Ready to learn?

A qualitative investigation into what Key Stage 2 children say contributes to their subjective well-being and facilitates their learning in school, and the development of an instrument to capture change in this domain.

Submitted by Sarah Jane Aldrich to the University of Exeter
as a thesis for the degree of
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Finally, I dedicate this to the children who have inspired and worked with me on this research, with thanks for your honesty, openness, trust, challenge and humour. It is as much yours as mine!
**An overview of the research**

In November 2009, considerable interest was generated by a study day of the National Association of Principal Educational Psychologists (NAPEP) on evaluation of outcomes of the work of Educational Psychology Services (EPSs). Following this, my service requested that I investigate this area during my training placement, as a topic for my doctoral research.

A review of the literature and professional networking sites (for example, EPNET) revealed that although many services at the time were considering or actively seeking valid and reliable ‘tools’ to evaluate services, using both qualitative and quantitative approaches, in practice, few were undertaking evaluation systematically, and those that were did not feel confident that they were doing it well. While a number of services were regularly collecting data on how much service (quantity) they were delivering, to whom and in what ways, and on the subjective experience for a range of service users, few were focussing on outcomes, and even fewer were measuring these in any systematic way (Norgate, 2010). My service was one of those that already collected data on delivery in terms of quantity and subjective quality, and they had just introduced Target Monitoring and Evaluation (TME) (Dunsmuir, Brown, Iyadurai and Monsen, 2009), as a goals-based approach to informing service delivery, and a way of recording consultation and engagement with children, families and schools. While this was a positive step towards more systematic evaluation, it was noted that a missing dimension was what the children themselves felt about the outcome of engagement with an EP, and whether they felt that things had been improved in domains that were significant to them.
While there was considerable interest in hearing children’s voices driven by international agreements, legislation, policy initiatives and research, a review of the literature suggested that engaging with children in meaningful ways, and eliciting valid views, was a challenging endeavour. This was particularly true for certain groups of children and young people; those with additional needs, particularly those with profound and multiple difficulties or severe language difficulties, and also for the youngest children in the pre-school and primary years.

The two research studies presented here aimed to begin to redress that balance. I chose to focus on the collective voice of local children aged 7 – 11 years in Key Stage 2 (KS2), in mainstream primary schools, and of all abilities, including children with additional needs at all three stages of the Special Educational Needs Code of Practice. My reason for this was to ascertain the views of ‘typical’ children in mainstream education, so that they might be better understood by adults (presented in Paper 1), and in order to produce a general measure (presented in Paper 2), which could later be modified and refined, as appropriate, for other groups, for example, younger age groups, or children with more significant difficulties.

Paper 1 briefly reviews the literature on hearing children’s voices, some of the difficulties encountered in this enterprise, and approaches that have been proposed to overcome these, including attempts to actively involve them in decision making and research about issues that affect their lives. The findings of a selection of studies, which have explored what children and young people have identified as being important factors in their school lives, are presented. The qualitative research study that follows is informed by this
review of the selected literature. The approach is informed by ‘positive psychology’, with an explicit focus on ‘what works’, while not denying or ignoring what children say does not work for them.

Forty primary school children in Key stage 2 were interviewed using a range of approaches. The children were recruited from local schools with differing demographics in the South West of the United Kingdom. The research approach was pragmatic, and adopted a critical realist perspective and mixed methodology. A thematic analysis was carried out to explore children’s understandings of what helped them to learn at school (Paper 1), and these understandings were subsequently used within a realist approach to develop a tool co-designed with the children (Paper 2). The approach was also inductive, being driven by the data rather than theory. The aim was to put the children at the centre of the research, not just as participants, but as collaborators and co-constructors of the interpretations made of their ‘talk’, and of the subsequent design of a ‘tool’ to facilitate helpful conversations about what they might like to change, and to subsequently measure any impact of interventions.

The interview data were analysed using a thematic approach, and the findings were discussed, modified and validated through focus groups with the original interviewees. A thematic network or ‘map of the child’s-eye view’ is presented. A descriptive reading of three emerging topics; academic competence, social competence and social recognition, is offered and discussed, and exemplified by original quotes from the children. (Due to the word limit, additional descriptive analysis is presented in the appendices). Finally, at a deeper level of analysis, two overarching themes, ‘competence’
and ‘connectedness’ are suggested as having emerged from the data. The results of the thematic analysis are linked to previous research, and it is proposed that, while this is only one possible reading of the data presented, there are significant resonances with data collected for children and young people across cultures and age ranges. Therefore findings may tentatively be generalised beyond the local culture. The implications of the findings for EP practice are discussed.

In Paper 2, the previous study is used to inform the design of a measure to assess children’s satisfaction with their school life, in terms of issues that are important to them. Current literature on evaluating outcomes in EP services is briefly reviewed. This is followed by discussion of a selection of the measures currently available which target aspects of children’s life in schools, and the advantages and drawbacks of using these in evaluation. Finally, I discuss why it might be advantageous to view school life from the perspective of children’s subjective well-being or ‘happiness’, and review evidence from experimental research, within a positive psychology framework, and particularly the ‘Broaden-and-Build’ Theory of Positive Emotions (Frederickson, 2005).

Subsequently, the thematic network, created in Paper 1, was used with four focus groups of the original interviewees, to design items for an instrument to assess subjective satisfaction with school life; what makes them ‘happy’ and ‘ready-to-learn’ in school. The children were included in every step of the design, including; choosing and wording the items (guided by frequency data and the range of topics and themes identified in Study 1), choice of the rating
system, instructions for completion and layout, and naming of the instrument (the ‘Ready-to-Learn’ Scale).

Following piloting and minor modification, the ‘Ready-to-Learn’ Scale was administered to an opportunity sample of 344 children from the four participating schools over the summer term of 2011. Principal components analysis on the data generated a six factor solution, interpreted as six sub-scales: school competence (α = .81), social competence (α = .80), academic competence (α = .78), distress and discomfort in school (α = .68), environmental support for learning (α = .70), and acceptance and recognition by adults (α = .80), with an overall scale reliability, α = .92, and a 95% confidence interval of 17 (16.72). The scale now requires further validity checks and standardisation, but is offered as a useful instrument for initial engagement with children in this age group. It provides a focussed and enjoyable approach to identifying areas which a child would like to change (which are important to children themselves, and not specified by adults), and allows possible interventions to be negotiated with the child. It also provides a pre and post intervention measure that may be particularly helpful in capturing and quantifying change in social and emotional targets, which may be harder to operationalise and measure, as part of a comprehensive evaluation process. It is now being subjected to ongoing evaluation in practice. Current use in practice suggests, however, that it may prove most useful as an interview tool in exploring the school experience with children.
What do Key Stage 2 children tell us makes them feel ‘happy’ and ‘ready to learn’ in school?

Abstract
Listening to children is a key role for Educational Psychologists (EPs) (Gersch, 2004; Fallon, Woods and Rooney, 2010), and children’s right to be heard is enshrined in legislation (UN, 1989). There is increasing interest in translating children’s views on service provision into policy, and using them to inform practice. However there have been concerns whether younger children can hold and express valid views. These concerns are largely grounded in adults’ beliefs about children’s understanding and judgements, due to developmental limits on their capacity and skills for thinking, and their ability to hold meta-level perspectives (Clifford, 1993; Hall, 1996). These difficulties are compounded by adults’ views on children’s abilities to express themselves, and this is particularly the case for younger children and those with additional needs (Gersch, 1996). The study presented here describes an attempt to engage collaboratively and meaningfully with Key Stage 2 children, in order to elicit what is important to them, and what helps them to feel settled, secure, ‘happy’ and ‘ready to learn’ at school. Data, collected using a range of open and semi-structured interview techniques, was generated by 40 children (18 girls and 22 boys, ages ranging from 7 – 11 years) across four school settings in the South-West of the UK, including inner-city, suburban and rural areas. Settings were chosen to provide a range of socio-economic, ethnic and cultural groups, representative of the
region. Data were analysed through the adoption of a thematic analytic approach, and interpretations are presented at a broad descriptive level, and at a deeper level of emergent themes. Using a range of techniques, the children were able to express clear and detailed views on school life. Descriptions of three areas or topics identified by the children are given here; academic competence, social competence and social recognition. At a deeper level of analysis, two emergent themes are offered for consideration. These are ‘competence’ and ‘connectedness’. These themes permeated much of the children’s talk. Finally, suggestions are made about ways in which the understandings gained from the interviews could be used in future intervention and research, and in particular to develop a ‘tool’ to explore the experience of an individual child or groups of children, to suggest potential areas for intervention, and to evaluate whether intervention has resulted in meaningful change.

**Introduction**

**Context**

In November 2009, I was asked by the Community Psychology Service (CPS), in which I was undertaking my training placement, to consider the evaluation of EP services as a research focus. The qualitative study which follows reports the preliminary exploratory work in the design of an instrument to illuminate the issues that children felt were pertinent, and to contribute to the evaluation of EP and multi-agency services to primary school-aged children.
A review of the literature and current practice suggested that the data collected by many EP Services related to what was done, how much was done and how well it was done, in terms of client and stakeholder feedback. What was harder to make visible and to quantify was whether children were any better off as a result of intervention (Friedman, 2005). There is a requirement for pragmatic and workable solutions and approaches to evaluation, which can make issues more visible, and make sense to, and are valued by, all stakeholders. Additionally these should be easy to use, and should help rather than hinder the day to day work of the EP.

An additional issue was to determine who should be considered the primary client or stakeholder. Outcomes need to reflect a change in the area of agreed difficulty for the child (Matthews, 2002), but particularly with younger children, it is often the adult, either parent or teacher, who is the problem identifier and holder. Consultation, design and agreement on appropriate intervention, and subsequent evaluation of the outcomes of the intervention may, in practice, be done exclusively with adults (Wagner, 2008). Whilst this is acknowledged as a productive and efficient way for EPs to work, it is difficult to see how the voice of the child, who is most intimately concerned, can be heard in this type of interaction.

Since 2011, the CPS in which I was placed had been using a Target Monitoring and Evaluation (TME) approach (Dunsmuir, Brown, Iyadurai, and Monsen, 2009) as both a goals-based outcome measure, and a way to contract and record many of their involvements with children, families and schools. While this process was frequently and actively negotiated in collaboration with secondary-aged pupils, in practice, this was less likely to
happen with younger children in primary school settings. As a result, the child may not have the opportunity to express her/his views, have a say in the areas to be targeted, be consulted over the proposed intervention, or be a part of the evaluation of whether anything has changed for the better. Additionally, the targeted areas agreed may not be those in which the child held subjective concerns.

Given this background, it appeared that there was a ‘gap’ to be filled in obtaining the evaluations of younger children on their involvement with CPS in a systematic way. With this in mind, it seemed that an appropriate area of research focus might be the design of an evaluation tool that would allow the voices of primary-aged pupils to be heard in the identification of areas of difficulty, to be actively involved in target setting, and which could also be used to indicate change (outcomes) in the areas of difficulty identified.

It has been proposed that there is a role for the EP in developing assessment methodologies and effective interventions, and this can helpfully be approached from a positive psychology perspective (Gersch, 2009). Positive psychology is understood as an approach which offers an opportunity to move away from a preoccupation with difficulties, problems and distress. The focus in a traditional ‘pathological’ model is on identifying what is wrong, in order to provide a ‘repair’ or ‘cure’. In a positive psychology approach, this is replaced by a focus on positive subjective experiences, positive traits such as resilience, and positive systems and institutions (Seligman, 1999, as cited in Linley, Joseph, Harrington and Wood, 2006, p.4), “what works, what is right, and what is improving” (Sheldon and King,
Despite the criticisms which have been levelled at positive psychology (which will be discussed at greater length in Paper 2), adopting a positive psychology approach was felt to be a potentially fruitful way to elicit children’s views on what was important to them, what they felt facilitated their learning in school, and to build on what was positive. As an approach to investigation, it promoted a focus on what was working, and on seeking solutions, that I felt was helpful to engender in my interactions with the children, while also acknowledging that they should feel free to express their difficulties and struggles in school. I felt it was vital that children themselves should be involved as co-constructors and collaborators at every stage of the process.

Initially, there were a number of considerations to be addressed and questions to be asked; do younger children hold considered views on their school lives, and if they do, can they express them? If they can, what are the best ways to elicit these views? And, if these views can be elicited, what do they tell us about the experience of younger children in school, and how can this help us to support them?

**The voice of the child**

Legislation has repeatedly emphasised the importance of listening to the voices of children in matters that affect them. In the international context, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN, 1989), was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1989, and ratified by UK Government in December 1991. Article 12 states that every child “who is capable of forming his or her own views” must have the right to express those views freely in all matters.
affecting the child” and given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child. In the UK, the 1989 Children’s Act gives public bodies the responsibility of taking the wishes and feelings of children into account when making decisions which affect them. The Special Educational Needs Code of Practice highlights the importance of children’s views being heard in assessment and intervention for both ethical and pragmatic reasons (DfES, 2001, p. 14). Children’s views are increasingly sought over how the curriculum should be delivered (McCallum, Hargreaves and Gipps, 2000; McIntyre, Pedder and Ruddock, 2005; Hopkins, 2008) and the present government agenda has placed responsibility on those involved in education to be proactive in developing ‘happiness’ and well-being in children (Evans, 2011), and in ensuring that pupils’ views of schools are taken into consideration as part of inspection processes (Ofsted, 2005).

Perhaps a logical starting place would be to attempt to determine what it is that children value in school, what factors are relevant to them, and under what conditions they experience subjective well-being, (or in children’s terms feel ‘happy’), and ‘ready to learn’. There is no shortage of literature on educational and pedagogical theories about factors contributing to the ‘ideal’ conditions for learning. However, the majority of the research underpinning these theories has been generated through questions asked by adults on the basis of their understandings of children. There are some notable exceptions to this, where researchers have attempted to elicit younger (7 – 11 years) children’s views on their education and school experience (e.g. McCallum, et al., 2000; Hopkins, 2008). By definition, the only people who can comment
accurately on the contemporary experience of childhood are children themselves. Even parents’ views may be different to those of their children, and what they say may not always be in child’s best interests (Pugh and Selleck, 1996). As Kelly succinctly stated, “If you want to know what’s wrong, then ask” (Butler and Green 2007), and likewise, we can ask, “What’s right?”

EPs are equipped with the skills to engage with primary aged children, and research suggests that children feel that EPs are particularly skilled at engaging with them in a way that helps them to feel ‘heard’ (Aubrey and Dahl, 2006). However, this is not as straightforward as it may seem.

**The challenge of listening to children**

Interviewing children takes time, skill, and requires careful thought and planning (Whitehurst, 2007). Concerns have been raised that the quality of information gained through talk with children may not be valid and reliable, and that children may either remain silent through lack of understanding, unfamiliarity with having their views sought by adults, or their responses may not be authentic because they feel compelled by unequal power relationships to say what they believe is expected of them (Lewis, 1992). The information gained may therefore be of limited value. Communication can be blocked by power differentials between adult and child, but also by race and cultural issues (Dwivedi, 1996), and the gender of the child and adult may influence interactions (Barnes, 1996). There may be a lack of awareness of issues about the child’s world that are particularly important, or of the ‘micro- culture’ of families and schools, including loyalties to family, school, teachers, and friends. It is important to be informed about children’s backgrounds before
interviewing them so that the researcher can be sensitive to their experiences (Brooker, 2001).

Environmental issues also require consideration. It has been argued that the school context can inhibit children from exercising their right to participate, as it is a place where adults control most of their choices; their time, occupation of space, choice of clothing, times of eating, and when and where communication is permissible. This has resulted in the validity of some school-based research being questioned (Morrow and Richards, 1996).

Ethical considerations include gaining access to children, consent (both parental, and of the child), confidentiality, feedback and ownership of, and respect for, the information shared (Lewis and Porter, 2004, as cited in Harding, 2009).

While it is important to hear the views of all children, some groups are particularly marginalised due to their perceived inability to make their views known due to age, language, or physical or developmental difficulties. Doubts have been raised about whether these children are able to hold or express valid opinions on their experience. Pugh and Selleck (1996) suggest that even young children (under 7 years) have as much right to contribute to the debate of what constitutes a quality service as parents, staff and policy makers. However, they argue that the culture, structures and procedures through which they engage do not encourage adults to listen seriously to the views of children. It has been suggested that the “hardest voices to reach are the ones that we most need to hear.” (DfES, 2001, p3). This especially
includes those children with severe communication difficulties and profound and multiple leaning difficulties, and there is relatively little research in this area (Harding, 2009), although this is beginning to be addressed (Kellett, 2008).

Given the difficulties, it is understandable that younger children and those with additional needs are not always involved as active participants in research. However there should be no barriers to communication and engagement that are insurmountable, although this may demand significant effort on the part of the adult researcher. There is no minimum age for listening to a child (Davie, 1996), and the active involvement of children in all forms of school life is to be encouraged (Davie, 1993). All children have a right to be heard, and there are more than legal and moral imperatives for making the effort to hear them.

There are also compelling pragmatic reasons (Gersch, 1987, 1992). Contemporary childhood must be culturally different to the experience of childhood for those who are now adults. Kellett (2005) describes the subculture of childhood, suggesting that only children themselves can have the ‘insider’ perspective that permits an authentic understanding of children’s worlds. When children are actively involved, they have ownership of identified problems, and develop commitment to bringing about solutions. Also, children tend to enjoy giving their views and make perceptive and constructive comments (Gersch, 1996). Additionally, active participation may be viewed as preparation to becoming involved and participatory citizens in the future.
Listening to younger children

The first steps in hearing the voices of younger children involve enabling adults to listen (Gersch, 1996) and equipping them with sensitivity to the child’s world. Interacting with children so that they feel able to share their authentic feelings is a skill. It requires respect, warmth, time, curiosity and a willingness to enter into a child’s experience, to adopt the child’s perspective, and engage at their developmental level. Adults require openness to interpretation of other modes of communication; behaviour, choice, interaction, play, and drawings or paintings. Additionally, adults need to be skilled at opening up conversations, to allow time to develop rapport and trust, to be patient, paced, respectful, curious, accepting, and to be able to contain, and not negate, any negative feelings expressed by the child. The use of “child-sized language is vital” (Barnes 1996, p. 150). Actively listening to children is an act of respect from adults, and eliciting children’s views tends to increase their feelings of confidence and worth (Gersch, 1996).

When asked sensitively, and using approaches appropriate to their developmental age, evidence suggests that younger children can and will respond, and demonstrate an impressive capacity for reflection. In research with a group of children under the age of 12 years, who were receiving services due to additional needs, researchers reported that “children held clear, realistic and, indeed, sophisticated views about a number of aspects of their school environment, their teachers, their peers, their lessons and their behaviour, as well as the importance of their education” (Aubrey and Dahl,
Children can and do provide reliable responses if questioned in a way they can understand about issues that are meaningful to them. The challenge is to find ways to engage that neither exclude nor patronise (Kellett, 2005).

**Ways to engage with younger children**

In an exploration of the views of three and four year-olds on the early childhood centre they attended, Clark (2004) used a variety methods which utilised young children’s strengths. She particularly adopted the role of the ‘inexpert’, recognising that children typically perceived the power difference between themselves and adults in terms of knowledge and experience. This could result in younger children trying to give the ‘right’ answer in interactions with adults, that is, the answer that they perceived the adult wanted to elicit, rather than to express their own opinions (Clark and Moss, 2001). The role acknowledges the children as the ‘experts’ of their own experience (Clark and Moss, 2005). Similarly, in a study of children up to 4 years old in day care, children’s views were gained through observation, triangulation interviews with parents and key setting staff, interviews with the children, tours of the setting with the children taking photos of likes and dislikes, and role play where children could ‘make it [a less preferred situation] better’ (Day, 2010). Elsewhere, children have taken the lead in role-play scenarios, and expressed their views through creative approaches like writing a ‘message in a bottle’ (Messiou, 2002).
Brooker, (2001) offers a range of creative approaches that have been used to engage with young children including; dolls and puppets, photographs and pictures, children’s own drawings, and ‘smiley faces’ as a non-verbal way of indicating liking/dislike, or agreement/disagreement. In their systematic review, Aubrey and Dahl (2006) listed approaches that may facilitate communication with younger children or those with additional needs. These included; activity based techniques, child-friendly framing of questions, enactment, the use of play props, drawing and computer-based approaches. A similar multi-method and participatory strategy is the Mosaic approach which enabled children under 5 to ‘take the lead’ in the interview process (Clark and Moss, 2001). Varied approaches are likely to be needed even with one child (Harding, 2009).

The use of statements, or scenarios, in place of questions has been proposed. A particularly useful approach was described as ‘out-loud’ thinking, that is, the adult interviewer volunteering information, and encouraging and welcoming the child’s attempts to correct or modify her thinking (Hutt, Tyler, Hutt and Christopherson, 1989; Brooker, 2001). In day-to-day interactions, and particularly in school, children are asked questions to which the adult already knows the answer. The job of the child is to determine the correct response on this occasion. A more open and conversational style, permits a child to develop and explore their ideas, and offers the researcher the opportunity to explore their understandings by being curious and asking for elaboration.

Strategies employed when interviewing children in legal contexts include child-led activities, time to build rapport, the use of free narrative accounts,
open-ended, simply-phrased questions, and attention to closing the interview on a ‘positive’ note, so that the child leaves feeling good about the encounter, and with positive feelings about themselves (Hall, 1996).

Although it requires effort, there is evidence that the use of ‘child-friendly’ approaches is fruitful. Older KS2 children are able to express their views on even complex metaphysical and spiritual concepts. In a mixed group of sixty Year 5 and Year 9 children, over 88% felt able to express what made them happy or unhappy (Gersch, Dowling, Panagiotaki and Potton, 2008). In another study, primary school children with additional needs drew pictures and spoke openly about their school lives (Maxwell, 2006).

It has been noted that children’s can be involved at three levels in expressing their views and wishes; through consultative processes, participative initiatives and the promotion of self-advocacy (Lansdown, 2001). Other researchers have taken children’s participation even further, and rather than eliciting their views as participants, have either collaborated with them as active researchers (Nieuwenhuys, 2001), or equipped them with the skills to carry out their own research and analysis, with the adults acting as facilitators (Kellett, 2005). This approach is still relatively new, and studies with children in the middle years of childhood are particularly few in number (Kellett & Ding, 2004; Kellett, Forrest, Dent and Ward, 2004). However, there is increasing interest in this area, particularly in response to policy initiatives, as I will discuss later, and the importance and uniqueness of children’s perspectives is more readily acknowledged (Kirby & Bryson, 2002; Kellett, 2005). When they are given the opportunity, as for example, at the Children’s
Research Centre (http://childrens-research-centre.open.ac.uk) at the Open University, typically developing children most frequently want to research issues that directly concern their own quality of life (Kellett, 2005) and/or changes they would like to see happen, for example, school-based issues such as homework.

What children and young people say about their well-being and the school experience

In the UK, a comprehensive study on pupil voice was carried out by the Children’s Society and the University of York (2006). The aim was to investigate subjective well-being, and to develop measures to track well-being in children and young people. This involved 11,000 teenagers in the 14 – 16 year age group. Ten themes emerged from the qualitative analysis of the data, the four most frequently mentioned being family, friends, leisure and school (Evans, 2011). From this, a framework has been developed offering three domains of well-being; self, relationships and environment (of which school life is a significant part).

Internationally governments are beginning to actively seek ways of listening to what children and young people tell them about the policies that affect their lives (Fattore, Mason and Watson, 2007, as cited in Awartani, Whitman and Gordon, 2008). However, much research into pupil voice is carried out with older children, perhaps because they are thought to be more able to
engage in conversation, respond to questions and to have reflected to some degree on their experiences.

Internationally, there has been a shift in focus from a decrement model centred on identifying problems, and towards a positive focus on well-being (Awartani, Whitman and Gordon, 2008). In the UK, the Welsh Assembly have been actively promoting children’s voices in policy making, particularly by consulting on and monitoring their well-being (Llywodraeth Cymru/Welsh Government, 2011). They are currently involved in a pilot study, (which includes a quantitative survey and qualitative techniques), to collect data on the perceptions of young people in the 15 – 16 year age group, specifically around the ways in which schools affect their wellbeing. Initial studies were carried out in the Middle East (Awartani et al., 2008). One aim is to develop research tools to elicit and monitor children’s perceptions of their well-being (Voice of Children Programme (VOC)). The long term aim is to produce a package of measures (the VOC Toolkit), which allows the voice of children to be heard in order to influence policy making, and can emphasise the gap between the espoused intention of prioritising well-being, and what is actually achieved in practice. The report suggests that there continues to be a significant gap in measures and approaches applicable to primary school and early year’s education (Awartani et al., 2008). Likewise, in a recent European report into child well-being, and the tools available to measure it, the authors recommend taking account of the personal perceptions of children, and particularly younger children, and for their active participation in developing indicators of their well-being (Gordon, Arjomand and O’Toole,
Australian research, including younger aged children of eight years and above, reported that the three themes identified as most important to their well-being in relation to learning were a sense of agency, security, and a positive sense of self (Fattore, Mason and Watson, 2009).

Smaller scale studies with younger children, and those with additional needs, have explored how these children see their school lives (Maxwell, 2006). Maxwell found that the children talked openly about school life. They stressed the importance of social relationships, particularly with peers, as being more important than time in class. The playground and opportunities for alternative play were of prime importance. A sense of inclusion and belonging was central, and they raised concerns about being excluded from social groups. Perceptively, they suggested that there was a difference between knowing about appropriate social skills and being able to use them effectively. Importantly, as a result of this study, changes were made to play provision and policy through the School Council.

The review of selected literature suggests that younger children can and should give their views on issues that impact on them, for example, their school lives. Additionally, an approach which allows them increased agency as co-collaborators in research, and particularly in the development of tools to monitor their well-being in school is to be welcomed. Therefore, the study reported subsequently attempts to sensitively capture the views of younger children on the school experience, and answer two related research questions;
1. Can Key Stage 2 children give us meaningful information about what is important to them in school, which could be useful in informing assessment, intervention and evaluation of positive outcomes (that is, desirable changes in, for example, performance, behaviour, feelings, beliefs, or interactions)?

And if they are able to do this;

2. What do children in Key Stage 2 tell us are the important factors in helping them to be ‘happy’ and ‘ready to learn’ in school?

Definitions of terms adopted

In the two papers that follow, the terms ‘happiness’, ‘well-being’, and ‘readiness to learn’ are used. It is important to acknowledge that these are concepts that do not hold singular or straightforward definitions.

It should be noted here, that the dispositional descriptions of ‘happiness’ and ‘readiness to learn’ were the terms most readily offered by the children in the initial focus groups, and agreed by the children who took part in the pilot study groups. These were terms that they agreed and easily understood, as reflected in the ease with which they used them between themselves in conversation. As the research was driven by a desire to use children’s words and concepts and to ‘follow their lead’, these were the terms adopted.

‘Happiness’ is an imprecise concept, especially because of its familiarity. Overuse can mean that a term becomes so generic that it is relatively meaningless. The temptation was to avoid its use entirely. However, Argyle
(2001) states that surveys on ‘happiness’ have demonstrated that, other than for academics, where the precise definition of terms is so important, people do not struggle with or question the concept, and can clearly define what it means for themselves in their own lives. Importantly for the studies reported here, in preliminary discussions, and the piloting phases of possible research approaches with children in this age group, it was the word that children used by choice to denote the general experience of positively evaluated emotions. Here happiness is defined as, “often being in a state of joy or other positive emotion, or it is being satisfied with one’s life”, (Argyle, 2001, p. 1).

Well-being, often termed subjective well-being, also offers multiple definitions in the academic literature. It has been defined as “a positive and sustainable condition that allows individuals, groups or nations to thrive and flourish” (Huppert, Baylis and Keverne (2005). Specifically ‘student well-being’, that is, well-being directly related to the school experience, has been defined as “a sustainable state, characterised by predominantly positive feelings and attitude, positive relationships at school, resilience, self-optimisation and a high level of satisfaction with learning experiences” (Noble, McGrath, Roffey and Rowling, 2008, p. 30). The authors suggest that student well-being has strong positive links to learning.

Happiness has been directly related to subjective well-being, and for some researchers in the field it is synonymous with happiness (Diener and Ryan, 2009). For the purposes of the studies reported here, happiness and well-being are also taken to be synonymous, as this was how they were understood by the children.
“Readiness to learn” is another complex term with no clear theoretical definition. It was adopted for use in this study because it was offered by one of the collaborating children, and agreed through the focus groups, as the term of choice to capture and communicate a positive state conducive to engagement, perseverance and enjoyment in learning. Through exploration within the focus groups, it can be summarised as a subjective state in which a child has the attentional, cognitive, behavioural and emotional resources to enable them to engage with learning opportunities in a supportive physical and social environment. Perhaps this might be best conceptualised by describing a child who is ‘ready to learn’ (as discussed in the focus groups). This child would have her basic physiological needs met (not hungry, thirsty or tired), be free from undue concerns (feel safe), be relaxed and at ease (but “not sleepy”), be interested in the material being taught, have a belief in her personal resources and ability to engage with ideas, activities and tasks (confidence), and be able to produce behaviours conducive to learning (for example, looking and listening).

The children felt that these were the optimum conditions for learning. However, the complexity of human motivation is acknowledged, and this does not naively assume that children will not learn under different, and less than optimal conditions. For example, a child may dedicate themselves to engaging and working hard in order to escape negative aspects in their home or social life, or in order to develop feelings of competence and bolster self-esteem, when this cannot be obtained from other sources. Interestingly, none of the children in the focus groups, or in the subsequent interviews,
offered the suggestion that learning would be facilitated under these conditions, but a significant proportion claimed that it would be impaired.

From the academic literature on the related concept of ‘student engagement’, Furlong and Christenson (2008) offer a model of four levels of engagement which echo the views of the children. They include; academic engagement (time spent on learning tasks), behavioural engagement (learning behaviours demonstrated in class, engagement with wider school activities), cognitive engagement (interest in learning, goal-setting and performance monitoring), and affective engagement (sense of belonging and connection to adults and peers around learning). The authors also highlight the importance of children having positive relationships with peers and adults, facilitated by a ‘caring and supportive’ environment, support with interpersonal (friendship) problems, and development of social skills (Furlong and Christenson, 2008).

**Approach to research**

The study reported here is exploratory in nature, and can be situated in a pragmatic and contextualist approach within a critical realist perspective (Willig 1999, Bhaskar, 1989, as cited in Robson, 2002, p. 41). The assumption is that identity (for example, that of being a pupil in school) and social processes (for example, being part of a ‘learning community’ situated in a school) are negotiated, understood and accepted in local and historically situated cultures, and may be ‘real’ in the sense that they are largely agreed as having value to the culture at that time, as a theory or narrative of ‘how things are’. Individuals operate within these processes ‘as if’ they share common understandings of a singular underlying reality, a unitary narrative. However, any narrative is likely to be problematic in so far as it prevents
other narratives, understandings and perspectives to be explored. Dominant narratives are maintained through power mechanisms operated by dominant groups, for example, on the basis of skin colour, gender, or age. Within a critical realist approach, dominant narratives are accepted pragmatically ‘as if’ they were real, but through exploration and analysis they are examined for the operation of power, and challenged on the basis of the practices, experiences and outcomes that they both allow and prohibit. Assuming this research stance allows explorations of the understandings of children, whilst it also admits of other possible constructions and understandings of ‘school’ and ‘learning’ from multiple perspectives (for example, those of teachers and parents).

The research approach adopted here is self-consciously inductive in its commitment to ‘follow the data’ provide by the children and put their voices at the centre of theory building (Hayes, 2000). This is underpinned by a critical realist perspective (Bhaskar, 1989, as cited in Robson, 2002 p. 41) where it is assumed that underlying social structures have their own ‘reality’ and can be experienced, but are subject to change and modification through the human activities of reflection, construction, and modification, through talk and social practices. What is offered here is a ‘reading’ of the collected talk of the children, the validity of which relies on the level of involvement of the children with its analysis and interpretation.

Importantly to me, this research also adopts a critical perspective in that it is passionately child-centred, in an attempt to redress the balance of power back to children and from adults who construct the ‘reality’ of school for them. I have attempted to do this by involving and working with the children
at every stage of the research, and checking out all observations and assumptions at each stage to ensure validity. The research is critical in the sense that it does not assume an inevitable status quo, but facilitates the possibility of change through raising awareness in those who interact to create a particular version of ‘reality’ that is culturally and historically situated (Bhaskar, 1986). This permits the possibility of actors understanding their agency, and acting to produce positive change for all involved.

I have tried to design the research so that it is ethically motivated at every step. Each child must have a real choice about whether to participate and how to participate. It was very important to me that the tasks that I asked the children to complete should be engaging and enjoyable, and should leave them feeling at least as positive about themselves and their school experience as they had before our time together.

A thematic analysis was carried out on the interview data (for a more detailed review of the approach as utilised in this study, please see Appendix 12).

All names have been changed to maintain anonymity. I have chosen to refer to the children who participated in this study as collaborators rather than participants in order to reflect their active role in the research more accurately. (Where other research is cited, the term ‘participants’ is retained, if this was the term used by the authors). Additionally, I have chosen to write in the first person as researcher in order to remind myself and readers of the active and participatory role I have in the research, and the interpretations made. The research has adopted a specific focus on ‘in-school’ feelings and behaviour. While acknowledging the significant impact that home and
community circumstances have on children and their learning, an examination of these issues was outside the remit of the current study. Rather there was a conscious focus was on issues and factors that EPs working alongside multi-agency colleagues might be able to modify or control, particularly within the school setting, but also through direct or indirect work with colleagues in families and communities.

Data collection

Selection of schools and collaborators

Informal focus groups were held in two of the participating schools (Schools C and D). These were schools with differing demographics, as previously discussed, and were selected due to ease of access for preliminary exploration of suitable ways to engage with the children and discuss the issues. Six children from KS2 took part in the group at School C, and eight children took part in a similar group in School D. The emphasis was to encourage free talk about the experience of school, highlighting positive but also negative issues and experiences. Topics raised included things that happen in class, things that happen at break-times, friends, environmental conditions (including teacher qualities), learning behaviours of self and others, influence of relationships with adults in school, experiencing emotions in school, understanding behavioural expectations, perceived achievement or failure, feeling good about achievements or bad about things that were difficult, and the impact of home on school and vice versa. These early insights guided the development of data collection materials.
Design of data collection materials

A script was designed to guide the introduction to the interview schedule, including a choice of ‘free talk’ led by the child, drawing a picture, or work with a puppet. An ‘incomplete sentences’ stimulus was also produced, and seven ‘emotion/smiley faces’ were prepared for sorting by the children with a view to producing a rating scale. Details for the interview schedules, incomplete sentences and emotion faces can be found in Appendices 6, 8 and 10 respectively.

Pilot study

There were three parts to the interview process (see Figure. 1, below and Appendix 9). The first two parts included an open interview, the approach to which (talk, drawing or the use of a puppet) was determined by the child, and an incomplete sentences stimulus exercise. These approaches were used as a vehicle for exploring the children’s experiences and feelings about school and learning. The third part supplied data for the study reported in Paper 2. The entire interview process was piloted on ten children in KS2, from one of the participating schools (School C). The children had not previously participated in the focus groups. These children were known to me, and included one of my own children. I did this explicitly because I felt that they would have few inhibitions about telling me how the process felt, and offering comments and suggestions for improvement. I tried each of the approaches, with the members of this group. It was as a result of this process that the children decided that the puppet (when used) should be given a name that
corresponded with the gender of the interviewee, and that there should be a ‘container’ (the rucksack) to place the ‘ideas’ into. The children raised some practical concerns about the time it would take to complete a picture or storyboard.

The children told me that they liked the opportunity to explore their feelings about school life, although one child commented that “you could get upset if things are going wrong”. The open neutral stimulus sentence, “Boys/girls feel...” caused most children to pause and struggle a little, but generated interesting replies. The children included in the pilot study had little difficulty with responding to the incomplete sentences exercise, however, I had some concerns that this exercise could be more problematic with children who I had never met previously, and with whom I had not yet developed a rapport. They told me that the process had been fun, and “better than being in class”.

Data collection process

Four schools were approached in the South West of the UK. Three schools were situated in a city-based Unitary Authority, and one was approximately 44 km from the city, in a rural area. The schools were chosen to be broadly representative of the range of primary schools in the area. Faith schools were not included, and neither were special schools. This was largely on the basis of negotiating access to schools with a range of demographics. Faith schools are more likely to draw their pupils from a wider range of locations across the city, as, particularly for the Catholic Schools, priority for entry is given to practising Catholic families. Additionally, I felt that it was necessary to explore techniques and develop skills of working collaboratively with this
age group before working with children experiencing a significant level of additional needs requiring specialist provision. I am hoping to develop the scale with children in this group in the future.

According to local demographic data (Lower Layer Super Output Area data), for the two inner city schools, one school was located in an area experiencing high levels of deprivation (School A), and one had a catchment area of medium deprivation (School C). One school drew pupils from an area of relatively low deprivation, situated in a suburban area (School D). The final school was located in a relatively affluent rural area (School B). (Specific demographic data about the schools can be found in Table 1, Appendix 1.)

Initially the Head Teacher and Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCo) in each school was approached by phone. If the school expressed an interest in taking part, a follow-up e-mail was sent, outlining the broad requirements and details of the study. All four schools approached consented. (See Appendix 2 for introductory e-mail and Appendix 3 for Head Teacher consent form).

Subsequently, I visited each school and discussed the requirements of the study in detail with the SENCo and Head Teacher, offering an opportunity to answer any questions that they might have. Schools were asked to select ten pupils in KS2 who were representative of their broad demographic on the basis of gender, ethnicity, socio-economic status, year group, ability and Special Educational Need (SEN). (See Table 1 below for details of collaborators). The choice of children to put forward for the interviews was left to the Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCo) at each of the
schools. Fourteen of the children selected were identified as having special educational needs (35%), and were at School Action, or School Action +, and three of these children had Statements of Special Educational Need. This is in excess of the relatively high UK average of just under 20% classified with SEN. Two children had English as an additional language (one Polish boy, and one Egyptian), and two children were classified as Black, one of whom was of mixed ethnicity. For the group as a whole, sixteen children were classified by the SENCo in their school as being below average ability, thirteen were of average ability and eleven were of above average ability. Children with additional educational needs, or of below average ability may have been slightly over-represented because they were known to the SENCo making the selection. However, this was reassuring as it suggested that the views of the children collaborating in the study would represent those who were less able, and potentially less likely to have a voice, rather than only those of able and articulate children.

Parental consent was obtained, via the school, with an explanatory letter and individual consent form (see Appendix 4). All parents approached consented.

Each school supplied minimal biographical data about each child for whom consent had been obtained in order to ensure that the interview went smoothly, and as far as possible was a positive experience for the child. For example, I was told if a child was in care, fostered, had one or both parents or other carers at home, and if they had specific educational needs, if relevant to the interaction, for example, if they used Makaton.
Table 2: Details of research collaborators (N = 40)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Number of children</th>
<th>Year group</th>
<th>Code of Practice level</th>
<th>Social care involvement</th>
<th>Social care involvement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
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<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SA = School Action, SA+ = School Action plus, CPP = Child protection plan, CiC = Child in Care, EAL = English as an additional language.

Informed consent

In the first part of the interview, each child received an explanation of the role of the EP, why they had been selected to take part in the study and what would be required of them should they choose to participate. They were assured of anonymity and confidentiality, and informed of the likely uses of the findings of the study. Each child was given the opportunity to ask questions. It was stressed that they were not compelled to take part. Child consent was obtained by signature or mark on a separate consent form which was read aloud with each child (See Appendix 5). This was really 'assent' as a child is not able to give consent in law (Coady, 2001).

Interviews took between thirty and sixty minutes, as dictated by the naturally evolving conversation.

Only 1 child, a boy in Yr 3 in School C, declined the interview following the explanation. He was replaced with a child matched on the selection criteria.
and interviewed at a later date. Another boy in the same school, also in Yr 4, withdrew at stimulus question 16, having become upset, and disclosed an issue with bullying. (This was discussed with him, and later referred to the SENCo, with his consent to disclose this information).

All children were interviewed within school during the course of the school day, in a quiet classroom, office or other space, where they were likely to feel comfortable and relaxed. A particular difficulty has been noted (Clark, 2004) where there is a mismatch between the interviewer and interviewee with one either being perceived as the expert, and the other knowing too little to understand, or there being a distinct power differential between the dyad. I tried to address this by telling the collaborators that I knew about schools because of my job, but that they were the ‘experts’, and we were working collaboratively on this research. All the children who participated entered into the conversations and activities thoughtfully and enthusiastically.

For a graphic representation of the interview process see Figure 1 and additional information at Appendix 9.
Figure 1 Interview process

Meeting with child, explanation and consent

‘Open’ interview
(using semi-structured interview schedule as prompt where needed)

Story/recount  Picture/storyboard  Puppet

Incomplete sentence prompts

Sorting ‘Smileys’

Debrief and thanks

Please see Appendices 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10 for full details of the interview approach.
Focus Groups

Following analysis of the data, I returned to each school and conducted a focus group using a subset of the original interviewees, chosen on the basis of their availability on the day of the visit. At each school, a minimum of four of the original children took part (maximum six). We discussed the issues raised in the combined data from all the school sites. The information was represented graphically, (see Figure 2), both to make it more visual and immediately accessible to the children, and to ensure that individual schools or respondents could not be identified, for reasons of confidentiality. The data were discussed in relation to the two levels of analysis conducted; firstly to ensure that I had captured and represented the range and detail of their views (descriptive level), and secondly, to check the tentative interpretations that I felt had emerged from the thematic analysis of their comments. This provided a validity check and an opportunity for further exploration, adjustment and elaboration of the themes.

The focus groups were key in reaching consensus on topics, but also to challenge views, and develop themes, adding a richness to the data (Lewis, 1992), as in previous work with this age group (Ashton, 2009), the children were able to do this with me acting only as facilitator and ‘clarifier’, to keep the discussion ‘on track’, and to ensure all themes were covered. The aim was to ask broad questions and then to explore the answers alongside the children to ensure clarity, understanding and to provide elaboration. I was very aware of many of my own pre-conceptions, which I tried to put aside by recording them in a reflective research diary.
The children were also able to freely express their views on the interpretations made within the focus groups. They confirmed the validity of the analysis and acknowledged the range of views expressed as those that they were aware of in school life, even if they did not hold them personally.

When presented with the descriptive thematic network or ‘map’ of the topics and themes, the children in the focus groups, recognised it as a valid collective representation of what they had shared. Naturally, not all children held each specific view of the topic or felt that all were important to them personally, but importantly they all recognised them either in themselves or others.
Approach to data analysis

Thematic analysis – an overview

In the following text, I use ‘topic’ to refer to a surface, descriptive level issue and ‘theme’ to indicate an emergent issue at a deeper level of analysis.

The aim of the data coding was two-fold, and provided analyses at two levels. Firstly, a descriptive analysis, or surface-level overview of the data, and secondly, responses were re-grouped and coded for meaning, rather than surface content, in an attempt to explore underlying themes which emerged. Thematic analysis was an approach that would permit engagement with the data at both of these levels. As such, “Thematic analysis can be a method which works both to reflect reality, and to unpick or unravel the surface of ‘reality’ ” (Braun and Clarke 2006, p. 83). It has been argued that thematic analysis is best conceptualised as a flexible and practical research tool that is at the core of many qualitative approaches, and across different qualitative methods (Boyatzis 1998). Its use enables a search for repeated patterns of meaning (themes) to be revealed, identified and explored across a set of data. The aim is to organise, and elegantly and parsimoniously describe the data in rich detail. It may include further interpretation, and can be carried out at both a descriptive, but also an analytic level. (For an overview of the underlying philosophical approach adopted for this study; the methodology, and the thematic analysis approach, please see Appendix 12).

Selected themes will be discussed here, as an exploration of all themes would be beyond the scope of this paper.
Data reduction

The responses to the interview exercises and incomplete sentences task for the 40 collaborators generated 918 data fragments. These data fragments were analysed using two different approaches, in order to produce two levels of analysis. Firstly, responses to the incomplete sentences task were sorted and tabulated on a question by question basis to see the range of responses given by collaborators and the frequency of each category of response across the four school settings. This was to check for differences in the responding patterns across different groups. It was also possible to obtain an indication of how important and general a topic was likely to be, by using frequency of mention across collaborators and school settings, i.e. whether the topic was localised to a particular setting, or held more generally across the four school settings (See Appendix 13 for selected examples). Secondly, data fragments from the open interviews were combined with the responses from the incomplete sentences task and de-contextualised.

This process was carried out manually, using and viewing the actual data fragments themselves, and achieving a physical overview, rather than through utilising computer software. A preliminary coding framework was devised, and the data fragments were recursively sorted and grouped into categories on the basis of key words, references and meanings to explore the possible arrangements that would ‘make sense’ of the data. This was a reflective and reflexive process, and developing initial codes was an important part of analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The aim was to capture, at a descriptive level, the full range of issues within school that the children felt were important, and within each of those issues or topics, the
range of sub-issues or nuances that were raised. The initial aim was to be as inclusive as possible in identifying topics and issues, as it was unclear at this stage which would become important or interesting at a later stage of analysis. Initial descriptive topics were named and possible proto themes began to emerge.

Surface-level descriptive analysis was carried out by sorting into the following topic areas; Child (academic competence, personal characteristics, socialisation, social recognition, internal distractions), school environment (external distractions, teacher qualities, classroom organization, curriculum, playground), home (family, pets, leisure opportunities), and community (physical environment, safety). This was only one of the possible ways to arrange the topics, but it was pragmatic in that it permitted a focus on areas of children’s lives over which the EP may have a progressively decreasing level of influence, that is from the school to a community setting. It also mapped on to an eco-systemic perspective (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) as an organising principle.

In order to discuss the descriptive level data with the children in the focus groups, and to check for validity, I presented the data as a descriptive thematic network (Attride-Stirling, 2001). This allowed the data to be immediate and visual, so that it could be easily accessed and understood by the children. In constructing the network, I arranged the topics for clarity and centralised the two emergent themes reported here into qualities of the child.
Three of these topics; academic competence, social competence and social recognition, are included here as examples. As this exercise was deliberately exploratory and aimed to gather a full range of the children’s views on school life and learning, a large amount of data was generated. Description of other selected topic areas can be found at Appendix 15. (A full analysis of the data is available by request to the author, but was too extensive to be included here.)

Subsequently, the data were interrogated at a more interpretive level for the range of underlying meanings that were subsumed within them. When a particular grouping or theme began to emerge, it was important to return to the data as a whole and look for other data fragments that would contradict or disconfirm that theme and offer alternative or contradictory meanings or understandings. It was also important to check each response item in its original context to ensure that the likely meaning of the original utterance had not been changed by being de-contextualised. This was a recursive process where the data were continually re-interrogated in light of new ideas or perspectives.

Where direct quotes have been used, I have retained the children’s original words, and not made changes to the grammar, unless the quote is unintelligible without elaboration, when I have enclosed additional information in square brackets.
Descriptive analysis

In the following discussion, both themes and frequency of mention of those themes by children (as a digit in brackets) are recorded. This is done explicitly to both indicate where themes are expressed and commonly held, but also to allow themes with low frequency of mention, the potentially 'unheard voices' to emerge and be given equal recognition in the full breadth of views expressed. (Frequency of occurrence of themes is used more explicitly in the following related paper, when decisions were taken about the inclusion of ratable items in a scale).

An overview is represented in a thematic network or ‘map’ (Figure. 2).

Descriptive topics

Academic competence

Competence with academic work was important to many of the children interviewed. Within this were specific mentions of what the children felt to be indicators of competence, which included; getting the correct answers to problems (or good marks), working hard, or doing one’s best (12), completing work (9), the quantity of work produced (doing 'lots') (8), and quality of work in terms of presentation (7).

Some children were concerned when they got things wrong, particularly if they felt that they should know. Others set very high standards and felt it was important to be 'perfect'.

"Some people worry if they haven’t got it all right even if they try their hardest.” (Fleur)
Trying hard, engagement, focus and concentration, were either directly referenced, or alluded to frequently by the children. This can be experienced as intensely rewarding. One girl explained;

“I am in a ‘deep’ writing space...focussing on my work...not getting distracted.” (Amanda)

This suggested an experience of ‘flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990).

A sense of completion is also rewarding; the sense of having finished work was reported to bring a sense of achievement (9).

“When I have done the work and given it in...it’s complete.” (Amanda)

Being unsure that there is time to complete work can be stressful for some children (6).

It is important for teaching staff to ensure that children get the opportunity to experience this sense of achievement, through knowledge of the individual pupils, planning and appropriate differentiation.

“We have a good level of work, not too easy, not too difficult, and there is just enough of it to do in the time.” (Lizzie)

The perceived difficulty of the material by the child has an influence on how good they feel about mastering it (2).

“I have just achieved something really tricky which took a long time...I managed to complete it and persevered.” (George)

These positive feelings are developed when the environment is suited to the child’s current development. It is important to ‘rise to the challenge’ (13), but
while the task or activity must be sufficiently hard, the child must perceive themselves as competent to meet the challenge, to be stretched but not overwhelmed (Harris 2000), and this has to be tempered with some activities that are easier, in order to build and maintain confidence.

“Best when bits are challenging and bits are easy.” (Oliver)

“Going for a goal I think I can meet.” (Oscar)

“I like pushing myself out of my comfort zone sometimes...I’m going to try to challenge to be more clever.” (Kevin)

This was one of the few areas where gender differences came to the fore, with boys predominantly offering these comments.

The perception of the quantity of work completed is an additional factor. Having done 'lots’ of work is perceived as being good, and sometimes doing this quickly (2).

“I am getting quite a lot done...speeding ahead.” (Amanda)

Perhaps this is because it suggests to the child that they are particularly competent in this part of the curriculum, or in comparison to others.

“I have done the most work in the class.” (Kevin)

Academic competence was perceived to have both short and longer term benefits. Interestingly, eleven children held a long term view of the relevance of school, and mentioned this specifically. They made reference to the importance of school (3), its role in preparing them for adult life, and the good feelings that being active in their learning could engender. Specifically the
importance of ‘learning to learn’ was mentioned, developing and using skills, and holding an holistic view of learning and development. Children mentioned becoming more confident, competent and developing pride in their skills and achievement.

“I understand better…I am learning more and its fitting together better…I’m getting good at it.” (Zoe)

One child reported using this sense of competence as a naive technique to support mental health and well-being, and to develop resilience,

“I think about the good things that I have achieved in the day.” (George)

The children mentioned meta-learning skills (Claxton, 2007) and the use of resources to help them. It was important to be able to ask for support, either by asking the teacher when stuck (4), or by checking with friends (3), without eliciting a negative response, or fearing ridicule from adults or peers.

Self-help skills included using learning resources or techniques (6), for example, times table posters, number lines, a dictionary, thesaurus, the Internet, letter pyramids and aids to memory like mnemonics,

“Lots of things around the class to help when I am stuck.” (Zoe)

Prominent independent strategies were preparation and planning out work, checking through, practice and having a positive mental attitude.

“I am doing some work and I have researched it on the internet and I know what I am doing.” (Fleur)

“Takes a while to learn new things...keep going and persevere.” (Alison)
Others mentioned the use of provision in school, from which they could elicit support.

“I don’t feel worried at all...always something to help, like homework club.”
(Amanda)

However, the children also alluded to disadvantages of appearing more competent academically than their peers. There is some evidence that children are monitoring for the risk of alienating themselves by their actions and interactions across social, emotional and academic areas of school life, and this was of particular relevance for girls. At times this monitoring may inhibit their performance. This was alluded to in a comment about the presentation of work.

“I have tried my best and my work is really well-presented...not perfect, because I feel good but don’t want to make my friends feel jealous. Don’t ‘rub it in’. (Lizzie)

This aspect of social monitoring and comparison is a constant underlying theme in the majority of topics discussed; academic, social and emotional. There is a continual sense of the child perceiving themselves in relation to others, and this resulting in either a sense of connectedness or alienation.

“So some people want to be better than others and get upset if they don’t [do better] or get it wrong.” (Lizzie)

There is a threat to feelings of competence and self-esteem if you ‘get it wrong’, and particularly if you do so publically.

“People laughing when you get it wrong is unhelpful.” (Amber)
This negative social recognition is painful. It might be argued that this is particularly the case because social acceptance is held to be so important, as we shall now see.

**Social competence**

There were many references to the overwhelming importance of positive friendships (43) in talking with the children. Many other comments also implied that being happy is about belonging and ‘fitting in’. The ideal is specified as;

“*Everyone includes everybody.*” (Amber)

“No one is left out.” (Mandy)

However there are variations in the number of friends that one requires in order to be happy, with some commenting that it is good to have lots of friends (4), and others wanting a best friend (2) or a special friend (6). Four children commented that they often had no one to play with, and this made them sad. However one child commented that he was happiest at playtime when,

“I’m on my own.” (Robert)

Clearly, personal qualities and relationship skills, being able to make and sustain friendships and negotiate disagreement, are key. Misbehaviour in the playground was often related to falling out with friends, fighting (3) and name calling (3). The boundaries in this freer environment appear harder to understand, and are open to diverse interpretations between children.
“Wrestling and stuff gets out of order…” (Sulayman)

Regulation of the behaviour of self and others is difficult to achieve, and can result in poor judgements.

“It began as a little ‘take down’ game…people and how they make the game go.” (Sulayman)

These misinterpretations extend to adults.

“…hit someone when we are playing chase and it looks like we are fighting [to the meal time assistants].” (Alan)

There is an understanding that making friendships work requires skills and effort; being able to ‘behave’, not ‘falling out’, being ‘nice’ to others, and understanding the rules of games, both explicit and implicit. Gaining behavioural control can have positive outcomes.

“Having lots of friends…I didn’t used to have, but I’m better behaved.” (Mark)

However this is not always straightforward. Choosing the ‘right’ people to play with (those with whom you don’t get into trouble) is important, and this can create personal conflict.

“I play with the right people…sometimes difficult…others ask me to play and I want to…it’s hard.” (Sulayman)

Poor relationship skills leave a child at risk of social exclusion. One girl commented that things go well when;

“I play properly…join in a game. Most of the time I draw on the stones on the wall.” (Daisy)
Frequently, the choice of playmates appeared to be in single gender groups, and the assumption that this was understood implicitly was reflected in the construction of responses. One girl commented;

“Sometimes have friends to play with...sometimes [I] play with the boys.”
(Mandy)

Ideally, the best relating was had;

“When all my friends join in together and don’t mess it up... [misbehave and get into trouble]”. (Kevin)

Children also enjoyed playing with siblings (4) or extended family members within school. This was particularly important to younger children wanting to play with older siblings.

“I get to play with my friends, and my brother [Year 6] lets me talk and play with him.” (Angus)

In three of the four schools, children were particularly enthusiastic about opportunities for all year groups in the school, or a key stage, to play together. This occurred either because outdoor space permitted this, or the school had prioritised it and put in structures to support it. One child commented that one of their best times in school was;

“On the field playing with lots of people...the whole school joined in.” (Ellie)

Having friendship skills confers feelings of social competence and confidence. Interpersonal and physical skills also contribute to an overall sense of competence. A ‘good’ sense of humour and the ability to entertain
and make others laugh was stressed by a number of children, particularly boys.

“I’m funny,... or skateboarding and [I] can do a trick.” (Jacob)

**Social recognition**

While it is possible to hold an internal model of competence that is personally relevant and reinforcing, most children also wanted their achievements to be publically recognised and celebrated by those who are important to them and to whom they felt connected; their peers (3), teachers and school staff (19), parents (5) and extended family.

Recognition can be class-based and local, or more public and formal at a whole-school level. At the simplest level, this could be receiving a smile from the teacher (1). Getting picked when you put your hand up (3) is an opportunity to demonstrate one’s competence publically, although this was potentially problematic for higher achieving children, who felt that they were rarely picked to demonstrate their knowledge.

“Even if we put our hands up, there’s no point.” (Lizzie)

Being chosen to complete or demonstrate an activity (4), or through one’s work being shown as a good example, was highly reinforcing for some.

“[Teacher] shows all the class my work and reads it...I’ve done my best and its worth something.” (Mandy)
Teachers’ noticing good work or effort, and spontaneously mentioning this, was highly valued by the children. Two children particularly wanted to emphasise what they saw as ‘turning points’ for them in school;

“I got told that I was doing really well in my learning and my behaviour.”
(Mark)

“Teacher told me I was good at numeracy...said I was ‘flying’...she noticed, which was good.”
(Ellie)

However, the praise needs to be authentic, not mechanistic or instrumental, or it will be detected.

“The teacher says good things about my work...can tell they mean it by the way they look and sound.”
(Lizzie)

For some, this can be fundamentally important to reinforcing their feelings of self-worth.

“Makes me feel appreciated...I’m not a ‘nobody’, I’m a ‘somebody’.”
(Arthur)

As part of a formal reward system, the schools in the study frequently offer specific rewards (25), from ‘cards’ for academic attainment or good behaviour (2), to ticks (1), team points (5), merits (3), certificates (4) and cups (2) publically given in assemblies, and these were largely appreciated.

“Like getting rewards...find it encouraging and makes me feel more confident.”
(George)

“I’m achieving something, getting team points, stickers, the [School] cup. Something special so people can see... [I] feel special.”
(Millie)
However, the overall positive attitude towards these awards was tempered. One boy responded,

“I get a certificate...it’s not that important to me.” (Alan)

Status could also be conferred through roles and responsibilities delegated by adults. The School Councillor role was explicitly mentioned (4), and where this was so, it appeared that what was important was the social status and the public recognition conferred by the role, in addition to having a voice in decision-making.

“When I was a School Councillor... picture in reception.” (Tom)

However, this can be a ‘double-edged sword’. One boy commented,

“I don’t like being important or in charge of anything, don’t like controlling things, unless it’s a game. Its responsibility ... [I] like having freedom.” (Alan)

As we have seen, academic performance is not the only way that children achieve a sense of competence. Positive evaluation of social, emotional and physical competence, are also ways in which children build their sense of self and maintain self esteem.

This is at risk if a child transgresses the ‘rules’, explicit or implicit. Many of the children expressed fears about being socially excluded, frequently through psychological means. This was often as a result of other children being ‘mean’ or ‘horrible’ (18), though, interestingly, this was rarely referred to as bullying behaviour (3). Examples included, teasing about physical characteristics or attributes, your name (particularly for an EAL child), physical appearance (body weight), behaviour and social skills, and
comments on past embarrassing behaviour. This is extended to include negative comments about family members.

“When people gang up and go on about something you have done wrong.” (Sam)

“Everybody makes fun of me...I rolled in fox poo.” (Kevin)

Most children can accept and deal with occasional or infrequent unkindness from their peers, but there is sometimes concern that this is not a ‘one off’ and will continue.

“It’s my first day back, someone is mean and I worry that it won’t stop...going to go on.” (Ellie)

“People are mean to me, pick on me, whisper and point... they are making you feel different and you don’t want to be.” (Ellie)

Other negative behaviours and feelings include others ‘ganging up’, sometimes to exclude from play or access to a social group (3), concern at being left out or alone (9), struggling with work, and feeling jealous of other’s friendships. One child perceptively suggested that besides being unpleasant, being a victim of negative behaviours also has implications for learning and well-being.

“Sometimes people can be mean, and worrying stops people learning.” (Alison)

“Some people do get poorly if they have no friends.” (Edward)
However, many children enjoy positive relationships or have resilience factors (often social in nature).

“Friends support me if someone is being mean.” (Poppy)

“I don’t feel sad at all. I am always included and having a lot of fun.”
(Amanda)

Overarching themes

Competence

Competence, having something they were ‘good at’ was an overwhelming emerging theme which underpinned or permeated many of the comments made by the children, and this could be divided into an internal sense of competence (a sense that ‘I’m OK and I know it’, and the social recognition of competence, ‘I’m OK and others recognise it’.) The majority of children mentioning competence and positive feelings about their performance used class-based and academic competence examples. However emotional competence, pro social behaviour, physical and creative achievements and self –management were all areas for potential pride and positive self-regard. Two children specifically mentioned achievement with improvements in their behaviour, while for others sharing learning with family members was an opportunity to demonstrate competence, for example, by teaching parents computer skills. Some stressed playground or sporting achievement (3).

“Doing Sports Day, and I won and everyone was cheering.” (Amber)

“I play Man-Hunt...I never get caught early on.” (Terry)
Competence is negotiated through social reference in interactions with others. A sense of, and belief in, personal competence is recognised through self-evaluation, informal reinforcement from peers, parents/carers and adults in school, and through more formal school reward systems. Positive evaluation by others must be seen to be authentic to be meaningful, and can result in a breakdown of trust in relationships and disengagement, with a resulting lowering of positive self-concept, if praise and recognition are felt to be tokenistic, or at worst, manipulative.

**Connectedness (Social acceptance)**

The children were very aware that they were part of a wider evaluative social network including peers, adults in school and family members. There was a sense of needing to feel settled and to belong, not only with peers but with teaching staff. Being ‘known’, valued and ‘held in mind’ by the teacher, both in terms of academic abilities, and as a person, was reflected in their comments, and where they felt that this was not the case, they were at risk of feeling alienated from school and learning.

“I’ve done something and the teacher ‘doesn’t get it’ when I’ve not finished work and she reads my plan...misunderstands.” (Lizzie)

The need to be ‘known’ was both practical and affective; so that work was appropriately differentiated, and that the teacher would know when they were likely to struggle, and offer help before they needed to ask, and in order to feel worthwhile as a person. Demonstrations of affection, like the use of smiles, nick names, hugs if upset, humour and holistic care were all mentioned. For some children, who had formed a strong attachment to their
teacher, a supply teacher was a cause for distress, and this was particularly so for children who might experience less secure attachments at home. One interviewee, a girl in Year 6, who had experienced domestic abuse, spoke at some length about changes to teaching arrangements;

“Supply teachers give me the creeps.” (Chloe)

Perhaps this is one reason why supply teachers find classes so difficult at times.

Teachers were also key in mediating relationships with peers. An important role was that teachers support friendships in the class, and help to ‘sort things out’.

The relationship between the themes was complex. At times, there can be conflict between the public recognition of competence, and the need to remain connected.

“I have tried my best and my work is really well-presented…not perfect, because I feel good but don’t want to make my friends feel jealous. Don’t ‘rub it in’. (Lizzie)

It is easier to become alienated from others that it is to repair the rift, particularly if the child does not possess the skills to do so. At times it may be beyond the control of the child, and here adult mediation from the teacher could ameliorate, if not resolve, painful experiences and the risk of disengagement. For one child, who was ostracised due to the behaviours of her extended family in the local community, just getting to school was a daily emotional struggle.
“Don’t want to go [to school] because people pick on me...go back and wrap myself in a blanket and think that I want to come and do more work instead of staying home.” (Katrina)

At times, there is conflict in balancing and maintaining relationships and expectations, between adults in school and peers.

“Don’t want to lose friends when they talk to me, but the teacher catches me and I get into trouble.” (Millie)

Perhaps the hardest balance to maintain is between social acceptance and authenticity to a developing sense of ‘self’. There is pressure to be other than yourself, to ‘fit in’. One boy had particularly struggled with his attempts to be one of the ‘cool guys’ (‘bad lads’), and the difficulties that this created for him when he found himself in conflict with the school rules, and the class teacher, of whom he was particularly fond. He commented that his ‘real’ friends liked him best, and things went well in school when,

“They know I’m me and [I’m] not trying to be new and cool.” (Arthur)

In summary, school life is complex, and young children are dealing with a network of complex social interactions and negotiations on a daily basis in order to both build a positive self-image and achieve social acceptance.

Discussion

In response to the initial research question, the children in this study were overwhelming able to express their views on what they believed to be important in facilitating their learning in school. When asked, using flexible approaches suited to their age, ability and preferences, treated as the
experts of their own experience, and given the time, they were remarkably detailed and perceptive in their answers, as previous studies have found (Kellett, 2005; Aubrey and Dahl, 2006; Gersch, 1996). Some interviews took up to an hour, rather than the twenty to forty minutes originally anticipated. Children should be able to say that they ‘don’t know’, or exercise their right not to speak (Hartas, 2011), however only one child declined the interview, and very few children failed to express an opinion on any of the points raised. Indeed there were only five occasions over the forty interviews where a child did not have an opinion to share. The success of the interviews was directly related to the consideration and preparation of the possible approaches proposed in the literature to facilitate child voice, and my reflection on my attitudes prior to engaging with them.

In answer to the question of what children feel enables them feel to be ready to learn in school, the children generated rich data across a range of areas in school life, including; self-knowledge about their own skills and abilities, personal characteristics, internal distractions and motivations, areas of competence, friendships and relationships with adults in school, teacher characteristics (personal and professional), curriculum and teaching style, classroom, playground and whole school environment, and organisation and aspects of the wider community. Most of all, children of this age need to feel competent (in some area of their life that is meaningful to them) and connected to others, through positive and nurturing relationships with both peers and adults.

In this study, most children were happy in school and felt that school and ‘learning to learn’ was important to their development and future life chances.
The specific topics and themes that the children raised have much in common with those cited by other authors working with children in the UK and elsewhere, and in older age groups. The importance of families, friends and school issues (Evans, 2011), agency and a positive sense of self (Fattore et al. 2009) relationships with peers, belonging and concerns about social exclusion (Maxwell, 2006) were stressed. However, in this study, the importance of relationships with adults in school was identified as a key issue.

**Implications for EP practice**

The understanding of school life from the child’s perspective that was generated through the interviews, gives adults a ‘window’ and potentially new insight into children’s school experience. This may suggest ways to improve their experience and intervene when things are not working. Two particular roles for teachers are stressed here; the importance of differentiating work to match the ability of individual children, and the teaching of social skills, and mediation and support for peer relationships.

However, hearing children’s voices and adapting practice to their perceived needs is not without its challenges for teachers (Bragg, 2007). The need for children to feel competent across at least some areas of participation in school has been established. Academically, it is clear that differentiation for ability is key. There is a clear role for the EP in working with and supporting teachers to ensure that children, particularly those who may be struggling academically, have work that is differentiated to their ability across all areas of the curriculum. Helping children to be stretched in their areas for
development, without becoming overwhelmed, is challenging for teachers but central to children’s feelings of competence, positive sense of self and continued engagement. Whilst balancing the demands of the changing curriculum and new initiatives, children need to be set learning tasks that are manageable, so that they can experience success by ‘getting it right’, complete tasks in the available time, feel like they have ‘done a lot’, and feel enabled to present their work well within their individual abilities. For example, a child with hyper-mobility of the wrist joints, or particularly ‘messy’ handwriting, may have a greater sense if achievement in demonstrating her/his knowledge by filling in single words in a cloze presentation, rather than attempting to write everything. Learning is hard, and teachers and schools need to continue to nurture an environment where making mistakes or getting things wrong is considered a pre-requisite to effective learning.

The importance of teachers in getting to know their pupils extends further than an accurate appraisal of their academic abilities. A holistic knowledge of each child, as a learner and a person, their home life, interests and challenges is fundamental to building the sort of relationships that foster positive interactions in the classroom. There is a role for the EP in supporting the development of positive relationships through consultation, and by encouraging interaction between teaching staff and pupils that is based on ‘fun’ in addition to curriculum delivery. For example, guiding teaching assistants to get to know the likes and dislikes of the children they support, and working together with them to generate interventions that are tailored to the individual child’s interests, may promote better engagement and progress.
In order to facilitate and support interpersonal relationships in school, all adults supporting children in school will benefit from an understanding of the local culture of social groupings, and implicit social rules, and realise that these will be different for every class and will develop and change over the school year. Initiatives which encourage the teaching of social and relational skills, for example, Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning, SEAL (DfE, 2005) and R-time (Sampson, 2004), are likely to be helpful, but children also need opportunities to practice social skills in ‘real-life’ situations, and they are likely to require the help of adults and older, more socially competent children (without other agendas) who can mediate and support relationships.

The EP is in a position to negotiate and work at a whole school level in consultation with staff and pupil bodies like school councils to facilitate arrangements that can support the development of more positive peer relationships and social interaction both in and out of class.

Holding these insights in mind, it is possible to share these perspectives and understandings in consultation with teachers and other key adults in schools (for example, Teaching Assistants and Meal Time Assistants), and to use the shared understandings and expertise to inform and develop workable modifications to local conditions that will support children in ways that are meaningful to them.

**Criticisms of the study and future research**

Selection of the children was by the SENCo in each school, and while they had been asked to select children on the basis that they were representative of their school demographic, there were a relatively high proportion of
children on the Special Needs Register (see Appendix 11 for details).

However, this suggests that it is comparatively easy to give children with additional needs a voice, and there were no obvious differences between the comments of these children and others without identified difficulties.

Despite attempts to develop good rapport and minimise power differences in the interview relationship, inevitably the questions asked and approaches used, exercised some constraint on the topics and areas the children spoke about. Future research could develop the approach of children as researchers; deciding the research focus, which questions should be asked, and conducting the interviews and focus groups themselves with only adult facilitation and support. While an explicit focus on school life was adopted for this study, it would be interesting to see if the children responded any differently in an environmental context of their choosing, for example, at home or in a community space, like a local library.

Time constraints limited the further exploration and development of topics and themes in the focus groups. A future study could attempt to extend these groups, particularly if they could add to the children’s skills and learning by equipping them with research skills as part of the curriculum. This could be negotiated with individual schools.

In this study, the children were a typical mix of typically developing children, and those with additional needs which could be met through mainstream education. The sample did include children at all stages of the Code of Practice, and some children with significant physical difficulties (as mentioned previously, this group was over-represented). However it was not
extended to include children with profound and multiple needs, and this should be an area for future research.

Due to the amount of data generated, it was not possible to do justice to either a full description of the topics, or particularly to fully develop the underlying themes, within the word limit. Further analysis and exploration will continue, with a view to informing future work in the area.

**Conclusion**

This interpretation of the children’s talk is offered not a simple reflection of underlying truth, but rather as a careful and contextualised reading which I believe can ‘make sense’ of the collected data. It is important to remember that my interpretation will always be from some viewpoint, and that it may not be that of others (Peshkin, 2000). Any value that the analysis has is in its usefulness to help us to understand this age group of children and their school experience better (Becker, as cited in Peshkin, 2000, p. 9). Does it help us to ask good questions, have better conversations and shared understandings, to question where there is room for improvement and begin to think of ways to intervene to improve the school experience?

Perhaps most importantly to me, there was evidence that the children enjoyed the process of being the ‘experts’, being listened to, and collaborating with the research. In answer to a question about things that make one feel important, one girl responded,

“I get picked for things...like this...it makes me feel special and proud.”

(Lizzie)
References


The ‘Ready to Learn’ Scale: Using what Key Stage 2 children tell us makes them ‘happy’ and ‘ready to learn’ in school to create a measure to evaluate outcomes of Educational Psychologist involvement.

Abstract

The following paper details a study carried out in the South West of England in the summer of 2011, in response to a request from a Community Psychology Service (CPS). The Service was reviewing the way in which they evaluated the outcomes of educational psychologist (EP) intervention with young people, to ensure that the methods used were ‘fit for purpose’. While outcomes were being described and measured (using a goal-based approach), it was frequently the views of adults which were taken into account. The views of children, and in particular younger children (Key Stage 2 and below), were rarely sought, or if they were, this was not in any systematic way. Following an earlier study, which had sought to elicit the views of Key Stage 2 (KS2) children on what made them feel ‘happy’ and ‘ready to learn’ in school, the qualitative data generated from this study was filtered through four focus groups of the original collaborators. Subsequently, these collaborators were involved in co-constructing an instrument, the ‘Ready to Learn’ Scale, consisting of forty six items which they had generated. This was then trialled and modified, and the instrument was administered to an opportunity sample of 344 children in KS2, from four local schools with differing demographics. Following a principal components
analysis, the resulting scale generated a stable six factor solution interpreted as six sub-scales: school competence ($\alpha = .81$), social competence ($\alpha = .80$), academic competence ($\alpha = .78$), distress and discomfort in school ($\alpha = .68$), environmental support for learning ($\alpha = .70$), and acceptance and recognition by adults ($\alpha = .80$), with an overall scale reliability, $\alpha = .92$, and a 95% confidence interval of 17 (16.72). The scale now requires further validity checks and standardisation, but is offered as a useful instrument for initial engagement with children in this age group. It provides a focussed and enjoyable approach to identifying areas of strength and difficulty (in areas which are important to children themselves, and not imposed by adults), and allows possible interventions to be negotiated with the child. It also provides a pre and post intervention measure of whether the intervention has been helpful to the child, which can contribute to a comprehensive evaluation process.

Introduction

Context and rationale

The research reported here arises from the previous paper, and is in response to a CPS request for a tool that can help to monitor the outcomes of EP involvement. Set within the context of budgetary constraint, and wishing to demonstrate efficiency and value for money (Norgate, 2010), the Service had adopted the Target Monitoring and Evaluation approach (TME) (Dunsmuir, Brown, Iyadurai, and Monsen, 2009), as a method of both recording and evaluating the majority of EP involvements. This worked well in large part in secondary school settings, where typically targets were set in
consultation with the young person concerned, alongside parents, teaching and pastoral staff. However, this was not generally the case for younger children, where consultation (Wagner, 2008) and negotiation was more frequently between adults. Within this approach, there was a risk that the child’s views were seen as a desirable, but optional, addition to the consultation process. Within the Service, involvement with primary-aged children represents a relatively high percentage of overall work.

The aims of this study were; firstly, to produce a practical and useful tool which could demonstrate whether EP involvement was resulting in improvements for children and young people, and secondly, to investigate whether such a tool might be helpful in giving greater insight into an individual child, and illuminating their strengths and difficulties, in practice.

I chose to focus primarily on school-based activities and behaviours, but also to acknowledge the importance of the wider community of which children are active members. Using the rich qualitative data generated in the previous study, an additional aim was to co-construct the tool with the children themselves, ensuring their active input and control over decisions at each step.

In order to situate the endeavour in the context of current knowledge and debate, a literature search was carried out via EBSCO, and further sources were accessed through citations in particularly pertinent papers. (See previously marked literature review, appended). A selection of the literature is presented here, but in addition, I have chosen to situate the current study within a positive psychology approach, and in particular I have grounded the
rationale in the ‘Broaden-and-Build Theory of Positive Emotions’ (Frederickson, 2005). Once again, the voice of the child is of primary importance for both ethical, but also pragmatic reasons.

**Evaluation of EP involvement and child voice**

The role of the EP has been debated over many decades (Gilham, 1978; Cameron, 2006; Ashton and Roberts, 2006) generating a number of significant reviews (Farrell, Woods, Lewis, Rooney, Squires and O’Connor, 2006; AEP, DECP and NAPEP, 2009), and many aspects of the role have been subjected to intense scrutiny (Fallon, Woods and Rooney, 2010). The role has been extended to include a wider focus on family, community and systemic roles (Guishard, 2000; Smith, 2002; Shannon and Posada, 2007) rather than focussing exclusively on work within schools and educational settings.

As previously stated, for the purposes of this study, I have chosen to focus primarily on school-based activities and their influence on younger children’s well-being. This is because while we cannot always change or have an impact on risks to children’s mental health and well-being (for example, the experience of bereavement, family breakdown or poverty), we can facilitate positive experiences that may help to build their resilience to the challenges of life (Frederickson, Dunsmuir and Baxter, 2009) via their experiences in schools. This does not absolve EPs from engaging in work with families, community-based initiatives and involvement in wider influence by contributing to societal issues through policy initiatives. However, it does offer immediate and direct ways in which EPs might make small changes,
which could have significant effects on the subjective experience of children as individuals or groups. Schools have been identified as an area of “untapped potential” for engaging with children and young people to improve their subjective well-being (Frederickson, et al., 2009, p 3), and this has been exploited by the previous Government with the introduction of a number of initiatives including Targeted Mental Health in Schools (TAMHS, DCSF, 2008), and the National Healthy Schools Programme, commenced in 1999 as a joint initiative between the Department of Health (DoH) and the Department of children, schools and families (DCSF). School have a role in recognising their potential to promote well-being and positive experiences for children through the curriculum, positive and supportive relationships between staff and pupils, school culture and engagement with families and the wider community.

However, any intervention or initiative will have cost implications in terms of resources, and can only be supported if it can be shown to result in an improvement in tangible outcomes. Some form of assessment and measurement that is ‘fit for purpose’ is therefore necessary to determine individuals and groups in need of support, and whether interventions have been effective. Additionally, children have the right to give their views on psychological services received by them (Woolfson and Harker, 2002). The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN, 1989), Article 12, lays down the child’s right to express an opinion, and have that opinion taken into account in any matter affecting them. This was ratified in the Children’s Act (HMSO, 1989), and it has been acknowledged that opportunities for pupil participation should be provided, “provision will be more responsive and
relevant to pupils’ needs when pupils themselves play an active role” (DfES 2001 p 3). Attempts have been made to make full participation more accessible, for example, through visual Annual Reviews (Hayes, 2004), or Person-Centred Planning approaches, where a young person and significant others of their choosing are actively involved (Forest, Pearpoint and O’Brien, 1996).

However, it has been noted that there is a need to exercise judgement so that a child is not burdened with taking responsibility for decisions for which they have not yet developed the skills and experience to understand and negotiate (DfES, 2001). Whether children, and particularly younger children or those less able to express their views, are really heard has been questioned, and it has been suggested that in many cases responses to hearing the ‘voice of the child’ are tokenistic (Noble, 2003). Studies exploring how children and young people feel about their participation in decision-making have suggested that they feel that their voices were heard, but on a partial basis. The authors recommend that children need school cultures, adult attitudes and systems which allow them to share their views and to know that they will be valued (Aston and Lambert, 2010). However this is not unproblematic. Children are not a homogenous group (Hartas, 2011). Not all children wish to express their views and take their own decisions, and this should also be respected. There should also be the right to be non-participatory (Hartas, 2011), as long as this right has not been assumed.
Evaluation approaches and currently available measures

A recent survey of EP Services in the UK, recommended that data collected should elicit children’s views, be triangulated where possible, and be straightforward to conduct in order to motivate EPs to prioritise evaluation (Norgate, 2010). The importance of hearing children’s voices has been established (see previous paper for an extended discussion of the literature in this area). Whether these are authentic attempts at listening, rather than being tokenistic depends on finding ways to engage that allow all children to access the debate.

Norgate, (2010) indicated a range of approaches were used across the UK including standardised measures, scaling measures, interviews, and questionnaires. It was observed that currently available standardised measures can be limiting as, if they are detailed enough to be useful and valid, they tend to be specific to a particular area of concern. For example, the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) (Goodman, 1997), is sometimes used as a pre and post intervention measure with children experiencing behavioural difficulties. It is particularly useful as it has child, parent and teacher versions permitting triangulation of results. It asks the child whether there have been changes, rather than relying solely on the reports of adults.

Target Monitoring and Evaluation (TME) (Dunsmuir, et al., 2009) was derived specifically to address evaluation of EP interventions from the earlier Goal Attainment Scaling model (Kiresuk and Sherman, 1968) in adult mental health. It is currently a very popular and respected approach, and 39% of EP
services in the UK who responded were using some form of scaling system in 2010 (Norgate, 2010). A number of targets (commonly three) can be set for the child, addressing a range of areas for development, for example, attentional focus, reading difficulties and friendship issues. Ideally, targets should be negotiated with the child. However, in practice, with younger children, these are often constructed with teaching staff and parents/carers, and it is most usually, although not exclusively, adults who are asked to rate changes in the target behaviour or intensity of problems. This is particularly true for younger children. Some targets lend themselves to objective measurement, for example, the number of previously unknown words to be read. Others are harder to define and operationalise in meaningful ways. It has been argued that it is not only directly measurable outcomes that are relevant in EP involvement with children, Turner and colleagues have stated that “experiences are as important as outcomes” (Turner, Randall and Mohammed, 2012, p 315). Criticisms of the TME approach are that it can be reductionist, and Dunsmuir has suggested that it is ideally accompanied by other evaluative measures, like participant feedback and standardised tests.

A review of available measures of children’s well-being (Wolpert, 2009, as cited in Frederickson, et al., 2009) recommended routine screening of children aged eight and older with a quality of life measure, in an evaluation of Service outcomes with an initial focus on Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), but the need for evaluation was extended to other service providers. They recommended the use of the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (Goodman, 1997), but also two or more relevant
measures as determined by the service. This might be a goals-based outcome measure (for example, TME), but should include other measures as appropriate within an interactionist approach (Frederickson, et al., 2009). It is unlikely that any one measure could be produced that would be universally applicable, or fit for the purpose intended across different groups (Humphrey, Kalambouka, Wigglesworth, Lendrum, Deighton and Wolpert, 2009).

Humphrey and colleagues (2009) also identified a number of difficulties with existing measures with a social and emotional skills focus; firstly the range of social and emotional skills covered was limited, or the age groups with which they could be used, secondly, many measures were not standardised or failed to report UK norms, very few had been subjected to advanced analysis over and above internal consistency and reliability, and no measure had been tested for bias with specific subgroups, for example, ethnic minorities, or groups with identified difficulties, for example Autistic Spectrum Disorder.

Other standardised tools are available that might be used for eliciting evaluations by children, for example, the Measures of Children’s Mental Health and Well-being (Frederickson and Dunsmuir, 2009). These include questionnaires on enjoyment, resilience, healthy living, belonging, social behaviour and responsiveness, but, focus on specific areas, although frequently from a positive perspective. The School Children’s Happiness Inventory (Ivens, 2007) is a 30 item instrument, measured on a four point scale, for children of 8 – 15 years, designed to measure subjective well-being in school and for assessing the effects of school-based interventions and
environmental variables on children’s well-being. Comprising both positively and negatively phrased items, it indicates a child’s affective state in relation to school over the previous weeks, but gives no indication of the situations in which those feelings were induced. It has been demonstrated as having good reliability and concurrent validity however, and is standardised on a UK population.

The Pupil Attitudes to Self and School Scale (PASS – GL Assessment) focuses on children’s attitudes to school, self-efficacy, and perception of themselves in the school environment. It is a computerised 50 item questionnaire, rated on a four point scale, and designed to elicit attitudes to school in pupils aged between eight and eighteen years (but it can be accessed by children down to 4 years with adult support). Emphasis is placed on the identification of individual difficulties, attendance and school improvement, and in particular, engagement with the curriculum rather than the whole school experience. It generates nine sub-scales focussed particularly on attitudes and responses to academic demands and learning: feelings about school, perceived learning capabilities, self-regard, preparedness for learning, attitude to teachers, general work ethic, confidence in learning, attitude to attendance, and response to curriculum demands. An advantage is that the computer interface may help children to become and remain engaged with completion of the Scale. Software makes the Scale easy to score. However, the data it generates provides information on the individual child, their attitudes and responses, and how they need to change, rather than how the environment can be changed to support them.

Likewise, the Myself-as-Learner Scale (Burden, 1998) has a specific focus
on academic self-concept. It would be useful to have a more global measure, generating information on the child’s views across the school experience.

The previous study established that children in KS2 both could and would share their views on what they felt facilitated their feelings of happiness and learning in school, concepts that this group of children felt to be related. There is a need to continue to explore ways to allow the voice of the child to be heard, and for them to play an active role in their education (Harding and Atkinson, 2009). Is it then possible for children themselves to become active collaborators in generating outcome measures themselves?

**Children as researchers**

In some studies, the children have played a more active role by becoming directly involved as researchers. “Children have a unique perspective on the experience of contemporary childhood” (Burton, Smith and Woods, 2010, p. 91) and their inclusion as researchers increases the value and validity of findings. Kellett (2005) recommends greater pupil participation in research. Children as researchers are relatively rare in the middle school years (Kellett and Ding, 2004), but more recent research has actively involved young children and those with learning difficulties as active researchers, not merely collaborators (Kellett, 2004; 2005; 2008).

**A positive psychology approach to learning**

In the section which follows, I propose that a positive psychology approach, and in particular the Broaden and Build Theory of Positive Emotions
(Frederickson, 2001) may offer a useful framework in which to situate the current study, with its focus on determining what children believe helps them to experience positive affect and to engage with learning in school. Firstly, I will discuss the origins of the positive psychology movement and offer definitions of positive psychology. This will be followed by a review of some of the criticisms that have been levelled against the movement. Secondly, I will examine whether there is a theoretical and empirical link between the experience of positive emotions and learning in the published literature, an association which the children in the current studies felt to be self-evident and unproblematic. I will review a selection of experimental studies from the positive psychology perspective which suggest that adults and children may engage more readily and creatively in learning and problem-solving when experiencing positive emotions, hence suggesting that it is worth examining the experience of children in school from this perspective. It is acknowledged that the testing of this theory in children and under naturalistic conditions, such as the classroom, is limited. However exploring the usefulness of the Broaden-and Build Theory in practice with children is currently enjoying some interest in the literature (Reschly, Huebner, Appleton and Antaramain, 2008; Hutchinson and Pretelt, 2010). (Key terms, frequently used in a positive psychology approach, such as ‘happiness’, ‘well-being’, have been defined theoretically, and as used here, in the previous paper. A critique of their acceptance as singular, straightforward and easily comprehended terms is implicit in the debates that follow).

What is Positive Psychology?
‘Positive psychology’ emerged as a ‘new’ perspective within the discipline when it was introduced to the psychological community in Seligman’s presidential address to the APA in 1998 (Seligman, 1999, as cited in Linley, Joseph, Harrington and Wood, 2006, p.4). Seligman presented a challenge to psychology to fulfil the post-war commitment to focus not only on ameliorating or curing mental illness, but to contribute to making people’s lives more fulfilling, and identifying and enhancing human excellence (Terjesen, Jacofsky, Froh and Diuseppe, 2004). The ‘new’ approach offered “…a change in the focus of psychology from preoccupation only with repairing the worst things in life to also building positive qualities” (Seligman and Csikszentmihayli, 2000, p. 5). A move away from a medical and pathological model of ‘curing’ mental illness, and a focus on what is wrong, to a focus on what ‘works’, and excellence in terms of performance and achievement. This was with the aim of helping people to lead more productive and fulfilling lives, and identifying and nurturing the gifted and talented. Initially, it was hoped that the approach would provide a new “interpretative lens” offering a fresh perspective on old problems (Linley et al. 2006, p.5). It was introduced at a time when the number of published psychological studies with a problem focus far outweighed those with a focus on what was good or functional in human experience (Rozin and Royzman, 2001, cited in Linley et al., 2006). An aim was to redress this imbalance in research and practice, and for this to influence at a pragmatic level what psychologists do and how they use psychology. Advantages of adopting a positive psychology perspective include the possibility of asking different questions, and the ability to integrate research areas previously perceived as
separate (for example, creativity, and emotional intelligence) and to create a shared language to synthesise and communicate these ideas (Linley et al., 2006). A research focus on both positive and negative emotions is more likely to reflect human experience.

From the outset it was acknowledged that there were almost as many definitions and understandings of what constituted positive psychology as there were psychologists who identified with it. Areas of agreement include a focus on positive emotions, traits, experiences and optimal performance within individuals and groups. It has been variously been defined and described as “the study of the conditions and processes that contribute to the flourishing or optimal functioning of people, groups, and institutions” (Gable and Haidt, 2005, p.104), and the “scientific study of optimal human functioning that aims to discover the factors that allow individuals and communities to thrive” (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). It has a focus on “valued subjective experiences in the past, present and future, and positive traits in both individuals and organisations, social processes and institutions (Seligman and Csikszentmihayi, 2000). In short, and for the purposes of this study, it is defined as “...an interest in finding out what works, what is right, and what is improving...” (Sheldon and King, 2001, p. 216).

As a movement, it rapidly gained popularity, perhaps seductive because of the promise it seemed to offer of access to the ‘good life’ and ‘happiness’ for all. As Linley and colleagues state, it is a reasonable assumption that “(almost) everyone will want to be happy, or to be good parents and friends,
or to be effective students, or to be productive and satisfied at work” (Linley, et al., 2006, p.13).

There was, however, criticism of the movement from both academic and popular culture. Critics challenged the ‘evangelical’ nature with which positive psychology had been ‘created’, marketed and ‘sold’. The movement was also promoted actively by powerful psychologists of good repute (Seligman was at the time the President of the American Psychological Association), and research programmes attracted considerable financial backing (Linley at al 2006).

Criticism of positive psychology

Despite being hailed, at least by implication, as a new approach (Seligman and Cszikszentmihayli, 2000), many critics have rejected that there is anything fundamentally new or different in positive psychology. These critics have viewed it as making claims to be new, and offering possible outcomes of happiness and success for all, that it will ultimately prove unable to deliver, in short it has been described as a “fad” (Lazarus, 2003, p.93). A focus on human strengths and resilience, while possibly taking a ‘back-seat’ to more problem-oriented approaches, has a long history in both philosophy and psychology, and it is claimed that the positive psychology movement is ‘presentist’ (Fernandez-Rios and Cornes, 2009) in that it shows either a lack of knowledge of, or a disregard for, historical and cultural precedents (Lazarus, 2003). This is seen not only as a “short-sightedness about giving honest credit to ideas and research that has gone before”, but also carries the risk of “‘re-inventing wheels’” in current research endeavours (Ryff,
Ryff traces the precursors of positive psychology back to early history, from Aristotle, through St Augustine, to William James and Maslow (see Ryff, 2003). Indeed it was Maslow (1968) who first coined the term ‘positive psychology’.

**Methodological issues**

Positive psychology claims to be different to humanistic psychology and earlier positive psychologies because it adheres to robust empirical methods (Seligman and Csiksentmihayli, 2000), but it has been questioned whether those methods may be the most appropriate for the research questions dealt with by positive psychologists, which largely refer to processes within individuals or groups, and changes over time that a 'snap-shot' approach cannot capture (Tennen and Affleck, 2003). These authors argue that it is intrapersonal data collected over time that is likely to be most useful in answering questions posed from a positive psychology perspective.

Other theories, and the studies on which they are based, have been subject to criticism on the basis of their research design and choice of statistical analysis. This includes aspects (the ‘upward spiral’ hypothesis) of the Broaden-and-Build Theory proposed by Frederickson (Frederickson and Joiner, 2002), and adopted here (Nickerson, 2007). Specifically it was argued that the correlational analysis applied to data did not test what the authors claimed it was testing. Across-person theories were tested, not the within-person theories necessary to make claims about positive affect increasing emotional repertoires and producing an upward spiral of positive
affect over time (across occasions). However the paper did not criticise the Broaden-and-Build theory per se.

A new ‘opiate for the masses’?

The positive psychology movement has been accused of being politically unaware. Emphasising individual happiness, success and fulfilment may have political implications, promoting individualism as opposed to collective action. Additionally, an assumption that the experience of every situation can be improved or changed by individual actions alone denies, or at least devalues, the importance of the operation of power in political and social structures. It has been noted that pessimists, through their reluctance or inability to ‘look on the bright side’, can mobilise outrage and ‘righteous’ anger against conditions such as social injustice and poverty (Lazarus, 2003).

There are parallels in the research on coping. Emotion-focused coping, where a problematic situation is conceptualised or cognitively ‘re-framed’ to be more positive, may lead to the individual feeling better by thinking more positively about the difficult situation they are experiencing. However what may be more adaptive is problem-focused coping, bringing cognitive resources to bear directly on the issue which may lead to action to reduce the threat (Lazarus, 2003). In popular culture, this point has been made by Ehrenreich (2009), who suggests that approaches that are overly positive or optimistic impede productive behaviour and encourage delusional thinking. However, this may prove to be more of a criticism of ‘positive thinking’, where
individuals are encouraged to ‘look on the bright side’ without a critical appraisal of their circumstances, than resulting from the application of positive psychology approaches.

Polarisation of emotions

Is it possible to determine which emotions and experiences are negative and which positive in any objective sense? While it may be a commonly held belief that what is positive, pleasant or functional can be agreed, at least within a given culture and historical period, this may not be straightforward when subjected to rigorous scrutiny. Emotions in themselves are not singular experiences with singular outcomes or potentials for action, and they cannot be isolated in an experiencing individual and taken out of the context of the environment in which they are felt and expressed; “what is positive or good is complex and multi-dimensional” (Gable and Haidt 2005, p. 108, as cited in Miller, 2008). There is an ‘emotion valence’ problem in categorising emotions on basis of whether they are perceived as positive or negative (Lazarus, 2003, p.96). Many emotions, for example, love and anger are bivalent (compare concepts of destructive anger or ‘righteous’ anger, which may promote positive social change), or have different valence in differing cultures and time periods, even inter-generationally.

Over-simplification of human experience

It should be noted that once certain fundamental, cultural, social and legally determined ‘norms’ are observed, there is no one desirable way to be a
human. Indeed human characteristics that are deemed positive can vary depending on the context within which they operate. These characteristics should not be studied exclusively as independent of one another. There may be positive characteristics that conflict, so that if an individual has more of one, they have less of another, for example, assertiveness and social sensitivity. Positive characteristics are represented within individuals embedded and operating in larger systems (Diener, 2003).

A positive psychology approach may polarise and over-simplify the complexity of human experience, by making the assumption that negative emotions are dysfunctional, whereas holding negative views and experiencing negative toned emotions may hold advantages. In certain circumstances, those with a negative or pessimistic outlook may be evaluating themselves and their situations more realistically, and they can be more critical in their thinking, which may lead to better decision-making (Argyle, 1987, p. 218). Natural pessimists, while not claiming to be ‘happy’, can be high achievers and express life satisfaction (Norem, 2001, as cited in Miller, 2008). An emphasis on studying only those who experience the best in life would miss the experiences and accounts of those who suffer adversity and find that it results in personal growth. In certain circumstances, negative emotions, for example, anger or guilt, may promote or drive ‘flourishing’ (Schneider, 2011).

Additionally, the suggestion that all can achieve their goals, often through the use of their ‘signature strengths’ (Seligman, 2003) and adopting the strategies of optimists, will depend on the realistic appraisal of those goals, and the skills and resources of the goal setter. It could also be argued that
there may be some goals from which it is most adaptive and beneficial to the individual to withdraw (Miller, 2008).

**Is the enduring experience of positive emotions achievable or desirable?**

It is difficult to conceive of circumstances in which it is either possible or desirable to remain permanently happy and optimistic. The capacity to experience both positive and negative emotions in response to life events is adaptive (Ryff, 2003). Expressing and experiencing both is important to healthy functioning. Living involves the experience of a spectrum of emotions experienced with variable intensity, and to deny this is to risk trivialising experiences or making them unacceptable (Harvey and Pauwels, 2003). It may be that times of great suffering offer the opportunities for the development of psychological growth, and optimal performance, when people are at their ‘best’ and most resilient. Additionally, emotions that are subjectively perceived as negative by the individual experiencing them may have positive social consequences. For example, the experience of grief and guilt may lead to positive actions such as reparation. There is a need to be able to study both in order to appreciate the complexity of human emotional experience (Tennen and Affleck, 2003), and to begin to have possible solutions to offer to help people with both their ‘highs and lows’.

**A synthesis of psychological approaches**

Linley and colleagues argue for a reduction of emphasis on the differences between positive psychology and other psychological approaches which
focus on negative human experience, and a new focus in a synthesis of how the approaches can advance a more holistic understanding of human affect, interaction and functioning across the spectrum of human experience (Linley et al., 2006). They argue that this has positive implications for applied psychologists as it can suggest new ways to engage with practical human problems, dilemmas and opportunities. This may be particularly the case for practitioner psychologists who are trying to offer not only pragmatic solutions where problems exist, but also to engage with the prevention of problems through a proactive focus on promoting positive experience and optimal functioning in individuals, groups and systems.

Evidence for the usefulness of a positive psychology approach in school or when working with children

Given these criticisms, can positive psychology, and theories generated within this approach, have anything to offer educational psychology? Miller suggests that positive psychology has a particular appeal within education where it appears to offer “achievement and empowerment to all” (Miller, 2008, p. 592). A focus on goal-setting and goal-achieving, persistence and striving certainly resonates with the achievement ethos of education and learning. Within research and practice in educational psychology, a positive psychology approach has been proposed, because it can offer both an ethical and pragmatic perspective, with a research focus on solutions rather than problem elaboration (Gersch, 2009). Psychologists have a role in “fostering strength” in both families and schools (Seligman, 1998, cited in Snyder, Lopez and Pedrotti, 2011, p. 5). A positive psychology approach should then resonate with the focus within educational psychology of working
with, and developing strengths in individuals, groups and systems (families and schools). Research findings from organisational psychology suggest that a focus on what ‘works’ promotes positive change, whilst a focus on problem-identification inhibits desired change and traps organisations in a cycle of focussing on the negative (Ashton, 2009; Lewis, Passmore and Cantore, 2007).

As a humanistic principle, there is a general belief that society should strive to provide the conditions in which children are likely to experience positive emotions or ‘happiness’. Research suggests that, above all else, parents are concerned about what makes their children happy (Diener and Lucas, 2004), and parent’s views and choices have begun to be prioritised in good practice and endorsed through proposed legislation (DCSF, 2009; DfE, 2011). In the previous study reported here, the children linked positive affect or, in their words, ‘happiness’, to optimal conditions for learning, as if this relationship was implicit and unproblematic. However, is there any evidence for this association?

A number of laboratory based studies have positively linked performance to positive emotion, but many of these have been carried out with adults. However, some studies have included children as participants. These have demonstrated some support for improved engagement, performance, and readiness to take on a cognitive challenge. Under experimental conditions, both adults and children in a good mood selected higher goals, achieved higher scores and were more persistent at cognitively demanding tasks (anagram solving) under test conditions (Marks and Fleming, 1999).
In another study, children in a good mood (induced in the laboratory) could solve maths problems up to 50% faster (Bryan and Bryan, 1991). However they were less logical, critical and analytical in their thinking (Argyle 1987). There is some evidence that positive mood induction under experimental conditions can boost performance in learning tasks even in children as young as four years (Masters, Barden and Ford, 1979).

Of course, performance under artificial test conditions may not reflect day-to-day performance, and education is not solely about academic learning and achievement, but includes the development of many skills and abilities, including social interaction, self-help and independence skills, and moral and physical development, in preparation for becoming responsible adults and members of society. Research findings from other studies, some of longitudinal design, indicate that children who experience and report higher levels of positive affect or ‘well-being’ are able to learn more effectively, are more likely to engage in positive and rewarding social behaviours, and in life choices that promote the well-being of themselves, others and the environment when they reach adulthood (Blum, McNeely & Rinehart, 2002, as cited in Awartani et al., 2008; Skevington, Birdthistle & Jones, 2003).

Experiencing positive affect and having well-developed social skills may be related to successful learning. This is supported by neuro-scientific research findings suggesting that how children feel in school, and how they interact socially, has a direct effect on their learning, and particularly on their ability to generalise and apply what they have learnt in real-life situations (Immordino-Yang and Damasio, 2007).
Why should positive affect (or as the children in this study termed it, ‘happiness’) produce these effects? One theory, from a positive psychology and evolutionary psychology perspective that may contribute to an explanation of these findings is the Broaden-and-Build Theory of Positive Emotions (Frederickson, 1998; 2001; 2005). This suggests that the experience of positive emotions, ‘broadens’ thinking and encourages individuals to be curious, approach, explore and demonstrate creativity across a range of activities at any given time. If this were the case, this ‘broad’ thinking would be an ideal state to induce in children (by supporting the experience of positive emotions). It may promote learning in school as it permits engagement, development of interest, the asking “what if...?”, the making of associations and promotion of memory.

**The Broaden-and-Build Theory of Positive Emotions**

Frederickson (1998; 2001; 2005) proposes that positive affect broadens momentary thought-action repertoires, cognitively generating multiple different options and ideas, and hence potential actions or responses, to a given stimulus, whereas negative emotions tend to narrow these repertoires. Both responses are adaptive from an evolutionary perspective, depending on context. The experience of fear will prompt the limited responses of ‘fight, flight or freeze’ very rapidly, permitting an immediate and beneficial response (in a situation of physical threat, for example, an encounter with an aggressor). It might be suggested that these impulses are being acted upon when an overwhelmed child runs from the classroom, or adopts avoidance behaviours in response to tasks which they perceive as threatening because they exceed their resources. Here, the behaviour is not adaptive, and does
not benefit the child. Even if these negative thoughts are not acted upon, Frederickson argues, their presence results in a narrowing of focus to a specific set of behavioural actions, whereas, positive emotions tend to produce a wider range of possible thoughts and subsequent actions. Many human activities, and particularly learning, require a more open and divergent response, for example, relating new ideas, sensations and experiences to known ones; comparison and elaboration. The theory suggests that experiencing positive emotions makes us more likely to approach and engage in situations and activities and to remain engaged (Carver and Scheier, 1990).

This has been explored experimentally with adults, by inducing positive, negative or neutral emotions using film clips, and then asking participants to generate possible actions or responses to a genuine situation in which they might experience similar feelings. Those in the two positive mood induction groups could generate more options than those in two negative mood induction groups, and also more than a neutral mood induction control condition (Frederickson and Branigan, 2005). This was true on self-report and also confirmed by electro-myographic signals from facial expressions.

In a review of studies providing further support for the theory, Frederickson (2005) suggests that there is research evidence that positive emotions produce optimal functioning and desirable outcomes in a range of ways. Positive emotions can promote engagement with activities and encourage exploration of the environment (Frederickson 2005), broaden and expand attentional focus (Derryberry and Tucker, 1994), and promote cognitive flexibility. If this is the case, then we might argue that the experience of
positive emotions should create favourable conditions for learning. Additionally, the experience of positive emotions can reverse negative affect and build psychological resilience (Tugade and Frederickson, 2002), whilst also increasing an individual’s perception of personal resources and skills that can be called upon and utilised throughout the life-cycle (Frederickson, 1998; 2002, p. 220).

There is relatively little work to date which applies Frederickson’s model to children in schools (Reschly, Huebner, Appleton and Antaramian, 2008), and particularly to younger children, although there is beginning to be increased interest in both testing the theory with children and young people, and using it to inform interventions with them. In a study with 293 young adolescents in the United States, (the UK equivalent of KS3), the authors tested the Broaden-and Build model within a school environment. Scores on standardised measures of affect; the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule - Children (PANAS – C; Watson, Clark and Tellegen, 1988), the Self-Report Coping Scale (SRCS; Causey & Dubow, 1992), and the Student Engagement Instrument (SEI; Appleton, Christenson, Kim and Reschly, 2006) were correlated. The authors reported findings supporting the idea that the experience of positive emotions was associated with broadened cognitive and behavioural coping strategies, that is, increased problem-solving behaviour and social support-seeking. There were significant positive associations between positive affect and engagement, and the use of coping strategies. There was a significant negative association between negative affect and engagement. Students who reported experiencing positive affect
were more engaged in school activities, and experienced more supportive relationships with teachers. The authors note that these are factors which are related to success in school (Reschly et al., 2008). These findings provide support for the Broaden-and-Build theory outside the laboratory.

Is there any evidence that interventions based on the Broaden-and-Build theory may offer positive outcomes? Hutchinson and Pretelt (2010) report preliminary outcomes from a UK-based intervention designed to utilise the ‘upward spiral’ effect (Frederickson and Joiner, 2002) proposed by the theory and the potential for positive emotions to ‘undo’ the effects of previous negative experience (Frederickson, Mancuso, Branigan and Tugade, 2000). The ‘Mighty-Me’ Programme reports a nine-week primary school-based work programme aimed at encouraging the ‘upward spiral’ of positive emotions in children who have experienced bereavement, bullying or abuse. The Programme has a narrative and solution-oriented focus, using art, imagination and play-based techniques in the therapeutic intervention (Hutchinson and Pretelt, 2010). The authors report positive outcomes in the children, which they claim is in line with and supports the upward spiral hypothesis, specifically in reduction of negative physical behaviours in the playground, and an increase in reflection on behaviours, apologies and reparation when incident have occurred in children taking part in the programme. They acknowledge that the Programme now reviews more systematic evaluation, ideally using longitudinal designs.

In summary, there is some evidence that the implicit relationship between ‘happiness’ and being ‘ready to learn’ offered by the children collaborating in
the previous study, is supported by theory, particularly the Broaden-and-
Build Theory of Positive Emotions (Frederickson, 1998; 2001; 2005). There
is also experimental evidence to support this relationship, although there are
a limited number of studies where is explored with children in this age-group
in naturalistic settings.

**Aim of the study**

Building on the information gained in the previous study, the aim of this study
was to produce an instrument that could assess subjective feelings about
school life in KS2 children, defined in terms that had been highlighted as
important by the children themselves. Here the children were the ‘experts’ of
their own experience, and working collaboratively with them from the data
they provided, the instrument could be designed by them, facilitated by,
rather than created by adults. It was hoped that this could then be used to
assess individual children or groups, to provide insight into where the school
experience was good and not so good, to help to increase understanding in
the adults supporting the child, and to inform the design of interventions. It
may also be useful in assessing the effectiveness of an intervention by using
it as a pre and post measure.

**Research assumptions**

A pragmatic approach has been adopted for the purposes of this research
While it has been argued that realist and constructivist approaches are
basically incompatible, a pragmatic view would hold that “truth is ‘what
works’” (Robson, 2002, p.43), with important caveats on the place of values
and ethics in research. The study reported in this paper is situated within a
realist paradigm. The assumption has been made that, having carefully and reflexively negotiated a view of ‘reality’ which has been agreed with the children as active collaborators in the research reported in Paper 1, it is now possible to use those understanding of a shared reality, at least within the local populations from which the original collaborators were drawn. I am choosing to proceed ‘as if’ this view of reality is relatively unproblematic. Within this realist paradigm, it is possible to identify what features of school experience, as identified by the children, cluster together. This is done by agreeing statements that capture the children’s views, and then gathering responses to those statements, and seeing which statements are associated with each other. The statistical approach (R methodology) used, depends on these assumptions, and correlates individual responses to stimulus statements; an across-persons, within-occasion design.

The intention is not to suggest that a singular ‘reality’ in terms of school experience exists, but rather to suggest that having made a sincere attempt, driven by my values and ethical considerations, to listen to children’s views and opinions, to consult with them over interpretations to support claims for validity, and to collaborate with them in the design of the scale presented here, it is now possible to proceed with an assumption of a shared ‘reality’ which enables a realist approach to be applied.

(Note: In the text which follows, children who took an active part in developing the scale are described as collaborators, while children who helped by completing the scale are described as respondents).
Research design

In a previous study, 40 children (18 girls and 22 boys) in KS2 had been interviewed using a range of approaches. The children were drawn from four schools, three across a city (Unitary Authority) and one in a neighbouring rural area (28 miles away). Schools were chosen to represent the local demographic. Ten children were selected by the Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCo) in each of the four schools, to represent the school demographic in terms of; gender, socio-economic status, having English as an additional language (EAL), ethnicity and stage of the Code of Practice (see Paper 1 and Appendix 11 for details of the collaborating children).

With parental consent, and the informed consent of the children (see Appendix 4 and 5 respectively for consent forms), I firstly held focus groups, and subsequently interviewed forty children individually, using a variety of approaches based on the child’s choice. Children were asked about what made them ‘happy’ and ‘ready to learn’ in school (terms that had been chosen by the children as being largely interdependent, and holding meaning for them), and what acted as an obstacle to their learning and feeling settled and happy in the school environment (see previous paper for full details of the approach). Open-ended qualitative interviews and focus groups are recognised as a systematic method of ensuring that all possible domains are sampled in questionnaire design (Loewenthal, 1996), and are an effective approach to eliciting the views of young people (Morgan, Gibbs, Maxwell and Britten, 2002).
The children were also asked to sort seven simple ‘emotion faces’ into an order from ‘happiest’ to ‘saddest’ (see Appendix 10).

Following thematic analysis of the interview material, I returned to each school to run focus groups with a sub-set (opportunity sample) of the original interviewees. The children received an explanation that their views had been combined with the views of children in three other schools. The children were asked if the topics identified had captured their views in order to check validity, and to add any clarifications or comments that they might have.

Issues raised by the children were represented graphically to enhance accessibility (see Figure 2, Paper 1, for Thematic network map), and in order to maintain confidentiality of individual collaborators.

There was broad agreement across the focus groups about the main areas of importance. The children were guided to discuss the most pertinent topics (as elicited by frequency and/or generality of mention of topic in the previous study), but also the full range of views expressed, with reference to a previous constructed test specification or ‘blueprint’ (Rust and Golombok, 2009), derived from the thematic analysis reported in the previous study. This was used as a prompt rather than a constraint, in keeping with the collaborative aims of the study. Rust and Golombok (2009, p. 220) state that the ‘blueprint’ should be “a guide and not a straightjacket”. These discussions were used to generate items for the instrument, which were then worded by the children themselves.
Once items were written, the focus groups proved useful to reach consensus on topics, but also to challenge views (Lewis 1992). The children were active in making specific adjustments to the items. For example, when I suggested that a possible item could be, “I have lots of friends”, because the importance of social relationships had been such a central theme in the previous analysis, I was aptly corrected by one group who told me that this should be re-worded to, “I have all the friends I want” (Item 11). Subsequent focus groups agreed this as a more appropriate wording.

The children in another group also argued for two items that superficially appeared the same; “I often get the right answers” (Item 45), and, “I often know the right answers to questions” (Item 19). These had initially been included as a reliability check. However, there was a clear distinction for the children between knowing information, which appeared to enhance their self-esteem and feelings of competence, and ‘getting’ the right answers, which occurred in situations where they were able to share their knowledge and which had a component of social recognition, by for example, getting high marks on work sheets or responding correctly to a publically asked question. This latter aspect was also important in school life, hence the statement, “I get picked when I put my hand up (Item 21).”

The items were developed into an instrument to measure children’s subjective experience of school life. A final group of 46 statements was agreed. Particular emphasis was put on accessibility. Where possible familiar, short, high frequency words were used, presented in brief sentences, using concrete concepts (Abedi 2006). Additionally, the chosen items were checked by colleagues for acceptability and culturally sensitivity
(Dwivedi 1996). Items were ordered so that the children would begin and end on relatively neutral or positively emotionally-toned items. The scale was subsequently cross-checked against guidelines for questionnaire development proposed by Rust and Golombok (2009). (A full list of items is available in the instrument at Appendix 21).

Finally, the focus groups approved the order in which the seven ‘smiley’ faces (adapted and modified from Andrews and Withy, 1976) should appear on the final instrument. Items were rated on this seven point scale. The number of faces was agreed by the children to be ‘about right’ in order to be sufficiently sensitive to detect relatively small changes, without offering so many choices that the options became meaningless. The children agreed that it ‘made sense’ to respond consistently to items on the basis of whether you felt ‘happy’ or ‘sad’ about them. This presentation made the reversal of individual item scores unnecessary (for ease of scoring) whilst still safeguarding against response bias. Therefore for a child who felt insecure, a response to the item, “I feel scared in school” (Item 35), would attract a comparatively low score, because feeling scared would be associated with a sad face, but a high score (happy face) would be obtained by a child who always felt safe in school.

The position of faces labelled 4 and 5 was the most disputed. In discussion with the focus groups, this was because of the relative relationship between the curvature of the smile and how far the smiling mouth was open. Over 60% of the children ordered the faces in the order 5, 4. Six children positioned the faces differently. Five were girls, three of who were at School Action plus (SA+) or above on the code of practice, and one was a boy with
a diagnosis of Asperger’s syndrome. This was a concern as I wished the scale to be accessible to all children and particularly the most vulnerable. However children in the focus groups pointed out that the order was likely to be far more intelligible within the context of the scale, than as symbols to be freely sorted. A decision was taken to widen the mouth and increase its curvature on the second most smiling face, in order to eliminate the confusion.

The children in the focus groups also discussed design, layout, and appearance to make the instrument attractive and appealing to others. They suggested what written instructions should be provided, and agreed the instrument should be called the ‘Ready to Learn’ Scale.

On a return visit, the children were invited to test out the instrument by completing it themselves (n = 12) and suggesting modifications. The instrument was also piloted on an opportunity sample of 10 children from each school who had not been involved in its design (n = 40), giving a total sample of n = 52, in excess of the number of items plus one (Rust and Golombok, 2009). Feedback on the intelligibility of statements, presentation, and ease of completion was taken, and minor modifications made. The facility index for each item was found to be acceptable, so all items were retained in the ‘Ready to Learn’ Scale. The Scale is appended at Appendix 21.
Data Collection

Instrument testing

In the summer term of 2011, the original four schools were approached for their permission to trial the instrument on as many of their KS2 children as possible. Opt-out consent forms were agreed with the schools and supplied for parents (see Appendix 16). No parent refused permission for their child to take part. Subsequently, the resulting instrument was administered to 344 children from KS2 across the four school sites, either in their class, or in smaller groups in another learning area (for example, the computer suite). In some schools, a Learning Support Assistant was available to assist children of lower ability to complete the scale, and in one case a child, who was a wheelchair user with limited manual dexterity, completed the scale with the support of her usual Teaching Assistant.

Children received a detailed explanation of the reasons for the research, what was required and how long it would take (approximately 20 minutes, although some children completed it on their own in significantly less time than this). Before the scale was administered, all children were asked if they were happy to take part, in an attempt to provide informed consent (Cohen and Manion, 1994, p.353). No child declined to take part in Schools A or B. In School C, eight children (six boys and two girls) in Year 4, and three boys in Year 5 declined. In School D, two Year 4 boys also declined, and one Year 4 girl was present in class but did not take part due to a previous unrelated incident. (It should be noted that Year 6 children are under-represented because of school trips and transition arrangements during the period in
which data was collected). In all, 96% of the available sample participated (N = 344). I was able to be fairly confident that the sample was large enough for principal components analysis to be applied to the data, as Tabachnick and Fidell (1996) recommend, “it is comforting to have at least 300 cases for factors analysis” (p640).

The Scale was administered to groups, but the children were asked to complete the scale individually. They were able to ask for clarification during the exercise, and the questions asked demonstrated that they were reading the items carefully. Children were free to respond by ticking or crossing through the ‘faces’, or by colouring them in. On completion of the exercise, open views were elicited on the experience, and comments were sought on how it could be improved. Approximately 85% of children who took part expressed that they had enjoyed the process and found it to be ‘fun’ (as elicited by a show of hands). Of the children who did not particularly enjoy it, most expressed that they had not enjoyed having to read the statements, and it felt like it was too long (mostly boys). However, several boys commented that they found the exercise easy because they did not need to write. All the children said that they liked the layout of the questionnaire, and found it relatively easy to understand and use. They were impressed that it had been designed in collaboration with children at their schools. Several children commented that it had made them think more deeply about their school experience. On the whole, the children completed the exercise and left feeling positive about themselves, an important ethical consideration.

A small reward in the form of sweets, pencils or rubbers was given to each participating child following completion of the instrument in thanks for their
participation (in accordance with school policy, and with regard to allergy risks).

**Characteristics of respondents**

For pragmatic reasons, opportunity samples of children completed the scale in each of the four participating schools. No parent opted out of the research on their child’s behalf. In total, 169 girls and 173 boys took part. Detailed demographic data was not obtained for respondents. They were asked only their names, year group and gender. Data was not collected on indicators of deprivation for individual children, for example, whether they were in receipt of free school meals, or their status in relation to attainment or additional needs. Although it is acknowledged that this data, would have provided a better overview of the demographic of the respondents, it would have been demanding on school resources at a busy time (the end of the academic year), as this information would need to have been supplied by administrators or teaching staff. This may have been likely to reduce the likelihood of schools taking part.

There were more respondents in years 4 and 5, resulting in more 9 and 10 year olds giving responses. There were many fewer 11 year olds respondents due to the time of year data were collected. These older pupils had completed examinations and were involved in school trips and extracurricular activities.

Data on physical disability, ethnicity and English spoken as an additional language were obtained, primarily for pragmatic reasons, that is, whether the child could access and complete the scale. One child was a wheelchair user.
Ten respondents spoke English as an additional language. A total of 15 children (4% of respondents) were categorised as belonging to an ethnic minority; eight children were Black/Black British, two were Romanian, two Polish, one Asian, and two of mixed ethnicity; Anglo-Indian and Afro-Caribbean/White British. This means that the opportunity sample was slightly less multicultural than is typical of the local population from which it was drawn, in which approximately 6% of the population is classified as ‘mixed’ (South West Observatory, 2011). This is possibly due to the inclusion of one rural school where there were no children from an ethnic minority.

Thirteen children (eleven boys) across 2 two schools declined to take part. There did not appear to be any particular defining features of these children. In one school, it was felt that this was probably because the group had been offered an alternative, and preferred, activity.

Table 3: Characteristics of children completing the Ready-to-Learn Scale
(for whom demographic data was supplied (N = 344), and breakdown of data by school setting.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Number of children participating by school</th>
<th>Number of children at each age</th>
<th>Number of children in each year group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>169</td>
<td>173</td>
<td>342</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Please note: 2 missing values for gender information, and 6 missing values for age in years mean that not all totals = 344

Age range = 7 years – 11 years.
*First language spoken: French (4), Latvian (1), Egyptian (1), Romanian (2), Polish (2).

Data scoring

All items were reverse scored, attributing a score of 7 to the ‘happiest’ face and 1 to the ‘saddest’ face. A high overall score represents greater satisfaction or happiness with the school experience. All responses to the items were entered into SPSS 15 for Windows.

Preparing the data.

Once entered, the data were scrutinised and checked for accuracy of data input. No values greater than 7 or less than 1 were found. Due to the relatively large initial sample size, cases missing data were excluded from the analysis.

As principal components analysis (PCA) is sensitive to outliers and missing data, and linearity is an assumption of the approach, the variables were checked through boxplots. The distribution of scores on each item was checked for skewness and kurtosis. Both Kologorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests for normal distribution were significant (p<0.001). Given the relatively large sample size, it is easy to get significant results even if deviations from normality are only small. On visual inspection, a number of the items were found to be negatively skewed, and consideration was given to transforming the data. However, this was not carried out, as normal
distribution of variables is not essential if used to examine observed relationships in a large set of variables (Tabachnick and Fidell, 1996, p.640).

**Analysis of data**

Principal components analysis was chosen to analyse the children’s responses to items. This enabled an examination of which items clustered together because they correlated with one another forming a single component, but were largely independent of other items. Each cluster forms a relatively distinct component (subsequently referred to as factors for convenience) (Tabachnick and Fidell, 1996, p.635).

A principal components analysis was carried out with oblique (oblimin) rotation*. Initially, both orthogonal and oblique rotations were used to explore the data. Rotation increases interpretability of the factors. In orthogonal rotation the factors are uncorrelated with each other. In oblique rotation some level of correlation between the factors is assumed. Given the nature of the data, it was theoretically more likely to get a ‘good’ solution with an oblique rotation, as it was unlikely that there would be no correlations between the factors, and oblique rotation would allow one to maximise this manually.

**Results**

The appropriate choice of sample size was confirmed as the Kaiser Meyer Olkin (KMO) value = 0.86, (which is ‘great’ according to Field, 2009, p. 659; Hutcheson and Sofroniou, 1999). KMO values for individual items were > .61(range .61 - .94), which is above the acceptable limit of .5.
Barlett’s test of sphericity $\chi^2 (1035) = 5786.158$, $p < .001$, indicates that correlations between items was sufficiently large to apply PCA to the data.

Initial analysis obtained eigenvalues for each factor in the data. Six factors had eigenvalues over Kaiser’s criterion of 1, and when combined they explained 47.14% of the variance. The scree plot (see Appendix 17) indicated a clear point of inflection at factor 7, in agreement with the component solution. Six factors were therefore retained in the final analysis.

Table 4 shows the factor loadings following oblimin rotation for the pattern matrix. This has been chosen to report here as it is simpler to interpret (Field, 2009, p 666). The final choice of alternative rotations depends on the researcher’s view on the interpretability and ‘usefulness’ of the derived factors. There is a significant level of subjectivity associated with these decisions and the final solution is essential interpretive (Field, 2009). When evaluating the outcome of analysis, a ‘good’ PCA “makes sense” (Tabachnick and Fidell, 1996, p. 636). On examination, there was found to be considerable similarity between the pattern and structure matrices. Both are included here for independent scrutiny (See Appendix 18 for the structure matrix rotated factor loadings.)

*A copy of the correlation matrix has not been appended due to its size, but is available in electronic form from the author on request via the University of Exeter.*
Table 4
Pattern Matrix – Rotated factor loadings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I understand the teacher.</td>
<td>.026</td>
<td>.102</td>
<td>.215</td>
<td>.141</td>
<td>-.064</td>
<td>-.359</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The noise in my class is OK.</td>
<td>-.097</td>
<td>.050</td>
<td>.058</td>
<td>.053</td>
<td>-.661</td>
<td>-.048</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I get on well with my friends.</td>
<td>.124</td>
<td>.695</td>
<td>.066</td>
<td>-.071</td>
<td>.094</td>
<td>.008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I play with lots of people at playtime.</td>
<td>-.187</td>
<td>.633</td>
<td>.191</td>
<td>-.032</td>
<td>-.265</td>
<td>.039</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There are good things to do at break-times.</td>
<td>-.030</td>
<td>.198</td>
<td>.042</td>
<td>.079</td>
<td>-.349</td>
<td>-.274</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning is fun.</td>
<td>.080</td>
<td>-.282</td>
<td>.203</td>
<td>.062</td>
<td>-.265</td>
<td>-.430</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I like to work in a group.</td>
<td>.055</td>
<td>.272</td>
<td>-.202</td>
<td>.096</td>
<td>-.466</td>
<td>-.114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don't get distracted by my thoughts.</td>
<td>.277</td>
<td>-.084</td>
<td>.159</td>
<td>.091</td>
<td>-.477</td>
<td>.060</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have good playtimes.</td>
<td>.207</td>
<td>.575</td>
<td>-.040</td>
<td>-.060</td>
<td>-.298</td>
<td>.024</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel I belong in my class.</td>
<td>.222</td>
<td>.191</td>
<td>.125</td>
<td>-.109</td>
<td>-.129</td>
<td>-.231</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have all the friends I want.</td>
<td>.065</td>
<td>.495</td>
<td>-.148</td>
<td>.010</td>
<td>-.265</td>
<td>-.106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can listen to the teacher.</td>
<td>.451</td>
<td>-.108</td>
<td>.125</td>
<td>.021</td>
<td>-.242</td>
<td>-.177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I like to work by myself.</td>
<td>-.021</td>
<td>-.251</td>
<td>.522</td>
<td>-.049</td>
<td>-.086</td>
<td>-.158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can keep up with my work.</td>
<td>.155</td>
<td>.131</td>
<td>.605</td>
<td>.072</td>
<td>-.001</td>
<td>-.019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In class, I do things to help me to learn.</td>
<td>.276</td>
<td>.117</td>
<td>.217</td>
<td>-.030</td>
<td>.064</td>
<td>-.406</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am a good friend.</td>
<td>.373</td>
<td>.481</td>
<td>.053</td>
<td>-.022</td>
<td>.135</td>
<td>-.151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can use things in class to help me to learn.</td>
<td>.106</td>
<td>.039</td>
<td>.019</td>
<td>.003</td>
<td>-.035</td>
<td>-.557</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People behave well in my class.</td>
<td>-.009</td>
<td>.034</td>
<td>.072</td>
<td>-.008</td>
<td>-.695</td>
<td>-.118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I often know the right answers to questions.</td>
<td>-.057</td>
<td>.024</td>
<td>.726</td>
<td>-.076</td>
<td>-.109</td>
<td>.105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I help other people.</td>
<td>.292</td>
<td>.211</td>
<td>.139</td>
<td>-.013</td>
<td>.018</td>
<td>-.386</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I get picked when I put my hand up.</td>
<td>.088</td>
<td>.030</td>
<td>.065</td>
<td>.102</td>
<td>-.180</td>
<td>-.558</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement</td>
<td>-056</td>
<td>-025</td>
<td>.171</td>
<td>-.101</td>
<td>-.159</td>
<td>-.618</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I get rewarded when I try.</td>
<td>.159</td>
<td>-.026</td>
<td>.088</td>
<td>.690</td>
<td>-.060</td>
<td>.026</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I get angry in school.</td>
<td>-.066</td>
<td>.040</td>
<td>-.115</td>
<td>.030</td>
<td>.042</td>
<td>-.712</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can ask for help when I don't understand.</td>
<td>-.134</td>
<td>.410</td>
<td>.121</td>
<td>.086</td>
<td>-.167</td>
<td>-.297</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People say nice things about something I have done.</td>
<td>.005</td>
<td>.093</td>
<td>.699</td>
<td>-.020</td>
<td>.025</td>
<td>-.050</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have good ideas.</td>
<td>.361</td>
<td>.102</td>
<td>.166</td>
<td>-.035</td>
<td>-.429</td>
<td>.069</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The grownups in school like me.</td>
<td>.321</td>
<td>-.112</td>
<td>.023</td>
<td>-.022</td>
<td>-.069</td>
<td>-.565</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel happy in school.</td>
<td>.136</td>
<td>.318</td>
<td>.019</td>
<td>.068</td>
<td>-.065</td>
<td>-.389</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am kind to other children.</td>
<td>.677</td>
<td>.255</td>
<td>.031</td>
<td>.049</td>
<td>.037</td>
<td>.084</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I get told off most days.</td>
<td>.384</td>
<td>-.174</td>
<td>-.138</td>
<td>.544</td>
<td>-.194</td>
<td>.021</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I finish my work most of the time.</td>
<td>.080</td>
<td>.042</td>
<td>.613</td>
<td>.117</td>
<td>.197</td>
<td>-.130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I know what to do next in school.</td>
<td>.146</td>
<td>.137</td>
<td>.403</td>
<td>.161</td>
<td>.065</td>
<td>-.247</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I make good choices about how to behave.</td>
<td>.777</td>
<td>.061</td>
<td>-.053</td>
<td>-.003</td>
<td>-.031</td>
<td>-.129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel scared in school.</td>
<td>-.043</td>
<td>.062</td>
<td>-.057</td>
<td>.722</td>
<td>-.144</td>
<td>.159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I get ready for school on time.</td>
<td>-.010</td>
<td>.109</td>
<td>.231</td>
<td>.104</td>
<td>-.162</td>
<td>-.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am asked to do things by the teacher.</td>
<td>.201</td>
<td>.114</td>
<td>.096</td>
<td>.090</td>
<td>.197</td>
<td>-.420</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other kids are nice to me.</td>
<td>-.026</td>
<td>.693</td>
<td>.105</td>
<td>.086</td>
<td>-.073</td>
<td>.056</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I know the rules in school.</td>
<td>.485</td>
<td>-.072</td>
<td>.099</td>
<td>-.065</td>
<td>.043</td>
<td>-.233</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I behave well in school.</td>
<td>.826</td>
<td>-.025</td>
<td>-.076</td>
<td>.003</td>
<td>-.078</td>
<td>-.096</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I get hungry in school.</td>
<td>-.163</td>
<td>.104</td>
<td>.009</td>
<td>.552</td>
<td>.196</td>
<td>-.301</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I keep the school rules.</td>
<td>.735</td>
<td>-.001</td>
<td>-.020</td>
<td>-.003</td>
<td>-.013</td>
<td>-.108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am tired at school.</td>
<td>-.067</td>
<td>-.072</td>
<td>.074</td>
<td>.677</td>
<td>.074</td>
<td>-.011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I do my homework.</td>
<td>.491</td>
<td>.015</td>
<td>.128</td>
<td>.105</td>
<td>.047</td>
<td>.132</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I often get the right answers. | .016 | .067 | **.780** | .071 | -.002 | .100
---|---|---|---|---|---|---
I do ‘fun’ things after school. | .009 | .367 | .067 | .076 | .144 | -.101

| **Eigenvalues** | 6.75 | 4.96 | 5.90 | 3.19 | 3.91 | 6.78 |
| **% of variance** | 24.63 | 5.64 | 5.07 | 4.43 | 3.84 | 3.57 |
| **Cronbach’s α** | .81 | .80 | .78 | .68 | .70 | .80 |

Cronbach’s α for scale overall = .92

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.
Rotation Method: Oblimin with Kaiser Normalization.
Rotation converged in 14 iterations.

Items loading onto the six factors in the pattern matrix are presented below at Table 5. (A list of item loadings for the structure matrix is included at Appendix 19).

The items clustering to form each factor suggest that factor 1 represents school competence, a general ability to behave in ways that attract positive attention and success in school. Factor 2 represents social competence with peers, having good social skills and having friends. Factor 3 represents academic competence, having confidence, ability and experiencing success with learning. Factor 4 represents distress and discomfort in school due to internal and external factors. Factor 5 represents environmental support for learning, in terms of behaviour of self and others, and the impact this has on learning. Finally, Factor 6 represents acceptance, belonging and recognition by others, and particularly adults in school in terms of feeling supported and valued.
Table 5

Pattern matrix – item loadings

Contains information about the unique (uncorrelated) contribution of an item to a factor (Field, 2009, p 667).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor 1 – School competence</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I behave well in school.</td>
<td>0.826</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I make good choices about how to behave.</td>
<td>0.777</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I keep the school rules.</td>
<td>0.735</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am kind to other children.</td>
<td>0.677</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I do my homework.</td>
<td>0.491</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I know the rules in school.</td>
<td>0.485</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can listen to the teacher.</td>
<td>0.451</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor 2 – Social competence</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I get on well with my friends.</td>
<td>0.695</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other kids are nice to me.</td>
<td>0.693</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I play with lots of people at playtime.</td>
<td>0.633</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have good playtimes.</td>
<td>0.575</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have all the friends I want.</td>
<td>0.495</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am a good friend.</td>
<td>0.481</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People say nice things about something I have done.</td>
<td>0.410</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor 3 – Academic competence</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I often get the right answers.</td>
<td>0.780</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I often know the right answers to questions.</td>
<td>0.726</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have good ideas.</td>
<td>0.699</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I finish my work most of the time.</td>
<td>0.613</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can keep up with my work.</td>
<td>0.605</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I like to work by myself.</td>
<td>0.522</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I know what to do next in school.</td>
<td>0.403</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor 4 – Distress in school</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I feel scared in school.</td>
<td>0.722</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I get angry in school.</td>
<td>0.690</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am tired at school.</td>
<td>0.677</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I get hungry in school.</td>
<td>0.552</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I get told off most days.</td>
<td>0.544</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Factor 5 – Environmental support for learning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Factor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>People behave well in my class.</td>
<td>-0.695</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The noise in my class is OK.</td>
<td>-0.661</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t get distracted by my thoughts.</td>
<td>-0.477</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I like to work in a group.</td>
<td>-0.466</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t get distracted by other people.</td>
<td>-0.429</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Factor 6 – Recognition by adults

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Factor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I can ask for help when I don’t understand.</td>
<td>-0.712</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I get rewarded when I try.</td>
<td>-0.618</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The grown-ups in school like me.</td>
<td>-0.565</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I get picked when I put my hand up.</td>
<td>-0.558</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can use things in class to help me to learn.</td>
<td>-0.557</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning is fun.</td>
<td>-0.430</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am asked to do things by the teacher.</td>
<td>-0.420</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In class, I do things to help me to learn.</td>
<td>-0.406</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Discussion

The aim of this study was to work collaboratively with KS2 children in order to develop a valid instrument to provide a pre and post intervention measure to be used in a systematic approach to explore whether an intervention has been helpful to a child, contributing to a comprehensive evaluation process. The ‘Ready-to-Learn’ Scale was produced through such a collaboration, and initial analysis and use in practice suggests that it might also contribute to exploring an individual child’s perspective, negotiating an intervention, and evaluating the outcomes of intervention, from the child’s perspective. Use of the scale, alongside a TME approach, allows at least one of the targets to be immediately personally relevant to the child, and any other targets and interventions to be designed so as to have impact on areas and issues that are significant to the child.
The items included in the Scale explicitly explore areas within school and the community over which the EP, working in consultation with parents/carers and school staff, may be likely to have direct or indirect influence. This may initially involve a simple change for an individual (child, teacher, parent/carer), a modification of the environment or a process, or a longer term and more systemic change for the school. For example, a group of children commenting less than favourably on playtimes and social relationships, may result in further exploration with a group, followed by play skills training for Meal Time Assistants (MTAs), and in the longer term, could involve the wider school, and community groups in bid-making or fund raising for more stimulating play equipment.

Examination of the items loading onto each of the six sub scales which resulted from the analysis were best interpreted and captured conceptually by the following descriptive titles; school competence, social competence, academic competence, distress in school, environmental support for learning and recognition by adults. Initially, ‘school competence’ and ‘academic competence’ appeared similar, but they differ subtly, with ‘school competence’ referring to adaptive school behaviours, whereas ‘academic competence’ relates directly to the ability to produce good work in the classroom. With this understanding, it is possible for a child to feel competent in school, without achieving at or above average levels academically, so long as they are socialised to the school environment, and can manage and adapt their behaviours to the school ethos.

‘Social competence’ was predicted to be important from previous research with children of this age (Maxwell, 2006). The ability to use social skills in
practice, rather than knowing about them in theory, was reflected in the reciprocal nature of being a good friend, and having others who behaved similarly towards you.

The management of the classroom environment by the teacher was reflected in the subscale ‘environmental support for learning’. Children mentioned that noise and external distractions in class could be a problem, whilst many simultaneously acknowledged that they contribute to it, at least some of the time, by talking (inappropriately) and ‘mucking about’. Developing their awareness of the associations here, and facilitating a problem-solving process at a whole-class level, could be a way forward to reducing this difficulty in classes where it is a particular problem, while promoting children’s agency and commitment to bring about change.

All children recognised the category of ‘distress in school’, and most could recall an incident where they had experienced all the highlighted factors that might cause it. However, the overwhelming majority were mostly happy in school, and felt safe. They referred directly to environmental adaptations, and security measures adopted, but in particular, to their trust in the adults in school to look after them and keep them safe.

This linked with the final subscale, recognition by adults. Most children value their teachers (and other adults in school) highly, and want to enjoy positive relationships with them. Where good relationships exist, this can contribute to the child’s sense of personal competence, being ‘worthwhile’, and their sense of connectedness and belonging to their class and school, prerequisites for engagement and their belief in their ability to learn and
succeed. Interestingly, the importance of the relationship with adults in school to mediate the learning experience, and influence it either positively or negatively, was a finding of a large study with teenaged children in the Middle East (Awartani, et al., 2008). This perhaps suggests that positive recognition by adults in school transcends culture and age groups. Importantly, a link was found between perceptions of teacher support and academic attainment.

An unexpected outcome of the study was the amount of interest it generated among teaching staff. A number of teachers saw the Scale as a way to understand the pupils that they found ‘hard to reach’, and about whom they had particular concerns. A number were disappointed that I would not share the findings for individual pupils (as I had not obtained their consent for this). However, this did suggest that the Scale, appropriately used with a child’s understanding and consent, would be a useful tool for developing both understanding and empathy in teaching staff. One teacher commented,

“I would be fascinated to see what he said… I’ve tried but I can’t get to know him, to open up and say what’s wrong. It’s too hard to start that conversation, it wouldn’t go anywhere. But he did the questionnaire … and enjoyed it”.

This suggests that it could be a useful experience for a teacher and pupil to complete the scale together, leading to potentially new understandings and shared perspectives, enhancing the adult/child relationship, and offering the possibility of new ways forward.
Criticisms of the study

I would have liked to have more time within the focus groups to develop the issues and ideas that the children introduced into the discussions, and to enable them to develop the understandings and skills required to make more of the decisions and to guide the research themselves (compare Kellett, 2005; 2008). The practicalities of working within a busy school environment, and with schools with whom, in most cases, I did not have a prior relationship, made compromise necessary. However, in further research, I would like to negotiate with the schools for even greater participation and ownership of the research by the children, possibly as part of the curriculum, in keeping with Kellett’s (2008) work with younger and more vulnerable groups. I am planning to develop this work in the future within a specialist provision and in a pre-school setting.

In attempting to develop an instrument that was accessible to both younger and less able children, the item wording was kept to the simplest form, which led to a loss of the richness and nuance of the original issues raised by the children interviewed and the focus groups. However, this was offset to some degree by the children having the final say on the wording of each item. Additionally, no child in this group, despite their difficulties, said that they were unable to understand the items.

I did not ask the children to think about and respond with reference to the previous few weeks as other scales have (Ivens, 2007), so there is a danger that the induced positive mood of the approaching summer holidays skewed the responses in a happier or more positive direction (Argyle 1987). Some children may have wanted to respond more positively on the basis of social
desirability. However the lack of an overt focus on happiness makes this less likely, and in practice the children demonstrated that they were very thoughtful and honest in their responses.

The sample of respondents should generate a full range of scores on each item (Rust and Golombok, 2009). I attempted to ensure this by choosing a schools with differing demographics, in which children were both as representative of the local population as possible, but also who could be assumed to have a different range of life experiences, attitudes and beliefs about school. A full range of scores were returned for every item but one (where the range was 2 – 7). However there was a risk in this strategy, as differing sub-groups may create different factors (Comrey and Lee, 1992). The Scale should now be administered to more homogenous groups, on the basis of gender, school, year group, or other variables, to identify any significant differences in response.

**Critical evaluation of the ‘Ready-to-Learn’ Scale**

There were a number of methodological difficulties with the scale due to the use of an opportunity sample of children as respondents. Significantly more children in the mid age groups (9 and 10 year olds) completed the scale in testing, than older or younger children in KS2. This was due to the number of children available on the days which I visited the four school locations. There were also relatively few older children in Year 6 who completed the scale due to data being collected near the end of the summer term, when National Curriculum Assessments (SATs) had been completed and there were a number of extra-curricular activities organised.
The collection of more detailed demographic data on the children who completed the scale would have permitted a more accurate and detailed description of the respondents in the sample. Obtaining details of, for example, socio-economic status of families, and current achievement levels of each respondent, would have been prohibitive because of the time and resources available to me within a professional doctorate. Additionally, this information would have required the full co-operation of school staff at a busy time of the academic year. Data was obtained on gender, ethnicity, first language spoken, and any issue which was likely to impact on the completion of the scale, for example, physical inability of a child to complete the scale without support.

**Strengths of the Scale**

The children’s comments on completing the scale suggested that it was an enjoyable experience for them, and relatively easy to complete. In a group administration, it took a maximum of twenty minutes (and for many children it was completed considerably faster). 85% of respondents said that completing the scale was ‘fun’ on group administration. There is no requirement for the child to be able to read the items, if it is completed with adult support, either as an individual or in a group. It is also useful for reluctant writers, as there is no requirement to do other than make a mark. This means that the scale is likely to be accessible to the majority of children in mainstream schooling. Many children expressed that they enjoyed having the choice of how to make their responses (mark making through the ‘emotion face’ of choice or colouring it in). In subsequent use on a 1:1 with a number of children in the course of EP practice, it has been helpful to use the
time taken by a child to colour in their face of choice, to explore and expand on the issues around their response in a relaxed manner.

The seven point scale, rather than the more frequently occurring four response option (compare the PASS) enables the child to record more subtle changes in response to intervention where it is used as an evaluation tool.

**Difficulties with the scale**

Whilst the initial stated aim of the research was to produce an evaluation tool for EP intervention, it is questionable to what degree this aim was achieved. As the research developed, the focus shifted to a fascination with what the children had to say about their school experience, and the opportunity to create a platform from which to hear their voices. It was also clear from the outset that there was a balance to be negotiated between creating a specific or more general measure. The intention was to produce the latter in relation to the whole school experience for a child. Whenever this is the case, it is likely that for any specific desired outcome, there will be a more specific measure that can capture change in that area. It is acknowledged that for many outcomes of EP involvement with children in schools, there may be other available tools that may be more elegant, parsimonious, and quicker to use than the scale developed here; an important consideration for the busy EP. For example, if the focus of work and support is around a learning issue with a child, outcomes may be more directly measured through the use of a single scale metric, for example, a Target Monitoring and Evaluation approach (Dunsmuir et al., 2009). Teacher assessment can augment this data over time, with the advantage that it reflects the child’s typical
performance in class. Likewise progress towards desired outcomes in a
behavioural goal may be better measured through observational techniques
such as recording the frequency of pre-defined behaviours over time.

However, if the focus of involvement includes more subjective outcomes,
such as an increase in a child’s subjective feelings of competence, friendship
skills, or feelings of acceptance within school, the scale may offer a way to
access these changes over time and make them visible. For these
experiences it is subjective evaluation that is likely to be most meaningful,
although this may be accompanied and augmented by behavioural
observations. Here, the scale may offer a point of access to the child’s
perceptions, particularly in younger children and where expressive language
difficulties may be a problem. For example, an intervention aimed at
increasing positive interactions between a child and her peer group could be
evaluated behaviourally by adults in school recording the time that the child
spends alone, or in positive interaction with one or more peers, in
unstructured time. This would be demanding of adult time and resources,
and the effects of being closely observed, however unobtrusively, would be
likely to effect the interactions creating a false environment. It may be useful
in this situation to use pre and post scores on the Social Competence
subscale to indicate any changes in this area. It would also be enlightening
to explore the child’s response to the item “I have all the friends I want”. Not
all children need or want intensive social interaction with their peers.
Accompanied by teacher feedback and behavioural observations by school
staff, the scale could contribute to a comprehensive evaluation process.
An informal trial of the scale across differing foci of is currently in progress to test its utility in practice. However, in recent use, in my personal practice, and from reports of other EPs in the service, the scale has shown itself to have greater utility as an interview tool, particularly for those children who are more reluctant to engage, or where the presenting issue is not clearly defined. Engagement appears to be facilitated when it is explained to the child that the scale was designed with and by children just like them. In practice this appears to develop their curiosity, and may also be experienced as empowering. Where it is completed individually, and then used as a ‘springboard’ for discussion, the scale has enabled an exploration of issues that are important to the individual child, and allowed further questioning and exploration by the EP. This has led on several occasions to a reappraisal of the child’s situation and permitted alternative hypotheses to be formed. Also, where the child has consented to this, sharing the information, gathered at interviews facilitated by the scale, with significant adults (parents, teachers and teaching assistants), has on a number of occasions, resulted in a shift in the adults’ perception and understanding of the child, and increased empathy and engagement.

Within the interview process, two children have spontaneously reflected that completing the scale has helped them to explore their own feelings resulting in greater insight, understanding and self-acceptance.

In conclusion, while the aim of the study was to produce a general evaluation tool to measure the outcomes of EP interventions, was only partially achieved. However, the resulting scale may have a more significant
contribution to make to EP practice through the opportunities it offers to engage meaningfully in helpful conversations and assessment with children.

**Implications of the research for educational psychology practice**

When carrying out applied research, it is important to ask was it worthwhile? Have the research process and findings contributed anything that is likely to be helpful in practice? I suggest that there are a number of areas which may prove useful to informing EP practice.

**Actively involving children in consultation**

The research presented here clearly demonstrates that children in KS2 hold, and are able to express clear, insightful, and often detailed views on what creates a positive learning experience in school. They are able to express what is and is not ‘working’ for them. For a significant proportion of their day-to-day practice, educational psychologists, by the nature of their work, are engaged with children who are deemed by adults (parents, carers, teaching staff or other professionals) to have a ‘problem’. It is not always clear if the child also perceives this (Terjesen, Jacofsky, Froh and Di Giuseppe, 2004), or if they do, that the problem expressed is of the same nature or in the same domain. Consultation (Wagner, 2008), which focuses EP contact almost exclusively on the adults who support the child, while being an efficient approach to EP work, denies individual children or groups the opportunity to express their views and opinions. Potential problems may be conceptualised quite differently by children and adults, even those who know them well (Pugh and Selleck, 1996). I would suggest that it is important to include
children as active collaborators in the exploration of problems, discussion of desired outcomes, creation of potential solutions, design of interventions and evaluation of outcomes. Not only would this begin to redress the power imbalance that exists between adults and children, but it may also lead to the child having a clearer understanding of the situation and greater commitment to working towards solutions. This is a potential area for future research, using a mixed methods design, to compare the experience, engagement and outcomes of EP involvement when utilising either a consultation model, or an approach where the child’s views and involvement are actively elicited.

**Dissemination of findings to key adults**

It is important that when children have been asked their views, they are used to inform the adults and systems that support them, and where necessary, to bring about change. If this does not occur, then it could be argued that only ‘lip-service’ is being paid, and rather than empowering children, hearing their voices is seen only as a token gesture. The qualitative study reported in Paper 1, generated detailed data offering an insight into how KS2 children may feel about the school experience and learning. The two key overarching themes identified as importance contributors to a positive experience of school and learning (as defined by the children) were ‘competence’ and ‘connectedness’. Making teachers and support staff aware of the importance of children feeling competent, by utilising and emphasising their strengths, may contribute to the importance of staff differentiating work for the individual child so that they can experience success. Likewise, teachers may not know just how important a role they have in mediating social relationships between children in their classes, and also in building their own relationships with the
children. The quality of relationships with both peers and adults was reported to be foundational to a positive school experience.

Additionally, the research revealed issues that could helpfully be considered in both the classroom and the playground, and which have implications not only for day-to-day organisation within school, but also potentially for school design. This may be a role for an EP working at a systemic level. For example, at a classroom level, an unexpected theme with more able children was their potential disenchantment and risk of disengagement because they perceived they were receiving less ‘reward’ (both through school motivation and reward systems, and social recognition; being selected to answer when they raised their hand). This is understandable when viewed in the context of encouraging their less-able peers, but is an example of where ‘excellence’ and ‘what works’ is being ignored, while a problem-focus is maintained.

Another surprising finding was the emphasis made by children across the school sites on the importance of outdoor play across mixed year groups and key stages, and the further importance of organised games.

Currently the views expressed by children about their school experience, is being shared locally through involvement with professional development training for newly qualified teachers, and also through professional development seminars and workshops with other professional colleagues who support children in multi-agency teams.

The Ready-to-Learn Scale as an assessment and evaluation tool

Finally I would like to suggest, as discussed in the previous section, that the scale developed in collaboration with the children, and presented in Paper 2,
can be a useful vehicle for facilitating helpful conversations with children, especially where perceived difficulties are not clearly formulated or understood by the adults supporting the child (with the important caveat that the child make have very different views even if this is the case), or where the child is perceived to be difficult to engage with or ‘hard to know’ (as expressed the teacher of a child who completed the scale). In practice, the scale has the ‘novelty’ value of having been designed by children, for children, and this had been particularly helpful when shared with individual children, and as a mechanism for developing rapport (Beaver, 1996). It is also child-friendly in design and layout. When completed alongside a child, it offers the possibility of both the EP and child ‘being curious’, exploring and elaborating responses. Markedly low scores (representing dissatisfaction) on particular sub-scales or items can be explored further and targeted as areas for possible intervention, whereas high scores can be reinforced, celebrated and shared, helping to support feelings of competence.

Additionally, there is a use for the scale, as was originally intended, in measuring change as a result of intervention, although this may prove most useful where concerns are in the areas of social and emotional development, and desired outcomes may be harder to operationalise and measure. At other times, the scale may contribute, as part of a more comprehensive evaluation of outcomes, where a holistic evaluation of the child’s perception of the school experience is desired.

The relative usefulness of the scale will continue to be explored in the course of EP practice and through more systematic investigation and research.
Future development of the Ready-to-Learn Scale

As previously discussed, initial trials of the scale, within the context of individual casework, suggest that it can be a non-threatening, respectful and enjoyable way to engage a child, and to begin to develop rapport, whilst generating useful insights and suggesting possible areas for intervention. The trial has been extended to other EPs in the CPS, and to colleagues on the multi-agency team, including inclusion Practitioners and therapists. Additionally, following informal presentation of the research at a professional development seminar, I have been approached by the manager of a local parenting organisation to discuss the possibility of using a modified version of the scale to evaluate outcomes of parenting interventions from the child’s perspective.

For greater ease of use within the CPS, it may now be useful to develop a shortened form of the Scale, which can be trialled systematically within the Service as a pre and post intervention measure, to provide evaluative feedback on change in response to intervention. This could be done by taking the first three items which load onto each factor, to produce an 18 item scale. Advantages are that it would be quicker to administer and score, whilst continuing to provide information of specific areas of change in addition to an overall single metric (score) for comparison. It would however, be useful to retain the longer version as a more exploratory tool, particularly as it has been stressed that it may be most useful in facilitating conversations with children. It can be used to help to understand a child’s experience of school
better, what is important to them, and to open up an authentic dialogue between a supporting adult (EP, teacher or Key Worker) and child. This can assist in the identification of areas of strength, as well as to identify specific areas of difficulty for a child, or to highlight issues or areas which they would like to change, leading to the negotiation of targets and interventions that are acceptable to the child, and to which they are likely to commit. It is also possible that schools could use the Scale with groups as a screening device, to identify both children who may be having difficulties, and those who are enjoying the school experience. This could be used to develop class discussions and negotiations about possible changes and improvements to the school experience, encouraging participation, engagement and ownership.

A comparison of the total scores (possible range: 7 – 322) obtained by children selected on the basis of their perceived positive adaptation to school and academic progress, or general difficulties in the school setting, suggested that the Scale is able to discriminate between these groups. Children judged by their teachers to be happy and performing well in school scored up to 90 points higher on the Scale than the children about whom teachers expressed concerns. Further investigation of this is necessary, and should be included in subsequent research designs.

A full analysis and standardisation of the Scale is outside the time-frame, remit and resources of a professional doctorate. Face and content validity was judged acceptable by the children who co-designed the Scale, and in feedback from collaborators who completed it in the testing phase. A test is
said to possess concurrent validity if it can be shown to correlate highly with another test designed to measure the same or a closely related variable administered at the same time (Kline, 1993, p. 17). Future studies should consider concurrent validity checks through comparison with other established instruments which are designed to test aspects of the current Scale, for example, the Pupil Attitudes to School Scale, the ‘Myself as Learner’ Scale (Burden, 1998) and the Happiness Scale (Ivens, 2007).

Future developments could include the extension of the approach to parents and teachers, determining areas of the school experience that they believe to be important for their children. This would ultimately produce an evaluation of a single piece of work with a child, or group of children, from multiple perspectives, and permit triangulation of outcome data, similar to the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (Goodman, 1997). A possible advantage of this could be that it would allow better understanding of all actors’ perspectives. This could permit the design or selection of interventions that ‘make sense’ to actors, and are more likely to be adopted.

In conclusion, the ‘Ready-to-Learn’ Scale presented here, whilst requiring further development, offers a useful, practical, informative, respectful and enjoyable way to engage with KS2 children, and to indicate their current satisfaction in areas of school life that children of the same age have identified as most important.

Children in this age group were reflective on their school experience, held considered opinions, and were frequently perceptive about all areas of
school life, learning and social development. They were able to engage in discussions, negotiations and make decisions about the design of the Scale. The resulting Scale was understood by the majority of children, was relatively easy to complete, and most children found it enjoyable. No child was distressed as a result of completing the Scale.

Importantly, the majority of the children reported that completing the Scale was a positive experience. In keeping with the ethos of the study, I close with a comment made by one of the children on completing the Scale, giving a child the last word.

“It like tells you what you are feeling, where you are now. The questions help you to think about it. I’d like to do it every year, just to check where I am.” (Amanda, Year 4).

References


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**Weblinks**

Department for Education (DfE). (2012). *Healthy schools programme*

http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/pupilsupport/pastoralcare/a0075278/healthy-schools


https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/.../DCSF-00784-2008

*Pupil Attitude to Self and School Scale (PASS) – GL Assessment*


Appendices

Appendix 1.

Table 1. Demographic data for the four participating schools.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Number of children in school</th>
<th>Free school meals (FSM)</th>
<th>Code of Practice level</th>
<th>Social care involvement</th>
<th>EAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>SA+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>169</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>292</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>235</td>
<td>420</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SA = School Action, SA+ = School Action plus, CPP = Child protection plan, CiC = Child in Care, EAL = English as an additional language.

School A – inner city school in an area of relatively high deprivation
School B – rural school in a relatively affluent area
School C – inner city school in an area of moderate deprivation
School D – suburban school in a relatively affluent area

Appendix 2. Introductory e-mail

Dear [Head Teacher],

Further to our telephone conversation, thank you for expressing an initial interest in allowing me to carry out research in your school. I am now writing to supply you with further information about the research process and what I will require from the school, so that you can make a decision about whether to participate.

There are 2 parts to the study and I will need to make a minimum of 3 visits to your school:

In Part 1, I would need to interview 10 KS2 children for 15 – 30 minutes each (in a quiet area). These children should be broadly representative of the demographic in your school (for example, on the basis of gender, indicators of deprivation, eligibility for free school meals, EAL and SEN). We would use
a range of approaches to talk about when they feel particularly happy and successful in school and at home, using their own experiences. They would then help me to generate statements for my questionnaire. Very few resources in the way of time or space would be required from the school. (Visit 1)

In Part 2, I will be designing a research tool to help indicate areas to target for intervention, and to measure change in children's well-being as a result of interventions. The important issue is that, unlike many other 'questionnaires' of this type, which are largely designed by adults for use on children, I want to design something collaboratively with the children themselves.

Therefore, on a subsequent visit, I would like to see a sub section of the children originally interviewed (maybe 5 - 6) so that they could tell me if I have 'got it right' and represented their views (time required approx 30 - 40 minutes), and whether the themes that emerge from the data are valid and meaningful to them. They would also, at this stage, help me to generate statements suitable for inclusion in a questionnaire, ensuring that the wording is clear, meaningful and intelligible. (Visit 2)

Finally, I would like to administer the questionnaire to a group of about 30 children in Key Stage 2 (or as many children for whom consent can be obtained). This should take a maximum of about 15 – 30 minutes, depending on the size of the group, although I would also want to include any students who may have difficulty reading the questions, and I would see these children individually and act as a 'reader' for them. (Visit 3)

I would do my best to fit flexibly around the needs of the school and children at all times. I do not expect there to be any demands on staff time or school resources as I will carry out all the data collection, including the administration of the questionnaire, releasing teaching staff at that time, so long as you are happy for me to do this. I am able to provide a current Enhanced Disclosure and a Certificate of Ethical Approval for the research from the University of Exeter, before carrying out any work in school. I will also provide parental consent forms (which you could modify to meet your needs).

Each child will receive a small gift (pencil, rubber or sweets) on completion of the data collection for taking part. I would appreciate it if you would let me know your school policy on what would be appropriate, and also if any of the participating children have any known allergies.

Please let me know if you need any further information.

Hoping you may be able to help,

Best wishes and thanks,

Sarah Aldrich
Trainee Educational Psychologist
Appendix 3. Consent form – Head Teacher version

CONSENT FORM

I have been fully informed about the aims and purposes of the project, and I give my consent for staff and pupils (with written, informed parental consent) in this school to take part as research collaborators.

I understand that:

there is no compulsion for me to participate in this research project and, if I do choose to participate, I may at any stage withdraw my participation and that of staff and pupils in this school

I have the right to refuse permission for the publication of any information about me or my staff/pupils

any information which I give will be used solely for the purposes of this research project, which may include publications

If applicable, the information, which I give, may be shared between any of the other researcher(s) participating in this project in an anonymised form

all information I give will be treated as confidential

the researcher(s) will make every effort to preserve my anonymity, and that of the school and individual staff and pupils

..........................................

(Signature of Head Teacher)
Date: ..................

..................................................(Printed name of Head Teacher)

..............................................................(Name of school)

One copy of this form will be kept by the participant; a second copy will be kept by the researcher(s)

If you have any concerns about the project that you would like to discuss, please contact:

Sarah Aldrich (07794413189/01752 224962)

Data Protection Act: The University of Exeter is a data collector and is registered with the Office of the Data Protection Commissioner as required to do under the Data Protection Act 1998. The information you provide will be used for research purposes and will be processed in accordance with the University’s registration and current data protection legislation. Data will be confidential to the researcher(s) and will not be disclosed to any unauthorised third parties without further agreement by the participant. Reports based on the data will be in anonymised form.
Appendix 4. Consent form – Parent version

Dear Parent/Carer,

I am a Trainee Educational Psychologist in the final year of my 3 year training. As part of our course, we are required to carry out a research project that will form the basis of our doctoral thesis, and which will contribute to better understanding of children and young people, and better provision of services to them and their families.

In trying to help children to get the most out of school, both in terms of their learning and social development, we tend to be good at talking with and seeking the views of parents and teachers, and the other adults who support children in school. However, we do not always consider the views of the children themselves. Through my research, I am trying to bring children’s voices and views to the centre of our attempts to help and support them. I am designing a questionnaire that we will be able to use to see whether children are happy and ‘ready to learn’ in school. In order to do this, I would like to talk to a large number of children in schools across the city of Plymouth and elsewhere. I would like to request your permission to talk with your child in school.

This will happen over the next few weeks. If you are happy for your child to take part, and they are also happy to do so, I would see them for 20 – 30 minutes within the school day. I will make every attempt to ensure that your child does not miss out on learning as a result of this. I will be asking your child what they feel about school, what makes them happy and when they feel at their best both in class and in the playground. We will do this by
talking together, or creating stories and/or drawings, whatever your child feels happiest with. Each child will also receive a small token gift to thank them for their participation.

At a later date, I will ask a few of the children who have taken part to see me as a group for another 20 – 30 minutes, to check that they agree that the final questionnaire represents the views they expressed.

If you would be happy for your child to take part in this research, would you please complete the consent form attached and return it to ......................... by ............................... If you have any further questions, you can contact me on 07794413189.

With thanks in anticipation,

Sarah Jane Aldrich
Trainee Educational Psychologist

I am happy for my child ................................................... (child’s name) to take part in this research project.

• I understand that there is no compulsion for my child to participate, and even if she/he does, we have the right to withdraw at any time. (Your child’s consent will be gained on the day, and your child will not participate if he/she does not agree at this stage).

• Any information will be used only for the purpose of this research project.
• All information will be kept confidential. My child’s identity will be kept anonymous, and any data collected will be securely disposed of at the end of the project.

• I have the opportunity to contact the researcher, Sarah Aldrich, if I have any further questions.

………………………………..(Signature of parent/carer)
…………………………………..(Printed name of parent/carer)
…………………………………..(Date)

Please sign and return by .....................................2011
Appendix 5. Consent form – Child version

I am happy to take part in this research project to help grown-ups to understand better what children feel is important, and what helps them to feel ready to learn in school.

- I understand that I don’t have to do this and I can ask to stop at any time. No one will be cross or think I am rude or behaving badly.

- What I say will only be used to help with this project.

- No one will tell anyone else what I have said, and no one will know my name. (Unless something that I say makes Sarah worry that I may not be safe in school or at home).

- I can ask Sarah as many questions as I like about the research and she will do her best to answer them.

...........................................(My signature)

...........................................(My name)

...........................................(Date)
Appendix 6. Introduction to Interview schedule
(Delivered in conversational style rather than verbatim.)

Hello, my name is Sarah, and I’m an Educational Psychologist. That means that I help lots of children, from little babies to much older young people (sometimes as old as 19), to get the most that they can out of learning, growing up and having fun. I sometimes help when lessons are a bit difficult to understand, things like reading, writing or numeracy are difficult, when people are feeling sad or angry and are finding it hard to behave well, and when people find it difficult to make or keep friends. Whatever I help with, the idea is that together we can make things better.

But that is not why I am here today. Your teachers have chosen you because they think that you might be able to help me. You do not have to help, but can I explain what I would like us to do and why, and then you can make up your mind whether you would like to stay and help, or go back to class?

I am interested in knowing how to make school and learning the best it can be for all children, and you are an expert! I want to know what you think makes you feel happy and what helps you to learn in school, and also what makes you unhappy and gets in the way of your learning. Is that something that you have ever thought about?

If you would like to help me, I will ask you to do 3 things. First, I would like you to tell me what you think makes you happy and ready to learn in school. We can do this by you telling me a story, drawing a picture, with the help of a puppet, or, if it is something that you already have some clear ideas about,
you can just tell me! What you say is very important to me and I might ask you some questions to check that I have understood properly.

Then, I am going to give you the beginning of a sentence and I would like you to finish it. Let me give you an example. I might say, “I like...” and you would tell me what you like. What would you say? I would probably say, “...chocolate!” I might ask you some more questions about your answer so that I am sure that I have got the right idea. There are around 20 of those.

Lastly, and this is really quick, I want you to sort some ‘Smiley’ faces into order for me from saddest to happiest.

This will all take about half an hour, but there is no rush and it is OK if it takes more or less time as long as you are enjoying yourself and are happy to carry on. If there is a question that you would rather not answer, or you would like to stop at any time, that is fine too.

What do you think? If you would like to help, I will ask you to sign a special form. If not, that’s fine and no one will be cross. It is OK to say that you would rather not do this and go back to join your class.
Appendix 7. Introduction and script for puppet exercise

I was wondering if you would be able to help a little friend of mine? Her/his name is Ruth/Rufus and she/he is going to a new school soon. She/ he will be in Year (insert the year group of the interviewee). Ruth/Rufus has got her/his uniform and a new rucksack. Would you like to help her/him to put it on? Now I think that she/he has everything that she/he needs. Oh, wait a minute... what was that Ruth/Rufus? She/he is asking if you can think of anything that will help when she/he goes to Year X? What do you think will help her/him to learn and to have fun? So you think.... Have I got that right? Maybe I can write them down on a little piece of paper and we can put these ideas in her/his rucksack? What else do you think might help? Are there any things that you can think of that might make it hard to learn or might make her/him feel sad? Do you have any ideas about what would make things better?

Appendix 8. Incomplete sentences: Background and exercise.

The ‘Incomplete sentences’ stimuli

Incomplete sentence stimuli are used in clinical psychology to explore personality (Rotter and Rafferty 1950), as an open-ended method to illuminate client difficulties and possible treatment options (Rogers, Bishop and Robert, 2003), or as a form of projective test used within a psychodynamic approach. The use of the sentence stem acts as a form of
indirect questioning, and act as a stimulus to the client in expressing attitudes, perceptions and feelings. The approach “immediately immerses the [child] in a scenario” (Rogers p 236). Rogers and colleagues suggest guidelines for use with children. They should be presented orally (to develop rapport and affective engagement). There should not be too many questions (to reduce boredom effects). Clear instructions should be given (intelligibility of sentences appropriate to age and development), and content should reflect the construct that you hope to measure (focus on positive aspects of school life, learning, class-based and social experiences, etc.). Attention should be given to ‘stimulus pull’, the affective tone (positive, negative or neutral) of sentence fragments, and the biasing effect that they may have on the expression of positive or negative opinions (Stephens 1970). Sentence stems should be clear and well structured.

Respondents tend to differ in the length of their responses and level of engagement. Those who reply briefly can be asked to expand their explanations, and understandings can be checked.

References


Incomplete sentences

1. My best time in school was when...
2. I am happiest in class when...
3. I am happiest at playtime when...
4. I feel good in school when...
5. I feel that my teacher is pleased with me when...
6. I feel safe in school when...
7. I feel I am doing my best when...
8. I feel I am important in school when...
9. I find it hard to learn when...
10. I feel sad at school when...
11. I feel angry at school when...
12. I get scared at school when...
13. I get into trouble at school when...
14. I feel worried when...
15. I feel poorly at school when...
16. Girls/boys feel...
17. I know what to do next when...
18. I understand the teacher when...
19. My friends like me best when...
20. I feel pleased with myself in school when...
21. My Mum/Dad/Carer is pleased with me when...
22. I feel best in school when before I go in the mornings I...
23. I feel best in school when I know that after school I...
24. I feel best in school when I know at the weekend I...
Appendix 9. Approaches to data collection

Part 1

Firstly, each child was given an opportunity to give their opinion about their preferred school experience in a choice of more or less structured ways. This helped me to establish a relationship with the child, to build rapport and to put the child at ease. All children were asked to tell me what they felt made them feel happy and ‘ready to learn’ in school, and what made them unhappy, and made learning more difficult.

To increase accessibility to all the collaborating children, regardless of chronological or developmental age, a choice of 3 approaches was used to elicit their views; the use of narrative/conversational techniques, drawing materials or puppets. Whilst, once I had met them, I held a view on the suitability of a particular approach for each child, depending on their age and understanding, the child was given the final decision about the way in which they would like to participate.

Approach 1 (for younger/more vulnerable children)

A dog glove puppet was used (called either Ruth or Rufus, depending on the gender of the participating child). The dog had a little school hat and rucksack, and the child was invited to ‘make friends’ with the puppet, ask it questions, and was told a brief story about its joining their class at school (See Appendix 7). The child was then encouraged to help the puppet to get the most out of school in terms of learning, friendships and fun. They were encouraged to imagine what they could ‘give’ (as pieces of advice to ‘put into the rucksack’) that would help the puppet when it joined their class as a new
pupil. The child was encouraged to talk freely, and reflective questions were used to ensure that the puppet and I had understood what was being said by the child. Where a particular area of school life had not been mentioned, prompts were used from the interview schedule. One child chose this approach, (a year 4 girl at School Action Plus). Verbatim responses were recorded in writing during the interview. Rather than hindering conversation, the natural pauses gave the children the ‘space’ to clarify and elaborate on their comments.

**Approach 2**

The child was asked to draw a picture of their best day at school, either as a single picture, or a story-board. Again, the child was encouraged to explain their picture as they drew it, and reflective questions were used, and clarification sought to ensure that we had covered a wide range of issues and experiences, and that I had correctly recorded and represented their meaning. Two children chose to use this approach, one boy in Year 4, and one girl in Year 3.

**Approach 3**

Alternatively, the child was asked to recount their best day a school either imagined, real, or an amalgamation of their favourite school experiences. The child was then asked to tell me what they felt made them happy and ready to learn in school, and what they felt made learning more difficult and the school experience less enjoyable. Despite my feeling that this might be the most challenging approach, as the child would have to have previously reflected on their school experience, thirty seven of the forty collaborators
chose this approach, and experienced little difficulty with stating their opinions. Responses were recorded in writing during the interview, and additional information and clarification was sought to ensure that I had understood what was being shared.

Part 2

Following the fairly open structure of the interview phase, each child was asked to perform an incomplete sentence task (see Appendix 9). This consisted of twenty four incomplete sentences drawn from topics raised in the pilot phase of the study and in discussion with EP colleagues, and from themes which emerged from previous exploratory interviews with adults (four teachers and four teaching assistants, from one of the participating schools, 2 EPs and a parent).

The incomplete sentence stems attempted to capture the themes emerging from the initial focus groups, in the minimum number of items, and without being directive. A mix of positively phrased (16), negatively phrased (7), and neutral statements (1) was generated. The order of presentation was arranged so that stimuli which may have elicited negative emotions in the children (sadness, fear, worry, sickness) were positioned in the midst of the sentence exercise to ensure that the children left the interview situation having most recently spoken about more positive aspects of school and home life.

In total, 40 children were interviewed. For the incomplete sentences, only 30 children responded to stimulus sentences 22 to 24. These were added in response to the frequency of mention of how issues at home influenced the
experience of the school day by the 10 respondents in the first school (School C). Initially, while the importance of the wider context was always acknowledged, an attempt was made to constrain the questioning to school only. However I felt that this would be failing to follow where the children and data were leading.

**De-brief**

At the end of the interview, each child was asked whether I had missed anything that was important to them, or if there was anything that they would like to add. I also asked them about their experience of the interview, whether they had found it difficult, enjoyable, interesting, and whether they had learned anything about themselves. Each child was told something positive about themselves that had emerged, for example, "I think that you are very good at thinking about your learning and how to help yourself. This will really help you at school". Finally, each child was thanked and received a small gift (choice of sweets/chocolate, pencil, or rubber) to thank them for their participation (having previously checked the school's policies, individual allergies and acceptability to parents.)
Appendix 10. Example of emotion faces for sorting task.

Emotion faces/ ‘Smileys’ (adapted and modified from Andrews and Withy, 1976)

Faces were printed separately onto card, randomly numbered on the back, laminated, shuffled and offered to each child for sorting. Two cards marked with either ‘happiest’ or ‘saddest’ were used as markers, so that the faces could be arranged in a line. Results of the sorting process are appended below.

Appendix 11. Thumbnail biopics of children interviewed

Pseudonyms have been used throughout to protect the identity of collaborators.

School A

Isla Year 3 girl of average ability, reported as a ‘delight’ to have in class.

Angus Year 3 boy of slightly below average ability. Absent father following recent breakdown in family relationships. Enjoys sport and plays for his local community team.

Carol Year 5 girl. Family is implicated in longstanding substance abuse and criminal activity which creates issues in the community and has implications for relationships within school. Child Protection Plan for alleged neglect.

Oliver Year 4 boy, at School Action + for emotional and behavioural difficulties.

Katrina Year 4 girl at School Action + and being considered for a diagnosis of autistic spectrum disorder, able and coping well in school. Supportive family.

Carly Year 4 girl with a Statement of Special Educational Need for generalised learning difficulties and social and emotional difficulties (attachment issues). Complex family composition.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Billy</td>
<td>Year 5</td>
<td>Able boy. Lives with birth parents and siblings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colin</td>
<td>Year 5</td>
<td>Able boy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edward</td>
<td>Year 6</td>
<td>Boy, at School Action + with 'dyslexic' difficulties.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tom</td>
<td>Year 6</td>
<td>Boy of average ability. Lives with mother and two brothers. Some concerns about transition to Year 7.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**School B**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Robert</td>
<td>Year 6</td>
<td>Above average, School Action +, diagnosis of Autistic spectrum disorder.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oscar</td>
<td>Year 5</td>
<td>Social, emotional and behavioural issues, School Action.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alison</td>
<td>Year 5</td>
<td>Girl, average ability. Requires medication for a medical difficult (unspecified).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terry</td>
<td>Year 4</td>
<td>Boy, with a Statement of Special Educational Need and a diagnosis of Autistic Spectrum Disorder. Special interests in drama and the theatre.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christine</td>
<td>Year 3</td>
<td>Girl, School Action + for generalised learning difficulties. Lives with mother and older brother.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amber</td>
<td>Year 5</td>
<td>Girl, average ability.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George</td>
<td>Year 4</td>
<td>Boy, above average ability/gifted and talented pupil for numeracy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mandy</td>
<td>Year 4</td>
<td>Girl. Behaviour and friendship difficulties, significantly overweight girl, one of only five girls in class, others often pair off and leave her. Lives with mother, no contact with father.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mike</td>
<td>Year 3</td>
<td>Boy, average ability. Son of teacher in school, popular boy with peers and staff.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**School C**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alan</td>
<td>Year 5</td>
<td>Able boy, preparing to sit his 11+ examination.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jacob</td>
<td>Year 5</td>
<td>Boy of average ability. Polish speaking family, been in UK 6 years. English now fluent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kevin</td>
<td>Year 3</td>
<td>Boy, average to above average ability, adopted as a baby, impulsive and active, School Action +.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Amanda  Year 5, recent move to school in last year, parents recently separated. Mother and sister at home.

Ellie   Year 3 girl, average ability but recently ‘flying’ at maths.

Sam    Year 6 boy, traumatic parental separation, seeing counsellor, tearful, no access to father, only child, very able, anger issues, taken 11+ and starting at Grammar school.

Chloe  Year 6 girl, recent quick move by Social Care from Scotland, domestic abuse, beginning to make significant progress, just achieved a level 4 in SATs. Lives with mother and siblings. Very proud of achievement. Commented on ‘bad’ neighbourhood. Child protection plan and social care involvement.

Sulayman  Year 4 boy. Started in Reception. English is an additional language for Sulayman, French and Egyptian are spoken at home, but both parents also speak good English. Sulayman is from an Islamic background. He has some difficulties with literacy, behaviour and social relationships, and is at School Action. He has also experienced some difficulties with bullying. He revealed more difficulties during the interview, which was terminated early as a result.

Millie Year 4 girl, below average ability, multi-racial, some minor behaviour issues.

Mark   Year 4 boy, recent move to school, behaviour issues, chromosomal/medical issues in family, Statement of Special Educational Need.

School D

Fleur Year 4 girl, below average ability, was at School Action previously

Louis Year 4 boy with a Statement of Special Educational Need for generalised learning difficulties.

Daisy Year 6 girl, School Action + for social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. One of eight siblings, adult brother with alcohol problems. Loves to sing and dance.

Charlie Year 5 boy, School Action for literacy difficulties/memory issues. Re-combined family (recent).

Lizzie Year 3 girl, able. Interested in dogs and horses/riding.

Doug Year 3 boy, able. Lives with mother and sister.
Max Year 5 boy, above average ability. About to start 11+ coaching. Proud of his achievements, but would like to be better at sport.

Arthur Year 4 boy. Average ability, with some behaviour issues. Recent parental separation. Strong attachment to class teacher who is leaving. Very perceptive about his difficulties with anger and wanting to fit in socially.

Betty Year 5 girl, average ability.

Poppy Year 6 girl, average ability.

Appendix 12. Thematic Analysis

It has been argued that thematic analysis is best conceptualised as a flexible and practical research tool that is at the core of many qualitative approaches, and utilised across different qualitative methods (Boyatzis 1998). Its use enables a search for repeated patterns of meaning (themes) to be revealed, identified and explored across a set of data. The aim is to organise, and elegantly and parsimoniously describe the data in rich detail. It may include further interpretation, and can be carried out at both a descriptive but also an analytic level.

Perspective and methodology

As it is subsumed into many other qualitative approaches with similar aims, (for example, narrative analysis, discourse analysis and grounded theory), the approach is commonly not clearly explicated in use, and this has implications for the validity of the research. Unlike other analytic approaches, it is not ‘wed’ to any theoretical framework. It is used here in a contextualist
approach within a critical realist perspective (Willig 1999, Bhaskar, 1989, as cited in Robson, 2002, p. 41). This approach makes the assumption that social processes are negotiated, understood and accepted in local and historically situated cultures, and may be ‘real’ in the sense that they are largely agreed as having value to the culture at that time as a theory or narrative of ‘how things are’. However, any narrative is likely to be problematic in so far as it prevents other narratives, understandings and perspectives to be explored. Dominant narratives are maintained through power mechanisms operated by dominant groups, for example, on the basis of skin colour, gender, or age. Within a critical realist approach, dominant narratives are accepted pragmatically ‘as if’ they were real, but through exploration and analysis they are examined for the operation of power, and challenged on the basis of the practices, experiences and outcomes that they both allow and prohibit. For example, allowing children, and particularly young children or those with difficulties, to have a ‘voice’ and a say in issues that directly concern them is a relatively recent concept historically, as is the idea of ‘childhood’ itself (Davie, 1996). Formerly, a paternalistic narrative, that children are not equipped or able to consider the issues involved in arrangements which are made for them, and that ‘adults know best’, has prevented the voices of children being heard. The degree to which children are able to express their views and exercise agency is now being challenged and explored, for example, through the work of Kellett in authentically listening to children, and training them as researchers in their own right (Kellett, 2004, 2005, 2008).
At one level, this analysis has been carried out in the realist sense, to provide a surface level description of the data set or corpus, and this is reflected in a quantitative approach where tabulated data is offered to make clear the number of references made to a particular theme, and the number of school contexts over which a theme was mentioned (see Appendix 13). In this instance it was more of a content analysis (Wilkinson 2000). Braun and Clarke (2006) recommend this as a useful approach where participants’ views on a topic are relatively unknown. However, analysis was also carried out at a deeper level in order to explore the range of meanings that I felt were subsumed into a particular theme. Paper 1 presents a selection of the descriptive level analysis (which is fully presented in Appendix 15). The descriptive analysis, presented as a thematic network map, is also included in the text of Paper 1 (Figure 2), and informs the design of the Scale presented in Paper 2.

**Details of analytic process**

The following terms are used to clarify the analytic process. The data corpus refers to all data collected. The data set refers to data related directly to a theme or area of interest. A data item refers to a data extract, instance or textual fragment. An early decision was to carry out, as far as possible, a ‘data-driven’, inductive analysis, letting the children ‘lead the way’, rather than using educational theory and previous academic research to constrain the design of the research or the subsequent analysis of data.

All responses were transcribed manually during the interviews, and each interview phase was combined to form the data corpus. Data were re-
transcribed, that is processed into electronic form, for clarity, and also to help me to familiarise with the data corpus as a whole. Familiarity with the data was aided by the process of having conducted all the interviews myself, and I often ‘heard’ individual children’s voices in my head as I read textual fragments, even out of context.

The process of coding is part of analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994), and in this study was done manually. Data fragments were disaggregated and de-contextualised, and then examined, sorted and re-sorted into groups prior to coding. This was a ‘key’ phase (Bird, 2005, p. 227), and including tabulating to organise data items in different ways, and to see data from different perspectives (see Appendix 13 for examples). This was a recursive process, where the data were continually re-interrogated in light of new ideas or perspectives.

The initial aim was to be as broad as possible in identifying topics and issues, and developing codes, as it was unclear at this stage which would become important or interesting at a later stage of analysis.

The tables created were later collapsed to create a new graphic organisation of the data, which permitted an overview of emerging issues. At this stage I returned to the original codes, as I did not feel that I had adequately captured the data sets, some data items were rearranged and read in new ways (always retaining a sense of the original context in which they had been expressed by the interviewee). There was a pragmatic aspect to the analysis
phase, as I was working to a fixed timescale. I therefore stopped the analysis when I felt that I had produced a ‘map’ of themes which captured a good enough ‘fit’ to the landscape of the children’s reports of what was important to them in their school life. The aim was to produce a parsimonious but inclusive presentation of the data, which could be easily grasped and understood by both adults and children. As a result, the conceptual ‘thematic network map’ (Attride-Stirling, 2001) is presented using both the children’s own words and more academic concepts themes (see Figure 1, Paper 1). It is offered as a rich surface description of the data. I had the additional safeguard of being able to return to a sub-set of the children in focus groups for their approval, or otherwise, of my analysis. Within the focus groups, there was limited time to discuss the analysis, (as it was also necessary to use this time to devise statements and design the scale reported in Paper 2). It would have been impractical, and potentially unethical, to take too much time out of the children’s school days. I felt the most important thing was to give the children the opportunity to respond to my interpretations, and to respectfully listen to them if they told me that I had got it wrong, and to respond to their criticisms. It was necessary to accept some degree of compromise in the real life messiness of field research (Robson, 2002, p. 4). The children demonstrated that they understood the thematic map, and they largely approved the analysis. They also showed that they were able to challenge areas that they either did not understand, or with which they disagreed. As a result, minor amendments were made.
Later, a ‘deeper’ interpretive search returned to the coded data items, and analysed them for the range of underlying meanings, or linking themes, that were subsumed within them. Two main themes emerged, both through the frequency of mention and their pervasiveness within the data items; I have termed them ‘competence’ and ‘connectedness’. These were checked in two ways. Firstly, by re-visiting the data and checking for internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity (Patton 1990), that is, was each theme coherent, and was it sufficiently different from the material in other themes to be distinct? These themes were chosen for reporting purposes in Paper 1 because, in my judgement, they provided an interesting perspective, or were likely to be helpful in suggesting ways of understanding and working with KS2 children (rather than being reported because of prevalence in the data set). Braun and Clarke (2006) refer to this as the ‘keyness’ of a theme in its relevance to the research questions. On examination, a significant proportion of the data items either related directly, or alluded to, these two themes of ‘competence’ and ‘connectedness’.

Tabulated data, the thematic network, examples of quotes from the children interviewed and examples of the analysis process are included in the text or appendices, in order that other researchers may be able to scrutinise the data and analysis, to interrogate it for themselves, and to take an informed view of the believability and utility of the analysis. Implicit in the analysis is the importance of the theoretical and philosophical perspectives of myself as researcher, and the active part that I have played in the construction of the themes, rather than that they been passively ‘revealed’, and demonstrate a
singular underlying reality. I have tried to be reflective and challenge my preconceptions and understandings, but I acknowledge that my interpretation will always be from some view point, which may not be that of others (Peshkin 2000). I offer an interpretation of the data that I believe to be plausible, and which is endorsed by the children who generated the data. It has been suggested that the only authentic way to judge an analysis is by how useful or interesting is it (Becker, as cited in Peshkin, 2000, p. 9). I hope that the analysis offered here will be both engaging and helpful in understanding the school experience of children in KS2.

References


Appendix 13. Example of data coding framework

I feel pleased with myself in school when...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>School A</th>
<th>School B</th>
<th>School C</th>
<th>School D</th>
<th>Occurrence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Getting right answers</td>
<td>3 (3)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2 (2)</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High level (N/C)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Merits/team points</td>
<td>2 (2)</td>
<td>1 (3)</td>
<td>2 (3)</td>
<td>1 (2)</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Play with friends</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helping teachers/peers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2 (2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoiding getting into trouble</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congratulated (adults or peers)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Try hard</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense of achievement (personal/intrinsic)</td>
<td>2 (2)</td>
<td>1 (4)</td>
<td>2 (4)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finish work</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Highest frequency of mention/across most sites: Personal/intrinsic sense of achievement /Merits, team points (10/3), Getting the right answers (8/3), Congratulated (adults or peers) (5/4).

Exemplar Quotes

“We have got our books back and I have a ‘spot’ or team point.”

“When I get an award, but most of the time. Everybody’s so good. Teachers have noticed you being good...not easy to get...everyone is working hard all the time.”

“I answer tricky problems.”

“I have done something well like getting the part in the play.”

“I’ve made a good choice and behaved well.”

“I’ve done the work and it looks good.”

“I’ve done the most work in the class.”
I am happiest at playtime when...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>School A</th>
<th>School B</th>
<th>School C</th>
<th>School D</th>
<th>Occurrence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Boy</td>
<td>Girl</td>
<td>Boy</td>
<td>Girl</td>
<td>Frequency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Playing with friends/getting on well</td>
<td>3 (2)</td>
<td>2 (2)</td>
<td>3 (3)</td>
<td>4 (4)</td>
<td>26 (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New games</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Football</td>
<td>3 (3)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special equipment</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organised games</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2 (2)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed year groups</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5 (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alone</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relax in sun</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Highest frequency of mention/across most sites: Playing with friends/getting on well (26/4), Organised games (5/4), Mixed year groups (5/3).

Exemplar Quotes

“I play Man-Hunt [chasing game]. I never get caught early on.”

“Everyone is playing together... no one is left out.”

“I’m on my own ... walk and think... free head-space.”

“All our friends are playing and getting on nicely.”

“I’ve got something to do... sometimes I can’t think of things.”

“Getting out is important to help my learning without it getting boring.”

“The sun’s out... we sit on a bench and relax.”

“I play with the right people... sometimes difficult... others ask me to play and I want to... it’s hard.”

Sorting ‘Smileys’ - The modal order was 2, 5, 4, 1, 6, 7, 3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Happiest</th>
<th>Saddest</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tom</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Boy</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5 4 1 6 7 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edward</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Boy</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5 4 1 6 7 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colin</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Boy</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5 4 1 6 7 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Billy</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Boy</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5 4 1 6 7 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>** Carly</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Girl</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2 5 1 3 7 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>** Katrina</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Girl</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5 4 1 6 7 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carol</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Girl</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5 4 7 3 6 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angus</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Boy</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4 5 1 6 7 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isla</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Girl</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4 5 6 1 7 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oliver</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Boy</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5 4 1 6 7 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amber</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>Girl</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4 5 1 6 7 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terry</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>Boy</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5 4 6 1 7 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oscar</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>Boy</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5 4 1 6 7 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alison</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>Girl</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5 4 1 6 7 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mike</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>Boy</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4 5 1 6 7 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>Boy</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4 5 1 6 7 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zoe</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>Girl</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5 4 1 6 7 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mandy</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>Girl</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4 5 1 6 7 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christine</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>Girl</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4 5 1 6 7 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>Boy</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5 4 1 6 7 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alan</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>Boy</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5 4 1 6 7 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jacob</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>Boy</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4 5 1 6 7 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amanda</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>Girl</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5 4 1 6 7 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ellie</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>Girl</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5 4 1 6 7 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>Boy</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5 4 1 6 7 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chloe</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>Girl</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5 4 1 6 7 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sulayman</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>Boy</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5 4 1 6 7 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>Boy</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4 5 1 6 7 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kevin</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>Boy</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5 4 1 6 7 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Millie</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>Girl</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4 5 1 6 7 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doug</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Boy</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4 5 1 6 7 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louis</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Boy</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5 4 1 6 7 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arthur</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Boy</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5 4 1 6 7 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lizzie</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Girl</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5 4 1 6 7 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Max</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Boy</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4 5 1 6 7 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charlie</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Boy</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5 4 1 6 7 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Betty</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Girl</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5 4 1 6 7 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daisy</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Girl</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4 5 6 7 1 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poppy</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Girl</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5 4 1 6 7 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fleur</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Girl</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4 5 1 6 7 3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

** Markedly different response pattern - Additional needs (communication/interaction, social/emotional).
Appendix 15. Selective descriptive analysis of additional topic areas

(Academic competence, social competence and social recognition are presented in Paper 1. A full descriptive analysis is available from the author on request.)

School environment

Classroom environment/management

Many children appreciated the importance of routines, rules and timetables.

“The teacher tells me and gives me clear instructions...routines and visual timetables [help] ...don’t need to worry what to do next.” (Ellie)

Group working, particularly in small groups, and with preferred companions is generally popular, but this is dependent on individual preferences. There was enthusiasm for working in pairs or small groups (28). Advantages included; opportunities for shared ideas and planning, support, finding answers together, sharing skills and knowledge, discussing answers, freedom to talk, and getting work done faster. Small groups were also an arena for trying out ideas, rehearsing the answers to questions and having opportunities to contribute in a safer space (mistakes are not too public). Problems cited were having control over who will be in the group and having teacher support and steering, opportunities for distraction, difficult behaviour of certain group members preventing learning and completion of tasks, ensuring equal division of labour (2), and gender issues (2).

“Working with boys can be difficult...the group divides into girls and boys.” (Millie)

This was also raised by a boy who was the only male in his ability group for science.
On balance, more children liked to work in groups than alone, but some enjoyed and felt they benefitted from both. However, some children did express a preference for working alone, mostly because they wanted to develop their own ideas and have control of outcomes, without having to negotiate with others. These feeling were expressed more frequently by boys of higher ability.

“Better to do it on my own...get on with it rather than agreeing with everyone first.” (Sam)

**Curriculum and topics**

When asked, the children gave a surprising range of responses to questions about what they enjoyed in school, when they were happiest in class and what they felt they were best at. As might be expected, there were a range of responses naming favourite subjects or topics. This was mostly on a basis of either enjoyment or being ‘good’ at the topic.

Literacy, both reading and writing, was generally fairly popular (9). Within writing activities, the importance of creativity was stressed (7). Writing was particularly enjoyable when there were minimal restrictions, and the children could use their imagination.

“I like writing stories...get carried away with writing.” (Alison)

“Lessons that I enjoy...literacy...I like World War II and diary entries...I can put my emotions into the characters.” (Arthur)

Interestingly, slightly more boys than girls made positive reference to creative writing.
Numeracy received a very positive response (20) with 50% of the children making at least some positive references to numeracy. Those that suggested this felt this because they were ‘good at it’, and ‘know that you are getting the right answers’. Two children even suggested that it was ‘fun’!

“Maths because it’s easy…good at it…makes me feel good.” (Edward)

“My best day at school was when I started to get better at my numeracy.”

(Ellie)

There was less perceived threat from challenge for these respondents.

“[Teacher] gives us tricky problems…don’t mind if I get them wrong because I am trying to solve them.” (George)

Where Science was cited as a particular interest (11) it was frequently because it was linked to maths, and involved becoming actively involved in experiments (7), but the children also made links with art and DT (in a class project on making rockets and racing cars). ‘Learning through doing’ was very popular as an approach, and this was stressed by a number of children (14). These were mostly linked to science and DT. Simply expressed,

“Doing helps.” (Colin)

“Making the rockets...we could explore new ideas, play with ideas and find out what works best.” (Amanda)

Only two children identified PE as a particular area of skill or enjoyment in school. Others mentioned religious studies (1), ICT (5), or design technology as particular favourites (5), and art (5). Preferences were often expressed
explicitly on the basis that they offered opportunities to be creative (which was also a theme across the curriculum).

“We do something exciting...making a bag.” (Daisy)

Interestingly, there was also reference to the intrinsic enjoyment to be gained from creative activities.

“I'm doing my favourite subject, DT...I like doing it but I am not sure that I am good at it...don't have to be good at it to be enjoyable.” (Betty)

Two children particularly enjoyed history topic work, and here links across the curriculum were mentioned as being important and visible.

“World War II [as literacy topic] it links to history...I like it joining up.” (Fleur)

Learning new skills, or achieving something that was previously difficult, received a number of positive mentions (9). Sometimes there is an element of surprise to this,

“...manage to do something that I am not good at or something works that I didn’t think would.” (Alan)

“I do something I didn’t know I could like get home runs.” (Alan)

Eliciting what the children already know is an appreciated technique, but can be counterproductive at times, if over-used, leaving children feeling frustrated.

“Have to think hard...the teacher asks more questions instead of telling me...I’m figuring out one question while they are asking more.” (Zoe)
In addition to considering the personal characteristics of teachers, the children had given considerable thought to what they did and did not like in terms of teaching style and delivery.

Children liked;

Explanations (17) which could simplify material, which should be repeated (4), detailed (3), and expand on what they already knew. The teacher should take time, gauge vocabulary to the abilities of the group (3), but also opportunities to extend vocabulary were appreciated.

“When [the] teacher explains well…really detailed, using good vocabulary [that] we can learn then and use later.” (Doug)

However, the children did not want to be ‘spoon-fed’ (2). A number of children (12) encapsulated aspects of the Vygotskian concept of teaching in the zone of proximal development,

“Gives me clues to work it out for myself.” (Angus)

“The teacher explains half and we have to work out the next part.” (Fleur)

“Teacher encourages me…think about what you know.” (Amber)

When being given instructions, the children liked these to be written (17) listed, in order, broken down into steps, and linked.

“Breaking bits into little steps…clear on what you need to do next…links are important.” (Amanda)
Two children mentioned that what was written was not always clear. This raised issues about supporting working memory and ensuring that material was learned correctly.

“When it’s written up on the board, you can concentrate on one bit without having to remember the next.” (Amanda)

“Like the teacher to write it down so that it’s right...my spelling isn’t great.” (Fleur)

The use of pictures (8) and visual media was welcomed by many, who wanted things to be ‘more realistic’ and to handle ‘real objects’ and see demonstrations (6).

“Like to listen and see real things or pictures at the same time”. (Doug)

For the majority, it is a combination of multiple sensory channels for learning that works best.

Adult support was mentioned by four pupils with additional needs as being very helpful.

“Grown up help...one to one help with literacy...make posters and fun activities... really helped... learned lots of new nouns, like ‘foetus’.” (Doug)

Generally, access to help and support with work was frequently mentioned (14), often positively. However, two children mentioned embarrassment in front of their friends when asking for help, and this was particularly pertinent for more able children.

“People laugh... if you are on the top table.” (Billy)
A ‘stuck’ table was mentioned as being a good way around this, so that all children were encouraged to access the teacher, and this could be done without the whole class being aware. Children were relieved and delighted when the teacher noticed when they were stuck, rather than them having to put their hand up and request help. There is a considerable risk to social status, and a stigma of ‘not getting it’.

High ability children frequently commented that they understand quickly (8), perceive that they require only one explanation, want to get on with things immediately, and feel held back by the rest of the class catching up. For this group, there was too much repetition, and there were specific mentions of feeling bored frequently (2) (the majority of these comments were from boys). As this group of high achievers also stressed that they do not get asked to answer questions, and get less concrete rewards for their work and behaviour (in terms of team points, certificates, etc), this is a group that is at risk of becoming disillusioned, and perhaps they do not enjoy their school experience as much as they could or should. However, differentiating appropriately and consistently is a challenge for teachers.

**Teacher characteristics**

The children were clear about the personal characteristics they wanted in their teachers, and had clearly given this considerable thought. Similar themes were mentioned by nearly all the children, although individual differences and abilities made different aspects important, or even contradicted each other, demonstrating how difficult it can be for a teacher to
differentiate appropriately at all times in a class with markedly different ability groups.

“*She’s not standing with her back to us ... or speaking French.*” (Angus)

Teachers need to consider their own ‘voice’. Speech should be clear (7), loud enough for everyone to hear (5), and information and instructions need to be given from a central and accessible position to the class. Speed of delivery (8) was mentioned by a number of children. However, the teacher should not be too slow, fast or loud. All pupils should be engaged and included.

“*Says things to everyone in class.*” (Billy)

“I *like it if the teacher gives everyone a turn to answer a question.*” (Fleur)

The quantity of teacher talk must also be finely judged, achieving a balance between providing enough explanation, but not talking too much, and giving the children time to think and finish work.

“*The teacher talks for the whole lesson...long droning voice makes me sleepy and I can't concentrate.*” (Alan)

“*Getting talked at too fast by a teacher and I am trying to work it out.*” (Oscar)

Teachers are most effective when they are calm and in control (2).

“*Miss sorts out bad behaviour straightaway.*” (Tom)

However, control should be kept without adults resorting to shouting (8). Children find this humiliating and threatening, and it may even be counter-productive.
“Doesn’t shout too much so people listen.” (Travis)

At the very least, the teacher should raise their voice only in the final stages of a graded response.

“Miss X is best...she doesn’t shout straightaway if you do something wrong.” (Alan)

Children also suggested that they would prefer to be ‘told off’ in private (2), not only because of the fear of public humiliation, but also because the child could then focus on what they has done wrong and how to learn from it, rather than how they would be able to ‘maintain face’ with their friends, which might in turn lead to further misbehaviour or getting into more trouble for trying to act as if the reprimand ‘didn’t bother them’.

“Get told off quietly so it doesn’t embarrass you.” (Tom)

**Personal relationship**

Five children mentioned how they valued teachers who knew them well, who could differentiate work, and know when they were likely to struggle and offer help before they needed to ask. Demonstrations of affection, like the use of smiles, nick names, and hugs if upset, made children feel cared for and ‘held in mind’. Another important role was identified for the teacher in supporting friendships in the class. Teachers should ‘look after you’, and the use of gentle, but not sarcastic, humour was appreciated. Three children stressed how nice their teacher was.
Perhaps because personal relationships are held in such high regard, children find supply teachers difficult (4), and particularly those children to whom an attachment to the teacher is important for emotional reasons.

“Supply teachers give me the creeps.” (Chloe)

Also, different teachers have different implicit rules and expectations, and this is possibly most obvious to primary-aged children when a supply teacher is covering. However they also detect, and feel insecure with different expectations between other adults in school, teaching assistants (TAs) and meal time assistants (MTAs), and there were three specific mentions of difficulties arising due to inconsistencies between teachers and TAs.

Learning is not always easy or straightforward, and the wider environment has a role to play in facilitating or obstructing learning opportunities. The children were very ready to tell me some of the things that they felt ‘got in the way’.

Children frequently mentioned background noise being problematic (12), specifically in the classroom. This makes it difficult to hear the teacher, slows down work, and can create confusion in understanding instructions and learning.

“There’s lots of interruption...laughing, making jokes, noisy...when it’s easier to work quietly.” (Mike)

The teacher’s role in managing this through their own behaviour and personal characteristics was mentioned frequently and specifically, and within the focus groups, it was suggested that children talk between
themselves about these problems and develop their own opinions and solutions.

Home

Family, including extended family relationships with grandparents and aunts and uncles, are very important (19).

“My Mummy and Daddy and whole family are really important.” (Isla)

Special times spent with parents, particularly absent parents, and doing activities together are valued.

“Get to make stuff with Dad...Go-Kart. I get to do it and learn. He cuts the first two, I do the last two.” (Colin)

This emphasis on sharing learning received a number of mentions, and was bi-directional. When children were sharing their learning with adults, this boosted a sense of competence, worth and efficacy.

“I've taught the [parents] something new...on the laptop.” (Doug)

A number of children commented upon the influence of home events, and particularly morning routines (7) and experiences influencing the day either positively or negatively. They identified having enough sleep (5) and eating breakfast (8), as having a positive effect. However, most influence was reserved for social issues (9) affecting the day either negatively or positively, including arguments with parents or siblings (2), or good time spent with family members (3) or even special time alone with a parent,
“*We have to be extra early… I can sit in the car and chat with Mum… nice.*”

(Lizzie)

Positive time spent with friends before school is important, talking on the bus, in the playground or playing games (6). This is sometimes a way to ‘calm down’ from events at home that may have been distressing. Some children also expressed concerns about arguments and disagreements at home, or parental health.

Children spend the majority of their waking hours out of school, and activities after school and at weekends form an important part of their experience and development. Possibly because the context of the interaction was explicitly school-based, some of the children referred to homework (5) as an after-school activity, but also relaxation and rest (4) following the school day. Some children emphasised playing with siblings (2),

“*Can go home and lie on my bed and play games with my brother.*” (Arthur)

Pets including dogs, chickens and a tortoise were even more popular playmates (10).

Outdoor activities (7), including football, playing in the park, and dog walking, received mentions (perhaps as this was the summer term, and the weather had been relatively good). These activities were always with friends. Interestingly this outnumbered mentions of virtual games (4), and even here there was an emphasis on playing on the X Box with friends.

Evenings and weekends can also offer opportunities for adult organised activities and trips (16), including swimming, visits to the cinema, restaurants,
horse riding, and after-school and community-based clubs. These were enjoyed not only at the time, but there were 3 specific mentions of being able to share the experience with friends, as a talking point, when they returned to school.

A gender difference was apparent in the activities mentioned between boys and girls, but not in type of activity, both genders mentioned enjoying football, but rather in socialising ‘for the sake of it’, such as having friends over for tea (2) or sleepovers (2) which was mentioned exclusively by girls.

**Girls and boys**

Boys generally felt happy, (7 responses, up to 10 if qualified comments are included).

“Happy when they play and skateboard…or talk about it…and play TechDecks [miniature skateboards].” (Jacob)

“When girls ask them out.” (Billy)

Most responses were positive in tone, and self-evaluative;

“Strong”. (Colin)

“Tough”. (Terry)

“Cool”. (Oliver & Kevin)

Only one response appeared negative in tone.

“I can’t be bothered…too much to do…why do I have to do this?” (Sam)
Two boys mentioned anger, but as a response to being hit or as a balanced comment on general feelings.

“Happy at times, sad at times, angry at times.” (Max)

Energy was expressed both physically and in their thought life.

“They need to jump up and shout and feel free!” (Arthur)

“They think about explosions!” (Alan)

One commented,

“Different because they have fights with girls.” (Doug)

This perhaps reflected the relatively strong awareness of gender and dislike of opposite gender qualities and interests that is frequently found in this age group.

Girls generally felt happy (13) but this was often in relation to or modified by friendships.

“Happy when they have other girls to play with...when a girl is alone and someone has taken away their friends, they are sad...want to play together.” (Daisy)

Two girls mentioned that being a girl was exciting, while three comments expressed dissatisfaction. Largely unhappiness was caused as a result of relationships with others. One girl was very upset about her sister being unhappy, another because of the gender split in the class.
“Left out because there are 13 boys and only 5 girls...pairing up for work means that I get left out.” (Mandy)

Finally one girl commented that she felt,

“Embarrassed ...unsure with strangers and in strange places.” (Amanda)
Appendix 16. Parental opt-out consent form

Dear Parent/Carer,

I am a Trainee Educational Psychologist in the final year of my 3 year training. As part of our course, we are required to carry out a research project that will form the basis of our doctoral thesis, and which will contribute to better understanding of children and young people, and better provision of services to them and their families.

In trying to help children to get the most out of school, both in terms of their learning and social development, we tend to be good at talking with and seeking the views of parents and teachers, and the other adults who support children in school. However, we do not always consider the views of the children themselves.

Through my research, I am trying to bring children’s voices and views to the centre of our attempts to help and support them. I have worked with children in schools across the city and county to design a questionnaire that we will be able to use to see whether children are happy and ‘ready to learn’ in school.

The next step is to ask a large number of children in schools across the city and elsewhere to complete this questionnaire in order to trial it. I would like to request your permission for your child to take part in this.

This will happen over the next few weeks, before the end of term. The children will complete the 40 item questionnaire in their class groups during...
school time. It will take about 20 minutes. Each child will receive a small
token gift to thank them for their participation.

If you would be happy for your child to take part in this research, you need do
nothing further. However, if you would prefer they that did not complete the
questionnaire, would you please complete the slip below and return it to
school by Monday 11th July. Alternatively you could call me on the number
supplied below, or contact the school by phone.

If you have any further questions, you can contact me on 07794413189.

With thanks in anticipation,

Sarah Jane Aldrich
Trainee Educational Psychologist

I DO NOT want my child ........................................... (child’s name) to
take part in this research project.
Signed..............................................................................
Appendix 17. Scree plot

Figure 3. Scree Plot
### Appendix 18. Structure Matrix – Factor loadings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rotated factor loadings</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I understand the teacher.</td>
<td>.261</td>
<td>.272</td>
<td><strong>.402</strong></td>
<td>.263</td>
<td>-.209</td>
<td>-.504</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The noise in my class is OK.</td>
<td>.083</td>
<td>.186</td>
<td>.190</td>
<td>.137</td>
<td><strong>-.677</strong></td>
<td>-.177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I get on well with my friends.</td>
<td>.238</td>
<td><strong>.701</strong></td>
<td>.205</td>
<td>.048</td>
<td>-.062</td>
<td>-.203</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I play with lots of people at playtime.</td>
<td>.018</td>
<td><strong>.671</strong></td>
<td>.294</td>
<td>.082</td>
<td>-.371</td>
<td>-.168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There are good things to do at break-times.</td>
<td>.193</td>
<td>.347</td>
<td>.247</td>
<td>.197</td>
<td><strong>-.446</strong></td>
<td><strong>-.406</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning is fun.</td>
<td>.292</td>
<td>-.060</td>
<td>.380</td>
<td>.172</td>
<td>-.351</td>
<td><strong>-.515</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I like to work in a group.</td>
<td>.196</td>
<td>.372</td>
<td>.009</td>
<td>.184</td>
<td><strong>-.521</strong></td>
<td>-.232</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don't get distracted by my thoughts.</td>
<td>.394</td>
<td>.086</td>
<td>.303</td>
<td>.194</td>
<td><strong>-.546</strong></td>
<td>-.170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have good playtimes.</td>
<td>.343</td>
<td><strong>.646</strong></td>
<td>.168</td>
<td>.079</td>
<td><strong>-.427</strong></td>
<td>-.221</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel I belong in my class.</td>
<td>.378</td>
<td>.324</td>
<td>.312</td>
<td>.029</td>
<td>-.261</td>
<td><strong>-.403</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have all the friends I want.</td>
<td>.206</td>
<td><strong>.556</strong></td>
<td>.056</td>
<td>.116</td>
<td>-.363</td>
<td>-.251</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can listen to the teacher.</td>
<td>.576</td>
<td>.093</td>
<td>.339</td>
<td>.158</td>
<td>-.369</td>
<td><strong>-.393</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I like to work by myself.</td>
<td>.140</td>
<td>-.103</td>
<td><strong>.531</strong></td>
<td>.033</td>
<td>-.156</td>
<td><strong>-.277</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can keep up with my work.</td>
<td>.365</td>
<td>.294</td>
<td><strong>.692</strong></td>
<td>.217</td>
<td>-.181</td>
<td>-.329</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In class, I do things to help me to learn.</td>
<td><strong>.477</strong></td>
<td>.298</td>
<td><strong>.442</strong></td>
<td>.130</td>
<td>-.123</td>
<td><strong>-.588</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am a good friend.</td>
<td><strong>.497</strong></td>
<td><strong>.571</strong></td>
<td>.275</td>
<td>.127</td>
<td>-.063</td>
<td><strong>-.389</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can use things in class to help me to learn.</td>
<td>.314</td>
<td>.211</td>
<td>.258</td>
<td>.129</td>
<td>-.168</td>
<td><strong>-.617</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People behave well in my class.</td>
<td>.193</td>
<td>.204</td>
<td>.247</td>
<td>.106</td>
<td><strong>-.733</strong></td>
<td>-.273</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I often know the right answers to questions.</td>
<td>.123</td>
<td>.139</td>
<td><strong>.687</strong></td>
<td>.029</td>
<td>-.211</td>
<td>-.143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I help other people.</td>
<td><strong>.494</strong></td>
<td>.385</td>
<td>.391</td>
<td>.152</td>
<td>-.174</td>
<td><strong>-.581</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I get picked when I put my hand up.</td>
<td>.352</td>
<td>.249</td>
<td>.341</td>
<td>.248</td>
<td>-.327</td>
<td><strong>-.669</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I get rewarded when</td>
<td>.210</td>
<td>.170</td>
<td>.380</td>
<td>.039</td>
<td>-.276</td>
<td><strong>-.664</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I try.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I get angry in school.</th>
<th>.294</th>
<th>.124</th>
<th>.240</th>
<th><strong>.729</strong></th>
<th>-.177</th>
<th>-.182</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I can ask for help when I don't understand.</td>
<td>.147</td>
<td>.182</td>
<td>.121</td>
<td>.125</td>
<td>-.064</td>
<td><strong>-.658</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People say nice things about something I have done.</td>
<td>.123</td>
<td>.528</td>
<td>.314</td>
<td>.212</td>
<td>-.303</td>
<td><strong>-.443</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have good ideas.</td>
<td>.225</td>
<td>.237</td>
<td><strong>.728</strong></td>
<td>.112</td>
<td>-.132</td>
<td>-.312</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don't get distracted by other people.</td>
<td><strong>.482</strong></td>
<td>.259</td>
<td>.337</td>
<td>.102</td>
<td><strong>-.534</strong></td>
<td>-.208</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The grownups in school like me.</td>
<td><strong>.507</strong></td>
<td>.105</td>
<td>.297</td>
<td>.124</td>
<td>-.216</td>
<td><strong>-.662</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel happy in school.</td>
<td>.356</td>
<td>.468</td>
<td>.278</td>
<td>.214</td>
<td>-.233</td>
<td><strong>-.546</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am kind to other children.</td>
<td><strong>.705</strong></td>
<td>.366</td>
<td>.240</td>
<td>.183</td>
<td>-.140</td>
<td>-.222</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I get told off most days.</td>
<td><strong>.434</strong></td>
<td>-.021</td>
<td>.051</td>
<td><strong>.579</strong></td>
<td>-.270</td>
<td>-.145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I finish my work most of the time.</td>
<td>.282</td>
<td>.191</td>
<td><strong>.671</strong></td>
<td>.235</td>
<td>.021</td>
<td>-.367</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I know what to do next in school.</td>
<td>.380</td>
<td>.317</td>
<td><strong>.571</strong></td>
<td>.304</td>
<td>-.128</td>
<td><strong>-.488</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I make good choices about how to behave.</td>
<td><strong>.822</strong></td>
<td>.233</td>
<td>.225</td>
<td>.150</td>
<td>-.208</td>
<td>-.393</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel scared in school.</td>
<td>.045</td>
<td>.133</td>
<td>.030</td>
<td><strong>.703</strong></td>
<td>-.189</td>
<td>.028</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I get ready for school on time.</td>
<td>.123</td>
<td>.197</td>
<td>.297</td>
<td>.174</td>
<td>-.236</td>
<td>-.153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am asked to do things by the teacher.</td>
<td>.366</td>
<td>.253</td>
<td>.298</td>
<td>.204</td>
<td>.032</td>
<td><strong>-.530</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other kids are nice to me.</td>
<td>.141</td>
<td><strong>.720</strong></td>
<td>.242</td>
<td>.196</td>
<td>-.216</td>
<td>-.176</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I know the rules in school.</td>
<td><strong>.558</strong></td>
<td>.079</td>
<td>.282</td>
<td>.056</td>
<td>-.093</td>
<td>-.394</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I behave well in school.</td>
<td><strong>.849</strong></td>
<td>.153</td>
<td>.197</td>
<td>.148</td>
<td>-.240</td>
<td>-.356</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I get hungry in school.</td>
<td>.012</td>
<td>.194</td>
<td>.141</td>
<td><strong>.571</strong></td>
<td>.090</td>
<td>-.336</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I keep the school rules.</td>
<td><strong>.768</strong></td>
<td>.160</td>
<td>.223</td>
<td>.134</td>
<td>-.173</td>
<td>-.350</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am tired at school.</td>
<td>.040</td>
<td>.016</td>
<td>.140</td>
<td><strong>.661</strong></td>
<td>.008</td>
<td>-.099</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I do my homework.</td>
<td><strong>.493</strong></td>
<td>.104</td>
<td>.228</td>
<td>.180</td>
<td>-.065</td>
<td>-.092</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I often get the right</td>
<td>.223</td>
<td>.209</td>
<td><strong>.775</strong></td>
<td>.191</td>
<td>-.154</td>
<td>-.208</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>answers.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I do 'fun' things after school.</td>
<td>.113</td>
<td>.392</td>
<td>.162</td>
<td>.142</td>
<td>.034</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eigenvalues</td>
<td>6.75</td>
<td>4.96</td>
<td>5.90</td>
<td>3.19</td>
<td>3.91</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of variance</td>
<td>24.63</td>
<td>5.64</td>
<td>5.07</td>
<td>4.43</td>
<td>3.84</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cronbach's $\alpha$</td>
<td>.85</td>
<td>.81</td>
<td>.80</td>
<td>.68</td>
<td>.75</td>
<td>.87</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Appendix 19. Structure matrix - item loadings**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor 1</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I behave well in school.</td>
<td>0.849</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I make good choices about how to behave.</td>
<td>0.822</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I keep the school rules.</td>
<td>0.768</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am kind to other children.</td>
<td>0.705</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can listen to the teacher.</td>
<td>0.576</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I know the rules in school.</td>
<td>0.558</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The grown-ups in school like me.</td>
<td>0.507</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am a good friend.</td>
<td>0.497</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I help other people.</td>
<td>0.494</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I do my homework.</td>
<td>0.493</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t get distracted by other people.</td>
<td>0.482</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In class, I do things to help me to learn.</td>
<td>0.477</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I get told off most days.</td>
<td>0.434</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor 2</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Other kids are nice to me.</td>
<td>0.720</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I get on well with my friends.</td>
<td>0.701</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I play with lots of people at playtime.</td>
<td>0.671</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have good playtimes.</td>
<td>0.646</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am a good friend.</td>
<td>0.571</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have all the friends I want.</td>
<td>0.556</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People say nice things about something I have done.</td>
<td>0.528</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel happy in school.</td>
<td>0.468</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor 3</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I often get the right answers.</td>
<td>0.775</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have good ideas.</td>
<td>0.728</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can keep up with my work.</td>
<td>0.692</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I often know the right answers to questions.</td>
<td>0.687</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I finish my work most of the time.</td>
<td>0.671</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I know what to do next in school.</td>
<td>0.571</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I like to work by myself.</td>
<td>0.531</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I class, I do things to help me to learn.</td>
<td>0.442</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I understand the teacher.</td>
<td>0.402</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor 4</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I get angry in school.</td>
<td>0.729</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel scared in school.</td>
<td>0.703</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I get told off most days.</td>
<td>0.579</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement</td>
<td>Score</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I get hungry in school.</td>
<td>0.571</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel tired in school.</td>
<td>0.661</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Factor 5**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>People behave well in my class.</td>
<td>0.733</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The noise in my class is OK.</td>
<td>0.677</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t get distracted by my thoughts.</td>
<td>0.546</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t get distracted by other people.</td>
<td>0.534</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I like to work in a group.</td>
<td>0.521</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There are good things to do at break-times.</td>
<td>0.446</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have good playtimes.</td>
<td>0.427</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Factor 6**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I get picked when I put my hand up.</td>
<td>0.669</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I get rewarded when I try.</td>
<td>0.664</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The grown-ups in school like me.</td>
<td>0.662</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can ask for help when I don’t understand.</td>
<td>0.658</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can use things in class to help me to learn.</td>
<td>0.617</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In class, I do things to help me to learn.</td>
<td>0.588</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I help other people.</td>
<td>0.581</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel happy in school.</td>
<td>0.546</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am asked to do thing by the teacher.</td>
<td>0.530</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning is fun.</td>
<td>0.515</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I understand the teacher.</td>
<td>0.504</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I know what to do next in school.</td>
<td>0.488</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People say nice things about something I have done.</td>
<td>-0.443</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There are good things to do at break-times.</td>
<td>-0.406</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel I belong in my class.</td>
<td>-0.403</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 20.

This literature review has been marked and examined separately from the examination of the thesis. It is appended here for completeness and to give coherence to the whole thesis.

Positive outcomes for children and young people in school: The role of the Educational Psychologist, measuring effectiveness of interventions and listening to what children and young people really want.

A literature review.

Student number: 580030274

DEdPsych Child, Community and Educational Psychology.

Word Count = 6562 words
The following review underpins and informs two research projects undertaken for my doctorate in Educational, Child and Community Psychology at the University of Exeter. The research was steered by a request from the Educational Psychology Service (EPS) where I completed my 2 year training placement. In late 2009, in a climate of increased financial pressures and a focus on evidence-based practice, the Senior Management Team was seeking a meaningful process through which to measure the impact of Educational Psychologists (EP) work on outcomes for children. This was to assist them in evaluating and demonstrating quality and effectiveness, and to provide the most accountable service to children and young people (CYP), families, schools, commissioners, and the funders of our work, the tax payers.

In order to determine approaches that might provide information that is meaningful, there are a number of questions to answer. Firstly, what is being evaluated, that is, in what sorts of activity may an EP be involved? Should we measure the quantity of work (how much is done), or the quality of that work (how well it is done, that is, with what positive outcomes and satisfaction levels for those involved), or both. I will attempt to provide a context for this through a brief review of the EP role, in order to establish the range of work to be evaluated.

Secondly, how can outcomes be measured? How are the ‘products’ of services currently evaluated, by whom, and do approaches permit evaluation across all consumers of EP services? I present a review of what the literature suggests is currently done in practice, what processes and measures are available, and importantly, which areas are not covered by existing
measures. A particular focus will be whether groups with less power (for example, CYP) are authentically consulted. I will argue that the ‘voices’ of children are currently underemphasised in evaluating these processes, and particularly the voices of our younger children.

Finally, I review selected literature on whether children’s views are sought, heard and used to inform policy and intervention, with a particular focus on school life. This will include how children’s views are elicited, and whether these views are valid. Does the research suggest that younger children can express their opinions and make their views known? Additionally, I will briefly review how seeking the voices of children links with current Government aspirations.

The main aim of this selective review is to examine and synthesise selected literature in an attempt to illuminate current knowledge, and to identify where further investigation may helpfully increase understanding and offer practical ways forward.

Before I attempt to answer these questions, I will provide an overview of the context and political climate in which they are being asked, specifically within the Educational Psychology profession. I will also provide a brief overview of how the literature was searched and accessed.

**Background**

In recent years, nationally and internationally, and across a number of public arenas, there has been an upsurge of interest in outcomes of policy initiatives, evidence-based practice, accountability and ‘value for money’.
This is no less true in the relatively small profession of educational psychology. In November 2009, a study day was held by the National Association of Principal Educational Psychologists (NAPEP). This focussed on evaluation of outcomes; how EPs can evaluate and demonstrate that what they do makes a difference. This focus is important for a number of reasons; to ensure that we are providing the best possible support to children and families, being accountable to Government, commissioners and tax payers, development of theoretical understanding of what works and for whom, and to promote innovation and development of future interventions. Our work supports some of the most vulnerable members of our society, children and young people. They will become the citizens, workers, parents, entrepreneurs, academics and policy makers of our future. Additionally, in an increasingly challenging global and local economic climate, it is fundamental to the survival of the EP profession that its members can demonstrate their worth.

The importance of this enterprise has been reflected in the position it occupies in the policy agenda. For more than a decade, successive Governments have sought to improve outcomes for children and young people in the UK (DfES, 2004). There has been a progressive move away from a focus on welfare (the reduction of poverty and inequality) in the conceptualisation of a ‘good’ society, and towards well-being (holistic thriving) (Awartani, Whitman, and Gordon, 2008). This may be linked to a shift in thinking to which the positive psychology movement has both contributed and responded since its emergence through the latter decades of the twentieth century (Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi, 2000, Snyder, Lopez
and Pedrotti, 2011). EPs have a central role in championing and promoting well-being from this perspective. I will argue that a positive psychology approach can offer a pragmatic (Terjesen, Jacofsky, Froh, and DiGiuseppe, 2004), ethical and energising perspective, which also resonates with the zeitgeist of bringing individual and community wellbeing to the forefront of new policy initiatives, and as a focussing lens for evaluation of services. However it must be remembered that whatever approaches and interventions EPs utilise, and however good the application of psychology, it will be irrelevant if it fails to produce more positive outcomes for CYP. It is not how much has been done, or how well, but whether it has made a difference that counts (AEP, DECP and NAPEP, 2009).

**Approach to literature search**

Initially, the literature in three broad areas was searched electronically, via EBSCO and EJS. Search term used included; ‘role’, ‘educational psychologist’, ‘evaluation’, ‘outcomes’, ‘voice’ and ‘child’. Search terms were refined by reference to the key words in the most useful papers. Research cited in these papers was accessed if relevant. A search of books likely to contain relevant material was carried out in the psychology section of the libraries of two local Universities.

Additionally, copies of the contents list and abstracts of the following journals were searched online, to ensure coverage of publications in the major journals relevant to educational psychology: British Journal of Educational Psychology, Contemporary Educational Psychology, Educational Psychology, Educational Psychology in Practice and Debate. Literature from
all years was included initially, but only the most recent material is cited here, unless it has particular relevance to the area under review.

In total, the search strategies generated 93 papers, from which additional material and a number of book chapters were also searched. A selection of the most relevant material is presented here.

**What are we measuring? What do EPs do?**

As Fallon, Woods and Rooney (2010) comment there is no shortage of publications on the role of the EP, particularly in the last 30 years (Gilham, 1978, Cameron, 2006, Ashton and Roberts, 2006, DfES, 2006). However, they also argue that, as a relatively small profession, the role is not clearly understood by either colleagues from other professions or service users. In part, this may be because of the diversity of theoretical perspectives, interventions and areas of work in which EPs are involved.

In a review of the role, and the contributions of EPs to the Every Child Matters agenda, with a particular focus on outcomes (DfES, 2006), Farrell and colleagues listed core functions which included work on an individual, group and systemic level, and statutory functions within the Code of Practice (DfES, 2001). The precise nature of these latter functions is likely to change on publication of the awaited White Paper in response to the current consultation document, ‘Support and Aspiration’ (DfE, 2011). The role incorporates; assessment, planning, intervention (direct therapeutic work, or via work with teaching staff, parents or carers), preventative work and early intervention, supporting parents, child and parent advocacy, strategic level
work and school improvement, training and professional development. Work is carried out largely in a multi-agency context and across multiple settings. Many EPs choose to specialise. Published literature suggests an active role with a wide array of different client groups in different locations, and many more than can be listed here, but including, different age groups, for example, pre-school children (Shannon and Posada, 2007) and those in further education (Guishard, 2000), in addition to areas of developmental difficulty and issues that affect young people. Wider roles have been identified, for example in contributing to more positive community relations (Smith, 2002). EPs have also actively sought potential areas for developing the role, for example, by working with children who are home educated (Arora, 2003). It is clear that the range of work and approaches is locally determined and varied. Further, there is little standardisation in the way that EPs practice, with variation in approaches to assessment (Woods and Farrell, 2006) and intervention. The ability to apply psychological theory to each of these tasks and contexts is the unifying theme, and a distinctive characteristic of EP practice (DfES, 2006).

The theory base is eclectic, but some authors have commented that the adoption of particular perspectives may offer ethical and pragmatic advantages over others. Gersch (2009) makes a direct link to positive psychology, the “scientific study of optimal human functioning that aims to discover the factors that allow individuals and communities to thrive” (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). He argues that research should focus on solutions rather than problem elaboration, and that there is merit in
incorporating ideas from positive psychology in interventions, and the development of new types of assessment methodology. He also stresses that the work of EPs must be seen as relevant and useful, and that EPs are proactive in steering the profession and policy formation in a direction that will benefit CYP.

Within this, there is an increasing role for EPs in research and evaluation, particularly since the introduction of the three year doctoral training. This is in part a response to the call that educational psychology must have an evidence-based future (MacKay, 2002; Gersch, 2009) with research skills being fundamental to the EP role (DfES, 2006). This has led to EPs being characterised as ‘scientist-practitioners’, who use psychological knowledge, understanding and skills across a range of activities and settings, working at individual, group and systems levels, and increasingly within multi-agency teams (Fallon et al., 2010).

In addition to the complexity of the role, Gersch (2004) suggests that the profession is operating within a zeitgeist of “significant change, uncertainty and anxiety” (Gersch, 2004, p.142). He further observes that EPs are held accountable for their practice within an increasingly litigious society. Work should be monitored and evaluated as a measure of the quality of the services provided to clients. What is certain is that EPs need to respond flexibly to demands from the socio-political context (Stobie, 2002, Norwich, 2005). The role is essentially one that is fluid, negotiated and responsive to need (Norwich, 2000), and there are many opportunities for developing the role (Gersch, 2009).
Despite the variety and challenges offered by the role, Fallon and colleagues (2010) stress that it is CYP who are the primary customers for EP services, and outcomes should be evaluated with reference to their expectations. A major implication for educational psychologists will be to develop and utilise highly sophisticated techniques for eliciting the child’s views, whilst balancing such information sensitively with the perspectives and experiences of parents, teachers and other significant adults (Gersch, 2004). The onus is on EPs to demonstrate their effectiveness to commissioners of services (DfES, 2006, Fallon et al., 2010)

This leads us to question, how can we tell that EP involvement makes a difference?

**Current approaches to evaluation**

Evaluation for accountability purposes is currently a ‘hot topic’ across many areas of activity. There is a political imperative to be pro-active in evaluating services, with an increasing focus on outcomes and accountability in business and Governmental policy. This is accompanied, particularly in health and education, by a move towards evidence-based practice. It is acknowledged that, by definition, public policy environments are inherently messy and complex (Friedman, 2005). There is an additional layer of complexity within educational psychology (in addition to those already identified), where there is often a lack of clarity around who is the client (Dickinson, 2000). This means that the EP is potentially accountable to a range of clients who may not have the same goals.
When seeking an evaluation process, the aim is to simplify this complexity, but also to guard against attempts to devise tools that are so simplistic that they reflect none of the complexity which they are attempting to measure. The simple metrics often employed in evaluation data may appear to psychologists to be unacceptably reductionist, but viewed from a different perspective, this may become a more familiar and less threatening process. It can be better conceptualised as a conscious ‘stepping back’ and reflecting on the process of work in a systematic way, in order to improve outcomes. This should be reassuringly familiar to EPs as reflective practitioners (Schon, 1983).

The types of approach that can be applied to the interventions employed by EPs, frequently preclude methods used to produce ‘best evidence’ in parallel arenas. For example, the double-blinded randomised controlled trial sets the ‘gold standard’ for research evidence (Fox, 2003) and lends itself well to many medical interventions. This is particularly the case where a pharmacological treatment can be made indistinguishable from an identical preparation with no active ingredient. Treatment can be prescribed, without the either the practitioner or patient having knowledge of which contains the active ingredient (so controlling for, or eliminating, expectancy and placebo effects). It is hard to imagine the possibility of a parallel approach in EP interventions. The underlying issues are philosophical, with medicine aiming for a universal solution applicable to all clients, who are viewed as homogenous biological systems, with some caveats applying to selected groups. Conversely, most psychological approaches view clients as active sense-makers, entering into relationships with professionals, the outcome
being the result of a joint construction of change and a new reality. What is required is evidence from well-designed, self-reflective and politically aware research approaches, including both quantitative and qualitative techniques. Fox (2011) argues that psychologists, as practitioners, need to become more actively involved in a range of research approaches as a way of examining and challenging professional expertise, to create ‘practice-based evidence’. Interventions in education and educational psychology may lend themselves more readily to advice from meta-analyses of existing studies selected on the basis of their design quality (for example, Hattie, 2009). These report an effect size indicating the efficacy of the approach.

Another challenge is in attributing outcomes directly to EP involvement. Interaction with children is often indirect. Much EP involvement is delivered via a consultation model (Wagner, 2000) where the adult (teacher, teaching assistant, special educational needs co-ordinator or parent) enters into a collaborative, problem-solving process with the EP, based around their immediate needs in supporting a child or group of children. It is frequently this adult, or group of adults, who delivers the intervention in practice.

Clearly with so much complexity, outcomes of service delivery must be “unbundled” (Schorr, as cited in Friedman, 2005. p.6) so that the most essential and important aspects can be subjected to scrutiny. For Friedman this approach can be explicitly applied to the wellbeing of children (Friedman, 2005, p1). Three simple questions drive this process. How much was done (quantity measure)? How well was it done (user satisfaction, professional peer appraisal and outcomes)? Who is better off, and by how much
(qualitative and quantitative measures)? Answers to the first of these questions are available from activity monitoring records kept by most services. The second question has two aspects, how closely an intervention resembles current ‘best practice’, and published evidence where available, and whether clients were satisfied with the interaction. The final question requires before and after measurement of one or more meaningful aspects that might be expected to change as a result of the intervention, and some understanding of the characteristics of the individuals who have taken part in the interaction.

An additional difficulty is that subjective and objective measures are not simply related. Subjective measures, it may be argued, have a particularly pertinent place in the work of EPs, for while it may be possible to achieve an improved outcome for a child or family without them personally valuing the interaction, this could have a significant influence on their willingness to engage with EP services subsequently. Perceived quality is directly related to acceptability (Anthun, 2000). Likewise, it is possible to like an intervention, and the EP (Norgate, 2010), but for there to be no real change in pupil progress or well-being, the most important outcome criteria.

Measuring outcomes is a recurrent theme on EPNET (Leadbetter, 2000), a professional networking site for educational psychologists. Recent exchanges suggest that EPSs continue to be in different stages of choosing locally suitable evaluation models. When data was collected for the study cited above in 1998, the author commented on the range and number of evaluation systems reported by the sampled services in England and Wales. Some were using six different systems and others none. Quantitative and
qualitative data were collected, including; monitoring systems for time spent and activities within schools, speed of written feedback, and interviews, focus groups, and questionnaires with parents and school staff. Internal monitoring systems included supervision, shadowing of work, and feedback from multiple perspectives, performance reviews and appraisals. Some approaches were more commonly used than others, perhaps because they were easier in practice. However, there are risks in targeting what is easily measurable, as it may become the focus of activity (Leadbetter, 2000, Stringer, 1998), and the most important aspects of interaction may be overlooked because they are harder to examine.

In practice, data collected is often that which is easily obtainable. A recent survey on current practice in UK Service evaluation was carried out by NAPEP (Norgate, 2010). The author states that findings should be treated with caution as only 23 Services responded. Most responding Services (74%) reported using activity recording systems. 83% of services used stakeholder satisfaction measures, perhaps because it is relatively easy to ask clients for subjective feedback. 52% had asked parents/carers, and 26% asked pupils for their views, with 22% having asked CYP, parents/carers and schools as a triangulation exercise. Methods used included questionnaires, interviews and focus groups. Most services surveyed schools annually or less frequently. Training was better evaluated, perhaps because there was greater initial clarity over aims and objectives, and start and endpoints. However, there was rarely mention of whether there had been changes in outcomes for children as a result of training interventions. This weakness in
evaluating outcomes was noted across the data collected. Only ten of the services who responded currently monitored outcomes, or had considered or trialled this approach.

Given the complexity of the situation, and the difficulties in producing an acceptable solution, it is tempting to avoid the challenge. However, “the pursuit of perfection may be less important than systems that work reasonably well” (Norgate, 2010, p14). The NAPEP survey stated that there is a political imperative to be proactive in the agenda for targeting services and influencing policy. It is important to develop self-evaluation models, because it is increasingly likely that external monitoring systems may be introduced by the wider organisation (Cherry, 1998), which may not be pertinent to EP practice, or reflect outcomes that are the most meaningful to clients (Matthews, 2002). Additionally, to be meaningful, evaluation should be continuous, and it will only be prioritised if the products are perceived as useful, and if the process is not overly time consuming (Matthews, 2002). The survey recommends that, where possible, outcome evaluation should be co-ordinated nationally, involve mixed methods data collection, be ‘built-in’ to practice and be demonstrated to be ‘worth the effort’. Data should elicit children’s views, be triangulated where possible, and motivate EPs to prioritise evaluation (Norgate, 2010).

**Measures**

The NAPEP survey (Norgate, 2010) indicated a range of approaches were used across the UK including standardised measures, scaling measures, interviews, and questionnaires. It was noted that there are advantages to
some form of objective measure of progress, for example, behavioural observations. Adult reports may have other agendas, overt and understood, or covert and subconscious. Standardised measures can be limiting as, if they are detailed enough to be useful and valid, they tend to be specific to a particular area of concern. For example, the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) (Goodman, 1997), is sometimes used as a pre and post intervention measure with CYP experiencing behavioural difficulties. It is particularly useful as it has child, parent and teacher versions allowing for triangulation of results. It asks the child whether there have been changes, rather than relying on the reports of adults. Other standardised tools are available for eliciting evaluations by children, for example, the Measures of Children’s Mental Health and Well-being (Frederickson and Dunsmuir, 2009). These include questionnaires on enjoyment, resilience, healthy living, belonging, social behaviour and responsiveness, but again, focus on specific areas, although frequently from a positive perspective.

Processes

EPs have acknowledged the need to review their practice for some time, as evidenced by models of practice with inbuilt evaluation, (a ‘plan, do, review’ cycle (PDR)). A range of different frameworks for practice have been proposed to support EP work in schools (Lyons, 1999). Examples include; the use of conversational scripts and key questions in consultation (Wagner, 2008), Monsen’s problem-solving model (Monsen, Graham, Frederickson and Cameron, 1998; Monsen and Frederickson, 2008), the Constructionist Model of Informed and Reasoned Action (COMOIRA) (Gameson and Rhydderch, 2008), the Spare Wheel Model of Illuminative Evaluation
(Burden, 2008), or the setting of plans, actions, results (outcomes) and evaluation within an Illuminative Enquiry approach (Parlett and Hamilton, 1977). For Dickinson (2000) evaluation is about clarity of purpose, negotiating clear and intentional goals, and excellent communication within a consultation process. Outcomes are noted when work is completed in this explicitly open model. The author even refers to it as “tatty” (p. 22), arguing that this reflects the reality of the situation.

Target Monitoring and Evaluation (TME) (Dunsmuir, Brown, Iyadurai, and Monsen, 2009) was derived specifically to address evaluation of EP interventions from the earlier Goal Attainment Scaling model (Kiresuk and Sherman, 1968) in adult mental health. A number of targets (commonly three) can be set for the child, addressing a range of areas for development, for example, attentional focus, reading difficulties and friendship issues. Ideally, targets should be negotiated with the child. However, in practice, these are most commonly constructed with teaching staff and parents/carers, and it is most usually, although not exclusively, adults who are asked to rate changes in the target behaviour or intensity of problems. This is particularly true for younger children. Use of the approach is dependent to some extent on the skills of the EP in consultation, target setting, and in operationalising how progress towards a desired goal may be manifested. Some targets lend themselves to objective measurement, for example, the number of previously unknown words to be read. Criticisms of this approach are that it can be reductionist, and Dunsmuir has suggested that a TME approach is ideally accompanied by other evaluative measures, like participant feedback and
standardised tests. It is currently a very popular and respected approach. In the NAPEP survey, 39% of services who responded were using some form of scaling system. The report indicated that, “The use of TME/GAS within a PDR model of service delivery would appear to present as the ‘Rolls-Royce model of evaluation as applied through scaling systems.” (Norgate, 2010, p.16). Additional advantages are that it is an individualised process, and targets can be mapped on to Every Child Matters (ECM) outcomes, then a major focus.

In the period prior to the current coalition Government, there was a particular focus on attempts to link outcomes to the ECM agenda. This was done more explicitly in 2009 in collaboration between the Association of Educational Psychologists (AEP), Division of Educational and Child Psychologists of the British Psychological Society (DECP) and NAPEP. The report advocated the use of an evaluation matrix, in which EP activity is explicitly matched and linked to desired ECM outcomes and evaluation options (AEP, DECP and NAPEP, 2009).

Since the inception of this review and the linked research projects, the new Coalition Government (May 2010) has been less vocal on the ECM agenda, and it is unclear where the next developments will take place. However, essentially the ECM agenda reflected a move away from framing children within a deficit model, and towards a positive model of change and improvement in conditions for children. This is reflected in the positive framing of the five outcomes. An indication that this focus on well-being is
being maintained by the present Government is demonstrated in the cross-governemental mental health outcomes strategy, “No health without mental health” (HM Government 2011), with its focus on psychological therapies and interventions across all age groups of citizens. Two outcomes are particularly relevant here, ‘starting well’ and ‘developing well’. Additionally, there is a focus on how well-being can be measured (Mental Health Foundation 2011), with the current Government expressing an interest in well-being and ‘happiness’ as central to future policy initiatives.

However, is well-being just a ‘soft’ option? While it is ethically desirable, what are the benefits to children and society in more concrete and measurable terms? Research findings from diverse studies are indicating that children who experience and report higher levels of holistic well-being are more able to learn effectively, more likely to engage in positive and rewarding social behaviours, and more likely to engage in life choices that enhance the well-being of themselves, others and the environment when they reach adulthood (Blum, McNeely & Rinehart, 2002, as cited in Awartani et al., 2008; Skevington, Birdthistle & Jones, 2003).

Whatever the challenges in measuring outcomes, it is important to note that while it is usually consumers who provide direct feedback on the services that they receive, this is often not the case with EP interventions, particularly for younger children. It has been argued that ultimately children are the consumers of EP services, and they should therefore have the opportunity to contribute to service development (Dorrian, Tisdall and Hamilton, 2000). The
child has a role in negotiating services, not just being a passive recipient (Baxter and Frederickson, 2005). It is to this issue that we now turn.

**Child ‘voice’**

Legislation has repeatedly emphasised the importance of the voices of children in matters that affect them. In the international context, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN, 1989), was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1989, and ratified by UK Government in December 1991. Article 12 states that every child “who is capable of forming his or her own views” must have the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child” and given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.

In the UK, the 1989 Children’s Act gives public bodies the responsibility of taking the wishes and feelings of children into account when making decisions which affect them. While legislation in the UK has encouraged service providers to take the views of children and young people into account (DfEE, 2000), and the “Every Child Matters” agenda (DfES, 2004) actively promoted the outcome that children and young people will "make a positive contribution”, it is unclear how often this is enacted in practice. This may be due to the inherent difficulties already identified in accessing the views of children, particularly younger children and those with complex needs.

CYP were actively involved with the development of ECM. 3137 CYP responded to the consultation paper on the construction of the 5 ECM
outcomes. Of these 2270 were recorded as being ‘under 16’. The age range in this category is not stated, and so it is not clear to what extent the views of younger children were represented. It is also unclear from the report whether young people were actively involved in the generation of areas of concern, rather than responding to what was offered by policy makers. While CYP may have agreed the 5 ECM outcomes, as Fallon and her colleagues (2010) suggest, it is likely that civil servants constructed the final wording.

In Wales, the Welsh Assembly has been leading the way in promoting children’s voices in policy making, particularly by consulting on and monitoring their well-being (Llywodraeth Cymru /Welsh Government, 2011). Additionally, the Welsh Assembly have been actively involved in the UK in the piloting of international research on the well-being of children, with a particular focus on learning environments, through collaboration with the Universal Education Foundation (UEF). The UEF was founded in 2004, and acts as a global advocacy movement which works with public, private and voluntary organisations to bring together providers (education, health, business, and community organisations) to ask “How can we create learning environments that nurture the well-being of children and young people?” (Awartani et al., 2008, p.51). Research activities include a major international literature review on how school experience influences the well-being of children and young people. One aim is to develop research tools to elicit and monitor children’s perceptions of their well-being (Voice of Children Programme (VOC)). The long term aim is to produce a package of measures (the VOC Toolkit), which allows the voice of children to be heard and to influence policy making, and can emphasise the gap between the espoused
intention of prioritising well-being and what is actually achieved in practice. The intention is that this toolkit will combine quantitative and qualitative approaches applicable to different age groups which will be both internationally valid (enabling comparison of major trends) and adaptable to local contexts. Pilot studies, first in the Middle East, and now in Wales, include a quantitative survey and qualitative techniques to collect data on children’s perceptions of how schools affect their wellbeing. Currently these tools have been used with older children in the 15 – 16 year age group. Techniques used included a lengthy questionnaire (135 closed questions), data from focus groups, and young people’s drawings. Areas covered included satisfaction and engagement with school, perceptions of safety, general health, relationships with school staff and peers, and feelings about approaches to teaching and learning. What is important is that internationally governments are beginning to actively seek ways of listening to what CYP tell them about the policies that affect their lives (Fattore, Mason and Watson, 2007, as cited in Awartani et al., 2008). Results suggest that the issues held to be most important for CYP in this age group were supportive relationships with teachers, peers and a sense of belonging and being respected. Feelings of security were linked to satisfaction with academic achievement, although the report’s authors acknowledge that this is yet to be validated by achievement data.

The UEF report suggests that there are currently gaps in the research programme, which include eliciting and incorporating the personal perceptions of children and young people, and creating opportunities for their
active participation in developing indicators of their well-being. It also suggests that the following should be included in tools for monitoring well-being in children and young people: sense of self (for example, positive self-worth, being appreciated, ability to express feelings), communication (for example, self-expression, feeling listened to), relationships (for example, sense of belonging, and quality of relationships with peers and adults), participation and engagement (for example, engagement in school and authentic representation), and environmental issues (for example, classroom management, support from teachers, and teaching and learning issues). Additionally, the report suggests that there continues to be a significant gap in measures and approaches applicable to primary school and early year’s education (Awartani et al., 2008).

Children should be given a say, wherever possible, about things that will have an influence on their lives, but this may require fundamental changes in thinking. While this is now acknowledged as an important aspect of all work with, and policy making for children, it could be that there is a tendency to predominantly elicit the views of older and more verbally skilled children, and even here to restrict consultations to relatively small numbers of children and young people on the basis that the process of gaining their views is time consuming, requires parental consent and the consent of the participating child, and requires skills in addition to those of the average researcher. It has been argued that, where children’s views are sought, this may be tokenistic, and what is required is a fundamental change in thinking and attitudes. For example, where children can be involved as researchers, there is a necessity
that participatory cultures rather than just participatory practices should be
developed (Burton, Smith and Woods, 2010).

Where attempts at eliciting the voices of children are made, and particularly
with younger children, their views are frequently expressed through their
parents/carers. Implicit within this is the assumption that children may not
know, or be able to express, what they want, and that the adult’s voices will
be identical to their children’s. However, what parents/carers say may not
always be in child’s best interests. Pugh and Selleck (1996) argue that our
culture, structures and procedures do not encourage adults to listen seriously
to the views of children. Burton and colleagues (2010), comment that the
experience of contemporary childhood, as opposed from that viewed from a
‘chronological’ distance, means that children have a unique perspective, and
they may have very different priorities and concerns from those of adults.
Children may have different understandings, and attach very different
meaning to their experiences, than those held by the adults who support
them (Moinian, 2006). Younger children, or those with learning or
communication difficulties, may be further under-represented. Researchers
have often considered children below the age of seven or eight to be
unreliable as interviewees (Kellett and Ding, 2004), but this may be attributed
to a failure of researchers to develop appropriate interview skills and ways of
eliciting children’s views (Carroll, 2002).

As Gersch (1996) reports, most adult interaction with children is in the form
of instruction. Adults feel that they know best. Really listening and
responding to the voices of children can be a considerable challenge (Bragg,
Given a sensitive approach, children can give their opinions, and demonstrate that they are remarkably perceptive, but they must believe that the adult has interest in and respect for what they have to say, and holds no underlying agenda. For EPs, identifying and understanding the feelings of children by listening to them is one of the ‘essences’ of psychological practice (Hall, 1996, Gersch, 2004), and Gersch (2009) predicts that advocating for the rights of children will become increasingly important in educational psychology.

Given the importance ascribed to listening to children, it is surprising that this is not common practice. Due to the inherent practical difficulties, the NAPEP survey (Norgate, 2010) called for an in-depth exploration of how children’s view could be meaningfully elicited. Respondents to the survey did not suggest that any service is currently addressing this area satisfactorily, but it was stated that Services are interested in exploring how this might best be achieved.

**How do we ask younger children?**

An understanding of a child’s developmental level, and a creative approach, can allow much younger children to engage. A good example of this is an evaluation of a play-based intervention by children between five and ten years of age using creative, child-friendly techniques, for example, ‘small world’ play, puppets or being the ‘expert’ on an imaginary helpline or chat show (Jager and Ryan, 2007).
Maxwell (2006) explored how individual children see their school lives and what might be useful approaches or techniques to elicit these views. Thirteen primary school children participated through conversations based around their drawings, within a PCP approach. Children talked openly about school life. Maxwell commented on, “…the importance of using a number of techniques in listening to children. They have value in that they facilitated good quality conversations, which allowed the pupils to know more about themselves and their relationships in the context of their school.” (Maxwell 2006, p.25). For these children, relationships in the playground were more important than other aspects of learning. Importantly, the findings were used to bring about changes to school policy and provision through the School Council.

Aubrey and Dahl (2006) carried out a systematic review of 43 studies, meeting specified quality criteria, on reliably eliciting children’s views. Through activity-based techniques or computer-based interviews, they also elicited the views of vulnerable children under 11 years old, who were being provided with services within a multi-agency approach. The authors observe,

…evidence from the focus groups suggests that children held clear, realistic and, indeed, sophisticated views about a number of aspects of their school environment, their teachers, their peers, their lessons and their behaviour, as well as the importance of their education. (Aubrey and Dahl, 2006, p.34).
Children of this age, it was concluded, could and should contribute to evaluation of the services they received, and have a say in how future services could be better developed to meet their needs. Interestingly, when asked who listened to them, children answered “parents” and “educational psychologists”.

Children can and do tell us what works best for them and can be a reliable source of data to evaluate interventions (Cooper, 1993, Gersch, 1996) particularly those in which they have taken part as active collaborators. Evaluations of children and teaching professionals correlated on evaluations of teacher performance (Tairab and Wilkinson, 1991, as cited in Hennessy 1999). Children offer views on what they have experienced directly, for example, teacher quality and teaching methods (Dickinson, 1990, Johannessen, Grünhaug, Risholm, and Mikalsen, 1997, as cited in Hennessy, 1999), rather than wider school climate issues. In a review of studies Hennessy (1999) noted that there was a seeming reluctance to investigate the views of children under secondary school age. Only one study (Driscoll, Peterson, Crow and Larsen, 1985, as cited in Hennessy 1999) included primary-age pupils.

This review of selected literature, and my current experience in practice, suggests that there is a gap in the espoused values of listening to what children have to say about their experience, and giving them an active voice in expressing their views. This is particularly the case in negotiating areas for
EP intervention and evaluating the outcomes of those interventions in primary-age pupils. There is current, (and overdue), interest in consulting children about their well-being and the services they require, alongside the need to ensure that interventions to support them are effective and represent value to commissioners of services. As surveys of current practice have identified, a difficulty here is having access to practical approaches and tools through which children’s views on more general changes in their experiences, feelings, performance and behaviours can be made manifest, and this may be particularly true of younger children. One tool that may be missing is a subjective, but scaled, measure that can tell us, in terms that are most relevant to children, what is challenging to them, and if what we have done to help, in terms of intervention, has made things any better.

In the research arising out of this review, I would like to take the opportunity to redress this balance by authentically listening to some of our younger children (Key Stage 2). The aim will be to engage with them in an explicit collaboration, in which they are equal and active partners. I will ask what is important to them in their school lives, and attempt to develop a way to measure changes in their feelings about these issues that can illuminate their experience, increase the understanding of concerned adults about their difficulties, suggest areas for intervention, and provide additional evidence of whether EP interventions have facilitated positive change.

References


Association of Educational Psychologists, the Division of Child and Educational Psychology and the National Association of Principal Educational Psychologists, (2009). *The evaluation of educational psychology services in the light of outcomes for children*. Durham: AEP.


Moinian, F. (2006). I can tell it as it is! Exploring how children write and talk about themselves in school, *Ethnography and Education, 1, (2)*, 231-246.


Try to be honest. Don't rush, take your time. Make sure you have answered all the questions.

Then - put a tick on the face that shows how you feel.

First - read each sentence.

There are no right or wrong answers - it is what you think and feel that is important.

Do this by yourself - don't look at your friend's sheet, and don't talk until you have finished. If you need help, put up your hand and I will come and help you.

I want to know what helps children to be happy and ready to learn in school. I have talked to lots of children and they have told me that the things on this sheet are important to them. I want to know how you feel about these things.

Put a tick on the face that shows how you feel.

Try to be honest. Don't rush, take your time. Make sure you have answered all the questions.

First - read each sentence.

There are no right or wrong answers - it is what you think and feel that is important.

Try to be honest. Don't rush, take your time. Make sure you have answered all the questions.

First - read each sentence.

There are no right or wrong answers - it is what you think and feel that is important.
I understand the teacher.

The noise in my class is OK.

I get on well with my friends.

I play with lots of people at playtime.

There are good things to do at break-times.

Learning is fun.
I like to work in a group.

I don’t get distracted by my thoughts.

I have good playtimes.

I feel I belong in my class.

I have all the friends I want.

I can listen to the teacher.
| I like to work by myself.               | ......................................................... |
| I can keep up with my work.            | ................................................. |
| In class, I do things that help me to learn. | ............................................ |
| I often know the right answer to questions. | ............................................ |
| People behave well in my class.        | ................................................ |
| I can use things in class to help me to learn. | ............................................ |
| I am a good friend.                    | .................................................................... |
| In class, I do things that help me to learn. | ............................................ |
| I can keep up with my work.            | ................................................ |
| I like to work by myself.              | ................................................ |


20. People say nice things about something I have done.

21. I get picked when I put my hand up.

22. I get rewarded when I try.

23. I get angry in school.

24. I can ask for help when I don't understand.

25. Help other people.
26. I have good ideas.

27. I don't get distracted by other people.

28. The grownups in school like me.

29. I feel happy in school.

30. I am kind to other children.

31. I get told off most days.

32. I finish my work most of the time.
33 I know what to do next in school.

34 I make good choices about how to behave.

35 I feel scared in school.

36 I get ready for school on time.

37 I am asked to do things by the teacher.

38 Other kids are nice to me.
39 | I know the rules in school.
40 | I behave well in school.
41 | I get hungry at school.
42 | I keep the school rules.
43 | I am tired at school.
44 | I do my homework.
45 | I often get the right answers.
I do fun things after school.

Thank you very much for your help!
Certificate of ethical research approval

STUDENT RESEARCH/FIELDFWORK/CASEWORK AND DISSERTATION/THESIS
You will need to complete this certificate when you undertake a piece of higher-level research (e.g. Masters, PhD, EdD level).

To activate this certificate you need to first sign it yourself, and then have it signed by your supervisor and finally by the Chair of the School’s Ethics Committee.

For further information on ethical educational research access the guidelines on the BERA web site: http://www.bera.ac.uk/publications/guidelines/ and view the School’s statement on the GSE student access on-line documents.

READ THIS FORM CAREFULLY AND THEN COMPLETE IT ON YOUR COMPUTER (the form will expand to contain the text you enter). DO NOT COMPLETE BY HAND

Your name: Sarah Jane Aldrich
Your student no: 580030274
Return address for this certificate: 12 Brunswick Place, Stoke, Plymouth. PL2 1BR
Degree/Programme of Study: D.Ed. Psych in Educational, Child and Community Psychology
Project Supervisor(s): Dr Tim Maxwell, Andrew Richards
Your email address: sjad215@exeter.ac.uk
Tel: 01752 564648

I hereby certify that I will abide by the details given overleaf and that I undertake in my dissertation / thesis (delete whichever is inappropriate) to respect the dignity and privacy of those participating in this research.

I confirm that if my research should change radically, I will complete a further form.

Signed: ___________________________________________ date: 6th September 2011

NB For Masters dissertations, which are marked blind, this first page must not be included in your work. It can be kept for your records.

Chair of the School’s Ethics Committee
updated: July 2010
Certificate of ethical research approval

Your student no: 59030274

Title of your project:
Ready to learn? What do primary-aged children tell us about feeling of well-being and engagement in school, and how can Educational Psychologists (EPs) help? Design of an instrument to capture change and evaluate EP involvement.

Brief description of your research project
Educational Psychologists are increasingly aiming to enhance the effectiveness of their involvement with children and families through adopting a model of evidenced-based practice. It is therefore important to evaluate the outcomes of EP involvement and interventions, and it could be argued that it is especially pertinent to do this by focusing on factors that are of central concern to children themselves. This 2 stage study aims to develop an instrument to evaluate the well-being and ‘readiness to learn’ of primary school children in Key Stage 2, by assessing factors that the children tell us are most important to them.

Phase one of this research aims to investigate the role, (as perceived, experienced and desired), of the EP, by examining the experiences of 4 families who have been in receipt of EP services. Additionally, the views of the professionals (EPs, Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators (SENCOs), Teachers and Teaching Assistants) involved with these families will offer their own accounts of how they experienced EP services, and what they feel might have been improved to most effectively contribute to the well-being and ‘readiness to learn’ of the focus children. Children, families and professionals will be interviewed in a series of 12 individual interviews, using a semi-structured interview schedule. The experiences reported will be used to inform phase 2 of the study.

In phase two, a series of brief interviews will be carried out with primary school children (Key Stage 2) in order to elicit what factors they believe help them to experience well-being in school, and to support them in being ‘ready to learn’. Views elicited will be used to inform the collaborative design of an instrument for measuring ‘readiness to learn’ and well-being in school. This resulting instrument can be used to give an indication of how an individual child is currently perceiving school life, in terms of the factors that are most important and relevant in this age group. When used as a pre and post intervention measure, it will also offer a tool to capture change as a result of EP involvement and intervention.

Give details of the participants in this research (giving ages of any children and/or young people involved):
Phase 1

4 focus children will be selected from one Primary school. They range in age from 7 to 11 years. These children will be purposively chosen because they have had previous involvement with Educational Psychology Services, and have difficulties which may be best represented by one area of the Code of Practice: Cognition and learning needs, communication and interaction needs, physical and sensory needs or social and emotional needs.

Parents and the key teaching and psychology professionals supporting these children will also be research participants.
Phase 2

Child participants will be drawn from 6 Plymouth Primary schools (Key Stage 2, ages 7 to 11 years). The schools have been chosen to be representative of urban, suburban and rural areas, and to include pupils from different socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds. A special school for children with severe learning difficulties is included in the sample.

10 pupils from each school (N=60) will be purposively selected to participate through collaboration with the Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator in each school. These pupils will represent children from a range of ages in Key Stage 2, and approximate the gender split in the school. Additionally, they will include both children who have had contact with an EP at School Action + or through a Statement of SEN, and children who have not had contact with an EP, but may, or may not have benefitted from systemic EP work within the school setting.

Give details (with special reference to any children or those with special needs) regarding the ethical issues of:

a) informed consent: Where children in schools are involved this includes both headteachers and parents. An example of the consent form(s) must accompany this document. A blank consent form can be downloaded from the GSE student access on-line documents.

The study will be conducted following the British Psychological Society code of Ethics and Conduct (BPS, 2006).

Informed consent, in writing, will be obtained from all adults taking part in the study as interview participants, using a consent form which fulfils all University requirements and is acceptable to each school setting.

A letter will be provided to schools and parents/carers explaining the study, its intentions and full details of what is involved in acting as a participant at each stage of the research. Informed consent will be obtained in writing from the parents and Head Teachers of all children taking part in the study, and each child will receive a full explanation of the aims of the study, and their part in it, before requesting their participation. They will be asked to provide written consent (or to make their mark) on special designed, age-appropriate consent forms, where able.

All participants will be made aware of how the research findings will be used. Essentially, informed consent will be an ongoing process throughout the research. Participants will be reminded that they have the right to withdraw from the research at any time up to the submission of the thesis, and that data related to them will subsequently be destroyed.

Within the collaborative design that underpins both projects, the explicit permission of participants will be sought for any direct quotes used within the texts. For the focus groups, a general letter will be sent out by the school and opt-out consent obtained. A telephone number will be provided so that participants and their parents can ask the researcher questions at any time.

b) anonymity and confidentiality

Both adult and child participants will be made aware that all information they provide will remain confidential, the only exception to this being if information is disclosed within an interview suggesting that there is a risk to a child or to others. It will be made clear that under

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these exceptional circumstances it will be necessary to report concerns to the Safeguarding Officer named for the setting.

Digital information including interview recordings and transcripts will be anonymised and kept on a password protected computer with a recognized virus protection system, and stored in a secure and safe place. This will only be accessed by the researcher. Paper copies of recorded data/interviews will be stored in a secure building.

Real names and the names of settings will be reduced to codes, and anonymity will be maintained in written materials reporting the research.

Respect for the views of all participants, especially the voices of child participants, is central to this study, and integral to the philosophy and methodology of phase one. I will attempt to ensure that the views of children, parents and other adult participants are respected and straightforwardly represented. I will attempt to be reflective over the assumptions and judgments I bring when interpreting the data, and will actively seek the collaboration of participants in order to check whether I have accurately represented their views before recording my findings. I will attempt at all times to respect individual and cultural differences, including those involving disability, level of education and ability to engage, race, cultural origin and ethnicity, language, age, gender definition, religious affiliation, sexual orientation, marital or family status and socio-economic status.

Give details of the methods to be used for data collection and analysis and how you would ensure they do not cause any harm, detriment or unreasonable stress:

Phase One: Thematic analysis using an Interpretative Phenomenological approach.

Data Collection

Qualitative data will be obtained through a series of interviews using a semi-structured interview schedule derived through a process of hierarchical focussing (Tomlinson 1989). The purpose of the interviews is to elicit the views and ‘lived experience’ of each child and their family, and the teaching and psychology professionals supporting them, offering an opportunity to ‘tell their story’. Central questions will elicit participant’s views and experiences of their involvement with EPs, what role the EP has played, and what the participants feel they might have done to improve outcomes for the focus children. Interviews will take place either in participant’s homes on in the school or workplace setting, depending on participant’s preferences.

Data Analysis

Interviews will be recorded and fully transcribed and analysed into emerging themes using NVivo 5. Similarities and differences between the views and experiences of participants will be explored, and comparisons made between groups, for example, parents and teaching staff.

Phase Two: Design of an instrument to measure ‘readiness to learn’ and well-being in school

Data Collection

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Selected children from each of the 6 school settings, will participate in brief (15-20 minute) individual interviews. The purpose of these interviews will be to elicit their views on what helps them to feel happy and ‘ready to learn’ in school. A variety of approaches will be used, including narrative techniques, projective techniques, and drawings, individually chosen to be suitable to the age and ‘ability to engage’ of each participant. At the end of each interview, the researcher will agree the 3 most important emerging themes with the child and record them as short statements. These will be used as items in construction of the instrument. Participants will also order 7 ‘smiley’ faces to be used as a rating scale on the instrument. Interviews will take place in the school setting.

On a subsequent visit, a subset of the same participants will form a focus group to discuss the suitability of the items generated and to ensure that their views have been honestly and fully represented. The participants will help to choose up to 30 items for the final instrument. These will also be checked by Educational Psychologists who are experienced researchers and members of the Theory and Research Interest Group (TRIG) at the Psychology Service.

The 30 item instrument will be administered to between 30 and 50 children from each of 5 school settings, and as many children as practicable from the Special school setting. Additional support will be provided to any child who requires it in order to complete the instrument (a reader, amanuensis or help from their usual support staff).

Data Analysis of Phase Two:

Responses from the instruments will be entered into SPSS 15.0 for windows and analysed using exploratory factor analysis, to identify domains and any subscale structure. This will be guided by theoretical understanding from the literature, understandings from thematic analysis of the qualitative data obtained in phase 1, and the feedback provided by the children.

Give details of any other ethical issues which may arise from this project (e.g. secure storage of videos/recording interviews/photos/completed questionnaires or special arrangements made for participants with special needs etc.):

When the study is complete, all recorded information, personal information, transcripts and completed instruments will be destroyed. Digital information will be erased, and written information will be shredded before disposal.

Additional support will be provided for any child who wishes to participate but would be unable to do so unless supported by myself or their usual adult helper.

Give details of any exceptional factors, which may raise ethical issues (e.g. potential political or ideological conflicts which may pose danger or harm to participants):

Given the general nature of the data being collected about interactions with EPs and positive feelings about school, it is unlikely that participants will be distressed by any of the research activities in which they are asked to participate. However within the interview phase, it is possible that participants may be reminded of a difficult time in their lives which may cause distress. If this is the case, participants may be signposted to support services via the Parent Support Advisor in each school, or through the Psychology Service. All interview participants will be followed up by phone and made aware of the findings of phase 1 of the study, and any issues that may have arisen can be identified. I will also provide a contact phone number to all participants, either directly, or through the school settings.

Chair of the School’s Ethics Committee
updated. July 2010
This form should now be printed out, signed by you on the first page and sent to your supervisor to sign. Your supervisor will forward this document to the School’s Research Support Office for the Chair of the School’s Ethics Committee to countersign. A unique approval reference will be added and this certificate will be returned to you to be included at the back of your dissertation/thesis.

N.B. You should not start the fieldwork part of the project until you have the signature of your supervisor

This project has been approved for the period: Jan 2011 until: Jan 2012

By (above mentioned supervisor’s signature): Tim Marshall Date: 14th April 2011

N.B. To Supervisor: Please ensure that ethical issues are addressed annually in your report and if any changes in the research occur a further form is completed.

GSE unique approval reference: B17

Signed: Chair of the School’s Ethics Committee
date: 18/4/11

This form is available from: http://education.exeter.ac.uk/students/

Chair of the School’s Ethics Committee

updated: July 2010