.

During the meetings the transition comics were a starting point for generating discussion. They helped the young people decide what to talk about and in which order. Moreover, there were occasions when the young people did not know how to verbally communicate or sign a specific interest, so they found the appropriate picture in their transition comic and showed those at the meeting. The transition comic was used as a low-tech communication aid. The comic also helped the professionals at the meeting to ask the young people questions, as they could already see what topics the young people liked to talk about (Section 6.2.2).

I was able to use the transition comic as a tool for helping the young people to access the meeting: it was a useful visual support. The complex vocabulary associated with transition, was represented in the comic, so I could then show the young people the appropriate symbol when someone spoke using over-complicated terminology.

Transition comics have some similarities with other multi-media transition tools, but what makes them unique is their potential for greater young person involvement. The Comic Life application was very easy to use and several of the young people were able to operate the program with minimal support. Other multi-media packages are far more complex and the young people require a greater amount of support to produce their transition resources. Comic Life helped several of the young people to be more independent.

If the young person has difficulties with fine motor control there is still the potential for them to use Comic Life and make their own transition resources. Assistive devices like the 'Big Mac' (A large button that can be used as mouse) can be plugged into the computer, which to make it easier for young people to operate the application

Although the transition comic had many benefits, there are some limitations to their use. Collaboration comics can be used with individuals with moderate and severe learning disabilities, however it would be difficult to modify their use for individuals with more profound difficulties. An altogether different approach would be required. It may be useful to have a transition tool that is appropriate for all levels of intellectual disability with modification, rather than having many different tools.

Further exploration is also required to identify ways in which the young people could more independently assemble their own photo libraries. In this study, the researcher

had to either take photographs on behalf of the young person, or the young person took photographs for themselves, but which then had to be transferred to the computer by the researcher. Moreover, further photographs and symbols had to be found on the internet to supplement the photograph library.

This issue would need careful consideration: if the young people were left solely to produce their photograph libraries it may lead them to only make choices within a limited range of options. Through the researcher supplementing the photograph library she was showing the young people further activities and options available to them, some of which may have been outside the young people's current frames of reference.

## Summary

This chapter demonstrates that people with severe learning disabilities have the potential to maximise their social position. However, it is unlikely that within existing practices they would be able to obtain the most valued social position. The way that the transition process is structured places all the power in the hands of one or two key professionals and it is unclear why and how they would relinquish their power.

In the final chapter this thesis concludes with a discussion of the main research findings and their relationship to the research questions. Further areas for research are suggested.

# Chapter 9.

## Conclusion

This chapter presents the main findings from this study. I will begin by reviewing the study's aims and questions and conclude with areas for further investigation.

### 9.1. The aims of the study

The aim was to explore whether the young people in this study had the ability to exercise personal power during their transition meeting and achieve communicative rationality. This included an investigation into the social positions of different stakeholders; the power relationships between them; and the effect this had on the young people's participation.

To fulfil the studies aims, the following questions were devised:

1. Were the young people able to exercise personal power during their transition planning meeting and their preparation sessions?
2. How did this compare to other contexts? Were they able to exercise personal power in the classroom?
3. Were the young people meaningfully included by other stakeholders in their transition planning meeting?
4. How did this compare to their inclusion by other stakeholders in the classroom?

The following section reports the main findings of the study. The data that answers question one is found in Chapter 5. Chapter 7 contains the data to answer questions two and four, while data for question three can be found in Chapter 6.

## 9.2. Main findings

The study demonstrated that the young people were able to exercise personal power during their transition planning meeting and their preparation sessions. They were able to express their views; often in an assertive manner (Chapter 5). In contrast, there were fewer examples of the young people exercising personal power in the classroom (Chapter 7). The situations in which they exercised personal power was dependent on the lesson being taught and whether the class teacher modified his or her communication to increase participation. In key curriculum subjects, such as Maths, English and Science, the young people were less participative compared to lessons, such as Circle-time and Citizenship, which were designed with a more child-centred pedagogy. The difference in participation can be attributed to the way that the class teacher taught the lesson; the young people's motivation; or the presence of 'learned helplessness'.

The frequency of passivity in the classroom suggests that, in spite of being a new context, the transition planning meeting was motivating for the young people and they had the confidence to express their views and aspirations. Being involved in the research process may have introduced the young people to the possibilities of speaking out or helped them to develop their self-confidence in sharing their views. However, equal participation was not achieved. For more equal participation to occur other professionals and class staff needed to relinquish some of their power, which did not happen. I do not believe that this was intentional or malicious, but instead stakeholders were accustomed to their social position at transition meetings and unused to including the young people (Chapter 6).

Furthermore, it was unclear how some professionals could relinquish their power: the transition social worker was allocated responsibility for transition funds as part of her professional role. She did not have the power to delegate this role to someone else. The use of direct payments could ameliorate this tension, however the transition social worker would still maintain a position of power, as they would be responsible for deciding who could access direct payments and would be monitoring their success.

The young people entered an already well established process, which had not necessarily been developed with them in mind. There was a set routine for how the meeting was run. Stakeholder's social positions and their associated power relationships were already developed and ingrained in practices. The language that was used during the meeting and the way that stakeholders interacted with each other (Chapter 6) suggested

that the professionals at the meeting held the most privileged position. The professionals were described as the agents of action and their views were frequently transcended to. This meant that the transition meeting was very professionally centred.

The majority of the stakeholders failed to modify their communication in order to include the young people. A possible explanation for this was that stakeholders were unused to including young people in these meetings and so forgot to modify their language. Alternately, stakeholders may have believed that the young people should not be present or may have not seen the need to modify their language as I was there translating for the young people. It is also feasible that stakeholders were struggling with their own social position and power relationships.

To ensure that transition planning becomes more centred around the young person, this study identifies that the existing structure of transition planning meetings needs to change (Chapter 8). Whatever the structure of the meeting, I understand that there will always be power imbalances, as power is omnipresent (Bourdieu 1992, Foucault 2002). Furthermore, certain professional groups will always have greater power than other stakeholders by having budget responsibilities and from being the gatekeepers for specific types of information. However, if the structure of the meeting is reconsidered to be more young person centred then this may help to challenge some of the less inclusive practices that are currently being used, and instead encourage a new schema to develop.

It is possible that some stakeholders may not be willing to relinquish their power and therefore will not alter the structure of transition planning. If the young people begin to ask for more diverse services, this could place pressure upon budgets and available services. Therefore, I question whose interests transition planning is really serving. Is it a way of managing money long term? Or a way of ensuring a good quality of life for service users? I'm not sure that the answer is very clear-cut.

These findings suggest the presence of optimum conditions for participation. To ensure that the young people are meaningfully included and as equally as possible, I believe that the following conditions need to be in place:

**Personal power** The young people must have the skills to exercise personal power, in particular a method of expressing their views and feelings, as well as the assertiveness to get their message across.

**An inclusive procedure** The transition meeting procedure should encourage the participation of the young people. Currently the meeting is too professional centred, so the voices of the young people have the potential to become lost.

**Resources** Professionals and school staff should have adequate information about the young people's communication needs prior to the meeting and should feel they have the skills to communicate with the young people in a way that is accessible to them. They should use their skills to ensure that the young people are included in their meeting.

Currently at both Glendale and Springfield schools, I do not believe that the optimum conditions for participation are in place. The young people are able to exercise personal power, however, not all stakeholders have the resources to ensure that the young people are included and their current transition procedure is very professional centred. Nonetheless, there is evidence to suggest that practices are changing and professionals are moving towards a new form of professionalism. This acknowledges that professionals have an important role to play in transition planning, but other stakeholders, such as the young people themselves, have a valuable contribution to make as well.

### 9.3. Contribution to the field

Unlike other studies, I believe that this study examines in finer detail why transition planning is problematic for individuals with learning disabilities. In particular, this study looks at the ways in which power is distributed amongst stakeholders and the influence this has on the meaningful participation of the young people.

Transition planning research tends to look at transition planning from either a parental or professional point of view, whereas this study sought the views of the young people themselves. The conceptual framework of Clegg et al. (2001) is very useful at understanding the issues arising from transition planning. However, this framework is also from a parental point of view. This study demonstrates that the framework of Clegg et al. is just as useful for exploring transition planning from the young person's perspective.

This study's methodology, in particular the use of collaboration comics, provides a unique contribution to this field of research. Collaboration comics are a visually interesting and easy to use tool to support young people with learning disabilities in

expressing their views, feelings, and aspirations. They are multi-functional and can also be used by parents, teachers and professionals to explain complex ideas in a fun and accessible way. I found my research comic especially useful when obtaining consent. In chapter 4 I demonstrated that comic books have been used by educators with low achievers with success. However, this is the first study that uses comic books with individuals with severe learning disabilities.

Unlike many communication books, collaboration comics are easily produced using a non-specialist computer package – ‘Comic Life’. This application has greater usability than some of the other packages available, which enabled the young people to produce their own comics, rather than staff producing them on their behalf. This ensured that the young people had greater control over the way that they were represented in their comics.

The transition comics had wider benefits than the research anticipated. Terri used her comic to develop a relationship with her aunt, who had previously struggled to communicate with her. This suggests that collaboration comics are useful in other circumstances where the young people may wish or need to communicate their views, feelings and aspirations.

During dissemination of this study, transition comics were met with great enthusiasm by other professionals working with people with learning disabilities. I felt that my transition comics and my enthusiasm for this subject encouraged others to think of different ways to interact with their clients, or ways in which they could apply my research to their working context.

The use of Critical Discourse Analysis in studies with people with severe learning disabilities is very uncommon. I have only found one other study that had used this tool with individuals with severe learning disabilities (Brewster 2007). This study shows that CDA can be useful applied with this client group if non-verbal communication is seen as important as verbal communication rather than supplementary to it. By combining both modes of communication, I found that there was enough depth in the discourses of the young people to make CDA an effective tool. Furthermore, I believe excluding non-verbal communication can contribute to silencing the voices of individuals with learning disabilities, especially as so many communicate using often idiosyncratic and non-verbal methods.

## 9.4. Limitations of the study

Although the sample size was too small to make generalisations, this study has revealed some important issues and made some new contributions to research.

The context of this study was limited. Transition practices vary depending on the organisation and the region of the country. In this study, both schools were in one district of the same county, and had chosen to adopt the same transition protocol. A different protocol may have increased the young people's participation.

Transition practices will also vary between one country and the next. Different countries will have different priorities and methods for approaching transition planning. The methods used in this study, therefore may not work with in a different context.

Time was restricted during this study. With more time, it would have been beneficial to follow the young people throughout their transition process to explore how their views and aspirations change, and what influence work or college experience has on their choices. Furthermore, it would have been possible to assess whether their choices were considered and integrated into their transition plan.

More time should also have been invested in building relationships with staff as well as the young people. I had not appreciated how crucial the role of staff would be in sustaining change. If I had ensured that the staff were more included in this research study, they may have felt more motivated to support the inclusion of the young people in their transition meeting and continue with the collaboration comics once the research had finished.

The use of collaboration comics benefited the young people in this study, however their usefulness for individuals with profound and multiple learning disabilities is questionable. Collaboration comics were created with the skills and needs of individuals with severe learning disabilities in mind. If an approach was to be accessible for individuals with PMLD, then I would need to consider the issues of intentionality of communication. However, this was not in the remit for this study.

It is unlikely that individuals with PMLD would be able to use Comic Life as information is presented through pictures and symbols rather than objects. The computer program would also be too complex to navigate. As objects would need to be used, it makes the concept of a comic redundant. Furthermore, part of the rationale for using Comic Life was to ensure that the young people were as independent as possible

in creating their transition comic. For individuals with PMLD, a great deal of adult intervention would be required.

## 9.5. Areas for further research

In spite of the study's limitations, it has identified some interesting areas for further investigation. Involving young people with severe learning disabilities in transition planning is complex. Previously, it was thought that the young people could not be included because of their intellectual difficulties. This research has demonstrated that they have the skills to communicate their views and aspirations, however, full participation was still not achieved. Further issues need to be resolved before people with severe learning disabilities can be meaningfully included:

- An exploration of the structure of transition planning meetings. How does the meeting need to be altered so that professionals no longer hold the most privileged position and the young people have more of an equal social position?
- The current study's findings suggest that organisational change would be necessary for young people with learning disabilities to be meaningfully included in their transition planning. What types of organisational change would need to occur to ensure that the young people had more equal social positions?
- An in-depth study of individual stakeholder attitudes towards individuals with learning disabilities. This current study only touches the surface. It was possible that negative attitudes existed, but they could not be isolated and their existence could only be speculated upon.
- A longitudinal study that follows the same young people through their entire transition planning process. It would be interesting to see how the young people's attitudes may change as they become older; and to what degree their aspirations are included in their transition plan.
- It would be useful to review existing transition services countrywide. There are many informal examples of good practice, however there is also evidence to show that different areas of the country use different practices. A review might enable some consistency to be brought into the process.

- During the dissemination of my research findings other speech and language therapists, and professionals that work with individuals with learning disabilities, were very enthusiastic about the collaboration comics and how they could be integrated into their practices. It would be useful to explore the wider possibilities of these comics for encouraging the participation of people with learning disabilities

Whilst this study has examined how individuals with severe learning disabilities can be included in transition planning, the needs of individuals with PMLD has not been addressed. Transition planning for individuals with PMLD is an area of limited research and warrants study. This research has demonstrated that young people with SLD can participate in their transition planning, even though there was some doubt in the literature. If the ability of people with SLD is questioned, then it is likely that people with PMLD will find themselves even more excluded.

## **Appendix A.**

### **Research findings comic**

The following single-page comic was given to the young people and their families at the end of the study. The comic summarised the main findings from the study.

Figure A.1.: Findings comic



## **Appendix B.**

### **Non verbal communication scores**

This appendix contains the raw data from observed interactions between Mrs Wilson and her students during circle time and then an English lesson. A score of 1 signals low agreement and a score of 7 indicates high agreement.

Non Verbal Scores		
Smiling	Score	Notes
Always smiled	4	
Was facially pleasant	2	
Smiled a lot	4	
Conveyed a positive affect	6	
Leaning		
Leaned towards partner	7	
Faced towards partner	7	
Sat face to face	7	
Leaned forward a lot	7	
Distance between bodies was close	3	Sat far side of circle
Distance between faces was close	3	
Agreement		
Nodded	0	
Touch	1	
Time spent touching	3 seconds	High five
Voice		
Contained vocal variety	5	
Sounded relaxed	7	
Sounded warm	5	
Sounded calm	7	
Was animated	5	
Sounded pleasant	7	

Table B.1.: Mrs Wilson interacting with Mark

Non Verbal Scores		
Smiling	Score	Notes
Always smiled	2	
Was facially pleasant	4	
Smiled a lot	2	
Conveyed a positive affect	4	
Leaning		
Leaned towards partner	6	
Faced towards partner	7	
Sat face to face	7	
Leaned forward a lot	6	
Distance between bodies was close	3	
Distance between faces was close	3	
Agreement		
Nodded	1	
Touch	1	
Time spent touching	3 seconds	High five
Voice		
Contained vocal variety	1	
Sounded relaxed	7	
Sounded warm	5	
Sounded calm	7	
Was animated	2	
Sounded pleasant	5	

Table B.2.: Mark interacting with Mrs Wilson

<b>Non Verbal Scores</b>		
<b>Smiling</b>	<b>Score</b>	<b>Notes</b>
Always smiled	7	
Was facially pleasant	1	
Smiled a lot	7	
Conveyed a positive affect	7	
<b>Leaning</b>		
Leaned towards partner	7	
Faced towards partner	7	
Sat face to face	7	intentional move
Leaned forward a lot	7	
Distance between bodies was close	5	
Distance between faces was close	6	
<b>Agreement</b>		
Nodded	1	
Touch	1	
Time spent touching	3 seconds	High five
<b>Voice</b>		
Contained vocal variety	7	
Sounded relaxed	7	
Sounded warm	7	
Sounded calm	7	
Was animated	7	
Sounded pleasant	7	

**Table B.3.:** Mrs Wilson interacting with Louise

Non Verbal Scores		
Smiling	Score	Notes
Always smiled	7	
Was facially pleasant	1	
Smiled a lot	7	
Conveyed a positive affect	7	
Leaning		
Leaned towards partner	7	
Faced towards partner	7	
Sat face to face	7	
Leaned forward a lot	7	
Distance between bodies was close	5	
Distance between faces was close	6	
Agreement		
Nodded	1	
Touch	1	
Time spent touching	3 seconds	High five
Voice		
Contained vocal variety	2	
Sounded relaxed	7	
Sounded warm	7	
Sounded calm	7	
Was animated	7	
Sounded pleasant	7	

**Table B.4.:** Louise interacting with Mrs Wilson

Non Verbal Scores		
Smiling	Score	Notes
Always smiled	4	
Was facially pleasant	4	
Smiled a lot	4	
Conveyed a positive affect	4	
Leaning		
Leaned towards partner	7	
Faced towards partner	7	
Sat face to face	7	
Leaned forward a lot	7	
Distance between bodies was close	4	
Distance between faces was close	5	
Agreement		
Nodded	0	
Touch	1	
Time spent touching	3 seconds	High five
Voice		
Contained vocal variety	5	
Sounded relaxed	7	
Sounded warm	6	
Sounded calm	7	
Was animated	5	
Sounded pleasant	6	

Table B.5.: Mrs Wilson interacting with Anna

Non Verbal Scores		
Smiling	Score	Notes
Always smiled	1	
Was facially pleasant	4	
Smiled a lot	1	
Conveyed a positive affect	4	
Leaning		
Leaned towards partner	5	
Faced towards partner	7	
Sat face to face	7	
Leaned forward a lot	5	
Distance between bodies was close	4	
Distance between faces was close	5	
Agreement		
Nodded	0	
Touch	1	
Time spent touching	3 seconds	High five
Voice		
Contained vocal variety	6	
Sounded relaxed	7	
Sounded warm	7	
Sounded calm	5	
Was animated	6	
Sounded pleasant	7	

Table B.6.: Anna interacting with Mrs Wilson

Non Verbal Scores		
Smiling	Score	Notes
Always smiled	5	
Was facially pleasant	5	
Smiled a lot	5	
Conveyed a positive affect	5	
Leaning		
Leaned towards partner	6	
Faced towards partner	7	
Sat face to face	7	
Leaned forward a lot	6	
Distance between bodies was close	2	
Distance between faces was close	3	
Agreement		
Nodded	0	
Touch	1	
Time spent touching	3 seconds	High five
Voice		
Contained vocal variety	6	
Sounded relaxed	6	
Sounded warm	5	
Sounded calm	6	
Was animated	5	
Sounded pleasant	5	

Table B.7.: Mrs Wilson interacting with Shona

Non Verbal Scores		
Smiling	Score	Notes
Always smiled	2	
Was facially pleasant	5	
Smiled a lot	5	
Conveyed a positive affect	5	
Leaning		
Leaned towards partner	6	
Faced towards partner	7	
Sat face to face	7	
Leaned forward a lot	6	
Distance between bodies was close	2	
Distance between faces was close	3	
Agreement		
Nodded	1	
Touch	1	
Time spent touching	3 seconds	High five
Voice		
Contained vocal variety	3	
Sounded relaxed	7	
Sounded warm	6	
Sounded calm	5	Spoke with loud voice
Was animated	6	
Sounded pleasant	5	Except during interruptions

Table B.8.: Shona interacting with Mrs Wilson

Non Verbal Scores		
Smiling	Score	Notes
Always smiled	4	
Was facially pleasant	4	
Smiled a lot	4	
Conveyed a positive affect	4	
Leaning		
Leaned towards partner	2	
Faced towards partner	7	
Sat face to face	7	
Leaned forward a lot	2	
Distance between bodies was close	6	
Distance between faces was close	6	
Agreement		
Nodded	0	
Touch	1	
Time spent touching	3 seconds	High five
Voice		
Contained vocal variety	5	
Sounded relaxed	7	
Sounded warm	4	At times sounded distant
Sounded calm	7	
Was animated	4	
Sounded pleasant	5	

Table B.9.: Mrs Wilson interacting with Andrew

Non Verbal Scores		
Smiling	Score	Notes
Always smiled	5	
Was facially pleasant	3	
Smiled a lot	5	
Conveyed a positive affect	5	
Leaning		
Leaned towards partner	7	
Faced towards partner	6	
Sat face to face	6	
Leaned forward a lot	7	
Distance between bodies was close	6	
Distance between faces was close	6	
Agreement		
Nodded	1	
Touch	1	
Time spent touching	3 seconds	High five
Voice		
Contained vocal variety	4	
Sounded relaxed	7	
Sounded warm	4	
Sounded calm	7	
Was animated	4	
Sounded pleasant	4	

Table B.10.: Andrew interacting with Mrs Wilson

Non Verbal Scores		
Smiling	Score	Notes
Always smiled	4	
Was facially pleasant	4	
Smiled a lot	4	
Conveyed a positive affect	4	
Leaning		
Leaned towards partner	5	
Faced towards partner	7	
Sat face to face		Jason was not sitting
Leaned forward a lot	7	Minimal interaction observed
Distance between bodies was close	1 and 6	Mainly 1, but whilst interacting 6
Distance between faces was close	1 and 6	
Agreement		
Nodded	1	
Touch	1	
Time spent touching	2 seconds	High five
Voice		
Contained vocal variety	5	
Sounded relaxed	7	
Sounded warm	5	
Sounded calm	7	
Was animated	4	
Sounded pleasant	4	

Table B.11.: Mrs Wilson interacting with Jason

<b>Non Verbal Scores</b>		
<b>Smiling</b>	<b>Score</b>	<b>Notes</b>
Always smiled	1	
Was facially pleasant	7	Looked anxious
Smiled a lot	1	
Conveyed a positive affect	1	
<b>Leaning</b>		
Leaned towards partner	5	
Faced towards partner	7	
Sat face to face		Jason did not sit
Leaned forward a lot	5	
Distance between bodies was close	1 and 6	Mainly 1 and 6 during interaction
Distance between faces was close	1 and 6	
<b>Agreement</b>		
Nodded	0	
Touch	1	
Time spent touching	2 seconds	High five
<b>Voice</b>		
Contained vocal variety		Jason is non verbal
Sounded relaxed		
Sounded warm		
Sounded calm		
Was animated		
Sounded pleasant		

**Table B.12.:** Jason interacting with Mrs Wilson

Non Verbal Scores		
Smiling	Score	Notes
Always smiled	6	
Was facially pleasant	6	
Smiled a lot	6	
Conveyed a positive affect	6	
Leaning	7	
Leaned towards partner	7	
Faced towards partner	7	
Sat face to face	7	
Leaned forward a lot	7	
Distance between bodies was close	3	
Distance between faces was close	3	
<b>Agreement</b>		
Nodded	0	
Touch	1	
Time spent touching	3 seconds	High five
<b>Voice</b>		
Contained vocal variety	7	
Sounded relaxed	7	
Sounded warm	7	
Sounded calm	7	
Was animated	6	
Sounded pleasant	7	

**Table B.13.:** Mrs Wilson interacting with Charlotte

Non Verbal Scores		
Smiling	Score	Notes
Always smiled	4	
Was facially pleasant	4	
Smiled a lot	4	
Conveyed a positive affect	4	
Leaning		
Leaned towards partner	5	Attention and listening very difficult
Faced towards partner	5	
Sat face to face	5	
Leaned forward a lot	5	
Distance between bodies was close	3	
Distance between faces was close	3	
Agreement		
Nodded	0	High five
Touch	1	
Time spent touching	3 seconds	
Voice		
Contained vocal variety	3	Sounded distant and repetitive
Sounded relaxed	7	
Sounded warm	5	
Sounded calm	7	
Was animated	2	
Sounded pleasant	5	

Table B.14.: Charlotte interacting with Mrs Wilson

Non Verbal Scores		
Smiling	Score	Notes
Always smiled	4	
Was facially pleasant	4	
Smiled a lot	4	
Conveyed a positive affect	4	
Leaning		
Leaned towards partner	7	
Faced towards partner	7	
Sat face to face	7	
Leaned forward a lot	7	
Distance between bodies was close	3	
Distance between faces was close	4	
Agreement		
Nodded	0	
Touch	1	
Time spent touching	3 seconds	High five
Voice		
Contained vocal variety	5	
Sounded relaxed	7	
Sounded warm	5	
Sounded calm	7	
Was animated	4	
Sounded pleasant	5	

Table B.15.: Mrs Wilson interacting with Tim

Non Verbal Scores		
Smiling	Score	Notes
Always smiled	7	
Was facially pleasant	1	
Smiled a lot	7	
Conveyed a positive affect	7	
Leaning		
Leaned towards partner	7	
Faced towards partner	7	
Sat face to face	7	
Leaned forward a lot	7	
Distance between bodies was close	3	
Distance between faces was close	4	
Agreement		
Nodded	6	
Touch	1	
Time spent touching	3 seconds	High five
Voice		
Contained vocal variety	6	
Sounded relaxed	3	Nervous laughing, appeared embarrassed
Sounded warm	7	
Sounded calm	3	
Was animated	6	
Sounded pleasant	7	

Table B.16.: Tim interacting with Mrs Wilson

<b>Non Verbal Scores</b>		
<b>Smiling</b>	<b>Score</b>	<b>Notes</b>
Always smiled	2	
Was facially pleasant	6	
Smiled a lot	2	
Conveyed a positive affect	3	
<b>Leaning</b>		
Leaned towards partner	2	
Faced towards partner	7	
Sat face to face	7	
Leaned forward a lot	2	
Distance between bodies was close	Closest 4 to 5	Varied
Distance between faces was close	Closest 4 to 5	Varied
<b>Agreement</b>		
Nodded	0	
Touch	0	Minimal 1:1 involvement
Time spent touching	0	
<b>Voice</b>		
Contained vocal variety	3	
Sounded relaxed	2	
Sounded warm	3	
Sounded calm	2	
Was animated	2	
Sounded pleasant	3	

**Table B.17.:** Mrs Wilson interacting with the whole class during an English lesson

# Appendix C.

## Researcher observations

This appendix contains two extracts from the researcher's observational notes.

### C.1. Adam: 11/10/2006 at 1:00pm

Lorna, the class teacher was keen to talk with me today. After we had got over why I was there, she was happy to talk about her experiences of Adam: she had been his class teacher for the last four years. Lorna explained that Adam takes a long time to adjust to new people and she felt that he was only now getting use to his classroom assistants: nearly a year and a half later. She was concerned that he may not adjust to me. I was very surprised by what she said as he did not seem phased by my arrival last week.

Lorna said that Adam was very passive, but this was part of his diagnosis of Autistic Spectrum Disorder. She spoke to me like I had no knowledge or maybe had never met someone with Autism..not all people with Autism are passive. I was also told that he does have a tendency to go along with things, which I will need to watch out for:

“You have to be careful. He often just goes along with things rather than saying what he wants.”

Lorna talked a lot about her son, who also has autism. Started to become unclear who she was talking about at times:

“Autism makes you passive. My son also has Autism, he is a lot older than Adam, but he is passive too. Not as much as Adam. My son likes to go around my pub talking to the customers, sometimes we talks far too much and we have to take him out back.”

FOLLOW UP: CHECK WITH SPEECH AND LANGUAGE THERAPIST HER PERCEPTIONS OF HIS FUNCTIONING

Adam has a special interest in trains. He likes to play with trains, look at books about trains and will spend hours looking up images of trains on the Internet.

Lorna explained that it was only in the last two months that Adam has begun to speak and use makaton signs. From what she was describing, it is likely that Adam was elective mute and that is only now that he feels confident to speak.

FOLLOW UP: CHECK WITH SPEECH AND LANGUAGE THERAPIST IF THERE IS A CASE HISTORY OF ELECTIVE MUTISM.

Until recently, she says that Adam has had no need to communicate with others, as people have been guilty of doing everything for him. Now he is encouraged to do more for himself and he misses out if he does not say what he wants. Adam speech is limited and still will only communicate on his terms.

“He will verbally communicate what he wants if someone has forgotten to give him a chance to say what he wants”

Lorna reported that Adam has a communication aid, but I did not see the aid or Adam use it. I asked her about its use:

“It’s easier for Adam to just verbally communicate with us. . . we don’t always remember to give him another way to communicate. Anyway I don’t think he’s very interested in his communication aid. . . he can happily tell us verbally what he wants for snack.”

I asked Lorna why she thinks Adam does not like his communication aid:

“It’s ever so expensive and really difficult to run. . . I don’t have the time to keep it updated and what would happen if it got broken? all that money.”

I believe that access is restricted because Lorna is worried about using the aid.

FIND OUT HOW ADAM FEELS ABOUT HIS COMMUNICATION AID.

Lorna reminisced on the first time that she heard Adam speak:

“It must have been September time that he was regularly talking with me verbally. He started talking earlier than that though. I remember it really clearly. We were on a school trip to the Black country museum. We took the kids in to see the Charlie Chaplin film. It was in black and white and was one of his old silent movies. It was great. Adam really loved the slapstick humour. He kept laughing when funny things happened to Charlie Chaplin. I know that was only laughter, but I had never heard him make a single sound until then. I’ll have to try and get hold of some more Charlie Chaplin films for him to watch.”

I was told that Adam has some basic literacy skills. He is able to read high-frequency words from year one and two reading lists and is able to write some words. Lorna said that, in the past, he has been able to write down his requests during snack time. I did not take any of this too literally, as I was not convinced that he would actually understand what he was reading from my limited observations of his skills.

FOLLOW UP: DOES ADAM UNDERSTAND WHAT HE IS WRITING? OR HAS HE JUST LEARNED THE PATTERNS OF WORDS?

Lorna feels that he has a good level of understanding:

“Adam has a very good understanding of language. I feel that he understands everything we say to him.”

TALK TO HIS SPEECH AND LANGUAGE THERAPIST TO SEE WHAT ASSESSMENTS HAVE BEEN COMPLETED TO ASSESS HIS LEVEL OF UNDERSTANDING- APPROACH THIS WILL CAUTION- HE WOULD NOT BE IN AN SLD SCHOOL IF HIS COMPREHENSION WAS FINE. I DO NOT WANT TO COMMUNICATE WITH HIM AT THE WRONG LEVEL AND PUT HIM OFF COMMUNICATING WITH ME.

Lorna reported that Adam tends to be more communicative in the mornings as there tends to be more structure:

“It’s a shame you come in the afternoons. Morning sessions are much more structured. You should see Adam he finishes lots of tasks in the morning. He sits at his work station and works through all the tasks we give him and he doesn’t need much help from us. He even talks with his class mates more in the morning. Mind you we do tend to use a lot more visual support in the mornings.”

I observed that there was a visual timetable on the wall in the classroom, however this did not get to referred to. Instead, members of staff verbally gave the class instructions. The class therefore relied on their staff- this will not help them to develop independence:

“Lunch is finished so it’s now time to brush your teeth.”

OBSERVE TO SEE IF THIS WAS A ONE OFF OR A REGULAR PRACTICE

After I had spoken with Lorna, I went to watch Adam and his class mates playing in the school’s splash pool. Adam was in the splash pool at school which resembled a bath tub when foam was added. Adam put on his goggles and went under the water pretending to be a shark: his hand was the fin. He swam up behind one of his class mates and splashed him gently, which made his peer laugh. This became a reciprocal interaction where they took turns to splash each other. Adam then included a classroom assistant in the activity. He sneaked up on her from under the bubbles and splashed her. Craig was the main target of his splashing, as he laughed each time Adam caught him out and then tried to get even with little success: Adam was too quick to get away.

Adam was very useful when it came to getting out of the splash pool. Andrew, one of his class mates did not want to get out of the jacuzzi: three staff in and no success. One word from Adam and a crisis is avoided.

After swimming Adam was given an activity which involved making a mosaic. Adam started the activity, but appeared to be having some difficulties. He stopped what he was doing and looked around the room trying to make eye contact with one of his teachers.

He waited until one of the staff noticed that he was not working and the member of staff had to interpret that he required help.

Once the member of staff had modelled exactly what he was meant to be doing Adam was then able to carry on with the task independently. He followed the same pattern as the teacher had done, but varied the colours. This was pretty flexible.

## **C.2. Anna: 07/02/2007 at 9:00 am**

Anna was back in school after a long period off. Today I spent some time with Anna to explain why I was at her school and see if she would like to be involved in my study. Anna positioned herself, so that she had the light behind her. She controlled the pace and the holding of the book to ensure that she could see. She pointed to the words and verbally indicated for me to read them. She spent a long time looking at the pictures of activities and people that I liked. She verbally indicated that she would like to work with me and said that she would also like a book like mine.

I asked Anna to show me things that she liked at school. With a lot of coaxing from the class teacher, she took me on a tour of the school. I was not convinced that she was showing me things that she actually liked: it was more like objects that we came across. When Anna selected an item, I checked back verbally and with symbols that if that was something that she liked. I chose not to use sign, as I felt that this may be difficult for her to see. Anna took some photographs of the objects/activities that she said that she liked. During my next session with her, I will look through the photographs with her and check if she still identifies them as things that she likes.

I talked through my observations with the class teacher. He asked if Anna had taken me to the musical instruments as she loves music and dancing. He said that when they have music lessons Anna comes alive: she performs in front of the whole class and when dancing becomes light on her feet. The class teacher instructed Anna to show me the musical instruments. Anna verbally indicated where the music cupboard was and said that she would like the keyboard. She helped me to set the keyboard up and she sat herself in front of it. She then verbally told me to sit next to her: calling me by my first name. At various points, Anna asked me to change the way that I was sitting as she could not see me properly. She did this clearly using full sentences and physically moving my chair into the best position for her.

Anna involved me at all times in what she was doing: she gave me turns on the keyboard and asked me to read all the different sound options across the top of the keyboard. When it was my turn to play badly on the keyboard, she asked me on several occasions to play slower. I wondered if this was so that she could see my hands more clearly, as there were times where she asked me to copy some of what she was playing and I felt she might have been trying to copy me:

ANNA: Caroline play

CAROLINE: (Caroline plays some random notes on the keyboard)

ANNA: Play slow (Anna then attempts to play the same tune)

I was very surprised about how talkative and welcoming Anna had been: she appeared more confident than she had done in her lessons. We set the keyboard up and Anna sat at the keyboard. She then verbally told me to sit next to her: addressing me by my first name. At various points, Anna asked me to alter the way that I was sitting, as she could not see my hands or not see the keyboard. She did this clearly using sentences and physically moving my chair to the best position for her:

“Caroline you play”

The class teacher said that this was common and that she becomes very spontaneous when music and dance are involved. She will perform to the whole class instructing them to clap along with her.

This contrast in Anna’s confidence and ability to express herself made me wonder what she would be like at her transition planning meeting. The meeting has the potential to be like the lessons where she sits with her head in her hands. I could explore how to involve music at the transition planning meeting, so that others can see this confidence and spontaneously.

During this visit I also noticed that Anna uses some echolalic speech: she repeats back sentences that she had heard other adults say. This can indicate a lack of understanding of a situation. This needs investigating further.

## Appendix D.

### Interview proforma: Young people

The interview was presented using a talking mats format. Before asking the questions, the pages in my research comic which demonstrated what a transition meeting would be like were shown so that the young person knew the topic of discussion. The following questions were asked:

1. How did the meeting make you feel?
2. Did you like or dislike talking?
3. When people used sign at the meeting did this help you?
4. When people used symbols at the meeting did this help you?
5. How did you feel about your transition comic?
6. Did the comic help you at the meeting?
7. Did you understand what was happening at the meeting?
8. How could we have helped you more at the meeting?

These are the basic questions, however in some instances the young person's response lead to further questioning that deviated from the original questions.

For question one, the young person was shown either symbols or photographs of different emotions that they may have felt. This was to help them understand what I was asking them and may have provided them with the stimuli to identify how the meeting made them feel. If the appropriate emotion was represented in the picture, the young people could point to the picture which they most associated with.

The remaining questions were also supported by symbols or photographs depending on the young person's needs. When I was asking whether the young people understood what was happening at the meeting, I used the concepts of hard and easy. I had symbols to represent both of these concepts and I mimed finding an activity hard and easy.

To ensure that the young people were giving a meaningful response the same question was asked, but using different question formats. Furthermore, the order in which symbols/photographs were presented was altered to ensure that answers were not due to

primacy effects. All concepts used in the interview were also checked before the questions were asked.

## Appendix E.

### Interview proforma: Parents and transition social worker

The following questions were used in interviews with the parents of Terri and Anna:

1. What information were you and your child given prior to the transition planning meeting?
2. What were your feelings about the information that you were provided?
3. How did you feel the transition planning meeting went?
4. Did you feel that you had a chance to express your views?
5. Did you feel that your views were listened to?
6. How did you think your child communicated their views at the transition meeting?
7. Did you feel that they were included in discussions during the meeting?
8. How do you think the meeting could be improved?
9. Is there anything else you would like to share?

The following questions were used in an interview with the transition social worker:

1. How did you feel the transition planning meeting went?
2. How did you think the young person communicated their views at the meeting?
3. Do you feel that they were included in discussion during the meeting?
4. How useful did you find the transition comics?
5. How do you think the transition meetings could have been improved?
6. Is there anything else you would like to share?

Further questions were asked if any interesting points arose that warranted further exploration.

# Appendix F.

## Coded examples of data

I have included two coded extracts. One is taken from my field notes and the other from an interview with one of the young people. Refer to Appendix G for a coded example of the video footage and to Appendix H for a coded example of a discussion with my critical friend.

The transcription conventions used in this extract are explained in Table 5.1, while the codes are listed in Appendix K.

### F.1. Sabal: 31/01/2007

CAROLINE: **My name** is Caroline. **Your name** is...? [stinitiate] [SHqu] [Dqu]  
[prompt] [modlang] [sign] [model] [vissupport] [sign]

SABAL: Sabal [part] [show]

CAROLINE: Hello Sabal. This is **my book** [*points to book and opens first page*] [vissupport]

CAROLINE: **My school** is Birmingham University [*shows a photograph of Birmingham University in research comic*] [vissupport].

CAROLINE: Sabal's schools is Glendale [*shows Sabal a photograph of his school*] [modlang] [sign] [symbols] [reducecomplex]

SABAL: [*nods*] [part] [agree] [show]

CAROLINE: **I am writing a book** [modlang] [sign] [symbols]

SABAL: [*nods*] [part] [agree] [show]

CAROLINE: Will **you help** me with **my book**? [SHqu] [Dqu] [modlang] [sign]  
[reducecomplex] (a less complicated choice of words was selected, for example book instead of thesis)

SABAL: Yes [PPC] [MAKC] [agree]

CAROLINE: **My book** is about things **you like** and **don't like** [*shows symbols that represent like and dislike*] **I like playing** with **my friends** [*points to the corresponding picture in the research comic*] Skiing [*points to picture in comic*] Going on holiday [*points to picture in comic*] [vissupport] [sign] [modlang] [sign] [symbols] [reducecomplex] [ExpF] [ExpI]

SABAL: Swimming [PPC] [ypshare] [initiate] [ExpI]

CAROLINE: **You like swimming?** [SHqu] [Dqu] [sign] [extend] [modlang] [sign]

SABAL: **yeah** [ExpF] [ExpI] [ypshare] [show]

CAROLINE: **you show me where you swim?** [SHqu] [Dqu] [modlang] [sign]

SABAL: No [disconfirm] [ypshare] [assert]

SABAL: Football [PPC] [ypshare] [initiate] [ExpI]

CAROLINE: **You like football?** [SHqu] [Dqu] [Extend] [modlang] [sign]

SABAL: Yes [agree] [part]

CAROLINE: **Show** me **what** you **like** at **school?** [SHqu] [Fqu] [modlang] [sign]

SABAL: toilet [*Sabal takes me to the toilets: no prompting was required*] [PPC] [ypshare] [MAKC] [part] [ExpF] [show]

SABAL: Like cook [*He takes me to the cookery room*] [PPC] [ypshare] [MAKC] [ExpF] [ExpI] [show]

CAROLINE: **Who** are **your friends?** [SHqu] [Fqu] [modlang] [sign]

SABAL: Like Anthony ... like Craig [PPC] [ypshare] [ExpF] [show]

SABAL: [*Craig and Anthony are in the cookery room, Sabal goes over to Anthony*] Anthony

SABAL: [*goes to Craig*] Craig

CAROLINE: Craig and Anthony are **your friends?** [SHqu] [Dqu] [extend]

SABAL: yes [agree] ... class [PPC] [MAKC] [assert] [ExpF]

CAROLINE: **You want** class? [*points in direction of classroom*] [SHqu] [Dqu] [modlang] [sign] [vissupport]

SABAL: [*walks back to classroom, I follow*] [PPC] [MAKC] [show]

MR JAMES: Was that fun Sabal? [SHqu] [Dqu] [stinitiate]

SABAL: [*smiles*]

CAROLINE: Sabal says **he likes** swimming and football [stinitiate] [extend] [modlang] [sign]

SABAL: Swimming [part]

CAROLINE: Does he swim here at school? [SHqu] [Dqu]

MR JAMES: No he swims at Crossley swimming pool [disconfirm]

CAROLINE: Do **you like** Crossley swimming pool? (directed to Sabal) [SHqu] [Dqu]  
[modlang] [sign]

SABAL: Yeah [ExpF] [ypshare] [show]

CAROLINE: **You swim** at **school** pool [Dqu] [sign] [modlang]

SABAL: No [PPC] [ypshare] [show] [*leaves the conversation and returns with a certificate*]

CAROLINE: **You did good** swimming [extend] [modlang] [sign] [encourage]

SABAL: [*smiles*]

MR JAMES: He is very good at swimming [encourage]

## F.2. Tarak: 07/03/2007

I introduced that we would be talking about meeting by showing the transition book and also referring to transition pages at the back of my communication book that represented the meeting.:

CAROLINE: **We** are going to **talk** about the meeting [modlang] [sign] [vissupport]  
[stinitiate]

TARAK: Yes [agree]

CAROLINE: **You remember** meeting? [SHqu] [Dqu] [modlang] [sign] [vissupport]  
[prompt] [check]

TARAK: Peter ... Mr James ... Caroline ... Connexions ... social lady [part] [ypex-  
tend] [show]

I used a talking mat, as I knew that I would be talking about some complex issues. I wanted to have symbol support [vissupport].

At the top of the mat, I had a picture of a meeting. I matched this to the picture in my book and his transition book to show that we were talking about the same concept [vissupport].

For my visual scale, I had symbols for like and hate [vissupport]. First I checked if she knew what they symbolised:

CAROLINE: **Which picture** is **like**? [Shqu] [Dqu] [modlang] [sign] [check]

TARAK: [*points to the correct symbol*] [show]

CAROLINE: **Which picture is hate?** [SHqu] [Dqu] [modlang] [sign] [check]

TARAK: [*points to the correct symbol*] [show]

I had already spent a lot of time prior to this using talking mats to try to help with his engagement.

First I asked Tarak:

CAROLINE: **you like** or **hate** meeting? [SHqu] [Dqu] [modlang] [sign] [vissupport] [reducecomplex]

TARAK: Lovely [*places the meeting symbol below the like symbol on the talking mat*] [PPC] [ypshare] [ExpF] [show]

CAROLINE: These are feelings. This is > [*points to the happy symbol*]

TARAK: Happy [show] [ypshare]

CAROLINE: This is > [*points to the sad symbol*] [SHqu] [Dqu] [modlang] [sign] [vissupport] [check]

TARAK: Sad [show] [ypshare]

CAROLINE: This is > [*points to the angry symbol*] [SHqu] [Dqu] [modlang] [sign] [vissupport] [check]

TARAK: Cross [show] [ypshare]

CAROLINE: And this is > [*points to the frightened symbol*] [Dqu] [modlang] [sign] [vissupport] [check]

TARAK: Silly [noshow]

CAROLINE: And this is > [*points to the worried symbol*] [Dqu] [modlang] [sign] [vissupport] [check]

TARAK: Silly [noshow]

CAROLINE: **How** did **you feel** at meeting? [SHqu] [Dqu] [modlang] [sign] [vissupport]

TARAK: Lovely [*picks up the happy symbol*] Like talking [PPC] [ypshare] [ExpF] [show]

Tarak did not understand the emotions frightened and worried, so just used happy, sad and angry [check].

CAROLINE: At meeting. . . **like** or **hate people signing?** [*shows a picture of some of the people at the meeting and a symbol of signing*]. [SHqu] [Dqu] [modlang] [sign] [vissupport] [reducecomplex]

TARAK: Like signing [*puts the signing symbol below like on the talking mat*] [PPC] [MAKC] [ypshare] [ExpF] [show]

CAROLINE: So did **you hate** or **like signing?** [SHqu] [Dqu] [modlang] [sign] [vissupport] [reducecomplex]

TARAK: Like signing [*again places the signing symbol below like on the talking mat*] [ypshare] [ExpF] [show]

I changed the order in which I said like and hate to ensure that he was not just picking the first item that he heard [check].

CAROLINE: At meeting...symbols **help**...**yes** or **no?** [*shows symbol for help and shows some of the symbols that I used in the communication book*] [SHqu] [Dqu] [modlang] [sign] [vissupport] [reducecomplex]

TARAK: Yes [ypshare] [ExpF]

CAROLINE: **Hate** symbols? [SHqu] [Dqu] [modlang] [sign] [vissupport] [check]

TARAK: No silly...like symbols [PPC] [assert] [show] [ypshare] [ExpF]

I then checked how Tarak felt about his transition book. I showed Tarak his book and said:

CAROLINE: **Like** or **hate?** [SHqu] [Dqu] [modlang] [sign] [vissupport]

TARAK: Like...happy [PPC] [ypshare] [ExpF] [show]

CAROLINE: At meeting **book help you**...**yes** or **no?** [SHqu] [Dqu] [modlang] [sign] [vissupport] [reducecomplex]

TARAK: yes [*puts book symbol below the yes symbol on the talking mat*] [PPC] [ypshare] [ExpF] [show]

CAROLINE: **You like book?** [SHqu] [Dqu] [modlang] [sign] [vissupport]

TARAK: Lovely [PPC] [ypshare] [ExpF] [show]

I then showed him a picture of some of the people at the meeting and had a symbol for talking. I asked:

CAROLINE: At meeting understand **talking?** [SHqu] [Dqu] [modlang] [sign] [vissupport] [reducecomplex]

TARAK: Happy [*I prompt him to choose which symbol reflected how he felt. He picks up the happy symbol and put it below yes on the talking mat*] [PPC] [ypshare] [ExpF] [show]

CAROLINE: At meeting need **more help?** [SHqu] [Dqu] [modlang] [sign] [vissupport]

TARAK: No...good...happy [PPC] [ypshare] [ExpF] [show]

CAROLINE: **you like more symbols?** [SHqu] [Dqu] [modlang] [sign] [vissupport]

TARAK: No [*places symbols picture below the no on the talking mat*] [PPC] [ypshare] [ExpF]  
[show]

## Appendix G.

### Video footage transcription

This extract is of coded video transcription data which was recorded on the 23/03/2007. The transcription conventions used in this extract are explained in Table 5.1, while the codes are listed in Appendix K.

CLASS TEACHER: We are going to do the>

PUPILS: [*All pupils are looking at the class teacher. Tim makes eye contact on and off and then puts his head in his lap*]

CLASS TEACHER: [*holds up the register and a symbol from the visual timetable*] [Shqu] [Fqu] [proclose] [actclause] [prompt] [closeprox]

CHRISTINE: Register [ypshare] [show]

CLASS TEACHER: Register> That's good talking there, \*thank you\*> let's put the register back up then> [*puts the register symbol back on the visual timetable*] it's \*time\* to take the register> [*Mark is looking away from the teacher*] so what... we are doing some \***good**\* *sitting*... we are doing some> \*Mark\* good \*looking\* please [*Mark looks back at the teacher*]... we are going to do some \***good** si\* *sitting*... [sign] [vissupport] [modlang] [extend] [Shqu] [Fqu] [prompt] [encourage] [exagpron] [closeprox] [proclose] [actclause]

TIM: Sitting [show] [ypshare] [closeprox]

CLASS TEACHER: doing some \***good**\* **sitting**, doing some \***good**\*> [extend] [sign] [modlang] [exagpron] [Shqu] [Fqu] [prompt] [closeprox]

CLASS TEACHER AND TIM: **looking** (only signed by teacher) [sign] [*Christine is looking out the window. Laura is looking at Christine*]

MARK: looking [ypshare] [show] [closeprox] [ypextend]

CLASS TEACHER: And we are going to do some \***good**\* *listening*> [*Christine's attention flits between the teacher and outside*] [Dqu] [exagpron] [sign] [prompt] [closeprox] [proclose] [actclause]

MARK: **listening** [ypshare] [show] [ypextend] [closeprox]

CLASS TEACHER: \*That's a big word there Mark, thank you\* [*Said really enthusiastically*] > and we are going to be **listening** for our *names*. . . . . [sign] [modlang] [exagpron] [prompt] [proclose] [actclause] [encourage] [check] [closeprox]

SHONA: (unintelligible word)

CLASS TEACHER: \*Names\* [exagpron]

SHONA: Names [imitate] [closeprox]

CLASS TEACHER: And then we are going to say **\*good morning\*** Mrs> W [sign] [vissupport] [modlang] [proclose] [closeprox] [exagpron] [prompt] [check]

CHRISTINE: Mrs Wilson [yshare] [ypextend] [closeprox]

CLASS TEACHER: Mrs Wilson. OK so are we ready? Are you \*ready James?\*. . . that's the end of term there. . . feels like a good one to do [*says this whilst laughing. Tim sees the class teacher laughing so laughs himself*] [ignore] [sign] [modlang] [Dqu] [prompt] [prodistant] [imitate]

CLASSROOM ASSISTANT: [*laughs*] [agree]

CLASS TEACHER: OK listening for our \*names\*. . . **good morning** Mark [sign] [exagpron]

MARK: Morning. . . Mrs Wilson [*maintains eye contact with class teacher*] [show]

CLASS TEACHER: Mrs Wilson. Do you want to give me a high five? [*raises hand for high five, Mark sees hand, gets up and gives the teacher a high five*] Thank you, good to see you. . . . . **good morning** Andrew [*Andrew turns and makes eye contact with Mrs Wilson once he hears his name*] [Dqu] [prodistant] [prompt] [vissupport] [encourage] [sign] [stinitiate]

ANDREW: Good morning Mrs Wilson [*zAlex puts his hand up to high five the teacher*] [ypinitiate] [show]

CLASS TEACHER: Good to see you, do you want to shake hands? That's fine. . . good to see you [*Anna enters classroom*] Good morning Anna, are \*you coming to join us?\* [ignore] [Dqu] [exagpron] [encourage]

ANNA: yes [ypshare] [show]

CLASSROOM ASSISTANT: Anna do you want to go and sit over there? [*Anna sits where she has been directed to sit*] [Dqu] [vissupport]

CLASS TEACHER: **Good morning** \*James\*, **thank you**, would you like to give me five? [*James has yet to sit down. He is pacing around the classroom*] Shall **I come to you?** Or are you coming round? [*James walks to the teacher and gives her a high five then resumes pacing the room*] Give me five. . . \*thank you\*, good stuff. . . OK. . . **good morning** Tim [*Tim makes eye contact with the teacher and*

*maintains it until the teacher says good to see you and then he giggles* [sign] [exagpron]  
[Dqu] [ExpF]

TIM: Good morning Mrs Wilson [*class teacher instigates a high five with Thomas and they high five*] [show] [stinitiate] [vissupport]

CLASS TEACHER: Good to see you. . . . . Terri. . . is \*Terri\* here? [Dqu] [exagpron]  
[encourage] [modlang]

PUPIL: Ugh

CLASS TEACHER: Has anyone **seen** *where* \*Terri?\* [Dqu] [exagpron] [sign] [modlang] [check]

SEVERAL PUPILS: No [ypshare]

CLASS TEACHER: \*No\* [exagpron]

CHRISTINE: Not at school [ypextend] [ypshare] [show] [ignore]

CLASS TEACHER: She must be at *home*> [extend] [sign] [prompt]

SEVERAL PUPILS: Home [ypshare] [show]

CLASS TEACHER: \*Home\* [exagpron]

ANDREW: Not see her this morning [ypextend] [ypshare] [show]

CLASS TEACHER: Anna, **good morning** [ignore] [sign]

ANNA: Good morning to you Mrs Wilson [*gets up and initiates a high five with the teacher. They high five*] [show] [ypinitiate] [prodistant]

CLASS TEACHER: Good morning to you Anna, good to see you. . . . . Shona, **good morning** [encourage] [imitate] [sign]

SHONA: **Orning** [ypshare] [show]

CLASS TEACHER: **Good morning** \*Mrs\*. . . Wilson [extend] [sign] [exagpron]

SHONA: Wilson *morning* [ypshare] [show]

CLASS TEACHER: OK, give me five [*puts hand up. They high five, but Shona stays in her chair and the teacher has to go to Shona. Shona gives a big smile and appears excited when they high five*] [stinitiate] [ExpF]

SHONA: Yeah

CLASS TEACHER: Good to see you

SHONA: Yeah

CLASS TEACHER: **Good morning** Christine [*Christine is looking out of the window*] [sign]

ANNA: Good morning Mrs Wilson [*Christine is still looking out of the window*] [interrupt]

CHRISTINE: Good morning Mrs Wilson [*makes fleeting eye contact with the teacher*] [show] [ypshare]

CLASS TEACHER: [*laughing*] That was good and that was **good looking** as well. Thank you. Do you want to give me five? [*puts hand up for high five. They high five*] \*good to see ya\* [*follows Laura's face to make eye contact with her*]. . . And **good morning** Laura [*Laura moves head to face the class teacher*] [encourage] [sign] [Dqu] [stinitiate] [exagpron]

LAURA: [*Unintelligible vocalisation*] [shpw]

CLASS TEACHER: \*Laura look at Mrs Wilson. Not a pretty sight on a Friday.\* [*Laura puts hand up and initiates a high five. They high five*] \*Good morning. Good morning to you, that was good looking then\*. . . Ok. . . so we got the register done. . . what is this register? Another register, what do we sing? [*holds up the dinner register and the class look at the register*] [exagpron] [prompt] [ypinitiate] [Fqu] [vissupport]

SEVERAL PUPILS: Dinner, Dinner, Batman [*Andrew, Tim and Anna sing along with teacher. Andrew punches arm up in air and gives a big smile. The pupils that are not singing are smiling*] [ExpF] [part]

CLASS TEACHER: Dinner, Dinner, Dinner, Dinner [extend] [check]

SEVERAL PUPILS: Batman [show]

CLASS TEACHER: \*The dinner register. . . the dinner register\* [exagpron]

SHONA: Ah yi dinner

CLASS TEACHER: OK again we will be listening for our > [prompt]

ANDREW: Names [show] [ypshare]

CLASS TEACHER: And we are going to say? . . . . . I'm going to say do you want a **\*dinner\*** and you are going to say **\*yes please\*** or **\*no\*** thank you [*Tim nods his head in agreement*]. . . Ok listening for our \*names\* again. . . \*Mark\* would you like a dinner *dinner*? [*Mark makes eye contact when he hears his name*] [Fqu] [passclause] [sign] [exagpron] [prompt] [support] [check]

MARK: **Yes, yes please** [ypshare] [show] [MAKC]

CLASS TEACHER: Thank you very much, OK. . . . . we have the menu here?. I wonder [*the teacher is handed the menu*] what Mark would like? . . . What do we have on Friday? [Fqu] [Dqu] [vissupport]

TIM: Chips [show] [ypshare]

CLASS TEACHER: Chips. Well done Tim [*Tim puts his head in his lap and giggles when given praise*]. We have fish fingers and chips, lasagna, jacket potatoes or pizza [encourage] [ExpF]

ANDREW: Pizza [*He is pleased and excited face- mouth wide open. Tim is looking at the wall behind him and Christina is still looking out of the window*] [MAKC] [ExpF] [ypshare]

CLASS TEACHER: So those are your choices, going to be your choices, OK \*Andrew\* would you like a **dinner?** [ignore] [Dqu] [exagpron] [sign]

ANDREW: Yes please [*makes good eye contact with the teacher*] [show] [ypshare] [MAKC]

CLASS TEACHER: What do you fancy? [Fqu]

ANDREW: I think Pizza and chips [MAKC] [ypshare] [ypextend]

CLASS TEACHER: You think fish fingers and chips or pizza? [ignore] [Dqu]

ANDREW: Yes [agree]

CLASS TEACHER: Yes, that sounds good. \*James\* would you like a **dinner?** [*James turns away from what he was doing and faces the class teacher*] [Dqu] [sign] [exagpron]

JAMES: *Yes please* [show] [MAKC] [ypshare] [distantprox]

CLASS TEACHER: **\*Yes please\***. That's **\*good signing\***. **\*Thank you\***. [imitate] [sign] [exagpron] [encourage]

ANNA: Thank you very much [interrupt]

CLASS TEACHER: \*Tim\* would you like a **dinner?** [ignore] [exagpron] [sign]

TIM: Yes please [*looks at the teacher and nods his head*] [MAKC] [Show] [ypshare]

CLASS TEACHER: What would you like? [Fqu]

TIM: Pizza [MAKC] [ypshare] [show]

CLASS TEACHER: You fancy Pizza. Terri?... \*Does Terri want a dinner?\* [extend] [Dqu] [exagpron] [check]

LAURA: No [show] [ypshare]

CLASS TEACHER: \*No. Good talking there\* because she is at \*home\* isn't she?... \*Anna\*, would Anna like a **dinner?** [encourage] [check] [exagpron] [sign]

ANNA: **Yes please** [*also attempts to sign, but inaccurate sign*] [MAKC] [ypshare] [show]

CLASS TEACHER: And what does Anna think she'd like? [Fqu]

ANNA: Chips [MAKC] [ypshare] [show]

CLASS TEACHER: You are going to have a sandwich are you? With a bit of \*salad do you think?\* [ignore] [Dqu] [exagpron]

ANNA: Yes [agree]

CLASS TEACHER: That's good. That's *\*good\** to hear. . . *\*Shona\** would you like a **dinner?** [*Shona turns and makes eye contact with the teacher*] [encourage] [exagpron] [sign]

SHONA: Yeah [MAKC] [ypshare] [show]

CLASS TEACHER: **Yes please** [extend] [sign]

SHONA: Egg [MAKC] [ypshare] [show]

CLASS TEACHER: You like. I know you like egg. *\*Egg\**. **\*Egg\*** is your favorite. It's **\*fantastic\*** isn't it? [Dqu] [sign] [modlang] [extend]

SHONA: Chips [ignore] [MAKC] [ypshare]

ANDREW: And me [agree] [interrupt] [show] [ypshare]

CLASS TEACHER: You are going to have some chips? Chips or pizza or fish fingers? [ignore] [Dqu]

SHONA: Pizza yeah [*Christine is giggling*] [MAKC] [ypshare]

CLASS TEACHER: Pizza. OK. I put it in the wrong. . . It's a hanging offense. . . *\*Christine\** what you like for **dinner?** [Fqu] [sign] [complang]

CHRISTINE: Ugh [*Moves head and makes fleeting eye contact with class teacher*]

CLASS TEACHER: What do you think? [Fqu]

CHRISTINE: Beef burgers [MAKC] [ypshare] [show]

CLASS TEACHER: You like burgers? I don't think there on the menu today. You've got Pizza or fish fingers? [extend] [Dqu] [disconfirm]

CHRISTINE: Pizza [MAKC] [ypshare]

CLASS TEACHER: Pizza. So you would like a dinner? So that's a *yes please*> [extend] [prompt] [sign] [check]

CHRISTINE: **Yes please** [show] [MAKC] [sign]

CLASS TEACHER: Yes [confirm]

ANDREW: I have the same as you [confirm] [ypshare] [part]

CLASS TEACHER: [*coughs*] Excuse me. . . And *\*Laura\**. Would Laura like a **\*dinner?\*** [ignore] [exagpron] [sign]

LAURA: **Yes** [*moves head to look at the teacher*] [MAKC] [ypshare] [show] [sign]

CLASS TEACHER: **Yes** that was \*good **signing**\* there Laura. \*Thank you\*. Yes please. Shall we do some counting to see how many pupils we have for dinner? [exagpron] [sign] [encourage] [Dqu] [complang]

LAURA: [puts arms in the air] [show] [agree]

ANDREW: Yes [agree]

CLASS TEACHER: Ready? We are going to start with Andrew [Dqu] [proclose]

ANNA: Andrew [imitiate] [interrupt]

CLASS TEACHER: We start with number> [puts one finger in the air] [proclose] [prompt] [vissupport]

SHONA: One [puts one finger in the air] [part] [show]

CLASS TEACHER: \*One\*. Well done. [encourage]

SHONA: Two [part] [show]

CLASS TEACHER: Well done. Are we all going to count together? [encourage] [Dqu]

CLASS TEACHER AND PUPILS: One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight [*the class teacher points to each pupil in turn. Christine copies the teacher's hand movement, but after several pupils stops joining in*] [vissupport]

CLASS TEACHER: \*Eight pupils for dinner>\* [exagpron] [sign] [check]

CLASS TEACHER AND TIM: \***Dinner**\* [*Class teacher uses exaggerated pronunciation and is the only person to sign*] [exagpron] [sign]

CLASSROOM ASSISTANT: Dinner

SHONA: Yeah

CLASS TEACHER: Yeah. . . . . so . . .

PUPIL: [*sneezes*]

## Appendix H.

### Discussion with critical friend

The extract below is a coded example of a discussion that took place between my critical friend and I. The discussion took place on the 06/03/2007 at 3:00pm. This particular discussion was about Peter's communication style during the transition meetings.

CAROLINE: I would like to talk about the transition meetings that Peter chaired. His behaviour really surprised me.

HELEN: What happened?

CAROLINE: Firstly, he dominated the meeting. He spoke for the majority of the time and everyone else only had a short amount of time to speak [domturn]. The other professionals then were given the next longest turn and the young people had the least amount of time to speak.

HELEN: When he was talking what was he talking about?

CAROLINE: He was talking about what would happen during the transition process [stshare] . . . I know this is important, but this information was sent out to the families prior to the meeting. It was a repetition and meant that the young peoples' futures could not be discussed in any detail [domturn]. Umm . . . It was a little bit preachy. He spoke a lot about how important and how great the professionals were at the meeting [profagents]. In fact, I found the meeting to be very professionally centred.

HELEN: What other ways did you find the meeting to be professionally centred?

CAROLINE: The fact that the professionals had more time to talk than the young people [domturn] . . . also come to think of it when he was asking questions to the young people he never actually made eye contact with them [ignore] [disprox]. He made eye contact with a professional instead [profagents] . . . His language was also pretty complex [complang]. He used lots of jargon and professional language [techlang] [powerlang] that the young people would not have understood and he spoke in really long and complex sentences [powersyntax]. Quite a bit of the language he used wasn't needed, you know empty language [complang]?

HELEN: Ummm

CAROLINE: He also used no visual support... he didn't sign once or alter his communication in any way to include the young people [complang]. It may have been unwitting or not... I don't know, but the way that he interacted with the young people suggested that he did not believe that they had the right to speak or to be listened to [ignore]. Anna's staff forgot to bring her to the meeting... Peter was happy for the meeting to start without her... I had to put my foot down and say we must wait [ignore].

HELEN: How did his behaviour affect the dynamics of the meeting?

CAROLINE: Apart from being more professional centred than it should have been... I felt like he was trying to overly control the meeting [domturn]. I know that he was the chair person... but... I mean I felt that he had too much power over everyone. Firstly, there was the problem with unequal turn taking [domturn] ... he got to speak the most. This suggests to me that he felt that his role was the most important. When he was talking with the professionals he spoke to them face to face, but he never made face to face contact with me or the young people [ignore] [disprox]. This again told me that he did not think we were very important. He also stood up when he was talking... it was like a speech... this made me feel uncomfortable as he was towering over us [barriers].

HELEN: Are there any alternative ways of interpreting his role?

CAROLINE: I don't know ... maybe he felt insecure. He was always saying how great the professionals were [profagent] and trying to emulate them in the language that he used [techlang] ... Maybe he wanted to show them that he is as knowledgeable and important as they are. Transition meetings are very professional centred and maybe he was trying to ensure that he was meaningfully included. This was at the expense of the young people though. I suppose the social workers are the purse holders and he wanted to impress them with his knowledge ... I don't think that he needed to feel insecure because not many of the professionals intervened when he was being too dominant... mind you the social worker did suggest that he should let one of the young people speak [decideturn], but I felt this was too late as the meeting was nearly over ... as soon as the request was made he let the young person speak [decideturn] ... this also showed how much he rated professional opinion.

CAROLINE: Maybe he communicated in the way that he did... you know long complex sentences [powersyntax] [complang] and jargon [techlang] because that is the way that he usually talks at transition meetings. This is the first time that the young people have attended their transition meeting... maybe he was unsure what to do to include them, so he just chaired the meeting how he normally would.

HELEN: Why don't you think that there was more intervention from professionals if he was being so obviously dominant?

CAROLINE: ... I suppose he had the role of the chair, which has its own rules... you are put in charge. Maybe they didn't want to disrespect his role [profagents]. Or maybe they did not really see anything wrong with how the meeting was conducted... maybe this type of chairing is the norm, so it was no surprise or they did not see anything wrong with it. I know that at work we don't get much praise... maybe they liked hearing how valued they are. I could imagine that may make them feel good.

HELEN: You said before that his behaviour surprised you. Why was it a surprise?

CAROLINE: I suppose I just assumed that because he had been given the role of transition co-ordinator that he would be pro-active and include the young people. When he talks about transition he talks about how good the school are at including the young people at transition, but I did not see this in his behaviour. Also, I have seen him interact with some of his students. He can include them and he is a pretty good signer. He did not sign at all during the meeting.

HELEN: That's interesting. Maybe that would be something to talk about with him... You do have to remember that because someone has been given a role it does not necessarily mean that they agree with what they are meant to be achieving.

CAROLINE: I guess not. I was just surprised as Mary and the head really get the idea of including young people. They were very enthusiastic about my research and made sure that I had whatever I needed for my study to work. I don't understand why they choose someone that does not share their views. Maybe he convinced them that he did when he knew that he didn't, or maybe when he took the job he was not aware that he held this belief, or maybe he is unwittingly excluding the young people.

HELEN: Maybe they felt that if he was involved in a project where he would have to meet and discuss transition planning that it would change the way that he works.

CAROLINE: Do you mean they were showing him a different way of working in the hope that it would alter some of his practices? I suppose this could be true. When I spoke to Mary, she asked me a lot of probing questions about the meetings and how Peter chaired them. She was not very surprised by some of the issues I raised. I mean... I think then they should have monitored what was happening more if they had concerns that he could co-ordinate transition planning in a way that was not consistent with their views.

# Appendix I.

## Transcription reliability

To ensure that my transcription of the video footage was reliable, both my critical friend and I transcribed the same recorded interaction and then discussed any differences that may have occurred in our transcriptions. Any differences that did occur, were then discussed and a common transcription was negotiated. A summary of the discussion between my critical friend and I is at the end of this Appendix.

The transcription conventions used in this extract are explained in Table 5.1.

### I.1. Extract of my transcribed footage

ANDREW: I'm not here tomorrow, 'cos I've gone and got, I've got, I've got, I've holiday [*faces the class teacher when he is talking to her*]

CLASS TEACHER: I was going to ask you to tell us in a minute, can we just finish the register off?

ANDREW: Yes I know

CLASS TEACHER: That's OK

ANDREW: You write in my book?

CLASS TEACHER: Yes. I've kept it all there I think [*points to where she thinks the book is kept*]

CLASSROOM ASSISTANT: I've got it. I'm sorry it was me. Who the hell's reading his>

CLASS TEACHER: \*Who is sitting smartly?\* Who is sitting smartly to take the register? [*sits up straight to demonstrate sitting smartly and holds up the register for the class to see*]

SHONA: Ah me

CLASS TEACHER: I think Mark is. Mark would you like to take the register please?  
[holds out the register in Mark's direction]

ANDREW: Go on Mark

MARK: A wi a wi away... see you later mate [leaves the room]

CLASS TEACHER: OK. Thank you. Today. What day is it \*today\*? [claps her hands together]

TIM: Friday

CLASS TEACHER: What? It's \*Friday\* isn't it?

TIM: Isn't it? [nods his head and looks at the teacher. He then looks away at the wall. Shona approaches him and puts her face very close to his]

CLASS TEACHER: Yep and \*tomorrow\* is ssss Saturday isn't it? And Andrew is doing something very special tomorrow. Would you like to tell us what you are going to do? [Whilst saying ssss the class teacher finger spells S]

ANDREW: A yes is Miss just going to read it? [points to his home/school diary which is next to the class teacher]

CLASS TEACHER: Can I read it? Yes. \*Andrew\* is very excited this morning as he is going to \*Donald Hall\* tomorrow for WINGS residential. He has brought some \*Beano magazines\* in for Mrs Scales

ANDREW: Yes done that [points in the direction of Mrs Scales' classroom]

CLASS TEACHER: Yes you have done that job, so have a really good time... So are you going with your friends?

ANDREW: Yes

CLASS TEACHER: Yes... That's super. Thanks for sharing that with us. OK?... So we have now \*finished\* [Andrew nods his head as the class teacher says thank you for sharing]

## 1.2. Extract of critical friend's transcribed video footage

ANDREW: I'm not here tomorrow, 'cos I've gone and got, I've got, [unintelligible vocalisation] I've holiday [turns and attempts to make eye contact with his teacher]

CLASS TEACHER: I was going to ask you to tell us in a minute, can we just finish the register off? [said in a sharp voice]

ANDREW: Yes I know

CLASS TEACHER: That's OK

ANDREW: You write in my book?

CLASS TEACHER: Yes. I've kept it all there I think [*points to the chair next to her*]

CLASSROOM ASSISTANT: I've got it. I'm sorry it was me. Who the hell's reading his [*does not finish sentence*]

CLASS TEACHER: Who is *\*sitting smartly?\** Who is sitting smartly to take the register? [*sits up straight in her chair and picks up the register and shows the register to the class*]

SHONA: Me

CLASS TEACHER: I think Mark is. Mark would you like to take the register please? [*holds out the register to Mark, but he makes no attempt to take it off her*]

ANDREW: Go on Mark [*Mark then takes the register from the teacher*]

MARK: A wee a wee away

ANDREW: See you later mate [*Mark leaves the room*]

CLASS TEACHER: OK. Thank you. Today, What day is it today?

TIM: Friday

CLASS TEACHER: What? It's *\*Friday\** isn't it?

TIM: Isn't it? [*nodding his head. Shona gets up and puts her face in close proximity to Tim's*]

CLASS TEACHER: Yep and tomorrow is **S** Saturday isn't it? And Andrew is doing something very special tomorrow. Would you like to tell us what you are going to do? [*uses finger spelling to accompany vocal production of s*]

ANDREW: Ah yes is Miss just going to read it? [*points to a book on the chair next to his teacher*]

CLASS TEACHER: Can I read it? Yes. *\*Andrew\** is very excited this morning as he is going to *\*Donald Hall\** tomorrow for WINGS residential. He has brought some Bea no magazines in for Mrs Scales

ANDREW: Yes done that [*points to the classroom door*]

CLASS TEACHER: Yes you have done that job, so have a *\*really good time\**... So are you going with your friends?

ANDREW: Yes

CLASS TEACHER: Yes... That's super. Thanks for sharing that with us. OK?... So we have now *\*finished\** [*Andrew nods his head whilst the teacher is talking*]

### 1.3. Agreed transcription of video footage

ANDREW: I'm not here tomorrow, 'cos I've gone and got, I've got, I've got, I've got, I've holiday<sup>1</sup> [*turns and attempts to make eye contact with his teacher*]<sup>A</sup>

CLASS TEACHER: I was going to ask you to tell us in a minute, can we just finish the register off?<sup>B</sup>

ANDREW: Yes I know

CLASS TEACHER: That's OK

ANDREW: You write in my book?

CLASS TEACHER: Yes. I've kept it all there I think [*points to the book on the chair next to her*]<sup>C</sup>

CLASSROOM ASSISTANT: I've got it. I'm sorry it was me. Who the hell's reading his>

CLASS TEACHER: \*Who is sitting smartly?\*<sup>D</sup> Who is sitting smartly to take the register?

SHONA: Me<sup>2</sup>

CLASS TEACHER: I think Mark is. Mark would you like to take the register please? [*holds out the register to Mark, but Mark fails to take it from her*]<sup>E</sup>

ANDREW: Go on Mark [*Mark takes the register*]<sup>F</sup>

MARK: A wi a wi away<sup>3</sup>

ANDREW: See you later mate<sup>4</sup> [*Mark leaves the room*]

CLASS TEACHER: OK. Thank you. Today. What day is it today?

TIM: Friday

CLASS TEACHER: What? It's \*Friday\* isn't it?

TIM: Isn't it?

CLASS TEACHER: Yep and tomorrow is **S**<sup>5</sup> Saturday isn't it? And Andrew is doing something very special tomorrow. Would you like to tell us what you are going to do? [*finger spells S*]

ANDREW: A yes is Miss just going to read it? [*points to the book on the chair next to the class teacher*]<sup>G</sup>

CLASS TEACHER: Can I read it? Yes. \*Andrew\* is very excited this morning as he is going to \*Donald Hall\* tomorrow for WINGS residential. He has brought some \*Bea no magazines\*<sup>H</sup> in for Mrs Scales

ANDREW: Yes done that

CLASS TEACHER: Yes you have done that job, so have a really \*good time\*... So are you going with your friends?

ANDREW: Yes

CLASS TEACHER: Yes... That's super. Thanks for sharing that with us. OK?... So we have now **\*finished\***[*Andrew nods his head*]<sup>1</sup>

## 1.4. Summary of discussion about transcription of video footage

- <sup>1</sup> After a second listen of the video footage we agreed that the unintelligible vocalisation was a repetition of the phrase 'I've got'.
- <sup>2</sup> It was decided that the 'Ah' was not said by Shona, but one of the other pupils. We were unable to identify which pupil made this vocalisation.
- <sup>3</sup> We realised that we meant the same transcription. We had used different methods to transcribe the same sound.
- <sup>4</sup> After close examination, I identified that it was not Mark that said 'see you later mate'. From a process of elimination, we agreed that Andrew must have said this. He had his back to the camera at the time, but none of the other pupils were talking.
- <sup>5</sup> After a further listen we agreed that the teacher made a continuous 'S' sound rather than four short 'S' sounds.
- <sup>A</sup> This was a more accurate description as eye contact was not actually made with class teacher. When Andrew was talking to her, she did not attempt to make eye contact with him.
- <sup>B</sup> We decided that the class teacher did not speak in an obviously sharp voice. Helen felt that she may have imposed her own meaning on the utterance as she felt the what the teacher said was a little abrupt considering Andrew was trying to share his views.
- <sup>C</sup> I could not be sure that it was the home school diary. I was filling in what I thought it should be.
- <sup>D</sup> After a second listen together, we decided that the whole sentence was said in an exaggerated way. However, 'sitting smartly' did stand out more as it was said in a slightly louder voice.
- <sup>E</sup> Forgot to include that Mark had failed to take the register from the class teacher.

- <sup>F</sup> Forgot to include that Mark had taken the register from the class teacher.
- <sup>G</sup> Same point as <sup>C</sup>
- <sup>H</sup> After a second listen we agreed that 'Beano magazines' was also said with an exaggerated pronunciation.
- <sup>I</sup> We agreed that the nod lasted longer than the duration of the class teacher saying 'thanks for sharing with us'.

We found that there were only small discrepancies in our transcription. The majority of discrepancies were found in the non verbal communication as there was more of this occurring than verbal communication. We agreed that the discrepancies did not affect the overall understanding on the video footage.

## **Appendix J.**

### **Non-verbal rating scales reliability**

To ensure the reliability of my rating of the non-verbal communication of the young people and stakeholders in this study, I checked my rating of the data against my critical friend's rating of the same interaction. Table J.1 shows my rating of the interaction between Anna and Mrs Wilsons using the rating scales of Guerrero (2005) side-by-side with my critical friend's rating of the same data.

#### **Summary of discussion of rating scales**

Helen and I had a high level of agreement for the majority of the behaviours. We both felt that the frequency of smiling, touch and nodding were easy to identify and hard to disagree upon, especially as there were not many instances within this interaction.

Agreement was also straightforward when assessing body orientation. In this interaction, the young people had been sat in specific seating positions which made the distance between bodies and faces easy to identify. The young people stayed in their positions for the majority of the time and there was minimal moving around. Before rating the interaction we agreed that each point on the scale equaled six inches (in the methodology chapter I stated that six inches was considered close proximity, so a score of 7). This gave us an objective measure to decide on body orientation.

My critical friend and I both felt that Anna sounded very relaxed, hence the score of 7. The volume of her voice and her use of intonation were what we would expect during an interaction where the person was feeling relaxed. No erratic behaviour was observed even though she did at times sound enthusiastic. We decided that enthusiasm was not an indicator of whether someone was calm or not.

The same scores were also given for animation, vocal variety and vocal pleasantness. On the whole, we felt that Anna used a lot of gesture when communicating and she spoke with varied intonation patterns rather than in a monotone voice. We both agreed that the full 7 could not be given, as there were a couple of occasions where Anna did uncharacteristically sound monotone. However, these were not frequent enough to warrant a lower score.

Non Verbal Scores				
	Myself		Critical Friend	
	Score	Notes	Score	Notes
<b>Smiling</b>				
Always smiled	1		1	
Was facially pleasant	4		4	
Smiled a lot	1		1	
Conveyed a positive affect	4		4	
<b>Leaning</b>				
Leaned towards partner	6		5	
Faced towards partner	7		7	
Sat face to face	7		7	
Leaned forward a lot	5		5	
Distance between bodies was close	4		4	
Distance between faces was close	5		5	
<b>Agreement</b>				
Nodded	0		0	
Touch	1		1	
Time spent touching	3 seconds	High five	3 seconds	High five
<b>Voice</b>				
Contained vocal variety	6		6	
Sounded relaxed	7		7	
Sounded warm	7		4	
Sounded calm	7		7	
Was animated	6		6	
Sounded pleasant	7		7	

**Table J.1.:** Rating of 'Anna interacting with Mrs Wilson' by myself and critical friend

We both struggled with the rating of facial pleasantness. I found it difficult to provide a rating either way and therefore opted for a middle ground of 4. Due to her specific facial appearance, which lacked in facial expression, we found it difficult to decide how she felt. I was quite aware that my existing knowledge of the young person was affecting my ability to rate the data. In contrast, my critical friend did not have the same degree of insider knowledge when it came to this particular young person, so provided a different rating. She felt that the lack of expression made Anna appear more facially unpleasant. The lack of facial expression made her feel more uncomfortable. Helen decided that she would prefer the score to be put as a 4 as this reflected how difficult it was to make a judgment. This same discrepancy was evident when we discussed whether the face conveyed positive or negative affect.

There was a slight difference in our ratings of how much Anna leaned forward during the interaction. However, we both agreed in general that she was leaning more than she was not. When we looked at Anna's score in relation to the scores of others, I realised that I may have been slightly too generous and that she had not leaned as much as some of her peers.

There was some discrepancy in our ratings of whether Anna's voice sounded warm. On balance, we both felt that I may have been influenced by the type of things that Anna was saying rather than voice alone. Helen said that she found it difficult to make a judgment on the warmth of voice and opted for a middle ground of 4. After some negotiation, we decided that a score of 5 would reflect my belief that there was warmth in Anna's voice, but also show that it was not completely straight forward to identify.

# Appendix K.

## Directory of codes

This appendix lists all the themes that were explored when analysing the data. Each theme is defined, exemplified and given a corresponding code. Each of the codes were applied to data collected from the transition planning meetings as well as other contexts. The codes [TPM] and [OC] were used to distinguish between these contexts. For example:

MARY: Sabal has done **good work** [TPM]

SABAL: Smiles

Or

CLASS TEACHER: What does Anna think she'd like? [OC] [circletime]

ANNA: Chips

CLASS TEACHER: You are going to have a sandwich are you? With a bit of \*salad do you think?\*

ANNA: Yes

CLASS TEACHER: That's \*good\*, that's good to hear

Each utterance recorded was labelled with the initials of the individual who produced the utterance for easy identification. For example:

SOCIAL WORKER: What would you like to do when you finish school? [SW]

The codes have been divided into sections depending on which stage of the coding procedure they relate to in Chapter 4.

### K.1. Codes used in stage one

The codes presented in this section were assigned to the research data during the first stage of the coding procedure. The themes exemplified in this section correspond with the literature presented in Sections 2.3.4 and 3.4.1.

### **K.1.1. Personal power at transition meeting [PPT]**

Personal power is when someone is able to take steps in becoming independent and autonomous. This can include: demonstrating a capacity to make choices; having the communication skills to speak out; being assertive about their choices; and having a sense of self. This code was used when identifying examples of personal power during the transition planning meetings. For example:

PETER: What if Terri was to work with the smaller children for work experience?

TERRI: No (also shook her head) [PPT]

CLASS TEACHER: Terri said she liked cooking. What about helping in the kitchen?

TERRI: Yes (Became very excited) [PPT]

Personal power was a broader theme of the research and one of the initial codes used to analyse the data. The examples identified were then more narrowly coded for specific examples of how personal power was exhibited.

### **K.1.2. Personal power in other contexts [PPC]**

This code was used when identifying examples of personal power outside of the context of the transition planning meeting, for example:

“Adam was making a mosaic pattern on a pot with gum paper squares. He was clearly having some difficulty sticking some of the squares. One of the class assistants attempted to intervene and help him stick some of the squares. Adam pushed her hand away [PPC] and carried on trying to stick the squares independently.”

### **K.1.3. Not demonstrating personal power at the transition planning meeting [NPPT]**

This code was used when the young people exhibited behaviour that did not demonstrate personal power during their transition planning meeting. For instance if the young person failed to communicate their choices, or did not communicate in an assertive manner. There were no specific examples of this during the transition planning meetings.

### **K.1.4. Not demonstrating personal power in other contexts [NPPC]**

This code was used when the young people exhibited behaviour that did not demonstrate personal power in other contexts, for instance if the young person failed to communicate their choices or did not communicate in an assertive manner. An example of this is:

“During circle time and science Anna came across as very passive. She was very quiet and did not make any spontaneous contributions to discussions [NPPC]. She would respond to a direct question, but not always. When she did respond to questions she replied mainly using single words and their were a number of instances of immediate echolalia [NPPC]. In the science lesson, she sat there for the majority of the time with her face in her hands [NPPC].”

## K.2. Codes used in stages two and three

The codes presented in this Section were assigned to the research data during the second of the coding procedure. After each example, I have cross referenced the theme with the corresponding literature from the literature review chapters. The codes that were recorded during stage three of the coding procedure are also shown in this section. They are presented as further subsections of the stage two themes.

### K.2.1. Participation [part]

Examples of the young people joining in with a conversation or an activity. For example:

TRANSITION SOCIAL WORKER: What do you **like**?

SABAL: Like swimming. . . like football [part]

In Sections 3.4.1, 3.5.1, 3.5.2, 3.6.2 and 3.7.

### Young people extending contributions [ypextend]

Instances where the young people extended the contributions made by other stakeholders were recorded. For instance when a stakeholder started a discussion did the young person continue with the subject rather than changing the subject to an issue they wished to discuss? An example of this is:

SABAL: like PC Plum. . . Balamory [ypextend]

CAROLINE: You **watch** on television?

SABAL: funny (laughs) [ypextend]

This code was recorded once instances of participation had been identified.

### **K.2.2. Non participation [Nopart]**

This code was assigned when the young people did not participate during their transition meeting [TMpart] or in another context [OCpart], for instance they did not communicate their views. An example of this is:

“During circle time and science Anna came across as very passive. She was very quiet and did not make any spontaneous contributions to discussions [Nopart]. She would respond to a direct question, but not always [Nopart]. When she did respond to questions, she replied mainly using single words and their were a number of instances of immediate echolalia. In the science lesson she sat there for the majority of the time with her face in her hands [Nopart].”

In Sections 3.5.1, 3.5.2, 3.6.2 and 3.8.

### **K.2.3. Making choices [MAKC]**

These are examples of when the young people were able to independently make choices, such as:

CAROLINE: When you are bigger where would you like to live?

TARAK: [*selects the symbol of living alone and places it below the like symbol on the talking mat*] [MAKC]

In Sections 3.4.1, 3.5.1 and 3.6.2.

### **K.2.4. Young people sharing their views [ypshare]**

Examples of the young people sharing their views, as in:

CONNEXIONS STAFF: Anna do you like school?

ANNA: No [*said loudly and sounded adamant*] [ypshare]

In Sections 3.4.1, 3.5.1 and 3.5.2.

### **K.2.5. Expression of feeling [ExpF]**

Instances where the young people expressed their feelings about a person, place or activity. For example:

CAROLINE: Anna like or hate meeting?

ANNA: like meeting [*simultaneously placed the meeting symbol below like on the talking mat*]  
[ExpF] [activity]

CAROLINE: How did you feel? [*I already knew that Anna had a reasonable understanding of emotions. I showed symbols representing happy, sad, angry, worried and frightened*]

ANNA: Happy [*simultaneously selected the happy symbol*] [ExpF]

A further code of [person], [place] and [activity] was recorded depending on what the expression of feeling was attributed to. In Sections 3.4.1, 3.5.1, 3.5.2 and 3.6.2.

### **K.2.6. Expression of identity [Expl]**

This code was recorded when the young people communicated a view that expressed their identity, such as:

“Not Squib, me Sabal [*points to himself whilst saying this*]” [Expl]

In Section 3.4.1 and 3.6.2.

#### **Strengths [strength]**

This code was assigned when the young people communicated a view that demonstrated that they understood their own strengths:

“When Sabal talked about being good at swimming, he found his swimming certificate to show me his achievements.” [strength]

This code was recorded once examples of the expression of identity had been identified.

#### **Weaknesses [weak]**

This code was used when the young people communicated a view that demonstrated that they understood their limitations:

“Terri placed my hands on the computer keyboard and gave the computer a thumbs down. She then spontaneously pointed to pictures on the screen that she wanted to include in her book.” [weak]

This code was recorded once examples of the expression of identity had been identified.

### **K.2.7. Confidence**

Whether the young people were communicating assertively [assert] or showing passivity [pass] during interactions. In Sections 3.4.1 and 3.5.2.

**Assertiveness [assert]**

Assigned when the young people demonstrated behaviour that was considered assertive, such as making sure that their views were heard or speaking up when choices were made that they did not agree with. This code was used once examples of personal power had been identified. An example:

PETER: What if Terri was to work with the smaller children for work experience?

TERRI: No [*shook her head*] [assert]

CLASS TEACHER: Terri said she liked cooking. What about helping in the kitchen?

TERRI: Yes [*becomes very excited*] [assert]

**Passivity [Pass]**

Assigned when the young people demonstrated behaviour that was considered passive, such as not being assertive or not speaking up when views were communicated that did not match their own. This code was used once examples of the young people not demonstrating personal power had been identified. For instance:

“During circle time and science Abbey came across as very passive. She was very quiet and did not make any spontaneous contributions to discussions [Pass]. She would respond to a direct question, but not always [Pass]. When she did respond to questions she replied mainly using single words and there were a number of instances of immediate echolalia. In the science lesson, she sat there for the majority of the time with her face in her hands [Pass].”

**K.2.8. Young people asking questions [YPqu]**

Examples of when the young people were asking questions:

CAROLINE: You move the mouse like this [*demonstrates*]

ANNA: What? [YPqu]

In Section 3.5.2 and 4.7.5.

**Facilitative questions [Fqu]**

All examples of questions were then coded to identify whether the speaker used facilitative or directive questions. Facilitative questions are questions that require more than a ‘yes’ or ‘no’ answer, for example:

“What did you do at the weekend?” [Fqu]

### **Directive questions [Dqu]**

All examples of questions were then coded to identify whether the speaker used facilitative or directive questions. Directive questions are questions that require a restricted response like ‘yes’ or ‘no’, for instance:

“Did you go to a car boot sale?” [Dqu]

The two codes above were also recorded during stage five of the coding procedure when looking at whether the stakeholders asked questions of the young people.

### **K.2.9. Showing understanding [show]**

These are examples of when the young people demonstrated that they had understood an instruction or a question that had been communicated to them, for instance:

CAROLINE: Do you have a talking aid?

TARAK: No [*places the picture of the communication aid below the no symbol*] [show]

It was decided that the young person had understood correctly if they responded in a way that was appropriate to what had been communicated to them, such as giving an appropriate answer to a question. In Section 3.5.2.

### **K.2.10. Shows non-understanding [noshow]**

Marks when the young people demonstrated that they had not understood an instruction or a question that had been communicated to them:

“To aid communication, symbols showing ‘like’ and symbols showing different interests were used. Adam took the symbol that showed like (a smiling face) and put a tick next to it [noshow]. This initially made me think he understood the like symbol as being positive. When I asked him what he liked, he smiled and nodded his head [noshow].”

It was decided that the young person had not understood correctly if they responded in a way that was inappropriate to what had been communicated to them, such as giving an inappropriate answer to a question. In Section 3.5.2.

### **K.2.11. Imitation [imitate]**

Assigned when the young person repeats back something that they have heard rather than giving a spontaneous response, such as:

MRS WILSON: How are you today Tom?

TOM: Good

MRS WILSON: Anna

ANNA: How are you today? Good [Imitate]

This was recorded once examples of non-understanding had been identified. When individuals repeat back something they have heard this can be an example of non-understanding. This code was also observed in instances of passive behaviour. It is possible that the young person was imitating what had been communicated because they did not have the confidence to communicate their own ideas and feelings. In Section 3.5.2.

### **K.2.12. Conflict [con]**

This code was given when instances of conflict were observed, such as two people arguing over a difference in opinion or being rude to someone else. An example of this is:

TERRI: Mr James [*verbally and pointing to Mr James*] *pig* [con] [yp Vs stake]

The individuals involved in the conflict were identified, in this case the young person arguing with a stakeholder [yp Vs stake] or the stakeholder arguing with the young person [stake Vs yp]. This code was also recorded during stage five of the coding process. In Section 4.7.5.

### **Disagreement [Disagree]**

Instances where either the young person disagreed with a stakeholder [ypdisagree] or vice versa [stakedisagree] were recorded, for example:

PETER: What if Terri was to work with the smaller children for work experience?

TERRI: No [*shook her head*] [disagree] [ypdisagree]

Instances of disagreement were recorded once instances of conflict had been identified as conflict can come about through disagreement.

### K.2.13. Agreement [Agree]

Instances where either the young person agreed with a stakeholder [ypagree] or vice versa [stakeagree] were recorded, for example:

TRANSITION SOCIAL WORKER: So Tarak wants to do computers at college? [*directed to the group*]

TARAK: yes [*smiles*] [Agree] [ypagree]

TRANSITION SOCIAL WORKER: That should not be a problem . . . would Tarak be able to go the taster college sessions as part of his work experience?

PETER: We will be able to consider this when he gets to post sixteen.

In Section 4.7.5.

### K.2.14. Young people initiate discussion [ypinitiate]

This code was assigned when the young people initiated a conversation:

“After everyone had introduced themselves, Sabal went straight to his transition comic and started turning the pages. He pointed at pictures and named them [ypinitiate]. If there was a particular activity that he really enjoyed, like swimming, he looked at that page for longer. Some stakeholders then asked questions about that picture.”

In Sections 3.5.1, 3.5.2, 3.6.2 and 4.7.5.

### K.2.15. Termination of discussions [terminate]

Instances where a discussion was terminated were identified and coded. An example occurred when we are looking through my research comic and talking about some of the activities that Adam likes.

ADAM: Book [*points to a book on the shelf*] [terminate] [yp] [OK]

CAROLINE: You **like books**?

ADAM: **Yes**

CAROLINE: [*Turns the page of the comic to continue*]

ADAM: Book gets up and fetches the book

CAROLINE: You **want to look at book**?

ADAM: **Yes**

A further code was then recorded identifying who terminated the discussion i.e. stakeholder [stake] or young person [yp]. The examples were then further coded to ascertain whether the termination of discussion was appropriate [OK] or whether the discussion was terminated prematurely [premature]. This code was also recorded during stage five of the coding procedure. In Section 4.7.5.

### **K.3. Codes used in stages four and five**

The codes presented in this section were assigned to the research data during stage four of the coding procedure. After each example, I have cross referenced the theme with the corresponding literature from the literature review chapters. The codes that were recorded during stage five of the coding procedure are also shown in this section. They are presented as further subsections of the stage four themes.

#### **K.3.1. Choices being restricted [RestrictCh]**

Situations when the young person's choice was restricted:

CLASS TEACHER: What does Anna think she'd like?

ANNA: Chips

CLASS TEACHER: You are going to have a sandwich are you? With a bit of \*salad do you think?\* [RestrictCh]

ANNA: Yes

CLASS TEACHER: That's \*good\*, that's good to hear

In Section 3.8.1 and 3.8.3.

#### **K.3.2. Stakeholders asking questions of young people [SHqu]**

When the stakeholders asked questions of the young person:

“What would you like to do when you finish school?”

In Section 2.3.4 and 3.7.

#### **K.3.3. Stakeholders sharing their views [stshare]**

Assigned when the stakeholders shared their views about how they felt the young people contributed either at their transition meeting or in another context, for example:

“I was really impressed. I thought that the activities that chose were all possible.” [stshare]

### **K.3.4. Extension of young people’s contributions [Extend]**

Instances where stakeholders extended the contributions made by the young people were recorded, such as whether when the young people started a discussion did stakeholders continue with the subject or did they change the subject to an issue they wished to discuss. An example of this is:

CAROLINE: **what** did **you** **do** at the **weekend**?

NARESH: went car

CAROLINE: did **you** **go** to a car boot sale? [Extend]

NARESH: No. Ride in car

In Section 2.3.4 and 3.7.

### **K.3.5. Disconfirmation [disconfirm]**

This code was assigned when either a stakeholder disconfirmed the views or feelings of the young person [stdisconfirm] or when the young person disconfirmed the views or feelings of a stakeholder [ypdisconfirm], for example:

NARESH: Me job...dad taxi

CAROLINE: **You want** to be a Taxi **driver**?

NARESH: No ...cooking [disconfirm]

This code was recorded once examples of conflict had been identified. In Section 3.8 and 4.7.5.

### **K.3.6. Underestimation of the young person’s skills [underestimate]**

Occasions of stakeholders believing that the young people had less communication skills than they actually had:

“I observed Naresh during an English lesson. Naresh was in a class with five other young people with PMLD. The class were being read a story about a shoe maker. The class teacher asked the class basic questions about the story. Most of the questions were too hard for the class. The class teacher asked questions directly to the young people. It was noticeable that Naresh was

only asked one question when the rest of the students were asked at least three questions [underestimate]. Naresh was able to answer his question and did respond to the class teacher, but was not encouraged to participate any further.”

In Section 3.8.3.

### **K.3.7. Over-estimation of the young person’s skills [overestimate]**

Occasions of stakeholders believing that the young people had greater communication skills than they actually had:

“Adam has a very good understanding of language. I feel that he understands everything we say to him [overestimate].”

In Section 3.8.3.

### **K.3.8. Interruptions [interrupt]**

Instances where either the stakeholder interrupted the young person [stake] or vice versa [yp]. There were no examples of this in the data. In Section 4.7.5.

### **K.3.9. Topic change [topchange]**

Instances where either the stakeholder [stake] changed the topic of discussion which had been initiated by the young person or vice versa [yp], for example:

“During some interactions Naresh would change the subject or stop verbally communicating. When he changed the topic he would talk about one of his interests, usually going to a car boot sale.” [topchange] [yp]

This was also recorded in stage two of the coding procedure. In Sections 4.7.5.

### **K.3.10. Stakeholders initiate discussion [stinitiate]**

This code was assigned to instances where the stakeholders initiated a conversation with the young people, for example:

What would you like to do when you finish school? [stinitiate]

In Section 2.3.4 and 3.7.

### **K.3.11. Ignoring [ignore]**

Examples were identified of stakeholders [stake] ignoring a contribution made by the young person and vice versa [yp]:

“ She would respond to a direct question, but not always [ignore]. When she did respond to questions, she replied mainly using single words and their were a number of instances of immediate echolalia. In the science lesson, she sat there for the majority of the time with her face in her hands [ignore].”

This code was also assigned in stage two of the coding process. In Section 4.7.5.

### **K.3.12. Pronouns distant [prodist]**

When the pronouns ‘you’, ‘they’, ‘those’, ‘them’ and ‘these’ are used in speech it suggests the speaker is distant from the subject as they are not showing membership to the group:

“You [prodist] should listen to these professionals as they have very important and valuable information to tell you” (Peter during Anna’s transition meeting)

This code was used to identify whether the stakeholders considered the young people to have membership to the group during the transition planning meeting or whether they were seen as outsiders. This code was also used to identify whether the young people communicated in a way that suggested that they felt part of the group. In Section 4.7.5.

### **K.3.13. Pronouns close [proclose]**

When an individual uses the pronouns ‘we’ or ‘us’ it shows that the speaker is close to the subject and identifies with having membership to the group, for example:

“Naresh is going to tell us [proclose] about what he wants to do when he leaves school.”

This code was used to identify whether the stakeholders considered the young people to have membership to the group during the transition planning meeting or whether they were seen as outsiders. This code was also used to identify whether the young people communicated in a way that suggested that they felt part of the group. In Section 4.7.5.

### **K.3.14. Active clause [Actclau]**

The position of the subject in a clause shows the level of importance attributed to the subject by the speaker. When the subject is at the start of the clause it shows that they are the active agent and hold the most important position, for example:

“The professionals [Actclau] have lots of information that about the options available to your son once he leaves school.”

In Section 4.7.5.

### **K.3.15. Passive clause [passclau]**

The position of the subject in a clause shows the level of importance attributed to the subject by the speaker. When the subject is placed in a passive position it shows that they do not hold the most important position, for example:

“Naresh is going to tell us [passclau] about what he wants to do when he leaves school.”

In Section 4.7.5.

### **K.3.16. Young people agents of action [ypagents]**

Once examples of the active clause had been identified, this code was assigned if the young person was the active agent of the clause, such as:

“Naresh is going to tell us [ypagents] about what he wants to do when he leaves school.”

In Section 4.7.5.

### **K.3.17. Professionals agents of action [profagents]**

Once examples of the active clause had been identified, this code was assigned if a professional was the active agent of the clause:

“The professionals [profagents] have lots of information that about the options available to your son once he leaves school.”

In Section 4.7.5.

### **K.3.18. Parents agents of action [Paragents]**

Once examples of the active clause had been identified, this code was recorded if a parent was the active agent of the clause:

“This transition meeting is a valuable chance for you, the parents [paragents], to be able to ask the professionals here about their work and what they can do to help your daughter in the future. Use this meeting to collect information

and asks lots of questions as these will be the main people that you will be dealing with, not the school.”

In Section 4.7.5.

### K.3.19. Complex language use [complang]

All examples of complex language use were identified, such as:

“This transition meeting is a valuable chance for you, the parents, to be able to ask the professionals here about their work and what they can do to help your daughter in the future. Use this meeting to collect information and asks lots of questions as these will be the main people that you will be dealing with, not the school.” [complang]

Complex language is associated with formal settings and with power and prestige. The examples were then further coded to see what made the utterances complex, such as the clauses used or the vocabulary. In Section 3.8.2 and 4.7.5.

#### Use of subordinate clause [subclause]

When individuals use a high number of subordinate clauses [high] this implies complexity in the way that they communicate, for example:

“You need to make a selection from one of these six cereal boxes and then you are going to copy the design onto our paper.” [high] [2 clauses]

When the speaker does not use a subordinate clause [low] this shows that they are presenting their ideas as a sequence rather than showing logical relationships between clauses, for example:

MARY: Naresh you have done **good work** [low]

NARESH: [*smiles and blushes*]

The use of more complex syntactical structures can be linked with a person’s power and prestige. A further code was added to identify who had produced the utterance. This consisted of the initial of the individual.

#### Length of utterance

Examples of long utterances were recorded using the code [long]. The number of words in the utterance was then recorded by the side of the utterance:

“You need to make a selection from one of these six cereal boxes and then you are going to copy the design onto our paper.” [long] [25 words]

When speakers use a large number of words in an utterance it can be a way of demonstrating power and prestige.

### **Technical language [techlang]**

Assigned to vocabulary that was considered technical or jargon, as in:

“When Sabal’s class teacher read the statement of educational needs she read the statement word for word rather than summarising the main points [techlang]. This meant that complicated or technical vocabulary was not substituted for vocabulary that was accessible to all stakeholders. The process took much longer than was anticipated and it was evident that Sabal was finding it difficult to attend.”

The use of this type of language excludes people that do not have these words as part of their vocabulary. A further code was added to identify who had produced the utterance. This consisted of the initial of the individual.

### **K.3.20. Use of auxiliary verbs [auxverb]**

When individuals use lots of auxiliary verbs it suggests that they are confident in what they are saying. There were no examples of the extensive use of auxiliary verbs in the data collected. In Section 4.7.5.

### **K.3.21. Use of softeners [soft]**

When speakers are less confident about what they are communicating they use softeners when they speak:

“Sabal is on review from outside agencies at this time... The speech and language therapist feels that Sabal has made...er [soft]... good progress... and therefore does not...um [soft]... require regular sessions. She feels that the school are...er [soft]...um [soft]... meeting his needs sufficiently in terms of... his communication goals.”

Examples of softeners include: ‘er’, ‘um’, ‘maybe’, ‘sort of’, ‘possibly’. In Section 4.7.5.

### **K.3.22. Tag questions [tag]**

A tag question is a question added to the end of a statement. No examples of tag questions were found in the data collected. In Section 4.7.5.

### K.3.23. Acquiescence [aqu]

Acquiescence is when an individual takes another persons point of view rather than communicating their own view. They may see the other person as having more power and prestige than themselves, so their view must be right, for example:

“I had symbols that represent both like and hate: signed and verbalised what the symbols represented. I then showed Nasser lots of pictures of activities that he might do at school. Nasser said hate for all the pictures that I had showed him including things that he had previously said that he liked [aqu]. I was confused as I was sure that he knew the difference between like and hate. I asked him to name the pictures: he pointed to like and said hate and vice versa. I then tried to use symbols for happy and sad to see if that made any difference. He correctly identified happy and sad, however once we Incorporated this vocabulary into the activity I felt that the initial identification may have been a guess. He communicated that all activities made him happy, even though he just communicated that he hated them [aqu]. This may be acquiescence: he feels that I want to hear that he liked everything. However, this is not clear cut. I am not sure that he yet understands the vocabulary used. Further investigation is required.”

In Section 4.7.5.

### K.3.24. Turn taking

All conversational exchanges were analysed to see how the turns were distributed. Exchanges that had equal turn taking, so that everyone had a equal amount of time to speak were coded [Equalturn]. There were no interactions observed that were considered to have equal turn taking. There was always a dominant communicator. Exchanges where one person dominated were coded [domturn], for example:

“Approximately 30 minutes of the hour transition meeting was dedicated to the young people sharing their views and aspirations. [domturn] [30 mins] This encouraged stakeholders to talk in more detail about the young people’s interests. Mary appeared to understand that the young people needed time to respond to any questions that they were asked [decideturn]. She gave them enough time to think and then respond to questions.”

The duration of the turn was recorded by the side of the data. The data was also coded to identify who decided who took their turn and when [decideturn]. In Section 4.7.5.

### K.3.25. Prompting & [prompt]

When someone gives a prompt they are giving a clue to what an individual should say or do. All examples of prompts were further coded to identify whether a visual prompt [visprompt] was used:

“What do you **like?**” [prompt] [sign]

or a verbal prompt [verbprompt], for example:

“Do you want to go to college?” [verbprompt]

Cases of visual prompts were then coded according to the objects [objects], pictures [pictures], symbols [symbols] or signs [signs] used. In Section 3.8.2 and Section 4.7.5.

### K.3.26. Encouragement [encourage]

Examples of encouragement being given. If the encouragement consisted of praise the code [praise] was given, for example:

MARY: Naresh you have done **good work** [encourage] [praise]

NARESH: [*smiles and blushes*]

In Section 4.7.5.

### K.3.27. Modifying language [modlang]

Occasions of individuals modifying their language were recorded. The way in which they modified their language was then coded. If the speaker used visual support the code [vissupport] was recorded:

MARY: Sabal has done **good work** [modlang] [vissupport] [sign]

SABAL: [*smiles*]

The type of visual support used was then coded according to the objects [objects], pictures [pictures], symbols [symbols] or signs [signs] used. In Section 4.7.5.

Examples of individuals reducing the complexity of their language was also recorded [reducecomplex]:

CLASS TEACHER: Sabal is participating well in class activities. His fine motor control is improving and he is now able to hold a pencil and draw in art. He really enjoys swimming and he has achieved his first swimming badge.

MARY: [*directed to Sabal*] You have done **good work**. You are **good** at **drawing** and **swimming** [reducecomplex]

The use of exaggerated pronunciation is also a language modification. This is when the speaker puts specific emphasis on words [emphasis], for example:

“I’m going to say, do you want a **\*dinner\*** [emphasis] and you are going to say **\*yes please\*** [emphasis] or **\*no\*** [emphasis] thank you.”

or changes the intonation of their voice [intonation], as in:

CLASS TEACHER: Finished? [*rising intonation was used to signal it was a question*] [intonation]

ADAM: [*puts away his work*]

CLASS TEACHER: I did not mean you had to finish . . . you can do more if you want. Come back to the table.

ADAM: [*comes back to the table looking confused*]

However, this is not useful for all people as they may not understand what a rise in intonation signifies.

Examples of stakeholders modelling the type of response that was expected [model] was also recorded, for example:

“I’m going to say, do you want a **\*dinner\*** and you are going to say **\*yes please\*** or **\*no\*** thank you.” [model]

All of the codes that were influenced by critical discourse analysis were crucial in identifying the individual’s social positions and their associated power relationships.

# Appendix L.

## P level scores

This appendix provides detailed information on the listening/receptive communication skills and the speaking/expressive skills of the young people in this study, using the P scales criteria. The criteria used to decide which level of the P scales was most appropriate for each young person in this study were taken from the Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency guidance (QCA 2005). Those that achieve a level of between four and eight are classified as having a severe learning disability.

### L.1. Naresh

Naresh's receptive skills fall between levels P6 and P7 of the P scales. Naresh is able to follow instructions that contain three key words (P6), but struggles with four key word instructions (P7). He is unable to respond to others in a group situation (P6), however, as Naresh is elective mute. This also means that Naresh finds it difficult to respond to questions from adults and peers about experiences and events (P7). However, in this study he demonstrated this ability. Naresh is able to listen and follow stories for a short period of time (P7). Naresh does not fulfil the criteria for P8 as he is unable to take part in role play with confidence and he is not able to consistently answer 'why' and 'how' questions.

Naresh's expressive skills fulfil the criteria of P7 of the P scales. He is able to communicate using phrases that contain three key words. However, this depends hugely on context as there are many people that Naresh chooses not to communicate with. Many of the teachers that worked with Naresh believed that he was able to achieve no more than P5. This means that they felt that Naresh was able to join two words together and had a vocabulary of over fifty words. I found that Naresh was able to communicate ideas in the past, present and future and on occasions include a greater amount of information that he was asked to provide (P7). However, Naresh was unable to contribute to small group discussions and role play consistently. In fact, the transition meeting was the first occasion where staff had seen him contribute in a group. Naresh does not fulfil the criteria for P8 because he does not join four key words together in

either a one-to-one context or group. He does not have an extensive vocabulary and he does not use 'cos' to join ideas.

## L.2. Sabal

Sabal's receptive skills fall between levels P6 and P7 of the P Scales. Sabal is able to follow instructions that contain three key words (P6), but struggles with instructions that contain four key words (P7). Sabal will respond to others in a group situation, especially in activities that require no expressive contribution, such as pass the parcel (P6). Sabal is able to follow stories for short stretches of time (P7), however his ability to do so varies greatly between activities. He has attention and listening difficulties. Sabal is able to answer questions about his experiences (P7), although this is very mood dependent. Sabal does not always feel confident enough to respond to questions, especially direct questions.

Sabal's expressive skills mainly fulfil the criteria of P7 of the P scales. Depending on his mood and level of confidence, he is able to express phrases that contain three key words. Sabal is able to communicate his ideas using experiences from the past and present and make statements about what might happen in the future. On occasions, Sabal will contribute appropriately one-to-one and in a school group. Again this is mood and confidence level dependent. Sabal is not yet comfortable joining in with role plays. When Sabal's confidence is good, he is able to contribute new information beyond what is asked. When Sabal is not in a confident mood, he can appear to have less expressive skills and communicates more at a P6 level.

Sabal does not fulfil the criteria for P8 of the P levels because he is unable to join four key words together. Furthermore, he does not have an extensive vocabulary to convey his message to his communication partner. He is not yet using possessives and is unable to take part in role plays with confidence.

## L.3. Tarak

Tarak's receptive skills mainly fulfil P6 of the P scales, however there is some evidence of emerging P7 skills. Tarak is able to follow instructions that contain three key words (P6), however he struggles to follow instructions that contain four key words (P7). Tarak is able to respond to others in a group situation (P6). He is able to take turns appropriately (P6), however this can be affected by his motivation for the task. Turn taking is generally better when he is motivated by the task, however if the task is too motivating then he has a tendency to dominate the activity. If the task is not motivating, he will withdraw from the activity.

Tarak is occasionally able to follow short stories for short stretches of time (P7), although this too is influenced by his motivation. He is able to respond to questions from adults about his experiences (P7) when he is motivated by the topic discussed.

Tarak's expressive skills fulfil P6 of the P scales. Tarak is able to initiate conversation using his preferred method of communication which is speech (P6). He is able to ask some simple questions and can use basic prepositions and pronouns correctly (P6). Tarak is not yet at P7 of the P scales as he does not communicate short phrases containing three key words. He does not always contribute to one-to-one and group discussions appropriately. He will often only join in with a discussion if it is about a topic that really motivates him. He will not provide you with more information than you have asked for during discussions. Although Tarak does not fulfil these parts of the criteria, he does demonstrate some ability to talk about experiences that have happened in the past and hopes for the future.

## L.4. Terri

Terri's receptive skills fulfil level P6 of the P scales. Terri is able to follow instructions that contain three key words (P6), depending on the vocabulary which is used. She is also able to respond to others appropriately in group situations (P6).

Terri does not yet fulfil the criteria for P7 of the P scales as she is unable to follow instructions that contain four key words. Terri does respond to questions from adults, however as her expressive skills are limited and she is reluctant to use her communication aid it can sometimes be difficult to identify how much she has understood. Although, in several situations with the right level of visual support, Terri has been able to respond to questions about her experiences.

Terri's expressive skills fulfil the criteria of P4 of the P scales. Terri is able to communicate over 50 words using a combination of speech, sign and symbols. Although this is an indicator of P5 skills, Terri does not fulfil the other criteria for this level. She is able to communicate her likes and dislikes using her preferred methods of communication (P4). When Terri communicates, she is unable to join two key words together (P5) and she struggles to repair misunderstandings by changing the words that she has used (P5).

## L.5. Anna

Anna's receptive skills fulfil the criteria for P7 of the P scales. Anna is able to listen and follow stories for short periods of time. The length of time will increase if she finds the task motivating. She is able to follow instructions that contain four key words and respond to questions from both her peers and adults about her experiences.

Anna does not fulfil the criteria for P8 of the P levels as she does not take part in role play confidently. In these situations, there is an increased presence of echolalia. Furthermore, she does not consistently give correct responses to 'why' and 'how' questions, so it is unclear if she understands what these questions require.

Anna's expressive skills fulfil P6 of the P scales, however there is evidence of emerging P7 skills. Anna is able to maintain short conversations using her preferred method of communication which is speech (P6). She is also able to ask simple questions to obtain information from others and correctly uses prepositions and pronouns in her speech (P6).

Anna fulfils some of the P7 criteria as she is able to use phrases that contain three key words. She is also able to talk about events and experiences that have happened in the past and she would like to happen in the future. However, these types of discussions often only occur on her terms. Anna does not contribute to small group discussions and role play with her peers appropriately. In these situations, she becomes very echolalic and repeats what others are saying rather than spontaneously contributing. Furthermore, she does not tend to add new information beyond what she is asked.

## L.6. Adam

Adam's receptive skills fall between levels P5 and P6 of the P scales. Adam is able to respond to questions about familiar people and experiences depending on who is asking the question and his general mood (P5). Furthermore, he is able to follow commands that contain two key words (P5). Adam is able to follow some three key word instructions (P6), however this is not consistent. Adam will take part appropriately in group activities, however this is dependent on the people in the group and his general mood that day.

Adam's expressive skills fulfil the criteria of P5 of the P scales. He is able to communicate phrases that contain two key words using a combination of speech, sign and using his communication aid (P5). When he is using his communication aid there is some evidence of him producing phrases that contain three key words, but these phrases are very limited in both vocabulary and their structure (P6). Adam is unable to try and repair misunderstandings when he communicates (P5). I believe that he has the skills to do so, but confidence stops him. Adam does not initiate or maintain short conversations (P6). This is left to his communication partner. It is difficult to ascertain whether he is able to use prepositions and pronouns correctly in his speech because he is a reluctant communicator and will only communicate the minimum he needs to.

# Appendix M.

## Field notes

The following extract is an example of the structure of the field notes collected in this study. They are a verbatim account of what people said and their actions during an interaction. This example is then coded in Appendix F. The transcription conventions used in this extract are explained in Table 5.1, while the codes are listed in Appendix K.

### M.1. Sabal: 31/01/2007

CAROLINE: **My name** is Caroline. **Your name** is...?

SABAL: Sabal

CAROLINE: Hello Sabal. This is **my book** [*also pointed to book and opened first page*] [vissupport] **My school** is Birmingham University [*showed a photograph of Birmingham University in my research comic*] [vissupport]. Sabal's schools is Glendale [*Showed Sabal a photograph of his school*]

SABAL: [*nods*]

CAROLINE: **I am writing a book**

SABAL: [*nods*]

CAROLINE: Will **you help** me with **my book**? [*a less complicated choice of words was selected, for example book instead of thesis*]

SABAL: Yes

CAROLINE: **My book** is about things **you like** and **don't like** [*I showed symbols that represented like and dislike*] **I like playing with my friends** [*pointed to the corresponding picture in the research comic*] Skiing [*pointed to the corresponding picture in my research comic*] Going on holiday [*pointed to the corresponding picture in my research comic. I am swimming in the picture*]

SABAL: Swimming

CAROLINE: **You like swimming?**

SABAL: **yeah**

CAROLINE: **you show me where you swim?**

SABAL: No

SABAL: Football

CAROLINE: **You like football?**

SABAL: Yes [agree]

CAROLINE: **Show me what you like at school?**

SABAL: toilet [*takes me to the toilets: no prompting was required*] [ypshare] [show]

SABAL: Like cook [*takes me to the cookery room*]

CAROLINE: **Who are your friends?**

SABAL: Like Anthony ...like Craig [*Craig and Anthony are in the cookery room, Sabal goes over to Anthony*] Anthony [*goes over to Craig*] Craig

CAROLINE: Craig and Anthony are **your friends?**

SABAL: yes ... class

CAROLINE: **You want** class [*pointed in the direction of the classroom*]

SABAL: [*walks back to classroom and I follow*]

MR JAMES: Was that fun Sabal?

SABAL: [*smiles*]

CAROLINE: Sabal says **he likes** swimming and football

SABAL: Swimming

CAROLINE: Does he swim here at school?

MR JAMES: No he swims at Crossley swimming pool

CAROLINE: Do **you like** Crossley swimming pool? (directed to Sabal)

SABAL: Yeah

CAROLINE: **You swim** at school pool

SABAL: No [*leaves the conversation and returns with a certificate in his hand*]

CAROLINE: **You did good** swimming

SABAL: (Sabal smiles)

MR JAMES: He is very good at swimming

## **Appendix N.**

### **Breakdown of data**

The following tables show the type of data and the proportion of the data that was used to support the arguments made in this study. The information is presented for each of the young people in this study as well as other stakeholders and my critical friend. A summary of this data is found in Chapters 5, 6 and 7.

Date collected	Data type	Number of extracts
04/10/2006	Field notes	1
04/10/2006	Researcher obs	1
11/10/2006	Field notes	7
11/10/2006	Researcher obs	2
01/11/2006	Field notes	2
01/11/2006	Researcher obs	1
08/11/2006	No data used	No data used
20/11/2006	Field notes	No data used
20/11/2006	Researcher obs	1
06/12/2006	Field notes	2
06/12/2006	Researcher obs	No data used
13/12/2007	Field notes	1
13/12/2007	Researcher obs	No data used
09/01/2007	Field notes	2
09/01/2007	Researcher obs	2
31/01/2007	Field notes	1
31/01/2007	Researcher obs	No data used
17/01/2007	Video	No data used
17/01/2007	Researcher obs	2
07/02/2007	Field notes	2
07/02/2007	Researcher obs	1

**Table N.1.:** Proportion of data: Adam

Date collected	Data type	Number of extracts
09/01/2007	Field notes	1
09/01/2007	Researcher obs	1
07/02/2007	Researcher obs	2
07/02/2007	Field notes	2
21/02/2007	Field notes	2
21/02/2007	Researcher obs	No data used
22/02/2007	Field notes	1
22/02/2007	Researcher obs	No data used
23/02/2007	Field notes	2
23/02/2007	Researcher obs	No data used
05/03/2007	Field notes	No data used
05/03/2007	Researcher obs	1
07/03/2007	Interview	1
23/03/2007	Video	1

**Table N.2.:** Proportion of data: Anna

Date collected	Data type	Number of extracts
17/01/2007	Field notes	2
17/01/2007	Researcher obs	1
31/01/2007	Researcher obs	1
21/02/2007	Field notes	1
22/02/2007	Field notes	1
22/02/2007	Researcher obs	4
23/02/2007	Field notes	4
05/03/2007	Field notes	3
05/03/2007	Researcher obs	1
07/03/2007	Interview	1

**Table N.3.:** Proportion of data: Naresh

Date collected	Data type	Number of extracts
09/01/2007	Researcher obs	No data used
31/01/2007	Field notes	2
31/01/2007	Researcher obs	No data used
07/02/2007	Field notes	2
07/02/2007	Researcher obs	2
07/02/2007	Video	2
21/02/2007	Field notes	2
21/02/2007	Field notes	No data used
22/02/2007	Field notes	3
22/02/2007	Researcher obs	No data used
05/03/2007	Field notes	1
05/03/2007	Researcher obs	2
07/03/2007	Interview	1

**Table N.4.:** Proportion of data: Sabal

Date collected	Data type	Number of extracts
09/01/2007	Field notes	2
09/01/2007	Researcher obs	No data used
07/02/2007	Field notes	No data used
07/02/2007	Researcher obs	1
21/02/2007	Field notes	5
21/02/2007	Researcher obs	No data used
22/02/2007	Field notes	2
22/02/2007	Researcher obs	No data used
23/02/2007	Field notes	2
23/02/2007	Researcher obs	No data used
05/03/2007	Field notes	4
05/03/2007	Researcher obs	No data used
07/03/2007	Interview	1

**Table N.5.:** Proportion of data: Tarak

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Date collected	Data type	Number of extracts
09/01/2007	Field notes	2
09/01/2007	Researcher obs	2
17/01/2007	Field notes	1
17/01/2007	Researcher obs	1
21/02/2007	Field notes	1
21/02/2007	Researcher obs	1
05/03/2007	Researcher obs	4
05/03/2007	Field notes	4
07/03/2007	Interview	No data used

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**Table N.6.:** Proportion of data: Terri

Date collected	Stakeholder	Data type	Number of extracts
11/10/2006	Adam teacher	Field notes	3
01/11/2006	Adam supply teacher	Field notes	3
08/11/2006	Adam's teacher	Researcher obs	1
09/01/2007	Mr James	Field notes	2
17/01/2007	Lorna	Field notes	2
17/01/2007	Lorna	Researcher obs	1
17/01/2007	Mrs Wilson	Researcher obs	1
31/01/2007	Adam's teacher	Researcher obs	1
14/02/2007	Anna Parent	Interview	4
14/02/2007	Terri parent	Interview	3
10/03/2007	Social worker	Interview	1
21/02/2007	School liaison	Interview	1
05/03/2007	Mary	Field notes	6
05/03/2007	Social worker	Field notes	2
05/03/2007	Mr James	Field notes	2
05/03/2007	Peter	Field notes	5
05/03/2007	Mrs Walters	Field notes	1
05/03/2007	Peter	Researcher obs	6
05/03/2007	Mary	Researcher obs	2
05/03/2007	Mr James	Researcher obs	1
05/03/2007	Mrs Walters	Researcher obs	2
06/03/2007	Mary	Interview	1
07/03/2007	Terri parent	Interview	3
19/03/2007	Peter	Interview	1
23/03/2007	Mrs Wilson	Video	16
23/03/2007	Mrs Wilson	Researcher obs	2
25/03/2007	Terri parent	Researcher obs	1

**Table N.7.:** Proportion of data: Stakeholders



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# Glossary

**catalytic validity**

The power of the study to create change. 91

**Communicative Rationality**

is the use of knowledge in one's use of language and actions. 21

**confirmability**

Research that is carefully interpreted and communicated to others. 92

**contextuality (within CDA)**

Different contexts can influence an individual's use of language. 136

**credibility**

Like standardisation, the practise of keeping the procedures and the methods of a study consistent. 92

**critical friend**

Someone that examines the researcher's work and critiques it. 91

**critical transivity**

The individual is able to deeply interpret problems by reflecting upon their views and values. Through reflection, they are then able to reconsider and possibly alter their beliefs. 14

**democratic validity**

The extent in which stakeholders are included in the research process. 91

**dependability**

Like rigour, a methodological approach should be used that can be replicated by others: someone should be able to analyse the data and reach the same conclusions. 92

**dialogic validity**

The process of critical review of the research techniques and findings. 91

**disclosure**

The act of making secret information known. 96

**generalisability**

When data can be taken from one study and related to similar situations. 88

**genres (within CDA)**

The different ways of interacting, such as how an interaction is organised and the modes of communication used. 136

**group time**

When all members of the group are actively involved in a shared activity. 255

**groupthink**

The practice of thinking or making decisions as a group in a way that discourages creativity or individual responsibility. 97

**independent mental capacity advocate**

Someone who instructs, consults and supports an individual to make decisions. 52

**medical model of disability**

A model where disability is perceived to be a condition that needs to be treated. 61

**modality (within CDA)**

The way in which individuals' consider what is truth. 136

**naive transivity**

Individuals begin to question problems within their society, however there is a tendency to oversimplify the issues. 14

**national qualifications framework**

The NQF was first introduced in the 1997 Education Act and is a collective term for qualifications that are registered nationally and achievement standards for schools. 27

**neurodiversity**

A standpoint that argues there is no such thing as cognitive normality. Everyone has different strengths and needs. 11

**objects of reference**

An augmentative method of communication that uses objects that symbolise a significant activity. 126

**orders of discourse (within CDA)**

The relationships between texts, social practices and identities. 136

**outcome validity**

The influence the study has on practise. 91

**phonological cue**

When the first sound of a word is provided to help an individual identify the word themselves. 256

**pragmatics**

The social use of language. 166

**process validity**

The appropriateness of the methodology for what is being studied. 91

**rigour**

Using a methodological approach that can be replicated by others: someone should be able to analyse the data and reach the same conclusions. 88

**schema**

Rules about how one is supposed to act in certain situations. 137

**semi-intransitive conscience**

Individuals become inactive and averting and are unable to recognize the contradictions within their society. 13

**social story**

A structured story, commonly used with people with Autism, to teach appropriate behaviour in new and everyday situations. 124

**special educational needs**

A label that is applied to children that need extra support to access the national curriculum. 61

**standardisation**

The practice of keeping the procedures and the methods of a study consistent. 88

**style (within CDA)**

The way that individuals change the words and communication structures they use depending on the context of the communication exchange. 136

**three information carrying words**

The words in a command that are imperative for the command to be carried out correctly. 102

**topics (within CDA)**

What people choose to talk about during conversation. 136

**total communication approach**

When more than one mode of communication is used to convey a message including: Touch, texture, environmental and concrete cues; facial expressions; body language; gestures; signing; tone of voice; speech; print and Braille.. 122

**transferability**

Like generalisation, data can be taken from one study and related to similar situations. 92

**triangulation**

When there are three or more types of data to study one research finding. 94

**trustworthiness**

Refers to the credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability of research. 92