

Eliciting the voice of children and young people in their Education, Health and Care Plans, and Annual Reviews: achieving meaningful participation

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Abstract

Eliciting the views, wishes and feelings of children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities became the primary element of a new law within England, as part of the Government's commitment to improving services for vulnerable children and their families, known as the Children and Families Act (2014). This thesis will explore the perspective of professionals within Local Authorities and specialist schools in England and how they elicit the voice of children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities during assessments for an Education, Health and Care Plan and their Annual Reviews. It also aims to develop group consensus on the characteristics of meaningful participation and provide solutions to perceived barriers in eliciting voice. An online-based questionnaire explored their attitudes, beliefs and opinions on eliciting voice; these were then followed up with six semi-structured interviews to further understand the factors that enable this and the barriers that are presented to both professionals and children and young people. Findings from the questionnaire and interviews show a varied approach to eliciting voice between professionals of different roles. Participants identified a range of enabling factors that support their role to elicit voice, whilst also identifying barriers that hinder the ability for children and young people to meaningfully engage in assessments and reviews. A Delphi study was also undertaken with eight professionals from one Local Authority and a local specialist school, in order to develop consensus on consultation based on the findings from the questionnaires and interviews. Through multiple iterations, the Delphi method developed consensus around the factors that enable professionals to elicit the voice meaningfully and provided solutions to overcome the barriers to participation. A document of good practice was produced from the findings and feedback was gathered on the usefulness and practicality of the document. This thesis concludes that despite a professional rhetoric of eliciting voice, the barriers within the field undermine the ability of professionals to do so consistently. By prioritising a child or young person's views within an assessment and using creative methods to elicit voice, professionals can overcome barriers to ensure their voice is heard. Implications for future practice and policy is discussed on ensuring a person-centred approach to Education, Health and Care Plans, and Annual Reviews.

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List of Abbreviations

AAC:	Alternative and Augmentative Communication
ARs:	Annual Reviews
ASD:	Autism Spectrum Disorder
BEI:	British Education Index
BME:	Black and Ethnic Minority
CDC:	Council for Disabled Children
CFA:	Children and Families Act
CoP:	Code of Practice
CYP:	Children and Young People
DBR:	Design-based Research
DfE:	Department for Education
DoH:	Department of Health
EHC:	Education, Health and Care
EHCP:	Education, Health and Care Plan
EP:	Educational Psychologist
ERC:	Education Research Complete
IEP:	Individual Educational Plan
LA:	Local Authority
LEA:	Local Education Authority
LDA:	Learning Difficulty Assessment
LSA:	Learning Support Assistant
MAPS:	Making Action Plans
MLD:	Moderate Learning Difficulties
MSI:	Multi-Sensory Impairment
NAS:	National Autistic Society

NASS:	National Association of Special Schools
Ofsted:	Office for Standards in Education, Children's services and Skills
PATH:	Planning Alternative Tomorrows with Hope
PCP:	Person Centred Planning
PCR:	Pupil Centred Review
PECS:	Picture Exchange Communication System
PfA:	Preparing for Adulthood
PMLD:	Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties
SALT:	Speech and Language Therapist
SD:	Standard Deviation
SEMH:	Social, Emotional and Mental Health
SENCO:	Special Educational Needs Coordinator
SEN:	Special Educational Needs
SEND:	Special Educational Needs and Disabilities
SO:	SEND Officer
TA:	Teaching Assistant
UK:	United Kingdom
UNCRC:	United Nations Convention on the Rights of The Child
UN:	United Nations

Chapter 1: Introduction

This introduction chapter aims to contextualise the proposed research study, which is an exploration of how the voice of Children and Young People (CYP) in England with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) are elicited by SEND professionals. Local Authority (LA) professionals and teaching staff within specialist schools play an integral role in eliciting the voice of CYP as part of their Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) assessments, and in their annual reviews (ARs). This thesis aims to explore their attitudes, beliefs and opinions on eliciting voice, whilst developing consensus about what meaningful participation looks like and how the barriers can be alleviated within practice.

The research took part in two phases; the first phase involved online-based questionnaires and interviews with professionals in LAs and specialist schools within England, in order to explore existing methods used, their opinions on pupil voice, and barriers they face within their practice. The second phase of the research involved eliciting expert opinion in both LAs and schools in order to reach a consensus on what constitutes as meaningful participation and to propose possible solutions to overcoming the limits to participation.

This chapter outlines the background and rationale of the research study from a policy, professional and personal standpoint, in order to provide context to the problem statement. This will be followed by a discussion of why this research is important in the context of the rights of the child and complying with statutory guidance for CYP with SEND. The 2015 SEND Code of Practice (CoP): 0-25 years, is a statutory document containing guidance for organisations which work with and support CYP who have SEND, developed by both the Department of Education (DfE) and Department of Health (DoH). The CoP (2015) states the views, wishes and feelings of CYP must be considered throughout assessments and meetings.

By highlighting the significance and scope of this research, the research aims are discussed based on the gap of knowledge within this area. The introduction then goes on to define key terms and concepts used throughout the thesis. Finally, this chapter concludes by providing an outline of the remaining chapters of the thesis.

1.1 Purpose of the research study

The purpose of the current study is to explore the views of SEND professionals within LAs and specialist schools within England around eliciting the voice of CYP with SEND. Specifically, it investigates their current opinions on the existing methods and tools they use, their views on pupil participation, the factors they feel help enable pupil voice, and the perceived barriers that inhibit their professional ability to meaningfully elicit the voice of CYP.

A further objective of this study is to reach group consensus around meaningful participation and how this can be achieved, in order to develop a document of good practice. This entails postulated actionable guidance for LA and school professionals by providing solutions to the barriers recognised within the field, in order to support their role in eliciting the voice of CYP with SEND during EHCP assessments and ARs.

1.2 Rationale of the research study

1.2.1 Policy rationale

Over 30 years have passed since the enactment of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989), where governments from all over the world, including the UK, pledged to uphold the rights of CYP. A topic that is often cited yet remains under-developed within research is the voice of CYP from disadvantaged groups such as those with SEND (Lundy, 2007). Article 12 in the UNCRC states CYPs right to express an opinion and to have that opinion considered when decisions are being made that affect them.

The DfE have since then developed policies to support practitioners in their duty to support CYP with SEND. As part of a government reform to improve services for CYP and their families, the Children and Families Act (CFA) was developed in 2014 as a way to allow a more person-centred approach to identification and assessment of CYP with SEND, through the introduction of EHCPs. The CoP (DfE, 2015) was then developed as guidance for professionals on their duties to support CYP with

SEND, which identified that although the views of CYP was always deemed as important within SEND, professionals now must ensure this is done within EHCP assessments and reviews.

*9.21 'Local authorities **must** have regard to the views, wishes and feelings of the child, child's parent or young person, their aspirations, the outcomes they wish to seek and the support they need to achieve them' (p.147).*

Both LAs and schools play a significant part in this process and are identified as 'front-line' practitioners who implement SEND policy into practice on a daily basis. The LA are required to identify and assess needs through an EHC needs assessment; decide on whether a CYP requires an EHCP; specify appropriate provision within the plan; and monitor the progress at least annually through the AR process, with the aim of improving outcomes for CYP with SEND. The assessment process is typically coordinated by the SEND team within each LA, however various professionals such as Educational Psychologist (EPs), health care professionals and social workers are all integral within the process. Schools then state if they can meet the needs of the CYP and deliver the provision required to support progress towards the specified outcomes within the EHCP. The LA is then responsible for monitoring this progress and ensuring schools are meeting need, which is done through the AR process. This is a review meeting done at least annually with all parties.

The policies and practices place an emphasis of the CYP being at the centre of the assessment, their views as integral components of EHCPs, and their direct involvement '*as far as possible*' (p.147). Although the values and ideologies of these policy documents are fundamental in providing structure and guidance for practitioners, the empirical evidence on the effectiveness of these legislative documents in capturing the voice of CYP are rather scarce (Palikara, Castro, Gaona & Eirinaki, 2018).

Many studies have examined the benefits of including CYP in decision-making processes (Cefai & Cooper, 2010; Hutzler, Fliess, Chacham, & Auweele, 2002; Shier, 1996; Hart, 1992) and this is actively advocated by the DfE (2014) and Ofsted (2010). Conversely, there are also studies that acknowledge that CYP with SEND remain on the periphery of decision-making despite the consistent rhetoric that professionals must elicit their views (Abbott, 2010; Pearlman & Michaels, 2019).

Literature has focused on the effectiveness of EHCPs in comparison to the previous assessment process of statementing and examined the quality of provision and outcomes specified within plan, however, to my knowledge, only one study has examined whether the voice of CYP is elicited within the EHCP process (Palikara, Castro, Gaona & Eirinaki, 2018). The researchers found disparities between type of school, region and primary need of the CYP. They concluded that; '*future research should endeavour to provide evidence to support the development of guidelines to improve the quality and comparability of the EHC planning process*' (p.7).

This study aims to do just that. By exploring current views across the nation and developing solutions through the Delphi method, the aim is to provide guidelines for professionals in order to improve the quality of the EHCP and AR process by ensuring a person-centred approach to assessments and meetings. This posits the policy rationale for this study; to ensure the voice of CYP remain at the centre as per the CoP (2015) guidelines.

1.2.2 Professional rationale

My interest in this particular area arises from my role as a Local Authority professional within the SEND team. Although every LA has a different structure within their Education and Inclusion department, usually the SEND team coordinate with various professionals as part of the EHC needs assessment. A typical structure of the inclusion team within an LA can be seen in figure 1.1 below. The SEND officers (SO) also coordinate with outside agencies as part of the assessment, including professionals within schools, health and social care.

As a senior officer within the team, I have experienced the barriers when eliciting pupil voice first-hand. I currently undertake EHCP assessments and attend ARs, as required by the CoP (2015) and CFA (2014), supporting both my staff and schools with this process. The CYPs views are integral to both processes and I feel it is equally my professional and personal duty to advocate for the rights of the child as per the UNCRC.

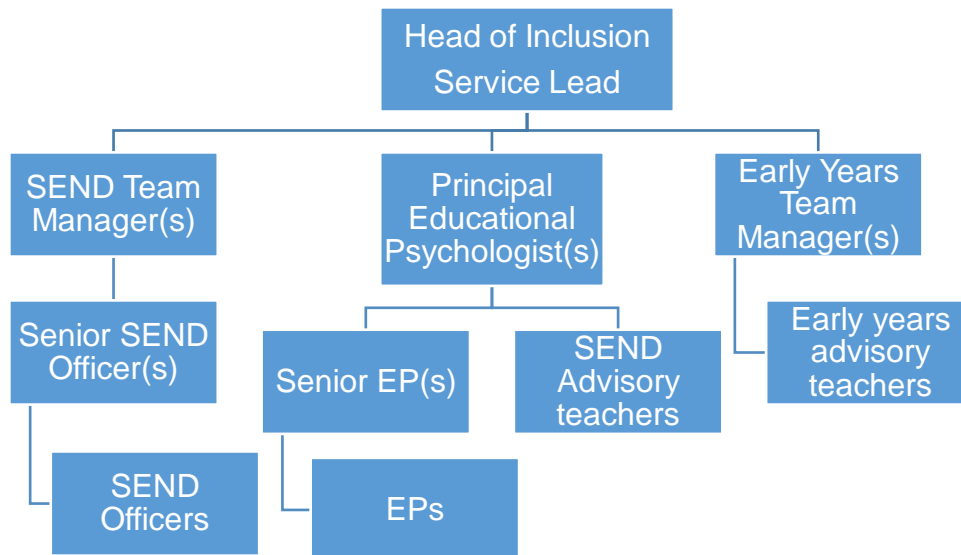


Figure 1.1: Structure of the Inclusion team within LAs

Previously, I have worked in specialist schools for CYP with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) as both a teacher and support staff. A specialist school provide education for CYP with SEND whose needs cannot be met within a mainstream setting. In January 2019, 22% of all CYP with EHCPs attended a specialist school in England¹. Whilst working in these schools, I felt there was a strong ethos from the staff about eliciting the voice of the pupils in every decision that affected them. Majority of the pupils within these schools had a high level of complex needs and many used alternative forms of communication. Staff had a range of methods at their disposal, tailored to the communication style of the CYP, and made readily available in all situations. This included software on iPad's, visuals attached to each member of staff to aid communication, and training of Makaton signing for all teaching and non-teaching staff. However, my experience as an LA officer was different. There was a lack of training on communication methods and the process of eliciting voice. Officers within the SEND team do not always have the skills to elicit voice, nor the opportunity to even attempt this. Similarly, ARs at schools were being carried out without the CYP present, and their views being mediated through the adults around

¹ SEN2 Data accessed December 2019:
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/805014/SEN2_2019_text.pdf

them. This led me to question why the professional ethos to elicit voice was not being translated into practice.

There is a clear rhetoric within national SEND policy to listen to the voice of the CYP and aspirations to include them throughout the process (CoP, 2015), however anecdotal discussions with colleagues and my first-hand experiences led me to believe that CYP are not always included in the process, and that is for many reasons. Firstly, the difficulty in eliciting pupil voice past a basic question and answering scenario proves to be problematic. If a CYP cannot answer a questionnaire presented to them by professionals, the alternative often meant reverting to asking the adults who knew them best. This is linked to the second barrier; the exhaustive time commitments of an LA officer. The role requires a high workload, which is an identified factor of stress for LA officers (Hellawell, 2015). Therefore, taking the time to elicit voice using innovative methods is desirable, however not essential for staff due to their statutory duties, and so often not seen as a priority. I also noticed the time commitment of schools to carry out ARs often meant the CYP did not get as much opportunity to discuss their views or fully understand the content of the meetings. The third barrier I have noticed was the lack of resources available to both LAs and schools, along with the lack of training in alternative methods. School staff appear to have more training in this area than LA staff, however not all schools show a consistent level of training in communication techniques and therefore experiences seem to vary based on the school. Finally, the most significant barrier in my opinion is the ambiguous guidance by the DfE around how a professional can overcome these barriers.

There is a lack of literature and advice around how SEND professionals can meaningfully elicit a CYP's views who all present with a varying degree of need, whilst providing actionable solutions to the barriers listed above. It is likely that I was not the only one who felt these challenges in my professional ability to elicit pupil voice, and therefore I wanted to focus on the experiences of SEND professionals. LAs and school are also often subject to scrutiny from parties such as the Office for Standards in Education, Children's services and Skills (Ofsted), who carry out inspections on services providing education, skills and care for CYP. These roles experience high levels of stress and burnout associated with the pressures of

supporting CYP (Hellawell, 2015; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2007) and therefore this study aimed to be an empowering experience for SEND professionals to share their views, the barriers they face and allow for the opportunity to collaboratively formulate solutions to the limitations of eliciting voice. By exploring the barriers from the perspective of LA professionals and teaching staff within a wider context allows a deeper insight to the daily complications experienced by SEND professionals. These barriers can then be addressed in order to formulate solutions as a way forward in a practical and realistic way.

This study encapsulates the theoretical dimensions of Bandura's social-cognitive theory (1977) and the construct of self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is the belief about one's ability to successfully carry out a course of action. Perceived self-efficacy relates to people's own beliefs on their capabilities to produce a given achievement, where self-efficacy can play a role in how an individual will approach a goal, task or challenge. This study uses the theoretical underpinnings of self-efficacy to explore whether SEND professionals perceived confidence in their professional abilities contribute to meaningfully eliciting pupil voice.

This research is funded by the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities team within a Local Authority and aims to benefit the service by improving practice. I am motivated to ensure LAs and schools have a consistent approach to eliciting CYPs voice and by implementing a clear process for one LA within a local context this can hopefully be a useful document of national relevance. It is therefore my observations working as both a teacher in a specialist setting and as a LA representative within the SEND team that prompted the professional rationale for this study.


1.2.3 Personal rationale

Any study to this depth also requires a personal motive. My interest in the area of pupil voice stems from my own personal philosophy; every child, no matter his or her needs, has the right to be heard, and it is our role as the adults in CYP's lives to elicit their voice and action accordingly. A running theme throughout this thesis however will highlight that bringing personal beliefs into fruition is a national difficulty. Many practitioners also have a personal philosophy to ensure CYP are at the centre and

recognise their importance as the key agent in any decision-making processes. However, given the complex and individual needs of each CYP with SEND, professional practice does not always allow for this. My personal motive therefore is to embed a listening culture from an early age, in all adults who interact with CYP with SEND, and achieve 'inter-connectedness' between theory and practice.

In my view, theory development in social sciences needs to be linked to an in-depth understanding of the practical barriers faced by those on the front-line, in this case the LAs and schools responsible for developing and maintaining EHCPs and ARs. The guidelines formed by the DfE (2015) may have acknowledged the barriers practitioners face but have not provided actionable guidance or solutions to these barriers, and therefore further work is needed within this area.

In undertaking research in an area where I have both personal and professional interest, it is imperative to outline any potential bias from the offset. The ethical considerations and my role as an 'insider' are discussed within the methodology and discussion sections of this thesis. However, within the introduction I would like to summarise the potential benefits of my 'insider' role as an LA professional and my previous experiences working in a specialist school, whilst also acknowledging potential areas of bias. This is highlighted in figure 1.2 below. By acknowledging my biases from the outset, I can make a conscious effort to sustain my presuppositions and approach each phase of the study with a fresh perspective every time, a perspective known as *epoche* or 'bracketing' (Moustakas, 1994; Radnor, 2001). This is discussed in detail in chapter 3.10.3.



Potential Benefits	Potential Bias
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In depth experience of EHCP and AR process - In a position to implement positive change - Detailed experience of barriers of eliciting voice - Awareness of different methods to elicit pupil voice - In-depth knowledge of the CoP - Easier access to participant sample due to links with schools and other LAs - Allow insight to the feelings and views of practitioners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - May lead to bias of responses from participants to be more positive due to my senior position within the LA - fear of reprimanding - My own personal experiences may influence the views of other practitioners - Over-estimation of LA influence <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Over-generalisation of the processes of change to other LAs - Under-estimation of contextual differences

Figure 1.2: Identifying potential benefits and bias that may arise from my connections to the research area

I concluded that the benefits of the study outweighed the biases due to the potential it holds to better practice and support the role of both LA professionals and school staff in effectively eliciting pupil voice, and therefore my personal rationale interlinks to both the policy and professional basis detailed above. This study has the potential to positively impact both professionals and CYP with SEND, to ensure a person-centred approach to EHCP assessments and ARs, and therefore I feel it is vital to delve into the views of SEND professionals in order to support them in their role. This in turn will benefit CYP to be not only listened to, but heard.

1.3 Definitions

The thesis has three main areas that must be defined in order to provide clarity for the reader, this includes; (1) the Child or Young Person, (2) Special Educational Needs and Disabilities, and (3) concept of the voice of the CYP. Other factors will be defined as and when they arise, within the literature review and methodology.

1.3.1 *Child or Young Person (CYP)*

This thesis aims to improve practice in order to ensure that Children and Young People (CYP) with SEND are the centre of all assessments and decision-making processes. CYP is the over-arching terminology to encompass both children, and young people. The distinction therefore that needs to be clarified, is at what point a child becomes a young person.

The Mental Capacity Act (2005) refers to 'children' as anyone aged below 16 and a 'young person' as a person aged 16-17, and then an 'adult' if they are 18 plus. The CFA (2014) similarly define a person under compulsory school age, which is 16, as a 'child', but a person over compulsory school age yet under 25 as a 'young person'. This suggests adulthood begins after 25 when a CYP has SEND; for this reason, SEND assessments and EHCPs were extended to age 25 to support transition into adulthood (CoP, 2015). Once a child becomes a young person, they are entitled to make decisions in relation to the Act on their own behalf, instead of parents making choices for them. This study does not look at how professionals elicit voice for a CYP over 16, as it is interested in allowing CYP of all ages to have a voice and aims to explore how LAs and schools do this for school-aged CYP.

Although the distinction in literature tends to be in relation to under and over 16 years of age, the Preparing for Adulthood (PfA) agenda refers to 'young people' as being 14 years and older, at which point they should begin to have conversations around adulthood. The PfA agenda is a key programme funded by the DfE (2014) to support young people getting into paid employment; good health; independent living options; and friends, relationship and community inclusion. The PfA agenda is an integral policy for SEND professionals and so under this definition, a young person would be a pupil who is in year 9 and above. At the year 9 AR, both LA and school staff would begin discussions around adulthood and amend the EHCP to reflect how a CYP is preparing for adulthood.

Therefore, this study adopts this definition and refers to children as below year 9, and young people as year 9 pupils and above. For the purpose of the thesis, the term 'CYP' will be used to encompass all pupils within the discussions, unless

explicitly referencing a specific group. The term CYP will be used to refer to both the singular 'child and young person' and the plural 'children and young people'; the reader should interpret this based on the context.

1.3.2 *Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)*

The term 'SEND' refers to two distinct yet interlinked concepts; Special Educational Needs (SEN) and Disability. SEN was initially referred to as a learning difficulty, where a CYP has '*significantly greater difficulty learning than the majority of children the same age*' (Education Act, 1996). The Disability Discrimination Act (1995) and Equality Act (2010) provided the legal definition of disability as '*a physical or mental impairment that has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on his or her ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.*' Both acts were implemented in order to end discrimination for disabled people and was extended in 2005 to include this within the context of education.

The literature review below outlines the legislative history on SEN and disability in England, demonstrating that as the understanding of SEND evolved, so did the definition. The principles of both SEN legislation (Education Act, 1996) and the Disability Discrimination Act (1995) has led to the collective term of 'SEND' being used to encompass both a special educational need, and a disability. By definition, some CYP will have both SEN and a disability, whilst some may only have one or the other. However, the dual legislative system introduced by the Labour Government led to confusion amongst SEND professionals in using one term to encompass two different concepts with their own distinctive provisions (Norwich, 2014).

Whilst definitions of SEND are open to interpretation, for the purpose of this paper, SEND will be defined based on the definition provided in England by the CoP (2015) and the associated CFA (2014), as this is the key legislative policy that this thesis has derived from. They combine both SEN and disability under one umbrella (p.15-16).

'A CYP has SEN if they have a learning difficulty or disability which calls for special educational provision to be made for him or her.

A child of compulsory school age or a young person has a learning difficulty or disability if he or she:

- a) has a significantly greater difficulty in learning than the majority of others of the same age, or*
- b) has a disability which prevents or hinders him or her from making use of facilities of a kind generally provided for others of the same age in mainstream schools or mainstream post-16 institutions'*

CYP may require additional provision within schools, over and beyond what is provided for all pupils. If a CYP presents with a high level of needs, it is the duty of the LA to carry out an Education, Health and Care (EHC) needs assessment, to determine whether a CYP requires an EHCP. Schools must also take relevant and purposeful action to identify, assess and meet the needs of CYP with SEND and can apply for an EHCP if the CYP has not made expected progress despite the various interventions put into place. The EHC needs assessment explores four main areas of need; communication and interaction difficulties; cognition and learning difficulties; social, emotional and mental health needs (SEMH); and sensory and physical difficulties. Again, some CYP may have needs in all four areas, whilst some may only have needs in a selected few. This thesis does not attempt to provide an in-depth description of EHCPs, or other research areas related to this such as high-quality provision, outcomes, or the view of the parent/carers. A basic overview of the process will be discussed within the literature review to provide the reader with an understanding of the purpose of an EHCP.

1.3.3 The voice of the CYP

The term 'voice of the CYP' can be operationalised as ways of listening to the views of pupils and/or involving them in decision-making within the educational context (DfE, 2014). The CoP refers to this as 'views' of the CYP, where they are to be '*involved as far as possible*' (9.21). The ambiguity in what constitutes 'voice' has led to misinterpretations and the lack of CYPs involvement by professionals. Capturing the views often is interpreted as asking the CYP questions around their likes and dislikes,

where LAs and schools often have templates of questions to ask for EHC assessments and ARs (Bradwell, 2019). Some researchers argue this is a CYPs preference at the time of questioning and is not equivalent to their views on their education (Pearlman & Michaels, 2019). Additionally, this narrow perception of voice being defined as 'vocal speech' defies Article 13 of the UNCRC (1989), where a child has the right to express themselves in any medium they deem appropriate. The views of a CYP can be expressed through different forms of communication, which will be discussed in detail within the literature section.

Although there are discrepancies within the definitions, which will be further highlighted within the literature review, this thesis will use the term pupil voice; views of the CYP; pupil consultation; pupil participation and; voice of the CYP, interchangeably.

1.4 Research aims and approach

The overall aim of this study is to explore the current views and opinions of LA professionals and specialist school staff on a range of topics around pupil consultation during assessments and reviews. There is sparse literature that focuses on the opinions and views of this group, and even less of a focus on providing solutions to the difficulties they experience in daily practice.

This study intends to address two over-arching research aims, which are operationalised into research questions within Chapter 3.

1. To explore how professionals within Local Authorities and specialist schools in England elicit the voice of CYP with SEND during EHCP assessments and ARs.
2. To develop group consensus from a range of SEND professionals on the characteristics of meaningful participation and provide solutions to perceived barriers in eliciting voice.

In order to address the aims of the current study, two distinct phases were completed. The first phase aimed to answer the first research aim, whilst the second phase aimed to answer the second research aim.

The first phase was the exploration of the current methods and tools used by LAs and specialist schools within England, whilst also exploring their opinions on pupil voice, factors they felt supported them in their role, and factors that presented as barriers to capturing voice of CYP. This exploratory phase was done through a mixed-methods approach consisting of an internet-based questionnaire and semi-structured interviews with LA professionals and school staff who are involved in the process of eliciting pupil voice during EHC assessments and ARs, with a particular focus on the perceived barriers within the field.

Rather than simply stopping at this point, the thesis wished to extend this further by offering a solution to the barriers in eliciting voice as perceived by SEND professionals. By analysing the data provided in the first part of the study, an expert panel was then able to provide possible solutions to these problems within the second part of the study. This study therefore acknowledges the barriers within the field but uses this as an impetus for overcoming barriers through collaborative thinking and discussions with those who are front line in eliciting the voice of CYP with SEND. The second phase of the study therefore required an iterative, on-going approach to identifying key barriers and providing solutions. By using the Delphi method, the second phase of the study allowed experts in the field to collaborate through an anonymous method and develop group consensus on what constitutes as meaningful participation. This study aims to produce a document of good practice based on the opinions produced in the Delphi method, which details the barriers identified and actionable solutions for professionals to utilise in daily practice.

1.5 Thesis outline

This thesis begins with a literature review in chapter 2, which provides an overview on the current literature around the topic of pupil voice and the various strands attached to this contemporary issue. The literature review aims to contextualise the thesis in order to provide the reader a summarised history of pupil voice in SEND and a clear overview on all aspects pertaining to it. It explores the law and legislation around the rights of the child and CYP with SEND, whilst detailing how pupil voice became part of current legislation. It discusses EHCPs and the stipulations around

including the voice of the CYP within assessments and reviews, the role LAs and schools play in this, and a critical analysis of the findings within this topic area. It then homes in on specific enabling factors when eliciting pupil voice, the barriers already known within the field, and the ethical considerations around eliciting the voice of CYP with SEND. The literature review then goes on to broadly describe and analyse a range of existing methods and tools available to professionals to use in their daily practice. It concludes by highlighting the gaps within the literature, which led to the development of this study.

Chapter 3 describes the methodological approach used in the study to explore existing methods and tools, current opinions on pupil voice, and the formation of an expert panel to tackle the barriers identified within the field. It describes the creation of the survey tool, which was used to explore current practice within LAs and schools in England, whilst justifying the use of a mixed methods approach to corroborate findings and illustrate the results. It discusses the interviews with selected individuals and the process of thematic analysis to identify key codes within the topic area. The codes were analysed further, and five key themes were identified for the purpose of phase two. The methodology chapter details the Delphi method and how it was implemented within this study in order to reach group consensus. The chapter concludes with the ethical considerations throughout the study and discusses pertinent issues within research such as my insider role as both a researcher and a professional within the field.

The thesis could be viewed as two separate studies; the first exploring current views of professionals on the methods and tools to elicit pupil voice, and the second as developing actionable guidance based on professional judgment. The findings were therefore broken down into two chapters; chapter 4 provides the findings from phase one of the study and chapter 5 provides the findings of phase two. The reason for this was to clearly exemplify what each phase of the study uncovered. Despite the distinction between the two phases of the study, they remain interlinked and connected. The findings from phase one of the study informed the design and implementation of phase two; the existing barriers globally recognised within the field informed what questions to ask the expert panel in the Delphi method. Chapter 5

concludes with the document of good practice produced as a result of the findings and the co-production of the panellists included within phase two of the study.

This thesis ends with chapter 6, which provides a discussion on the analysis of the findings; providing a summary for each phase and combining the findings to link both research aims together. It refocuses the integrated data in order to highlight some of the most significant findings into a discussion of their relevance to the individual research questions. The strengths and limitations of this thesis are discussed, along with the contribution to knowledge and recommendations for future research and practice. This chapter concludes by answering the problem statement and how this study has provided a unique perspective on the professional role in eliciting voice of CYP with SEND.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This literature review aims to consider and evaluate the relevant literature around pupil voice for CYP with SEND, the process of conducting this review is described below. This chapter begins with a discussion around international policy on the rights of the child and how England has formulated key legislative policy and practice in order to comply within a national context. By exploring the laws and legislations within a global context, the literature highlights how the emphasis on pupil voice has developed the Government's current position on the rights of the child, and the duty of the LA and schools in supporting CYP with SEND within England. It introduces EHCPs and the obligation of the LA and schools to elicit pupil voice throughout the process, and an evaluation of how effectively this is currently being done. The chapter then discusses the person-centred planning (PCP) approach and how the ethos towards inclusive practice has developed through legislation.

The identified enabling factors that facilitate pupil voice are then discussed, whilst also addressing the existing barriers present within the field. The barriers epitomise the need for an exploration of the methods and tools used, an examination of the benefits, and the necessity to implement an effective strategy for professionals to overcome these potential barriers. There is a discussion around the ethical considerations of pupil voice, and the opposing viewpoints on whether CYP with SEND can meaningfully express their views, without the assumption and generalisations from the professionals around them. The methods and tools used to elicit voice by professionals are then discussed; whilst evaluating the strengths and difficulties of these approaches. The chapter concludes by summarising the review and developing a focused problem statement that has emerged from the controversial issues within this literature review.

(i) How the literature search was conducted

A review of the literature was carried out between December 2017 and July 2020, using a number of strategies. One strategy involved a formal search on two databases; Education Research Complete (ERC), and the British Education Index (BEI). Prior to the search, key terms for the literature review were identified and

grouped into clusters. Synonyms for these key terms were listed and several advanced searches were carried out using these terms. Relevant articles were chosen based on reading the abstract and if there was any relevance to pupil voice, consultation and participation for CYP with SEND; the search terms and number of relevant hits can be seen in table 2.1. After reading relevant papers, the key references and citations that were mentioned in their literature were followed up; this proved to be another useful strategy.

<i>Date</i>	<i>Database</i>	<i>Search Term Used</i>	<i>Synonyms of search term</i>	<i>No. of Hits (No. of Relevant Hits)</i>
July 2018	BEI	Special Education + Pupil Voice	EHCP	20 (5)
September 2018	ERC	Pupil Centered + Special Needs	Pupil Participation	83 (3)
October 2018	ERC	Pupil Centered Planning		2 (2)
June 2018	ERC	Local Authority + Education, Health and Care Plan + Pupil Voice	EHCP	12 (5)
September 2018	ERC	Barriers + Pupil Voice		2 (10)
January 2019	ERC	Annual Review + Special Education	SEND	27 (3)
March 2019	ERC	Listening to young people	Voice	74 (11)
September 2019	BEI	Code of practice	SEND	18 (10)

Table 2.1: Literature search strategies

Articles that focused on the mainstream population and did not mention pupils with SEND were excluded for the purpose of this study. Literature exploring pupil voice were limited to post 2000 in order to provide an accurate reflection on current issues, with a particular focus on articles post the 2014 SEND reforms, which is discussed in detail in chapter 2.2.3. However, there was no date limitations around the literature detailing guidelines and policy in order to provide a comprehensive history of pupil consultation, and how it has changed over the years. Although international policy was explored to provide a wider context on the issue of pupil voice, the focus of this study was on current practices within LAs and schools in England and so particular emphasis was placed on policy and practice within this context.

SEND can be a wide field in terms of need, where the needs of the CYP may impact their ability to meaningfully participate in meetings. However, this thesis focused on CYP with SEND as a whole and the wider picture of pupil voice. Studies that have focused on specific needs are discussed within the review, in order to exemplify the barriers faced by CYP. Papers with both small and large sample sizes were also included, due to the pragmatics of obtaining studies with larger samples.

The websites of charitable organisations and relevant government departments that apply to England were explored for publications applicable to pupil voice. For example, the Department for Education (DfE) website was extensively used in reference to the SEND Code of Practice (CoP) and current statutory guidelines for LAs and schools. Charitable organisation websites involved in SEND research such as Council for Disabled Children (CDC) had valuable resources relevant to the research study, such as *'top tips for professionals who support children and young people to participate in their Education, Health and Care Plan'*². This factsheet is co-produced with CYP with SEND, as are the various other reports and factsheets on the CDC website, which remains an important source that actively showcase the voice of CYP with SEND.

² Can be accessed here: <https://councilfordisabledchildren.org.uk/help-resources/resources/top-tips-professionals-support-children-and-young-people-participate-their-ehc-plan>

2.2 Laws, Legislations and policies in England around pupil voice for CYP with SEND

2.2.1 The rights of CYP with SEND

The most widely ratified international human rights treaty in history that recognised children's interests and rights came from the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). The convention has 54 articles that cover all aspects of a child's life, and set out the civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights that all children are entitled to. It sets out that all CYP, regardless of their ability, have a right to express themselves. It also explains how governments must work towards ensuring children receive the rights they are entitled to. Article 7 of the UNCRC states the rights of children with disabilities to express their views and article 12 gave children the rights of participation;

Article 7

States Parties shall ensure that children with disabilities have the right to express their views freely on all matters affecting them, their views being given due weight in accordance with their age and maturity, on an equal basis with other children, and to be provided with disability and age-appropriate assistance to realize that right.

Article 12

States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.

CYP have the right to express an opinion and to have that opinion taken into account when decisions are being made on any matter that affects them. Article 13 of the UNCRC goes on to define that communication is not limited to verbal language and CYP can express themselves in other means;

Article 13

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

The UNCRC has been identified as the most prominent legislative drive towards increasing the participation of CYP and acknowledging them as key stakeholders in their own lives (Willow, 2002; VIPER, 2013). However, despite 30 years of laws and legislations that stress the importance of the child's voice, as discussed in detail below, the international recognition of children's rights in relation to educational decision-making has not been translated effectively in a local context (Lundy, 2007).

England has been highlighted as one of the few countries known for not embedding the UNCRC within daily practice (Payne, 2017; Bradwell, 2019), where consultation is often still one of the provisions most disregarded in children's lives (Sheir, 2001). Despite a perceived shift in ethos in the government narrative towards an inclusive and child-centred approach, the imbalance of power in educational policy showcase that the culture in England remains with the expectation that children listen to adults and only speak when asked to, around topics chosen for them (Bradwell, 2019). This poses question to how much the culture within England has evolved in regard to listening to the pupil voice since the introduction of the 1944 Education Act, where children's views were virtually non-existent.

Historically, under the 1944 Education Act, children's education was based around their age, aptitude and ability, and those who were '*able to benefit*' from education became the responsibility of the LA, leaving those who were '*uneducable*' under the care of the National Health Services. The UK saw a rise in special schools during 1945 to 1972 of a 176.29% increase, where CYP would receive '*special education treatment*' away from their mainstream peers (Tutt & Williams, 2015). Children had no input over this decision nor is the term 'voice' used within the act, or even considered relevant at this period of time. It was not until the Education Act of 1970, which brought all children, including those with 'significant' special educational needs, into the education system for the first time. Mary Warnock reviewed the education that 'handicapped' children were receiving and published the 'Report of the Committee of Enquiry into the Education of Handicapped Children and Young People', most commonly known as the Warnock Report (1978). This work resulted in the term 'Handicapped' to be replaced with the progressive term of 'special educational needs' or SEN. The Warnock report introduced the concept of a CYP

with SEN as an individual, who has individual needs, as opposed to placing children into categories of need.

This then gave rise to the 1981 Education Act, which aimed to address the problem of segregation by setting out a process of 'Statements of SEN', which was the requirement of the Local Education Authority (LEA) to identify and assess pupils with SEN and those who may require alternative provision, such as a specialist provision, in order to cater for their needs. A Statement of SEN was a legal document which set out the CYP's needs and what additional support was required for them to make progress in school. Older pupils in college also received a Learning Difficulty Assessment (LDA), which determined the level of support and funding needed for a young person to access their educational establishment. The statement was the first legally binding document that set out the responsibilities of the LA to the parent and CYP between ages 3-18 years old. Again, there is no mention of voice, rather the imperative duty of the LA to make an assessment '*in such a manner as the LEA consider appropriate*' and arrange special education provision as needed for the CYP, leaving the decisions in the hands of the LA.

The Warnock report is regarded by government as a '*key milestone in the history of SEN and still underpins current legislation*' (Ofsted, 2010), however the way the concept of SEN has been used in theory and practice has remained contentious from its initial inception in the Warnock report (Norwich, 2014). Warnock discusses the importance of the parent-school relationship in order to provide support for the child, yet there is no mention of the pupil-school relationship, despite the acknowledgement that fostering positive relationships between staff and pupils lead to collaborative approaches to tackle the difficulties experienced by CYP in school (Goodman & Burton, 2010). A whole document search of the Warnock Report shows no findings of the word 'voice'. 31 matches of 'views' are found, however notably refer to the views of the parent or school, not the pupil.

Pupil preference is only considered on the section on preparing for employment, however does not directly mention gaining views from the young person themselves on where they would like to work, rather the advice of the 'professional' who is allocated to support the young person.

'the local education authority should consult and take into account the views of the young person's Named Person, who will usually be the careers officer or his specialist colleague' (9.17).

After the introduction of the UNCRC (1989); England acknowledged that their current legislation was not representative of their commitment to the rights of the child. The Children's Act (1989) was the first policy within England that established that LAs must ascertain the wishes of children in their care, and where a child has complex needs then arrangements must be made to establish their views as this cannot be presumed by professionals.

On an international level, the rights of the child continued to drive towards an inclusive ethos; the 1994 UNESCO Salamanca world conference on SEN gave rise to an agreed statement towards the education of all disabled children, where inclusion was to be the norm. This explicitly led to all countries embedding the concept of inclusion within their education policies and practices, so all children had better access to a mainstream school environment. The shift towards an inclusive society was reflected within the UK 1993 Education Act, which placed a statutory duty on the government to support CYP with SEND to access mainstream schools. Guidance for LAs and schools were seen as a compulsory aspect of this agenda, and so the first SEND Code of Practice (CoP) was introduced in 1994. This served as statutory guidance and practical advice for LAs, maintained schools, and early education settings around identifying and assessing the needs of CYP with SEND, and making appropriate provision for their educational needs as described in their SEN statement. The CoP will be discussed in further detail below.

In the 1997 Green Paper *Excellence for All Children Meeting Special Educational Needs* under the new Labour Government, public support was given to the United Nations (UN) statement towards inclusive education, where mainstream schools were expected to extend their capacity to provide support for children with a wide range of needs. This growing legislation within the UK illustrated a shift from the previous medical model of disability, where people were defined as disabled due to their impairments or differences, to a social model of disability where disability is caused not by their differences but by the way society views those differences. These hindrances placed on those with disabilities include physical, economical and material barriers. Advocates of the social model therefore promote inclusivity through

changes on a societal level; such as implications of policy within England for schools, and for teachers and LAs to ensure CYP have their voices heard (Coates & Vickerman, 2013).

Various acts, legislation and research have followed these policies with the aim to include all children within a common education framework regardless of need; have their voice listened and acted on; and participate in decision-making around their education, health and social care (Valuing People, 2001; Every Child Matters, 2003; Putting People First, 2007; Equality Act, 2010; DfE, 2015). Education is a devolved matter in the UK and therefore different areas of the UK have different legislative contexts. For this purpose, this study looked at the context of SEND policy within England, and not the other areas of the UK such as Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

It is also important to highlight the differences in legislative documents within SEND policy; researchers have often produced reports and papers to summarise certain aspects of education that are not legally binding documents, but has often led to the development of Bills, Acts or statutory guidance. An Act creates a new law or changes an existing law that requires approval by parliament and has received Royal Assent from the Monarchy. The Government are then responsible for bringing Acts into force. Statutory guidance often accompanies new Acts, in order to support professionals to comply with the changes in law. Table 2.2 summarises the key developments in SEND policy that directly impacted England's legislation around pupil voice, for example, the Children and Families Act (2014) was the Act that led to the development of statutory guidance, the Code of Practice (2015). Policy within England therefore began to highlight this notable shift in SEN culture to a society that began to consider a child-centred plan based on individual need, as opposed to categorising children based on their disability (Norwich, 2002).

National Policy	Changes to SEND	Implications for pupil voice and decision-making
Warnock Report 1978	Coined the terminology of 'SEN' and introduction of education to all CYP	Treat CYP as individuals regardless of disability
Education Acts 1981,1993 and 1996	A statutory duty was placed on the Secretary of State of Education to set out a SEND code of practice for schools and governing bodies, and have a statement of SEN for those requiring additional provision	Power to parents over the SEN needs of their child. No mention of pupil contributing themselves.
The Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs. Came into effect on September 1st, 1994	Assessment of needs which may lead to a statement of SEN. Schools, LAs, Health and Social care services had to support the development of a transition plan after the child's 14th birthday.	Power to parents over the SEN needs of their child. No mention of pupil contributing themselves.
Special Educational Needs and Disability Act, 2001 and the Code of Practice, 2001	Prohibited all schools from discriminating against disabled children and required them to take reasonable steps to ensure that young people with SEND were not placed at a substantial disadvantage.	Pupil participation was a main focal point. All CYP have a right to express an opinion and have that considered when making decisions that matter to them. Duty to professionals to provide adjustments to allow all CYP to communicate their views.
"Valuing People" White Paper, 2001	Introduced person-centered planning (PCP) which focused on helping the individual concerned to plan their life and support requirements.	Led to developments of PCP tools to ensure that CYP are able to express themselves, regardless of need.
Every Child Matters, 2003	All children need to be consulted with, including those with SEND	Children must be consulted around five main outcomes: to be healthy, stay safe, enjoy and achieve, make a positive contribution, and achieve economic well-being.
Equality Act 2010	The Act provides a single, consolidated source of discrimination law, covering all the types of discrimination that are unlawful. Failing to make reasonable adjustments for disable pupils became unlawful.	CYP must be provided auxiliary aids where needed, to help access the curriculum and thereby express their views.
Children and Families Act, 2014 which led to the SEND Reforms 2014 and Code of Practice, 2015 (discussed below)	Led to the development of a new Code of Practice and regulations. Extended the support for disabled people to the age of 25 to focus more explicitly on the outcomes of individuals post school or college, and has led to the implementation of one all-encompassing single-assessment process: the "Education, Health and Care Plan" (EHCP)	The CYP's views and aspirations should be at the heart of the EHCP assessment, and central to all reviews.

Table 2:2: Key developments in SEND Policy in England; a national context

Stemming from Article 12 of the UNCRC (1989), being listened to and taken seriously should be a fundamental human right, and that view should always be considered regardless of the output it generates (Willow, 2002). Under the Labour government, the 'Every Child Matters' (2003) agenda identified the government's aim to ensure every child, regardless of background, need or circumstance, is consulted in order to achieve the key aims of being healthy, safe, achieve economic wellbeing, achieve, and make a positive contribution. Thus, by focusing on disadvantaged groups, such as CYP with SEND, the government was motivated on narrowing the gap by raising standards, introducing priorities to professionals, reducing bureaucracy and increasing information for parents through a multi-agency approach. However, this was over-ridden in the 2010 Conservative and Liberal Democrat Coalition; the emphasis was put on health visitors and social workers to carry out checks at home to ensure appropriate safeguarding of CYP. It is evident that the political vagaries within England shaped the approach of pupil consultation, and as policies developed the CoP was refined in 2001, and then again in 2014 to reflect the government's ever-changing position on SEND.

The three main aims for professionals that stemmed from the UNCRC (1989) was to ensure CYP have their right to be protected, participate in decision-making, and have appropriate provision made for them. However, as the analysis on the literature begins to unfold, the focus seemed to be more on protection and provision, and less on participation.

2.2.2 Adhering to Article 12

Guidance increasingly began to embed the concept that the CYPs views should be central to any decision-making process. Being listened to within a CYPs setting refers to listening to the 'pupil voice'. The term 'pupil voice' can be operationalised as ways of listening to the views of pupils and/or involving them in decision-making within the educational context (DfE, 2014). It appears to be a multi-layered concept consisting of many different processes, with no one agreed definition. This lack of clarity on what constitutes as a 'voice' allows room for ambiguity in professional

approach, where some practitioners remain with the narrow perception that voice only constitutes of vocal speech (Bradwell, 2019).

Article 12 became the central focus of work throughout the 90s, where models of participation and documentation of good practice were developed to advise others on how to elicit the voice of the CYP (Hart, 1992; Shier, 1996; Willow, 1997). The DfE (2003) produced a consultation paper entitled '*Working Together: Giving Children and Young People a Say*', which defined pupil participation as '*working in partnership with children and young people and valuing their views*' (p.3). This provided guidance for schools and LAs to promote pupil consultation by encouraging CYP to be active participants in their education through school committees, improving services available to them, and developing knowledge and key skills that CYP will need as they transition into adulthood. At a national level, there are examples of concrete child participation, such as the introduction of children's parliaments, youth councils, and student councils in schools (Doek, 2009).

Despite the CoP (2001) placing the duty of the LA to elicit CYP's views as part of any process that concerns them; the Children Rights Alliance (2009) surveyed 140 LAs to establish the extent Article 12 is implemented within the local level of daily practice. Their findings show that only 55% of LAs adopted the UNCRC (1989) to some degree. In relation to CYP's plans, 77% or three out of four LAs stated they do not explicitly reference the CYP's right to express their view during assessments. The four main barriers identified within the survey in realising children's rights included (1) funding difficulties, where professionals are in tensions between 'needs-led' and 'service-led' decisions; (2) inadequate knowledge of article 12; (3) difficulty in achieving 'meaningful' participation due to time and resource constraints; and (4) negative public attitudes towards children's rights. Therefore, LA professionals may be aware of this right and have a wish to exercise this to its full ability yet are unable to carry it out effectively due to practical elements that are known to commonly exist within the LA, such as a drain on funding and resources (Hellawell, 2015). In this survey, little detail was provided by LAs on how they consult CYP with SEND, yet a recognition that this remained a '*work in progress*'. Many LAs acknowledged CYP with disabilities should be involved in decision-making processes yet did not have a clear process in place to support this.

The recognition that involving CYP in decision-making carries benefits for all those involved is widely acknowledged (Ofsted, 2010; Lundy, 2007; Sellman, 2009; Smith & Sanderson, 2009). The DfE (2014) highlight that involving children in decision-making encourages pupils to be active members of society by developing key democratic skills such as co-operation, communication and taking responsibility. It is also found to increase confidence, self-respect, competence and achievement within schools, along with a motivation and engagement with learning (Smith & Sanderson, 2009). Being consulted about their views and beliefs promote a feeling of empowerment and being valued within society (Hutzler, Fliess, Chacham, & Auweele, 2002), and also serves as an emancipatory experience (Cefai & Cooper, 2010). When CYP were fully involved in decision-making process, they were more likely to secure positive outcomes (Ofsted, 2010).

Despite the benefits of participation, CYP from marginalised groups such as those with disabilities, have remained on the periphery of decision-making processes in education, even though it is likely that the outcomes will have a profound impact on their lives (Rose, 2005). They are more subject to assessments and medical interventions than other children yet remain disempowered and dominated by adult control in decisions around their lives (Dickens, 2004). A longitudinal study exploring young people's participation in decisions about services offered to them highlighted that many disabled young people are still excluded from participation and decision-making opportunities (VIPER, 2013), or they are given minimalist and tokenistic opportunities to participate with adults (Kilkelly et al, 2005). The consequences of not listening to the child can result in catastrophic outcomes for them; serious case reviews have highlighted that practitioners were not seeing, listening or hearing the child frequently enough, which lead to cases of serious safeguarding concerns (Ofsted, 2011).

Lundy (2007) developed a new model for conceptualising Article 12 of the UNCRC (1989) in order to fully capture the extent of the UK's legal obligation to hearing, listening and acting on the voice of the CYP. The model aims to support professionals to involve CYP in decision making based on four key factors. Article 12 states a child's right to express their views, meaning they need a safe and inclusive space to form and express their views, and must be facilitated to express their *voice*

freely with options on how to do so. It also states children have the right to have their views given due weight, therefore the *audience* is crucial for their views to be listened to, and *influence* being the fourth factor for their view to be acted upon. This conceptual framework can be seen in figure 2.1. The interconnectedness of all human rights means the UNCRC (1989) can only be understood when in conjunction with the other provisions for CYP; Lundy (2007) argues these four factors are interrelated and article 12 cannot be viewed in isolation. This model aims to help empower children as effective agents of their own lives, and allow them to impact change on their education, health and care; as their fundamental human right.

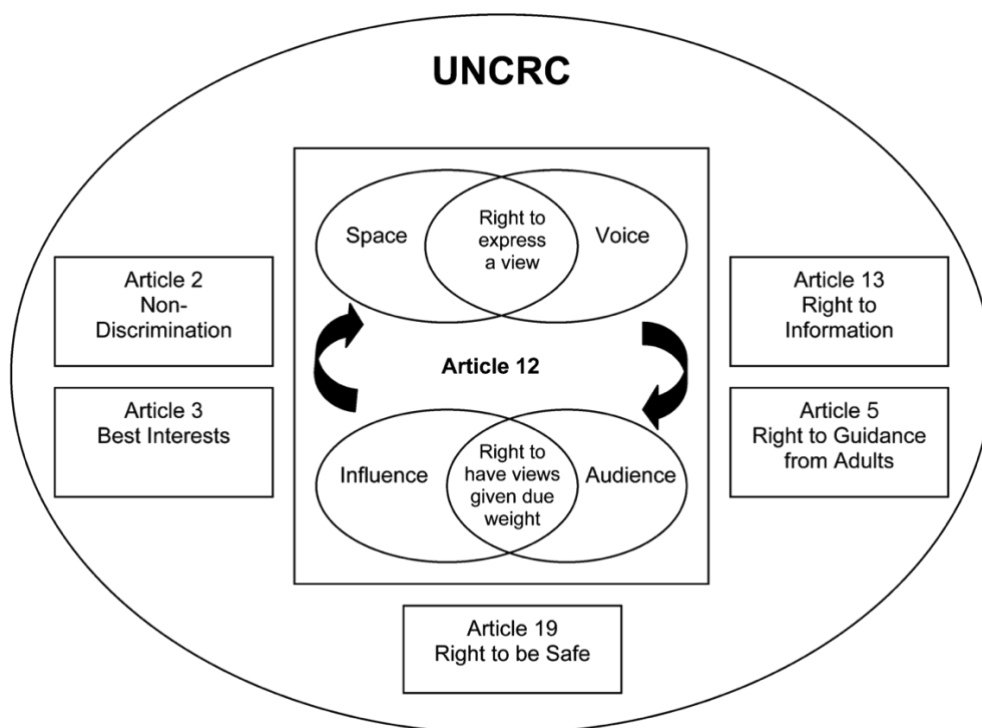


Figure 2.1: Conceptual framework of Article 12 (Lundy, 2007, p.932)

Hearing the authentic voice of the CYP requires professionals to think systematically about the way and frequency in which those views are heard, and how they respond (Lewis et al, 2007), however this skill is often acquired through practice rather than taught. Hart's (1992) ladder of participation was used as a tool for professionals to evaluate the quality of youth participation in any project and promote ways of meaningful engagement. Shier (2001) developed this by stating participation is a process and not a one-off project. He created a 'pathway to participation' in order to

encourage practitioners to evaluate their current position on how they include children in decision-making and identify next steps towards increasing the level of child participation. The five levels of participation are as follows:

1. Children are listened to;
2. Children are supported in expressing their views;
3. Children's views are taken into account;
4. Children are involved in the decision-making processes;
5. Children share power and responsibility for decision-making.

Each level has a question to reflect on whether the approach used is an *opening*, establishing a commitment to operate at this level of participation; an *opportunity*, providing the necessary resources to allow professionals to operate at this level; or an *obligation*, when it is the agreed policy requirement to operate at this level. The minimum requirement for professionals to showcase they are meeting the requirements of the UNCRC (1989) is completing level 3 of participation; having a policy in place that requires that children's views must be given due weight in regard to decision-making. However, Kilkelly et al (2005) explored how effective the rights of the child were being valued within Northern Ireland and concluded practices did not have a clear policy or process in place that acknowledges the importance of the pupil voice. These models are also limited as they refer to CYP who can voluntarily express their views, but the participation of all children cannot be readily assumed.

Under the Equality Act (2010), reasonable adjustments need to be made to allow CYP with SEND to participate, however there is insufficient evidence to show that these rights are fulfilled by all agencies (Kilkelly et al, 2005; McNeilly, Macdonald, & Kelly, 2015). Lundy (2007) argues that although Article 12 is the most widely cited provision of the UNCRC (1989), it remains the most commonly misunderstood provision, possibly due to the lack of clarity around its delineation. Pupil voice does not appear to be adequately defined, which has led to the violation of Article 12 throughout England. Showing a commitment to involving children's perspectives into daily processes moves past the desire for professionals to demonstrate good pedagogical practice and rather should be deemed a legal imperative around all decisions that affect them; Lundy (2007) asserts children have the right to both

participate and to impart and receive information, and it is time to go beyond article 12 and embed a listening culture starting from their early years.

2.2.3 The 2014 SEND Reforms

The SEN provision needed to reflect Labours 'Every Child Matters' (2003) agenda to ensure multi-agency involvement across all ages. The previous system of SEN statements was described as:

'demonstrably no longer fit for purpose and there is a need for government to develop a new system that puts the needs of the child at the centre of the provision. ...the government needs to develop a child centred approach with regard to each stage of the statementing process: assessment of needs, allocation of resources and placement' (House of Commons Education and Skills Committee, 2006, p.6).

Various debates about professional practice and the failure to identify support needed for CYP in a timely manner, due to the separate working of education, health and social care, led to the governments' reevaluation of how SEND is identified, assessed and monitored. One review significantly contributed to the reforms of SEND policy, known as the '*Lamb Inquiry, special educational needs and parental confidence; Report to the secretary of state on the Lamb Inquiry review of SEN and Disability information'* (Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2009). This review investigated parental confidence, interestingly not children's confidence, in the SEN system of assessment and how this could be improved. The four areas where change was most needed were:

1. Putting outcomes for children at the heart of the system;
2. Giving parents a stronger voice;
3. Focusing on children's needs and not waiting for them to fail before help is provided, and;
4. Strengthening the voice of the child.

Lamb also recommended Annual Reviews (AR), which is the review of the statement, to be altered in order to consider the needs of the parent and CYP, and to take account of their views on their provision and outcomes. In December 2010, the

governments SEN Green paper, which is a report used as part of a consultation exercise within government, aimed to find ways to identify the needs earlier and make it easier for parents to receive support. Through asking parents, charities, teachers and LAs, the publication of the Green paper '*Support and aspiration: a new approach to educational needs and disabilities*' (2011) marked the beginning of the consultation and pilot period of testing reforms within 31 different LAs, known as the SEND Reforms.

The reforms were further strengthened by the *Special Educational Needs and Disability Review* published by Ofsted in 2010. At this point, one in five pupils were identified as having SEND, where 2.7% of the population required a statement of SEN. Discussions were held with CYP and families on how they felt about current processes and procedures in identifying and assessing need, expectations of LAs, and progress towards the future. The majority of parent/carers felt that the current system did not support their children to achieve these goals, often feeling they had to 'fight for the rights' of their child. This review also asked the opinion of young people between ages 16-19 years with disabilities on their views for their future, the findings resonate majority of what all young people hope for; to be successful, have relationships and friendships, be independent, work and choose who they live with and how they spend their time. Additionally, 22 LAs were visited, along with early years providers, health and social care sectors, schools and further education colleges. Inspectors found support to be inconsistent and assessments varied both between localities, and within them. The conclusion was to review the SEN CoP (2001) to reflect recommendations from the report, in order to address the inconsistencies in assessment and inappropriate identification by improving access to quality provision, and to ensure all services are held accountable for their responsibilities to bettering outcomes for CYP with SEND.

Both the Ofsted review and the Lamb inquiry have been regarded as significant documents towards the government realising the need for change in the current SEN system (Tutt & Williams, 2015), where the voice of the child was acknowledged as a key area requiring improvement. However, a notable weakness within both reports is the lack of consultation with CYP with SEND. Although young people aged 16-19 were asked their views within the Ofsted review, younger children were not asked as

part of the review. Additionally, the young people were not asked their views on the current statement process, how they found the experience, or how they felt this could improve. Surely at the time of reforms with the criticism being CYP are not at the centre of the process, researchers would then ask CYP how they could be at the centre of the process? With all the developments made within the area of pupil voice and government guidance driving this forward (UNCRC, 1989; Children's Acts (2004), researchers should be asking *how* to include the views of CYP with SEND, as opposed to *whether* this should happen (Abbott, 2010).

Encouragingly, the DfE sought the views of young people during the reforms. They formed a young people's advisory group in October 2012 known as 'EPIC', which stood for *Equality, Participation, Influence and Change*, and involved young people aged 13-25 with disabilities³. However, it is notable here that younger children were not part of the consultation process who are likely to have different priorities than those at 13-25 years. EPIC met regularly over a three-and-a-half-year period to discuss particular issues posed by the DfE and the introduction of the SEND reforms, which aimed to reform the current SEN system. This group ensured the voice of CYP with SEND influenced the reforms and advised on several key policy areas. This was seen as a positive step for the government to introduce new policy with the involvement of those the policy would affect most. However, Lewis (2010) highlights how advisory groups involving CYP appear to be a progressive approach to consultation yet can often be treated in '*over-simplistic or token ways*' (p.17), benefiting the adult agenda as opposed to reflecting the CYPs true opinions. EPIC raised key issues in which the government considered but did not necessarily agree to all, therefore supporting this conclusion that the comments made by CYP that supported their work were agreed and those that didn't, were not included within the SEND reforms.

The SEND reforms aimed to respond to the frustrations of the CYP, their families and the professionals who work with them, in order to implement a system to support better outcomes for CYP and focus on early identification and support. The aim was also to give parents confidence in the system by LAs clearly communicating what

³ Details of EPIC can be found here: <https://councilfordisabledchildren.org.uk/our-work/participation/policy/epic-former-young-peoples-advisory-group-dfe>

support and services are available for their child, who to contact, and how; this is known as the 'Local Offer' which is adapted for each local council. As a result of the SEND reforms; the Children and Families Act (CFA) was introduced as national policy in 2014. Part 3 of the CFA related to CYP with SEND, where section 19 of the CFA clearly states that the LAs function is to support and involve children and young people;

In exercising a function under this Part in the case of a child or young person, a local authority in England must have regard to the following matters in particular—

(a) the views, wishes and feelings of the child and his or her parent, or the young person;

(b) the importance of the child and his or her parent, or the young person, participating as fully as possible in decisions relating to the exercise of the function concerned;

(c) the importance of the child and his or her parent, or the young person, being provided with the information and support necessary to enable participation in those decisions;

(d) the need to support the child and his or her parent, or the young person, in order to facilitate the development of the child or young person and to help him or her achieve the best possible educational and other outcomes.

The CFA (2014) also promotes integration and joint commissioning arrangements with health and social care to ensure a multi-agency approach to assessment and provision. The reforms gave power to professionals on the front line and aimed to reduce bureaucratic burdens by providing simplified guidance, whilst allowing them to work together in order to use innovative techniques to support CYP with SEND. This is marked as the most significant reform to the SEND statutory assessment process in England in the past 30 years (Sales & Vincent, 2018) and the aims and processes of the EHCP is further discussed in Chapter 2.3.

The SEND CoP was adapted in 2014 as a result of part 3 of the CFA (2014) and provided statutory guidance on the duties, policies and procedures for LAs and schools. The CoP replaced previous statements of SEN and LDAs with the introduction of an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP). The aim was to introduce a multi-agency approach to assessment, in order to ensure all needs relating to a CYP's education, health and care were all stated within one key document. The CoP was then updated in 2015 based on Section 36 of the CFA

(2014) and Regulations 6, 7, and 8 of the SEND Regulations 2014 stating that “*Early years providers, schools and colleges should take steps to ensure that young people and parents are actively supported in contributing to needs assessments, developing and reviewing EHC plans*” (p.147).

The guidance states that LAs **must** take into account the views, wishes and feelings of the parents or the young person.

*9.45 When carrying out an EHC needs assessment the local authority **should** seek views and information from the child using appropriate methods, which might include observation for a very young child, or the use of different methods of communication such as the Picture Exchange Communication System. (p.155)*

Following an 18-month inquiry into the effectiveness of the CFA (2014), the House of Commons Education committee published its First Report of Session 2019 (House of Commons, 2019) to Parliament. By collecting the experiences and perspectives of individuals affected by SEND provision, they concluded that whilst the 2014 reforms were the right idea, poor implementation has put LAs under pressure, left schools struggling to cope, and left families feeling in crisis. There were various references to the lack of consultation and ‘*more needs to be done to include CYP in the writing of their plans and decision-making about the support they receive*’, along with ensuring ‘*greater support for professionals to enable them to include their views and ensure they are central to the process*’ (p.21).

The Government Ministerial response was published on 23rd July 2020⁴ and agreed to government funding to invest resources to improve participation by CYP in local and national decision-making in relation to SEND (p.19). The committee also felt a ‘neutral’ role needed to be introduced within LA that is allocated to a CYP and parent once an assessment is received, to ensure aspects such as their voice is heard. The Government did not feel the need to create an additional neutral role as the LA are bound to consider the views and wishes of CYP with SEND, and therefore their view being that eliciting the voice should be integral to the role.

⁴ Accessed on 27.07.2020 at:
<https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/2067/documents/19714/default/>

At this point it is important to highlight that this is purely advice and recommendations offered to LAs, however not a legally obligatory process of the EHC needs assessment, nor an area that a parent or carer can appeal against. The language of '*should*' opens up interpretation of how the CYP is consulted, and the more important question, '*if*' they are consulted. It seems therefore that the rhetoric of the CoP as a result of the SEND reforms has opened up SEND services to ambiguity and interpretation, as opposed to its intention of being actionable guidance for LAs and schools.

2.2.4 *Pupil voice in the three 'Codes of Practice for Special Educational Needs'*

The SEND reforms highlighted that the voice of CYP were not embedded within policy, which is reflected in the language used within the CoP. When looking at the way pupil voice is referenced in the three different CoPs for SEND, that is the 1994, 2001 and 2015 versions, pupil participation in the assessment and review process shows a stark comparison in language. What follows is an exploration of the similarities and differences in the three CoPs.

The 1994 CoP, which was statutory guidance that followed the Education Act (1981) and the introduction of 'statementing', focused on pupil inclusion within schools and provided power to the parents to have their say on their child's education. It does recognise that children have the right to be heard (2:35) on both a practical level and as a principle, however meaningful contribution can only occur from coordinated guidance and encouragement from professionals around them. The CoP states that '*pupils who are able to do so could submit their views themselves on a form*' (p.78), therefore only those who have the verbal or cognitive prerequisites to formulate their views on a form were able to contribute to their statement of SEN. There is one short paragraph on involving the CYP in the process of their statement, with no guidance on how to elicit views nor any mention of eliciting views of CYP who cannot access methods such as a form.

There is a section on using advocates and advisors to support the views of CYP (6:59), particularly in regard to transitioning into adulthood. The views of CYP and

parents also go at the end of the statement as ‘any other advice’, where in comparison to the current EHCPs, the views of the CYP and parent go into Section A as the opening of the plan, this will be discussed further below. In terms of the AR process, CYP should be ‘*actively involved in the review process...and should be encouraged to give their views of the process during the previous year; discuss any difficulties encountered; and share their hopes and aspirations for the future*’ (6:15). However, this is again only ‘*wherever possible*’. There is a strong focus that parents should attend the review, and if they are unable to they should be informed of the discussions after the meeting; there is no mention of doing this with the CYP. The chapters focused on principle and procedures; schools-based assessments; statutory assessments; statement of SEN; and annual reviews. There is no prominence on pupil participation or listening to the CYPs views.

In striking contrast, the 2001 CoP dedicated a whole chapter to pupil participation and the rights of the CYP (Chapter 3) in response to the 1997 Green Paper and the 1989 Children’s Act. The chapter begins by highlighting article 12 and 13 of the UNCRC in a clear box; this is not mentioned in the 1994 version in the same explicit manner despite the close proximity of its conception, and interestingly the 2015 version only reference it once throughout the document in a discrete way (p.20). The 2001 CoP depicts CYP as the key stakeholder in their lives who possess unique knowledge of their own needs and circumstances. As such, they should ‘*wherever possible*’ contribute to discussions over their education, learning targets, discussions on school choices, contribute to the assessment process, AR, and transition processes (3:2).

The 2015 CoP argues that effective participation is achieved when the CYP is confident that they are listened to and their views are valued. This version also accepts the difficulty in ascertaining views for those who are very young or have severe communication difficulties, and the challenge this can present for professionals, along with the apprehension some parents may have in involving their children in the decision-making processes, perceiving them to be too ill-equipped or feel their child would not be listened to (p.14). Despite acknowledging these barriers, the CoP values the CYPs views as important and ‘*their perceptions and experiences can be invaluable to professionals in reaching decisions*’ (3.3). In reference to the

statutory assessment process, professionals should seek the '*ascertainable*' views of the child (p.51); this does not necessarily mean all CYP with SEND, as seeking the views is not always an easily ascertainable task.

7:85 LEAs should also seek to ascertain the views of children and young people as part of the assessment...A child's views about their needs and aspirations should, wherever possible, be recorded as part of the statutory assessment process. The LEA may consider providing a pupil report form for this purpose. Pupils who are able to do so could submit their views themselves on such a form. Where children or young people need help, special arrangements for gathering the child's views could include asking parents, educational psychologists, class teachers or form tutors and other adults who know the child well.

There is a high focus on ensuring '*parents are happy with the proposed statement*', and the focus on their views, whilst '*similar effort should be made to ensure that, so far as possible, the child's views are reflected in the proposed statement and that the child understands the reasons for the proposals*' (p.115). The 2001 code also produced a SEN toolkit as a source of further advice to be read in conjunction with the CoP, which featured heavily on how to effectively involve CYP. The toolkit provided advice on enabling individual and collective participation for CYP with SEND, and methods that could support in eliciting their voice. This is a progressive document of its time and provides a clear picture on what the ambitions were within SEND, with clear summaries in an easy to read and accessible format. The toolkit chapter on pupil participation again pays strong regard to the UNCRC article 12 and 13, where the focus of successful participation is built around a culture of listening. It moves beyond the rhetoric of superficial and meaningless participation and into encouraging an on-going active role for CYP.

The 2001 CoP values the presence of the CYP throughout the process of the statement and the review of the statement, where pupils should be '*actively involved in the review process, attending all or part of the review meeting. They should be encouraged to give their views on their progress during the previous year; discuss any difficulties encountered; and share their hopes and aspirations for the future.*' (9.19). However, this is within the context of '*wherever possible*'; this phrase can be interpreted in many ways; (1) practitioners trying everything they can to involve CYP, (2) practitioners making an attempt but then refuting once a CYP does not initially engage, or (3) a practitioner not seeking their views as this is not '*possible*'.

This terminology in reference to seeking the CYPs views was also seen in the 1994 CoP. The toolkit however acknowledges ways to make the AR meeting a positive experience for the CYP, with regard to giving them time to process information, time to ask any questions and providing accessible copies of reports. It also recognises those who do not attend their review should still be consulted ahead of time. Those with profound needs who cannot communicate directly can share their views through other means such as pictures and videos, which is the first mention of enabling pupil participation for differing levels of need. The language within the toolkit is accessible, clear and jargon-free. It provides helpful tips to all involved in the assessment and review, particularly towards CYP and parents. Despite, the addition of the toolkit in conjunction to the code, LAs and schools were only required to 'have regard to' the code, and not the toolkit, and therefore was not a statutory aspect of the statement and review process.

The CoP was then amended and introduced in 2014, and then refined in January 2015, which remains the most current legislation in place. This version proclaimed to be less confrontational for parents, and more efficient for CYP with SEND. It came as a result of the coalition government that attempted to overcome a system under New Labour, which had seemingly led the country into a climate of public debt. The SEND reforms described above led to the introduction of EHCPs, which aimed to be a pupil-centred document for 0-25-year olds, combining a multi-agency approach of education, health and care provisions in one easy-to-read document. The focus was more on employment and reduced reliance on government welfare, with a heavy focus on preparing for adulthood and consistent conversations around transitions.

The EHC needs assessment is a 20-week process and is described as a person-centred approach where '*the needs of the individual child and young person should sit at the heart of the assessment and planning process*' (9.21). The 2015 CoP mandates LAs to consult with the CYP throughout the process and involve the child as far as possible in this process. EHCPs also introduced a section specifically on the CYPs views, how they communicate and how they were involved in the development of the plan, where their aspirations **must** be specified in section A (p.163). ARs must also take into account their views, particularly when preparing for adulthood. Effective participation is only achieved when it is evident at all stages in

the planning, delivery and monitoring of services, and CYP are clear of their roles and how their participation has made an impact (p.22). The previous codes emphasised that *parents* should be involved in each stage of the process, whereas the 2015 code is explicitly clear that it is the *CYP* who must be involved. Therefore, the assessment and planning process should be easy and accessible for CYP to understand by using clear, ordinary language and images as opposed to jargon.

Professionals should be aware of the strengths and capabilities of the CYP as described in the plan, and what outcomes they wish to achieve. CYP should also be provided all information in accessible formats, given time to prepare for discussions and meetings, and have dedicated time to express their views. The code itself however does not have pictures, images, jargon-free language or accessible formats. Although a document aimed at practitioners, it is a document about CYPs rights, and is described as an '*overcomplicated and confusing*' system for parents, children and young people (Lehane, 2017).

Despite the SEND reforms focus on participation of the CYP, it can be queried how much the code has actually changed since its 2001 version. As mentioned, pupil participation was highlighted in the previous version (Kennedy, 2015), and so this is not a new concept. Norwich (2014) points out that the 2015 code tends to show "*even more generality in its guidance about assessment and identification*" than its predecessor (p.419). The language used within the 2001 CoP was a clearer introduction to families, CYP and professionals on the shift in ethos towards an inclusive approach to SEN, where the tone is perceived to be accessible (Lehane, 2017). This language is not seen in the same way in the 2015 version, possibly as it serves as an update to prior models and stems from the CFA (2014) which discusses the importance of pupil involvement and so it almost carries the assumption that all practitioners should know the importance of the pupil voice without directly specifying this. However, for practitioners new into the world of SEND, they would adhere to the existing legislation and not necessarily consider previous practice.

The 2015 update also requires pupils to keep informed on decisions made about them, and thus a focus on follow-up and consistency in communication. The 2001 version also recommends consultation but does not oblige schools to involve pupils

in decision making (Sellman, 2009). Similarly, the 2015 version states LAs and schools **must** consult, but lacks guidance on how to do so, which has led to high levels of variance in outcomes based on where the CYP lives and goes to school. The question therefore remains on how one can *learn* to consult in a world so dedicated to participation-focused outcomes, without distinguishable guidelines on *how* to consult.

(i) *Lehane (2017) discourse analysis of the CoP*

Lehane's (2017) discourse analysis on the three CoPs looks at the word count; the conclusion that each code gets bigger, with more chapters and more information. Lehane explored how often words such as 'must', 'should', 'commission' and 'inclusion' were mentioned in the body of the text, with the conclusion that although each code differs in their word count, word choices, pictures and tone, none consider what inclusive practice may look like.

By applying this same principle to explore how often there is mention around pupil voice and views, there is an interesting comparison between the three versions. Table 2.3 summarises how often the words 'views', 'voice', 'participation' and 'consult' are used in each document explicitly in relation to the CYP, compared to referencing 'others' such as the parents and the professionals. The term 'voice' is non-existent within the 1994 version, with a heavier focus on the views of the parent/carers; although the table shows a close comparison between CYP and 'others', language such as 'preferences' and 'wishes and feelings' of the parent are heavily used throughout the code and therefore remains highly parent focused. The views of CYP are only sought to be obtained '*where appropriate*' (p.39) and no mention of using alternative methods of communication to access the views of all CYP dependent on their need. There is a heavy focus on consulting the LA, professionals and parents around the decisions that affect the CYP, yet only two references to consulting CYP.

Despite the heavy parent focus of the 2001 version, the views of the parent are mentioned 30 times within the main body of the text, whereas the CYPs views are mentioned 42 times. Although quite similar, this is encouraging as the CYPs views are recognised just as important as the parent/carers views. However, the term

'consult' refers heavily to again consulting with the parents on their views and consulting with practitioners for advice. The word 'voice' is mentioned three times, where two are in regard to the voice of the CYP, and the other to the parent. Encouragingly, there is a higher focus on pupil participation; as discussed above there is a whole chapter that addresses this area and emphasises the importance of encouraging participation of CYP and working towards removing barriers.

	1994		2001		2015	
	In relation to the CYP	In relation to others	In relation to the CYP	In relation to others	In relation to the CYP	In relation to others
Word frequency 'views'	14	16	42	64	57	78
Word frequency 'voice'	0	0	2	1	1	1
Word frequency 'participation'	2	1	22	9	27	9
Word frequency 'consult'	2	28	8	82	26	35

Table 2.3: Frequency of individual words relating to the CYP, and to others

In the 2015 CoP, the word 'views' is mentioned 135 times, however only 57 mentions are in relation to the views of the CYP, where the others reference the views of the parents or other stakeholders such as health professionals. This code seeks more of a multi-agency view, where all professionals can bring their knowledge into supporting the CYP. Which brings the question, who is the client within the CoP? Fox (2015) concludes the code makes it clear that the client is the child, however these figures do not seem to indicate they are the primary client. The parents' views are given high regard and they are the ones who hold the power in objecting any part of the assessment or review. They are also the ones who control access to the CYP, due to their legal responsibility until age 16, where in some instances, children under 16 are not involved in the EHCP assessment at all due to parental requests (Adams

et al, 2017). Pupil participation is also more widely cited than the participation of others, similar to the 2001 practice. Yet again consultation refers to consulting with practitioners and parents, and less so with CYP. The definition of consult refers to seeking information or advice from someone, especially an expert or professionals (“Consult”, Dictionary, n.d.). Therefore, the terminology is commonly associated with a professional, yet Clark & Statham (2005) argues that CYP are ‘*experts in their own lives*’, and therefore they should be consulted with in regard to decisions that affect them.

The CoP is more than its superficial definition of helpful guidance for practitioners to advocate the voice of the child; it is a product of the particular mode of government. Despite the artificial focus of adhering to the rights of the child, it could be argued the code serves more as an economically oriented product of meeting the requirements of costs rather than the needs of the citizen. As Burch (2018) concludes, ‘*if we move beyond the rhetorical haze that the code presents, its contextual and political positioning is less inspirational*’ (p.95). The discourse analysis of the language used in reference to the views, voice, participation and consultation of CYP is weak. CYP have historically been on the periphery of decision-making (Abbott, 2010; Rose, 2005), where the CoPs have not addressed key issues such as *how* do you consult, *how* can you ensure understanding, and *how* can you ensure the views are then acted on.

The CoP, despite being statutory guidance for professionals, provides details of how to comply with legal duties yet is not a legal document in itself and therefore open to interpretation, which questions if the ‘statutory’ aspects are being carried out nationally. The discussions seem to indicate this is not the case. There is a clear need to provide actionable guidance to LAs and schools on how best to effectively elicit voice using a range of practical methods and tools (Kennedy, 2015; Skipp & Hopwood, 2016). The introduction of EHCPs were to provide easy-to-read, accessible documentations for CYP, yet the code does not depict how practitioners can do this effectively.

2.3 Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs)

2.3.1 Statements of SEN to EHCPs

From 1st September 2014, within the legal framework under Section 20 of the CFA (2014), children with statements of SEN, and young people with LDAs went through a transition process of being converted into an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP). This conversion process was the duty of the LA where the CYP lives with the completion deadline of 1st April 2018. This task placed on LAs led to increased strain on resources, resulting in an influx in recruitment for a position within SEND teams, most commonly known as SEND officers (SO), to carry out the conversion process. The role varied in description, but the overall purpose was to manage a designated caseload of CYP within the local area, complete the conversion process for all pupils with statements and LDAs, whilst continuing with existing commitments such as assessment requests and ARs. The SEND team therefore are responsible for ensuring appropriate provision for all CYP with an EHCP, which entails naming an educational provision on their EHCP that can meet their special educational needs. This is a statutory process that must be monitored by the LA and is reported to the DfE annually. As of January 2019, there were 354,000 CYP with EHCPs maintained by LAs, which represent 2.1% of the population in England⁵. This is increasing every year in all regions throughout the UK.

The purpose of an EHCP, as set out by the SEND CoP (2015), is to;

'make special educational provision to meet the special educational needs of the child or young person, to secure the best possible outcomes for them across education, health and social care and, as they get older, prepare them for adulthood' (p.142).

Various changes were introduced as a result of the CFA (2014), such as extending educational support from 0-25 years, as opposed to statements that provided support from the ages of 3-18 years. This followed the enquiries of Lamb (2009) and Ofsted (2010) that identified that CYP with SEND may require further time to complete college or further education, and therefore the extension to 25 would

⁵ SEN2 Data accessed December 2019:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/805014/SEN2_2019_text.pdf

encompass them receiving additional support in order to successfully transition into adulthood. Notably, EHCPs were intended to be more person-centred and forward-looking documents that help raise aspirations and prepare the individual for adulthood (CoP, 2015). The CYPs views was to be a 'golden thread' throughout the EHCP, that is that their views and aspirations should link to their needs, their outcomes and their provision within their EHCP.

The transition phase of converting statements of SEN to EHCPs, and the introduction of a multi-agency approach led to mixed reviews on the SEND reforms. Questionnaires, interviews and focus groups were used to gain perspectives of parents, young people, teaching staff and professionals within the education, health and care sector, on the extent the reforms had addressed the shortcomings of the previous statementing process. Sales & Vincent's (2018) interviews found that professionals felt the EHCP process achieved greater parental involvement and a more person-centred approach in comparison to the statement process, whilst studies have also highlighted the SENCOs perspective as EHCPs being supported purely by education, and a lack of partnership between health and social care provisions (Boesley & Crane, 2018).

Despite professionals identifying the EHCP process to be more pupil-centred than its predecessor, it often remained tokenistic as the CYPs views were superficially heard, but not acted upon. Early research when the EHCPs were first introduced showed that less than a quarter of 512 parents surveyed by the National Autistic Society (NAS) were satisfied with the new system (2015, p.10). Questionnaires were also given to four CYP between 10-17 years old to explore their experiences of the EHCP process; they all reported feeling more involved in decision-making processes and given choices. Although these questionnaires were adapted based on their preferred communication methods, all were administered within the home and three out of four of the questionnaires were completed with parental support. Therefore, it cannot be known how much the views are representative of the CYP views, and how much of the parents. It is important to note that despite the CYP's positive comments on the process, they continued to experience barriers to being involved in formal meetings of the process due to limited communication skills and lack of accessibility.

The variance between LAs and regions of England has also been reflected within

national statistics. The annual report of SEN data submitted by every LA and published by the DfE highlight how the proportion of 0-25-year olds with EHCPs vary based on the region. For example, the January 2019 statistics show the South East of England has the highest proportion of EHCPs and the East Midlands has the lowest. The ranking by region can be seen in table 2.4 below, along with the percentage increase from the previous year and therefore highlighting the growing number of EHCPs issued every year in all regions. Other factors also vary by regions, such as the placement of CYP in state-funded mainstream schools or those in specialist placements. For example, London has the highest proportion of CYP in state-funded mainstream schools, and the North East has highest proportion of CYP in state-funded specialist schools (DfE, 2019).

Region of England and national rank	Current year (2019)	Difference from previous year (2018)
1. South East	2.26%	+0.23%
2. North East	2.24%	+0.18%
3. East of England	2.20%	+0.22%
4. London	2.18%	+0.21%
5. North West	2.17%	+0.22%
5. West Midlands	2.17%	+0.17%
7. South West	2.11%	+0.25%
8. Yorkshire and the Humber	1.90%	+0.20%
9. East Midlands	1.73%	+0.13%

Table 2.4: % of 0-25-year olds with an EHCP as of January 2019 (DfE, 2019)

Literature within SEND has focused more on perceptions of the process from different bodies such as parents and Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators

(SENCOs), the quality of outcomes within EHCPs, and provisions in place for CYP (Castro, Grande & Palikara, 2019; Robinson, Moore & Hooley, 2018); there is a lack of literature around how the voice is depicted in EHCP and methods used to ascertain voice. Palikara, Castro, Gaona & Eirinake (2018) appear to be the first to explore whether the voice is elicited within EHCPs. Their study analysed 184 EHCPs within 9 LAs in the Greater London area, and aimed to address how CYPs voices were obtained and presented in Section A, what methods were used to elicit their views, and any differences between mainstream and special schools. The researchers concluded there was limited scope in plans around the abilities of the CYP, with a higher focus on disability. There also appeared to be a difference between mainstream and specialist schools in the way the voice was elicited, where mainstream schools provided more detail. This contests with research that highlights the difficulty in eliciting pupil voice for those with significant SEND, such as Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties (PMLD), and therefore more likely to be in a specialist school (Harding, 2009; Whitehurst, 2006). The content analysis of Section A showed 63.6% of EHCPs using first person 'I' to express the views of CYP instead of a third person narrative, however there is question on whether the CYP actually said that or an adult has said it on their behalf. The vernacular used does not seem to match the cognitive and communication abilities depicted within the plan, which led the researchers to question the accuracy of the section.

This leads to a wider issue; if adults begin to not only speak on behalf of CYP, but also dictate their views through the use of 'I', the voice of the CYP is not only limited, but silenced.

2.3.2 *Role of the Local Authority (LA)*

(i) Voice of the CYP in EHCP assessments

The SEND CoP section 9.21-9.24 stipulates that '*Local authorities **must** consult the child and the child's parent or the young person throughout the process of assessment and production of an EHC plan*' (p.147), therefore the pupil voice remains central to the doctrine of the EHCP. There is no specified or dictated way to elicit the views of the CYP and therefore it is assumed that this varies by LA. Some

LAs have been using innovative methods for some time to gain views of the child, for example Coventry Education Authority used a national organization called 'Young Voice' to consult children on their new inclusion strategy (Brook, Katz & Stockdale, 2005). LAs often include examples on their local offer on how they consult with the CYP, and many include a pro forma for their schools to use within the AR process⁶.

When '*including pupil voice in EHCPs*' is inserted into an internet search engine, various examples of policies, guidance and practice are given from different LAs. It is encouraging that some LAs are publishing their approach to pupil voice and are actively engaging CYP in the process. Hackney Council advertise a guidance booklet with tools and techniques for professionals to use when hoping to elicit the views of CYP with SEND⁷. Examples of guidance include recording in the plan how a particular view was sought e.g., '*Talking Mats was used to gain Destiny's views. She was shown a range of picture symbols and asked to sort them into like, dislike and not sure*' (p.3). The booklet describes techniques to elicit voice such as drawings, videos, talking mats and solution-focused techniques. It also contains case study examples and references to websites that can provide further recommendations. This was done as part of a multi-disciplinary team, including EPs, Speech and Language Therapists (SALT), and members from the SEND and Inclusion team. They have formed a 'Pupil Voice and Views Working Party', who meet once a term to discuss how to ensure pupil voice is central to the process. This is a positive example of how LAs are actively ensuring the voice of CYP are central to the plan and providing actionable guidance within a local context on how professionals can do this within daily practice. These examples of guidance booklets and operational working parties highlight the work done within individual authorities, however remain localised within the context of one particular LA and remain as documents of local relevance.

The attempt to overcome the limits to participation is not nation-wide; a large-scale survey by the DfE (Adams et al, 2017) examined the experiences of parents and young people in the process of the EHCP assessment and reported that majority of

⁶ An example of a '*child or young person 'all about me' booklet*' can be found here:

<https://www.hackneylocaloffer.co.uk/kb5/hackney/localoffer/advice.page?id=WaZA5W4YiPQ>

⁷ Can be accessed:

https://search3.openobjects.com/mediamanager/hackney/fsd/files/obtaining_the_views_and_opinions_of_children_and_young_people_updated_dec_2017.pdf

parents agreed that their views, hopes and wishes were included in the EHC plan, however felt the wishes of their children were not taken into consideration to the same extent. This is reflective of literature mentioned earlier where parents clearly have more power in the process and CYP again remain at the periphery (Sales & Vincent, 2018; NAS, 2015). Parents felt their child needed an additional form of support to explain the process to them, such as an advocate, visual aids or communication aids, but this had only been offered in 10-12% of assessments. The CoP acknowledges some children need support to share their views and it is the duty of the LA to provide access to this support (9.23), yet these findings suggest practice differs from policy.

This study only interviewed young people over the age of 16, possibly to avoid the ethical issues around consent, so this should not be seen as reflective of all CYPs experiences. One section of the questionnaire sent to parents aimed to understand the experiences of CYP from their own perspective. Parents were asked to either encourage their child to answer questions or to write their answers based on the perspective of the CYP. They also asked the parent to indicate who had completed each section. The analysis shows the majority of the responses came from the parent/carer on behalf of the CYP, although Adams et al (2017) comments that '*this does not undermine the validity of these results and may reflect factors such as the nature of the needs the young person had to the extent of their involvement in the EHC plan process, and therefore their ability to answer the questions*' (p.37). This is an assumption, not based on any evidence or follow up from interviews with parents or young people. Out of the 13,643 responses from questionnaires received, 10,675 were from parents/carers answering on behalf of their child on the experience of EHC plan process, an additional 2,246 answered for their children who were over the age of 16 years old.

Young people over 16 years old should presumably, and legally, make their own decisions as young adults yet only 5.29% of all responses were from CYP over the age of 16 on their own experiences. It also cannot be assumed this was solely completed by the YP with no support, a drawback of self-administered surveys (Bryman, 2012). Although the code also states that '*Local authorities **must not** use the views of parents as a proxy for young people's views. Young people will have*

their own perspective and local authorities should have arrangements in place to engage with them directly' (CoP, 2015, P.22), literature has highlighted that it can be difficult to ascertain whether the views of the CYP within forms is from the CYP themselves, or completed by the parents on their child's behalf, using the first-person narrative of 'I' (Palikara et al, 2018). These findings also resonate from my experience as an LA professional, where the initial letter sent to seek views of the CYP during an assessment request is often completed by the parents.

The views that are generally sought during EHCP assessments include the CYP likes and dislikes, hobbies and interests outside of school, thoughts of school in terms of their strengths and preferences, and any difficulties they may experience (Harding & Atkinson, 2009). An examination of Section A in selected EHCPs, which is the section in the plan that includes the views of the CYP and their parents, showed a variety of strategies for eliciting and reporting on the voice of the child, such as teacher observations, written feedback from the CYP, or observatory notes (Pearlman & Michaels, 2019). However, there appears to be little guidance on how to elicit the views, feelings and aspirations of CYP with intellectual and communication difficulties for their EHCP. It was found that questionnaires elicit their *preference* at the time of questioning, this is what they like at the moment of asking, which is not equivalent to their *views* on their experiences of their education, this is discussed further in chapter 2.4.2. Questionnaires most commonly used for Section A by LAs does not allow for meaningful service input as part of the EHCP process (Ware, 2004). Although there is a section within the plan which asks how the parent and CYP has contributed to the development of the plan, very few EHCPs include concrete evidence of the CYP's communication methods and input in the plan (Palikara, Castro, Gaona & Eirinaki, 2018).

Skipp & Hopwood (2016) similarly mapped out user experiences in their qualitative study on the EHCP assessment process. They held three focus groups of 15 young people with SEND, aged over the age of 15 years, again focusing on the older cohort. They were asked to comment on what they liked and did not like about their plans, the process, their involvement and suggestions for improvement. This study positively gains the perspective of CYP on how the process could improve however the script or pro-forma used within the focus group is not within the appendices and

so it is unclear how the conversations took place. The researchers acknowledged the difficulty in appropriately engaging the young people in order to gain productive feedback, whilst also recognising the difficulty LAs must have in doing this. Ofsted (2010) also found that although many LAs worked hard to elicit the views of the CYP, particularly in the initial stages of the assessment, inspectors identified that 7 out of 22 LAs visited showed insufficient evidence that the views of the CYP and their families were accounted for and given due regards.

LAs have been critiqued on their intentions for inclusion of CYP, where the voice is only heard when evidence is required (Bradwell, 2019) and thus '*there is a sense of this being part of a tick list culture*' (p.424). Skipp & Hopwood (2016) conclude that LAs need to evidence that they have done more than just a 'tick box exercise' to show a commitment to inclusion and pupil-centred approaches yet fail to evidence how this can be achieved. The Council for Disabled Children (CDC) is a forum for CYP with SEND and works solely to represent their views. One of their projects explored the frustrations that CYP experienced during the EHCP process; they felt the current methods used by professionals were not accessible and subsequently felt their voices were not being heard. As a result of the findings, the CDC developed '*top tips for professionals who support children and young people to participate in their Education, Health and Care plan*' (see Footnote 2). This factsheet provides the 'dos' and 'don'ts' of consultation and serves as a reminder for professionals to ensure the CYPs aspirations and dreams are kept at the heart of the assessment, the discussions and the process; thus, adopting a whole child approach. This guide is one of its kind, providing practical and actionable items for professionals within the field to promote an ethic to keeping CYP views at the forefront, particularly during the EHCP assessment process. This document is based on the perspective of CYP from a wide range of geographical areas and therefore aims to be a document of national relevance. However, it does not acknowledge the barriers that professionals may face in order to successfully implement the recommendations.

(ii) *Voice of the CYP in Annual Reviews*

Based on Section 44 of the CFA (2014), the CoP also states that where a CYP has an EHCP, the LA **must** review the plan every twelve months at a minimum (p.87), and every six months for children under five (p.198), this is known as the Annual

Review (AR). The aim of the AR is to focus on the CYP's progression towards the outcomes identified within the EHCP, and whether they still remain appropriate (DfE, 2015). ARs also act as an opportunity to gather information from professionals working with the CYP such as the school setting, health and social care, an LA representative, and their parents/carers. It serves as a platform to allow professionals to consider the appropriateness of the EHCP in light of progress made, and whether any changes will result in enhanced or reduced provision, change of educational establishment, alternation of long-term and short-term outcomes, or alternatively if the EHCP should be ceased as it is no longer beneficial to the CYP (DfE, 2015). The CoP (2015) states reviews must be taken in partnership with the child and their parent, and must take in their views, wishes and feelings (p.194). The AR therefore ultimately serves as a platform for the CYP to express how they feel the year has been for them and what support they feel they need moving forward.

The AR process requires professionals to provide input to the services available for the CYP as per the provision stated within their EHCP. Professionals have reported tensions due to the various reports required by different stakeholders, for example the report often entails the CYPs views, the parent/carer views, details of the assessment and recommendations for the EHCP. Therefore, the report written by a professional has to suit the needs of not only the young person, but their parents, the school and the LA SEND department (Harding & Atkinson, 2009). An EP narrative also identified the difficulties in remaining person-centred given the demands placed on LA professionals (Mercieca & Mercieca, 2014). Although listening to the CYP needs to remain as an integral part of the role, this can be problematic due to capacity of speed and work load. While EPs would like to attend all the reviews of the pupils they work with, it would compromise two thirds of their post and restrain their time to write reports, carry out re-assessments, observations of pupils, and discussions with parents and teachers that may be required as part of assessment (Laws, 1994).

Many professionals also face the dilemma during EHCP assessments and ARs of the contradictory role of being an 'advocate for the pupil', to help aid their communication, or as an 'LA representative', giving a report on the pupil's progress and needs (Fox, 2015). Which raises the question of why a professional can't be

both? Do these distinct roles carry contradictory elements, which results in incongruity between carrying out the LA duty whilst advocating for a CYP?

'In particular, in taking up an advocacy position we are placing ourselves on the side of the least powerful, the children. Taking their position will make us feel vulnerable to hostile challenges from the LA, schools and even parents.' (Fox, 2015, p.394).

Despite the AR being an important discussion for the CYP around their support, some LAs concluded CYP either don't attend ARs or *'they would normally be in the meeting for some time ... rarely for the whole meeting'* (Soar, Burke, Herbst & Gersch, 2005). Jelly, Fuller & Byres (2000) point out when ARs are conducted in the absence of the pupil concerned and without prior or post consultation, the review has little meaning to them. Qualitative analysis on transcripts from ARs argue that even when the pupil is present, the conversation continues as if the CYP is not there (Van-Dycke et al, 2019). Kellet (2009) concluded that CYP feel little benefit or involvement due to the professionals' lack of mindfulness towards their needs; CYP reported minutes were not sent out before the meeting, the print was too small and contained no pictures for ease of understanding, professionals spoke too fast and the content contained 'big words' they could not understand. The participant group included a group of 14-18 year old CYP with learning disabilities, not specified, who designed a toolkit for the professionals to offer simple practical solutions to these perceived problems, such as ensuring scheduled breaks, big writing and pictures on the minutes, a traffic light system where the YP can indicate if there is a problem at any point, and a question card which they could hold up if they had a question. Kellet (2010) evaluated these measures in the 'WeCan2' group and found increased levels of understanding, participation and a sense of being listened to by the young person once professionals introduced these measures. In some cases, young people were asked to co-chair meetings and consulted on changes that would happen to their level of support. This is a positive example of how listening to suggestions of CYP with SEND on how to improve accessibility to meetings about them can lead to positive changes.

ARs must also be a way to document any concerns and provide an action plan for improvements and adjustments to support the views of the CYP or their parent/carer. Parents feel their views at ARs are valued in principle but devalued in practice as

their comments did not change the support for their child (Jones & Swain, 2001). This is found to be the same feeling from CYP, where their views may be requested in the meeting, but it is what happens as a result of those views that matter most. Whitty (2002) argues that there is little change after concerns are raised as professionals often do not act on the views of the CYP.

Gaining user feedback on the process of EHCP assessments and AR by the LA is a way to assess what works and what can be improved, yet this needs to be an on-going process, which requires significant time and resources. It is also important to understand that user feedback is only one aspect of understanding how well a local area are meeting the needs of CYP (Skipp & Hopwood, 2016). There needs to be a wider dialogue about achieving the best possible outcomes for CYP to focus past the EHCP process and on to the support, provision and steps towards achieving better life outcomes for the CYP. There are various stakeholders involved which contribute to the development of the child, who all interact with one another to influence how the CYPs needs are met. However, the CYPs voice should always be central to this process.

2.3.3 *Role of the educational setting*

The CoP identifies the educational institution as the most suitable environment to hold and lead reviews as they '*know the CYP best, have closest contact with them and will have the clearest information about progress and next steps (p.196)*'. It is also felt that reviews led by the educational placement will engender the greatest confidence amongst the CYP and family (CoP, 2015). Therefore, the LA may ask the educational setting to hold the AR. However, Corrighan (2014) emphasises how time constraints placed by LAs on schools to carry out ARs can impose tension and restrictions in carrying out reviews with a high focus on the CYP. For example, the 20-week process of an EHCP has certain time constraints on when the views can be gathered. When the LA impose timescales for transitions that may not match what the pupil wants at this particular point of time, it can create a tension in preparing to plan for that transition. The need to reduce the paperwork required for schools has historically been highlighted as a strain for school staff (Jones & Swain, 1999) and

further intensified due to the SEND reforms (Pearson, Mitchell & Rapti, 2015), where it can be difficult to manage both aspects of the review; the child-centred focus and abiding by local government guidelines.

A question around the suitability of the teaching staff eliciting pupil views can be bought in here. When teachers attempt to elicit voice within this process, they can be nervous of the approaches and often lack experience of the techniques required to do so (Flutter, 2007). Fayette & Bond (2018) highlight how some pupils choose not to attend their review and so the teacher provides a summary of their views on their behalf. The objectivity of the interpretation of this viewpoint needs to be approached with caution; the professional who makes inferences about a CYP's communication and views are likely to be the individual who is most emotionally attached to that CYP and this can affect their observations (Pearlman & Michaels, 2019). The question is whether the thoughts, views and feelings of a CYP can be accurately interpreted without influence or distortion, which is discussed further in chapter 2.4.2. Pearlman & Michaels (2019) advocate that professionals who gather views for ARs should be clear within the paperwork of how this information has been obtained and who has been involved in gathering the information, in order to show if it is the CYP's views directly or gained by other methods.

Fayette & Bond (2018) argue that being confident to be involved in decision-making during reviews is only possible if CYP are given daily opportunities for decision-making and highlighted the importance of making choices throughout their time at school. This includes choices that impact them on a daily basis such as what foods to eat or activities to engage in, which support decision-making that impact the wider community. Ofsted inspectors have showcased examples of confident CYP who took a central role in planning and running their own AR (Ofsted, 2010), however this was not consistent within different local areas and there is a lack of literature that showcase how pupils are involved in their AR.

Planning meetings need to have the individual at the centre, in order to reflect on the wishes and aspirations of the CYP (Valuing People, 2001), therefore steering towards a culture that is 'needs-led' and not 'service-led' (Children Rights Alliance, 2009; Parry-Jones & Soulsby, 2001), and changing status of individuals from 'consumers' to 'co-producers' (Department of Health, 2010).

2.4 Enabling factors and barriers in eliciting pupil voice

2.4.1 Enabling the pupil voice

Certain factors and conditions can support CYP to express their views to professionals, known as enabling factors. Within the context of SEND, enabling factors are defined as conditions that facilitate a CYP's voice to be heard. This includes both concrete conditions that can be controlled by adults such as the physical environment, along with abstract factors that require more thought and consideration such as building rapport with the CYP to ensure they feel comfortable to express their voice.

Lewis & Porter (2004) describe pupil voice as a continuum; some researchers argue CYP with SEND should be involved in the process from the beginning such as setting the agenda, collecting information and analysing it (Barnes, 2002), whilst others argue there are limitations to being fully involved, but CYP should be given the opportunity to contribute to the process by expressing their views in some manner (Harding, 2009; Kiernan, 1999). The literature has focused on how professionals can enable pupil voice through their approach and methodology, whilst also exploring the enabling factors that support this process.

Knight, Clark, Petrie & Statham's (2006) review on consultation methods to ascertain CYP's views about the support they receive from social care identified enabling factors in eliciting pupil voice; this includes ensuring practitioners have a wide range of tools to elicit pupil voice and being able to adapt these tools based on the needs of the child. Adapting materials is an identified enabling factor to pupil participation; Adams et al (2017) reported 45% of parents of CYP with a visual impairment and 43% of CYP with a moderate learning difficulty felt LA professionals had taken reasonable steps to make the process adaptable for their child's needs. Similarly, Fayette & Bond (2018) found when adults were aware of each pupil's preferred communication medium, the use of communication tools supported their role to elicit the views of pupils with ASD during their transition meetings. Practitioners should therefore be knowledgeable in a range of methods and tools but also provide the choice to the CYP. Giving pupils a choice of the method that they would prefer for communication acts as an empowering enabling factor to elicit voice.

'By enabling young people to choose how they wish to communicate with us, we recognise them as social actors and begin to move our practice away from adult-centric processes.' (Holland et al, 2008, p.19)

This recognition of the power dominance that adults historically have had over children and making a conscious effort to remove this perceived power imbalance can enable the pupil to feel comfortable to share their views. Lewis & Porter (2004) propose that professionals need to work on removing their dominance over children by letting the child set the agenda, have a choice of methods and be given strategies on how to answer questions within the meetings. It should also be their decision on when they wish to end their involvement, with a clear avenue on how to do so (Willow et al, 2004). By questioning the validity of the methods available to access pupil voice, professionals can make expert judgments on what factors can enable the voice based on the particular needs of the CYP.

Another key enabling factor for CYP to feel comfortable to share their views is based on their relationship with the adult asking them. Teachers can build positive relationships with pupils by providing the support they need on a daily basis, which in turn promotes feelings of acceptance within their school environment (Rose & Shelvin, 2017). It is identified as the professionals' responsibility to build trust, rapport and encouragement in order for the CYP to take a meaningful role in decision-making from an early age (Barnard-Dadds & Conn, 2018; Scott-Barret, Cebula & Florian, 2019). As mentioned earlier, professional jargon is a barrier to participation (Sinclair, 2004; Van-Dyke et al, 2019) and so removing linguistic complexities is an important enabling factor to allow CYP to understand what is being asked, and by repeating questions to ensure understanding (Alderson et al, 2005).

Other enabling factors include spending time prior to meeting the CYP to understand how they communicate best, such as speaking to others who know them well and preparing resources differentiated to their preferred communication style (Ravet, 2007). For pupils with PMLD, using low-tech communication tools such as Talking Mats has the potential to provide pupils to share their voice (Wright, 2008). The professional should also ensure the venue is familiar to the CYP, accessible and tailored to their individual needs.

Another factor that may act as an enabling factor to eliciting pupil voice includes the construct of self-efficacy, based on Bandura's social-cognitive theory (1977). Bandura defined self-efficacy as "beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the course of action required to produce given attainments" (1997, p.3). Self-efficacy theory suggests that one's efficacy is influenced by four factors: mastery experience, verbal persuasion, vicarious experience and emotional arousal. Mastery experience refers to performance accomplishment and promotes confidence, along with an eventual feeling of self-efficacy. Bandura explained that successful past experience creates strong positive feeling in the performer increasing their level of self-efficacy, thereby past failures would lower self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997).

Stajkovic and Luthans (1998) explored self-efficacy in work-related performances and concluded that individuals who have high self-efficacy will exert sufficient effort that lead to successful outcomes, whereas those with low self-efficacy are less likely to persist in effort and thus will fail. Within inclusive education, teachers with a high level of self-efficacy believe their pupils can be taught within the mainstream classroom effectively whilst those with low levels of perceived self-efficacy would believe there is little they can provide for students with SEND and therefore may be more reluctant to try (Sharma, Loreman & Florian, 2012). Similarly, high efficacious teachers provided persistent effort when working with low achieving students and utilised better teaching strategies, which resulted in more effective learning for the students. Whereas low efficacious teachers hindered the learning for their students due to their lack of effort (Gibson & Dembo, 1984). Self-efficacy therefore can act as an enabling factor for professionals when supporting CYP with SEND; professionals with higher levels of self-efficacy may be more likely to ensure the voice is meaningfully elicited.

Coates & Vickerman's (2013) research promotes an approach to consultation using the acronym 'V.O.I.C.E'. Firstly, practitioners must be *Versatile* and flexible in their approach to consulting CYP. They must provide the *Opportunity* to participate for all CYP of all levels of ability, which involves being *Inclusive* and *Creative* in the approaches used. Finally, the aim of consultation should always be to *Empower* CYP to be active participants in their own lives. If professionals acknowledge that pupil voice is an important aspect of education, then it is vital to include all children within

this process (Lewis & Ann, 2007). By being more flexible in the approaches used to gather the views of CYP, tailoring paperwork and adapting the way meetings are structured, professionals can take account of individual need and communication preferences in order to provide the opportunity for all CYP to take part in their EHCP assessments and ARs (Sales & Vincent, 2018).

The difficulties of involving pupils to share their views can be ameliorated by viewing the process of enabling the pupil voice as an ongoing iterative procedure, and not a one-off event (Brewster, 2004). This refers back to the earlier point of involving pupils in daily decision-making and communication of their needs, rather than expecting this on one-off occasions such as the EHCP assessment or ARs (Fayette & Bond, 2018).

2.4.2 Barriers in accessing the pupil voice

Despite the enabling factors, numerous barriers have been identified that prevent CYP with SEND to meaningfully participate in meetings and decision-making processes. A barrier is described as a circumstance or an obstacle that prevents an action. Within this context, a barrier is a factor that is preventing a CYP to express their views. This can be presented in two ways; barriers in the CYP expressing themselves and barriers to the professional in being able to meaningfully elicit the voice of the CYP.

(i) Barriers in CYP expressing their voice

Literature has identified numerous barriers presented to the CYP that prevent them from expressing their views, this includes lack of appropriate methods, barriers to communication and levels of self-esteem and anxiety in meeting new people and being engaged in meetings.

A factor that may prevent a CYPs participation is a lack of access to communication systems; there are a range of methods and tools available to elicit voice, which will be discussed further in chapter 2.5.2, yet not always utilised within settings. CYP who cannot communicate verbally need to be taught appropriate communication

systems, which requires an adult having prior knowledge on how to implement different systems. It also requires adults who interact with that CYP to be aware of their preferred communication style in order to appropriately respond; Franklin & Sloper (2006) identified that many social workers reported being unsure of the communication methods of children on their caseloads, along with their lack of skill, knowledge and training to communicate with CYP with predominately non-verbal forms of communication. Similarly, CYP who are deaf or hard-of-hearing have a barrier of communication with all professionals they meet if they do not have knowledge of sign language, often requiring an interpreter (Alasim, 2018).

The CDC also developed a factsheet listing the barriers to participation most identified by CYP themselves⁸. This included lack of exposure to prior decision-making situations and CYP often being unaware of their rights to participate. If adults in the CYPs life promote the attitude of hearing the CYP and involving them in decision-making processes from an early age, they would become accustomed to making decisions throughout; the value of their voice therefore must be embedded by those around them (Barnard-Dadds & Conn, 2018; Scott-Barret, Cebula & Florian, 2019). Professionals can promote CYP to feel safe and secure in their environment and build up decision-making experiences by practicing 'informal' approaches to child participation such as general discussions about how they feel about day to day tasks; therefore, allowing them to feel safe enough to share their views during more 'formal' child participation opportunities such as reviews (Norwich & Kelly, 2006).

EPs also identified factors that can affect their professional ability to elicit and subsequently report on a CYPs views, such as the CYPs level of self-esteem (Harding & Atkinson, 2009). Often CYP can feel too shy to attend meetings or share their views, and thus are better able to express themselves away from this environment (Barnard-Dadds & Conn, 2018). Formal meetings can also raise their anxiety levels and many professionals feel it would be in the best interest of the CYP not to be included in meetings about their needs (Soar, Burke, Herbst & Gersch, 2005).

⁸ Can be accessed: <https://councilfordisabledchildren.org.uk/help-resources/resources/factsheet-4-barriers-participation>

The CYPs specific needs may also lead them to feel unable to express their views and rely on adults to prompt them, for example, pupils with ASD may struggle with the social participation aspect of meetings due to the presence of a facilitator and a group of unfamiliar adults (Ghanouni et al, 2019). Conversely, pupils with physical disabilities may face barriers of accessibility within meetings (Shah, 2007). Pupils with SEMH often are not involved in meetings due to adults concluding that they would struggle to listen to the perceived weaknesses drawn to their needs within meetings and therefore it would be in their best interest not to attend (Norwich & Kelly, 2006; Faupel, 2003).

CYP are involved in various assessments during the EHCP process and meet many adults who all aim to elicit their voice as part of their contribution to the process. As discussed above, the relationship with the adult aiming to elicit views is also a key enabling factor. CYP are not familiar with the adults who assess them or visit them to elicit views, such as the SO or social worker, who they may only meet once. They have had many professionals in their lives asking the same questions about their views and this can become a tedious and purposeless activity; one aim of EHCPs was to avoid the rhetoric of the SEND journey and to have this documented once (CoP, 2015), yet all professionals involved in the assessment must elicit their voice in some form. Therefore, it is likely that CYP would be asked the same question around their likes and dislikes and may not wish to continue to repeat themselves to a stranger. This may hinder their willingness to engage or to fully disclose their views on what can be a personal, albeit onerous experience.

(ii) Barriers for professionals in eliciting voice

Cremin, Mason & Busher (2011) contend that despite a professional rhetoric around the importance of consulting with children, there is reason to think that many professionals continue to disregard their views in day to day practice, making it more difficult to ascertain this during crucial times such as EHCP assessments and ARs. As Lundy (2007) describes, adult concerns tend to fall into one of three groups; reluctance to engage in the effort to comply with children's rights, a worry that giving control to CYP will undermine authority, and a belief around the capacity of the CYP to make decisions. Each of these barriers, along with others that have been recognised as barriers for the professional, will now be discussed.

The lack of adherence to article 12 of the UNCRC was discussed in chapter 2.2.2, which gives the perception that there is a professional reluctance to ensure the voice of the CYP is central to all decision-making. The first barrier which can hinder a professional's ability or willingness to elicit the CYPs views is lack of resources (Hellawell, 2015; Whitty, 2002). There is a lack of time for professionals to implement innovative methods to elicit pupil voice and comply with children's right agendas within their timescales, and therefore often the quickest method of consultation is chosen rather than the most suitable method of consultation (Harding & Atkinson, 2009). This barrier ties in with practical barriers such as location, transport, difficulty of booking meetings and confliction with other commitments.

The range of methods available, which will be discussed in detail in chapter 2.5.2, can be used in all settings, however all require preparation ahead of time. LA professionals have identified high workload as a significant barrier to their role, and therefore having time to implement participatory methods to elicit pupil voice would not be practical with the sheer number of pupils with SEND within the local area (Harding & Atkinson, 2009). Similarly, teaching staff identify the high number of ARs can impact their ability to carry out person-centred reviews due to the time one review can take (White & Rae, 2016). Although the strain on SEND professionals has been acknowledged, there is a lack of literature that has explored the perspective from this group in-depth around the difficulties they face within their role, the feasibility in accessing pupil views and the tensions that rise when addressing CYP with specific needs.

The introduction of the conversion process of statements of SEN to EHCPs imposed by the government led to a high frequency of statutory work and high stress levels within LAs and particularly in the role of the SO (Hellawell, 2015). This impacted the tasks that became a priority, such as converting all statements into EHCPs by the government deadline, and therefore pupil consultation was not as prominent as ensuring reports were provided within the timescales (Winter & Bunn, 2019). The pressure of Ofsted to ensure paperwork is up to date and met within timescales contribute to the stresses of both LAs and schools to carry out statutory duties and monitor progress as opposed to decision-making, leading to '*more paperwork, less impact*' (Pearson, Mitchell & Rapti, 2015, p.54). Whitty (2002) disputes whether the

high ideals placed on schools and LA by government for person-centred approaches can really be put into practice; questioning if there is a political and professional will to hear what young people have to say? Another query is when the voice is elicited within reviews, is there any capacity to act on any changes that may have arisen as a result? Without action, the views elicited are a tokenistic exercise which does not directly contribute to decision-making (Kilkelly et al, 2005; Johnson, 2017).

There also appears to be tensions at a policy level, where SEND professionals have reported the lack of clarity in their processes on how to ensure person-centred approaches to assessment. Norwich & Kelly's (2006) questionnaire for SENCOs in seven LAs highlighted inconsistencies in practice between staff and their ability to effectively elicit pupil voice. One SENCO described her personal commitment to pupil participation, yet this was incongruent with practice across the school. This is seen as a form of 'moral stress' experienced by professionals who are aware of their professional obligation yet can be incongruent with their personal beliefs. The bureaucratic burdens for SEND professionals from imposed timelines and procedures often overrides their personal beliefs to support CYP to elicit their views and contribute to better outcomes (Hellowell, 2015).

The second barrier described by Lundy (2007) relates to the power dynamics between the adult-child relationship. The analysis of the previous CoP documents highlights an adult-led process to make decisions for the child, and although the current practice emphasises the pupil voice, adult dominance remains at the forefront of most decisions made for CYP. Children's involvement in decision-making rely on the assumptions made by adults on their perceived ability to participate, and therefore can limit their knowledge and involvement of any decision-making processes. There are opportunities for CYP to voice their concerns such as school forums, yet there is a lack of representativeness within these groups as only a handful of students with SEND are invited to participate. CYP in these forums are also expected to take on 'adult' modes of behaviour and communicate in ways that mirror adult bureaucratic systems, which are not child-friendly in their procedure, let alone disability friendly. CYP have argued the venues, timing, procedure and jargon used in forum meetings are a barrier to their participation (Sinclair, 2004). Evidence repeatedly indicated that CYP should set the agenda for ownership of decision

making (Lewis & Porter, 2004), yet they continue to be consulted around issues important to the adult, and therefore resemble a type of meaningless participation (Willow et al, 2004).

Within a school context, power dynamics exist due to the relationship between the teacher and the pupil; pupils are expected to listen to the teacher's instruction and do what they say. Therefore, within a context that asks CYP to express their views freely, such as ARs, they struggle to break away from what has been embedded throughout school and rather respond with what they feel they are expected to say (Scott-Barret, Cebula & Florian, 2019). Pupil interviews also highlight CYPs concerns around expressing their views within the school environment due to unapproachable teachers aiming to elicit views, doubts over teachers keeping their views confidential, and difficulty building trust. Pupils also felt their targets being discussed had already been set for them and so eliciting their views on this constitutes as tokenistic and meaningless consultation (Norwich & Kelly, 2006).

Adults tend to use language that is inaccessible to CYP, where meetings use professional jargon and deficit-based language about the child, despite them being present in the room (Van-Dycke et al, 2019). The authenticity of voice that is gained from contributions with professional support is often doubted due to the leading questions and pressure to respond in a certain way (Williams, 2011), and so the adult-child power imbalance is a key barrier to eliciting meaningful pupil voice.

At times, adults do not create a space for CYP to express themselves due to their role as a gatekeeper. For CYP under 16, the parent's consent needs to be sought prior to eliciting pupil views, and similarly within the school environment, the consent of the teaching staff is required. An EHCP assessment and AR requires parental input and participation at each stage of the process; the parents are also the ones who can appeal aspects of the plan and can influence the presence of their child during meetings (Anderson et al, 2005). Skipp & Hopwood (2016) found many parents had reservations about professionals approaching their children due to their specific needs. They expressed themselves as an acceptable route to sharing the views of their child; their role as gatekeepers is described as '*an understandable yet challenging one*' (p.44). All decisions to involve CYP go through the parent/carer and practitioner involved in their care, such as the teacher, and without this permission,

the child cannot be approached nor asked whether they would like to participate (Bradwell, 2019). As much as professionals acknowledge that '*the client is the child*', there also is the recognition that legally it is the '*parent's views that are paramount*' and who can allow others to access the views of their child (Fox, 2015, p.385-386). Similarly, those who work with the child in an educational setting tend to display a need to protect them when a situation is seen to threaten their self-esteem or appear too difficult for the pupil, which acts as a barrier in allowing the pupil to participate (Norwich & Kelly, 2006).

The third barrier refers to the assumption of capacity for CYP to share their views due to their perceived cognitive abilities. CYP with complex needs are not used to being asked their views and are often disregarded by key adults in their life due to presumptions of voice (Anderson et al, 2005). LAs and schools have reported struggling to elicit views for pupils who they feel show little insight due to cognitive abilities (Norwich & Kelly, 2006). For example, CYP with SEMH needs have been described to externalise their views through their behaviours as a means of communication, as they can lack the linguistic capacity to do so through verbal language (Faupel, 2003). However, Sellman (2009) argued that this cohort then is automatically not consulted with due to their behaviour, yet when given the opportunity by professionals are able to demonstrate capability to convey important messages about their views.

Harding & Atkinson (2009) also identify that the methods used to access pupil voice is governed by various factors such as the age of the child; majority of research has focused on the views of CYP who are slightly older, with sparse literature focused on eliciting the voice of CYP who are younger (Scott-Barret, Cebula & Florian, 2019; Bradwell, 2019). This is possibly due to concerns around capacity to share their views and be engaged in decision-making but may also be a barrier around access to children due to ethical concerns. The ethical issues around eliciting views of CYP in relation to mental capacity and meaningful contribution is discussed further below.

McNeish and Newman (2002) summarise that gathering the views of the CYP and involving them in decision-making processes takes time. It requires development of new skills for both adults and young people, and therefore a level of resources is required. It also involves a shift of organisational attitude from the 'consumer' to 'co-

producer'. This shift in culture may seem to have occurred through the growing legislation of inclusion, yet there appears to remain a lack of listening culture within England, which inhibits the ability to progress towards a plan based on what the CYP says (Bradwell, 2019). As Lansdown (2006) summarises well, adults who deny providing children opportunities for taking responsibility for decision-making diminish their development of capacity, and then use this position to justify the original failure in allowing children a voice.

Professionals are often criticised for their lack of mindfulness to the needs of CYP, yet there is sparse literature that aims to empower them to overcome the limitations within their role. The UNCRC (1989) identified three fundamental rights for children; Protection, Participation and Provision. The question is if professionals are capable of doing all three? Does the need to protect the CYP and provide provision to meet their needs within education, as per the code, over-ride the recognition that they legally have a right to participate? Arguably, the biggest barrier for professionals to elicit the CYPs views is the practicality of ensuring a pupil-centred approach to every decision-making process, whilst managing the statutory aspects.

2.4.3 Ethics in accessing the pupil voice

Whitehurst (2006) stresses the importance of the voice of the child, and the international recognition that this must be done in practice as per the UNCRC (1989), however the practical barriers discussed above are confounded with the ethical issues around accessing pupil voice for all types of need, such as CYP with intellectual difficulties or multiple and complex needs.

Lewis (2010) argues the promotion of child voice has led to a 'moral crusade'. There is a moral need to promote the authentic voice of the child whilst attempting to manage the professional barriers, such as time constraints to complete tasks, limited time to develop relationships with children, reluctance of children wishing to engage, and professionals working towards a pre-specified agenda where the CYP promote the message you are trying to achieve. Although Lewis discusses participatory methods in research, her argument can be translated to provide insight on the ethics around eliciting the voice of the CYP in assessments and reviews. The restricted

statutory timescales of an EHC needs assessment does not accommodate the time it takes to meaningfully elicit the voice of the CYP. Professionals are not able to make multiple visits in order to build a relationship or verify that the views expressed by the CYP is a *view*, and not a *preference* at that time (Pearlman & Michaels, 2019). It appears that promoting the authentic voice of the child has become more of a bureaucratic process aiming to corral voices rather than empower them.

CYP may feel pressured to be involved in activities such as ARs, as they feel they have to; there is sparse indication that CYP are told they do not have to share their views if they do not wish to (Lewis, 2010). This brings up the contemporary barrier raised in 2.4.2 about power dynamics, which also acts as an ethical one. CYP are taught to follow instructions of adults, particularly in school settings, and so when their voice is being elicited they often share because they feel they have to not because they choose to (Bradwell, 2019). However, instead of making a CYP aware of their right not to share their personal views, there is bureaucratic pressure to include the voice of the CYP in assessments and ARs and so quite often professionals become careless in the methods they use to attempt to elicit those voices. The focus should be not on what is produced or what is said, rather the encounter with the CYP and the silence of what is unsaid; by listening better, professionals can interpret their silence as a form of interaction as opposed to a form of withdrawal (Lewis, 2010).

Another ethical conundrum is around involving staff and familiar adults to validate the beliefs of the CYP. Some research has found involving Learning Support Assistants (LSAs) as a useful way to help articulate the views of CYP with complex communication or cognition needs (Fitzgerald, 2007), whereas alternatively this can also be a biased factor that censors the true beliefs of CYP (Stafford, Laybourn, Hill, and Walker, 2003). This relates to the earlier barrier of adult gatekeepers, and the need to protect the CYP (Norwich & Kelly, 2006). Stafford, Laybourn, Hill, and Walker (2003) found children wanted to discuss their education in a private place, away from staff and led by a neutral person not associated with the school. They reported it as easier to talk to someone they would not see again about issues they felt strongly about in school.

Harding (2009) has focused on the difficulty of participation for pupils with PMLD, one of which is gaining consent from individuals whose level of cognitive impairment does not allow a dialogue to indicate choice. Existing research that has looked at pupil voice often exclude pupils with PMLD due to the nature of their disability, and so their views are often not reflected within findings (Bishton, 2007). One method is to ask an adult who knows the pupil well how they indicate if they are happy or unhappy with a situation, and then use this as a basis when visiting them as a method to gain consent. However, relying on a child's affective state cannot commensurate to giving consent (Morris, 2003).

Another question is around the reliability and validity of responses for those operating a pre-intentional level. Ware (2004) differentiates a 'view' as being distinct from a preference or a choice, or a reaction to a stimulus or a set of questions. Research within pupil voice for PMLD students has been based on their expression or their reaction immediately, or immediately after being exposed to an activity or stimuli, which is then interpreted by those around them. Ware questions the high degree of inference associated with interpreting nonverbal behaviours. Mediated forms of communication, which will be discussed in chapter 2.5.2, rely on adult interpretation of views which can often lead to inaccuracies and generalisations of pupil responses (Harding & Atkinson 2009; May, 2004). Responses need to be validated by ensuring consistency in their answers over time; there needs to be discriminatory examples to show the CYP reacts differently to opposing stimuli to indicate their true choice (Porter, Ouvry, Morgan & Downs, 2001).

Professionals have begun to recognise that there is not a universal method that can be used to suit all CYP, nor is there one method that can be advocated to schools and LAs to utilise within their assessments and ARs. Rather that there needs to be transparency of the difficulties when eliciting pupil voice, recognising the barriers and ethical implications of this, and attempting to overcome this through developing individual skills, being flexible within your approach and utilising a thorough and systematic way to validate our analysis (Lewis & Porter, 2007)

2.5 Methods of Consultation

2.5.1 *Pupil centred Planning and Reviews*

The acknowledgment that individuals with learning disabilities had little control over aspects of their own life and poor planning at the point of transitions was reflected as a problem by the government (DoH, 2001). Although this thesis focuses on education, it is important to note the universal message that was coming across all government run services such as those in health and social care. The DoH published a new White Paper, 'Valuing People' (2001) that proposed a concept known as Person-centred planning (PCP) as a method to empower individuals with disabilities to make decisions about themselves regarding their health, education and care. The White Paper promoted the philosophy of shifting power from professionals within the field, to the service users themselves, and thus emphasising the underpinnings of a humanistic and positive psychological perspective (Wood et al, 2019). This was first seen in Carl Rogers (1959) person-centred approach to psychotherapy, moving towards an empathetic and empowering process for the clients; emphasising growth, equality and collaboration.

The New Labour Governments (1997-2010) '*Every Child Matters*' agenda (2003) suggested a need for an integrated model. Personalised learning refers to tailoring education to meet the individual needs of the CYP based on their strengths, skills, needs and interests (DoH, 2001). This differs from individualised learning where a pupil is isolated in their learning due to their strengths and needs within different areas and refers to including the CYP in the curriculum with their peers yet presented in a way that is differentiated to their level of need (Courcier, 2007). The agenda recognised that there is no 'one size fits all' approach to education, rather CYP learn in different ways (DoH, 2001). Personalised learning supports the agenda of inclusion; to allow CYP with SEND to access the mainstream environment alongside their peers whilst ensuring the work is differentiated to suit their needs, such as shorter instructions, visual aids and flexible classroom arrangements (Hopkins, Round & Barley, 2018).

PCP is a philosophy of empowering individuals and focusing on positive aspects of CYP as opposed to the deficit-based language often entrenched in policies,

procedures and resource-allocation models. By working with CYP towards their aspirations, it is working towards '*Putting People First*' (Her Majesty Government, 2007). PCP can therefore be loosely defined as planning that leads to positive changes in people's lives and services (Ritchie et al, 2003). Within health, studies have found introducing a PCP approach had a positive benefit on the life experience and outcomes of people with learning disabilities (Robertson et al, 2005; Parley, 2001). Although this work focused on young people transitioning into adulthood, researchers have applied the same principle to children in order to support the planning process around their education (White & Rae, 2016). Mechanisms are required to be put into place before expecting meaningful participation, and the characteristics of the PCP approach provides an opportunity to fulfil the criteria of the CoP.

PCP aims to support individuals by eliciting their perspective on what is important to them, and then tailoring the support based on their views. The key features of PCP as described by Sanderson, Kennedy, Ritchie & Goodwin (1997) are identified as follows:

- (1) the person is at the centre, in the sense they are consulted throughout the whole process, choose who they would like to involve in the process, and they choose the setting and timing of the process;
- (2) Family members and friends are partners in planning;
- (3) The plan reflects what is important to the CYP, their capabilities and the support they may require, and thus supporting a shared understanding between professionals and the individual;
- (4) The plan results in actions that are about life, not just services, and reflects what is possible, not just what's available, and;
- (5) The plan results in ongoing listening, learning and further actions.

A pupil-centred review (PCR), which is a meeting that entails the characteristics of PCP, includes the CYP as the central focus, surrounded by the key adults in their life, and is facilitated by another adult within the setting. Majority of LAs now advocate PCP on their local offer, with guidance for schools on how to carry out ARs in a child-centred way and support the CYP with this process. The PCP process involves '*paying attention to people's unique capacities, listening better to what really*

matters to them, and striving to follow through more directly on what we hear' (O'Brien & Lovett, 1993, p.482). White & Rae (2016) found that parents described PCP to be a collaborative and empowering process, where the young person is asked about their views and involved in the decision-making process.

PCP was found to positively impact some aspects of transition planning for young people who had been excluded and were being reintegrated into mainstream (Corrighan, 2014), for pupils with intellectual disabilities by increasing participation during the process compared to previous programmes (Kaehne & Beyer, 2013), and with increasing participation with young boys with SEMH needs due to the perceived 'reduced power imbalance' (Taylor-Brown, 2012). It was also found to be 'cost-neutral' as schools and LAs can use resources already available to them (Robertson et al, 2005) and therefore eliminating the criticism of the lack of resources in LAs (Barnard-Dadds & Conn, 2018) and addressing some of the barriers to participation mentioned in chapter 2.4.2.

(i) Challenges to PCP

Despite the seemingly positive aspects of a PCP approach, there remains acknowledgement that the fundamental principles of PCP can differ in practice (Barnard-Dadds & Conn, 2018). Claes et al's (2010) literature review on PCP methods for individuals with learning difficulties concluded there is no agreed definition of PCP and so it has been represented in different ways, and often synonyms are used to adapt PCP in varying context such as 'personal carer plan' in health and 'whole life planning' in business. Although PCP has been associated with positive outcomes for those involved (Buschbacher, 2004; Buschbacher & Fox, 2003; Gardner et al., 2003; Kennedy et al., 2001), the small sample sizes of studies questions how much PCP can be attributed as a casual factor to positive outcome changes (Claes et al, 2010).

The constraints against participation in PCP meetings includes the barriers present for a CYP to engage in meetings. Although the barriers are discussed in detail in chapter 2.4.2, PCP approaches have been criticised as not always being child-friendly as CYP may feel apprehensive about the meeting. There are times pupils felt too shy to participate and so information was offered by the parents or professionals

around them, thus defeating the objective of a PCR (Fayette & Bond, 2018). Studies that have looked at PCP meetings have identified limited engagement and minimal responses from pupils due to their needs. This includes the highly specific needs of CYP with ASD (Barnard-Dadds & Conn, 2018) and CYP with multi-sensory impairment (MSI), such as hearing, visual and physical impairments, who require adaptations to paperwork to be made ahead of time (Taylor, 2007). Researchers have identified adaptations that can be made to the PCP approach to support students access this method without undue anxiety or apprehension, such as informal meetings beforehand to build rapport between the facilitator and the student, have regular breaks during the meeting, using assistive communication devices, or giving the option to be involved via other means such as 'Skype' or a power-point presentation completed ahead of time (Hudson, 2006).

Lewis (2004) summarises challenges to accessing pupil voice, such as an over-formal process and the capability of the CYP, which requires extensive understanding of their participatory limits. PCP meetings do not have equal impact for all participants, as there are inequalities identified in both access to and the efficacy of the PCP in relation to various factors. This includes participant characteristics, contextual factors and the PCP process itself (Robertson et al, 2007). Often CYP do not understand the process of PCP meetings or what the outcome will be from it, and so choose to disengage (Claes et al, 2010). It is also important to highlight that SEND covers a wide range of need and the nature of the CYP's needs will have implications on their ability to participate. Individuals with SEMH or ASD were less likely to receive a PCP approach in their care due to difficulties in accessing the planning meeting. This cohort was also less likely to benefit from the implementation of a PCP meeting as they did not see the relevance.

A leading factor for a successful PCR is the skill of the facilitator; the responsibility to mediate PCP meetings requires the facilitator to be adequately trained to deliver the meeting concisely, whilst adjusting to the individual needs of the CYP (White & Rae, 2016). The facilitator acts as an integral part of the process (Robertson et al, 2007) in balancing the participation of the pupil, the parents and other professionals, whilst ensuring the views are not dominated by the adults (Michaels & Ferrara, 2006). Participants were identified to be 12 times more likely to receive a pupil-centred plan

if the facilitator expressed higher levels of commitment to PCP (Robertson et al, 2007).

In addition to the barriers of participation in PCP meetings, there are identified limitations in the implementation of a PCP approach for CYP with learning disabilities. As discussed, the facilitator plays an integral role in the successful participation of pupils, however they also play a role in implementing meetings and tracking participation. In a study by Robertson et al (2007), the facilitators who were trained to organise and deliver PCP meetings were not always available due to other commitments and practical difficulties in arranging planning meetings. If PCP is done to its ideal form, it is a time-consuming process and emphasises a lack of feasibility and sustainability (Corrighan, 2014). The need to invest sufficient time, training and capacity to facilitate PCP meetings is reflected in the SEND pathfinder evaluation of EHCPs by the DfE (2013), yet the acknowledgment of the lack of resources, time and capacity in LAs and schools remain problematic to applying PCP in practice (Barnard-Dadds & Conn, 2018; Hellawell, 2015).

PCP also carries a shift in values and attitudes of service providers (Parley, 2001), where a 'different type of listening' is promoted. The principles of PCP fit the social model of disability, by arguing a shift in the balance of power between individuals and the services they depend on. PCP emphasises creating opportunities for individuals with disabilities by changing the services, rather than trying to attribute change to the person. As discussed, the perceived reduce in the power balance can result in CYP feeling comfortable enough to share their views (Taylor-Brown, 2012). In order to successfully carry out PCP meeting, appropriate methods and tools are needed to apply the philosophical underpinning of PCP into practical context.

2.5.2 *Pupil centred methods*

As research progresses, there is a growing need for methods of consultation to be flexible and innovative in their approach, in order to cater for the individual needs of CYP with SEND. The factors that need to be considered include difficulties with memory, language, emotion, social skills and the pragmatics of language. The previous reliance on a proxy to convey the thoughts of a CYP is no longer seen as

an acceptable form of pupil voice and thus need for advanced methods to elicit pupil voice is now more prominent than ever (Dimitrellou & Mare, 2019; Lewis & Porter, 2007). These methods may differ in their approach, but all share the characteristics of PCP. The way pupil voice is elicited is dependent on the need of the CYP, however literature identifies that CYP with SEND are capable of sharing their views when given the right methods, and so establishing pupil centred methods are key in facilitating participation (Dimitrellou & Mare, 2019; Cefai & Cooper, 2010).

Macbeath et al (2003) suggest three approaches to pupil participation in order to elicit pupil voice, which can be seen in table 2.5. Their categories of methods for consultation are (1) direct, where children are asked their views directly such as in an interview, (2) prompted, where a cue or prompt is used to support children to express their views such as using sentence completers, and (3) mediated, where alternative methods are needed to support their communication such as drawing and photos. All three methods have been explored within the literature around pupil consultation, particularly for CYP with SEND. Each method will now be discussed in relation to pupil consultation.

METHOD			
	Direct	Prompted	Mediated
Examples:	Children asked directly for their views in talk or writing	Some cue or prompt is used to assist children to express their views	Alternative methods or media used to support communication
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● questionnaires ● conversations ● interviews ● post views in box ● diary / log 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● sentence completion ● video replay of teaching / learning situation ● report back observations of child interacting ● photos of different settings ● other materials that enable comparison ● information from completed questionnaire 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● drawings and paintings ● photos ● making video ● making poster ● role-play

Based on MacBeath, Demetriou, Ruddock and Myers (2003) *Consulting Pupils: a toolkit for teachers*.

Table 2.5: Methods for consulting pupils

(i) Direct

A direct method of consultation involves eliciting pupils voice directly via talking or writing. This can involve informal discussions, questionnaires, and written views. The most common method of eliciting views is identified as a direct method of talking to the pupil (Norwich & Kelly, 2006). Dimitrellou & Male (2019) used face to face interviews to discuss what makes a positive school experience for pupils with SEMH and Moderate Learning Difficulties (MLD). Their findings highlight how pupils are able to articulate their views and pupil voice can be a valuable method in informing inclusive practice. Humphrey & Lewis (2008) also used direct methods of semi-structured interviews and a diary log to explore the views of 20 pupils with ASD on their experiences within their mainstream school. This study asked the pupils to support in the design and implementation of the interview questions, to ensure it was appropriate for them and their feedback was used to refine the questions. Diaries were described as a useful but often under-used method that allowed descriptive information into the lived experiences of pupils, that can often be hard to obtain verbally. It provides personal and intimate information, that are temporally ordered, and seen as a 'less intrusive' method than interviewing due to the face to face contact and the apprehensions a pupil with ASD may feel in this situation. Using qualitative methods such as diaries are generally considered to be more appropriate and beneficial to explore the beliefs and perspectives of CYP with SEND, due to the difficulties in applying quantitative methods within research on pupil consultation, particularly for those within specialist settings (Fredrickson & Cline, 2002).

Questionnaires are also widely used within ARs to represent both pupil and parent views during the meeting. Direct methods of consultation provide a simplistic and cost-effective way of eliciting pupil voice and will often be the first method thought of when approaching CYP (Todd, 2003). However, not all CYP with SEND can access this method of consultation. It requires a certain level of cognitive ability and linguistic capability to process questions, understand the intent of the question, and respond appropriately. Pupils with speech and language needs may not have the rhetoric required to fully explain how they feel in interviews or in written formats. Similarly, pupils with intellectual difficulties may struggle to respond to direct questions due to their level of cognition (Pearlman & Michaels, 2019), direct methods also can cause

unwarranted anxieties (Barnard-Dadds & Conn, 2018). Todd (2003) extends to say just asking children about their views or filling in a form by completing sentences is not a sufficient way of capturing views and does not inform children about how decisions are being reached about them. Therefore, methods that extend this interaction are required to meaningfully elicit voice of CYP.

(ii) Prompted

Prompted methods involve eliciting voice via a 'prompt' or stimulus, such as taking photographs and then discussing views based on this prompt. Rabiee, Sloper & Beresford (2005) developed a reliable, non-threatening and enjoyable method to elicit pupil views about health services. Cards with different characters who feel different ways about how they would like to be addressed within a health screening were presented to the CYP, e.g. '*John wants the doctor to talk to him in a way he understands*', or '*Naseem does not want the doctor to talk to him*'. These act as prompts for the CYP to select which card resonates with their own thoughts; the key tenets being flexible in nature, so it could be adapted to different ages, needs and abilities of CYP. Photographs taken by pupils can also be used as prompts when interviewing them about their views on their school, as photos can be seen as an additional form of self-expression and removes the pressure of verbal language to articulate one's self (Cremin, Mason & Busher, 2011)

Prompted methods can be beneficial to elicit pupil voice however do run the risk of influencing the CYP in their views; using sentence completers for example may sway CYP to respond in a way they feel is expected, as opposed to free choice in how they would like to structure their views (Pillay, Dunbar-Krige & Mostert, 2013). Reporting on an observation also interferes with the CYPs views, as it will be influenced by the views of the observer and thus may carry pre-conceived notions by the practitioner (Bryman, 2012). Loyd (2015) found direct questions can be confusing for pupils with ASD and so used sentence completion tasks with three different options to choose from. This is an example of a forced choice and does not allow the pupil to freely give their view, rather to choose one of the pre-determined options that are most likely to resonate with their views, as determined by the adults around them. However, the researcher found this an effective way to discuss the views of pupils who were described as non-verbal, but some did require further prompting to

choose an option. It is likely that prompting can lead a CYP to choose any option out of pressure, as opposed to meaningful participation of what they actually think and feel.

Pupils with more complex needs such as PMLD struggle to access prompted methods of consultation due to their level of need. Using prompted methods alone is unlikely to elicit preference as the pupil is likely to struggle to understand the question being asked or be unable to respond due to their 'little or no communication' and written ability (Harding, 2009). In this instance, pupils need alternative forms of communication that is compatible with their level of understanding and need.

(iii) Mediated

Mediated approaches refer to pupils using alternative and augmentative means of communication (AAC) to express themselves, such as making a video, or drawing. Germain (2004) describes the use of photographs as an alternative tool to capturing a CYP's understanding of the social world, whilst removing some of the language barriers present within more direct methods. Photographs are also seen as a form of ownership of what you choose to communicate, and thus an empowering process for CYP with SEND to take control of how the camera is used. Pearlman & Michaels (2019) recommended video footage as the preferred technique to elicit the voice of the child for individuals with PMLD, due to the complexity in their needs and the difficulty in using either directed or prompted methods to elicit voice. Video footage can also provide concrete evidence of views, which can be made over time to record changes and progress.

Mediated methods such as photos, drawings and videos would be familiar to and enjoyed by young children, and therefore a useful method to keep them engaged and participate in activities with ease (Ravet, 2007). Interestingly one participant in the study described earlier by Humphrey & Lewis (2008) drew a picture in their diary to explain his day as oppose to writing about it, which was not expected by the researchers but allowed valuable insight into his feelings that he could not express with words. The researchers then promoted the method of drawing as a tool to provide deeper understanding of the views of CYP who may struggle to articulate

themselves or may not be able to access more 'traditional' methods such as interviews.

Although these methods involve technological advances that allow a shift from a proxy to the pupil directly eliciting their views through mediated approaches, it is important to recognise that the medium used may distort the message (Lewis & Porter, 2007). For example, when a mediator is used to interpret signing for pupils who are deaf or hard of hearing, the mediator may unknowingly introduce bias through emphasis on certain words and therefore distort the views of the CYP. Using AAC devices also requires a level of training; pupils need to be taught how to use AAC devices, which can be a costly and time-consuming activity. Reliance on technology also can have difficulties such as when a system needs charging or gets broken, this leaves the CYP without a method of communication, and respectively without a voice. AAC devices also require training of the facilitator to be accurate in order to respond back to the CYP. The level of knowledge and skill of AAC devices in teaching staff is often not proficient enough to facilitate communication for CYP (Ghani & Mohammed, 2019).

The goal of AAC should always be authentic independent communication, which can lead to improved quality of life through evidence-based methods. It is rooted in a belief that CYP with SEND can achieve some form of independence to express themselves, without the reliance on an adult proxy. This includes the methods listed in table 2.5, along with other mediated methods such as Picture Exchange Communication Systems (PECS) and communication apps.

2.5.3 *Pupil centred tools*

The urgency of PCP meetings and the differing methods of consultation led to the development of various tools for professional use when working with CYP in SEND. PCP tools were developed as templates to guide conversations, and for practitioners to successfully facilitate co-production meetings. Over the years, different approaches to planning have been developed to aid the PCP process, all based on the principles described in 2.5.1. However, the tools developed for consulting and engaging CYP with SEND in PCP meetings have been met with mixed results.

Whilst the government advocates a PCP approach to consultation, research highlights the tools are an adult-centric approach to consultation as opposed to the pupil-centred one it aspires to be (Barnard-Dadds & Conn, 2018). Examples of the different tools used in current practice to elicit pupil voice will now be discussed; they categorise as either a direct, prompted or mediated method of consultation, and the strengths and criticisms of each tool will be evaluated.

(i) One-Page Profiles

One of the first methods identified within PCP, and remains a popular choice by schools and LAs, includes a one-page profile (Sanderson & Smull, 2005). This captures important information about a CYP on a piece of paper in an accessible format, highlighting their likes and dislikes, what is important to them, and how best to support them. An example of a one-page profile can be seen in figure 2.2. The views are gathered from the young person by an adult, and parent input is also considered important due to their knowledge of how best to support their child. However, for individuals with complex needs, it is usually the adults who know them best that will create this profile for practitioner use.

One-page profiles have been found to be beneficial in times of transition, so the new setting can have a sense of the CYP before they come to the school and prepare any resources needed ahead of time (Smith & Sanderson, 2009). The benefits of a one-page profile includes developing a strong sense of self as valued individuals and part of their community, and hearing what others say about them can lead to positive self-esteem and well-being. It also benefits parents to know that the school is attempting to understand their child's strengths and needs, whilst supporting a whole school approach to personalised education (Sanderson, Goodwin & Kinsella, 2013).

One-page profiles tend to use direct methods of consultation by asking the CYP what they like and dislike through conversation. The pupil can often draw pictures to illustrate their views alongside the written information, therefore using elements of prompted methods. Its simplicity and practicality of capturing a CYPs views on their

education has led to various LAs advocating this approach on their local offer as examples of good practice⁹.



Figure 2.2: An example of a one-page profile (Smith & Sanderson, 2009)

Moving from a one-page profile to a pupil centred plan involves holding a meeting or review process with all individuals involved in the CYPs care, and who are important to them. Discussions are led by the one-page profile where co-created actions can

⁹ An example can be found here: <https://shropshire.gov.uk/the-send-local-offer/practitioners/resources/one-page-profiles/>

be made to support the CYP further. Smith & Sanderson (2009) introduced one-page profiles in a local mainstream school, this included writing comments about themselves and their classmates under the headings of 'great things about me', 'what is important to me', and 'how best to support me'. The last section was gathered through parent feedback, which was identified as a key feature to developing one-page profiles. The school found this a beneficial process to elicit pupil views and advantageous to both the children and teaching staff, however critiqued as a time-consuming process. Smith & Sanderson (2009) argue that it would not be a time-consuming task if built into the curriculum from the start and can act as a preliminary point to inform decision making based on what is important to the CYP. One-page profiles have also now transcended into health and social care practices for children, adults with learning needs, and some companies also have begun to create a one-page profile of their staff used in display or for performance reviews (Smith & Sanderson, 2009).

When searching for one-page profiles, various resources provide examples that are easily accessible for teaching staff and professionals to adapt prior to meeting a CYP, however some critique its simplicity as an impersonal system. A blog known as 'people thinking action'¹⁰ addressed common critiques of a one-page profile, one being it is a superficial list of likes and dislikes. The author responds by stating the tool is only useful if used correctly; a one-page profile should be used to structure a meaningful conversation and deliver change. It does not serve as a substitute of detailed person-centred planning; there is a risk that introducing one-page profiles for all would lead to the 'tick-list' culture mentioned previously for LAs and schools to evidence they have sourced the voice of the child through this exercise. Smith & Sanderson (2009) advocates one-page profiles as a way to open up conversations and make CYP feel comfortable enough to discuss deeper issues they may have. It does not serve as a piece of evidence for pupil voice, rather an empowering exercise for CYP to express their voice.

¹⁰ Can be accessed: <http://peoplethinkingaction.blogspot.com/2013/11/one-page-profiles-just-garnish.html>

(ii) Planning Alternative Tomorrows with Hope (PATH) maps

Another PCP tool used in schools and often by EPs is the PATH tool developed by Pearpoint, O'Brien & Forest (1991). This is a graphical model that supports individuals to build upon their strengths and find direction in their life by creating a positive future through solution-focused questioning. PATH meetings are often led by two facilitators, one that will lead in eliciting aspirations, and the other records each step graphically. PATH begins by identifying the CYP's dream and therefore begins in the future. Backward planning is then used to identify the actions required to reach the dream. After the facilitator has asked the young person to describe their vision for the future, this is drawn on to a piece of paper. The next step involves the young person thinking about 12 months into the future and what their positive goals are. They then explain how they feel right now and address any tensions between where they are now and where they want to be in 12 months' time. The facilitators then discuss who is involved to support the young person to achieve these goals, and ways to build up strength to meet these goals. The final step looks at setting a meeting in either three- or six-months' time to set interim goals.

Figure 2.3 shows an example of a template PATH and numbered to highlight the order it is discussed in. PATH is again a direct method of consultation as it involves discussions with the CYP on what their dreams are and how to get there. The graphical display illustrates the conversation; however, it is the facilitator who draws and not the CYP, and therefore is not a prompted or mediated form of consultation. The views are solely based on direct methods of consultation.

Wood et al (2019) conducted semi-structured interviews with secondary-aged male students, parents and the facilitator of the PATH methods to evaluate the impact of the PATH meeting on the CYP. They found that this tool allowed CYP to access the content due to the visual methodology and simplified language and supported them to be confident and motivated to do well. Most importantly the pupils and their families felt this method was an effective way to ensure the CYP is heard and at the centre of the process. However, a possible barrier identified in this study was the time taken for preparation. It was also identified that families and children felt they would benefit from receiving additional information about the PATH process ahead of time in order to prepare for the meeting and understand the process better. Schools

also reported not carrying them out frequently enough and so the facilitator was not always skilled to carry out the PATH meeting effectively. The visual aspect of the PATH requires skilled drawing methods to appeal to the CYP, which again is not always possible to have.

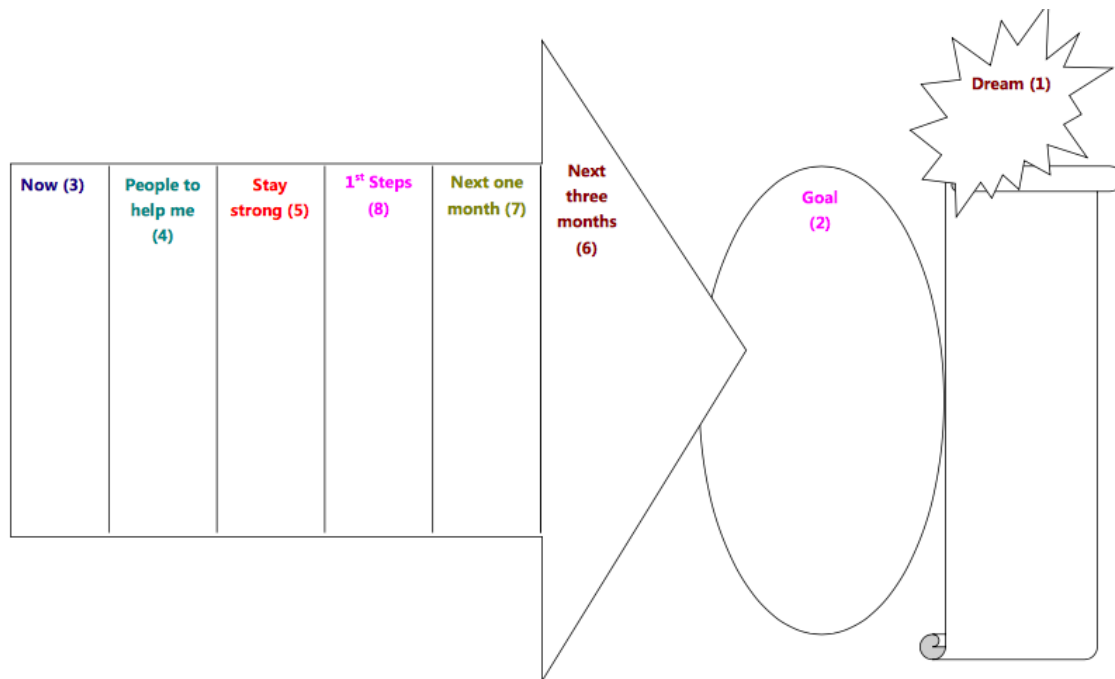


Figure 2.3: Example of a template for PATH

One criterion in this particular study was the CYP had to be able to verbally communicate and so any CYP who had speech and language needs were not included in the study. This limits CYP with differing levels of need to access this tool, suggesting it is only appropriate for those who have verbal language (Wood et al, 2019). There is no research that shows PATH being carried out with learners with more complex needs such as PMLD. An effective PCP tool would be a tool that can be adapted to all levels of need, which PATH cannot be.

Corrigan's (2014) highlights how the follow up meeting in 3-6 months' time is crucial to avoid the PCP review to be seen as a 'one-off meeting' and to reduce the risk of an implementation gap. However, she found that the follow up reviews had reduced number of attendees in comparison to initial meetings. This is possibly due to time allocation resources where the initial meeting would be prioritised, but review

meetings would not be in the same way. By not reviewing the process, PATH meetings then run the risk of being seen as a one-off meeting, with no significance as it will not be actioned or monitored.

(iii) Making Action Plans (MAPs)

A PCP tool devised by Forest, Pearpoint and O'Brien (1996) known as MAPs, relies on the use of visual imagery to holistically depict the child's strengths, difficulties and hopes for the future. A MAP is used by key people in the CYP's life and is made up of 8 key questions that form a circle on a piece of paper. The questions are as follows; (1) what is a map? (2) What is the story? (3) What is your dream? (4) What is your nightmare? (5) Who is the CYP? (6) What are the CYP's strengths and unique gifts? (7) What does the CYP like to do? What are they good at? What are the needs? And (8) What is the plan of action? The aim is to culminate a plan to help the pupil to achieve their dream. Visual methods of presentation resonate with the learning style of individuals with ASD (Rao & Gagie, 2006) and therefore can be a useful PCP tool for this cohort.

Hayes (2004) adapted MAP's to create an innovative child-centred planning tool, which was coined as a 'Visual Annual Review'. This describes an alternative approach to conducting an AR, aiming to make the CYP's presence at the review to be a meaningful experience. It is presented in a way that is accessible for the CYP to see a reflection of their progress through graphical methods. The visual AR was developed by EPs in Nottingham City, with a local special school for CYP with severe learning difficulties, in order to promote a more inclusive process during AR meetings. The review requires key preparation ahead of the meeting; a large 3-metre square paper is required, which is stuck on a plain wall with tape, with no distractions around it, consisting of 4 quadrants. These quadrants are labelled 'School', 'Home', 'Other People' and 'Next Steps'. Ahead of the meeting, the CYP is given an A4 version of this paper so they know what to expect during the meeting. The purpose of the meeting is explained and the CYP is asked who they would like to attend. This was based on the premise that if young people are to succeed, they need the support of those who are important to them. The CYP are informed who will be there and shown pictures so they know who to expect.

There are two key roles within an AR that need to be allocated ahead of time; one adult to lead the review and another to be the graphic facilitator who will represent the views on the large piece of paper. A class feedback exercise is also done ahead of the meeting, where a body is drawn on a large piece of paper and the classmates are asked to fill this in with comments about their peer. Preparation was identified as an enabling factor for successful ARs.

During the review, everyone is introduced, and language is kept as child friendly as possible. The CYP starts with looking at what their classmates have said about them, which often makes them feel positive at the start of the review. The child's preferred communication system is made available to them and they are asked their strengths and difficulties in school (Quadrant 1) and at home (Quadrant 2). The pupil is the main person speaking, however input from the other individuals present at the meeting is also considered. Attainment levels are discussed, as necessary within an AR, however this is explained to the young person with accessible language. The third quadrant refers to 'other people'; these are outside agencies who are involved in the care of the CYP. This allows the young person to be aware of who is involved in their care and gives them the platform to discuss any additional information needed, for example this could be the LA, a social worker or a health worker. The CYP can as to leave or take a break at any point. The last quadrant identifies next steps that need to happen to resolve any issues raised in the meeting. This would be a small step that can be achieved in the next three working days, and feedback should be given to the CYP on progress towards these steps after the meeting. The graphic facilitator captures what is being said by drawing simple pictures in the relevant quadrants to capture the main points. The review finishes with every member in the room, including the CYP, saying one word to describe how they feel about the review.

Hayes (2004) evaluated the effectiveness of this method with a year 6 pupil who had MLD and pointed at symbols to indicate their feelings. Following the AR, adults who participated were asked to rate its effectiveness on a short questionnaire. They found it 'very good' (5-point Likert scale ranged from 'poor' to 'very good'), and reported the experience being better than other reviews they had been to. Teaching staff found it more child-centred and accessible for the child, and the child found the

meeting good and liked the pictures. However, teaching staff still need to complete necessary paperwork required by the LA, as the visual AR was not sufficient to cover all areas needed. This includes progress towards targets and new targets set. Therefore, teachers felt this doubled both the time of the review and the administration required.

MAPs therefore are an illustrative and engaging method to convey the views of the CYP, however as defined by Forest, Pearpoint and O'Brien (1996), MAPs are '*tools held in the hand of a creative facilitator*', and not in the hands of the CYP. They do not draw their views but instead answer direct questions or are prompted to point to pre-selected options for the facilitator to then draw it out. Although this tool has the positives of being accessible and engaging for CYP, it does not allow personal involvement in expressing their views freely, rather reliance on an adult to illustrate their views for them.

(iv) *Talking Mats®*

Talking Mats® was developed as a low-tech communication tool by the University of Stirling, utilising a visual symbol-based approach to communication. Picture symbols are placed on a textured mat and the participant has time and space to consider and express their views by placing the symbols on the mat in a position under a 2 or 3 point visual scale, and there is a degree of experimentation with scales running from positive to negative or negative to positive responses. For example, "Happy" → "unsure" → "Unhappy/Sad"; "Good" → "okay/so so" → "Bad" or; "Like" → "okay/so-so" → "don't like" etc. A topic of consultation is chosen, it could be a school activity, food or a transition; a picture representing this is placed at the bottom of the mat and the CYP is asked how they feel about it. The CYP would then place the picture under the appropriate visual scale symbol that represents how they feel about it. The picture presented could be a PEC, a Makaton symbol, or a real-life picture of the activity in question. Talking Mats can now be presented on a digital space such as an iPad, through an app for communication. This is an example of a mediated method of consultation as symbols and pictures are crucial to eliciting pupil views.

Although Talking Mats® employ a relatively simplistic closed scale, the questions are asked in a form that allows for elaboration. It complements the learning style of CYP with communication difficulties such as Down Syndrome, but have also been extended to other vulnerable groups outside of SEN. This includes supporting individuals with Dementia to make decisions about managing their daily care (Murphy & Oliver, 2013) and views on mealtimes (Murphy & McKillop, 2017). It is used as both a research and a clinical tool to obtain individuals views on various topics such as general health (Macer & Fox ,2010), transitions (Mackay & Murphy, 2017), self-reported anxiety (Nilsson, Stefan & Buchholz, 2012), low mood (Bell & Cameron, 2008), and participation in long-term goal setting (Murphy & Boa, 2012). Talking Mats are an effective tool to break down linguistic expectations of meetings and allow individuals with differing needs to access this tool (Germain, 2004). It allows CYP to express their views on concrete topics such as their preferred activities, but also some pupils were able to give information on more abstract topics such as their own behaviour and influences on this (Bradshaw, Gore & Darvell, 2018).

Talking Mats® have also been found to be a useful way to express dissatisfaction; individuals with intellectual difficulties may struggle to express they are unhappy with something, but this method can provide a solution (Stewart, Bradshaw & Beadie-Brown, 2018). Teachers reported the combination of symbols and pictures helped those who had very little language to communicate, but also supported children who were confident speakers. It supported teachers to identify about times of day and locations the pupils did not like, and why, in order to allow for modifications in the timetable and their environment. However, one teacher felt that some children were displaying a willingness to please by looking at the teacher after making a response, and it proved to be difficult to explain to them they were being asked for their own opinion and so there was no 'right' answer (Georgeson, Porter, Daniels & Feiler, 2014). This tool is therefore powerful in including CYP with differing needs, including those with difficulties in their speech and language skills and pupils with intellectual difficulties, however Harding & Stewart (2018) question the effectiveness of talking mats for pupils with PMLD.

(v) Other Approaches

Other PCP tools have been developed over time and used in different settings. Some examples include 'a perfect week', where the CYP describes what a perfect week would look like; describing a good day and a bad day; identify what is working and what is not working, and the '4 plus 1 questions' which can support during challenging situations. The 4 questions include 'what have you tried?', 'what have you learned?', 'what are you pleased about', 'what are you concerned about', and the answers would lead to the 'plus 1' question of 'what we know now, what should we do next?' (Sanderson & Smull, 2005). Research continues to develop a range of tools and techniques to be used in practice but the individual and varying needs of CYP with SEND often means there is no 'one size fits all' method available.

2.5.4 *A multi-method approach to consultation*

As identified, pupils with PMLD struggle to access pupil centred tools such as PATH or MAPs without a high level of support (Pearlman & Michaels, 2019). Clark & Moss (2001) argue that 'traditional' data collection methods may not be the best approach when working with children; interviews are tedious, or they may struggle to express themselves confidently, and observations change the nature of the child's interactions and therefore are not a representative reflection of classroom experiences. Sentence completion tasks can be difficult without further explanation and mediated methods such as drawings may not provide the full picture of an individual's views. They argue for use of more than one method for pupil consultation.

This led to the development of the 'Mosaic approach'; the concept that researchers collect data using a wide range of means in order to piece together 'individual tiles' of the child into one big 'mosaic'. Elements of this include a multi-method approach in order to recognise the different 'voices' or languages of children; being reflexive in order to reflect on meaning; being adaptable; focusing on the lived experiences of children rather than knowledge gained or care received; and as a form of participatory involvement as children are '*experts in their own lives*' (Clark & Statham, 2005). These elements are then embedded into practice as a framework

for listening to children that can be used as both in practice and as an evaluative tool.

Based on the tenants of the Mosaic approach, Clark & Moss (2005) used a range of methods to gain the view of the children in how the physical environment of their school should be set out. This included qualitative observations, short structured interviews with the child, the child making a book using photographs of what they considered to be important, tour of the site as recorded by the child, the child making a map of the site with drawings and photos, informal interviews with parents and practitioners, and a slide show of familiar and different places, in order to provide a well-established view through the use of a triangulation of methods. Pearlman & Michaels (2019) found that using both conventional and AAC methods of communication resulted in 11 out of 22 CYP with PMLD able to indicate their responses to 75%-100% of the questions about their experiences, and 4 out of 22 were able to express their hopes for the future.

By triangulating information, additional sources can provide confirmatory evidence to validate the views expressed by a CYP. The process of validating communication can be used by investigating the views amongst family members and staff that have knowledge of communication of a CYP in context (Porter, Ouvry, Morgan & Downs, 2001), and then information can be corroborated to ensure consensus in interpreting the CYP's views and responses (Pearlman & Michaels, 2019).

Taylor (2007) summarises that a CYP may not express their views to the full extent, however '*partial participation is still significant and valid, and worth the investment of time and effort required*' (p.209). A researcher can also validate their interpretation of a child's responses by using additional methods to confirm or clarify their findings (Lewis & Porter, 2004). Lewis, Robertson & Parsons (2005) concluded that no single approach can be deemed as the 'right one' to use, rather that the crucial aspect of any approach is *flexibility*. The variety of methods need to be differentiated to match the learning style of the CYP; this may be visual through the use of photographs, auditory through role-play, or kinaesthetic through materials (Bishop, 2014).

The conclusion being that researchers should be creative in developing the individual tiles of the child, and not be limited to traditional methods of a

questionnaire. No one method to elicit pupil voice can be advocated due to the individual and changing need of CYP with SEND. By using a greater diversity of methods in order to cater for different learning styles allows children to have the opportunity to express themselves in new ways (Clark, 2005). Research advocates the use of multiple and multimodal data generation methods to elicit pupil voice (Cowie, Otrell-Cass & Moreland, 2010).

2.6 Summary of literature review

The literature above has explored many areas related to pupil voice. It has examined the historical development of legislation within the UK, along with the political vagaries that have accompanied SEND legislation throughout the years. The introduction of EHCPs were designed to promote a child-centred approach to assessment, and despite the heavy focus of the CYP being at the heart of the assessment, parents and most importantly CYP, feel the process is not as person-centred as its intention (Adams et al, 2017).

Primarily the focus within literature has been on adequate provision, outcomes within the EHCP and the perspective of the parent/carer (Castro, Grande & Palikara, 2019; Robinson, Moore & Hooley, 2018; Adams et al, 2017). There is a lack of empirical research to support practitioners working with CYP with SEND and understanding their perspective on eliciting voice. As discussed above, there are also a wide range of methods and tools available to elicit voice, yet a lack of understanding what methods are currently used within LAs and schools to meaningfully elicit participation for CYP with SEND. Understanding how voice is elicited by professionals would be the first step in understanding the extent that CYP are included within the process and the reasons behind a seemingly tokenistic experience for CYP.

Professionals appear to show a common rhetoric that the voice of the CYP is integral to all decision-making, however the practicalities of this, whilst maintaining statutory deadlines, remains problematic (Hellawell, 2015). The SEND professional perspective can provide further understanding around the factors that support their ability to do so confidently, along with the barriers present to both CYP and professionals that hinder meaningful participation. Although there are some

examples in literature that have focused on the barriers to eliciting voice, such as the CDC factsheets, further research needs to be done in order to understand the many complex and interlinking barriers that both CYP and professionals face within their day-to-day lives. Further scope on the barriers to pupil voice allows an avenue to generate practical solutions to overcome the limits to participation, and thereby improve practice to ensure CYP remain at the centre of the process.

The literature review has identified a need for research to focus on the perceptions of SEND professionals in relation to eliciting pupil voice and is therefore a unique yet necessary contribution to the existing body of knowledge around the rights of CYP and pupil-centred approaches in education. Without understanding the basic principles of participation, the barriers will continue to hinder meaningful engagement for CYP within the process. Professionals also have a lack of guidance on how to overcome the limits to participation and although the end focus is on the voice of CYP, by listening to the voice of those on the frontline, research can support professionals within their role in order to ensure they feel supported and confident to elicit the voice of the CYP. There is a lack of research that has engaged professionals to acknowledge the barriers within their role and to collaboratively work together to suggest practical ways they could improve their practice. This empowering process can also motivate them to continue to advocate for CYP and ensure their voice is heard.

The gaps highlighted within the literature review have led to the development of this study, its research questions and overall aims. I aim to address these gaps through two-over-arching research aims within this thesis, which are further broken down into research questions within the next chapter;

1. To explore how professionals within Local Authorities and specialist schools in England elicit the voice of CYP with SEND during EHCP assessments and ARs.
2. To develop group consensus from a range of SEND professionals on the characteristics of meaningful participation and provide solutions to perceived barriers in eliciting voice.

This literature review summarised the work that has previously been carried out in relation to pupil voice and meaningful participation within EHCP assessments and ARs. It also highlights the gaps that currently exist within pupil voice and areas where further research is required. From this point, the thesis discusses two phases of this research design. Phase one seeks to explore the first aim (Chapters 3-4) and phase two seeks to explore the second aim (Chapter 3 and 5). The findings are then drawn together in chapter 6 and a discussion around the contribution this study has made to the existing literature on pupil voice is explored in depth.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a description of the methods used to explore how pupil voice is elicited within EHCP assessments and ARs. It describes the gradual progression of the research design; from formulating the research questions, identifying appropriate methods to use, piloting and refining the methods, data collection, and preparing for data analysis.

My investigation is two-fold. Firstly, I am exploring the existing practices and opinions of professionals in LAs and specialist schools within England who work with CYP with SEND, in how they elicit the voice of CYP during EHCP assessments and ARs. The first phase of the study therefore involves online questionnaires and interviews with SEND professionals. I am then using the results from phase one to highlight the barriers in eliciting pupil voice, in order to formulate the second phase of the study. The second phase of the study will initiate discussions around best practice and how to overcome the barriers identified in phase one. The aim is to produce a document of good practice to support the daily roles of SEND professionals, offering practical solutions identified by the professionals themselves.

This methodology chapter begins with the philosophical stance I have taken in the study. I then discuss the mixed methods approach of the research design, the aims of the study, and the research questions explored. The research questions are split between the two phases of the study; Phase one and Phase two are discussed separately. I then go on to discuss access in both phases, the sampling methods, and the approaches used in each research question. I discuss in detail the various data collection methods used in reference to methodological literature, why and how they were used, and how the participants were approached and involved in each method. The approach to data analysis is also discussed, and I finish with the strengths and weaknesses of each method. The chapter then concludes by addressing the ethical considerations of this study, the restrictions of the methods used and discussion around how my insider role as a professional within the LA was advantageous to this research study.

3.2 Research Paradigm

3.2.1 *A Pragmatic philosophical stance*

The pragmatic approach has been presented as a response to the ‘ontological wars’ between ‘positivistic’ and ‘constructivist’ purists. It has been seen by some as a ‘middle ground’ between the two approaches (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004), a cross-over between ‘positivism’ and ‘constructivism’ beliefs. The advocates of the *incompatibility thesis* (Howe, 1988), which posits that qualitative and quantitative research paradigms, including their associated methods, are two distinct philosophical ontologies that cannot be mixed.

An ‘objectivist’ position tends to advocate the existence of an independent reality, where scientific and measurable quantitative methods are used to identify this reality. Alternatively, the ‘subjectivist’ does not support the existence of an independent reality and assumes that the world only exists through our construction of reality. Subjectivists therefore use qualitative methods to explore the perceived reality of the participants through more ‘in-depth’ and ‘detailed’ responses (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010). Pragmatists regard these as ‘traditional paradigms’ and reject the ontological duality between positivism and constructivism, proposing a new set of beliefs; ‘the third way’ (Cherryholmes, 1992). The ‘third way’ recognises that the world exists independently of the mind, as well as being in the mind (Creswell, 2007), and so requires a blended approach to research inquiry.

In this study, I took the theoretical orientation of Pragmatism; a philosophical stance that denies a dichotomy of theoretical orientations and promotes a practical approach to research, supporting an integration of both positions. Pragmatists link the choice of approach to the nature and purpose of the research questions posed (Creswell, 2003), seeking to understand and resolve a perceived problem within real-life application. My research aims to uncover the barriers associated with eliciting the voice of CYP and is an attempt to resolve these perceived problems for SEND professionals in order to improve practice for LAs and schools.

My own ontological position is that of a realist; this investigation seeks to understand existing practice and resolve the barriers to accessing pupil voice during their assessments and reviews. Proponents of mixed-method research signal a departure

from the methodological unity of research, in favour of a plural and non-hierarchical perspective on the different modes of inquiry (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010). The 'compatibility thesis', which is based on the tenets of pragmatism, states that combining Qualitative and Quantitative methods is a good research strategy and denies the contention that these two orientations are "*epistemologically incoherent*" (Howe, 1988, p. 10).

3.3 Research Design

3.3.1 Research Aims

This study is a two-fold investigation and is described as Phase One and Phase Two, each with their own respective research aim.

The first aim is exploratory in nature as it seeks to understand a variety of opinions and beliefs of both LA professionals and specialist school staff within England. This includes their views on pupil voice, the factors they feel benefit them in their role, the existing methods and tools currently employed to elicit the voice of CYP with SEND during an EHCP assessment or AR, and the barriers they face when eliciting voice.

The second phase of the study builds upon the first and is iterative in nature. By exploring the barriers faced by professionals who arguably are 'front-line' staff within the first phase of the study, the second aim is to develop solutions to the perceived barriers within the field. This involves a collaborative approach with SEND experts within a local area, with the aim of producing a document of good practice for professionals to use when co-ordinating EHCP assessments and ARs. The two aims of this study therefore are as follows:

1. To explore how professionals within Local Authorities and specialist schools in England elicit the voice of CYP with SEND during EHCP assessments and ARs.
2. To develop group consensus from a range of SEND professionals on the characteristics of meaningful participation and provide solutions to perceived barriers in eliciting voice.

3.3.2 *Research Questions*

By exploring current methods and views of professionals who work with CYP in SEND, the current level of pupil participation within EHCPs and ARs can be determined. Subsequently, areas of improvement can also be identified in order to establish recommendations of best practice for professionals to implement in their role of eliciting pupil voice. To achieve this purpose, the study aimed to answer two overarching research aims stated in 3.3.1 above. A mind-map was then used to further break-down each aim in order to ensure I addressed all areas I hoped to cover (Appendix 1). This mind-map allowed the aims to be further operationalised into research questions and associated sub-research questions. This is illustrated in table 3.1 below.

The first aim is broken down into five research questions (as seen on the left) with sub-questions attached to each (as seen on the right). The second aim is broken down into three research questions, with associated sub-questions attached.

<p>Aim (1): To explore how professionals within Local Authorities and specialist schools in England elicit the voice of CYP with SEND during EHCP assessments and ARs.</p>	<p>Question 1: To what extent do LAs and schools explore the views of the child or young person in relation to their statutory EHCP assessment or AR?</p>	<p>Sub-research Q1: What views are elicited from the CYP to enable pupil participation?</p>
	<p>Question 2: What are the strengths and difficulties that professionals in LAs and schools may experience when eliciting pupil voice?</p>	<p>Sub-research Q2: How confident do professionals feel in gathering the views of CYP who are predominantly non-verbal in their communication?</p>
	<p>Question 3: What supporting methods or tools are used to enable the voice of the CYP?</p>	<p>Sub-research Q3: How often are these methods used? Are methods dependent on specific needs of CYP?</p>
	<p>Question 4: What enabling factors help to elicit the views of the child or young person?</p>	<p>Sub-research Q4: Do professionals feel supported to elicit pupil voice?</p>
	<p>Question 5: What barriers have been identified when trying to elicit the views of the child or young person?</p>	<p>Sub-research Q5: What approaches and methods are available to help overcome these barriers?</p>
<p>Aim (2) To develop group consensus from a range of SEND professionals on the characteristics of meaningful participation and provide solutions to perceived barriers in eliciting voice.</p>	<p>Question 1. What are the identified characteristics of best practice for professionals within SEND to elicit the voice of the child or young person within EHCP assessments and ARs?</p>	<p>Sub-research Q1: What are the key principles identified by SEND professionals to ensure meaningful participation? How to panellists define 'meaningful participation'?</p>
	<p>Question 2. What were the practical solutions identified to overcome the barriers to eliciting voice?</p>	<p>Sub-research Q2: Do you as a professional feel these barriers are applicable to your daily practice? To what extent does the consensus involve practical steps that can be realistically achieved for professionals to meaningfully elicit pupil voice?</p>
	<p>Question 3. How can the findings from the Delphi process improve professional practice?</p>	<p>Sub-research Q3: Does the document of good practice hold value for national relevance?</p>

Table 3.1: Research aims and questions

3.4 Data Collection; Methodological Choices

The research questions above required appropriate methodology to answer them successfully; I needed a methodological approach that captures the exploratory nature of the first phase of the study and the on-going iterative process of the second phase of the study.

3.4.1 Methodology in Phase One

The first phase of the study incorporates the first aim. The method needed is pragmatic in outlook, and not solely associated with either positivistic or an interpretive paradigm, capturing data from both qualitative and quantitative research methods.

Exploratory studies involve methods that aim to understand the nature of a research topic in varying levels of depth, capture the beliefs of others and is used “*to tackle new problems on which little or no previous research has been done*” (Brown, 2006, p.43). Since there is a lack of empirical studies in the topic area of LA and school approaches to pupil voice in assessment and reviews, this study requires methods that allow an in-depth understanding of this whilst attempting to capture as much information in an effective and practical way. A mixed-methods approach appears to be the most appropriate methodological choice to allow an in-depth understanding on current methods and tools, and the views associated on pupil voice.

As the study is based on the opinions and beliefs of others, a suitable methodology that allows this to be captured on a large scale includes a survey. A survey can incorporate both quantifiable indicators of beliefs, whilst also including qualitative questions to allow for expansion. De Vaus (2013) breaks down surveys into questionnaires, interviews, observations and content analysis, where questionnaires are the most common method of collecting data. Questionnaires allow for an economical and efficient way to obtain information and opinions from a large number of individuals. An important part of the research aim was to explore the consensus amongst professionals both within the LA and in specialist schools on pupil voice and the methods currently used. Past literature that aimed to gather information

regarding EHCPs have successfully used large scale questionnaires (Adams et al, 2017), thus being an effective method. This study therefore chose to carry out a questionnaire in an attempt to provide answers to the first aim.

Although questionnaire data produces general quantifiable trends of opinion, attitudes and knowledge from a large group of practitioners, they can lack in-depth knowledge on the subject matter. The majority of the questions within the questionnaire were closed questions, which is discussed in detail below, and therefore this may limit the breadth of opinions gathered. By elaborating on selected responses via a semi-structured interview, the data can become illustrative and explanatory to allow the researcher to target specific areas of interests around opinions on pupil voice, methods used, and barriers for professionals (Bryman, 2012). It was therefore decided that the questionnaire data could be followed up with interviews to allow for further elaboration.

Therefore, the first phase of the study combined both online-based questionnaires and semi-structured interviews in order to allow an in-depth understanding of multiple professional views and opinions. As two different sample groups were used within phase one, two slightly differing questionnaires were produced and simultaneously sent out. This was then followed up with interviews that were individualised based on the participants responses in the questionnaire. Each methodology and sample will be discussed in detail below.

The first aim of phase one of the study, the associated research questions and their chosen methods are illustrated in figure 3.1 below.

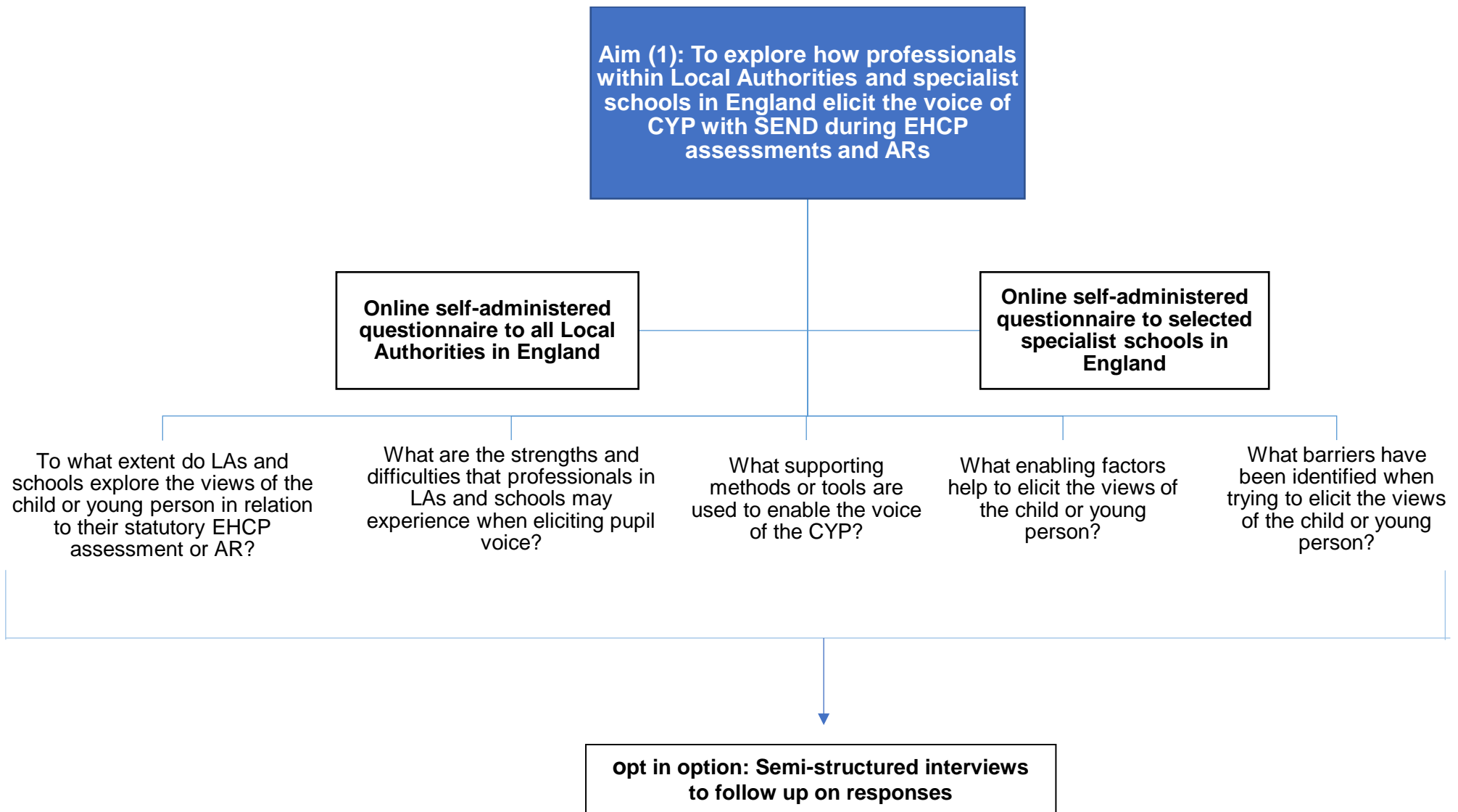


Figure 3.1: Phase One of the study

3.4.2 Methodology in Phase Two

The second phase of the study could only be formed after the first phase was successfully completed. The reason being that research aim two required a method that allowed consensus to be reached around a given problem. The barriers to eliciting pupil voice identified in phase one were the 'given problem', which was used as a basis to develop consensus on the practical solutions to overcome the barriers within phase two. This required a method that could be iterative in nature and allow for the opinions of various professionals to be collated in a logical way.

When researching methodology that would appropriately address research aim two, a range of options were presented. One methodology known as 'Design-based research' (DBR) was explored as an option. DBR is defined as;

'a systematic but flexible methodology aimed to improve educational practices through iterative analysis, design, development, and implementation, based on collaboration among researchers and practitioners in real-world settings' (Wang & Hannafin, 2005, p.6).

It is a methodology that aims to address complex problems in real-life context, in collaboration with practitioners, through usually 2-3 iterative cycles of testing and refinement of solutions in practice (Herrington, McKeeney, Reeves & Oliver, 2007). The design is constantly improved throughout the process based on how it performs practically, and therefore multiple evaluations of the success or failure of design products are carried out in order to achieve the best outcome. Although perceived to be a long-term and intensive approach to data collection, Herrington et al (2007) postulate DBR to be a feasible option for doctoral students within their thesis.

Another iterative methodology was then explored for comparison; the Delphi Method. The Delphi method is a systematic, interactive group facilitated technique initially pioneered by the RAND Corporation for the US Department of Defence. This method aims to elicit expert opinion on a research question or area of enquiry from a panel of independent 'experts' (Brown 1968; Uhl 1983; Adler and Ziglio 1996). It allows for cycles of questioning, feedback, and refinement of views to reach a consensus, and it is thought that the final outcome of the Delphi method when implemented through a feedback loop achieves a higher degree of reliability than other means of collating disparate individual opinions (Hsu & Sandford, 2007; Davidson, 2013).

The Delphi method is a pragmatic approach grounded in the philosophical assumptions that research should directly relate to and inform real-world practice and decision making (Kirk & Reid, 2002), and therefore is a fitting method for the philosophical stance taken within this study. As described by Brady (2015), the Delphi Method is evident of a pragmatic approach in the following ways; it is a flexible method using both quantitative and qualitative data sources, it incorporates low-cost questionnaires that can be easily disseminated to panellists, it seeks input from a purposive sample of expert panellists as opposed to a generalizable sample, and finally the aims within the Delphi have direct bearing on informing practice, policy or decision making.

Turoff (1970) outlined four objectives that can be achieved via the Delphi method; (1) to explore underlying assumptions or information leading to differing perspectives, (2) to seek out information which may generate a consensus for the respondent group, (3) to correlate informed judgments on a topic across a wide range of disciplines, or (4) to educate the respondent group to the interrelated aspects of the topic.

Upon reflection, the Delphi method seemed the appropriate choice to achieve the second research aim; it set to seek information by investigating identified problems and provide solutions within a given respondent group. The Delphi contained attractive elements of DBR such as a collaborative approach with professionals and an iterative cycle to allow for the best outcome yet appeared to be a less onerous experience for participations, contained clear guidelines on implementation, and required less time commitment than the DBR approach. The Delphi method could arguably be seen as a form of DBR; it is a solution-based approach that undergoes iterative cycles with the collaboration of practitioners. The advantages of the Delphi method add further rationale for this method and will be discussed in 3.8.2.

3.4.3 *A mixed-methods approach*

Overall, the three methods used for the purpose of this study all contained elements of qualitative and quantitative data, and therefore the study fits the description of a mixed method approach. Table 3.2 highlights how each method requires both

quantitative and qualitative exploration, except for the interviews which used a purely qualitative approach. The quantitative data can allow for comparisons between the two sample groups and develop descriptions of frequency, whilst the qualitative aspect allowed for codes and themes to emerge for the purpose of the analysis, which will be discussed later in this chapter.

Methodology	Quantitative Aspects	Qualitative Aspects	Instruments used
Online-based Questionnaire	Rating the frequency in different areas and an average of the perceived confidence levels of professionals in eliciting pupil voice	Open-ended questions asking professionals to expand on their answers and describe scenarios based on their opinion	Internet-based questionnaire consisting of Likert-scales with open-ended questions for expansion
Semi-structured interviews	Nil	Open-ended questions for professionals to express their views and opinions on the process of eliciting pupil voice	Semi-structured interview schedule consisting of open-ended questions
Delphi Method	Calculating the average after each round of questioning to determine the consensus on the order of importance	Open-ended questions in the first round to generate a list of opinions and views to be rank ordered by professionals. Discussion around top 3 practices as identified by the professionals	Three internet-based questionnaires that contained: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (1) Open-ended questions (2) Items to be rank-ordered (3) Further elaboration on top 3 practices in each area

Table 3.2: Quantitative and qualitative aspects of the methodology

There is some debate within the literature on whether the Delphi method is a quantitative, qualitative or mixed-methods approach within research, due to its split focus on quantitative rankings and gathering qualitative opinion (Brady, 2015).

However, the Delphi method has been regularly utilised within mixed method studies and therefore was defined as a mixed-methods approach within this study (Hsu & Sandford, 2007).

The combined findings from both methods in phase one provided a baseline of discussion in phase two. The relationship between the two phases of the study, and their associated research methods are illustrated in figure 3.2 below.

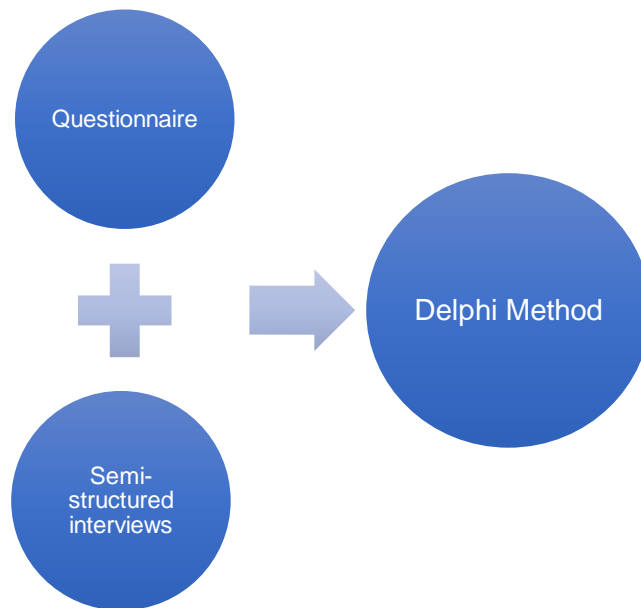


Figure 3.2: The relationship between phase one and two of the study

A further discussion of the efficacy of the mixed methods approach is discussed below in the strengths and weaknesses of this study. Each methodological choice is now discussed in detail; phase one and phase two of the study will be discussed separately for ease of understanding.

3.5 Phase One: Internet-based Questionnaire

3.5.1 Questionnaire Aims

Internet-based questionnaires were used in phase one of the study to explore the first research aim. The aim of the questionnaire was to explore the experiences of

professionals from the LA and specialist school perspective on capturing the views of CYP with SEND and build a representative national picture of the existing methods and approaches used to elicit the views during EHCP assessments and ARs. This was needed to help explore professional opinion on pupil voice, what current methods and tools are used, and highlight any barriers faced by professionals.

The questionnaire was designed on an on-line survey building site known as 'Online Surveys' in order to allow easy access for all participants; a hard-copy could also be sent on request. Two questionnaires were developed simultaneously and were adapted slightly in wording to suit the audience; one questionnaire was made for professionals in the LA (Appendix 2), and another for professionals within specialist schools (Appendix 3), however they both targeted the same areas of interest.

3.5.2 *Sampling*

The questionnaire focused on different target audiences and therefore the sampling varied for each questionnaire design. England was the focus due to the differences in SEN policy in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. The study only focused on LAs and schools within the 9 regions of England (see figure 3.3).

(i) Professionals within the Local Authority (LA)

Previous surveys by the DfE that have collected data around EHCP experiences and outcomes have surveyed all LAs within England (Adams et al, 2017), it was decided to follow the same practice. The questionnaire targeted the whole population of 152 LAs in England; the email addresses of the SEND team, the EP team and advisory services were sought from the Local Offer and contacted with details of the study and a link to the online questionnaire via email. The participants therefore were any professionals who work within the LA and are actively involved in assessments for an EHCP and/or contribute to the reports of advice for the EHCP assessment or AR; this includes but not limited to:

- Head of SEND team
- SEND Managers

- SEND Case Officers
- Educational Psychologists
- Advisory Teachers
- Social workers
- Health professionals



Figure 3.3: Nine regions of England

The LA that I work for was omitted from the sample to avoid any potential conflict of interest, as I work within the team of professionals that would be the target sample. Therefore 151 LAs were contacted. This was to target all 9 regions of England, with the aim to get a representative national picture. It was hypothesised that given an acceptable response rate of 30% for online surveys (Sheehan, 2001), there would be a minimum of 45 responses.

An opt-in option was included at the end of the questionnaire, by which the participant could indicate if they would like to be contacted to discuss their views

further via an interview. A follow up email for the questionnaire was sent after four weeks as a reminder. It was then sent again on intervals of four weeks for those who had not completed it until an acceptable response rate was reached.

(ii) Professionals within specialist schools

The second questionnaire aimed at specialist schools was simultaneously sent out on the same dates as the questionnaire for the LA. A CYP must have an EHCP in order to access a specialist setting and pupils who require a specialist setting have a level of need that may not be able to be met within a mainstream setting. Therefore, this sample was chosen due to the likelihood of teaching staff requiring alternative means to elicit pupil voice for a complexity of need, often found in specialist settings.

Only schools that catered for school-aged CYP (up to 16 years) were included in the sample and therefore specialist colleges were excluded from the sample. As discussed earlier, CYP under 16 years old remain under the care of their parent/carer and often are not consulted with (Adams et al, 2017); this study wanted to explore if and how the views of CYP under 16 are sought.

Another exclusion within the selected sample was the schools within the LA in which I worked. I omitted the specialist schools in my local area as I work with these schools as a senior member to ensure adequate provision; the professionals may feel pressurised to answer positively during the questionnaire as they may feel their LA is targeting their performance, and therefore was seen as a potential conflict of interest.

A list of specialist schools within each of the 9 regions in England were downloaded based on the School Data List 2016-2017¹¹. This list was filtered to include only specialist schools, both state-funded and independent, showing to be approximately 1609 specialist schools within England. I then filtered the schools by region and used a random generator to select 20 different specialist schools in each region, giving a total of 180 schools. Email addresses were found from their school website, mainly

¹¹ Information received from <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/schools-in-england>, accessed in August 2018. This has now been withdrawn as the content is seen to be out of date, but was relevant at the time of sampling

the office address, and were contacted with details of the questionnaire. I also called the establishments via telephone to get direct contacts for the school SENCO.

The questionnaire was aimed at professionals who are involved in eliciting pupil voice for assessments and review, such as, but not limited to:

- Head Teacher
- Assistant Head teacher
- SENCO
- Class teacher
- Teaching Support Staff
- Speech and Language Therapist
- Occupational Therapist

A follow up email was sent on four-week intervals as a reminder. This questionnaire also included an opt-in option by which school professionals could indicate if they would like to be contacted to discuss further in an individual interview.

Using the same 30% response rate aim, it was hypothesised that 54 responses would be returned; however, the response rate remained low after a 12-week interval and so I randomly contacted another 20 schools on the list to increase this.

Response rate continued to be low for schools and so I began to contact any specialist school on the list. The sampling therefore moved from stratified sampling based on the region, to random sampling. At this point agencies, forums such as SENCO and EP forums, charities and teaching organisations were contacted to share the link to the questionnaire with their associated specialist schools in order to increase the response rate. School forums such as the National Association of Specialist Schools (NASS) were also contacted, along with local SEND conferences to highlight the benefits of the study and recruit teaching staff from specialist schools within England. The final number of participants within each sample group is discussed below in chapter 3.5.6.

3.5.3 Questionnaire Design

The questionnaires were broken down into five sections, which focused on each research question in phase one of the study, as discussed in 3.3.2. The questionnaire consisted of statements and used a Likert scale. A Likert scale is one of the most common techniques used within questionnaires to measure a participant's attitude by measuring the extent to which they agree or disagree with a statement (Bryman, 2012). One of the advantages of a Likert scale include the ability to pre-code and therefore supports the process of data analysis, which will be discussed further in chapter 4.

In the questionnaire, participants stated their view for each statement from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree', there was also an option for 'neither agree nor disagree' if they did not wish to express an opinion, along with an option for 'not applicable' if they felt the question did not relate to their role. Some questions used a Likert Scale of 'Almost Always' to 'Never' to indicate frequencies.

At the end of each section, an open-ended question was included to allow for further details and elaboration of the participants' opinions, therefore involving the qualitative aspect of the questionnaire where the participant could expand on the rationale of their answers if they chose to. This however was not compulsory.

The statements within the questionnaire were derived from existing research and examples of best practice, and therefore followed a deductive approach where the literature informed the statements. Each section of the plan focused on a different area of interest, in order to build up a picture on professional views and practice.

(i) Section A

Section A of the questionnaire looked at research question 1; what views are elicited and the extent the professional will go to explore the views of the CYP, this can be found on page 353 in the appendix.

I used a toolkit developed by the Communication Trust (2016) to identify statements based on the CoP that educational settings could use to reflect on current practice and identify areas for development. Section 1 of the toolkit lists five statements;

these statements were selected as relevant to the views elicited and assessed the extent to which professionals will go to elicit voice and therefore were broken down within Section A. An example statement included '*we look at what the child or young person understands and how they communicate, and use this to inform our approach*'; this statement was identified as an attempt to get the views of the CYP and therefore was broken down in the questionnaire to '*I will try to find out how the CYP communicates best*', '*I use visual aids such as pictures and symbols*', and '*I use communication aids such as electronic devices, Picture Exchange Communication Systems (PECS), sign language*'. These statements were a clear and concise approach to measuring frequency of a particular practice, and so the questionnaire adopted similar structure and wording for all statements.

The first section in an EHCP (section A) focuses on the views, experiences and aspirations of the CYP. Therefore, the questionnaire aimed to encompass how professionals gain the CYP's views through its statements. The CDC developed a factsheet to support professionals to ensure the CYP is kept at '*the heart of the assessment and planning process*'. Their recommendations are to keep section A '*specific and relevant*' and indicate a good profile of the CYPs views include:

- Who they are,
- Who and what is important to them,
- How they like to communicate and be communicated with,
- How they like to spend their time,
- What things they need support with and what good support feels like for them,
- Their likes, dislikes, interests.

As each LA differ in their layout of EHC plans, and schools will differ in how they capture this information, the questionnaire aimed to explore how this is done. The views that are aimed to be elicited from the CYP were based around all the statements within the good profile described above. The statements included '*I usually ask the CYP's likes and dislikes in school for my report/ EHCP*', '*I usually ask the CYP's wishes about their future schooling as part of my report/ EHCP*' and '*I usually ask the CYP's views about the learning support they want for my report/ EHCP*'. The term 'usually' was used as a professional cannot ascertain whether this is always done, due to the individual nature of the child, therefore the questionnaire

looks at what they typically aim to capture during an assessment. An open-ended statement was included at the end of section A to allow the participant to expand on any other detail of the views that are elicited from the CYP, which may not have been reflected in the statements.

(ii) Section B

Section B looked at research question 2; the strengths and difficulties professionals may face when exploring the views of a CYP, this can be found on page 356 in the appendix.

This question was interpreted as the level of confidence professionals felt in their ability to elicit pupil voice, or more precisely their perceived ability to succeed. This section of the questionnaire was based on Bandura's (1977) Social-Cognitive theory and the construct of self-efficacy, as discussed within the literature. Examples of self-efficacy scales were researched in terms of layout and wording, in order to produce the self-efficacy scale within the questionnaire (Bandura, 2006). Different scenarios and statements were listed, and the participant was asked to rate their level of confidence using units of 10, where 0 is not confident at all, 50 was marked as moderately confident, and 100 as highly confident. This included the level of self-efficacy the participant had in '*making the effort to listen to the CYP*', '*making the meeting a positive experience*', '*understanding non-verbal communication methods used*' and '*identifying when I need to involve someone else or help with communication.*' Some statements were re-worded in a similar way to ensure consistency in responses. There was an option for participants to comment on any other views they had around eliciting pupil voice.

The literature has highlighted a relationship between teacher efficacy within inclusive education (Gibson & Dembo, 1984) and the findings can be applied to this study. It is hypothesized that levels of self-efficacy seen in Section B of the scale might impact the level of effort a professional will make in gaining the views of the CYP, as captured in Section A of the scale. Those with higher levels of self-efficacy will make more effort to elicit voice than those with lower levels of self-efficacy. The analysis of this hypothesis can be found in the following chapter.

It is important to distinguish the levels of confidence that were sought through section B of the questionnaire differs from the statistical concept of confidence intervals, which is the probability that a population parameter will fall between two set values for a certain proportion of times. This section aimed to get a numerical figure on perceived self-efficacy, i.e. how confident professionals felt in doing the statement within their daily role.

(iii) Section C

Section C focused on research question 3; exploring what type of method or tools was used to elicit pupil voice, and how often this was used, on a scale of '*Almost Always*' to '*Never*'. This can be found on page 357 in the appendix.

As discussed in the literature review, there are various methods identified for eliciting pupil voice, defined as direct, prompted and mediated methods. This categorical definition was described by MacBeath et al (2003) and can be revisited in table 2.4. The questionnaire had a statement for each example listed within the three different categories of methods. This includes '*Direct Methods*' and included statements such as '*I have a conversation with them about their views*' and '*I ask the CYP to keep a diary or a log*'; '*Prompted Methods*', including statements such as '*using a sentence completion prompt to ask about their views*', and '*I observe the CYP*'; and finally '*Mediated Methods*', where statements such as '*I ask the CYP to draw a picture or a painting*', or '*I use role play*' were used to demonstrate this.

The bottom of each method asked for an example of the needs and descriptors of the CYP that you tend to use this method of consultation, for example would you tend to use this method with a pupil who has MLD or PMLD. The objective of this was for professionals to draw upon scenarios within their daily practice to exemplify how methods can differ based on need. It was predicted that pupils who are verbal and/or of high capability would use direct methods during consultation, those who have moderate learning difficulties would use prompted methods, and those who are predominately non-verbal or have PMLD would use mediated methods in consultation; the findings are discussed in chapter 4.

The last statement in section C asked how often the participant used multiple methods to access the views of the CYP, which has been identified as the most

efficient way to access views (Clark & Moss, 2005; Cowie, Otrrel-Cass & Moreland, 2010).

(iv) Section D

Section D looked at enabling factors that help elicit pupil voice, in order to address research question 4 and can be found on page 360 in the appendix.

As discussed in 2.4.1, the enabling factors that facilitate pupil voice include actions such as adapting paperwork (Adams et al, 2017) and building a rapport with the CYP (Ravet, 2007). The Communication Trust toolkit (2016) also encourages using methods and strategies that are appropriate to the CYP's needs and strengths. This statement in Section 2 of the toolkit was used to frame the statements within section D, along with the existing enabling factors identified in the literature review. This included statements such as *'I take advice on how best to communicate with the CYP from those who know them well'* and *'I meet with the CYP more than once so they feel comfortable with me'*. Again, the bottom of this section had an opportunity for participants to expand on any other enabling factors they have found useful within their practice.

(v) Section E

Section E looked at barriers in eliciting pupil voice, as per research question 5, and how these could potentially be overcome. This can be found on page 361 in the appendix.

The statements were supported by the CDC's *'Barriers to participation factsheet'* (see footnote 8), which identified recognisable barriers that CYP with SEND felt in regard to participation. The CDC identify 21 barriers from the perspective of CYP; all barriers helped formulate statements for Section E such as *'I do not manage to elicit views when the CYP experiences anxiety or lack of self-confidence'* and *'the adult gives the views on behalf of the CYP'*.

These are examples of reverse wording statements to allow correlation between statements in other sections. For example, if a participant answered, 'strongly agree' for the statement *'I have had adequate training from my LA to access the views of*

CYP' in section A, and then answered, 'strongly disagree' to the statement '*I do not have the resources or skills to respond to a CYP*' in section E, then this would indicate the participant confidently feels this way and thus reduce acquiescence bias (Bryman, 2012). This is explored within chapter 4.

The factsheet from the CDC also presented with possible solutions alongside every barrier listed, which helped form the latter statements in Section E on how to overcome the barriers, such as making the CYP aware of their rights, adapting the room to make it more accessible, and keeping language simple and clear and making necessary adaptations to suit the individual needs of the CYP. A Focus group within my LA was also set up to explore the barriers faced by LAs when capturing the voice of the child during assessments and reviews; this is discussed in detail below, however the feedback helped aid section E of the questionnaire focusing on barriers. Statements within this section included '*I make the CYP and Gatekeeper aware that it is their right to participate and be included*' and '*I explain to the CYP the decisions from the meeting and the next steps*'. Participants could also comment on practices they use to overcome the barriers.

3.5.4 *Piloting the Questionnaire*

A pilot study was carried out with four SEND Officers and one EP within my LA in November 2018. The aim of the pilot was multi-faceted:

- (i) To get an indication of how long it took to complete the questionnaire,
- (ii) To ensure the information sheet was clear and concise of what the questionnaire would entail,
- (iii) To assess the accessibility of the questionnaire and how easy it would be to navigate,
- (iv) To ensure all relevant areas were covered, and,
- (v) Refine the questions as needed before administering online.

Pilot participants received the information sheet and if they agreed to take part, signed the consent form (Appendix 4). They then individually completed the questionnaire online, timing how long it took to complete. On the basis of the

feedback from the pilot study, the questionnaire stated it would be approximately 20-25 minutes, and the participants felt it was not too long nor tiring.

A conversation was held on a 1:1 basis after they completed the questionnaire to understand their experience. The statements and information sheets were revised on the basis of the feedback by making the wording clearer and concise in its description of the questionnaire. The pilot fed into removing and re-wording statements to reflect what the LA professionals felt were clear and representative of their work, for example, the statement '*I give the CYP the choice of how they would like to share their views*' was identified to be unclear and so the statement was expanded by providing examples; '*e.g. in person, give their views beforehand, drawing*'. The pilot also fed into adding statements identified by the pilot participants as part of their role. For example, it was pointed out that training is a crucial aspect that determines the extent a professional will go to gain the views; this was then added into section A as '*I have had adequate training from my LA to access the views of CYP*'.

Although I did not test the questionnaire with any specialist school staff, the changes made in the pilot were also applied to the second questionnaire. The pilot was a useful way to test the questionnaire before administering online to the required sample. It also allowed me to rehearse how I would analyse and compare the data.

3.5.5 Questionnaire Methodology

The questionnaire was live from 19th January 2019 to 17th February 2020, to allow for as many responses as possible. In order to maximise the accessibility of the questionnaire, the LAs and schools were offered the opportunity to complete online, via a paper questionnaire or by telephone. Almost all participants completed it online, one was done on a paper copy.

For the LA, the information sheet and consent forms were sent to the email addresses of the SEND team, the EP team, and any other contacts detailed on the Local Offer such as advisory teachers or social workers (Appendix 5). Within the email there was a brief description of the study, the aims, and a sentence for the

receiver to forward on to anyone they felt was relevant. The same process was carried out for the schools, where the main office or the SENCO was contacted via email with the information sheet and consent form (Appendix 6), along with a link to the survey and a brief summary. They were asked to send to relevant staff members who are involved in the process. The questionnaire was then modified when sent to NASS; the consent form and information sheet was integrated on to the survey itself. This resolved the issue of consent forms, which is discussed in 3.5.8.

3.5.6 Analysis of Questionnaire data

The responses from the questionnaire data were kept on two excel spreadsheets; one for each sample. Both the quantitative and qualitative data was recorded. The data was then split into each relevant section of the questionnaire (e.g. section A), for the purpose of analysis.

By the end of the data collection period, there were 36 responses from the LA professional sample and 17 responses from the specialist school staff sample, however one participant did not complete the rest of the questionnaire past the background characteristics and was excluded from the final analysis, leaving a final sample of 16 responses for the school professional sample. The findings from the data analysis of both questionnaires are presented in detail in Chapter 4.

Although the aim was to get a 30% response rate for both samples, the response rate for the LA questionnaire had 36 responses, which equates to roughly 24% and the response rate for the school remained significantly lower at 16 responses, roughly at 9%. The decision to cease data collection was made after a significant amount of time had passed and further responses were not being collated, despite numerous reminders. This barrier is discussed further below in 3.5.8 and in both the analysis and discussion chapters.

3.5.7 Advantages of using a Questionnaire

Surveys can provide a powerful approach to the study of facts, characteristics,

attitudes/opinions, and behaviours (David & Sutton, 2011). Online self-administered questionnaires are advantageous in being an efficient, cost-effective and anonymous method for large data collections (Evans & Mathur, 2018). There are no associated costs due to the many free online platforms that allow for creative designs, and a wide range of geographical locations can be targeted. Respondents input directly into an online form, which allows for easy formatting, distribution and analysis for the researcher, and means the researcher does not need to spend time inputting data manually. The statistical data they often yield can also create robust measures for analysis (Bryant, 2012).

Participants are also more likely to be honest in their responses through a medium of a computer, as they feel less pressure than a face-to-face situation (Robson, 2017). This reduces the risk of bias within the responses as the participants are anonymous to the researcher. The responses are also less likely to be influenced by the researcher, unlike interviews, as the researcher is not present during the questions. Participants also can complete the questionnaire at a time convenient for them and not dictated by the researcher (Bryman, 2012).

Questionnaires with closed questions structure questions in a way that allow '*only the answers that fit into categories that have been established in advance by the researcher*' (Denscombe, 1998, p.101), and therefore can limit the responses. Based on this disadvantage, the decision was made to add an optional open question at the end of each section to allow participants to add further comments, clarification or rationale behind their choice. This allowed for additional complex qualitative data from all participants, who did not necessarily agree for a follow-up interview. This additional information proved to be a valuable and insightful addition to the interviews, as discussed in chapter 4.

The features of this method include anonymity of the panellists, remote access and eliciting expert opinion without the associated bias of face-to-face contact (Mckenna, 1994). These aspects were fundamental within the study for two main reasons; (1) the study was carried out during a national pandemic, which required all individuals to remain at home, and so the research was carried out whilst panellists remained safely at home, and, (2) all panellists work together in the same local area and so anonymity was crucial to hinder any form of bias that may occur.

3.5.8 *Disadvantages of using a Questionnaire*

Despite avoiding certain problems with the use of a questionnaire, they do contain their own set of difficulties. The disadvantages of using survey methodology can arise due to ambiguity and misunderstanding of an on-line platform; the participant cannot ask for clarification if they do not understand the question and the researcher cannot provide prompts (Bryman, 2012). Although the pilot was successful in reducing this disadvantage to ensure clear, self-explanatory statements were used, a few participants left some statements blank which skewed the data analysis; one participant did not fill in any of the statements within the questionnaire and so was disregarded from the analysis. Non-response bias could be for a variety of reasons, but possibly due to a lack of interest in the content as it is found participants are more likely to engage in online surveys if the topic is of interest to them, either personally or professionally (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018).

It is also likely with online questionnaires that others can influence your decision as there is no way to monitor if a participant is expressing their views based purely on what they think, or the opinions of others around them. Additionally, questionnaires only collect data at one single point in time, and therefore the views a professional may express at one point may alter throughout their career progression or may be based on the certain mood of that day (Robson, 2017).

The responses often are based on the topic of the questionnaire, in this case the questionnaire asked LA professionals and school staff on their daily practice and there were statements around if they complete certain steps in order to meaningfully engage CYP. Similarly, there were statements around ethos of the establishment and it is likely that a participant may wish to answer in a positive light to reflect their school or LA as one that promotes capturing voice of the child as per the code, and therefore there is a possibility of social desirability bias (De Vaus, 2013). If the participant did not agree for a follow-up interview, there is no option to clarify responses or probing.

A disadvantage in the early stage of the data collection was the difficulty in getting consent forms back from the participant prior to completing the questionnaire. This was resolved by integrating the consent form on to the questionnaire itself; the

forced choice of the layout meant the participant could not proceed with the questionnaire until they agreed to voluntarily take part and understood the nature of the study. This is also an advantage of using an online platform as opposed to paper questionnaires, as the structure of the design is a forced choice where a participant cannot progress to the latter section of the questionnaire without completing the former.

Although response rates can be high in certain situations, such as collecting data in a classroom where each student would complete and hand it in, the response rate for this questionnaire was relatively low for the sample of school professionals, which remains the largest disadvantage to phase one of this study. Table 3.3 shows the chronology of data collection for the questionnaires, and the persistence in attempting to elicit responses without breaching ethical guidelines of a participant who does not wish to take part. Some schools replied to emails wishing that they did not want to be contacted again, which was respected and removed from any further correspondence. The low response rate could be for a variety of reasons. The sample for this study were two professional bodies that work in busy, fast-paced environment; both specialist schools and LAs have stressful and busy jobs that can affect their ability to participate in studies such as this, regardless of the perceived benefits. Other reasons could include low motivation, busy schedules, or lack of clarity in the questions.

The response rate was lower for the school questionnaire than the LA questionnaire, and despite numerous attempts, an equal number of responses could not be acquired for both questionnaires. As literature has consistently found, teaching staff experience high levels of burnout due to the busyness of the environment, high expectations and mental and emotional tiredness (Akin, 2019), particularly when working in specialist schools (Jennett, Harris & Mesibov, 2003). This may mean they have less time or energy to invest in research studies. Additionally, teaching staff may only work term-time, whereas LA staff work all year round, and therefore have more opportunity to complete surveys during less busy periods such as summer holidays. It is also likely that my role as an LA officer meant I had increased access to this sample of professionals in comparison to the school professionals. I was more aware of forums and conferences where I could contact LA professionals and this

may be a possible reason the LA response rate was higher than the school professionals.

19 th January 2019	Questionnaire made- All LAs emailed the questionnaire and 180 special schools randomly selected from 'Edubase'
February 2019	Follow-up emails sent to all those contacted
March 2019	Contacted further special schools from list
April 2019	Reminder emails sent to all who were contacted
May 2019	Reminder emails sent out again
June 2019	Opportunity sampling used; I contacted teachers I know and LA representatives. I also contacted conferences to see if I could present
July 2019	Contacted participants to do interviews Contacted agencies such as NASS Posted on EP forums and SENCO forums
August 2019	Further interviews done Further LAs contacted as summer holidays tends to be quieter
September 2019	Further schools contacted based on google search Contacted multi agency trusts
October 2019	Further multi-agency trusts contacted
November 2019	Contacted multi-agency trusts within Devon with supporting letter from supervisors
January 2020	Contacted specific regions in order to increase response rate and be representative

Table 3.3: Chronology of data collection for the online questionnaire

3.6 Phase One: Semi-Structured Interviews

3.6.1. Interview Schedule

Interviews are ubiquitously used as an integral method within social sciences, in order to understand how people interpret their social world and interact with their own emotions, feelings and experiences (Robson, 2011). Kvale & Brinkmann (2009) present the metaphor of an interviewer as a '*traveller*' who '*walks along with the local inhabitants, asking questions and encouraging them to tell their own stories of their lived world.*' (p.58). Knowledge is gained through an inter-subjective construction of a

narrative through the use of semi-structured techniques, often associated with qualitative methods of inquiry (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010). Interviews also aim to uncover the reality of a participant's experience in further depth and therefore is an appropriate method based on the principles of pragmatism.

A semi-structured interview was seen to be the best fitting method to answer the research questions in further depth. The method involves having an interview schedule with a list of topics to cover but there is flexibility in the wording, the sequence and the amount of time and attention given to each question. It also means the interviewer must utilise their listening skills to adapt the questions as needed, miss out questions that have been covered and expand on responses based on the interactive nature of communication. Wengraf (2001) speaks of the interviewer requiring 'double attention'.

'You must be both listening to the informant's responses to understand what he or she is trying to get at and, at the same time, you must be bearing in mind your needs to ensure that all your questions are liable to get answered within the fixed time at the level of depth and detail that you need' (p.194).

The end of the questionnaire had an option for the participant to engage in a follow up interview if they chose. Those who opted in for this were contacted and an interview date was arranged at the location of their choice, usually at their establishment in a private room, or alternatively via Skype or telephone. An interview schedule was compiled prior to data collection which followed the layout of an introductory comment to ease the participant into the interview, a list of topic headings based on the sections of the questionnaire and possible questions which could be asked, a list of prompts associated with their response to the survey questions, and a closing comment (Robson, 2011). The order of questions within the schedule were based on the order of the questionnaire and so the first set of questions related to section A, the second set to section B, and so on and so forth.

Two separate interview schedules were developed based on whether they were a professional within a school or within the LA (see example in appendix 7). However, the schedule acted as a guide for conversation, and was not strictly adhered to. Some questions can be answered based on one response and therefore the interviewer must use their initiative on what questions need to be asked, and ensure the conversation appears as natural as possible.

The aim of the interviews was to target specific areas within the questionnaire, this included;

1. Expanding on the opinions of the EHCP and AR process in relation to CYP's involvement,
2. Highlight any barriers professionals experience when eliciting views, and,
3. Understand ways the process could be improved to allow for higher participation.

3.6.2. Sampling

Opportunity sampling was used where all participants who agreed to an interview at the end of the questionnaire phase were contacted to arrange this. Some participants who agreed were not able to be contacted after or decided they did not want to participate in the interviews, and therefore this was no longer pursued.

I tried to contact professionals from varying roles in order to yield as much data-rich information as possible from differing perspectives. Six interviews were conducted in total: three from LAs and three from schools. The characteristics of the participants who participated in the interviews, in terms of their job role and experience of SEND, can be seen in Table 3.4 below. Participants with the same job role were differentiated for the purpose of analysis, this was done by numbering them.

Two interviews were conducted face-to-face, one via Skype and the remaining three via telephone. Those who agreed to take part were given an information sheet detailing the study, and if agreed signed the consent form (Appendix 8), a suitable time and date was then arranged based on their preference. The interview was audio recorded using a dictation device, an Olympus VN-8600PC - Digital voice recorder.

The interviews were on average 20.2 minutes long and the comments by participants were positive around the aims and nature of the study; many requested to read the final write-up.

		Job Role	Length of Service
LA Professionals	Participant 1	SEND Officer 1 (SO1)	Less than 6 months
	Participant 2	SEND Officer 2 (SO2)	Less than 6 months
	Participant 3	Educational Psychologist	1-2 years
School Professionals	Participant 4	SENCO	More than 10 years
	Participant 5	Assistant Head teacher	Less than 6 months
	Participant 6	Head teacher	5-10 years

Table 3.4: Characteristics of the interviewees

3.6.3 *Data analysis and coding*

Analysis of qualitative data can be an iterative process, as it requires repeated reading and recoding of text (Galetta, 2013). The data analysis of the interviews followed the process described by Creswell & Creswell (2017), and the steps they described form the basis of this following section. The steps are illustrated in the flowchart below in figure 3.4.

(i) *Organising the data*

The audio recordings of the interviews were securely stored on the researcher's computer immediately after each interview within a password protected file. Interviews were then transcribed manually on a Word Processor. It was important when transcribing to highlight any specific emphases on words and non-verbal cues noted during face-to-face interviews or long pauses before the participant responded to questions, as this can influence the way a response is analysed (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). This was done using italics when transcribing, an example excerpt from the interview transcript can be seen in Appendix 9. I chose to transcribe the interview either the same day or following day of interviews as to remember key details such as laughs, hesitations and gestures whilst transcribing. This proved to be a useful method to capture the non-verbal cues within the transcription.

After the data was transcribed into a word document, the data was checked for any identifiable features such as the name of the LA/school or CYP names. There was no mention of this and so pseudonyms were not required. At this point, I began the process of 'pre-coding', where I highlighted any particular comments I felt to be significant, with notes of my initial thoughts (Saldana, 2013). This later proved to be a beneficial technique as I began the data coding process described below.

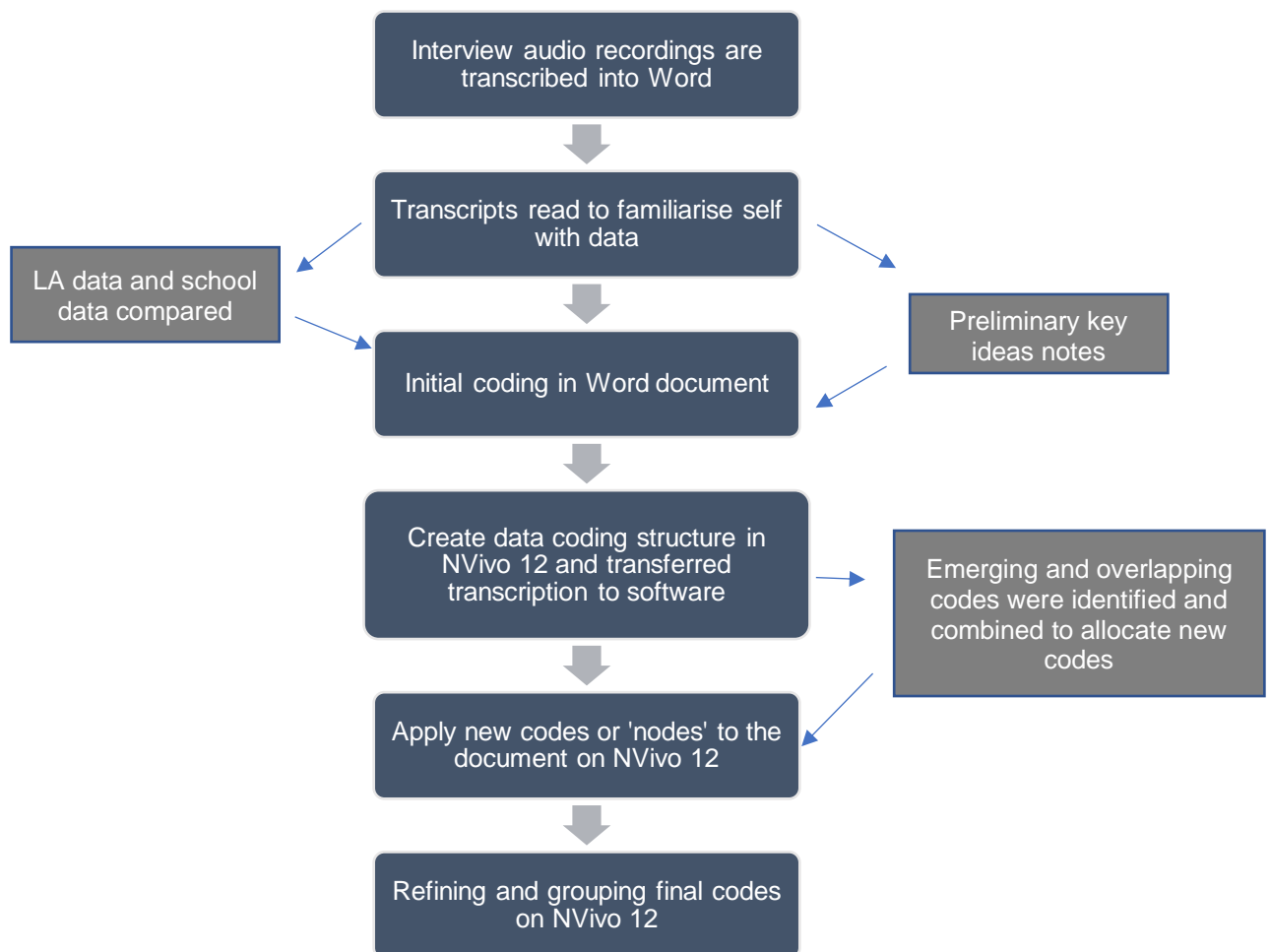


Figure 3.4: Flow chart of the data analysis process for qualitative data

(ii) Developing preliminary ideas for coding

The transcripts were then read and re-read in order to become familiar with the data; preliminary key ideas were noted based on the knowledge I had from the literature

review and my own experiences as an LA officer. Data was colour coded on the word document based on initial thoughts and this generated over 25 key ideas. This was graphically illustrated in a concept mind map (Appendix 10). The ideas needed to then be converted into codes for the purpose of analysis.

Coding is described as a decision-making process which must be made in context of the research design (Elliott, 2018). A 'code' refers to '*labels that assign symbolic meaning to the descriptive or inferential information compiled during a study*' (Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2014, p.71). It is important to allocate time and thought into the coding process, as errors in coding can reduce the usefulness of interviews during analysis (Robson, 2017). In larger research projects, researchers will check the coding of data and provide a consensus, however due to the small scale of this study this was not possible.

As the previous chapter highlighted, literature around pupil voice in EHCP assessments and ARs is sparse. The existing literature around barriers and the methods and tools available to elicit voice was used to develop the questionnaire items and follow up questions in the interviews. Similarly, when approaching the study, I carry my own preconceived notions from the perspective of an LA professional and therefore my beliefs around pupil voice and the barriers faced by professionals could be used to frame and test a deductive approach to analysis. However, there was no existing theory around barriers to eliciting voice for SEND professionals to test and therefore implied the need for an inductive approach in analysis.

When developing the preliminary ideas for coding, I decided to use both existing literature and my own knowledge and experiences, whilst remaining open to the data and views of the professionals expressed during the interviews. This study implied the use of both approaches and therefore required an approach to analysis that could act as a 'middle group' between both. The concept of 'adaptive theory' (Layder, 1998) fit this description as theory is shaped by incoming data, whilst at the same time filtering this based on existing theory, known as 'abductive reasoning'. This process values both the inductive and deductive approach and use both qualitative and quantitative approaches to inform reasoning. An abductive approach also relies on explanation and understanding on the participants view; having

understood the social world from the participants perspective, the researcher must then come to a scientific social account of the social world seen from those perspectives (Bryman, 2012). As this was a mixed-methods approach and adopted a pragmatic approach to research, an abductive reasoning approach seemed fitting when beginning the coding process.

(iii) Generating codes

Preliminary ideas were generated based on the initial data. Due to the sheer volume of ideas generated, a decision was made to use NVivo 12, a qualitative data management software package, to support the coding process

All transcripts were transferred to the coding software and the codes, or 'nodes' as described in NVivo 12, were generated and grouped together for ease of comparison. The codes were re-read and similar or overlapping ideas were identified and merged to create new codes. For example, a code named 'capabilities' was identified and analysed, however upon analysis, the excerpts were examples of barriers of CYP, and was decided to amalgamate into this code.

I used the technique of mind-maps, as above, to identify links between codes and further refine as needed. I also cross-referenced different codes between the two samples; if the same code was seen in both the LA and school interviews, then it was included as a code, otherwise it was excluded.

This iterative process was repeated until I reached a manageable number of codes; although literature does not define a set number of codes needed for qualitative research studies. The final number of major themes or concepts should be 'held to a minimum', but there is no standardized number. The general consensus is roughly five themes (Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2014) Lichtman (2006) project studies in education generate initial thoughts of 80-100 ideas that become organised into 15-20 codes, and eventually amalgamate to 5-7 themes. The data generated 10 codes for the purpose of analysis. The data transcripts were then re-read a final time, and data was matched to each code on NVivo to produce the final data analysis. The analysis for each code is discussed in chapter 4.

The order of the codes was based on the frequency that they were mentioned within the qualitative data. Participants often referenced more than one code in their answers and at a variety of different points, and therefore the same excerpt could be used to illustrate two different codes. If both the LA participants and the school participants referenced the code, either positively or negatively, it was counted as a reference. The codes generated from the analysis along with the number of coding references can be seen in table 3.5 below for both the LA and school participants. It is also important to note that the qualitative data from the interviews were also analysed in the same way and counted as a reference towards each code. The data is ranked from most to least, where the highest number of references relating to the code is at the top.

At this point in the study, I did not analyse the codes further to create themes. The reason for this was the thematic analysis was decided to occur in phase two of the study, and so I did not want to pre-empt this. The themes developed from the coding system will be discussed in 3.8.4, in relation to the Delphi method, and followed Lichtman's (2006) prediction of generating 5 themes.

Number of references:				
Code	LA participants	School participants	Qualitative data from questionnaire	Total number
Barriers	32	22	11	65
Enabling factors	9	23	11	43
Aims of the EHCP assessment and AR	12	17	0	29
Methods used to elicit voice	10	19	0	29
CYP's interests vs. professionals own	7	10	1	18
Meaningless participation	6	8	1	15
Involvement of other professionals	2	10	3	15
Bureaucracy	6	6	1	13
Lack of consulting the CYP	6	2	5	13
Improvements	7	4	0	10

Table 3.5: The codes identified from the analysis, with the number of coding references for both interview and questionnaire data

3.6.4 Advantages of interviews

Semi-structured interviews have many advantages, mainly that an in-depth qualitative approach can be used to help answer specific questions based on the interests and aims of the researcher. Additionally, semi-structured interviews allow for greater flexibility than structured interviews, and thus allowing the researcher to

probe in order to gain greater detail around a particular area (Bryman, 2012).

Face-to-face interviews are characterised as synchronous communication in time and place. The interviewer can access social cues such as voice, intonation and body language, which can elaborate verbal answers and, in some cases, change the meaning of verbal answers (Robson, 2011). Although some research has proposed face-to-face interviews as the preferred technique due to access to nonverbal data (Opdenakker, 2006), there is growing interest around using mediums such as Skype and telephone calls. Using technological mediums allows access to participants all across England, without the time and costs of travelling; it also allows access to hard to reach populations who can be difficult to meet and those who struggle to fit in a face-to-face meeting.

In this study, using other mediums proved to be advantageous for both myself as the researcher and for the participant, due to less time and resources spent on travelling, arranging a meeting room and the prolonged social nuisances of a face-to-face meeting. It is likely that participants felt more comfortable communicating their views over phone as they felt relaxed and protected as they remained anonymous to the researcher, and therefore may disclose sensitive information they may not choose to share in a face-to-face meeting (Novick, 2008).

3.6.5 *Disadvantages of interviews*

Both roles as an LA professional and teaching staff within specialist schools come with a significant commitment to meetings, resourcing, paperwork and admin tasks; this led to the difficulty in arranging interviews or keeping to the arranged time agreed and so interviews were often rescheduled. Many participants who may have agreed to do an interview then realised they did not have capacity to do so and therefore did not participate any further. For those who did interview, some were concerned around the time it would take and possibly rushed their responses.

A similar potential disadvantage to questionnaires is that of social desirability bias; those who agreed to interview might be individuals who wished to promote their establishment in a positive way and endorse their methods of capturing pupil voice.

However, the analysis in chapter 4 will highlight that this was not the case as participants were truthful and did not just comment positively on their practice. Other forms of bias can exist during interviews, such as the mood of the participant on the day, or the time and day the interview was held. The time and day of each interview was noted in order to analyse a pattern in responses at a later date, however this was not needed.

The presence of an audio recorder also can be an impediment towards the participant's willingness to reveal their views and feelings. Recording may make them nervous and less apt to respond freely (Kendall & Kendall, 2014). However, as some interviews were done via Skype and phone, and although the participant was fully informed about the recording device, they could not see it, so it may have made them feel more relaxed in comparison to face-to-face interviews. Although recording interviews allows for an in-depth analysis, transcribing one hour of interview tape takes 4-5 hours, which is a strenuous role as a researcher (Bryman, 2012).

3.7 Conclusion of Methodology in Phase One

Phase one consisted of roughly one year of data collection of simultaneous online questionnaires and semi-structured interviews for two sample groups; LA professionals and specialist school staff. The questionnaire consisted of largely quantitative data from an online questionnaire, with elements of qualitative data if the participant chose. The interviews were solely qualitative based and produced a rich amount of data. The analysis of phase one can be found in the following chapter.

Phase One involved numerous attempts to recruit participants due to the low response rate. The difficulty in recruiting sufficient numbers for the online questionnaire was a continuous challenge in this phase; despite the various attempts and different avenues of contact, the sample for the school questionnaire was lower than the LA questionnaire, which hinders the ability to draw reasonable comparisons between the two as it is not a representative sample as originally intended. However, the findings from phase one identified key barriers and difficulties by front-line professionals who work with CYP with SEND on a daily basis, which helped form the basis of phase two of the study.

3.8 Phase Two: The Delphi Method

3.8.1 Aims of the Delphi Method

Phase two of the study used the barriers identified in phase one as a basis for conversation and aimed to reach an understanding of the characteristics needed for CYP to meaningfully participate in their EHCP assessments and ARs, whilst ensuring their voice is central to the process. By using the same target sample of LA professionals and specialist school staff, the study aimed to gather professional opinion about the barriers present and possible solutions to overcome this in daily practice, and therefore required a methodology that allowed for multiple iterations to help reach a consensus.

The Delphi Method, as described in chapter 3.4.2, was designed as a tool to try and forecast solutions to identified problems. It was originally described as '*a set of procedures for eliciting and refining the opinions of a group of experts or especially knowledgeable individuals*' (Dalkey, 1967, p.1). Linstone & Turoff (1975) expanded this by characterizing the Delphi as a method for structuring a group communication process in order to deal with a complex problem. This tool allows for '*iterative administration of a questionnaire designed to elicit the beliefs and judgments of a panel of experts, with the results from each round shared with the respondents, who might modify their responses in subsequent rounds accordingly*' (Sandford & Facer, 2008, p.6). To achieve this, feedback is required from individual experts using their knowledge and views on a particular problem within their field, some opportunity to revise these views, and a degree of anonymity for the individual responses.

The key elements to the Delphi therefore are the use of a panel of experts, seeking to arrive at a consensus on complex problems and anonymity of the panel (Davidson, 2013). The Delphi involves various rounds of questionnaires which is returned to the researcher to collect, edit as needed, and returned to each participant. A summary of the views of all the participants are then provided to each expert in an anonymised form and they are encouraged to respond to this summary through another round of further questions. By using multiple iterations based on individual feedback, participants are encouraged to reassess their initial views in light of reading the summary of the views of all experts on the panel. The aim of the

Delphi is that during the process, the range of responses from the group begin to converge towards a consensus (Hsu & Sandford, 2007).

The classical or original Delphi method involves no face-to-face contact through any of the rounds; however, it has been modified throughout the years of its use. One form of modification involves meeting as a focus group for the first round, and then via email correspondence for the remaining (McKenna, 1994). However, the key factors of an anonymous expert panel must remain in order to keep the process within its definition. The round of panels can also vary but three iterations have been identified as a sufficient feedback loop to collect and analyse information in order to reach consensus (Ludwig, 1997). It is important to identify when to stop rounds of questioning; too soon can lead to meaningless findings and too many can lead to fatigue in panellists. Consideration must be given to time and understanding demands of the panellists (Hasson, Keeney & McKenna, 2000).

A pre-determined criterion for achieving consensus is also required. There is no universally agreed level of consensus to be achieved within the Delphi method as this depends upon sample numbers and aims of the research. Literature has suggested various levels of consensus within the Delphi; Mckenna (1994) suggests consensus should aim for 51% agreement amongst panellists, others have suggested 70% (Sumsion, 1998), and some 80% (Green et al, 1999). Crisp et al (1997) argue that a percentage value is not the most appropriate form to measure consensus, rather assessing the stability of responses through a series of rounds is a more reliable indicator of consensus.

Researchers have applied the Delphi method as a tool to address wide variety of research problems. Although mainly used in areas of business management and information systems research (Okoli & Pawlowski, 2004), it has been used successfully in Education (Baumfield et al, 2012; Nworie, 2011; Green & Birch, 2019), and when appropriate, can be adapted as a positive method to modify during a doctoral thesis (Davidson, 2013).

3.8.2 *Advantages of the Delphi Method*

The Delphi method is a notable timesaving tool to gather expert opinion and to reach a consensus through a relatively quick and low-cost method. Successive questionnaires can be implemented in a non-adversarial manner and from a range of geographical locations (Gordon, 2009). As mentioned above, the second phase of the study was carried out during a global pandemic in 2020 that resulted in the population being asked to stay in their homes and refrain from social contact. Therefore, the method was ideal to collate data instantaneously from a range of locations and allow for re-distribution after each round, whilst respecting the boundaries of an unprecedented time.

As the method was carried out virtually, panellists were not aware of the other experts involved. This avoids the effects of individuals dominating the conversation, which is often seen in group-based processes to collect information (Dalkey, 1972). The anonymity of the group is achieved through all correspondence being via email and data being alphabetised in the initial rounds as not to indicate frequencies of opinion. As the expert panel in this study all work together, anonymity was crucial to ensure they all felt comfortable to share their views openly without any fear of repercussions within their role.

The expert panel is also a crucial part of the Delphi method as their knowledge will form the output of this study; the panel members all clearly had expertise and knowledge within the subject area as reflected within their responses. As panel members are experts on the issues being discussed, it is expected that they would be interested in the study and thus be motivated to contribute in bettering practice (Nworie, 2011), this was reflective of this study as the response rate was sustained at 100% throughout.

The Delphi method is a useful method can be a useful method to gather expert opinion in a non-adversarial manner and within relatively quick timescales. As panellists are given feedback on most frequent opinions, this allows them to reflect on their choices and provides panellists an opportunity to change their opinions should they wish (McKenna, 1994).

3.8.3 *Disadvantages of the Delphi Method*

One significant disadvantage of the Delphi method is often time; there is both the length of time it takes to complete the study and the time commitment required of the panel members. Therefore, the Delphi method should aim to be as efficient as possible to keep members engaged and focused; if a panel member does not continue through the rounds of the study, the data can become compromised and negatively affect the outcome (Davidson, 2013). The pilot study helped narrow down the statements in round one to keep participants engaged, however the surveys still required allocated time for panellists to complete and panellists needed reminder emails to complete the survey.

The time between each round is also important to allow participants to reflect after each survey; it is recommended that giving two weeks for panellists to respond to each round is advisable (Hsu & Sandford, 2007). However, it is also crucial to not allow too much time to pass between rounds where participants may lose motivation to engage in the study; I gave roughly three weeks between each round, which was enough time for panellists to sustain involvement whilst not feeling fatigued of answering questions.

One disadvantage of Delphi studies is the rate of response; if a panel member is to withdraw at any point in the study, the data can become compromised (Davidson, 2013). Fortunately, the study received 100% response throughout each round, however panellists often needed reminding to complete the survey. Having three rounds of questioning combined with qualitative inquiry can be tiresome, particularly in demanding roles where time is limited.

Although participants remained anonymous to each other, they did not remain anonymous to the researcher in round one. As I work with all the participants, it is likely that my role as their colleague and in some cases, their senior, impacted their views and opinions. Panellists may have felt compelled to answer desirably or be less truthful than if it was a researcher they did not know collecting their views. The term 'quasi-anonymity' can be used to indicate the panellists' responses would be known to the researcher; however, their opinion would remain anonymous to the other panellists (McKenna, 1994). Round two and three remained completely

anonymous as the on-line building site used did not identify the participants characteristics to the researcher. Although this was advantageous in possibly making participants feel more comfortable in their responses, the disadvantage was I could not track who had completed the survey and so when chasing responses, I had to email everyone which could be bothersome for those who had already completed it.

Bias is also a difficult aspect associated with the Delphi method; it is crucial when forming the questions, particularly in the first round, to avoid adding bias to the study. The researcher must be as objective as possible and allow panellists to express their own opinions and bias freely (Davidson, 2013), without imposing any preconceptions or leading questions. The role I adopted within the Delphi method is discussed further in 3.9.3.

3.8.4 Choosing the Expert panel

Choosing the panel members is arguably the most important aspect of the Delphi method as it directly relates to the quality of results generated (Hsu & Sandford, 2007). The panel members are selected as a form of purposive sampling; they are defined as 'experts' within a given area. The definition of 'expert' is ambiguous; there is no exclusive definition within the literature of what the criteria of an 'expert' may be, and this allows for the researcher to modify criterion to their study. Many assume length of experience makes a professional an expert, however I chose not to have this as a criterion for the panel members as Davidson (2013) clearly illustrates '*time doing the same job for an extended period does not, by itself, qualify an individual to be an expert*'. (p.63). Level of experience and expertise knowledge are not the same and therefore is not an advisable criterion (Nworie, 2011). Instead the identification of key criteria was approached by focusing on the problem statement of the research aims.

For the purpose of this study, the expert panel were required to be knowledgeable in the field of SEND and have an opinion on eliciting pupil voice. Therefore, the criteria for selecting experts were defined as a professional who:

- (1) Works directly with CYP with SEND,
- (2) Works within an LA or Specialist School in England,
- (3) Understands the EHCP assessment and annual review process, and,
- (4) Are involved in pupil consultation in some capacity.

I also chose to localise the sample to one specific area; the LA that I work for. This was chosen for a variety of reasons. Firstly, this sample was not originally included in phase one of the study and therefore they had no preconceptions of the content of the study, reducing any possibility of bias. Another reason was due to accessibility; I had easy access to participants in this sample and as a result, many readily agreed to take part. It also reduced the risk of non-response as the participants were all motivated to support the project. And lastly, the study aims to benefit my local area by improving practice and so I chose to have participants from the area to be part of the expert panel and elicit their opinion on how practice could improve. By doing so, the study aims to empower LA professionals and specialist school staff via the collaborative approach of the Delphi method, in order to create change in their daily practice.

The panellists were purposively chosen based on their role within the LA; certain groups of professionals who work with CYP during the EHCP assessment and AR process were approached with information on the study and asked if they would like to take part (Appendix 11). This included the SEND Team, the EP team, the advisory teachers, the early years team, social workers, and the three local specialist schools in the area. Ten participants initially agreed to take part, however upon reflection, two felt they would not have the time to commit to the study and so the final sample consisted of eight participants who agreed to take part from various teams. It is essential within a Delphi study to provide demographics on the panel members in order to allow the reader to judge the relevance and reliability of the respondents (Schmidt, 1997). The characteristics of the panellists can be seen in table 3.6 below. Participants with the same job role were differentiated for the purpose of analysis, this was done by numbering them.

All participants met the criteria listed above and therefore defining them as 'experts'; again, as they were my colleagues, my knowledge of their role allowed me to ascertain this information without further prompting.

	Job Role		Length of Service
LA Professionals	Participant 1	SEND Officer 1 (SO1)	3-4 years
	Participant 2	SEND Officer 2 (SO2)	1-2 years
	Participant 3	Educational Psychologist (EP1)	3-4 years
	Participant 4	Educational Psychologist (EP2)	3-4 years
	Participant 5	Family support worker (FSW)	3-4 years
	Participant 6	Advisory teacher	4-5 years
School Professionals	Participant 7	SENCO	More than 10 years
	Participant 8	Assistant SENCO	3-4 years

Table 3.6: Characteristics of the expert panellist

All participants who agreed to take part were initially contacted on their work email. However, it was then asked if they would like to use an alternative email address for the purpose of the study, in which some participants did provide me with their personal emails. A consent form was sent to all participants who agreed to take part (Appendix 11) to their preferred email address.

Once the sample has been identified, it is crucial to prepare panellists on what will be expected within the process. This step is important to avoid any adverse effects on the response rate for subsequent rounds. As the Delphi involves panellists being questioned about the same topic over and over again with slightly modified questionnaires, it requires a time commitment to the process throughout (Hasson, Keeney & McKenna, 2000). Panellists who have a thorough understanding of the aims and output of the process are more likely to commit to the process. Written information accompanied the initial recruitment of panellists to inform them of the process and the aim to produce a document of good practice to support a child-centred approach to the EHCP and AR process.

3.8.5 *Pilot of the Delphi Method*

A pilot study was carried out in February 2020 with both graduate students and lecturing staff at the University of Exeter, Graduate School of Education. The purpose of the pilot study was to test the process of the Delphi Method and the proposed questions before implementing the method within the LA. It also served as a way to refine the initial questions sent to participants.

The pilot study tested round one of the Delphi method, which is explained in 3.8.7 below. Participants for the pilot study volunteered to take part via email, and the information sheet was sent beforehand. A selection of questions was sent via email to gather initial views based on the theme of barriers. Only one topic area was considered due to time constraints of the pilot study. Another reason was the sample of participants in the pilot were not necessarily 'experts' as defined in 3.8.4, and therefore would not necessarily have relevant responses to all the questions. Barriers were chosen as the theme to focus on as it is being assumed majority would have some ideas around this through either personal or professional experiences.

When the participants arrived, the information sheet was reiterated, and they were asked to sign consent forms should they wish to participate (Appendix 12). The discussion was voice recorded for purpose of analysis of the feedback from participants. The results from this pilot does not contribute to the analysis of the project but proved a useful opportunity for me to practice the method and steps as described within the literature.

An anonymised summary of responses for each question was pre-populated and provided to the participants; each question was read out and opened a discussion about it. Each participant was then given a blank paper and asked to provide a sentence on two questions;

1. What in your opinion is the most significant barrier to eliciting pupil voice?
2. How can professionals overcome this barrier to elicit pupil voice?

The recording was then stopped and an open discussion for feedback was then had on the process and my role as a facilitator. The feedback helped refine the process as I acknowledged many factors that needed adjusting, such as:

- Ground rules are important to have before the discussion around anonymity and confidentiality, along with reassurance for participants to speak candidly,
- Some questions were repeated and can be removed, and,
- Questions could be reframed to allow more direct and specific responses.

Round one of the Delphi method was then refined based on this feedback. The pilot then allowed me to test how I would analyse the findings from round one for subsequent rounds. The pilot was effective in allowing me to become familiar with the process and data analysis.

3.8.6 *Generating Themes for the Delphi Method*

As discussed, the Delphi method was a follow on from the findings generated from phase one of the study. The interviews generated various codes that were used for the purpose of analysis (see table 3.5), however the Delphi method required these codes to be narrowed down to generate a solution-based approach.

The Delphi method requires participants to focus on working towards a solution and therefore the codes needed to be condensed, in order to provide clear questions for the expert panel. Prior to commencing the data collection process within phase two, I took the initial codes generated from the analysis of the interviews and questionnaire data in phase one, and then conducted a further analysis through iterative comparisons, in order to generate themes.

‘Themes’ are operationalised as ‘*broad units of information that consist of several codes aggregated to form a common idea*’ (Cresswell, 2013, p.186). Codes are described at the primary level, and themes at the secondary level; themes are formed from the initial analysis of the codes and therefore themes are outcomes of coding, not something that is coded itself (Elliot, 2018). Rallis & Rossman (2003) explain the difference between the two in the following way;

“think of a code as a **word or phrase** describing some segment of your data that is **explicit**, whereas a theme is a **phrase or sentence** describing more **subtle** and **tacit** processes” (p. 282)

The emphasis on the words in bold accentuate the differences between the two and incorporates the process of moving from the 'real' to the 'abstract' (Saldana, 2013). Themes involve a higher-level of categorisation and are used to identify the major elements of the data, and therefore a further iteration of analysis was needed. The thematic analysis process and relationship between the codes and themes is illustrated in figure 3.5 below.

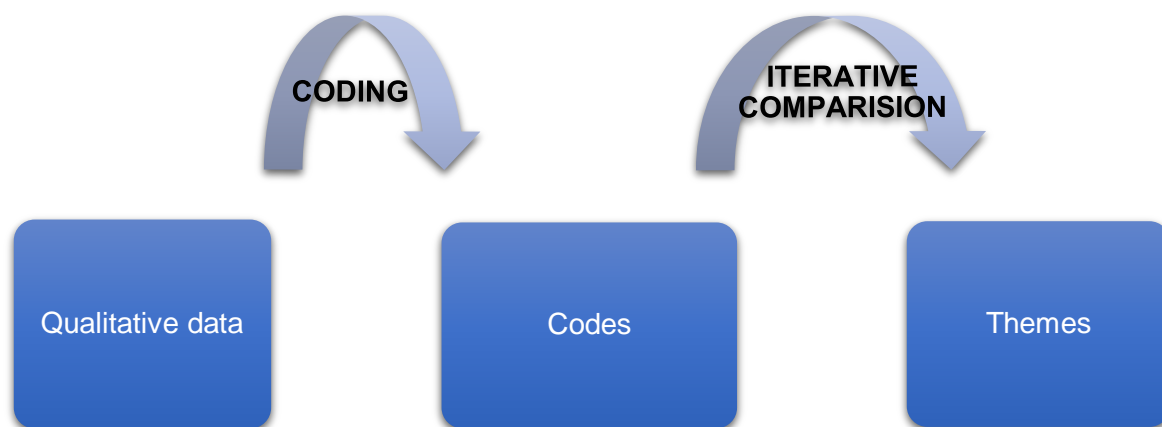


Figure 3.5: The thematic analysis process

A mind-map technique was used to narrow down the codes to a set of themes, which would be the focus of the Delphi method. The codes were analysed to identify potential relationships and links between them. The analysis chapter will quantify how often each code was referenced by each sample, and this proved a useful way to narrow down which codes were prominent features within this study.

From this iterative comparison of codes, themes were generated for the basis of the Delphi method. Once the themes had been initially selected, I then had to consider whether the thematic map represented the entire data set accurately. This required the data to be re-read and reflection on whether the themes represented what was conveyed by participants. The theme names were refined in order to ensure that

they conveyed clear meaning and condensed where possible. The final five themes were as follows:

- (1) Meaningful participation,
- (2) Key practices and conditions in capturing voice,
- (3) Enabling factors,
- (4) Barriers, and,
- (5) How to deal with limits to participation.

The codes-to-themes model for qualitative inquiry can be found in figure 3.6 below, colour-coded to each theme. Some codes fell into the category of more than one theme; for example, the codes 'meaningless participation' and 'lack of consulting the CYP' were both identified as problems that emerged from the analysis of phase one, and the solution would be to achieve 'meaningful participation'. Therefore, these two codes were merged to provide context to the over-arching theme of 'meaningful participation'.

The themes were also worded positively to avoid deficit-based language when attempting to generate solutions, for example, the codes 'meaningless participation' and 'lack of consulting the CYP' were joined to develop the code 'meaningful participation'. The Delphi method aims to generate the ways in which meaningful participation can be achieved and therefore the themes were positively worded within phase two.

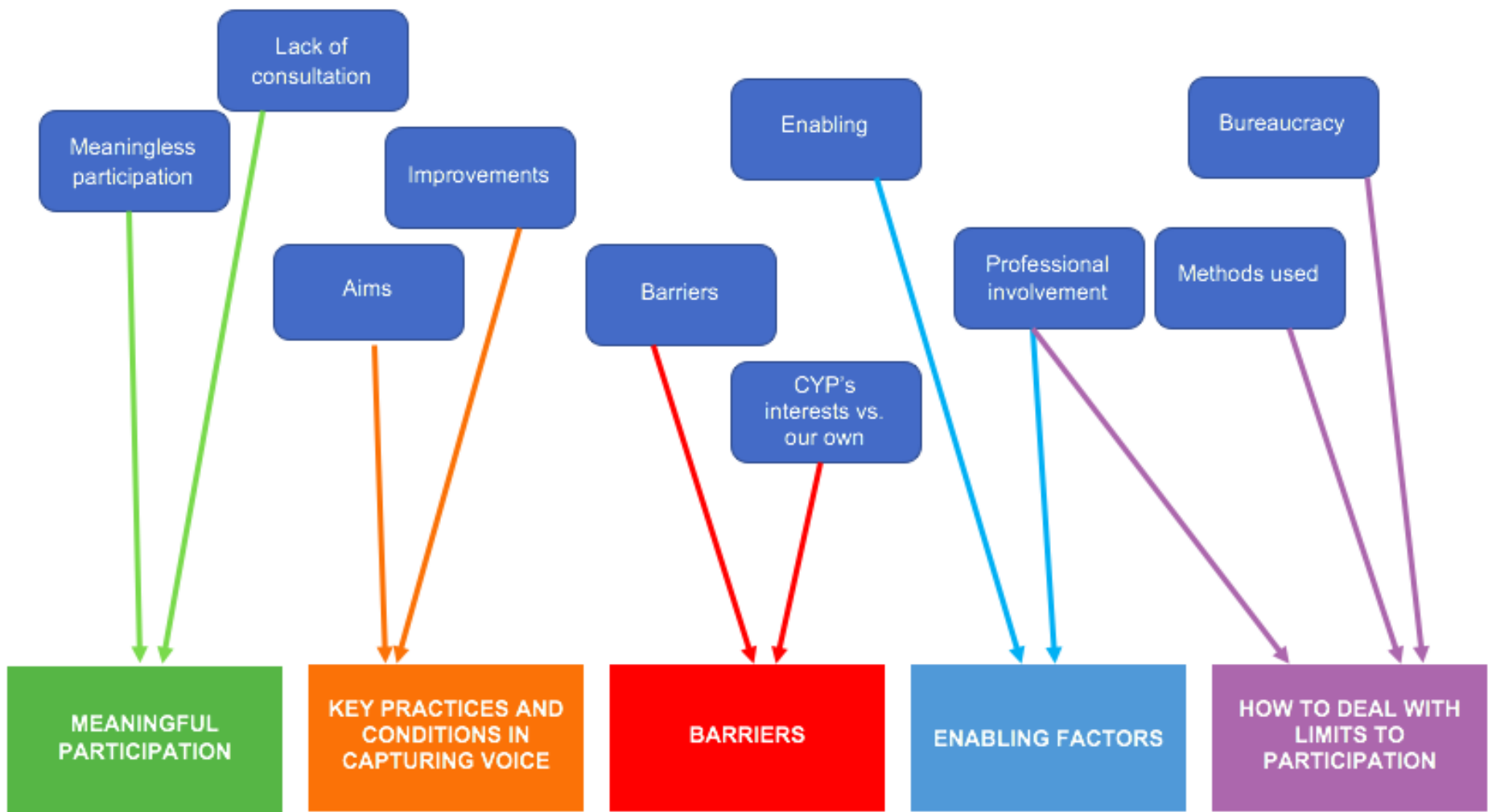


Figure 3.6: Codes-to-themes model for qualitative inquiry

3.8.7 *Process of the Delphi Method*

The Delphi method took place between March 2020 until June 2020. This study chose the original Delphi method to ensure anonymity amongst panellists, and entailed three iterations, as suggested by the literature (Ludwig, 1997). Figure 3.7 provides an overview of the process of the Delphi method within phase two of this study, explaining each step as guided by the literature.

(i) Round One

The first round of the Delphi method entails an initial questionnaire containing a series of open-ended questions. The open-ended questioning within the first round strengthens the reliability and validity of the Delphi method (Iqbal & Pison-Young, 2009), as the initial data is derived at this stage and therefore serves as the foundation for all rounds (Davidson, 2013). Round one of the Delphi method was intended to encourage participants to think about the EHCP and AR process in relation to the CYP and if and how their voice is elicited throughout.

The questions were based around the five themes identified above, in which more than one question was generated for each theme. The questions aimed to expand the comments made within phase one of the study in more depth and detail, whilst generating new ideas by the expert panellists.

In the first round of questioning, participants received an email with a link to the on-line survey. The survey contained 13 open-ended questions; the full set of questions grouped into the five themes can be seen in table 3.7. The on-line survey site was the same building site as the questionnaire in round one; 'Online Surveys'. The expert panellists were asked to provide a few sentences, no more than 500 characters, in order to gather their thoughts and opinions around the topic area. The goal at this point was to begin to create a list of opinions and new ideas around the five themes. Panellists were given a week to complete the survey. Follow up is crucial to the Delphi method to ensure reliability in the findings and so a reminder email was sent to complete the survey. Round one consisted of a 100% response rate.

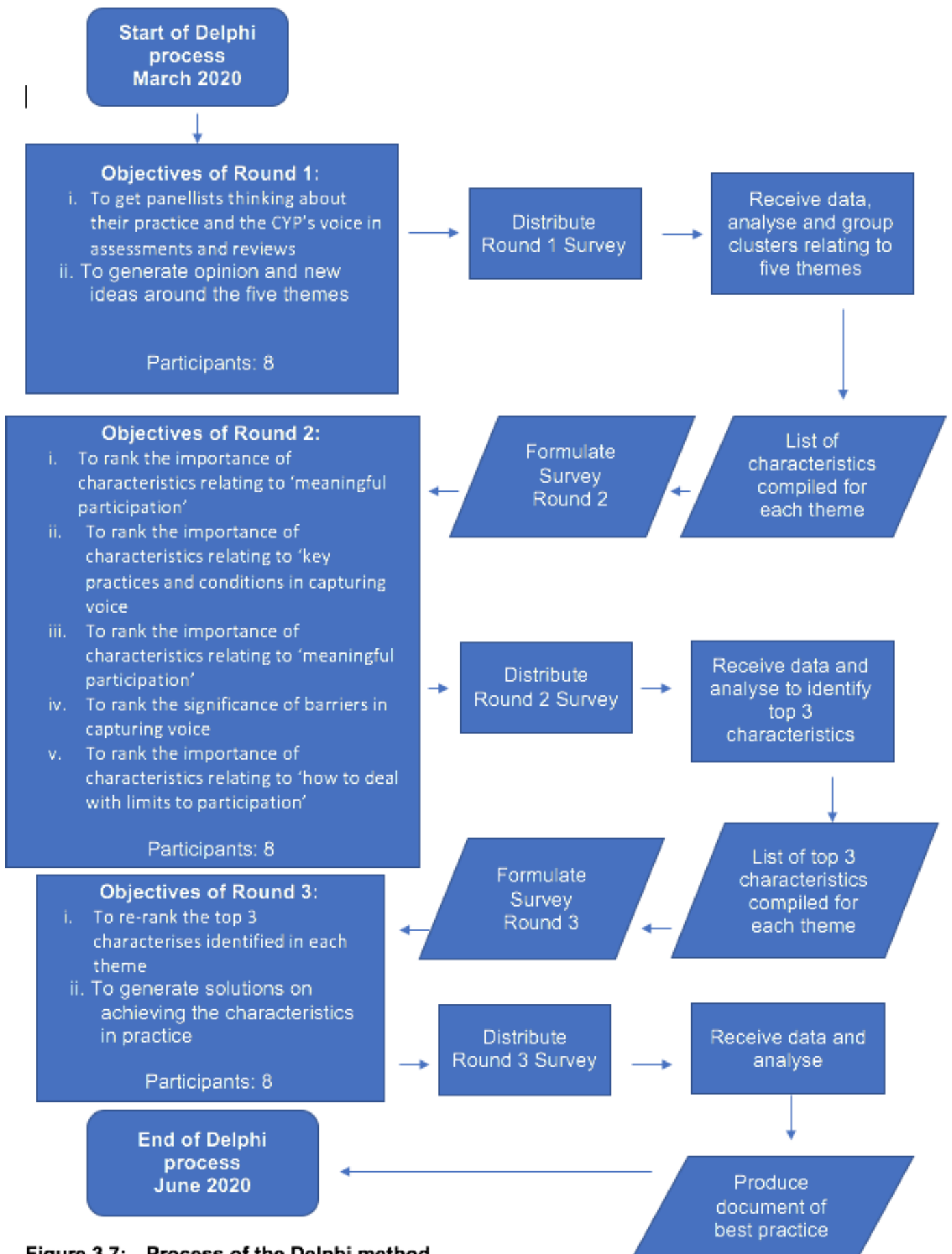


Figure 3.7: Process of the Delphi method

Meaningful Participation	1. How would you define 'meaningful participation' for a CYP in their EHCP assessment or AR?	2. To what extent do you believe that the assessment or review process is a meaningful experience for CYP with SEND? a) Why do you feel this way?
	3. Do you think CYP understand why they are asked to give their views as part of the process, and what the benefits are? a) Why do you feel this way?	4. What could be the problem in enabling the voice of the CYP to be accurately reflected within EHC assessments and reviews?
Enabling Factors	5. What approaches can you use to ensure the views that CYP shares during EHCP assessments and reviews are representative of how they actually feel and think?	
Barriers and how to deal with limits to participation	6. EHCP assessments and annual reviews require statutory assessments, that both come with paperwork. How do you manage this aspect of the process whilst ensuring the CYP is kept at the centre?	7. Many barriers have been identified that prevent a professional from capturing pupil voice; either a professional barrier or a barrier for the CYP to express themselves. Please list 1-5 barriers to capturing pupil voice. a) What in your view is the most significant barriers to either the CYP or the professional to elicit pupil voice during EHCP assessments and reviews?
	8. Professional barriers can include work capacity and lack of resources. How do you feel a professional could navigate these barriers to ensure pupil voice is elicited effectively?	9. Limited time has been identified as a key barrier for a professional, as it can be difficult to meet a child more than once or spend a length amount of time gathering their views. How can this be managed to allow the participation of the CYP to be meaningful, whilst managing professional time commitments?
	10. Many barriers have been identified for a CYP to express their views during assessments and reviews; this includes anxiety or not wishing to express their views at the time. Do you feel there are ways a professional could overcome these barriers to include the pupils voice? a) Is this an acceptable situation for an adult who knows them well to share their views of the child on their behalf?	11. Professionals can sometimes make assumptions that the CYP does not understand the process or what is being discussed due to 'intellectual capabilities' and therefore meetings are done without them. Is this an acceptable way to proceed? a) How does this affect the involvement of the CYP in the process and including their voice within the assessment or review?
Key practices and conditions in capturing voice	12. There are many different identified methods available to elicit pupil voice. What conditions are needed for professionals to use these different methods?	13. During the EHCP and annual review process, CYP come across many different professionals who ask the same questions around their views. In your opinion, is it a responsibility for everyone to elicit their views or a specific person? a) If a specific person, who is best suited to elicit their views and why?

Table 3.7: Questions sent to the expert panellists in round one

(ii) Post Round One

Data from the first round is purely qualitative and is analysed using content analysis techniques. After all participants had successfully answered all questions, the data was exported into a word document. The expert panellist's responses were read and key words and phrases relating to the five themes were highlighted. These were then re-read and coded into the five themes. Although specific questions targeted the different themes, some responses referred back to the other themes and so were cross-referenced throughout; for example, questions relating to enabling factors often led to panellists discussing the barriers they experienced. A full set of data was then compiled for each theme (Appendix 13). Each theme contained a large amount of data and so this was then re-read to identify any similar or overlapping responses. Similar or identical responses were combined to create a list; the responses were then further analysed and grouped into clusters to shorten the list.

Responses that were examples of similar practice were grouped together. For example, in the first area of 'Meaningful participation', the main response frequently identified was '*CYP express their likes and dislikes*', this was then further exemplified in other responses with example practice such as '*CYP draw pictures of things they like*'. It was decided that these two statements referred to similar concepts and so were merged. Some points therefore contained examples as written by the participants themselves to further elaborate the point. It is important to note here that the wording used by the panellists did not change, in order to keep the data as authentic as possible. The basic tenets of the Delphi method include eliciting the expert voice of the panellists and so should remain verbatim throughout the process (Hasson, Keeney & McKenna, 2000).

The number of responses varied for each theme, and some suggestions were more frequent than others. Chapter 5 provides an analysis on the percentage of mentions by panellists. However, it was important that the panel members were not aware of which practices were identified as most frequent within the following round, and so the questionnaire for round two contained an alphabetised list to mask any indication to the frequency from the first round.

(iii) Round Two

The second round of the method included a revised questionnaire, which comprised of five over-arching questions relating to each theme. Each question had a list of responses that were generated from the first round; an excerpt can be seen in table 3.8 for the list of responses for the first question relating to the theme of 'meaningful participation', the questionnaire containing all items can be found in Appendix 14.

You have identified these as characteristics of 'meaningful participation' of a CYP with SEND, how would you rate these in order of importance, from a scale of 1 as 'most important' characteristic and 5 as the 'least important' characteristic?

- CYP express their likes and dislikes
e.g.
 - Draw pictures of things they like
 - Share their own experiences of schools

- CYP feels comfortable to talk openly

- CYP understands and feels involved in process
e.g.
 - CYP attends either all or part of meetings
 - Shared ownership
 - CYP are explained clearly the purpose of meetings
 - Engaged in plan to ensure it is relevant to them

- CYP's views are listened to
e.g.
 - CYP's views are made clear even if an adult disagrees with it

- Questions are future focused on what they would like to achieve or change
e.g.
 - Share their hopes for the future
 - Have a say on decisions being made
 - Comment on what support they would like to have
 - Help set targets
 - See change happen

Table 3.8: An example of the list of responses sent to the expert panellists in round two; excerpt from question 1

The panellists were contacted 3 weeks after round one was initially sent out via email. They were thanked for their co-operation in round one and the process of the second round was explained, along with a link to the online survey.

Panellists were asked to modify an alphabetised list via a 'rank-order' process based on the level of perceived importance. The survey used in round two was built on a different site which could cater for a clear and easy ranking system known as 'Survey Hero'. Panellists were reassured that all items were identified as important and therefore an item that pertained a lower rank did not lose its significance in practice. They were asked to consider how practical each item would be to implement within their daily role, and therefore the ranking in round two was based on practicality in their role as opposed to ideological practices.

Panellists were asked to drag each response into a rank-order and could re-arrange the order of the list to indicate their opinion by moving items up or down, where '1' was most important or most significant. Each question had a different number of items based on the responses from round one. Round two consisted of a 100% response rate.

It is common practice within the Delphi method that round two requires the data to provide frequencies and statistical summaries for each item in order to provide panellists with an indication of group opinion (Hasson, Keeney & Mckenna, 2000). This study however chose to provide data in alphabetical order as opposed to in order of frequency as it did not wish to influence group opinion without undergoing the ranking process. The frequencies were only indicated in round three, which is discussed below.

(iv) Post Round Two

After all responses were received, the data was transferred to an excel spreadsheet where the ranking order for each item was ascertained. The values were averaged for each of the responses and the list re-arranged with the lowest value (i.e. 'the most important') was at the top of each question. Descriptive statistics such as the mean, mode and median were calculated for each question; the full analysis of the data findings will be discussed in chapter 5.

The top three statements for each theme as identified by the panellists was then chosen for round three as seen in table 3.9.

(v) Round Three

It is common practice within the Delphi method that the last round acts as a forecast or suggest future considerations based on the results from the first two rounds (Davidson, 2013). Therefore, the third and final round aimed to refine the views of the panel members and reach a consensus around the five themes.

	Meaningful participation	Key practices and conditions in capturing voice	Enabling factors	Barriers	How to deal with limits to participation
1	CYP's views are listened to	CYP feels safe	Doing work before meeting the CYP	CYP's language and cognitive ability	Ask adults who know them best
2	CYP feels comfortable to talk openly	Build rapport with the CYP	Prioritise getting views	CYP's anxieties and fears	Creative methods
3	CYP understands and feels involved in the process	Follow guidance on how to gather views	Have methods available to use	CYP's understanding of assessments	Child friendly assessment or paperwork to be made available

Table 3.9: The top 3 responses for each theme as a result of round two

Another survey was made, using the same survey building site as round two, and the top three practices in each theme were emailed to the expert panel members. They were not given the exact frequency of each statement but simply informed that the three practices for each theme were identified as the most frequently selected by all panel members. They were asked to again rank the top three responses to their perceived level of importance, where 1 would be 'most important/significant' and 3 as 'least important/significant'. The items were also given in order of importance; this allowed for the Delphi method to go through a second iteration, and for panellists to make further refinements or clarifications on their judgements of the relative importance of the statements, based on feedback from the other panel members. Compared to the previous round, only a slight increase in the degree of consensus can be expected (Hsu & Sandford, 2007).

Panellists were then asked to respond to each of the three practices and provide a practical example of each statement, along with how this could be achieved in an ideal world. They were asked to provide details such as resources needed, time taken and who would be involved. It is important to make the final question as open as possible in order to gain a robust response (Davidson, 2013).

Usually this step in the Delphi method can be done as a separate round, however I chose to combine ranking for the second time and expanded qualitatively on most frequently identified practices together, in order to avoid sending multiple surveys and risk a low response rate. Round three consisted of a 100% response rate.

(vi) Post Round Three

After all responses were received, the rankings on the top 3 items were merged on to an excel sheet. The values were averaged for each of the responses and the list re-arranged with the lowest value (i.e. 'the most important') was at the top of each question. Descriptive statistics such as the mean, mode and median were calculated for each question; the full analysis of the data will be discussed in chapter 5.

The qualitative data was then merged on an excel sheet for each practice. The responses were read and re-read, and key words and phrases were highlighted. These were then grouped together, and similar words and phrases were combined. The end result led to a bank of words and phrases in relation to each theme. The data from the Delphi was used to produce a document of good practice, where the words and phrases generated by the panellists were used to exemplify how to improve practice. This is illustrated and discussed in chapter 5.

3.8.8 Analysis of the Delphi Method

As discussed above, the Delphi method does not have a prescriptive approach to implementation of the process. Further to this, there is no agreed way to report the findings and interpret the results of a Delphi method. Literature has varied on how to report findings from a Delphi method where panellists rank items within a given field but also provide qualitative data illustrating their opinion. Therefore, researchers

have not used uniform means to report results within a Delphi study. The method of data analysis and reporting of results are directly related to the type of questions used within the Delphi method; thus, appropriate analysis technique needs to be applied by the researcher (Schmidt, 1997). As the Delphi is a mixed-methods approach, each round consisted of a different approach to analysis. This is exemplified in figure 3.8 below.

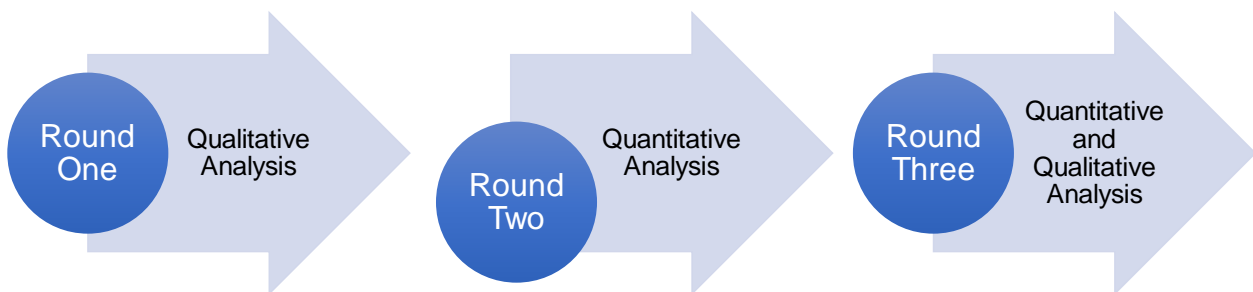


Figure 3.8: Mixed-methods analysis for Delphi method

Content analysis as described in the analysis for the interviews was used to analyse the qualitative findings within round one and identify items to be used for round two. Analysis of the findings in round two involves ordering the item ranking by the mean and the top three items from each question will be used within round three, to allow for a second iteration of ranking perceived importance by panellists. The consensus therefore needs to be determined between the first iteration (round two) and the second iteration (round three). The researcher must establish clear rules and guidelines prior to data collection to establish consensus (Hsu & Sandford, 2007).

One method suggested by Schmidt (1997) included a simple and straight-forward nonparametric analysis that presents both descriptive statistics and a way to

determine the level of consensus between panellists after each round of testing. Level of agreement amongst panellists is measured using Kendall's coefficient of concordance, also known as Kendall's W (Kendall & Gibbons, 1990). Using Kendall's W allows the researcher to determine whether any consensus has been reached, whether consensus is increasing between subsequent rounds, and the relative strength of consensus. Kendall's W also determines with confidence when the ranking process should be stopped; when an appropriate level of consensus has been reached. Kendall's W therefore could be used within round two to identify the strength of consensus between panellists during the first iteration.

However, Kendall's W is only appropriate to use within subsequent rounds when the items remain the same. Within this study, the top 3 items were chosen for a second iteration and so applying Kendall's W within round three would not be an accurate representation of whether consensus had been reached or if the strength of consensus has increased between rounds.

Table 3.10 shows guidelines to interpreting Kendall's W (Schmidt, 1997), a rank of '0' indicates perfect disagreement amongst all panellists and a rank of '1' indicates perfect agreement amongst all panellists. The null hypothesis when carrying out a Kendall's coefficient of concordance is there is no agreement or concordance between panellists. Therefore, the test would aim to reject the null hypothesis (H_0) and accept the alternative hypothesis (H_1) that there is some level of agreement within panellists.

Kendall's W	Interpretation	Confidence in ranks
.1	Very weak agreement	None
.3	Weak agreement	Low
.5	Moderate agreement	Fair
.7	Strong agreement	High
.9	Very strong agreement	Very High

Table 3.10: Interpretation of Kendall's W

Another study suggests using weighted Kappa (K) values to compare chance eliminated agreement between rounds (Holey, Feeley, Dixon & Whittaker, 2007). However, a Kappa analysis is appropriate to compare agreement between rounds for two raters; this study had eight raters and so would not be an appropriate statistical analysis to use.

Quite often results are represented graphically or via textual presentations of statistical results, including the central tendencies and variance. There is much debate on whether the mean is an accurate reflection of group consensus and advocate the median and mode to be better suited to reflect convergence of opinion (Hsu & Sandford, 2007; Ludwig, 1997; Hill & Fowles, 1975). Researchers have also set a pre-determined level of consensus based on percentage of responses. For example, it is suggested that a four-point Likert scale should aim to have a consensus level of 70% or higher with a median of 2.25 (Hsu & Sandford, 2007). Expressing consensus as a single percentage of threshold is common within Delphi studies and ranges between 70%-80% (Green & Birch, 2019).

Holey et al (2007) explain that quantitative analysis of the Delphi method should be clear for the reader to understand how the researcher interpreted the findings. They should be able to see the pattern of thought during analysis and this can only be done by reporting on each round, this includes:

1. Percentage response rates of each round,
2. Percentages for each level of agreement for each statement to compensate for varying response rates,
3. Median, range and their associated group ranking, and,
4. Mean (SD) and their associated group rankings.

The results from a Delphi method can be presented in various ways, this includes; only reporting items that have reached a pre-agreed level of consensus, reporting all items in order of consensus, or reporting those areas that caused debate amongst the panel (Iqbal & Pison-Young, 2009). This study chose to report on all findings in order of consensus to allow the reader insight into how panellists ranked each item, and the process involved to narrowing down towards a group consensus. It also chose to follow the suggestions of Holely et al (2007) as detailed above, with the

focus on the mode and median responses to indicate group consensus and the use of Kendall's W in round two to determine initial levels of consensus between panellists.

The pre-determined criteria for consensus between the first and second iteration was as follows;

- a) A percentage increase seen between the first and second iteration for each item ranking,
- b) A focus on items ranked as 1 or 2 by panellists (items of higher importance), and if this reached a consensus level of 75% or higher, and,
- c) If the highest-ranking item remained the same between both rounds.

If items met these criteria, then it can be assumed that consensus was reached by panellists through the process of the Delphi method, this will be discussed further within the analysis of the findings.

3.8.9 Producing the document of good practice

Once items that had reached consensus was established, the document of good practice could be developed. This was the final point of the research and amalgamated the findings on pupil voice in order to develop a guide for SEND professionals to use within their daily role.

A search was carried out on LA and school documents around eliciting pupil voice, as discussed in the literature review there were a minimum number of results that related to this area. One document mentioned earlier included a document on eliciting voice on the local offer for London Borough of Hackney (see Footnote 7). Although this document had a different approach in its intention i.e. it aimed to discuss specific techniques, it provided a useful layout when designing the document of good practice. The document therefore followed similar aspects such as the layout.

The document of good practice begins with an introductory note on how the booklet came together and its purpose. It was key to stress that the document was based on

feedback from a panel of SEND experts at part of the Delphi method, as other professionals would want the document to be relatable to their role. The document then goes on to summarise why it is important to elicit the voice. At this point, key legislation was mentioned but also research into the benefits of involving CYP in decision-making. The document then discusses the five themes that emerged from the analysis.

The layout was important as the document needed to be engaging and clear for professionals to follow. I chose to include animated pictures and differing font to capture the reader. Each theme was also summarised on one page to avoid excessive reading for the professional. Quotes from the panel members were included from the Delphi method to exemplify each theme; this was included to make the document applicable for the professional within context.

As this document was aimed to improve professional practice, a key feature was for it to be practical and easy-to-read. Feedback was sought from panel members on the design and content, which is discussed further in chapter 5. The final document of good practice can be found in Appendix 15.

3.9 Conclusion of Methodology in Phase Two

Phase two consisted of three months of data collection, which was all done via email and internet-based questionnaires, for both LA professionals and school staff within one local area. The Delphi method consisted of three iterative rounds of questioning to elicit expert opinion around the barriers to eliciting pupil voice. The first round consisted of analysis of qualitative data, and the following rounds of ranking led to analysis of the mean value for each statement.

The qualitative inquiry allowed for a rich amount of data due to the multiple iterations and response feedback (Okoli & Pawlowski, 2004), and the range of expertise from the panel members. Along with the qualitative information generated, the data also produced statistical analysis from the ranking system, allowing for comparison between panellists. As the Delphi method aims to elicit expert opinion and reach consensus towards a given problem, phase two was successfully able to generate a

solution-based document as a result of the findings and analysis of the data. The document focused on the items that reached consensus, as this was determined to be the most significant factors by the panellists. The analysis of phase two can be found in chapter 5 and a further discussion of the impact the document has on future research will be discussed in chapter 6.

3.10 Ethical Considerations

3.10.1 Gaining ethical clearance

For the current study, the ethical approaches as enshrined in the codes and guidelines produced by the British Educational Research Association (2011) were adopted. During the design phase of the study, the project was submitted and approved by the University of Exeter, Graduate School of Education Ethics Committee. Phase one and two were submitted separately, prior to data collection. This was due to the interlinked nature where phase two could only be identified after phase one had been successfully implemented. This was made clear to the ethical committee and approved for data collection. The certificate for ethical approval can be found in Appendix 16.

3.10.2 My responsibility to the participants

All participants were informed of the purpose of the research prior to any data collection. Each method used within this study had a separate information sheet and consent form.

For the questionnaire; participants were sent an introductory email that contained an information sheet detailing the purpose of the study and a consent form, with an accompanied link to the electronic questionnaire. One concern was the difficulty getting consent forms back from participants; this was then resolved by adding the consent form on the questionnaire itself. The online survey tool was designed so that data was not collected unless participants gave informed consent (see Appendices 5

and 6). My contact details were provided on information sheets, along with the contact of my supervisors for any queries throughout the study.

The interviews were carried out on participants who agreed to be contacted, however an information sheet and consent form was given to each participant to ensure they still wished to participate (see Appendix 8). The interviews were not carried out until consent forms were received. As these interviews were recorded, all participants were made aware of this and had information regarding how the recordings would be stored.

The Delphi method had its own information sheet and consent form, where all participants who agreed were asked to send this back and were told they could withdraw from the study at any point (see Appendices 11 and 12). Although a written consent was not required in each round of the Delphi method, participants were informed in every round that they could withdraw if they chose.

This study did not foresee any harm or distress to those involved, which was detailed within the information sheet. The benefits of the research were highlighted; however, the participants were notably made aware that there was no obligation to participate and they could withdraw at any time.

The anonymity of all participants was preserved throughout; they were not named in the thesis nor was the name of their school or LA given. Any references to direct people or organisations were omitted from the write-up, and quotations were also anonymised. Participants gave their email and phone number at the end of the questionnaire in phase one should they wish to be contacted for an interview. This data was stored securely and will be destroyed after submission. Similarly, in phase two, any email addresses given for the purpose of the Delphi method will be destroyed after submitting the final document to them. Participants were also asked to provide their emails should they wish to obtain a copy of the thesis, in which some did ask for this. The final write-up will be sent to all those who requested a copy, as per the agreement.

3.10.3 *Role of the researcher*

Walford (2001) argues that '*all research is researching yourself*' (p.98), and as the instrument of this data collection, I must acknowledge my subjectivity and individual choices made within this project. I took an 'insider role' (Pollard, 1985) within this study, as I work within a LA as a professional involved in the assessments and reviews of CYP with SEND. I also have been a teaching professional within specialist schools for CYP with SEND, implementing methods to gain the views of those with non-verbal means of communication. Although there are mixed reviews on adopting an insider role within research (Brannick & Coghlan, 2007), I found my position to be advantageous to the development of my study as my knowledge of SEND within both a LA and an educational context supported my approach when implementing each method.

(i) Questionnaire

Within phase one of the study, I was able to distribute the questionnaire to relevant LA professionals and school staff due to my experience of navigating the local offer of different authorities and being aware of where contact information was kept. I had professional contacts to many differing LAs and knowledge of specialist schools all over England due to the duties performed within my daily role. This allowed me to contact a variety of professionals when I aimed to increase the response rate.

Although I adopted an 'insider role' within the context of being a SEND professional, I did not adopt this role within my LA and chose not to include my local area within the questionnaire sample. I felt this would compromise the findings as my colleagues may feel uncomfortable being part of the study or experience undue stress, which could lead to a risk of social desirability bias. The benefit however was that the questionnaire was piloted in my local area and my colleagues were able to provide honest and immediate feedback, which benefited the design of the questionnaire.

(ii) Interviews

Within the interviews, my role was to expand on the opinions expressed in the questionnaire in a more detailed and in-depth manner. All participants were made aware of my role as a SEND professional and this was often used as a basis of

conversation. This appeared to make participants feel comfortable to discuss the problems within the field with ease, as they felt I could relate and be empathetic to their views.

I followed the criteria of a 'successful interviewer' as proposed by Kvale (1996). He proposed the interviewer must be *knowledgeable* of the focus of the interview; my role and experience meant I understood jargon terms and abbreviations mentioned by both samples, which allowed the conversation to flow smoothly. The interview must have *structure*; I was clear in the purpose of the interview and asked participants if they had any questions. I was *clear, gentle* and *sensitive* in my approach, keeping questions simple and short, giving participants time to think and listening to their response without interrupting. I was *open* to what the participant wished to speak about, however did *steer* the conversation back to the focus of the interviews when required. Kvale (1996) also noted the interviewer must remain *critical* and challenge any inconsistencies; I relayed the participants responses to the survey to them when referencing specific items, in order to further understand why they stated a particular view. I *remembered* previous comments made by participants and brought this back up when needed. And finally, I *interpreted* the meanings of statements said by participants and clarified where needed, but without imposing meaning on to them.

(iii) Delphi Method

Within phase two of the study, I decided to research within my local area. I was able to gain access to expert panellists easily as they were all my colleagues within my local area whom I had established rapport with through my daily interactions. All participants were individually approached via email to see if they would be interested to participate. All were motivated by the subject area and therefore voluntarily wanted to support the research study, which resulted in 100% response rate throughout each round.

However, as this stage of the data collection was held in my local area, I was more mindful of my role as a researcher and how this could conflict with my role as a colleague. I therefore had to make conscious decisions on my role throughout phase two of the study. Firstly, all correspondence relating to the study was sent via my

university email address, and not my work email address. I felt this was crucial as a way to distinguish these two roles. Secondly, participants were never approached in person in relation to the study or completion of rounds, both inside or outside of the work place. And finally, all panellists remained anonymous to each other, which is a crucial aspect of the Delphi approach (Davidson, 2013), and was emphasised throughout the study.

Literature has argued that researching from the inside can question the validity of the data generated for many reasons (Pollard, 1985). Participants may be selective in their responses based on the pre-existing relationship they have with their colleague, which may be a form of social desirability bias. Additionally, the researcher may have prior, tacit knowledge that may distort the way responses are interpreted and could lead to false assumptions. However, on the other hand, the researcher's prior knowledge can also act as an enabling factor for probing pertinent issues within the field, whilst also empathizing with the participants views (Rooney, 2005). As the panel members were all aware of my role within the LA, it is likely they felt I would share their views on the barriers within the field and therefore were honest about the shortcomings when capturing pupil voice.

These issues are important to consider within insider research and by acknowledging my subjectivity prior to data collection, I was consciously aware of my approach within the study. My role through each methodology remained pragmatic from the onset; instead of being an 'outsider looking in', I was an 'insider looking out' on how the barriers faced by professionals in eliciting voice could be alleviated in order to improve practice and provide a person-centred approach to assessment.

Chapter 4: Findings from Phase One

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter I present the findings from the data analysis of phase one of the study, which consisted of the internet-based questionnaire data and semi-structured interviews with LA professionals and specialist teaching staff. As I have used a mixed methods approach, both the quantitative and qualitative findings are discussed. I have not separated these out into sections but rather combined the findings from both in an attempt to show how each type of analysis corroborated the findings and shed light on the research aims. Although the findings from the questionnaire and the interviews are discussed in separate sections, the analysis will begin to combine the findings from each method and the interpretation and discussion of the findings take place in chapter 6.

This chapter begins with reporting on the characteristics of the participants who took part in both the online questionnaire and the interviews. Although this study does not aim to compare the characteristics of LA and school professionals, the background characteristics may be contributing factors that may influence the responses. The findings in the online-based questionnaire is then discussed in an attempt to address aim one. Each research question is discussed with graphical representation of the responses from both the LA professionals and school staff.

The chapter then discusses the codes identified within the semi-structured interviews, as per table 3.5. Each code will be described with illustrative quotes from the participants of both sample groups. The final part of this chapter will summarise how the findings from both methods directly relate to the first research aim and questions, and whether they have been successfully answered.

4.2 Participant characteristics of the online-based questionnaire

This study was designed to explore the views of SEND professionals in England around eliciting the voice of CYP. The aim was to get a national picture in order to make representative conclusions based on the findings. However, as stated in the

previous chapter, the number of responses for the school participants was low in comparison to the LA participants. With a larger sample, I would have carried out inferential statistics to determine if the two samples were statistically significant, however due to the small sample size it was decided not to pursue a detailed statistical analysis (Bryman, 2012).

The characteristics of the participants who took part in the questionnaire were grouped in many ways for the purpose of the analysis; this included the region of England they resided in, their role within their establishment and years of service in their particular role. The discussion chapter further explores whether background factors were likely to influence their responses to both methods used within this study.

4.2.1 Region of England

The nine regions of England previously depicted in figure 3.3 all follow the CoP guidelines when carrying out an EHC needs assessment and AR for CYP with SEND. The aim of the questionnaire was to get as many responses as possible, along with a roughly equal number of responses from each region, in order to make a representative analysis based on the findings.

Figure 4.1 shows the number of responses by LA professionals in each region, which varied considerably. There was at least one response from each region, and a significant higher amount from the South East. This could possibly be due to the fact that the South East is the most populous of all regions in England, consisting of a significantly amount of LAs and schools. It is important to note here that some LAs fell in between two regions and so I had to pick one region to categorise under. For example, part of Lincolnshire falls under Yorkshire and Humber, however the majority falls under East Midlands, and so was categorised under this region.

NUMBER OF LA RESPONSES

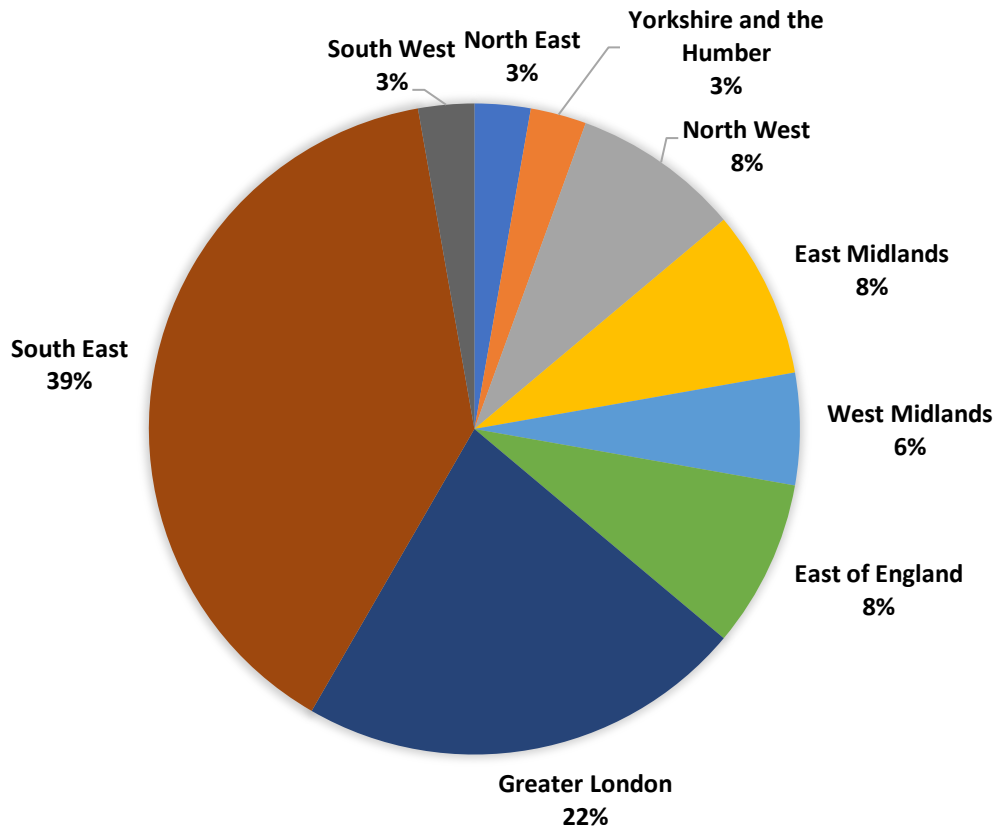


Figure 4.1: The number of LA responses per region of England (n=36)

Conversely, figure 4.2 shows the number of responses by specialist school staff in each region. Responses were not generated in each region, despite specific targeting during data collection in order to increase responses within particular regions and allow for an even response. For the school participants, the South West region had the highest number of responses, this was most likely due to the contact in the local area of Somerset who agreed to distribute the questionnaire to her colleagues.

NUMBER OF SCHOOL RESPONSES

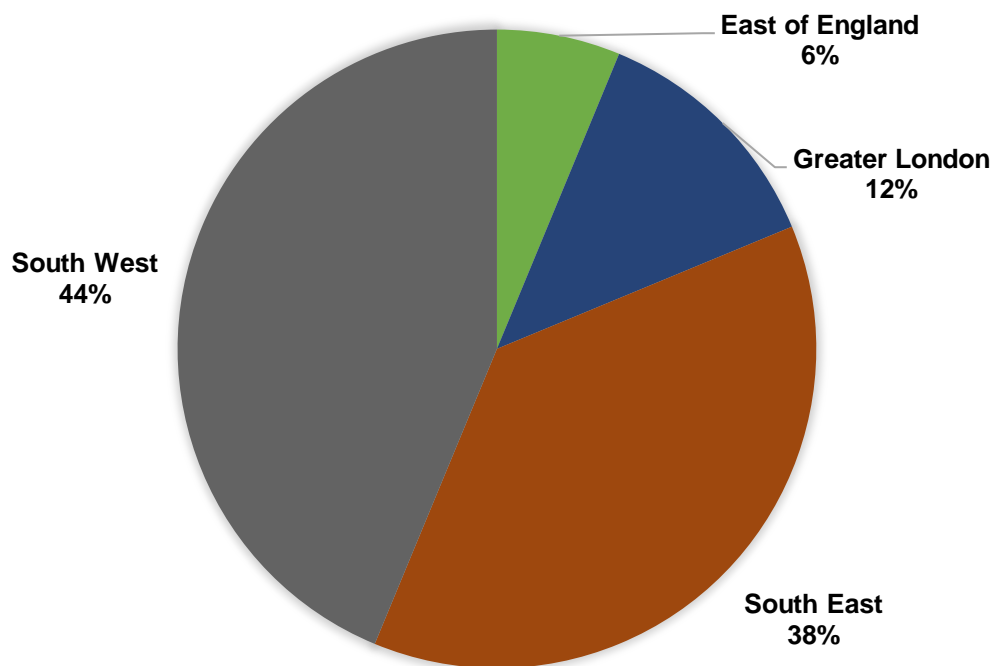


Figure 4.2: The number of specialist school responses per region of England (n=16)

4.2.2 *Role of the participant*

The questionnaire generated responses from participants with varying roles. Within an LA, there are numerous members of staff with differing job roles and responsibilities, who all contribute to the assessment process or AR in some degree. The level of involvement in the process does differ, for example, SO's have complete involvement in both processes, as this is their primary role as per their job description, whereas other professionals may contribute via reports or attendance at meetings. Table 4.1 shows the number of responses per role within the LA, consisting of a range of professionals who all contribute to the process. There was a higher degree of responses from EPs in comparison to other roles; the possible factors that contributed to this will be discussed further in Chapter 6.

Due to the disproportion between the two sample groups, data is presented as numerical totals rather than percentages.

Role	Number of responses
Head of Service	1
Advisory Teacher	1
Social Worker	1
SEND Officer	8
Educational Psychologist	20
Trainee Educational Psychologist	5
Total	36

Table 4.1: Roles of the LA professionals

The questionnaire for specialist schools also generated responses from a variety of roles, as shown in table 4.2. Many would assume a SENCO would be the primary member of staff who elicits pupil voice, due to the nature of their role being to co-ordinate SEN support, participate in EHCP assessments and lead ARs. However, as the table depicts, there are various members of staff who are integral to eliciting the voice of CYP within school.

Role	Number of responses
Head teacher	4
Assistant Head	3
Advisory teacher	2
Teacher	3
SENCO	2
Teaching Assistant	1
SALT	1
Total	16

Table 4.2: Roles of the specialist school staff

Certain roles are distinct to the establishment, for example, SENCOs and teaching assistants (TAs) are exclusive to the school setting, whereas a SEND officer is explicit to an LA setting. Conversely, some roles are applicable in both establishments; some specialist schools have their own SALT who provide therapy

and direct input to CYP within the school, similarly an LA has a SALT service who coordinate the SALT assessment as per the EHCP. Although responses were small in number, there was enough variance in participant role to allow for differing perspectives on eliciting pupil voice.

4.2.3 *Years of service*

The participants were also asked how long they had worked in their role. Table 4.3 shows the years of service of the LA professionals and the specialist school staff. It is important to note that the questionnaire asked for their years of service in that particular role; many participants later stated in their interviews that they had worked elsewhere in the same role or had progressed through the establishment to their current role. Therefore, their overall experience of eliciting pupil voice may be higher than the table below shows.

Years of Service	LA responses	School responses
Less than 6 months	3	2
6 months – 1 year	7	0
1-2 years	9	0
2-3 years	4	2
3-4 years	1	2
4-5 years	1	1
5-10 years	8	4
More than 10 years	3	5
Total	36	16

Table 4.3: Years of service of the LA professionals and school staff

4.2.4 *Primary Need*

The professionals within the specialist school were asked to clarify the type of school they were i.e. mainstream or specialist. Although only specialist schools were used within the sample, this question allowed for further assurance that any schools that did not meet the criteria of being a specialist setting was removed from the data analysis. As expected, 100% of the participants who responded to the questionnaire

were professionals within a specialist setting and were therefore all included within the final analysis.

The questionnaire sent to the school professionals also asked how they would define the primary need of their setting, more specifically, what are the special educational needs that the school can cater for. The participants were from 12 different schools and table 4.4 shows the percentage of schools that identified with a particular SEN category; some schools identified with multiple needs and this has been included within the table.

Primary Need	Percentage of schools identified
Autism Spectrum Disorder	75%
Speech and Language	43.75%
Learning Difficulties	68.75%
Complex Needs	31.25%
Social, Emotional and Mental Health	43.75%
Physical	18.75%
Medical	18.75%
Hearing/Visual Impairment	6.25%
Other	0%

Table 4.4: Identified primary type of need - % of schools (n=12)

The SEN category that schools mostly identified as was ASD; this is also the most common primary type of need for pupils with EHCPs within England, and therefore

representative of national figures for EHCPs. As of January 2019, 28.2% of all EHCPs list ASD as its primary type of need (DfE, 2019)¹².

The participant characteristics described above were important to gain background context to the participants. It is likely the characteristics may have an effect on the opinions expressed in the questionnaire and interviews, which will be discussed in detail within the discussion chapter.

4.3 Findings of the online-based questionnaire

The questionnaire was designed into five sections, as described in 3.4.3; each section had an associated research question. Each research question will now be discussed in relation to the findings, along with their associated sub-research questions depicted in table 3.1. For the purpose of the analysis and ease of understanding, the findings are discussed in relation to either the LA professionals or the school professionals. Each section also allowed for qualitative input, which is incorporated within the following analysis.

4.3.1 Section A: the views elicited

Research question 1: To what extent do LA's and schools explore the views of the child or young person in relation to their statutory EHCP assessment or AR?

The first research question wished to explore to what extent professionals would elicit the voice of the CYP. More specifically, if they would engage in particular methods or strategies to ensure they have tried every possible avenue to elicit voice. Various statements were given, and participants answered from a scale of 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree', with an option to choose 'not applicable' if they felt the question was not relevant to their role.

¹² SEN2 data accessed 01.05.2020. Can be found: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/804374/Special_educational_needs_May_19.pdf

(i) *LA professionals*

Figure 4.3 shows the findings from the questionnaire for LA professionals in ascending order, where the item that was most frequently rated as 'strongly agree' shows at the top of the bar chart.

The findings show the highest frequency responses that LA professionals strongly agreed with were meeting or observing the CYP face-to-face, including the views of CYP as part of the whole service approach to SEND, and gaining the views as an integral part of the EHCP process. This would be expected as the CoP clearly states the LA role is to include the wishes and views of CYP during assessment. Although majority either strongly agreed or agreed to the statement that gaining the views was always done as part of an EHCP assessment, there was one response that disagreed with this statement. There was also one response that strongly disagreed with meeting or observing the CYP face-to-face. This was also illustrated in the qualitative section for Section A, where a SO included:

'I do not meet with the CYP prior to writing the EHCP'

A small percentage also agreed to using reports over visiting CYP. Some LA professionals therefore do not meet CYP themselves and rely on other professionals to do so;

'As I tend to use reports such as the EP reports to incorporate child's views, I don't tend to seek these myself due to capacity' (SO).

However, other comments from LA professionals in differing roles directly contradicted this viewpoint;

'I would always try to get CYPs views directly, I don't like the idea of assuming their views based on other reports and would always meet with/observe a child' (Trainee EP).

To what extent do you as a professional agent within the LA explore the views of the child or young person in relation to their statutory EHCP assessment?

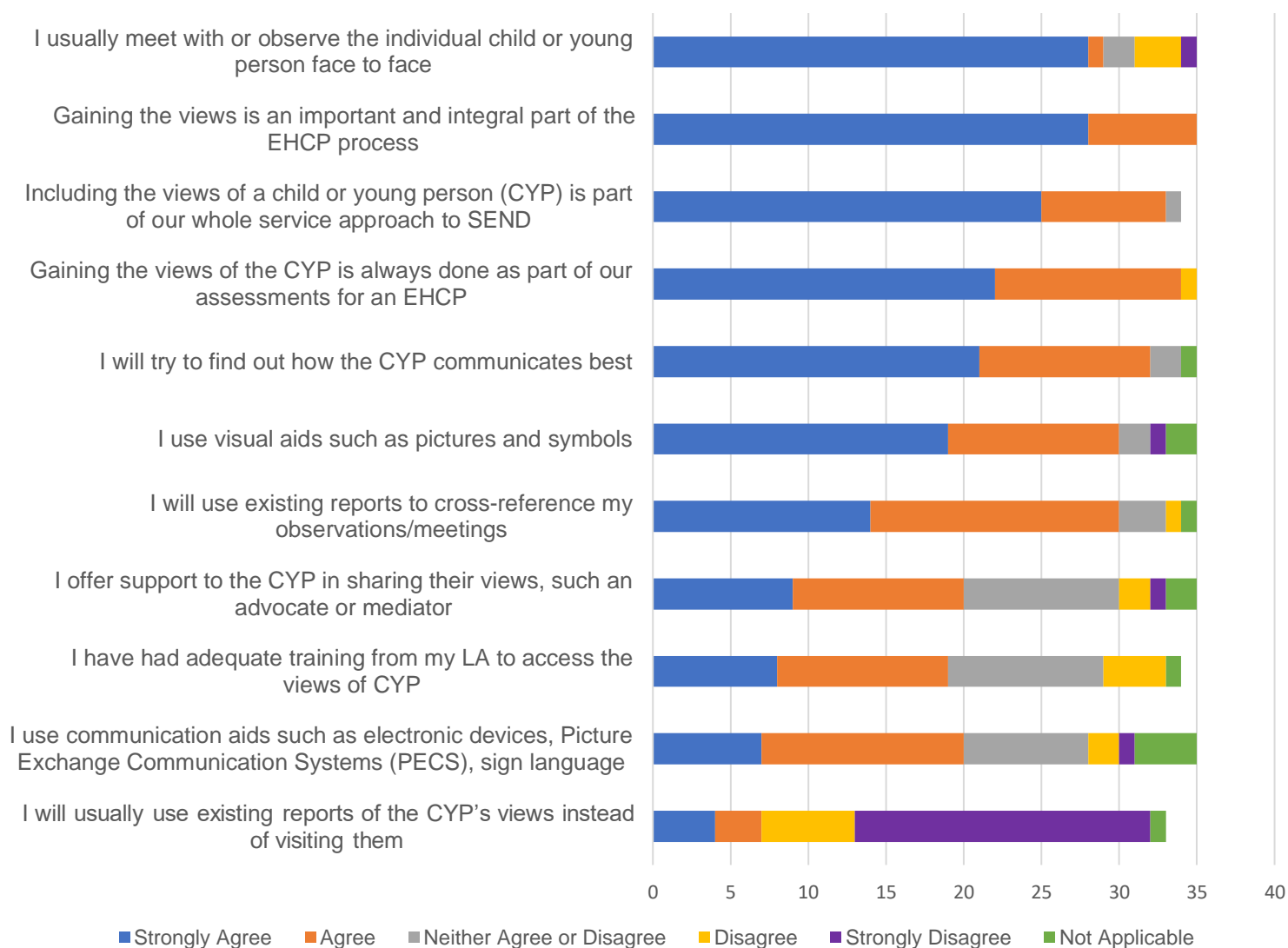


Figure 4.3: The questionnaire findings for LA professionals exploring the views of CYP (n=36)

It is clear that LAs vary in their view on whether using existing reports rather than visiting CYP is an acceptable method to ensure the voice is elicited in EHCPs, and this may be due to the role adopted within the LA. These differences in opinion will be discussed further in the discussion chapter.

The associated sub-research question addressed which views are specifically elicited from the CYP. Therefore, section A of the questionnaire was expanded by

asking questions around what views the professionals will aim to elicit; figure 4.4 shows the responses from the LA professionals.

The graph highlights the views that most professionals strongly agreed to were eliciting the likes and dislikes of CYP, both in school and outside of school, their interests and hobbies, their wishes on future schooling, the views on the current support they receive, and the support they would like to receive.

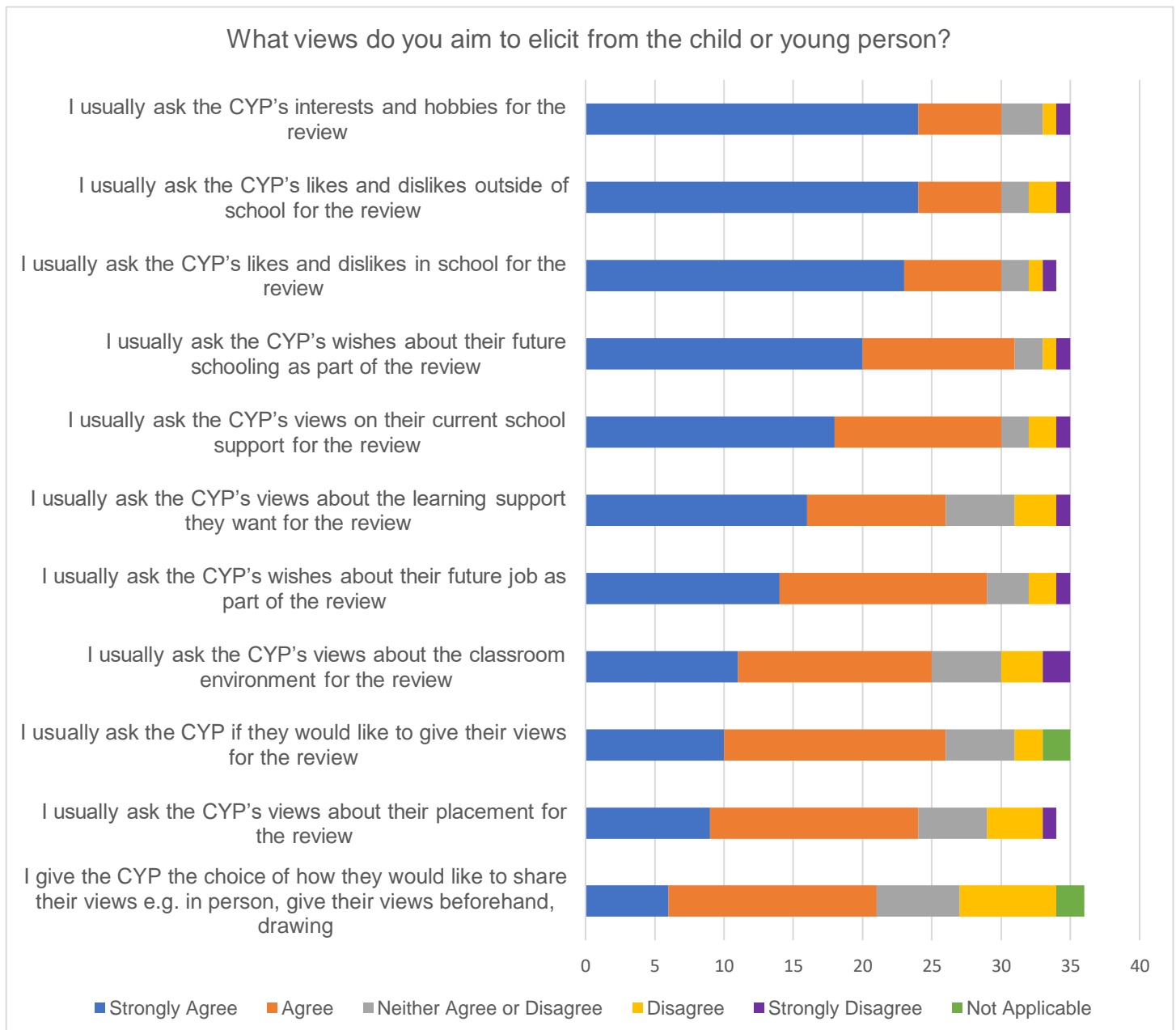


Figure 4.4: The questionnaire findings for what views are elicited by the LA (n=36)

LA participants were less likely to ask CYP on how they would like to share their views, such as giving choices to share their views in person, share their views beforehand, or via a drawing. This absence of choice to participate indicates that CYP are not always asked their preferences to communicate their views rather it is determined by the adult; this relates back to the barriers of power dynamics mentioned in the literature review (Lundy, 2007) and will be discussed further in chapter 6.

(ii) *School professionals*

When looking at the same question posed to the school professionals, the findings are illustrated in figure 4.5 below. The items in this questionnaire were the same as the LA professionals, however one statement was removed as it was not applicable to school staff.

Although the response rate was not as high as the sample of LA professionals, and therefore difficult to compare, the findings from school staff show a high level of agreement for all statements. The only level of disagreement included two participants who disagreed with '*I usually meet with or observe the individual CYP face to face*' and '*I offer support to the CYP in share their views such as an advocate or mediator*'. When looking at participant characteristics, it was roles such as the Head Teacher who disagreed with this statement, and this is likely due to them being less involved in capturing views due to the nature of their role.

One participant felt they had not received adequate training from their school to access views of CYP; similarly, some participants in the LA sample also shared this view. Training has been identified as a significant barrier to ensuring PCP reviews and approaches to assessment (DfE, 2013), and was also mentioned as a barrier within the interviews that will be discussed later in this chapter. Some participants in the school sample did not agree nor disagree with this statement, and therefore difficult to ascertain if they felt they had sufficient training or not.

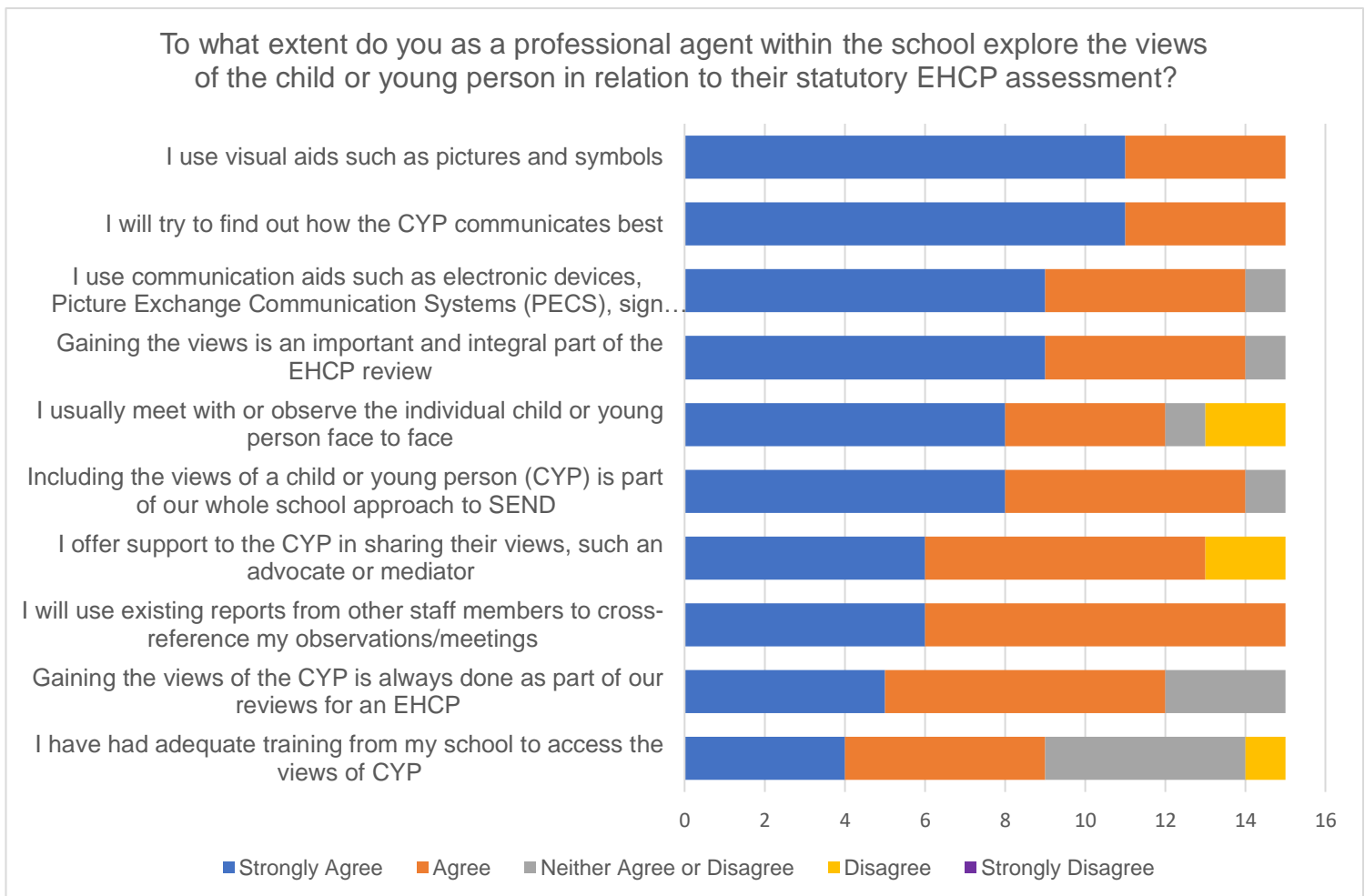


Figure 4.5: The questionnaire findings for school staff exploring the views of CYP (n=16)

The same associated sub-research question was asked to the school professionals; figure 4.6 highlights the views that staff elicit during ARs. Similar to the LA professionals, the most frequently agreed statement was including the likes and dislikes, both inside and outside of school, asking about their interest and hobbies, and eliciting their views on future schooling.

Some participants disagreed with asking CYP if they would like to share their views. There was also some disagreement on asking CYP their views on their learning support, their classroom environment and their views on future placement. This was also a common area that LA professionals strongly disagreed on, suggesting the

higher-level questions which may indicate that change is needed in the support CYP receive are often left out of reviews.

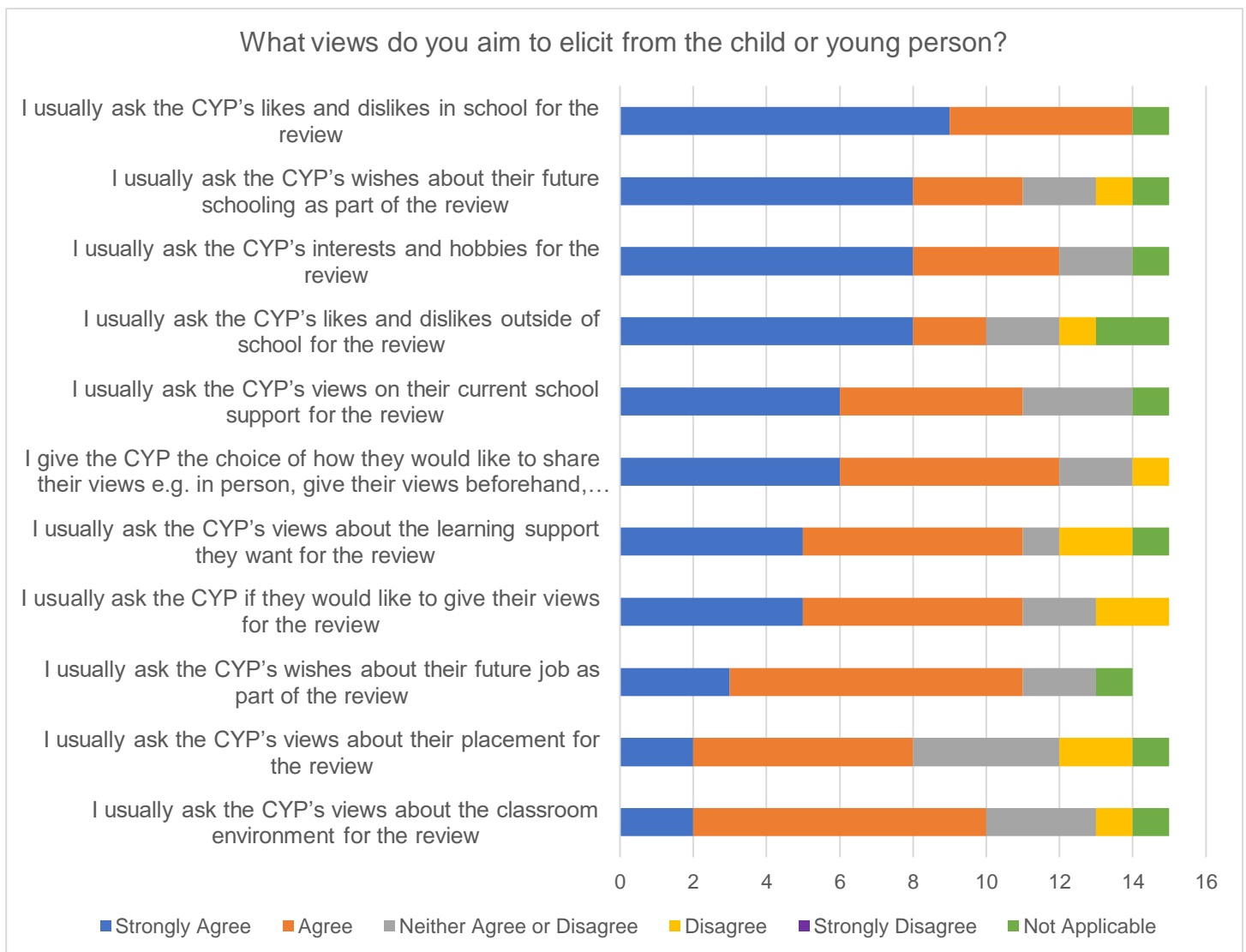


Figure 4.6: The questionnaire findings for what views are elicited by school staff (n=16)

The qualitative data in this section highlighted other views that schools aim to elicit such as their achievements and what they are most proud of, their plans for the future, their transport needs, and who is important to them in their lives.

4.3.2 Section B: Confidence of the professional

Research question 2: What are the strengths and difficulties that professionals in LAs and schools may experience when eliciting pupil voice?

(i) LA professionals

Section B of the questionnaire aimed to explore the perceived levels of confidence professionals felt on a range of statements based on the concept of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977) as described in the methodology chapter. The statements were related to eliciting pupil voice and ensuring meaningful participation during assessments and reviews. Participants had to indicate from a scale of 0-100, where 100 was the highest score of confidence, on how confident they felt in doing this within their role. The data was analysed by collecting the mean score for each statement, along with the mean score for each participant. For the purpose of this analysis, the mean scores for each statement for both the LA professionals and school professionals are presented together, as seen in Figure 4.7.

When looking at the responses from the LA professionals, the highest mean score for LA professionals was a score of 95; a high level of perceived confidence in their ability to *'make an effort to listen to the CYP'*. There were also high levels in listening to CYP and including their views within the assessment or report. The statement which had the lowest average score was a LA professional's confidence to *'identify when I need to involve someone else to help with communication'*.

There were lower scores for two statements that related to non-verbal communication methods; a mean score of 65 was given to both *'understand non-verbal communication methods used by the child'* and *'use alternative communication methods with the child'*. This was an area of particular interest in this study and was a sub-research question posed within this section for both aim 1 and aim 2; how confident professionals felt in eliciting the voice of CYP who are predominantly non-verbal in their communication. The data suggests this may be an area of difficulty for LA professionals to elicit voice. One LA participant elaborated in the qualitative section around eliciting views for those who are non-verbal;

'I feel as though I'm currently better at capturing the views of verbal CYP. This makes me feel a bit uncomfortable, as non-verbal CYP are arguably likely to be more vulnerable than verbal CYP' (EP)

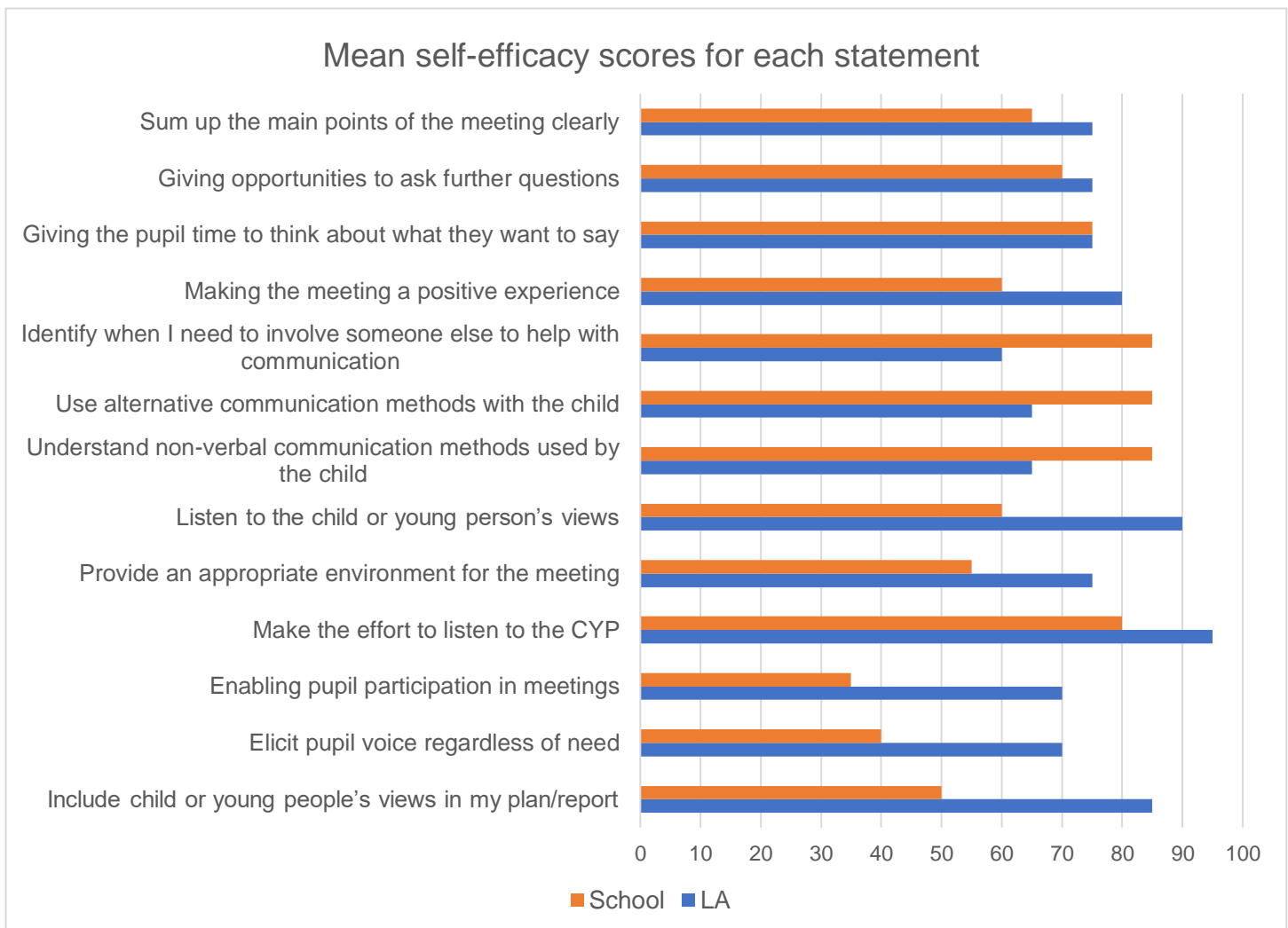


Figure 4.7: The mean value of self-efficacy scores for each statement by LA professionals and school staff (n=36)

Along with the mean score of each statement, the mean score of each individual participant was also calculated, as seen in figure 4.8. When analysing the mean scores for each participant's level of perceived confidence on all statements, there was a high level of variance in the overall mean self-efficacy scores. Although there were 36 responses from the LA, one participant did not complete section B of the questionnaire and therefore was not included within the analysis. Some participants also did not score on every statement, leaving some blank. I did not allocate a score

of '0', as this indicates no perceived confidence to carry out the task, which cannot be assumed due to a lack of response. It is unclear why participants chose not to answer some statements, possibly due to not having an opinion on a particular statement.

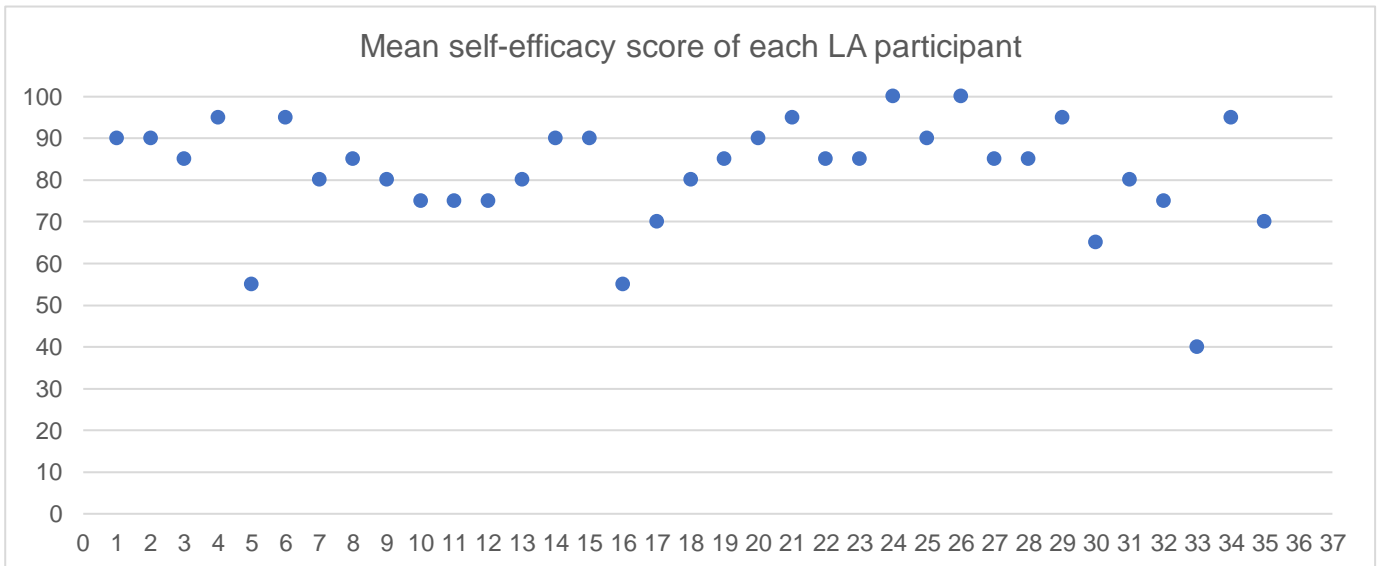


Figure 4.8: The mean value of self-efficacy scores for each LA participant (n=35)

The mean self-efficacy scores for each participant ranged from 40 to 100; where some participants answered '100' for nearly all statements and another answered '0' for majority. There is no way to be sure the responses accurately reflect the participants views or is merely a form of bias associated with self-administered questionnaires, as discussed in chapter 3. Majority of participants however showed variance in the scores they administered for each statement, therefore suggesting they thought about their perceived level of confidence before answering.

I will take an example of the median LA participant, who was participant number 19 with an average score of 85. The highest levels of confidence, a score of 100, was in '*making the effort to listen to the CYP*' and '*listening to the CYP's views*'. As these statements are similar, and the participant scored the same, it can be assumed therefore that this is an accurate response rate on how they feel. The lowest areas of confidence, a score of 40, was seen in professional confidence to '*elicit pupil voice*

regardless of need' and a score of 60 for *'giving the pupil time to think about what they want to say'*.

To analyse the levels of confidence further, I have taken the top three participants with the highest mean score and the top three participants with the lowest mean score, along with their background characteristics, as depicted in table 4.5 below. The top three LA participants who rated their confidence highly in all items were EPs, conversely the top three participants who rated their confidence on a low scale had two SO's and one EP.

The EPs who rated themselves highly scored a level of 100 for majority of the statements; there was some level of variance between them however all three scored 100 for the following statements; *'include CYP's views in my reports'*, *'make the effort to listen to the CYP'*, *'listen to the CYP's views'*, *'giving the pupil time to think about what they want to say'* and *'giving opportunities to ask further questions'*.

As discussed in the methodology chapter, some items were reworded in a different way to ensure consistency; as all three rated the same score for listening to CYP's views and making an effort to listen to the CYP, this shows reliability in their responses. Participants also provided further qualitative information within this section to further showcase their confidence;

'We have created a pupil participation booklet to encourage other staff within the LA to explore the views of CYP, with examples and resources to support this and the importance of doing so' (EP).

The three participants with a lower mean score showed a high level of variance between their scores. There were no items that were rated the same, however a statement that all three rated with a lower level of confidence was *'enabling pupil participation in meetings'*. The SEND officer with a mean score of 40 scored '0' for majority of the sections, which is a score indicating no confidence in carrying out the statement. They followed this up with a comment to explain why they scored in this way;

'This section is hard to answer as we don't meet the child for their views'.

	Mean Score	Role	Years of Service
Highest Means			
Participant 6	95	EP	5-10 years
Participant 24	100	EP	2-3 years
Participant 26	100	EP	2-3 years
Lowest Means			
Participant 5	55	SEND officer	1-2 years
Participant 16	55	EP	5-10 years
Participant 33	40	SEND officer	2-3 years

Table 4.5: The characteristics of the LA participants' mean score of perceived confidence

As the SEND officer states in their role they do not meet with the CYP, they would not be able to judge confidence levels on the different statements as they have not been exposed to this.

The EP who scored a mean of 55 also left two statements blank, which has skewed the data. The two statements left blank were ability to '*understand non-verbal communication methods used by the child*' and '*giving the pupil time to think about what they want to say*'. It is unclear why these two statements were left blank as there is no follow up within the qualitative question within section B.

The data suggests a pattern between the background characteristics and the perceived level of confidence a participant had in their ability to elicit voice. However, as tests of significance could not be carried out due to the small sample size, this perceived pattern could be down to chance. The role of the EP and the SEND officer within the assessment process and the findings from participants in this role will be discussed in depth within the discussion chapter.

Within the methodology, a relationship between section A and section B of the questionnaire was suggested due to the literature that has suggested higher self-efficacious teachers made more of an effort when working with children with SEND (Gibson & Dembo, 1984). It was hypothesized that a participant who had higher self-efficacy scores seen in Section B would make more of an effort to gain the views of CYP as suggested in the first part of Section A. To test this relationship, a test of correlation was carried out.

Section A consisted of 11 statements that indicated ways a professional can show that they are trying to ensure the voice of the CYP is elicited within assessments and reports. Therefore, any participant who rated themselves as 'strongly agree' or 'agree' for the statements were scored positively in terms of a percentage of all statements. All other options were scored negatively to indicate a professional is not making a strong enough effort to elicit voice. If the participant chose to leave an answer blank or the option of 'neither agree nor disagree', this was also marked negatively.

One statement in section A was negatively scored; '*I will use existing reports of the CYP's views instead of visiting them*', as agreeing to this indicates a professional is not attempting to keep the assessment child-centred. Therefore, a positive mark was given for this statement if a participant ranked this as 'disagree' or 'strongly disagree' and a negative mark was given if a participant ranked this as 'agree' or 'strongly agree'. For example, a participant who agreed to all statements and disagreed with the statement mentioned above would get a score of 100% in section A, showing they make a high level of effort to elicit voice; it would then be hypothesised that their mean self-efficacy score in section B would also be high as they feel confident in their ability to elicit voice. Percentages were rounded to the nearest whole number.

Firstly, a scatter gram was done to spot any initial trends within the two variables. This can be seen in figure 4.9 below; the regression line suggests a somewhat positive linear relationship between the two variables. The data is not normally distributed and fairly scattered, and so it is unclear whether this relationship is likely to be statistically significant. Additionally, the scatter gram also shows outliers and therefore suggesting that not all participants fit the hypothesized relationship, for

example a participant scored themselves highly by agreeing to majority of statements in section A, but then had a lower mean self-efficacy score.

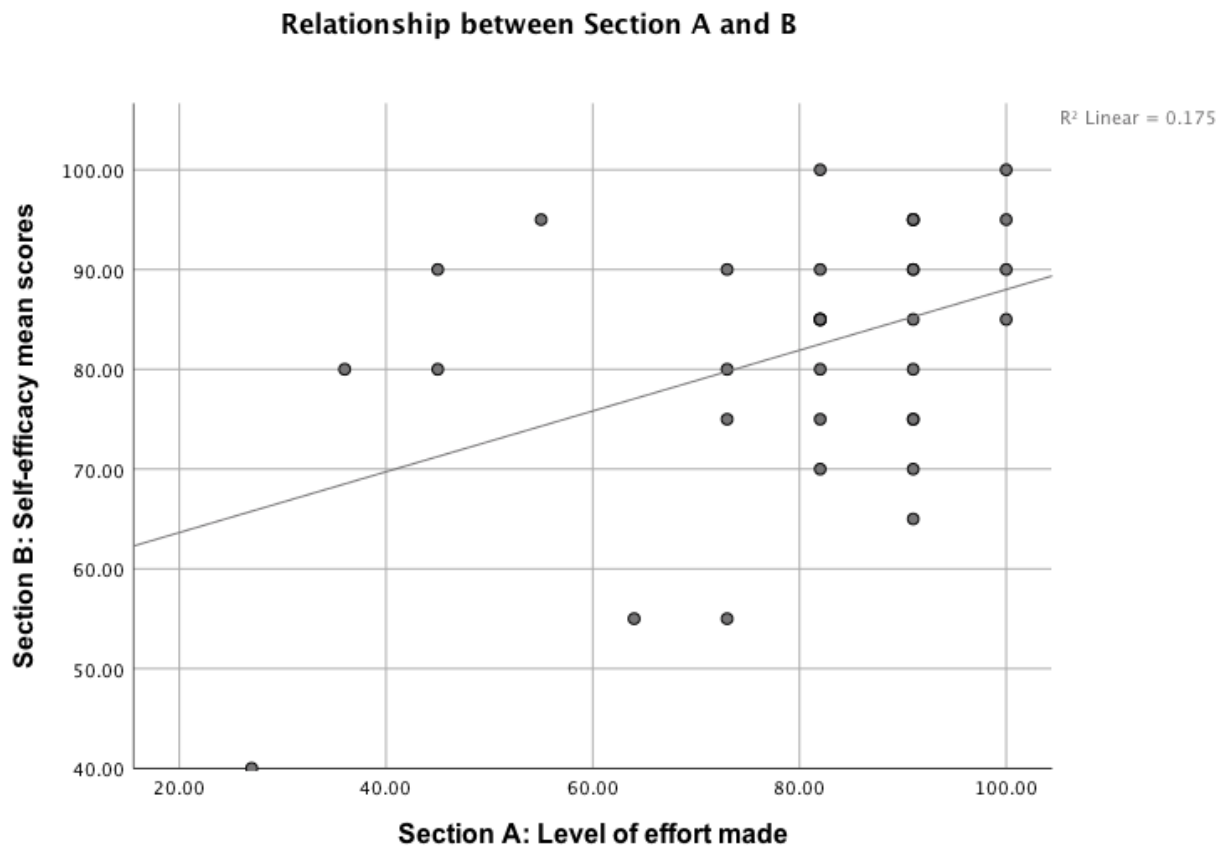


Figure 4.9: A scatter gram showing the relationship between level of effort and self-efficacy scores for LA participants

Although the chart may suggest a positive correlation between the two variables, an inferential test of correlation was carried out to ascertain whether this relationship was significant or not. A Pearson's r parametric test of correlation was carried out using the data from section A and B. Although 36 participants completed the questionnaire, one participant did not complete section A, and another did not complete section B and so both were excluded within the analysis.

There was a significant positive correlation between the level of effort made by a participant and their mean score of self-efficacy ($r = 0.419$, $N = 34$, $p < 0.01$, one-tailed). However, only 17.5% of the variation (r^2) is explained and therefore there is likely to be other variables that affect how a professional would measure their level of

self-efficacy in eliciting pupil voice. The scatter gram shows many outliers and as correlation does not indicate causation, it cannot be assumed that the responses in section A caused the responses in section B; other variables are likely to affect the level of confidence a professional may have in eliciting pupil voice.

(ii) *School professionals*

Interestingly, when looking at the mean values for the school professionals in figure 4.7, the highest confidence levels were in the statements the LA professionals felt weakest in. A mean score of 85 was given to the statements, '*understand non-verbal communication methods used by the child*', '*use alternative communication methods with the child*' and '*identify when I need to involve someone else to help with communication*'. These three statements were identified to have lower scores in the sample of LA professionals. This suggests that school staff feel better equipped at eliciting the views of CYP with non-verbal forms of communication and offering support services such as an advocate to CYP with SEND in comparison to LA professionals. This is likely due to be a direct impact of the relationship school staff have with pupils and will be discussed further in chapter 6.

The statements with the lowest average score for the school professionals included '*enable pupil participation in meetings*', with an average score of 35. This is further evidenced within the qualitative information, where a participant from the school sample stated:

'I generally work with non-verbal children...I am confident in using a range of alternatives to speech but still struggle to find effective ways of supporting children's understanding of questions...it is essential they have the cognitive ability to understand the concept being discussed' (SENCO).

Similar to the sample of LA professionals, the mean self-efficacy scores for each participant from the school sample was calculated, as seen in figure 4.10. Again, one participant did not complete section B and was therefore not included in the analysis. The mean self-efficacy ranged from 50 to 100.

The median participant was participant 2 who had a mean score of 80. They scored highest on statements such as '*understand non-verbal communication methods used by the child*', '*use alternative communication methods with the child*' and '*identify*

when I need to involve someone else to help with communication'. This was the same statements identified to be highest ranking within the school sample data. The lowest response was a score of 10 for 'enabling pupil participation in meetings', which was the lowest rated statement for the overall sample group.

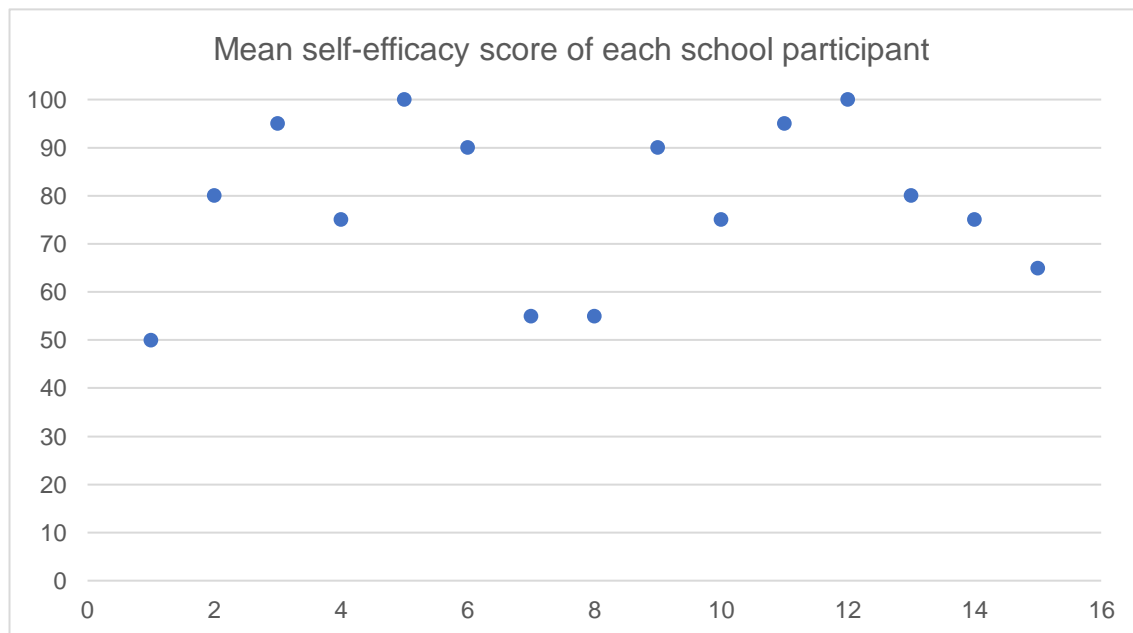


Figure 4.10: The mean value of self-efficacy scores for each school participant (n=15)

The same analysis was done for the school sample, where the top three participants with the highest mean scores and the top three with the lowest mean scores were analysed alongside their role, as seen in table 4.6. The top three participants with the highest mean score were all in positions of senior management and rated themselves as 100 for majority of the statements, such as 'identify when I need to involve someone else to help with communication' and 'making the meeting a positive experience'. The top three with the lowest mean score were also a mix of Head teachers and a SENCO; positions you might assume to be professionals confident in eliciting pupil voice. The statements they all rated themselves as having low confidence in were 'enabling pupil participation in meetings' and 'provide an appropriate environment for the meeting'. The school professionals did not elaborate their views within the qualitative section of the questionnaire and therefore further analysis cannot be added to their responses.

	Mean Score	Role	Years of Service
Highest Means			
Participant 5	100	Head teacher	More than 10 years
Participant 11	95	Teacher	3-4 years
Participant 12	100	Deputy Head teacher	5-10 years
Lowest Means			
Participant 1	50	Head teacher	5-10 years
Participant 7	55	Head teacher	5-10 years
Participant 8	55	SENCO	More than 10 years

Table 4.6: The characteristics of the school participants' mean score of perceived confidence

A test of correlation was also carried out on this sample to identify whether there was a relationship between the responses in section A and the responses in section B. Section A of the questionnaire for the school professionals had 10 statements, and did not include the previous statement in the LA questionnaire that was negatively scored. As schools see CYP on a daily basis, it was felt that questionnaire did not apply to them. Therefore, positive marks were given if the participant ranked statements as 'agree' or 'strongly agree'; if all 10 were ranked this way then the participant would receive a percentage of 100% in section A. Percentages were rounded to the nearest whole number.

A scatter gram was drawn to spot any initial trends within the two variables. This can be seen in figure 4.11 below; the data is more scattered in comparison to figure 4.9, and it is unclear if the relationship is statistically significant and the findings may be due to chance. Additionally, the scatter gram also shows outliers and therefore suggesting that not all participants fit the hypothesized relationship.

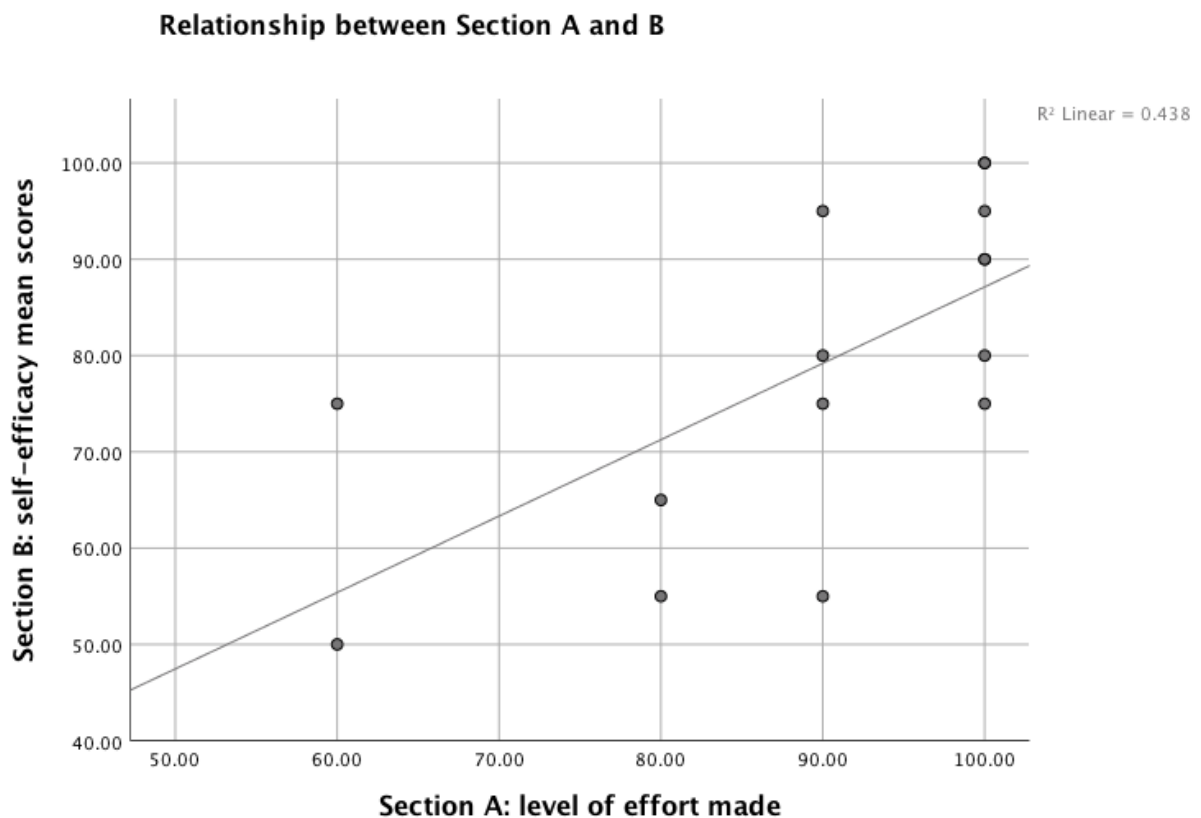


Figure 4.11: A scatter gram showing the relationship between level of effort and self-efficacy scores for school participants

A Pearson’s r parametric test of correlation was carried out using the data from section A and B. Although 16 participants completed the questionnaire, one participant did not complete section B and so was excluded within the analysis.

There was a significant positive correlation between the level of effort made by a participant and their mean score of self-efficacy ($r = 0.662$, $N = 15$, $p < 0.01$, one-tailed). 43.8% of the variation (r^2) is explained and therefore there is likely to be other variables that affect how a professional would measure their level of self-efficacy in eliciting pupil voice. The scatter gram shows many outliers and as correlation does not indicate causation, it cannot be assumed that the responses in section A caused the responses in section B; other variables are likely to affect the level of confidence a professional may have in eliciting pupil voice.

(iii) Comparison of the LA and school professionals

With an equal sample, I would have carried out inferential statistics to compare the mean levels of confidence between the two samples. However, due to the low and unequal sample sizes, analysis was based on the graphical illustrations.

The representations of both samples suggest the LA professionals showed generally higher levels of confidence in comparison to the school professionals. As illustrated in figure 4.7, the LA showed higher means for each statement in comparison to the schools for majority of the statements. This is likely to be due to the differing perspectives held by each sample based on their role and daily practice; this will be further discussed in chapter 6.

The findings are likely to be impacted by the higher number of responses by LA professionals and therefore it is difficult to compare the representativeness of the levels of perceived confidence of these two samples. Both samples showed variance in their perceived levels of confidence, which could be impacted by various factors such as their role within the school, or their years of service. The level of variance was higher for the school sample than the LA sample. The difference in variance between both samples is large and therefore it cannot be ascertained that the level of effort is most significantly affected by levels of self-reported confidence. The discussion chapter will highlight how the roles of each sample is likely to affect the scores attributed within the questionnaire.

4.3.3 Section C: Type of methods used

Research Question 3: What supporting methods or tools are used to enable the voice of the CYP?

Section C of the plan looked at the different type of methods used to elicit pupil voice, categorised as direct, prompted or mediated (MacBeath et al, 2003).

Participants were asked how often they used each method illustrated within the three categories. For ease of comparison, the results of the LA and school professionals will be discussed together for each methodological approach.

(i) *Direct methods*

When asked about how often direct methods are used, both the LA professionals and school professionals followed the same pattern. The most frequently agreed method used to elicit voice was having an informal conversation with CYP around their views, many also agreed with using questionnaires; this was particularly common in the LA responses. The least used direct method for both samples included keeping a diary or log about their views, posting views within a box was also frequently rated as ‘never’ by both samples. Bar charts illustrating how often each method was used by both the LA and school professionals can be found in Appendix 17.

Due to the disproportionate response rates between the two samples, it was decided the best way to compare the responses in section C was to compare the item means. Each ranking was given a numerical value, i.e. Almost Always (5), Sometimes (4), Every once in a while (3), Rarely (2) and Never (1). The item means and standard deviation (SD) was then calculated for each method based on frequency, for both the LA and school professionals, and can be seen in table 4.7.

	LA		School	
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.
I have a conversation with them about their views	4.51	1.05	4.31	0.77
I use a questionnaire that asks about their views	3.63	1.10	3.53	1.45
I interview them about their views (formal)	2.85	1.33	2.13	1.11
I ask the CYP to post their views into a box	1.63	0.96	1.75	1.03
I ask the CYP to keep a diary or a log	1.37	0.64	1.44	0.61

Table 4.7: The mean and standard deviation for both samples using direct methods (rounded to two decimal places)

The item means show the highest mean scores for both samples for the first direct method of having a conversation around views, and lowest mean for asking CYP to keep a diary or a log. The SD scores highlight the dispersion of the data from the mean, where a lower SD indicates values closer to the mean. When looking at the school data, the relatively low SD (0.77) for the first statement shows less dispersion of data, and so majority of school participants agreed with this statement. Similarly, there is a lower SD for both samples in the last statement of keeping a diary, where majority said they never do this.

As identified within the literature, direct methods are the most used method when attempting to elicit pupil voice (Todd, 2003). As one LA participant specified; '*I will attempt this with all CYP regardless of need*'. Whereas, it appears the more 'innovative' direct methods such as posting your views or using a diary or log are less frequently used by both the LA and staff.

In order to address the sub-research question for research aim 3, participants were asked to give an example of the needs and descriptors of CYP that direct methods are usually used with. Responses from school staff generally described pupils with moderate learning difficulties or high functioning pupils with a good level of expressive and receptive skills. LA staff stated similar needs; pupils in mainstream education, those with reasonable language and no mental health needs. As predicted in chapter 3, this was the cohort of pupils with SEN that were anticipated to use direct methods of consultation with.

(ii) Prompted methods

When looking at how often prompted methods are used to elicit voice, table 4.8 shows the mean and SD for each statement. The prompted method that was most frequently used by both samples were observing the CYP and reporting on this. When comparing the prompted methods that are less commonly used, there is a difference in the LA and school approach within this area. Majority of LA responses stated they never watch videos of CYP in their learning environment (22 responses), which is also indicated with the low mean score and low SD rate. Whereas some school staff did report doing this to gain views (M=3.47, SD= 1.36).

	LA		School	
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.
I observe the CYP and report on my observations	4.31	1.26	4.27	1.00
I use other materials that can help me compare their views	3.49	1.36	4.20	0.65
I ask questions based on a completed questionnaire	3.14	1.33	3.44	1.54
I look at photos of the CYP in different settings	2.71	1.28	3.80	1.22
I use a sentence completion prompt that asks about their views	2.89	1.28	3.00	1.15
I watch videos of them in their learning environment	1.63	0.93	3.47	1.36

Table 4.8: The mean and standard deviation for both samples using prompted methods (rounded to two decimal places)

The method that was least used by school staff was using sentence completion tasks, however indicates that this is used every once in a while. The school professionals therefore appear to utilise prompted methods more frequently compared to the LA professionals, as indicated by the means for the school professionals being higher for all statements compared to the LA professionals.

In the qualitative section, many responses linked using prompted methods with younger children, where observation would be used due to their age.

(iii) Mediated Methods

Finally, when comparing responses for mediated approaches, table 4.9 shows the descriptive statistics for both samples. The most frequent statement that professionals strongly agreed on were asking the CYP to draw a picture or painting.

The least used method by the LA was asking CYP to make a video of their views, and for the school professionals it was making a poster.

	LA		School	
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.
I ask the CYP to draw a picture or a painting	3.91	0.87	3.75	1.03
I ask the CYP to make a poster of their views	2.59	1.42	2.27	1.29
I ask the CYP to take photos of their views	2.00	1.04	2.80	1.47
I ask the CYP to make a video of their views	1.57	0.80	2.60	1.50
I use role play with the CYP to access their views	1.85	1.14	2.67	1.30

Table 4.9: The mean and standard deviation for both samples using mediated methods (rounded to two decimal places)

Schools were utilising mediated methods slightly more than LAs were, such as making videos or using role play. This may partially be due to the fact that schools have more than one occasion to utilise this method as they see pupils every day, whereas LA staff may only have one small occasion to meet the CYP and try eliciting views.

The findings overall show the methodological approach of using mediated methods to be less popular in comparison to the other two. With exception to the first statement, majority of responses for the statements from both LAs and schools were rarely or never used.

In the qualitative section, participants described using mediated methods for pupils who have severe and complex needs, pupils who are predominately non-verbal in their communication or those who experience anxiety or have SEMH needs. However, many participants expanded that they use this method with all pupils due to its creative nature, regardless of need.

'I would use these methods with all children of all abilities. I believe using a playful and curious approach to ascertaining a child's emotions is reliant on forming a relationship with them that allows them to feel comfortable enough to express how they really feel' (SENCO)

'Drawing is usually part of all my assessments' (Trainee EP).

It was initially predicted that pupils who are verbal and/or of high capability would use direct methods during consultation, those who have moderate learning difficulties would use prompted methods, and those who are predominately non-verbal or have PMLD would use mediated methods in consultation. Although majority of responses in the qualitative section did fit this pattern, one comment pointed out the complexity of this question. One LA member felt:

'It is based on individual need and their profile...I'm not sure this question is as straight forward as posed, for example, a highly capable pupil may not be talkative for whatever reason and I may use visual based methods with them instead. I do not see clear boundaries e.g. a LD pupil would only respond to one approach. There is a range of factors that impact the approach used' (EP).

Therefore, when considering the sub research-question of whether certain methods are dependent on specific needs of CYP, it is likely that this participant is correct. There may be methods that commonly link to specific needs e.g. using direct method with CYP with a higher language ability, however that does not guarantee that method can always be used to elicit voice. As section 4.2.5 will illustrate, there are numerous barriers that can prevent CYP expressing their views and therefore one particular approach may not always be suitable. Majority of professionals identified matching the method to the context as a way to determine which would be most appropriate.

'I would say that I use different methods depending on the young person and the setting and what they say they prefer' (EP).

Professionals therefore are suggesting using a mixture of methods based on varying factors such as context, mood of the CYP, and age.

(iv) *Mixed methods*

As identified in the literature review, using a triangulation of methods appears to be the most effective way to elicit views in a meaningful way. Figure 4.12 shows the responses of both LAs and schools using multiple methods to gain the views of CYP.

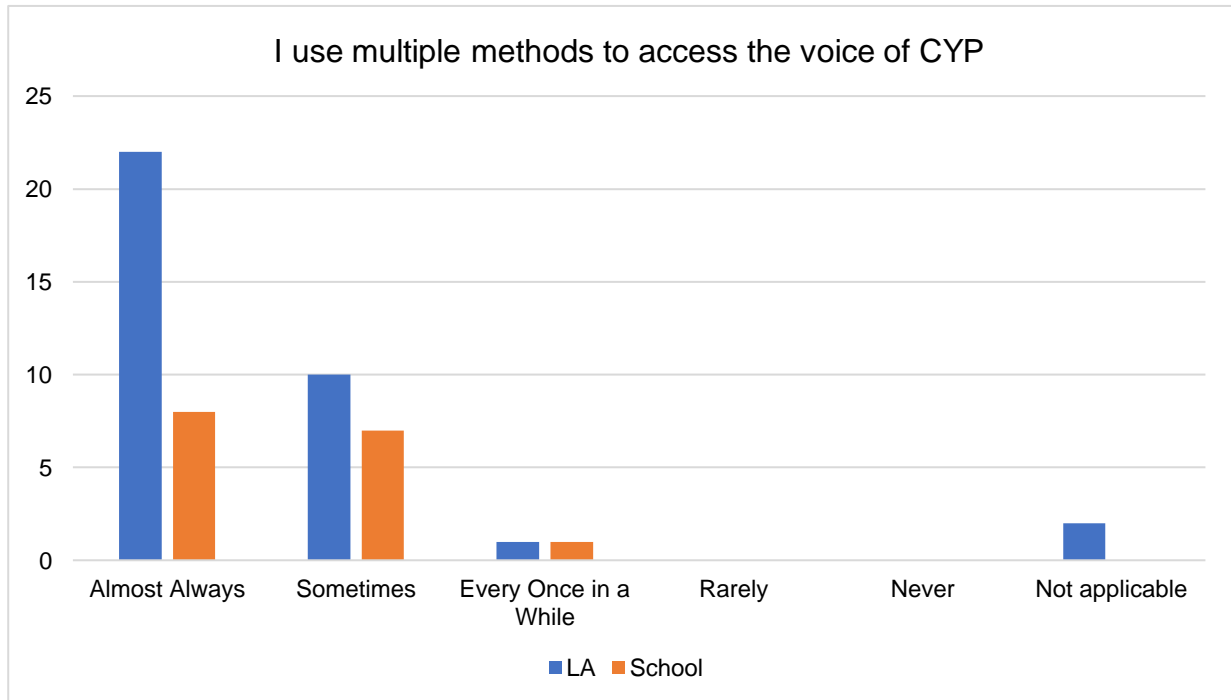


Figure 4.12: The questionnaire findings for how often multiple method are used (n=51)

As illustrated, both samples tend to use multiple methods as opposed to relying on one particular methodological approach; in which all agreed with this statement.

'I usually use multiple methods in order to gather the accurate information or I let the child choose' (SALT).

When asked other methods utilised in the qualitative section, LA staff have a range of methods such as PECs, person centred planning methods such as PATH, rating scales and drawing an ideal school. Similarly, school staff use choice boards or resources such as a story. Both samples were able to showcase different method that were not mentioned explicitly within the questionnaire but do fit into the three categories e.g. drawing an ideal school as a form of a mediated method.

4.3.4 Section D: Enabling factors

Research question 4 (Aim One and Two): What enabling factors help to elicit the views of the child or young person?

Section D of the questionnaire aimed to explore the enabling factors that each sample felt supported their role in eliciting the views of CYP. The item means and SD was calculated for both samples based on frequency of responses for each identified enabling factor, this can be seen in table 4.10 below. Each ranking was given a numerical value, i.e. Strongly Agree (6), Agree (5), Neither agree nor disagree (4), Disagree (3), Strongly disagree (2) and Not applicable (1).

	LA		School	
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.
I take advice on how best to communicate with the CYP from those who know them well	5.54	0.55	5.34	1.22
I adapt the paperwork or information so it is accessible for the CYP	4.94	1.43	4.8	1.64
I ensure the venue of the meeting is comfortable and accessible for the CYP	5.06	0.98	4.93	1.34
I meet with the CYP more than once so they feel comfortable with me	3.89	1.54	5.34	1.22

Table 4.10: The mean and standard deviation for both samples identified enabling factors (rounded to two decimal places)

Both samples had the highest mean scores on taking advice on how best to communicate with CYP from those who know them well. The SD for the LA professionals was small (SD = 0.55) and so majority of participants agreed with this enabling factor. The school professionals also had a high mean score for meeting with the CYP more than once (M= 5.34, SD= 1.22), whereas this was the score with the lowest mean for the LA professionals. As stated in previous sections and will be reiterated in the rest of this chapter, the LA professionals tend to only meet CYP once due to time constraints.

The school professionals scored relatively high for all statements indicating their use of the enabling factors to elicit pupil voice. However, some felt many statements were not applicable to their role. This is likely to the fact they see pupils on a daily basis and so do not need to seek information on how they communicate or meet with them more than once.

When asked to list any other enabling factors that support their role in eliciting pupil voice, participants in the LA mentioned using games, play-based techniques, building rapport and trying to meet them more than once. They also suggested techniques such as providing a photo of themselves before hand and explaining why they would like to meet them. The school sample mentioned enabling factors such as utilising teaching staff that know them well to support the process or be the ones to elicit views, as they are familiar adults in the CYP's life.

4.3.5 Section E: Barriers

Research question 5: What barriers have been identified when trying to elicit the views of the child or young person?

(i) LA professionals

A key focus of phase one of the study was to explore the barriers that professionals faced in their daily practice, and to see if this resonated throughout England. The final section of the questionnaire focused on barriers, and figure 4.13 below illustrated the barriers identified by LA professionals. Many disagreed with the statements as barriers, particularly for statements such as '*when the CYP experiences anxiety or lack of self-confidence*' and '*when the CYP does not have a well-formed view to share*', suggesting they do not feel these factors as barriers to eliciting voice.

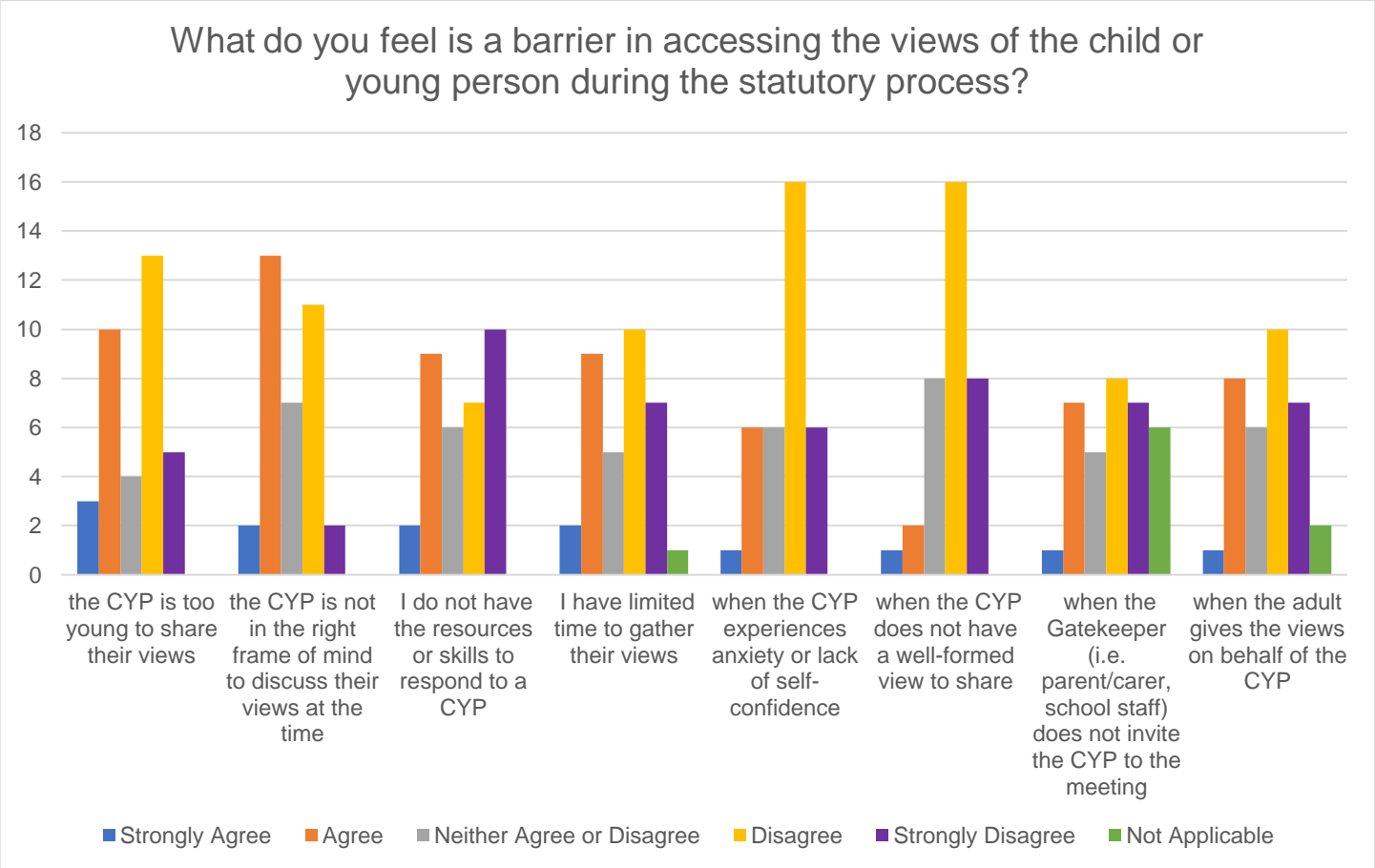


Figure 4.13: The questionnaire findings for barriers identified by LA professionals (n=36)

The item means and SD was calculated for both samples based on frequency of responses for each identified barrier in order to provide a clearer picture, this can be seen in table 4.11 below. Each ranking was given a numerical value, i.e. Strongly Agree (6), Agree (5), Neither agree nor disagree (4), Disagree (3), Strongly disagree (2) and Not applicable (1).

The majority of statements for the LA fall into the ‘disagree’ category, therefore suggesting LA professionals did not find these to be barriers to eliciting voice. The statement with the highest level of agreement was difficulty eliciting views when the CYP is not in the right frame of mind (M=4.06, SD= 1.07), but this falls into the ranking of ‘neither agree nor disagree’. No statements show an item mean score that indicates a high level of agreement with the barriers. There was a stronger level of

disagreement for LA participants in the suggestion that ‘*the CYP does not have a well-formed view to share*’, where participants did not see this as barrier.

	LA		School	
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.
I don't manage to elicit views when...				
The CYP is too young to share their views	3.8	1.24	4.27	1.39
The CYP is not in the right frame of mind to discuss their views at the time	4.06	1.07	4	1.55
I do not have the resources or skills to respond to a CYP	3.59	1.31	4.07	1.34
I have limited time to gather their views	3.59	1.31	3.8	1.42
The CYP experiences anxiety or lack of self-confidence	3.43	1.05	4.19	1.38
The CYP does not have a well-formed view to share	3.2	0.95	3.2	1.22
The Gatekeeper does not invite the CYP to the meeting	3.09	1.46	3.07	1.44
The adult gives the views on behalf of the CYP	3.42	1.29	3.54	1.20

Table 4.11: The mean and standard deviation for both samples identified barriers (rounded to two decimal places)

The qualitative data within this section identified further barriers for LA professionals that were not included within the statements, such as time constraints;

‘capacity due to workload’

‘time limits sometimes mean I don't feel I have captured their views fully’.

Many participants have expressed in the qualitative data that time constraints as a key barrier due to work capacity, however not many respondents indicated this in the questionnaire under ‘*I have limited time to gather their views*’ (M=3.59, SD= 1.31).

LA participants also felt when '*pupils have had limited experience of their views being meaningfully sought in school and at home*' they struggle to elicit their views during key assessments such as EHCPs or ARs. This refers back to exposing CYP to decision-making throughout their life which makes it easier to elicit views during these key assessments. Additional barriers such as challenging behaviour, work capacity, a pupil refusing to engage, and inability to do more than one visit were also identified.

The sub question wished to explore what approaches and methods are there available to help overcome these barriers for LAs and schools. Section E of the questionnaire therefore elaborated to understand what approaches are used by LA professionals to overcome the barriers to eliciting voice, as seen in figure 4.14 below. Majority agreed with all statements as ways to overcome the barriers to eliciting voice, however some showed disagreements in adapting materials or resources to make it accessible for CYP or explaining decisions after a meeting has been held.

The qualitative information highlighted additional ways to overcome barriers as identified by LA professionals. This included the approach in eliciting voice and arranging meetings to be more pupil-centred.

'open and honest, setting realistic expectations'

'addressing the meeting to them rather than the adults around them'.

Despite attempting to remove barriers, one participant stated the difficulty when barriers arise.

'there isn't much that can be done when a child cannot attend for any reason or is unable to give their views. There are times when this is the ideal but not the norm' (SO).

Irrespectively, majority of the views were positive in overcoming barriers to elicit views and '*always get their views first*'. As one LA participant stated '*there is always a way if you prioritise it!*' (EP).

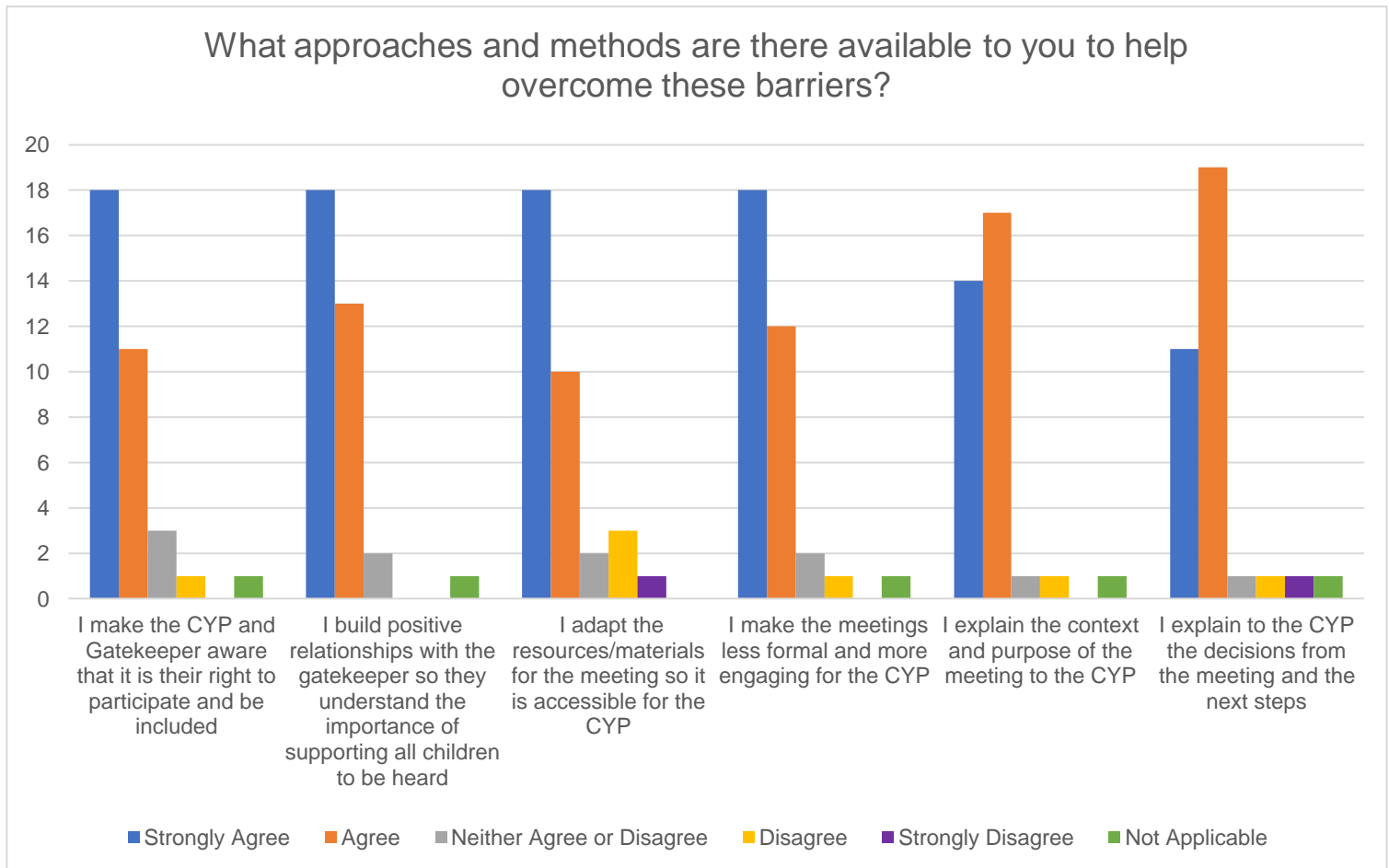


Figure 4.14: The questionnaire findings for methods to overcome barriers identified by LA professionals (n=36)

(ii) *School professionals*

The same statements were given to school staff; as seen in figure 4.15 below. The participants agreed that views can be difficult to elicit when CYP have anxiety, are too young, or not in the right frame of mind. This was also illustrated within the qualitative comments. One comment mentioned that the school practice meant;

'we do not invite the CYP to the meeting. Their views are elicited in as natural a setting as possible for their maturity' (Advisory teacher)

The item means in table 4.12 does not show a high level of agreement to any of the barriers within the questionnaire. The statement with the highest level of agreement as a barrier was difficulty eliciting views when the CYP is too young to share their views (M=4.27, SD=1.39). The barrier with the lowest level of agreement was when

the gatekeeper does not invite the CYP (M=3.07, SD= 1.44). The SD scores for all statements were quite high and therefore suggest a wide range of variance in responses between the participants, this can be seen in the bar graph also.

The school data therefore does not show a clear level of agreement between different school members in what they perceive to be barriers in eliciting voice. This could be due to a variety of reasons such as their role within the school, which will be explored further in chapter 6.

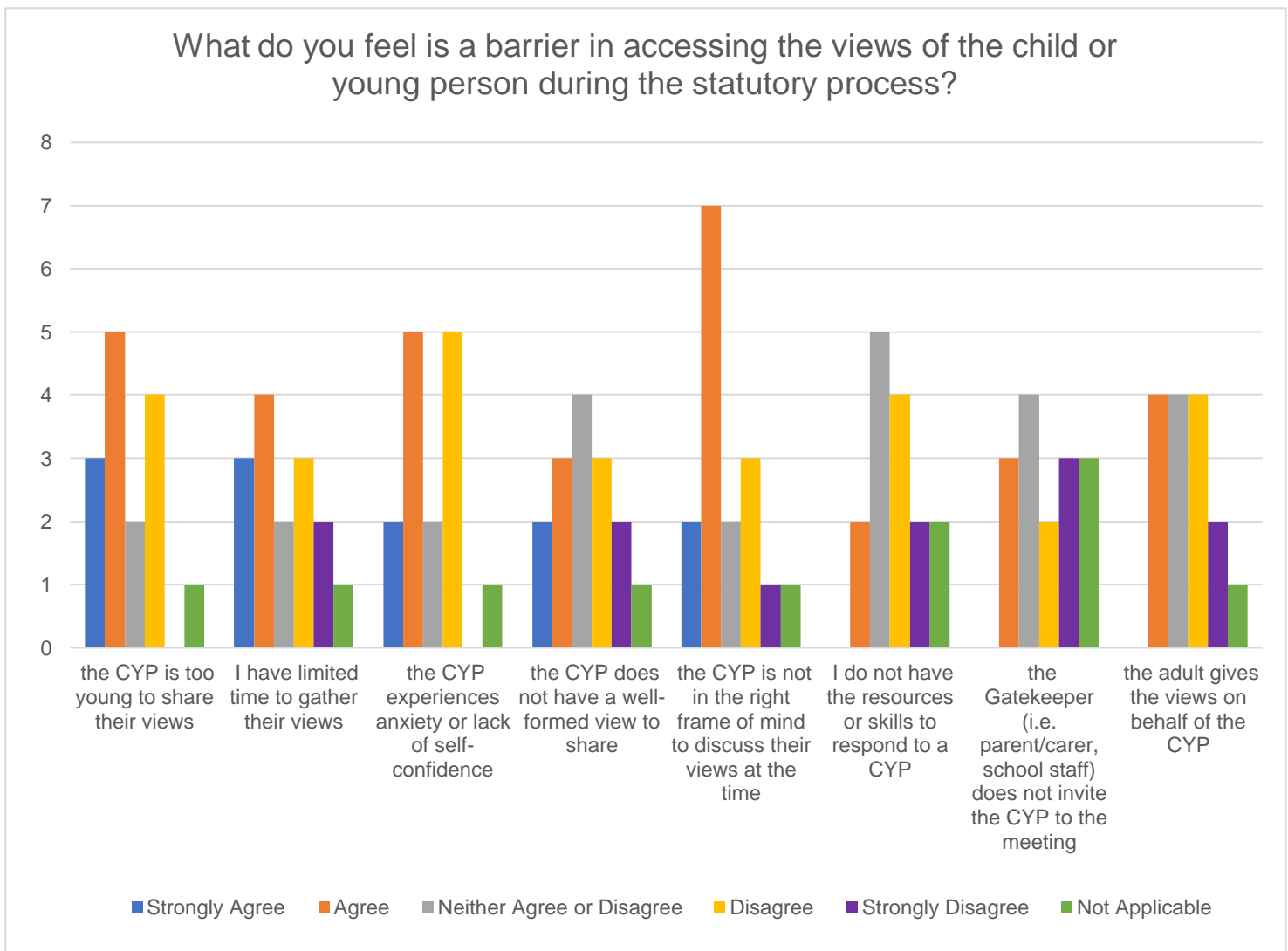


Figure 4.15: The questionnaire findings for barriers identified by school staff (n=16)

When comparing the item means to each barrier for both samples, the school professionals show a slightly higher level of agreement in comparison to the LA professionals. This suggests the schools felt these statements were more of a barrier within their role compared to the LA professionals.

The school professionals were also asked if they felt there were approaches and methods to overcome the barriers in eliciting voice, as seen in figure 4.16. Similar to the LA professionals, the responses for using various approaches and methods to overcome barriers were generally positive. School staff strongly agreed to build positive relationships with gatekeepers, such as parents, and explaining meetings to CYP. This corresponds to the previous comment where gatekeepers were not viewed as a barrier; by building positive relationships with the parent who acts as the gatekeeper at times, this possibly prevents this from becoming a barrier to eliciting voice.

There was a small level of disagreement in making the CYP and gatekeeper aware of their right to participate and be included. Many participants felt the statements were not applicable or they neither agreed nor disagreed to them, again this is likely to be due to the role they hold within the school.

One staff member suggested a method to overcome barriers by planning PCR's and adapting the way meetings are held, which is also discussed within the interviews;

'children plan meetings and invite trusted adults; they design the environment for the planning meeting' (Teacher).

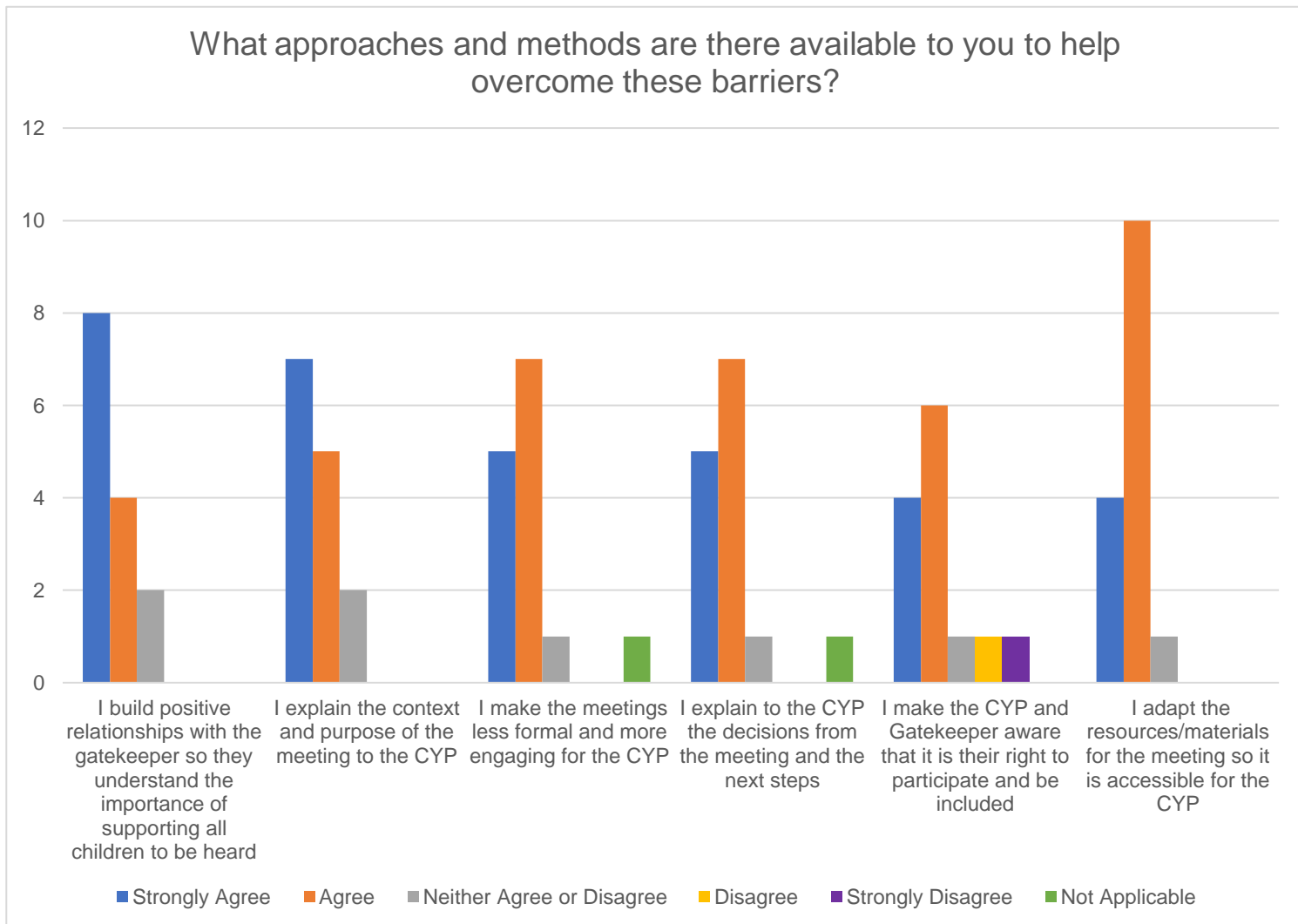


Figure 4.16: The questionnaire findings for methods to overcome barriers identified by school staff (n=16)

4.4 Summary of the findings from the questionnaire

The questionnaire data presented with a wide array of opinions both between and within the two samples. Due to the differences in sample size, carrying out statistical analysis between the two sample groups was limited. Comparing the item means proved to be a useful statistical method to illustrate differences both between and within the samples.

The data showed variance in the level of agreement for each statement between both sample groups. LA professionals showed a higher level of confidence and

disagreement with statements as barriers to capturing voice in comparison to the school professionals, however this is contradictory to the qualitative comments which will be discussed in detail below. Both samples also utilised different enabling factors to support their role in capturing voice, which suggest the level of support needed is determined by their role.

Additional to the quantitative data, the qualitative data within the questionnaire proved to be useful supplementary information to justify and, in some cases, expand participant responses. The semi-structured interviews were also used as a supplementary method to the online-based questionnaire to address the first research aim and provide further insight into the views and opinions of LA and school professionals. This will now be discussed in detail for each code identified within the analysis.

4.5 Findings of the semi-structured interviews

This section presents the findings of the thematic analysis of the interview data collected to address the views and opinions of LA professionals and specialist school staff on eliciting pupil voice. The process of data analysis was discussed in chapter 3, where the ten codes were identified through the process of thematic analysis. The codes were ordered based on frequency of references, as illustrated in table 3.5.

Each code will now be discussed in detail with quotes and illustrations from the six interviews conducted, the list of interviewees can be seen in table 3.4. Although this section focuses on the findings from the semi-structured interviews, excerpts from the qualitative data within the questionnaire will also be used to support each code.

4.5.1 Barriers

The first code identified within the data analysis was the barriers to eliciting voice, which was the most referenced code by the interviewees. This code was particularly prevalent amongst the LA professionals, who referenced barriers on 32 different occasions.

Barriers were a key area of focus throughout phase one of the study; to identify the problems highlighted by professionals in order to find solutions within phase two. During analysis, the code 'barriers' highlighted different types of barriers and it was decided that there were two distinct types of barriers, where barriers to accessing pupil voice mentioned by the participant can be found to affect both the professional attempting to elicit voice and the CYP themselves. Therefore, 'barriers' was then identified as the over-arching category, with two distinct codes; (i) barriers for CYP and (ii) barriers for the professional. This distinction was also seen in the literature review and is illustrated in figure 4.17 below.

(i) Barriers for CYP

The barriers affecting CYP included: the "ability" of the CYP to participate; and the nature of the meetings themselves.

The difficulty CYP face in '*being understood in the meeting*' due to communication needs, along with additional factors such as their '*cognition ability*', '*challenging and complex needs*' and '*behaviour*' affected the decision on whether professionals felt they should attend meetings.

'We don't tend to involve children who are non-verbal, or who don't understand the process of the meeting, because again they would participate in it, but not really have a concept of what is going on and the significance' (SENCO).

The interviewees felt that involving pupils who did not understand the process often led to their views not being representative of how they feel.

'you're asking them how they feel about something, and they want to say they're happy about it, even though you might know, they don't understand the question or they're not happy about it' (SENCO).

An assistant Head teacher explained '*one young person who is wheelchair bound and uses a communication aid*' campaigned to have a heated pool suitable for his needs in his town, so he could join in with his friendship group. His success in accessing funds from his local government to build this was based on his capabilities;

'he has that cognition and learning, he should be able to be accessing the same things everything else is accessing'.

In this example, although the pupil used alternative forms of communication and may be perceived to lack capability by someone who does not know him, he has the cognitive capacity to share his views and be involved in decision-making processes. However, this assumption of CYP being capable to express their views is often assumed based on the special educational needs of the CYP or determined by the adults around them.

CYP are often unaware of their rights to participate as this is not embedded within the culture around them. This lack of exposure to decision-making processes therefore affect how they view EHCP and AR meeting;

'they don't really understand the purpose of the meeting...they just don't really want to engage with it. They just kind of want it running in the background. You know, not really interfering with their life' (SEND Officer).

Interviewees felt CYP don't understand the meetings and so their attendance was not always beneficial.

'I don't think young people have any understanding at all about the annual review process. I don't think they own it very much at all. I think they are used to it being a meeting in which the school and the parent come together to talk about what's not working for the child. That tends to be my experience of the kids that come to us and arrive to us, they have a real kind of fear of that meeting. So much so that you see spikes in behaviours the week before leading up to it. And I think, I don't think pupils own that at all. I think the parents own that. And have always owned that, and I think that's quite tricky to unpick' (Head teacher).

Other barriers identified include self-esteem of CYP, where they may experience anxiety as a result of a meeting. Attempting to elicit voice and participation in these meetings becomes problematic due to the barriers CYP face;

'sometimes it can be quite intimidating in a room full of people to share your views...so I think confidence, self-esteem, factors such as those can impact it' (SO1)

'fear of that meeting' (Head teacher)

'not all CYP feel comfortable being there at that meeting' (SO2)

'general anxiety that they feel about making decision like that' (Head teacher).

In this case, the AR is not always a beneficial process for them and therefore adults may decide it is in their best interest not to be a part of that meeting. Interviewees felt

that sometimes the presence of the CYP at a meeting is a barrier within itself, where parents and professionals could not be honest about the difficulties the CYP may be facing or may cause undue anxiety.

'decisions need to be made by people who know them well, so actually [the CYP] need[s] a summary, they don't need to be here for the whole meeting...it won't be very child-centred if we're not actually being honest' (Assistant Head teacher).

A second category of barrier that affect the CYP is the nature of the process itself, for example the 'exposure' of 'too many adults' during EHCP assessments and ARs.

'I think it's very hard for them to have somebody they don't know coming and asking them all these questions because they're probably less likely to be open and honest' (Assistant Head teacher).

The assessment process entails the CYP being asked for their views, as per the guidance, but often this is on multiple occasions. As a SENCO summarised;

'we've had external people and try to gain views...they've had a child who's sat there and nodded their head the whole time, and it hasn't been representative of what they are able to do, what they really feel'.

The various professionals that CYP meet during assessments can be overwhelming and add to the levels of anxiety mentioned above.

'I think a lot of children are so used to seeing professionals they either openly tell their story over and over again, or just kind of, not phase by the process so that feels kind of disheartening' (EP).

This lack of empowerment is amplified by multiple professional involvement, which is a barrier recognised by professionals themselves as;

'you don't want to be just another face asking them more questions' (SEND Officer).

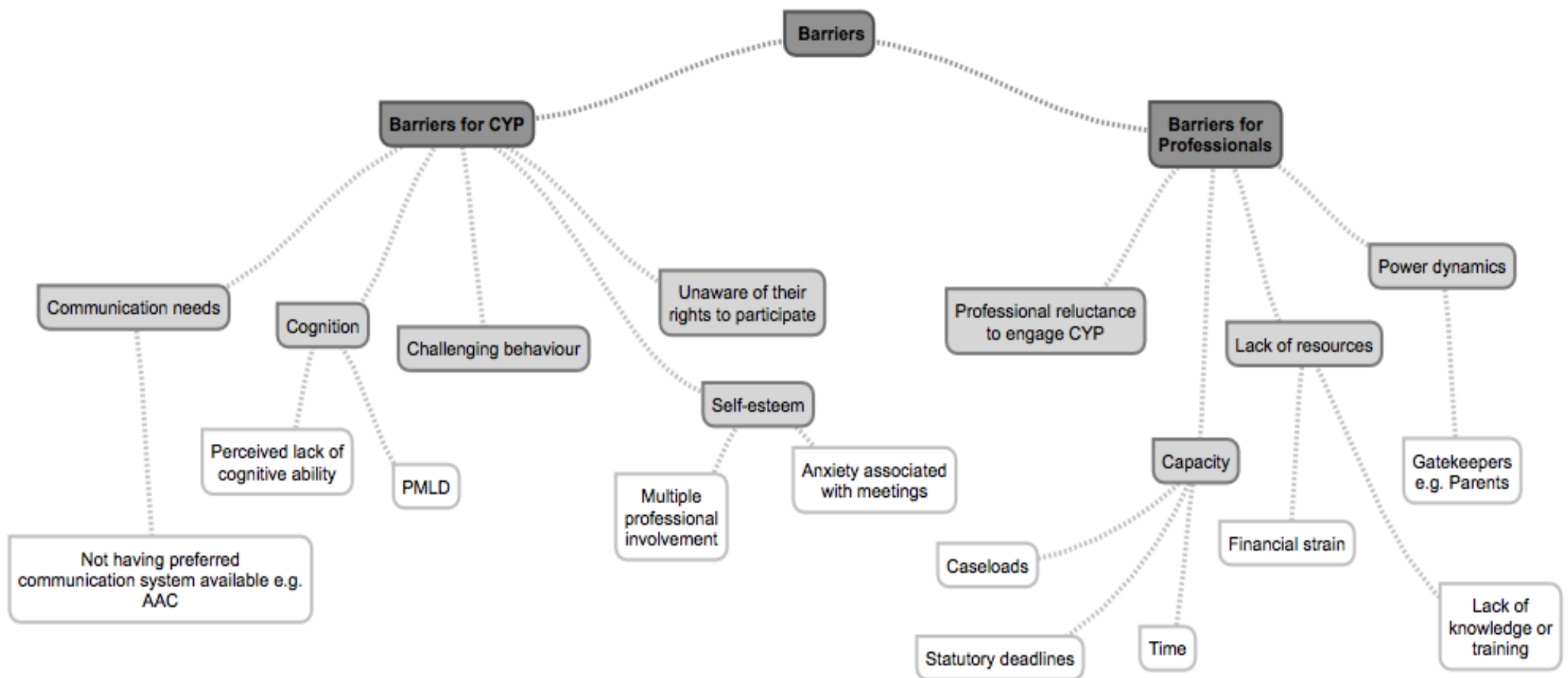


Figure 4.17: The identified barriers for CYP and for professionals during the semi-structured interviews

(ii) *Barriers for the professionals*

The barriers affecting the professionals who attempt to elicit voice included: professionals' reluctance to engage in an effort to comply with the rights of the child; power dynamics between CYP and adults; and the strain in resources, including capacity of professionals. Some of these barriers were discussed in the literature as identified barriers when meaningfully eliciting the voice of CYP and can also be seen in figure 4.17.

Despite the aims of meetings identified by the professionals as being an opportunity of ownership and empowerment, the meeting itself becomes incongruent to this. Language used within meetings and reports focuses on the negative aspects of a CYP's SEN, as opposed to a solution-based approach.

'narrative has become a bit fixed on the difficulties they have, the problems they have, and it's all deficit-based language' (EP).

By using ARs as a platform to discuss difficulties over the achievements, the meeting does not serve to empower the CYP, rather the meetings become an event of pessimism for some CYP. Additionally, the reports and paperwork required for assessments and reviews are not pupil-centred.

'our report is very lengthy, very word...I just think it can mean very little to the young person' (EP).

The second barrier related to power dynamics between adults and the CYP. Quite often professionals can influence the CYPs views based on their own views and it is important *'we're not steering their voice'* (Assistant Head teacher).

Professionals felt the gatekeepers at meetings, which in this case are the parents, can act as a barrier for them to elicit the voice;

'when they've got the parent there, it's hard to know whether it's the young person views or the parents' (EP).

'I think the biggest challenge for us is that, the level of parental expectation...it's kind of managing that process and knowing the best way about enabling the child to be a huge part of the process without the parents feeling completely overwhelmed and undermined' (Head teacher).

And finally, additional barriers that were identified within the interviews was the lack of resources and capacity of LA and school staff. Schools have high levels of students with individual needs and can struggle to allow for person-centred reviews for all CYP.

'it is very hard to do that daily...it's limited resources, money and time to be able to do that' (Head teacher).

The financial strain impacted the ability of professionals to carry out their duty to the quality they would like;

'there's only so much that we can invest in someone running our PCR process. If our school has the more cash or injection to invest in that area, we would' (Head teacher).

Similarly, LA professionals often don't visit CYP to gather views due to the difficulty *'out of office and office balance'*.

'SEN is such a busy field...I probably have 400 people on my caseload that I work with now, it's not feasible and it's not possible to go to every review or meet every single child and get their views myself because I won't have time to sit in the office and complete the written work that I need to' (SO1)

'unfortunately, we don't actually go to annual reviews because of our capacity' (EP)

'I think some of it does come back to the capacity of the local authority' (SO2)

'do you have the capacity to go meet the child to gain their views, to get all the relevant equipment... sometimes professionals don't agree that you need to go meet the child if you got their views in a report. So, capacity wise, you are trying to keep up to date with everything and on top of everything, that you don't want to always agree to additional meetings when you, where it's not necessary' (SO1).

The caseloads were often referenced by SEND Officers as *'not realistic'*, which adds to the body of literature highlighting the strain and workload stress within this role (Hellawell, 2015).

'it's not realistic the amount of work that we have based on what needs to be done as a service' (SO2)

During assessments, professional capacity to spend time eliciting voice is limited by the deadlines of assessments and the sheer number received by LAs.

'we don't always get to spend a lot of time with the young person...I was just going in, getting the views, and going back out again' (EP).

This was also referenced within the qualitative comments in the questionnaire by EPs from different boroughs. Many professionals felt time constraints and lack of resources constrained their ability to elicit voice in a meaningful way.

'often feel it is rushed due to the time I have available for the whole EHC assessment process'

'Although I would like to meet the CYP more than once, this is rarely possible'.

This inability to connect with CYP on a more meaningful level may inhibit them to share their views openly and honestly.

'one of the main barriers is not gathering in a way that's meaningful' (EP).

4.5.2 *Enabling factors*

This code had the highest number of references by the specialist school staff, who mentioned multiple enabling factors within their interviews. Participants were able to provide examples of enabling factors that they either utilise currently or feel would benefit CYP in an ideal situation. This is summarised in figure 4.18.

Previously, chapter 2.4.1 discussed the enabling factors identified within the literature that support professionals in eliciting pupil voice; the responses from the participants further added to the existing factors identified to enable pupil voice, whilst also acknowledging some new factors not previously identified.

One identified factor that enables pupil voice included adapting materials to suit the CYPs needs, such as adapting the paperwork or venue to make it accessible to pupils with differing needs;

'there always going to have those guys who can't access the thing we're providing so we're going to need to do something different, and that could be through making it physically accessible for them through use of switches or making things larger, clearer' (SENCO)

'different usage of visuals' (EP)

'decorating a room to be specific to PCR's, so how it's set up and how it looks, and more plants, more soft seating and lower tables...it's a lot more accessible to pupils and a lot more comfortable and engaging' (Assistant Head Teacher).

By being prepared for meetings ahead of time, participants felt this enabled their success to elicit pupil voice. This was also in the form of preparing CYP for meetings beforehand and so there may be less pressure or anxiety for the CYP when asked about their views.

'Work with the child beforehand to get their views...and that seems to work to a certain extent' (Head teacher)

'There's time to prepare before the meeting, so parents can think about their point of view, students can think about their point of view, teacher can think about their point of view' (Assistant Head teacher).

CYP should also have the choice on if and when they want to share their views;

'because it doesn't have to happen at a time dictated by an adult...it's not just a task to be done, it's finding out what somebody thinks' (SENCO).

The SENCO goes on to explain that professionals attempting to elicit voice should be led by the decisions made by the CYP, in terms of *where* and *when* they choose to express their views. However, *why* they are giving their views for the purpose of meetings or reviews needs to be explained to CYP, for them to understand the importance.

'it shouldn't be a replacement for work. This is not a work activity, this is something that they're helping us with, so we need to make sure it makes sense to them and understand what they are doing' (SENCO).

Giving CYP choice on when and where views are given and why this is important however remains supplementary to giving choices on *how* they communicate. CYP cannot express their views without the tools to do so. By using different mediums and forms of alternative communication, CYP are enabled to express their voice through other means past verbal speech.

'sometimes words are just too difficult for them' (EP)

'communication skills, speaking to the child on a level they understand, breaking it down, you need to really have an understanding of their needs and what works best for them' (SO1)

'really have a think about how that young person can express their views in the best way' (EP)

'Whether that's visual communication or whether that's actual tangible communication. And allowing kids to touch and feel and interact with something before they make a choice so they can develop that kind of kinaesthetic understanding of what it is you're asking them to do' (Head teacher).

The most recurring enabling factor identified by the interviewees related to the relationship between the CYP and the adult eliciting views. Often CYP meet professionals once who are unfamiliar to them and therefore they may be hesitant to express their views. Professionals identified the importance of voice being elicited by familiar adults the most prominent enabling factor.

'rapport is important' (EP)

'If you are looking to elicit views on something quite personal, maybe building that relationship first and getting to know that child before kind of going into those questions' (Assistant Head teacher)

'having someone that they're familiar with that can even provide the reassurance, that comfort for them, so a key adult in school' (EP).

This was also referenced frequently in the questionnaire data;

'establishing a rapport does make gathering pupil voice easier' (Trainee EP)

'staff that know them well elicit pupil voice' (Deputy Head Teacher).

The question often led to who would be the professional best suited to elicit voice. LA participants felt the school were better suited to elicit voice due to the opportunities they have to build relationships with pupils on a daily basis, along with their knowledge of the CYP's likes and dislikes.

'the school knows the child a lot better, the school has also built a rapport with the child, they got staff member they trust' (SEND Officer)

'I don't feel I'm the best person to get the views. For example, it was about a month ago, there was a young person who was 14 and didn't actually, said very little to me, but I know that he will speak to a key adult in the school a lot more openly...there are definitely times when I feel like the school could take on a lot more of that role' (EP).

School staff similarly felt that key adults who work with CYP would be best suited to elicit voice, and therefore the enabling factor to capturing voice would be a well-known adult to the CYP being the one to elicit this.

'I sometimes feel that I am not always the appropriate person to elicit views, for example, if they are not choosing to engage with me but they feel more comfortable to give their views to a key adult' (EP)

'I think having someone at the table they feel completely comfortable with. And I think it's much easier with the kids who have been with us a little longer, the ones who just started with us takes a while' (Head teacher).

Participants also commented on skills and qualities required to enable pupil voice;

'having very good communication skills, being quite open...making sure we haven't got leading questions' (Assistant Head teacher)

'patience...and open mindedness' (SO2)

Specific qualities enable professionals to approach CYP with SEN to elicit their views in a way that is sensitive and adapted to their needs. Training was seen as a way for professionals to better their practice, and a lack of training would hinder their ability to elicit views meaningfully; this will be discussed later in the barriers code.

'it comes with practice' (SO1)

'we do quite substantial amount of training at the start of the year to make sure pupils get their voice in there, and that staff actually understand the process involved and what happens after that point' (Head Teacher)

'observing somebody who is experienced' (SENCO).

The enabling factor that resonated the most with a total participation approach was identified as the optimum way to ensure CYP feel comfortable enough to share their views. By allowing complete control over meeting, professionals felt CYP are more likely to express their views if they feel involved in the process.

'having the child do invites to invite whoever they would like to come to the meeting, making decisions maybe on music being played, they also choose pictures to make presentations to show what they have done over the last year, choose whether they want to come in the beginning of the meeting, the middle, the end, or if they want to stay for it all. You know to make decisions on whether parents or whoever sit on the table, if they want it more informal, where they want the meeting, so you know get them to choose everything so they're more likely to engage in that process' (Assistant Head teacher).

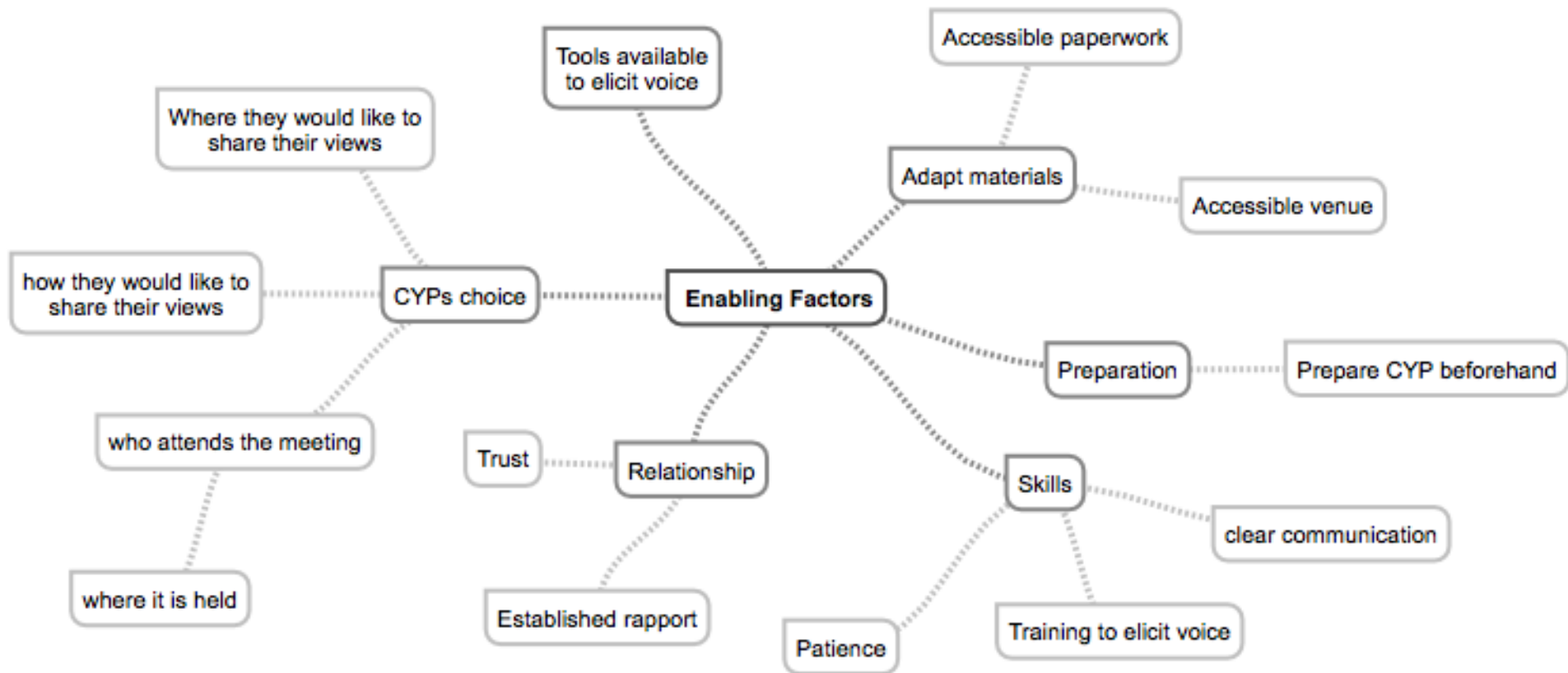


Figure 4.18: The enabling factors identified during the semi-structured interviews

4.5.3 Aims of EHCP assessments and ARs

The next code identified within the data was the aims of EHCP assessments and ARs from the perspective of LA professionals and school staff. The participants felt the aims were to understand the CYP; enable them to feel involved in the process; and to focus on the positives they have achieved throughout the year whilst addressing any problems they may have.

As discussed in the literature review, the role of the LA is to consult the CYP throughout the process (CoP, 9.21). When eliciting the views of CYP, professionals felt the purpose of this is to understand them better.

'ask how they feel, that's question number one' (SENCO)

'get a sense of who they are, and views about themselves, how they would describe themselves' (EP)

'likes and dislikes, how they feel in terms of school, how they feel in terms of the support they receive, and whether they feel like they need any more support' (SO2).

Many professionals referenced key legislation as a policy that drives their involvement when discussing the aims of reviews and meetings.

'looking at their ambitions for the future because that was the very much drive of the code of practice, and thinking about support, long term ambitions in school, support they would need for transport, for activities for daily living, and any choices they were making around family' (SENCO)

'we're always doing the conventions rights of the child' (Assistant Head teacher).

The second aim derived from the analysis was enabling CYP to feel part of the process. There was a shift from focusing on likes and dislikes of the CYP to more concrete forms of participation, where CYP are involved in decision-making and have ownership over meetings around their education.

'if they are capable of being there to be there' (SO2).

'deserve a right to have some ownership about their learning, and their future, and the decisions that are made in regard to them' (Head teacher)

'they should be able to make choices about everything within their lives, for the little ones, the non-verbal ones, they should be able to make choices about

what they play, what they eat, where they go, who they spend time with. I mean life is about choice, and being informed in the choices you make, so whoever it is and whatever stage they're at, it's about giving them choices and allowing them to activate that thought process' (Head teacher).

The meetings aim to be child-centred, where CYP are the focus;

'putting the child first and not what we think better, but what would the child think better for them, and what their interests are and abilities' (Assistant Head teacher)

'reminding people that it's having that young person at the centre where possible, if they do find it overwhelming then getting them to think about what might be helpful for them to be a part of it, and to see it as a meaningful exercise I think, sometimes maybe that is not always seen' (EP).

Many professionals mentioned involving CYP in decision-making processes but capturing their views was referenced as the most prominent way to make CYP feel included in the process.

'it is really important that if we are making decisions for children that we hear their voice' (Assistant Head teacher)

'it is so vital that we capture that...we look for the golden thread throughout the entire process, so we're trying to link it back to the child, make sure it reflects that child's needs, not what someone else think their child needs, and yeah it's very centred around the child in my line of work' (SO2)

And a final aim that participants identified was using the meeting as a platform to discuss the achievements of the CYP. A SENCO described the aims of an AR in two ways. The first includes the CoP description of an AR, where professionals are required to complete certain paperwork within set timeframes.

'box ticking exercise and reviewing the document is one part of it'.

This was also referenced by the SEND officers where the aim is reflective of their job role to ensure the EHCP is up to date given the information.

'it's all about reviewing whether they're in the best placement for it, if they need to maybe be moved to a specialist setting, and making sure the EHC plan is up to date with the most accurate information'.

However, literature has highlighted LAs need to evidence that they have done more the 'box ticking exercise' to elicit pupil voice (Skipp & Hopwood, 2016). The SENCO therefore describes the AR in a second way;

'ideally, we take the opportunity to meet with parents and professionals and talk about the young person, to focus on them for a period of time, all the wonderful things they have done over the past year, and what if anything needs to happen differently for them so that we can continue to support them.'

The reality being that *'not everybody will be happy with the outcome of AR meetings'* (SENCO), but it is important for CYP to express any dissatisfaction from the support they receive in order to have their needs adequately met.

'what's the extra thing that needs to happen in order to meet those needs, to make the provision' (SENCO)

'it's what they need to be supported to reach their potential and its things like do they need that 1:1 support, do they need someone to break things down, do they eventually want to go to university, if so how can we help them with that, or rather how can we ensure that is delivered by the school setting' (SO2).

This aim of ensuring the AR is used as a platform to celebrate the CYP and support them in any difficulties they have suggests a solution-based approach as opposed to the previous mention of *'deficit-based language'* (EP) often used within meetings.

Participants overall were very positive about the aims of EHCP meetings and reviews and many referenced ways to improve the process to make it more child-centred.

'always looking to improve, always making changes' (Assistant Head teacher).

However, some participants acknowledged the barriers in meaningfully capturing views;

'I think more needs to be done' (SO2).

This view is also prevalent within the other codes. However, the end aim for all participants as described within the interviews remains;

'Ultimately, it's making sure we're doing the right thing' (SENCO).

4.5.4 *Methods used to elicit voice*

Within the online-based questionnaire, there was a section on the different methods used to elicit voice by LA professionals and school staff. Participants further

elaborated on this within the interviews and discussed the different methods they employ within their daily practice, whilst commenting on other methods that could be used.

As illustrated in the literature, direct methods are the most frequently used methods due to their ease and simplicity in administration. However, many participants felt this method was not always appropriate given the needs of the CYP they work with and they needed a *'range of options'* (SENCO);

'some of the children don't always understand how to use a Likert type scale when they're giving a response from 1-10' (SENCO).

'through PCR, pupil surveys...communication in print, voting systems...PECS, or symbols, we can film, we use picture, whatever to meet the needs of our child to make sure we're capturing what we know about the child' (Assistant Head teacher).

Many discussed how to access the views of pupils who are non-verbal or have complex needs, which were referenced as methods identified within the literature;

'we can even show video things they don't like so how their body language changes and that helps inform everyone in the meeting what, how they kind of come across when they're not happy and when they're happy, so we've all got the same picture' (Assistant Head teacher)

'talking mats approach...symbol exchange, that could be they are typing on a computer...eye gaze' (SENCO)

'more lengthy observations...drawings...giving me a tour of the school' (EP)

'data, because that always helps why their behaviours bad in certain lessons... that all helps give a pupil voice because its data that clearly shows where they have a lack of interest or they really engaged in things' (Assistant Head teacher)

'PATH...tree of life...getting the young person to sort pictures within two different areas...I basically bring a whole toolkit of different visuals with me' (EP)

'one page profiles' (Head teacher).

There was reference to adapting methods to suit the needs of the CYP, as opposed to using standard templates to elicit views.

'adapt it.... it's not just coming up with a form that everybody can complete, but coming up with the questions that we ask, and then figuring out how young people can answer that' (SENCO).

Other examples suggested by participants included using support services as referenced in the CoP;

'where people were not able to be in the meeting for certain reasons, they could meet with an advocate beforehand have their views shared that way' (Assistant Head teacher).

One approach discussed within the literature referenced visual ARs as a participatory method to ensure person-centred practices during meetings (Hayes, 2004). A SENCO commented on this approach as an ineffective way to elicit voice; despite its appearance as seemingly to be a participatory method, the participant described this as an adult dominating the meeting and viewpoints of CYP.

'there is another way I've seen it done, where somebody comes in and has charts up on the wall and big paper, and nobodies at a table, we're all sitting round in a circle and watching this show, and all the things that are working well, I don't feel that is, necessarily, participatory approach but it, in its worst instance it resembles something that is participatory and isn't really, it is still the person at the front who's doing all the talking and leading it, and expecting responses that are then written up on the wall'.

Professionals did however support the literature of multiple methods as the best way to capture the views efficiently and accurately;

'we kind of do the observations, but hear the observations of others, other professionals that have been involved. So, we try triangulate as much information as possible' (EP)

'it's through the staff that know them really well, but also parents and carers triangulating that, so if we have any other services involved making sure that we're all, we and then you'll see we're actually making the right valid thing if everyone's saying the same things' (Assistant Head teacher).

4.5.5 CYPs interests vs. professionals own

Professionals have a duty to complete assessments within certain timeframes, but they also have a duty to consult with CYP as part of assessments as per the CoP. The interviews highlighted the conflicts professionals face when attempting to remain

pupil-centred during meetings, whilst simultaneously ensuring their professional agenda has been met. The analysis identified the paradox between fulfilling professional duty to the CYP by fuelling their interest's vs fulfilling the professionals' own interest to ensure paperwork is complete and deadlines are met.

This includes the '*box ticking exercise*' of an AR, where involving others in this process can slow it down;

'the quickest way is to do it yourself and not consult with anyone' (SENCO).

However, professionals also are aware of the importance of eliciting participation in CYP and many referenced focusing on the CYPs interests over their own professional interest.

'the life of the school is the young people in it, and if we're doing things without consulting them, or we're making choices about their life without listening to what they feel is important, then we're not acting in their interest, we're acting in our own interest' (SENCO).

Quite often, ARs are used as a way to showcase the progress made by the CYP, along with the support that professionals have put in place. However, this does not always mean positive comments will be made; an AR should also serve as a platform to discuss difficulties the CYP may experience and ways to overcome this.

'the default is you're expecting are that things are going well, are you happy in school – yes. And if you don't get that answer, if you don't get the answer you're expecting, then what's the follow up question then. What's the exploration?' (SENCO)

'not everybody will be happy with the outcome of AR meetings' (SENCO)

Professionals may struggle to accept a CYPs views during meetings, as it may not match their professional interest, but acknowledgment of this means they are aware of this difficulty and attempting to remain pupil-centred within their practice.

'be open to the answers you don't expect' (SENCO)

'you've got to be open to the discussion, you have to in some ways let the child lead it, so you can't just try to get the answer you want' (SO2).

The priority remains to listen to the views of CYP and not make assumptions that they are content with all aspects of their life and support that has been put into place. Professionals need to ensure all views, whether positive or negative, are captured.

'if it's not working then its best to capture their voice saying it's not working, we might think something is more important for them and they might see something else that's more important, so I think it's really important that if we are making decisions for children that we hear their voice' (SENCO).

4.5.6 Meaningless participation

The next code identified by participants acknowledged situations where CYP's participation in meetings are often tokenistic and conversations are *'a description of children's behaviour, and their preferences'* (SENCO), which as identified in the literature as not equivalent to enabling their voice (Pearlman & Michaels, 2019).

This notion that views are not gained in a meaningful way was acknowledged by professionals, where CYP are basing their answers on what they feel is expected by an adult, as opposed to their actual views.

'preference to say yes' (SENCO)

'said what he thought I wanted to hear' (SEND Officer)

When CYP do express their views in meetings, professionals felt these were not representative of how they really feel;

'they are nodding and going along with it, and it doesn't necessarily represent their views'

'For some children, happy is always the right answer. So, you're asking them how they feel about something, and they want to say they're happy about it, even though you might know, they don't understand the question or they're not happy about it' (SENCO).

CYP at times would attend meetings but not show understanding of the content, and therefore professionals deemed this as a form of meaningless participation.

'they would participate in it, but not really have a concept of what is going on and the significance of things' (SENCO)

'they didn't really understand a lot of what was going on, but they still got involved' (SO2).

The qualitative data suggested a reason why participating meaningfully may be difficult for them;

'when pupils have had limited experience of their views being meaningfully sought in school and at home' (Trainee EP).

Participants also felt the meaningless participation in meetings led to the EHCP becoming meaningless;

'when you get the EHCP, the views are quite basic...doesn't necessarily give you an idea of who they are, what they want' (SENCO).

This suggests when assessments or ARs are held, the views captured are minimal and this is translated into the EHCP, which no longer serves to be a child-centred document.

4.5.7 *Involvement of other professionals*

The interviewees identified using other professionals to support in their approach to eliciting voice. Many of the participants commented on collaborative approaches with other professionals to enable them to elicit voice more effectively, particularly those with an expertise in different roles.

'it's down to the people that know them very well, it's working with the professionals' (Assistant Head teacher)

'school staff, parents and the EP' (SO1)

'we're drawing on our support from our colleagues who are in social care, or in educational psychology service, if there are strategies that they've got, how do they talk to young people?' (SENCO).

Participants from the school sample often referenced utilising the expertise of a SALT to support with communication methods, as they were considered to be the experts in this field;

'particularly experienced in gaining children's views, it could be that we are talking to a speech and language therapist about the way we are asking for those views' (SENCO)

'we have a speech and language therapist on staff...making sure the pupils are involved in understanding how to communicate with us and how we should communicate with them' (Head teacher).

However, as previously discussed, having multiple professional involvement is not always beneficial for the CYP.

There was also reference to professionals running training on how to elicit views and sharing best practice, which is an encouraging way of professionals getting involved without causing undue anxiety for CYP.

'we have our EPs who will go out and they will kind of give interventions and so on, and some of that is how to capture the child's views....our speech and language therapist, they have also been really good in that, they sometimes deliver intervention again focus in capturing views, and we also, I don't know if any other local authority does it, but we have we call DSPL, which is delivering service providers or something, and it's like little groups of schools that come together and they share common practice and they share good practice, and they have meetings where they will discuss that. We also have cluster meetings where that is shared as well. So, a lot of is about kind of sharing it and doing that professional development training as well' (SO2).

4.5.8 Bureaucracy

This code was identified as a recurrent message throughout interviews due to the paradox between policy requirements of the CoP against the impracticality of professionals carrying out person-centred approaches due to the sheer workload.

'practicalities of it, we have 185 children on roll...we need a room, we need the people, we're tight on resources to make sure that happens' (SENCO)

'it's instinctual now, we just do things because we know we need to meet something' (SO2).

The bureaucratic process of EHCP assessments and ARs often result in professionals feeling pressurised to complete tasks within a timeframe, which negatively hinders the involvement of the CYP.

'the purpose is, a statutory requirement that we review the outcomes, the necessary provision, at least once a year. That's the easy bit, that's a box ticking exercise, and it's making sure the document is updated' (SENCO).

However, the difficulty is ensuring meaningful participation in these reviews.

'It shouldn't just be a sort of tick box exercise, it should be really thinking about that year in terms of support that's been in place and what everybody feels might need to change...having that young person understand that process rather than a kind of tick box exercise, you know loads of adults sitting around the table' (EP).

Schools also felt eliciting views becomes repetitive for CYP, as discussed above, and the constant narrative of expressing their views can become tedious;

'when they moved to a new setting, they kind of have to get to know them all over again because the EHCP is not up to date, and that's not our fault. It's down to the LA' (Assistant Head teacher).

Therefore, the AR process of ensuring information is updated and new outcomes are set may be a tedious and bureaucratic part of the process, however it is the only way to ensure the EHCP is reflect of the CYP, including their views.

Similarly, the requirement to complete assessments within set timeframes can mean professionals don't have much time to explain the process to CYP and ensure they remain at the centre throughout, despite this being expressed within the CoP.

'the EHC often feels it is done to the CYP' (EP)

The culture of the LA or a school may aim to reflect person-centred values and practices, however the reality is the workload and strain on these establishments inhibits their ability to focus purely on ensuring a person-centred process throughout.

'In the school, we want to be a place that listens to children, takes their concerns seriously, acts on things that are raised, and people who are supporting them in the choices that they are making' (SENCO).

4.5.9 Lack of consulting the CYP

Despite the recognised enabling factors, a code identified by the professionals was the lack of consultation shown by LAs and schools during the process. LA professionals found a lack of consultation by other professionals around them during EHCP assessment and meetings.

'what I've found, so I've worked in two boroughs now and what I found is there is a lack of gaining the voice of the child sometimes' (SO1)

'the whole meeting people are talking about the child as if they're not there...normally they're not at attendance in the AR' (SO2).

Similarly, schools explained how CYP are not always involved in ARs due to their assumed level of cognition, which was a code highlighted earlier around the barriers of participation for CYP.

'don't tend to involve children who are non-verbal, or who don't understand the process of the meeting, because again they would participate in it, but not really have a concept of what is going on' (SENCO).

Professionals also commented on practices and decisions made without the CYP;

'we did a consultation with the staff, in fairness we didn't do that with the students, we didn't open it up what they wanted from, what they wanted to tell us about' (SENCO).

Despite professional rhetoric to include the views of CYP and promote a child-centred approach, this is not always possible for a variety of reasons. Professionals tend to make the judgment on if they feel the CYP would benefit from being involved in meetings or expressing their views at that point.

'sometimes its including the child sometimes it's not including the child, again because of the spectrum around children, you know it's very very different for each child' (Assistant Head teacher).

4.5.10 Improvements

The final code identified within the interviews related to identified ways professionals felt participation could be improved. Despite this being the least referenced code within the interviews, there were differences in both samples; the LA felt more resources and time could help improve their approach, whilst the school professionals felt changing their approach could help promote meaningful engagement in meetings.

As identified, the sheer workload of LA professionals makes it difficult for them to develop meaningful relationships with CYP and elicit pupil voice effectively within their given timescales.

'making time to meet the children instead of reports' (SO1)

'Obviously an ideal would be that we would know the young person over time, or we would observe over time, but that's just not possible with the timescales and things' (EP).

LA professionals felt more investment in effectively capturing voice would be beneficial to the service, however unsure how that could be put into practice given the nature of the role.

'more work needs to go into capturing the voice as efficiently as we could, at this time I'm not sure how that could be done, just in terms of feasible, but I would like it to be improved' (SO1).

The question being how LAs could prioritise capturing views how this could be done in a feasible way that factors in the challenges faced by the LA.

'If the LA did bring something new out to capture the views, I think it would be great, because I don't think it's something we have at the moment, because everybody is using different methods, every LA works differently from what I can see as well... it needs to work for everybody, not just be set for one LA where that LA might deal with it well' (SO1).

LAs therefore would like to see improvements in the way pupils are consulted with, whilst managing the practicalities of the role. They also require methods that can be adapted to each LA and therefore factoring in the individual differences between LA practice.

Schools also discussed improvements in pupil consultation;

'I would definitely like to see more ownership of that meeting from the child, and the professionals and the parents able to step back, I think that's something we'd like to be better at, something I'd like to look at in the future but we're just not there yet' (Head teacher).

Many schools mentioned the improvements they have made in their practice or suggestions of how they could alter their existing practice to enable higher levels of participation.

'decorating a room to be specific to PCRs...reviewing our paperwork to make sure we're updating it correctly' (Assistant Head teacher)

'there's a clear agenda and structure to it, there's no reason that couldn't be shared with the high functioning kids and they could lead that meeting' (Head teacher).

Schools identified however that participation would vary based on the needs of the CYP and therefore the improvements would need to be apt to their level of need.

'the low functioning, again it's about pupil voice beforehand' (Head Teacher).

There was less discussion on how PCP meetings could improve to allow for meaningful participation for CYP who are non-verbal, but there was discussion on more work needed to be done.

'Some of the best reports I've read have been the ones where they've offered the child the opportunity to show their views in a different way that's not verbal, and I think that really needs to be encouraged more, because that has been really helpful' (SO2).

Professionals did express a consistent narrative that they wished to improve practice to ensure person-centred approaches.

'always looking to improve, always making changes' (Assistant Head teacher).

4.6 Summary of findings from the interviews

The interview data explored the views professionals expressed within the questionnaire in further depth, whilst exploring additional opinions and beliefs around pupil voice.

Professionals most frequently referenced the barriers they face when eliciting voice, which were consistent with the barriers identified within the literature. The LA professionals were particularly attuned to the barriers in capturing voice and reported capacity as a significant barrier within their professional role. Both samples showed an awareness of the barriers present to CYP when attempting to elicit their voice, yet there was a clear professional rhetoric that capturing the voice is integral and should be part of the EHCP and AR process. The school professionals highlighted particular examples of enabling the voice and had methods and tools available to support this within their role.

The data also showed professional acknowledgement that CYPs views are not always captured as part of the process, and when they are, this is often superficially

elicited and not representative of what CYP really feel. All professionals felt improvements were needed in eliciting voice within their role, however were unsure what that could be. This recurrent message of including the voice of CYP was seen in both samples and reinforced the professional need for guidance on how to capture views both practically, and meaningfully.

4.7 Summary of the findings from Phase One

The data analysis of the interviews highlighted a range of views and opinions, where some viewpoints were directly in contrast to the opinions expressed within the interviews. The collective findings from both the questionnaire and interviews provided insight into how professionals within LAs and schools elicit the voice of CYP with SEND during EHCP assessments and ARs, and therefore successfully addressed the first research aim.

The methods used within phase one narrowed down what views professionals aim to elicit from CYP and to what extent they will go to get these views as part of the process. The statistical analysis showed a relationship between perceived levels of confidence in eliciting voice and the extent the professional would go to elicit voice; a positive correlation was found in both samples between higher self-efficacy scores and participants making more of an effort to elicit voice. Professionals also utilise a range of methods to elicit voice, which was more prominently expressed in certain roles. The relationship between role within an LA and school, and the approach on pupil voice will be discussed in depth within the discussion chapter.

Both groups of professionals identified enabling factors that can support a CYP in expressing their views, which was predominately recognised within the school professionals. However, the most noteworthy analysis within the questionnaire and interviews was the barriers to capturing voice. Phase one successfully identified the barriers within the field; both the barriers present in CYP that inhibit their ability to meaningfully express their views, and the barriers present in professionals that impede on their ability to meaningfully elicit the views of CYP within their role.

Chapter 5: Findings from Phase Two

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter I present the findings from the data analysis of Phase two of the study, which consisted of eliciting the opinions of a group of expert panellists via the Delphi Method. As discussed in the methodology chapter, all panellists were from one local area in England and were chosen based on pre-agreed criteria. The characteristics of the panellists can be found in table 3.6.

The chapter begins by detailing the analysis within each round of the Delphi method by providing statistical analysis carried out on the quantitative findings, and content analysis carried out on the qualitative data. Both the qualitative and quantitative findings are discussed and given equal weight. Although the findings from each round are discussed in separate sections, the analysis will begin to combine the findings from each round to determine the level of consensus achieved via the Delphi method. The criteria for achieving consensus was discussed in the methodology chapter.

The findings produced a document of good practice co-produced with both LA professionals and specialist teaching staff, which is discussed within the latter part of this chapter. The interpretation and discussion of the findings take place in chapter 6.

5.2 Findings from the Delphi Method

In a Delphi study, analysis is conducted iteratively throughout the process, as data must be analysed after each round in order to inform the questionnaire developed for subsequent waves of the study (Turoff, 1970). Literature has identified that reporting on each round separately illustrates the array of themes generated in round one, and the strength of support for each subsequent round (Holey et al, 2007; Hsu & Sandford, 2007). Findings should be summarised from each round and how the researcher interprets the results is crucial for the reader to understand how the strength of consensus has been interpreted (Hasson, Keeney & McKenna, 2000). The findings will now be discussed within each round of the Delphi method.

5.2.1 Analysis of Round One

In round one, panellists were presented with 13 open-ended questions to gather their opinions around pupil voice. As described in the methodology chapter, the qualitative data was coded into five identified themes. The responses from round one resulted in 92 items emerging as key concepts within the five themes; table 5.1 shows the percentage of mentions of each theme in order of frequency within the full set of data by all participants.

The table shows the most frequently mentioned theme by all participants was around *'how to deal with limits to participation'*, whilst the least mentioned theme was *'key practices and conditions in capturing voice'*. It is important to note that some statements can be interpreted as corresponding to more than one theme.

Round 1 (N = 8)	
Theme	Percentage of mentions
How to deal with limits of participation	29.3%
Barriers	25%
Meaningful participation	17.4%
Enabling factors	17.4%
Key practices and conditions in capturing voice	10.9%

Table 5.1: Percentage of mentions for each theme in round one

This data was then re-coded and grouped together to condense the findings into similar or identical practices. This then generated the final list of practices for the purpose of round two, which consisted of 32 items for all five themes (between 5-8 items per theme) and contained examples to illustrate each practice (Appendix 14). Content analysis was used to examine the qualitative findings in round one where key words and phrases were highlighted within each theme. At this point within the Delphi method, items of agreement and disagreement are identified. Each theme will

now be discussed in terms of the analysis and how items were selected for round two. The themes are discussed in order the questions were given to panellists.

(i) *Meaningful participation*

There was some consensus on the way 'meaningful participation' was defined by panellists. All panellists used similar wording and phrases when defining what meaningful participation looks like;

'views are listened to and taken into account' (EP2)

'feel at the centre of the process and that their voice is a vital part of that process' (Assistant SENCO)

'actively involved in all professional assessments, able to share their views...attend the meetings, help in setting targets, share what is/isn't going well, hopes for the future etc.' (SO2)

'shared ownership and engagement in the plan to make sure that it is relevant to them' (Advisory Teacher)

'a child should feel listened to and their opinion valued and respected...they should see change happening as a result, and if this is not possible, explained clearly to the child why not' (SENCO)

'understands and feels involved in the process. Where they have felt comfortable and at ease enough to be able to talk openly about their views and what they think supports them best. Where they have had a say in the decisions that are being made' (SO1).

These items were merged to develop items for round two based on CYP expressing their likes and dislikes, being listened to and understanding the process. Panellists felt the process should *'reflect meaning for that individual child'* (EP1), and the EHCP/AR process should be person-centred throughout.

'I believe the assessment/review process is key for these CYP...if assessments weren't complete or reviewed our children would not exceed in the way they have' (FSW)

'it is meaningful in the sense that it is a big point in their life where there's the opportunity for them to receive support that will break down the barrier to their learning' (SO1)

'pupils need to participate fully in decisions about their EHCP/AR and is a key part of the SEND code of practice' (Assistant SENCO).

Panellists also reflected on what does not constitute as meaningful participation;

'future focused questions around what they would like to change/achieve in their lives are essential. Questions about likes/dislikes are not very meaningful in my opinion' (EP1).

A majority of panellists listed a CYP expressing their likes and dislikes as a way to show participation, hence it was included as an item within round two, however one panellist did not agree that this shows meaningful participation. An item around *'future-focused questions'* was added to exemplify the opinion of this panellist.

Although not explicitly asked, panellists provided examples to showcase how they try to make the EHCP and AR process meaningful during their daily role;

'I try make this meaningful by catering what I am doing to the YP e.g. drafting meeting with a Y1 who loves dinosaurs, we did dinosaur colouring/drawing which encouraged him to talk' (SO2)

'when we can, we try to make it meaningful for the CYP' (EP2).

There was reference to meaningful participation being dependent on level of understanding of the process, which links to the themes of 'barriers' that will be discussed further below.

'the young person only realises how meaningful it was if they understand the process somewhat' (SO1)

However, one panellist disagreed and felt CYP do understand the process and therefore not the barrier that prevents them from meaningfully engaging, rather it is not knowing how to express their views;

'I think [CYP] understand the 'process' but don't know how to make their views known' (Advisory Teacher).

Despite this, all panellists agreed the benefits of CYP participating within the process and felt they should *'be involved as much as circumstances allow'* (SO2).

'I have seen CYP fully understand the process and why their views are asked for, and they have always responded with it's for my education and to make sure I am getting the best one for me- which is a spot-on representation of the benefits of asking them' (FSW).

There seemed to be mixed opinions as to what constitutes meaningful participation. The items therefore were based on varying opinions and aimed to encapsulate all the views expressed by panellists. The analysis highlighted five items to use within

round two, with examples of phrases produced by the panellists. Therefore, ranking for question 1 was on a five-point scale, where 1 was most important and 5 was least important.

(ii) *Key practices and conditions in capturing voice*

During analysis, there were fewer mentions in reference to this theme, as seen in table 5.1 above, where some panellists did not reference any key practices and conditions in capturing voice within round one. The possible reasons for this are discussed within chapter 6.

Panellists felt key practices and conditions that were needed in order to capture voice included the relationship with the CYP, the environment in which the views are captured, explaining the process to CYP and professionals viewing the capturing of voice as an essential part of the process.

The relationship and atmosphere in which professionals aim to elicit views should support the CYP to feel comfortable enough to share their views.

'good rapport with CYP' (EP2)

'pupils should always be made to feel welcome' (SENCO)

'understand why they are giving their views' (Assistant SENCO).

The physical environment was also important as a condition to allow CYP to share their views in a meaningful way, this included logistics such as a *'private room'* (EP2) or involving other adults to make *'CYP to feel safe and relaxed'* (EP2). Panellists also mentioned technology and organising appropriate facilities to allow professionals to capture voice.

'IT equipment...facilities to share video/recording' (SENCO)

'acceptable way of recording the information, some guidance on alternative methods of gathering the views...and motivate them to participate' (Advisory Teacher).

The priority should be on capturing the views within an assessment and viewing this as part of the process, not something additional or optional. Panellists felt by making this a priority within the assessment process, the voice of CYP would always be captured.

'Think of meeting with the YP as part of the assessment to be part of the process, essential' (SO2).

The analysis highlighted five items to use within round two, with examples of words and phrases used by the panellists. Ranking for question 2 was also on a five-point scale.

(iii) Enabling factors

Previously, within the interviews, enabling factors were frequently identified by professionals, particularly within the school sample. Panellists shared similar factors as seen in phase one that support their role to capture the voice. This included using appropriate methods differentiated to the needs of the CYP.

'use visual communication strips for CYP who have verbal communication difficulties, large print for children with VI' (Advisory Teacher)

'using a few different approaches to gain their views' (EP2)

'knowledge of how best to communicate' (SO1).

The relationship between the CYP and adult asking their views was also identified as a crucial factor to elicit meaningful participation. This reiterates what has been identified within the literature and phase one of this study of identifying the best person to elicit the voice of CYP.

'have people in the room that know the child well and can advocate from their perspective' (EP1)

'show an interest in their hobbies' (SO1)

'trusted adult working with the CYP are ideal to capture views and opinions' (Assistant SENCO).

'who else can capture their voice' (EP1).

Interestingly, a view raised by a panellist commented on professional relationships with each other that can foster a calm environment for CYP; much of the focus has been on the relationship with the CYP or the parent and so this provided a unique viewpoint that had not been previously considered.

'professionals to have good relationships with each other in order for the child to feel in a safe environment to share how they feel' (FSW).

Other enabling factors included '*simplified language*' within paperwork and organisation of meetings;

'great deal of planning, organisation and timely approach to ensure the CYP is kept at the centre' (Assistant SENCO).

Panellists also felt it was important to assess whether CYP were happy with the content and was an identified enabling factor that was included within round two.

'checking with them that what I have written is right' (EP2)

'letting them know why you are there instead of being another face at the table' (SO1)

The enabling factors were condensed to seven items within the second questionnaire to encapsulate the various suggestions from panellists.

(iv) *Barriers*

The barriers in eliciting voice were a focal point of the questionnaire and so round one aimed to generate a list of barriers as perceived by the expert panellists. They were asked to list 1-5 barriers they felt hinder the ability to capture views, and which they felt was most significant. Panellists reported the following barriers in order of frequency;

1. '*Language ability*' (EP1)
2. '*Time restraints*' (EP2)
3. '*Work capacity and lack of resources*' (SO1)
4. '*Lack of motivation*' (SENCO)
5. '*Capacity to understand*' (Advisory Teacher)
6. '*Schools are parents sharing what they think their views are*' (SO2)
7. '*Anxiety*' (Assistant SENCO)
8. '*Lack of knowledge from professionals*' (Advisory Teacher)
9. '*Not understanding the importance of sharing their views*' (SENCO)

These barriers were then combined where possible and were listed within round two as seven items.

Panellist expanded on their views on the barriers, and many agreed with previous findings within phase one that there is a lack of consultation within EHCP assessments and ARs.

'I think that a very large percentage of reviews and assessments are held without the input of the CYP...I am always shocked by the lack of participation and views of the CYP' (Advisory teacher).

'it's very difficult to keep their views central amid all professionals, schools, parents' views and reports' (SO2).

The *'bureaucratic'* process of the EHCP assessment often means CYP views are not made a priority within the process and there were references to the *'box-ticking'* exercise that was elicited within the interviews and questionnaire data.

However, one panellist disagreed with this and felt professionals try to overcome barriers present to them to keep CYP at the centre, which suggests some level of disagreement between panellists within round one.

'professionals do make time even with the limits time they have, professionals go over and beyond for their CYP' (FSW).

(v) *How to deal with limits to participation*

This theme was most frequently mentioned within round one, as seen in table 5.1 above. Panellists had many suggestions on how to overcome the barriers mentioned above. Some included general statements such as, *'some of the issues could be overcome if I had more time with the child'* (EP2). However, many included practical suggestions such as the use of technology, training, building relationships and developing a *'streamlined system to prevent continuously asking same questions'* (SO2).

'More virtual options for sharing views...we should be offering multiple opportunities to gather their views, not just one day' (SO2)

'Use technology. Facetime/videos/have a template of discussion topics that people can use and capture the answers from the CYP' (Advisory Teacher)

'Professionals need to feel confident and they need a range of resources at their disposal' (EP1)

'Writing a letter to the CYP beforehand [and] afterwards' (EP2)

'Ask an adult that the pupil has a positive relationship with' (SENCO)

'Child voice should be central. It should be prioritised and captured first so that if capacity means up cannot complete the rest of the assessment the voice is still the primary information' (EP1).

Panellists felt the importance of professionals to take responsibility to explain the process of assessments to CYP and why their voice is integral, after all *'how would they know if it's never been explained?'* (SO2). Although there was understanding that barriers cannot always be alleviated, panellists felt *'planning is key'* (FSW) to overcome the identified limits to eliciting voice.

'Sometimes it is inevitable that there is no possibility of them being able to access the meeting, but attempts should always be made to try' (Advisory Teacher).

By identifying the barriers, they were able to provide suggestions for improving practice. For example, an officer found a barrier to eliciting voice due to resources;

'LAs only have one views form, this is not friendly to all ages and needs' (SO2).

This was also raised by another panellist who provided a solution to overcome this;

'Templates/proforma/materials that can be used by all' (Advisory Teacher).

Therefore, there seemed to be a level of agreement between panellists on how to overcome the limitations to participation. Eight items were used within round two to encapsulate the views of the expert panel.

5.2.2 Analysis of Round Two

In the second round, panellists were given five questions relating to the five themes, which contained a list of practices identified in round one in alphabetical order, an example question can be seen in table 3.8. They were asked to rate in order of perceived importance or significance, where a score of '1' indicated the highest score and therefore perceived as the most important/significant factor.

A detailed statistical analysis will now be discussed for each question within the Delphi method.

(i) *Meaningful participation*

The first question asked panellists to rate the characteristics that contribute towards ‘meaningful participation’ in order of importance. Table 5.2 shows the descriptive statistics for the theme of meaningful participation; including the mean score, standard deviation (rounded to two decimal points), median and mode of each item.

Meaningful Participation	Mean	S.D.	Median	Mode	Range
CYPS views are listened to	2	0.93	2	1 & 3	1-3
CYP feels comfortable to talk openly	2.25	1.39	2	1	1-5
CYP understands and feels involved in the process	2.63	1.30	2.5	4	1-4
CYP express their likes and dislikes	3.63	1.19	4	4	2-5
Questions are future focused on what they would like to achieve or change	4.5	0.76	5	5	3-5

Table 5.2: Descriptive statistics for questions on ‘Meaningful participation’ in round two

The item with the lowest mean score (highest level of importance) of ‘2’ was ‘*CYPs views are listened to*’, with a relatively low S.D (0.93), indicating scores were close to the mean. This shows this item was perceived to be most important by panellists when considering meaningful participation. However, the item ‘*CYP feels comfortable to talk openly*’ had a modal value of 1, which was the most frequently selected ranking and therefore suggesting majority of panellists felt this item was the most important factor defining meaningful participation. The top two items also had a median score of 2 and modal values of 1, indicating they were frequently chosen by panellists.

The item with the highest mean, and therefore considering to be least important within the respective list was ‘*questions are future focused on what they would like to*

do or achieve’; the median and mode score was also 5 suggesting majority of panellists chose this as the least important item. Therefore, a degree of consensus already seems to be apparent within the theme of meaningful participation where panellists were clear in items they deemed to be most important (M = 2, SD = 0.93) and least important (M = 4.5, SD = 0.76).

However, the statistical degree of consensus between panellists needs to be ascertained at this point. A test of Kendall’s coefficient of concordance was carried out and showed a level of consensus had been agreed in round two for the first question (W = 0.434, N=8, p < 0.08), however not at level of statistical significance. The coefficient of concordance indicates a weak to moderate agreement between panellists on the characteristics that contribute to meaningful participation.

(ii) *Key practices and conditions in capturing voice*

The second question asked panellists to rate the characteristics that contribute towards ‘key practices and conditions in capturing voice’ in order of importance. Table 5.3 shows the descriptive statistics for this theme; including the mean score, standard deviation (rounded to two decimal points), median and mode of each item.

The item with the lowest mean score (1.63) was ‘*CYP feels safe*’, which also had a low SD (0.74) and a modal value of 1, and median of 1.5. This suggests that majority of panellists scored this item as the most important factor. However, the item ‘*follow guidance on how to gather views*’ also had a modal value of 1 and median value of 2, and therefore some panellists ranked this practice as most important.

Key Practices and Conditions in Capturing Voice	Mean	S.D.	Median	Mode	Range
CYP feels safe	1.63	0.74	1.5	1	1-3
Build rapport with the CYP	2.38	0.52	2	2	2-3
Follow guidance on how to gather views	2.75	1.58	3	1	1-5
Prioritise capturing views first in any assessments	3.5	1.20	4	4	1-5
IT equipment needed to facilitate getting their voice	4.75	0.46	5	5	4-5

Table 5.3: Descriptive statistics for questions on ‘Key practice and conditions in capturing voice’ in round two

The item that was ranked as least important was *'IT equipment needed to facilitate getting their voice'* (M = 4.75, SD = 0.46). The low S.D and median and modal value of 5 suggests that this was ranked as least important by majority of the panellists.

A test of Kendall's coefficient of concordance was carried out and showed a level of consensus had been agreed in round two for the second question, and therefore we can reject the null hypothesis due to the high level of statistical significance (W = 0.566, N=8, p < 0.001). The coefficient of concordance indicates moderate agreement between panellists on the characteristics that depict key characteristics and conditions in capturing voice.

(iii) *Enabling factors*

The third question asked panellists to rate the characteristics that contribute towards 'enabling factors' in order of importance. Table 5.4 shows the descriptive statistics for this theme; including the mean score, standard deviation (rounded to two decimal points), median and mode of each item. The item with the lowest mean score was *'doing work before meeting the CYP'*, which also had a modal value of 1 and median value of 2. There was a relatively high S.D. (1.77) that suggest variance in the ranking order within this theme.

Enabling Factors	Mean	S.D.	Median	Mode	Range
Doing work before meeting the CYP	2.5	1.77	2	1	1-6
Prioritise getting views	2.63	1.60	2	2	1-5
Have methods available to use	3.13	1.13	3	2	2-5
Have familiar and trusted staff	3.5	1.77	4	4	1-6
Check CYP is happy with what you have written	4.25	1.75	5	5	1-6
Simplified language in paperwork	5.13	1.46	5	4, 5 & 7	3-7
Capture views over time	6.75	0.46	7	7	6-7

Table 5.4: Descriptive statistics for questions on 'Enabling factors' in round two

The item with the highest mean and therefore considered to be the least significant enabling factor was *'capturing views over time'* (M=6.75, SD= 0.46), with a median

and modal value of 7. This suggests that majority of panellists agreed this factor was the least important in respect to the overall list.

A test of Kendall's coefficient of concordance was carried out and showed a level of consensus had been agreed in round two for the third question, and therefore we can reject the null hypothesis due to the high level of statistical significance ($W = 0.498, N=8, p < 0.001$). The coefficient of concordance indicates moderate agreement between panellists on the identified enabling factors that support professionals in eliciting voice.

(iv) *Barriers*

The fourth question asked panellists to rate the characteristics that contribute towards 'barriers' in order of significance. Table 5.5 shows the descriptive statistics for this theme; including the mean score, standard deviation (rounded to two decimal points), median and mode of each item. There was a considerable level of variance in this question, as no modal answer showed the value of 1. The barriers with the lowest mean score was '*CYPs language and cognitive ability*', however had a relatively high S.D. (1.19) and a median and modal value of 3. The barriers '*CYPs anxieties and fears*' had a modal value of 2, suggesting majority of panellists ranked this as one of the most significant barriers. There were no items with a median value of 2.25 or less as suggested by Hsu & Sandford (2007).

Barriers	Mean	S.D.	Median	Mode	Range
CYPs language and cognitive ability	2.63	1.19	3	3	1-4
CYPs anxieties and fears	3.13	1.89	2.5	2	1-6
CYPs understanding of assessments	3.5	1.60	3	3	2-7
Gatekeepers	3.75	2.19	4.5	5	1-7
Limited time to elicit views	4.38	2.33	5	6	1-7
Pupils reluctance to engage	4.75	2.19	5	5	1-7
Lack of resources	5.88	1.13	6	7	4-7

Table 5.5: Descriptive statistics for questions on 'Barriers' in round two

The item with the highest mean and therefore considered to be the least significant enabling factor was '*lack of resources*' (M=5.88, S.D 1.13), with a modal value of 7 and median of 6. This suggests that majority of panellists felt this was the least significant barrier they face when attempting to capture views.

A test of Kendall's coefficient of concordance was carried out and showed a level of consensus had been agreed in round two for the fourth question, and therefore we can reject the null hypothesis due to the high level of statistical significance (W = 0.498, N=8, p < 0.001). The coefficient of concordance indicates moderate agreement between panellists on the identified barriers that inhibit a professionals' ability to successfully elicit voice.

(v) *How to deal with limits to participation*

The fifth and final question asked panellists to rate the characteristics that contribute towards 'how to deal with limits to participation' in order of importance. Table 5.6 shows the descriptive statistics for this theme; including the mean score, standard deviation (rounded to two decimal points), median and mode of each item. Again there was a considerable level of variance in this question. The item with the lowest mean score was '*creative methods*', however had a relatively high S.D. (1.41) and a modal value of 1 and 3, therefore not all panellists felt this was the most important way to deal with limits to participation.

How to deal with limits to participation	Mean	S.D.	Median	Mode	Range
Creative methods	2.38	1.41	2.5	1 & 3	1-5
Ask adults who know them best	3.75	2.12	4.5	1, 5 & 6	1-6
Child friendly assessment or paperwork to be made available	3.88	2.10	3.5	2	2-8
Prioritise capturing views first in an assessment	4	2.20	3.5	3 & 7	1-7
Share best practice	4.38	2.97	4	1, 4 & 8	1-8
Schools to capture voice throughout the year	5.5	1.77	5.5	4 & 7	3-8
Transparency	5.75	2.25	6.5	7 & 8	2-8
Decision-making	6.25	1.16	6	6	4-8

Table 5.6: Descriptive statistics for questions on 'How to deal with limits to participation' in round two

The item with the highest mean and therefore considered to be the least important way to deal with limits to participation was '*decision-making*' (M=6.25, SD= 1.16). Many other items had a high modal value which suggests this was most frequently ranked as least important, for example the item '*transparency*' had a median value of 6.5 and modal value of 7 and 8.

A test of Kendall's coefficient of concordance was carried out and showed a level of consensus had been agreed in round two for the fifth question, and therefore we can reject the null hypothesis due to the high level of statistical significance ($W = 0.498$, $N=8$, $p < 0.001$). The coefficient of concordance indicates moderate agreement between panellists on the characteristics identified as ways to deal with limits to participation.

5.2.3 *Analysis of Round Three*

In the third and final round, panellists were given the top 3 rankings for each question in order of importance based on group consensus. They were asked to rate these practices again in order of perceived importance or significance, where a score of '1' indicated the highest score and therefore perceived as the most important/significant factor, and '3' as the least important/significant.

Panellists were also asked to give an example for how each item could be successfully implemented in practice; they could provide either a real-life example or an ideal example. Participants were asked this for each item within each theme, with the aim being to generate actionable solutions to the perceived limitations. It is important to note that at this point, the information was anonymous to the researcher. A detailed analysis of both the quantitative and qualitative data will now be discussed for each question within the Delphi method.

(i) *Meaningful participation*

The top three characteristics for 'meaningful participation' was given to panellists, and they were asked to rank in order of importance. Table 5.7 shows the descriptive

statistics for the theme of meaningful participation; including the mean score, standard deviation (rounded to two decimal points), median and mode of each item.

Meaningful Participation	Mean	S.D.	Median	Mode
CYPs views are listened to	1.38	0.52	1	1
CYP understands and feels involved in the process	2.25	0.71	2	2
CYP feels comfortable to talk openly	2.38	0.91	3	3

Table 5.7: Descriptive statistics for questions on ‘Meaningful participation’ in round three

The item with the lowest mean score remained the same as the previous round; ‘CYPs views are listened to’ (M=1.38, SD=0.52). This had a modal and median value of ‘1’, suggesting this was most frequently chosen as the most important item relating to meaningful participation by panellists.

The item with the highest mean, and therefore considered to be the least important within the respective list was ‘CYP feels comfortable to talk openly’ (M=2.38, SD=0.91); the median and mode score was also 3 suggesting majority of panellists chose this as the least important item.

Panellists were asked to provide an example of how each item could be implemented within their daily role using either a real-life scenario or an ideal example. Panellists showed common agreement that the practical solution to ensuring the CYPs are listened to within EHCP/AR meetings was to include their views regardless ‘if others disagree’. Majority of panellists mentioned views should be clear within the paperwork;

‘they see them written in the paperwork and spoken about in the meeting’

‘CYPs views are represented in full at the start of the EHCP/advice and then in each section where it is relevant’

‘exact wording they have explained to you’

The 'views [are] incorporated in the targets, outcomes' for the CYP and panel members felt outcomes should be determined by the CYP and not the professional. Outcomes are based on professional assessments, however this panel member felt that this should be child-led and not provision-led.

'If a CYP identifies something as a target, it should be included. If a CYP says they do not like a certain approach/intervention/resource, it should be made explicit in the EHCP and should not be included as provision unless there was a very good reason (e.g. damaging to their health). Same for if a CYP says they do not want something to be an outcome. For example, sometimes adults want the child to make more friends but this should not be an outcome if the CYP is happy with how things are and they do not see it as an issue. Adults should always be considering- who is this a problem for?'

When asked how a CYP could understand feel involved in the process, panellists felt it was vital for 'the CYP knows it is THEIR meeting' and to 'explain what an EHCP means for them in real terms'. This means stripping back professional jargon and language to explain the process adjacent to the CYPs level of understanding.

'a simple explanation sheet could be a useful tool to share with the CYP before gaining their views outside of the meeting, so they are aware of the purpose of the meeting'

'Professional to explain who they are, what their job is and why they are asking the CYP questions- in a way appropriate to their age/development'

Panellists also mentioned providing as many 'choices as possible' on how they would like to share their views and 'ensure CYP knows they do not have to answer any questions they don't want to or can say if they don't know the answer'. There was also reference to what professionals could do to ensure understanding when a CYP does not attend the meeting;

'Where young people don't feel they can attend meetings, there is always an opportunity after the meetings to give feedback'

'CYP should be invited to the meetings and if they feel they couldn't face that maybe join via a video link if it's more comfortable for them'

'Although not all CYP will be able to understand and feel involved it is best practice to ensure they if they have the capacity to understand things to be shared whatever is relevant and to ensure they are involved even by updating their picture on their EHCP as this shows their involvement'

One real-life example was given of when a CYP understood and felt involved in the process by sharing their views about their plan;

'LA management wanted to cease a plan. All paperwork pointed to this until the young person (who was quite shy) explained in their own words why they still wanted it. They felt lots of changes were going on and that they wanted their plan there to ensure they could access the support if needed- we of course agreed and they really impressed me'.

This scenario showcases the importance of listening to CYP and ensuring meaningful participation within the process, otherwise key decisions such as ceasing a plan can be made without them. One panel member indicated they ranked this item as the most important in their view when discussing meaningful participation.

'I think this is most important for our young people. They need to know that we listen to what they say even if we cannot accommodate all of their requests, they need to know that their views have been heard and considered'.

The last item discussed how CYP could feel comfortable to talk openly in order to participate in meetings. Panellists felt this could happen within the right *'environment where they can share their views'* or *'share in a medium which they can fully express'*.

There were many references to ensuring *'trusted adults [are] with them to enable them to talk comfortably'*, however setting an appropriate balance so that *'if trusted adults are present, ensure they do not talk for the CYP'*. The environment was also important to make a CYP feel comfortable, such as AR meetings.

'the meeting, whilst formal in nature, should be made to feel a comfortable environment for the pupil'

One panel member provided an example where the CYP did not speak in front of their mum but then they went on a walk around the school and were then comfortable to share their views with the professional. It is therefore important to *'talk to them directly as opposed to going through parents or school'*.

Panellists acknowledged the importance of CYP feeling comfortable to share their views and felt a way to ensure this was to provide opportunities and choices for communication. The inclusion of meaningful participation in EHCPs and ARs

appeared to be tied to various factors such as resources, communication and a professional skillset to ensure the CYPs views are heard and captured.

'This is important but as with many CYP they can feel shy or uncomfortable talking to people about how they feel about things so I think that we should give them the opportunity to use other methods of capturing views such as online or voice recorders. Translators, language and signing to help them record their views comfortably.'

(ii) *Key practices and conditions in capturing voice*

The top three characteristics for 'key practices and condition in capturing voice' was given to panellists, and they were asked to rank in order of importance. Table 5.8 shows the descriptive statistics for this theme; including the mean score, standard deviation (rounded to two decimal points), median and mode of each item.

Key Practices and Conditions in Capturing Voice	Mean	S.D.	Median	Mode
CYP feels safe	1.25	0.71	1	1
Build rapport with the CYP	2.13	0.35	2	2
Follow guidance on how to gather views	2.63	0.74	3	3

Table 5.8: Descriptive statistics for questions on 'Key practice and conditions in capturing voice' in round three

The item with the lowest mean score remained the same as the previous round; panellists ranked '*CYP feels safe*' as the most important characteristic (M=1.25, SD-0.71), with a median and modal value of 1. The item that was ranked as least important was '*follow guidance on how to gather views*' (M = 2.63, SD = 0.74), with a median and modal value of 3.

Feeling safe was seen as a crucial condition to capture voice.

'I always ensure the CYP is safe during visits so they're relaxed and do not feel under pressure, this is important for them as if the CYP does not feel safe they will not speak about anything'

'CYP should be able to share prior to and separate from the meeting where they feel safe to share their views and ask any questions they may have.'

When panellists were asked to provide examples of how a CYP could feel safe to share their views, all felt this could be achieved through support of a trusted adult.

'Views are always gathered a place where they can speak freely - on a one to one basis and always with trusted adults that they are familiar with'

'Ensuring the CYP feels safe is important, and if they are seen at school a member of staff should be present to ensure they know there is someone available to them that they know should they need it'

Although panellists were advocating the key practice and conditions in capturing voice was to include a trusted adult in a private space, they felt this should not happen if the *'CYP feels uncomfortable with this'*.

Building rapport was another key condition and panellists felt *'views should always be gained by someone who has rapport with the CYP'*. Establishing rapport can be difficult within certain roles that do not allow more than one visit e.g. SEND officers during EHCP assessments and so panellists acknowledged that even though *'rapport should always be established before the meeting (where possible)'*, they felt this isn't always feasible. However, solutions to establishing rapport during meetings were based on the language used and approach to the meeting.

'Talk to them not about them'

'Build rapport through problem-free/everyday conversation or fun activities'

'Be interested in their interests and listen to their concerns seriously'

One panel member gave an example of how rapport can be established in meetings by doing some work before the meeting, this is an identified enabling factor which will be discussed further below.

'Young person was reluctant to open up. I saw in their plan they enjoyed video games so randomly started discussing games I've enjoyed on Xbox. They quickly joined in the conversation and eventually led to tell me all their other interests and hopes.'

Panellists also provided examples on how guidance can be used to support gathering views through the use of *'devised forms'* and *'guidance from LA [to] review what views and opinions are needed'*.

One panellist explained how the CYPs views take precedence over deadlines and timescales of EHCPs and therefore guidance is not always necessary.

'Made the decision to breach deadline in order to visit young person, explain the process and gather their views to make person centered priority'

Other panellists agreed that there was less of a need for guidance to elicit views and more of a duty for the professional to create key practices and conditions to ensure the voice is meaningfully captured.

'I feel comfortable without following the guidance and tend to use it as a tool if I need any support with someone I may not know so well or if there are any difficulties'

'this should happen as a given, but there is a need to think outside of the box as one size does not fit all! The guidance tells us what we need to ask but we as professionals need to find the best way of asking that particular CYP'

(iii) *Enabling factors*

The top three identified 'enabling factors' was given to panellists, and they were asked to rank in order of importance. Table 5.9 shows the descriptive statistics for this theme; including the mean score, standard deviation (rounded to two decimal points), median and mode of each item.

The item with the lowest mean score, and thus the most significant enabling factor identified by panellists remained the same as the previous round. Panellists felt 'doing work before meeting the CYP' was the most important enabling factor (M=2.5, SD=1.77). The modal value was also 1 and median of 2.

Enabling Factors	Mean	S.D.	Median	Mode
Doing work before meeting the CYP	2.5	1.77	2	1
Prioritise Getting Views	2.63	1.60	2	2
Have methods available to use	3.13	1.13	3	2

Table 5.9: Descriptive statistics for questions on 'Enabling factors' in round three

The item with the highest mean and therefore considered to be the least significant enabling factor within the respective list was *'have methods available to use'* (M=3.13, SD= 1.13), with a median value of 3 and modal value of 2. This suggests that majority of panellists agreed this factor was the least important in respect to the overall list.

Exploring the CYPs likes/dislikes and views on their hobbies before meeting them *'needs to be prioritised to ensure you have the big picture of the situation'*.

'It is always important to be prepared when meeting the CYP'

'Read all the paperwork to get a sense of the CYP's history and current circumstances before meeting them...know how the CYP communicates...know about any interests/ things that may motivate the CYP. Know about anything that makes them anxious or over-stimulated and avoid them'

All panellists showed agreement that this was essential prior to meeting a CYP to ensure the meeting can be a positive experience for CYP. This entailed speaking to key staff beforehand

'get up to date views on progress and to find out information regarding the student for example any key adults they have positive relationships with, any good times of the day to meet with the student and other preferences'.

Panellists linked this item to the previous items; ensuring work is done before the meeting can support a CYP feeling comfortable to share their views.

'Looking into their interests, reading about them further so that I could spark up a conversation the young person was interested in to make them feel comfortable'.

Gaining views were agreed to be a priority by all professionals and by *'allocating time before, during or after the meeting'*, a professional could ensure this is part of the assessment process. The solution therefore was *'booking timeslots to talk to them'*.

Panellist felt it was *'important to always have different resources available'* and was an identified enabling factor to elicit voice. By using a range of resources and tools, professionals are able to elicit the views of CYP with a range of needs.

'range of physical resources'

'iPad for engagement, activity sheets, toys, games, choices, visual prompts'

'lots of pictures and visuals'

However, panellists felt that professionals needed a '*mental bank of strategies/approaches to draw on*' based on the situation or needs of the CYP. This entails professionals being aware of different methods and feeling confident to utilise these based on the situation.

'I often use different methods for my CYP with SEND and it helps them to understand that I know about their needs and what best works for them, this often encourages me to gather their views in the most CYP friendly way as possible'

Panellists felt that if the other two enabling factors are carried out then a professional is able to have the appropriate methods ready to use when meeting a CYP.

Panellists often linked the top 3 enabling factors together when providing examples, suggesting that there are various enabling factors that need to co-exist in order to meaningfully elicit the voice of CYP.

'The views of the young person are, or should be, at the centre of all of the plan, their views should be prioritised. If you have prepared by doing the work before the meeting you should be able to get the best out of the meeting'

'If the work has been done and prepared prior to the meeting you should know what the CYP needs to be able to communicate their views best. It is important to provide what they need to enable them to communicate their views'

'I couldn't do this so easily without doing work before the meeting'

These views justify panellists' decision on ranking the other two items higher than this, as there are multiple references to these being vital enabling approaches to eliciting voice.

(iv) Barriers

The top three identified 'barriers' was given to panellists, and they were asked to rank in order of significance. Table 5.10 shows the descriptive statistics for the barriers to eliciting voice; including the mean score, standard deviation (rounded to two decimal points), median and mode of each item.

The results showed that panellists felt the barrier of '*CYPs language and cognitive ability*' remained the most significant barrier (M=2.63, SD=1.19). However, the

second most significant barrier identified within the first round had the same mean score; CYPs anxieties and fears (M=1.63, SD=0.74). Both barriers would be identified to be most significant based on the mean values. If we look at the modal value; the ranking '1' was given to 'CYPs anxieties and fears', which suggests this barrier was more frequently ranked as most significant by panellists, however the median value of '1' was given to 'CYPs language and cognitive ability'. The median value has been described as the best indicator of consensus (Hsu & Sandford, 2007) and so based on this the most significant barrier identified by panellists would be 'CYPs language and cognitive ability'.

Barriers	Mean	S.D.	Median	Mode
CYPs language and cognitive ability	1.63	0.52	1	2
CYPs anxieties and fears	1.63	0.74	1.5	1
CYPs understanding of assessments	2.75	0.71	3	3

Table 5.10: Descriptive statistics for questions on 'Barriers' in round three

The item with the highest mean and therefore considered to be the least significant barriers was 'CYPs understanding of assessments' (M=2.75, SD= 0.71), with a modal and median value of 3.

As phase one sought out the barriers within the field, the aim within the Delphi method was to frame questions positively in order to generate solution-based approaches. When discussing barriers, panellists were asked how each barrier could be addressed either in a real-life example or an ideal example.

When discussing a CYPs language and cognitive ability, panellists agreed that this is barrier was '*most significant*' and ways to overcome this included having '*age appropriate differentiated resources*'.

'visual resources or ranking statements'

'play with them or get them to do some drawings with me or colouring'.

Where this is not possible, panellists felt it was acceptable to capture their views from others who know them well.

'staff could explain what they think a pupil likes and explain why'

'ensure you have spoken to someone who regularly works with that person'.

However, one panel member conveyed a level of disagreement with this as they felt it does not represent the voice of the CYP.

'When CYP do not have a functional communication system, you can represent their views but it is through the filter of another person's perception, which in turn may be influenced by their own values and agenda... Observation is a snapshot in time and may not be representative of the CYP's more broad experience/likes/dislikes.'

They then elaborated this by providing a solution to supporting CYP with needs such as PMLD. By triangulating information, professionals can instil more confidence in the views representing the CYPs voice.

'The ideal is: observation over time, talking to a range of people familiar with the CYP, using a range of resources, asking the same question in different ways, and checking what you think with people familiar with the CYP'

The CYPs anxieties and fears could be overcome by simple actions suggested by the panellists, this included providing choices, warning them before meetings, reassuring them and having trusted adults with them.

'offering different options of where or how the CYP gives their views'

'ensure pupils are told about the importance of their views'

'gathering opinions and views beforehand...to give their opinions without the actual need to attend the meeting'

'doing fun activities'

One panel member was able to provide unique actionable solutions to support a CYPs anxieties' or fears about sharing their views.

'Writing a letter to the CYP, which includes a photo of me and an explanation of what I do and why I want to find out their views. Offering a choice of activities. Reassuring there are no wrong answers because it is just what they think/ feel. Write a checklist of the activities I will ask them to do, ticking them off as we go (so they can see the end point) and saying they can pass on any of the activities/questions. If they might be saying what they think you want to hear, can ask 'What would your mum/dad/teacher/friend say about this?' I also tell them about things I am not good at and need help with, and say we all need help with some things but are really good at other things'

Finally, when addressing a CYPs understanding of the process, one panellist felt *'this is probably the biggest barrier if the CYP is not capable of understanding the questions'*. Many panellists agreed that in this instance, an advocate can act on behalf of the CYP to ensure their voice is heard.

'some of our CYP with SEND will not understand the assessments at all, and it is important that those advocating for them, especially their parents ensuring they understand the assessments so that their CYP's goals are welcomed'.

They also felt by tailoring the experience to *'make it more relaxed'* and *'differentiating assessments'* to their level of need, panellists felt CYP could be involved in some capacity.

(v) *How to deal with limits to participation*

The fifth and final question asked panellists to rate the top three identified ways to 'deal with limits to participation'. Table 5.11 shows the descriptive statistics for the barriers to eliciting voice; including the mean score, standard deviation (rounded to two decimal points), median and mode of each item.

The item with the lowest mean score was *'creative methods'*, however had a relatively high S.D. (1.41) and a median value of 1. This remained the same as round two. The item with the highest mean and therefore considered to be the least important way to deal with limits to participation was *'child friendly assessment or paperwork to be made available'* (M=2.38, SD= 0.52).

How to Deal with Limits to Participation	Mean	S.D.	Median	Mode
Creative methods	1.5	0.76	1	1
Ask adults who know them best	2.13	0.99	2.5	3
Child friendly assessment or paperwork to be made available	2.38	0.52	2	2

Table 5.11: Descriptive statistics for questions on 'How to deal with limits to participation' in round three

The table is currently ordered based on mean values, however if we look at the median and mode values as indicators of consensus; the item with a lower median and mode value of 2 is *'child friendly assessment or paperwork to be made available'*, which suggests this has a higher level of consensus in comparison to *'ask adults who know them best'*.

Panellists mentioned using creative methods within the previous themes as solutions to overcome the barriers, and therefore the ranking of these items are consistent with above. By using a range of methods and having this at your disposal when meeting CYP allows the professional to tailor how views are captured based on the CYPs needs, anxieties and mood at the time of asking.

'A range of proformas are used'

'child friendly differentiated resources'

'We need to introduce as many methods as we can to enable a method that is suitable for that particular CYP. There is likely to be something that suits that CYP'

Technology was often referenced throughout each theme as a creative method to overcome the limitations in eliciting voice.

'with technology continuously changing and new communication methods being made for our CYP, using these creatively can benefit in practice, and ensure things are accurate by having everyone involved'.

Also speaking with the CYPs keyworker or a trusted adult were suggested solutions to overcoming the barriers mentioned above.

And finally, when using child friendly assessments or paperwork, all panellists agreed that this needs to be differentiated to the level of need and be engaging for CYP.

'If it is not child friendly, they just won't do it!'

'make it something they can engage in no matter their need'.

These suggestions were sometimes replicated within other questions, suggesting how the five themes link together.

5.2.4 Analysis of consensus

To establish if a group consensus had been reached, the ranking from the first iteration and the second iteration needed to be directly compared. As discussed in the methodology chapter, the pre-determined criteria for establishing consensus included a percentage increase for each item ranking, establish if a consensus level of 75% or more had been reached (based on a ranking of 1 or 2) and if panellists consistently ranked the same items as most important between each iteration. Each question will now be discussed, and both iterations will be directly compared to show if a percentage increase has occurred. The level of consensus at the end of the Delphi study will also be shown to determine whether group consensus has been established.

(i) Meaningful participation

When examining the consensus between panellists for the theme of 'meaningful participation', table 5.12 shows the percentage rankings for the top 3 items between each round.

Meaningful participation	Rank	1 st Iteration	2 nd Iteration	Level of Consensus
CYP's views are listened to	1	37.5%	62.5%	100%
	2	25%	37.5%	
	3	37.5%	0%	
	4	0%		
	5	0%		
CYP feels comfortable to talk openly	1	37.5%	25%	37.5%
	2	25%	12.5%	
	3	25%	62.5%	
	4	0%		
	5	12.5%		
CYP understands and feels involved in process	1	25%	12.5%	50%
	2	25%	50%	
	3	12.5%	37.5%	
	4	0%		
	5	12.5%		

Table 5.12: % rankings between round two and round three for Meaningful participation

When looking at each item ranking, a percentage increase can be seen between the rankings for '*CYPs are listened to*' for both '1' and '2'. A percentage decrease can be seen in '3', which suggests that within the second iteration, panellists showed a convergence of opinion and ranked the top 2 items as most important. When analysing the percentage of ranks for each item, 62.5% of panellists gave this item a '1' or '2' within the first iteration; this increased to 100% within the second iteration. Therefore, a level of consensus has been reached.

The item '*CYP feels comfortable to talk openly*' showed a decrease in percentage ranking for '1' and '2', and an increase for ranking '3'. This suggests that within the second iteration, panellists who rated this item as a '1' or '2' then felt this was least important within the respective list. This suggests some level of consensus on the least important item; however, this did not reach a consensus level of 75%.

The item '*CYP understands and feels involved in the process*' showed a decrease for rank '1' but an increase for '2' and '3'. Similarly, this did not reach a threshold of 75%. The second iteration shows a change in order in comparison to the first item; a CYP feeling comfortable to talk was ranked the least important item within the respective list.

The last two items in this theme were '*CYP express their likes and dislikes*' and '*questions are future focused*', both received 0% of rankings as '1', therefore no panellists felt these were the most important factors relating to meaningful participation. 62.5% of panellists rated the last item as a '5' suggesting it was the least important within the respective list. This was the highest-ranking score and thus also shows a level of consensus in the first iteration between panellists on the least important factors.

The item of '*CYPs views are listened to*' remained the highest-ranking item within both rounds, and no panel member ranked this as 'least important' within round two. This suggests a level of consensus for the theme meaningful participation had been reached, where the most important criteria to achieve this is for professionals to ensure '*CYPs views are listened to*'.

(ii) *Key practices and conditions in capturing voice*

When examining the consensus between panellists for the theme of ‘key practices and conditions in capturing voice’, table 5.13 shows the percentage rankings for the top 3 items between each round. When looking at each item ranking, a percentage increase can be seen between the rankings for the top-rated item for ‘*CYP feels safe*’. 87.5% of panellists ranked this as ‘1’ or ‘2’ within both iterations, which suggests this item remained as the most important to majority of panellists through both iterations and reached the level of consensus required.

Key Practices and Conditions	Rank	1 st Iteration	2 nd Iteration	Level of Consensus
CYP feels safe	1	50%	87.5%	87.5%
	2	37.5%	0%	
	3	12.5%	12.5%	
	4	0%		
	5	0%		
Build rapport with the CYP	1	0%	0%	87.5%
	2	62.5%	87.5%	
	3	37.5%	12.5%	
	4	0%		
	5	0%		
Follow guidance on how to gather views	1	37.5%	12.5%	
	2	0%	12.5%	
	3	25%	75%	75%
	4	25%		
	5	12.5%		

Table 5.13: % rankings between round two and round three for Key practices and conditions in capturing voice

The item ‘*build rapport with the CYP*’ did not receive a rank of ‘1’ in either iteration, which suggests consistency in opinion that this was not the most important item within the list. A percentage increase can be seen for rank ‘2’, which also showed a consensus level of 87.5%, which suggests consensus that this was the second most important item within the list.

The item ‘*follow guidance on how to gather views*’ showed a decrease for rank ‘1’ but an increase for ‘2’ and ‘3’. The increase for rank ‘3’ suggests majority of panellists

felt this was the least important item within the second iteration where 75% ranked this as '3', suggesting group consensus on the least important item.

The item of '*CYP feels safe*' remained the highest-ranking item within both rounds, and the item '*follow guidance on how to gather views*' was ranked the least important item. This suggests a level of consensus for the theme key practices and conditions in capturing voice had been reached for all items, where the most important criteria to achieve this is for professionals to ensure a '*CYP feels safe*'.

(iii) *Enabling factors*

When examining the consensus between panellists for the theme of 'enabling factors', table 5.14 shows the percentage rankings for the top 3 items between each round.

Enabling Factors	Rank	1 st Iteration	2 nd Iteration	Level of Consensus
Doing work before meeting the CYP	1	37.5%	37.5%	50%
	2	25%	12.5%	
	3	12.5%	50%	
	4	12.5%		
	5	0%		
	6	12.5%		
	7	0%		
Prioritise getting views	1	25%	62.5%	87.5%
	2	37.5%	25%	
	3	12.5%	12.5%	
	4	0%		
	5	25%		
	6	0%		
	7	0%		
Have methods available to use	1	0%	0%	62.5%
	2	37.5%	62.5%	
	3	25%	37.5%	
	4	25%		
	5	12.5%		
	6	0%		
	7	0%		

Table 5.14: % rankings between round two and round three for Enabling factors

When looking at each item ranking, the percentage remained the same for the first item of '*doing work before the meeting*'. This was previously the highest ranked item

in the first iteration, but the second iteration suggests a shift in consensus. Majority of panellists ranked this item as least important and there was a percentage decrease in panellists who ranked this item as '1' or '2', and therefore consensus was not reached on this item.

A percentage increase was seen in '*prioritise getting views*' where majority of panellists ranked this item as most important. There was a shift in group consensus within the second iteration, where majority of panellists then felt this was the most important enabling factor to eliciting voice. 87.5% of panellists ranked this as '1' or '2' and therefore reached the level of group consensus

The item '*have methods available to use*' did not receive a rank of '1' in either iteration, which suggests consistency in opinion that this was not the most important item within the list. A percentage increase can be seen for rank '2' and '3'.

(iv) *Barriers*

When examining the consensus between panellists for the theme of 'Barriers', table 5.15 shows the percentage rankings for the top 3 items between each round. When looking at each item ranking, a percentage increase can be seen between the rankings for the top-rated item for '*CYPs language and cognitive ability*'. 100% of panellists rated this item as '1' or '2' within the final iteration, and this item remained the most significant rated item. Therefore, this suggests a level of consensus has been reached on the most significant barrier that affects a professionals' ability to capture voice.

The item '*CYPs anxieties and fears*' also showed a percentage increase for rank '1' and '2'; a level of consensus was also reached for this item. The item '*CYPs understanding of assessment*' showed an increase for rank '3' where 87.5% of panellists ranked this as least important. This suggests that within the second iteration, panellists showed convergence that this item was the least significant barrier within the respective list.

Barriers	Rank	1 st Iteration	2 nd Iteration	Level of Consensus	
CYPs language and cognitive ability	1	25%	37.5%	100%	
	2	12.5%	62.5%		
	3	37.5%	0%		
	4	25%			
	5	0%			
	6	0%			
	7	0%			
CYPs anxieties and fears	1	12.5%	50%		87.5%
	2	37.5%	75.5%		
	3	25%	12.5%		
	4	0%			
	5	0%			
	6	25%			
	7	0%			
CYPs understanding of assessment	1	0%	12.5%		
	2	25%	0%		
	3	37.5%	87.5%	87.5%	
	4	25%			
	5	0%			
	6	0%			
	7	12.5%			

Table 5.15: % rankings between round two and round three for Barriers

The item of ‘*CYP language and cognitive ability*’ remained the highest-ranking item within both rounds, and the item ‘*CYPs understanding of assessment*’ was ranked the least significant barrier. This suggests a level of consensus for the theme barriers had been reached for all items, where the most significant barrier for a professional to elicit voice is the CYPs language and cognitive ability.

(v) *How to overcome limits to participation*

When examining the consensus between panellists for the theme of ‘how to overcome limits to participation’, table 5.16 shows the percentage rankings for the top 3 items between each round. When looking at each item ranking, a percentage increase can be seen between the rankings for the item ‘*creative methods*’, which was ranked as most important within the second iteration where 87.5% of panellists ranked this as ‘1’ or ‘2’, therefore becoming the most important item as ranked by panellists and reaching the desired level of consensus.

For item two *'ask adults who know them best'*, there is a percentage increase seen in panellists ranking this as most important. However, in the first iteration, 0% of panellists ranked this as '3', whereas in the second iteration 50% of panellists ranked this as the least important item. There is no level of group consensus shown for this item.

The last item *'child friendly assessment or paperwork to be made available'* showed a percentage increase for ranking '2' and '3' within the second iteration and remains as the least important item, however this did not reach the level of consensus.

How to overcome limits to participation	Rank	1 st Iteration	2 nd Iteration	Level of Consensus
Creative methods	1	37.5%	62.5%	87.5%
	2	12.5%	25%	
	3	37.5%	12.5%	
	4	0%		
	5	12.5%		
	6	0%		
	7	0%		
	8	0%		
Ask adults who know them the best	1	25%	37.5%	50%
	2	12.5%	12.5%	
	3	0%	50%	
	4	12.5%		
	5	25%		
	6	25%		
	7	0%		
	8	0%		
Child friendly assessment or paperwork to be made available	1	0%	0%	62.5%
	2	37.5%	62.5%	
	3	12.5%	37.5%	
	4	12.5%		
	5	25%		
	6	0%		
	7	0%		
	8	12.5%		

Table 5.16: % rankings between round two and round three for how to overcome limits to participation

5.3 Summary of the findings from the Delphi method

The Delphi method provided a range of items for each theme, with varying levels of agreement. However, as identified above, some items began to show convergence of opinion through each iteration. Table 5.17 provides a list of the items that reached consensus within each theme; seven items met the criteria for consensus and were deemed to be important and significant characteristics to consider within each theme. Two themes consisted of two items that were deemed to be important within the Delphi study.

Meaningful Participation	<i>CYPs views are listened to</i>
Key practices and conditions in capturing voice	<i>CYP feels safe</i>
	<i>Build rapport with the CYP</i>
Enabling factors	<i>Prioritise getting views</i>
Barriers	<i>CYPs language and cognitive ability</i>
	<i>CYPs anxieties and fears</i>
How to overcome limits to participation	<i>Creative methods</i>

Table 5.17: Items that achieved consensus as important characteristics within each theme

It is important to note that within a Delphi method, all items that reach consensus should be reported (Iqbal & Pison-Young, 2009). This includes if panellists showed convergence towards items they like, along with items that they dislike or found least important. Within the Delphi study, two items reached consensus as the least important or significant factors to consider. This included ‘*follow guidance on how to gather views*’ as the least important condition in capturing views, and ‘*CYPs understanding of assessment*’ as the least significant barrier. Therefore, nine items fulfilled the criteria for consensus.

Each round within the Delphi method successfully developed a convergence of opinion between panellists. Round one of the Delphi method was successful in identifying key words and phrases used by panellists to identify characteristics for each theme. A high number of items were initially generated, however were often similar or overlapping concepts and were combined to create the final list of items to be used within round two. This suggests similar opinions and ideas were generated by panellists from the onset.

In round two, panellists showed varying responses when ranking the level of importance of each item. The median and mode values were beneficial in identifying the appropriate ranking for each item. As suggested by Hsu & Sandford (2007), a median of 2.25 or less suggested a level of consensus had been reached by panellists. This was only identified within 6 out of the possible 32 items within round two; the last two themes of 'barriers' and 'how to deal with limits to participation' did not generate a median score of 2.25 or less for any items.

Kendall's W was also used to generate initial consensus levels within round two; the Kendall's W scores for each theme showed moderate agreement between panellists for all five questions, therefore suggesting there was some level of agreement between panellists from the onset. As the expert panellists consisted of SEND professionals, it is expected that their values and beliefs on eliciting voice would be similar.

The top 3 items based on mean, median and mode values for each theme was then used within the third questionnaire, to allow for a second iteration of views. As panellists were aware of the order of rankings from the second round, this allowed them to re-evaluate their initial rankings based on group feedback as most significant and important items to consider. All items that were ranked most important/significant remained the same within the second iteration, except for the theme of 'enabling factors'. Panellists showed a shift in opinion upon group feedback and felt '*prioritise getting views*' became a more significant enabling factor than '*doing work before meeting the CYP*'. However, within the qualitative analysis this was referenced frequently as an effective enabling method. This will be discussed further within chapter 6.

Overall, 9 out of the 15 items in round three met the criteria for consensus, suggesting the Delphi method was successful in developing group consensus around a perceived problem. Table 5.18 provides a summary of the total number of statements that were rated within each round of the Delphi study and shows how the number of items were reduced until reaching consensus.

These items and the collective feedback within the qualitative analysis were used to develop the document of good practice, which will be discussed below.

Number of items generated in Round 1	92
Number of items rated for Round 2	32
Total number of items rated by the end of Round 3	15
Total number of items for which there was consensus	9

Table 5.18: Summary of total number of statements rated in this Delphi study

5.4 Document of good practice

A document of good practice was devised based on the analysis of the Delphi method and the feedback from panel members (Appendix 15). The document was designed for SEND professionals in LAs and schools and intended to provide actionable solutions to support professionals in capturing the voice of the CYP. The methodology chapter discusses the development of the document of good practice as a result of the analysis from the Delphi method. The document was based on feedback from the professionals, and so it was deemed appropriate to return to panel members to gather their thoughts on the document.

5.4.1 *Feedback on document*

Feedback was sought on the first draft of the booklet from three panel members; I selectively chose three members with different roles in order to consider feedback from all viewpoints. The feedback from an EP, SENCO and a SEND officer was

sought, and their views were asked on the content, design and if they felt this would be beneficial in their daily role.

The overall response was positive, panellists felt it was a useful and appealing document to be used within practice;

'I think it can be very useful just in terms of making professionals stop and think about how to collect views' (EP)

'I think this looks great. The presentation of it is really engaging, and the points are made clear and consistently for each distinct area' (SENCO)

'It's laid out in a really reader friendly way and has some fantastic ideas I wouldn't have thought of' (SO)

Feedback on improvement were also given, which included suggestions such as 'add more pictures' and to clarify a few sentences further. These suggestions were taken on board and helped produce the final document of good practice. Direct quotes were also taken from the panellists to provide examples of practical solutions to support when eliciting voice. A SO felt there were helpful suggestions that they had not considered before, and felt it could be implemented within their role;

'the bit about writing a letter to the young person with your picture is such a good idea! We could give our schools something that they can use for all annual reviews if the young person wants to join' (SO).

Phase two therefore was successful in reaching consensus on the most significant factors relating to pupil voice, in order to provide actionable guidance for professionals to use within their daily role.

Chapter 6: Discussion and Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

This thesis concludes by discussing the findings of this study and the contribution to knowledge. This chapter brings together the findings from the two distinct phases of the research design and interprets them in relation to the research questions.

The first part of this chapter provides a summary of the two phases and an interpretation of the findings at many different levels. Each research question is explored and the key findings that derive from the analysis are discussed. The findings are linked to the literature and both the generalisability and significance of the findings are evaluated. The chapter then evaluates the strengths and limitations of the study; both from a methodological point of view in relation to the research aims, as well as a wider conceptual piece of work within the context of pupil voice.

The discussion then goes on to summarise the originality and contribution of the research to existing literature. By comparing the findings to those of previous studies, this thesis adds to the existing body of knowledge of SEND and pupil voice. The implications the study has for professional practice and policy is discussed and recommendations for future research are suggested. Finally, I finish with my concluding thoughts and a succinct explanation of the contribution this study has made to my own personal development.

6.2 Summary of Phase one and answers to the research questions

Phase one of this study aimed to explore how professionals within LAs and specialist schools in England elicit the voice of CYP during EHCP assessments and ARs through the use of online-based questionnaires and semi-structured interviews.

As described in chapter 4, the main findings were:

- LA professionals showed higher levels of confidence in their ability to elicit voice in comparison to the school professionals;

- Both samples utilise different methods and tools to elicit voice, but agreed that using a mixed-methods approach was most beneficial;
- School professionals utilise enabling factors more frequently than LA professionals to support their role in eliciting voice;
- The LA professionals identified capacity as the most prevalent barrier to eliciting voice, including factors such as limited time, resources and training;
- Participants acknowledged that pupil views are often superficially gained and more needs to be done, and;
- A strong professional rhetoric remains amongst SEND professionals to conduct person-centred assessments and ARs.

This thesis will now discuss the key findings and the relation to the research questions within phase one. In this way, a clear discussion and conclusion can be drawn around the professional approach to eliciting voice.

6.2.1. To what extent do LAs and schools explore the views of the CYP in relation to their statutory EHCP assessment or AR?

LAs and schools both elicit a range of views from the CYP and follow similar patterns. There are clearly some questions that would be a part of any conversation with a CYP such as their likes, dislikes and hobbies. However, the study wished to explore if professionals delve further past the 'preferences' of the CYP (Pearlman & Michaels, 2019) and elicit the views of deeper aspects of a CYPs voice. The findings show SEND professionals place emphasis on hearing the voice as part of the process and majority prioritise meeting the CYP to elicit their views. However, the school staff place a stronger focus on how best to communicate with the CYP in order to meaningfully elicit their views on both present and future aspirations. The analysis identified key areas for consideration.

(i) Facilitating change

The analysis showed a high level of agreement amongst both samples in asking CYP their likes, dislikes and hobbies. However, the questions which indicate a level of change is required were often disregarded by professionals; these 'higher-order'

questions include asking a CYPs views on their learning environment, future placement and any changes they would like to make.

The literature has highlighted how little changes are made after concerns are raised by CYP and thereby questioning whether professionals have capacity to act upon a view after they have been sought (Whitty, 2002). It may be likely that the reason the higher-order questions were less frequently asked by professionals is out of fear of the response. This concern was acknowledged by a SENCO during the interviews where *'the default that you're expecting are that things are going well'*, but questions how a professional follows up when they don't get the answer they expect. Once a CYP discloses unhappiness towards a particular aspect of their life, it is both the professional and moral duty of the adult to facilitate change where possible and provide feedback for the CYP after a change has been made. However, the findings show a reluctance amongst professionals to do so and therefore an identified area of improvement for SEND professionals includes firstly asking the questions that may facilitate change, ensure they act upon the response from CYP and finally provide feedback to the CYP, so they know their concerns have been heard (Hayes, 2004).

The school professionals were more likely to ask about views on placement and support in comparison to the LA professionals. This may be due to the relationship school staff have developed with the CYP and being *'confident in their own ability to ask questions, and who knows that child quite well'* (SENCO). The school can also differentiate the provision and adjust the environment accordingly based on a CYPs immediate feedback; however, the LA have the ultimate authority to change placement, provision and support for CYP with an EHCP. Despite this, LA professionals elicit these views less frequently and place higher emphasis on a CYPs preferences, as opposed to listening to their voice.

As Kennedy (2015) states *'there is little point in hearing a child's voice if there is no intention or capacity to respond'* (p.367). Voice needs to inform decisions and action plans to support the concerns of CYP, otherwise capturing voice moves away from becoming an emancipatory experience for CYP but rather another tool for maintaining adult-led power dynamics (Cefai & Cooper, 2010). Therefore, professionals need to not only elicit views but actively listen and respond to the voice of CYP by facilitating change through higher-order questions.

(ii) A 'View' vs. a 'Voice'

Another area of discussion identified within the findings was the differentiation between a 'view' and a 'voice'. Pearlman & Michaels (2019) conclude that questions around the likes and dislikes of a CYP elicit their '*preference*' at the time of asking, which is not equivalent to their '*views*', or their voice. Using this distinction, the findings suggest professionals often capture the preferences of the CYP, but the essence of their voice is often neglected. In order to actively listen to the voice of the CYP, professionals need to establish a distinction between the two definitions.

As discussed in the literature, 'voice' has not been adequately defined since Article 12 and thus open to interpretation (Lundy, 2007). It is interesting that the literature has focused so heavily on the *voice* of the CYP, eliciting *voice* and ensuring the *voice* is heard, yet the CoP does not mimic the same language as it uses '*views*' as opposed to '*voice*'. Literature does tend to use both 'voice' and 'views' of the CYP interchangeably and so they could be seen as synonyms of each other. However, it is possible to ascertain a deeper level of participation to 'voice' in comparison to 'views'.

When stripping back to dictionary definitions, 'view' is defined as 'an opinion, belief, or idea, or a way of thinking about something' ("View", Cambridge Dictionary, 2020), whereas 'voice' is defined as an 'expression of opinion, or the right to express your opinion' ("Voice", Cambridge Dictionary, 2020). Ascertaining a 'view' could refer to stating preferences about something at a given time, and therefore more of a fluid concept. Conversely, by ascertaining 'voice' as a right to express your opinion places a level of legitimacy in the term, whilst also resembling the definition of Article 12 from the UNCRC (1989). This suggests a step above tokenistic participation of gathering views such as likes and dislikes, and towards valuing the CYPs opinion on the decisions that concern them. The terminology in the code should perhaps move towards the 'voice of CYP', as opposed to 'views', which would then allow professionals to begin to transcend beyond voice to actively listening to the CYPs perspectives (Johnson, 2017).

In order to move past tokenistic elicitation of views and towards actively listening to the voice of CYP, professionals need to ask the questions that evoke change as

discussed above, such as the support they receive and where they wish to be educated. Without action, the views remain tokenistic and do not contribute towards meaningful decision-making processes for CYP (Kilkelly et al, 2005). Phase one highlighted how views are superficially heard but not acted upon by SEND professionals, and therefore the 'voice' of the CYP remains disregarded. Professionals need to be aware of their current position on how they include CYP in decision-making, as suggested in the pathway to participation model developed by Sheir (2001). They can then identify next steps on how to increase the level of participation to allow for CYP to not only be involved but to share power and responsibility for decision-making. The findings are therefore in agreement with existing research around the limitations to eliciting the voice of the CYP and respecting the rights of the child.

(iii) Whose role is it to elicit voice?

The findings of this study raised an interesting query around which role is best suited to elicit the voice of CYP. The CoP states the views must always be at the centre, it does not however state who must carry out this role, which brings in the ambiguity as to who is best suited for this responsibility.

Some participants argued that it is a collective professional responsibility to elicit voice, whereas other participants within the questionnaire and interview data felt certain roles were better suited to elicit the voice of CYP. This was for many reasons; professionals felt the needs of some CYP required specialist knowledge in order to ascertain their voice and therefore certain roles may be better equipped in doing this. Additionally, EHCPs set out to have a more streamlined process with the aim of avoiding the perceived burden of having 'too many adults' asking the same questions. Professionals felt this can lead to frustrations from families and CYP having to repeat their 'story'.

The difference in role responsibility also varied; some SO's within phase one expressed they did not meet the CYP within their role and gained their views from secondary sources such as the reports of other professionals. However, other professionals such as EPs did state they meet the CYP and gain their views as part of the assessment process. This can be seen as a geographical differentiation in

approach to participation and adds to the body of literature that where a CYP lives can affect the quality of their EHCP, and most significantly, the level of their involvement (Soar, Burke, Herbst & Gersch, 2005; Castro, Grande & Palikara, 2019). It is therefore likely that there are differences in the approach to eliciting voice by LA; this variation can be based on factors such as resources, number of CYP with EHCPs and workload of SEND professionals. Although this study did not carry out an in-depth analysis of the viewpoints from different regions, or the approach of the SEND team in different localities, it is possible that where a CYP lives may be an enabling factor for some, but a barrier for others. Future research may wish to delve into these perceived differences further.

Many SOs referenced EPs as being the best suited professional to elicit the voice of CYP. The role of the EP in advocating voice is apparent within the literature (Fox, 2013), and EPs within the qualitative data expressed that they always visit the CYP or prioritise capturing their voice as part of their assessment. However, despite this opinion, some EPS did not agree with this statement due to their lack of established rapport with the CYP, which in turn can make eliciting their voice difficult. They often suggested schools may be best placed to elicit the voice of CYP as they may be less likely to engage with an unfamiliar adult they meet for an assessment, as opposed to their daily key worker or teacher. Schools have the enabling factor of established rapport, trust and accessibility, and therefore a CYP may feel more comfortable in expressing their voice within this environment.

There are clear tensions as to whether one professional is best suited as opposed to a range of professionals to elicit voice. This specific question of whether it is a joint responsibility to elicit the views or whether a specific professional is better suited was asked within round one of the Delphi method. Although phase two is discussed in detail below, the consensus from panellists remained that eliciting voice is the collective responsibility of all adults who interact with CYP. Each professional comes with their own perspective based on their role, for example, a SALT may ask how a CYP feels about communicating at school, whereas a SENCO may ask how a CYP feels about the support they receive. Therefore, the cumulative views gained from the various SEND professionals during assessments and reviews provides '*a full picture*' of the views, wishes and feelings of CYP. This is also a way to cross-

reference the voice of the CYP by allowing them a way to express themselves on different days with different adults in their life.

There was acknowledgement within the findings that there should be a system in place to avoid repeating the same questions and allow for a more streamlined approach to eliciting voice, however it should remain every professional's duty to ensure the voice is captured within every assessment and meeting that relates to the CYP.

6.2.2. What are the strengths and difficulties that professionals in LAs and schools may experience when eliciting pupil voice?

When exploring the perceived levels of confidence, the LA professionals reported a higher level of confidence than the school professionals. This could possibly be due to the larger sample size of LA professionals. However, when evaluating the qualitative data within phase one, the LA professionals expressed lower levels of confidence in a variety of areas. It is unclear whether the quantitative measures of perceived confidence were an accurate reflection of their views. Despite the incongruity between the reported levels of confidence by professionals, the findings suggest that LA and school professionals both experience distinct strengths and difficulties when eliciting voice based on factors such as their professional role and experience.

(i) Eliciting the views of CYP who are predominantly non-verbal

Past literature has explored how CYP who use AAC methods to express themselves are able to meaningfully engage within decision-making processes (Pearlman & Michaels, 2019; Ghani & Mohammed, 2019; Lewis & Porter, 2017). The voice of this cohort of CYP are often unheard due to the nature of their needs and the lack of commitment from professionals to implement alternative methods to elicit voice (Bishton, 2007). The LA professionals reported lower levels of confidence in eliciting the views of pupils who use non-verbal means of communication, whereas the school reported higher levels of confidence and therefore felt better equipped in eliciting voice. This is likely to be due to the on-going relationship between pupils and

school staff; they see them on a daily basis and have built positive relationships with the pupil, are aware of their preferred form of communication and feel confident to provide the support they need.

LA professionals do not have the same enabling factor of established rapport and therefore may feel less confident in eliciting voice due to the lack of exposure and experience communicating with CYP who are predominately non-verbal.

Additionally, they do not often receive training on different methods that could be used to elicit voice or are aware of the specific communication needs of the CYP in the same way school professionals do. Without this prior knowledge, they may feel less confident when meeting CYP. There was also an opinion expressed that LAs may not view training on different methods and communication systems as a valuable investment within the role and therefore SEND professionals within the LA may not have access to the various resources available.

This is a highlighted area in which LAs feel less confident in. When considering training and professional development, LAs may wish to invest in resources to support SEND professionals in learning a range of techniques to elicit the views of CYP who are predominately non-verbal, in order to both promote confidence during assessments and reviews, and to ensure the voice of all CYP, regardless of need, is heard.

(ii) Experience

Another factor that could affect confidence levels of a SEND professional includes experience and years of service. Literature has suggested that professionals who are newly qualified within their role show lower confidence levels of meeting the needs of CYP with SEND (MacBlain & Purdy, 2011), which could also translate as hesitancy in eliciting their views. Participants in the questionnaire showed varying levels of service within both sample groups however this did not correspond with their reported levels of confidence.

Some participants did state that experiences within their role has exposed them to different barriers throughout the years, in which they have learnt how to overcome this with time. Therefore, it could be argued that longer years of service equates to more opportunities to elicit voice and thus a well-equipped view on the trials and

tribulations of doing so. It was also reported that professionals can become more confident with '*time*' and '*practice*'.

However, as highlighted in the interviews, years of service does not equate to skill in eliciting pupil voice. The opinions in the qualitative data of those who had been in their role for less than 6 months were just as insightful and valuable as those who had been in their position for more than 10 years. This was also the justification for not including a certain amount of years of experience as a key criterion within the Delphi method. There did not seem to be a strong link between time within a role and eliciting voice, rather a difference in approach due to the role of the professional.

(iii) Relationship between role and confidence in eliciting voice

The role of the professional may have had a direct impact on the way participants answered the questions within the study. All three methods involved a range of SEND professionals, both from LAs and specialist schools, who presented with varying viewpoints on pupil voice. The role of the participant is likely to be an influencing factor when expressing views on pupil voice and therefore it is important to note the views of each participant in relation to their individual context.

An interesting finding from this study was the role of the EP. Within the questionnaire, there was a higher degree of responses from EPs in comparison to other roles; 69.4% of all responses were from either EPs or those in training. This is likely to be for many reasons; forums were used for participant recruitment, and one forum that generated interest in the research area was the EP forum. EPs also contribute to EHCPs and ARs in a significant way, as their assessments and reports comprise the bulk of EHCP provision, outcomes and a CYPs strengths and needs. Statutory work therefore comprises a large portion of their job role and so their interest in this research area is likely to be higher. EPs also are familiar with research studies and may sympathise with the difficulties in recruitment from their own experiences, thus being more likely to take part in this study. These factors may have led to the higher rate of response within this particular LA role.

In terms of pupil voice, the advocacy role of an EP is a philosophy engrained during training (Fox, 2015) and EPs often have extensive knowledge of different methods to elicit voice, along with resources at their disposal. The EP therefore acknowledges

their *'role is to develop the autonomy of the child and to ensure the voice is heard'* (Fox, 2015, p.385) and this commitment to ensuring the voice is central to assessments were corroborated within the findings. A trainee EP expressed that they would *'always try get the views directly'* and ensure the voice is central to their reports, this opinion is likely to have been influenced by their current circumstances. A trainee EP would currently be learning about the EHCP process and methods to elicit voice as part of the doctorate training, and therefore would advocate the importance of ensuring the voice is captured as part of their role.

From the school professionals, the highest number of responses came from Head Teachers of various specialist schools, where the managerial input provides a unique insight into the mechanisms of an establishment. As Head Teachers act as gatekeepers in research through access to their schools, it is likely that they would want to contribute to studies in order to shed light on the methods and tools used within their establishment. However, responses from senior management need to be approached with caution, as it is likely they may choose to portray a more positive outlook on their organisation as opposed to a truthful one. Heads of service and Head Teachers are also not as involved as other 'front-line' staff in eliciting the voice as their role is often to oversee and manage staff, and therefore are unlikely to be eliciting the voice of CYP themselves, rather co-ordinating at a strategic level. This was reflected in the questionnaire, as responses from professionals within this role were often 'neither agree nor disagree' or 'not applicable'.

Each role approaches the EHCP and AR process from its own perspective and have different responsibilities throughout; SO's have complete involvement in the process and will co-ordinate the views of Education, Health and Care professionals, whilst ensuring the CYP and parent/carer views are central. Similarly, school staff are integral to ensuring person-centred approaches and involvement in decision-making throughout the school day. However, other roles focus on a distinct aspect of a child's education and wellbeing and would therefore approach the study from a differing perspective. For example, an advisory teacher is responsible for educational advice for an EHCP or AR and would approach the questionnaire and interviews from an educational perspective, whereas a social worker is responsible for the

pastoral care and safety of CYP and therefore may have developed a different viewpoint in relation to eliciting the voice.

Although this study did not aim to analyse the relationship between professional role and eliciting voice in great detail, there is a clear pattern with certain roles and the associated strengths and difficulties when eliciting voice. The role of the participant will often reflect their views and how strongly they advocate for meaningful engagement, however it can be argued that all adults working with CYP should advocate for their voice to be at the centre of all decision-making processes, despite their role within the LA or school (Coates & Vickerman, 2013).

As mentioned above, the data was not tested for statistical significance due to the small sample size and therefore caution is made when assuming patterns within the data, it is likely these may be a result of chance. However, based on my professional practice and observations of different roles within the LA and schools, it is possible there may be a relationship between these factors. I have noticed different approaches to eliciting voice based on background characteristics such as role and therefore feel these potential patterns are worth pursuing further to see if this has any significance to the level of confidence exhibited by a professional when eliciting voice.

6.2.3. What supporting methods or tools are used to enable the voice of the CYP?

Both sample groups used direct, mediated and prompted methods to elicit voice, and there were certain methods that were frequently used by both, such as informal questionnaires and observations. Despite research highlighting the benefits of implementing creative methods to elicit voice (Ravet, 2007; Humphrey & Lewis, 2008), SEND professionals showed lower levels of agreement in using mediated methods during consultation and thus a highlighted area of training and resources required within this area.

(i) *Mediated methods*

The school professionals reported using mediated methods slightly more than the LA professionals within phase one. This is likely to be a result of the specialism of the schools within the questionnaire; 31.25% of participants worked within a school providing support for complex needs and therefore were likely to be knowledgeable and skilled at eliciting the voice of CYP with a range of needs such as PMLD, where mediated methods are more frequently employed (Pearlman & Michaels, 2019).

The nature of the school environment also means school staff are likely to have various tools at their disposal that can elicit the voice of CYP through mediated approaches such as video and role-play. The school staff also spend more time with pupils and have multiple opportunities to elicit their voice through various mediums. The LA staff only reported asking CYP sometimes to draw a picture; this requires minimum resources and training, can be easily implemented when meeting a CYP and does not require much time to initiate this. This is unlike other methods that require preparation ahead of time and a certain level of rapport with the CYP for them to engage. As LAs do not have this enabling factor to support when eliciting voice, they are at a significant disadvantage in comparison to school professionals.

(ii) *Implementing innovative methods*

The findings showed a lack of identification of using more 'innovative' methods, such as using a diary and posting your views in a box. The literature has acknowledged the need for a range of tools to engage CYP and support them in eliciting their voice (Forest, Pearpoint & O'Brien, 1996) and phase two also highlighted the need to be creative when capturing views. However, the questionnaire data suggests very few professionals used creative methods within their role.

The interview data did suggest some innovative methods used by school staff and EPs, such as PATH planning, one-page profiles and using video, however there was a lack of identified methods referenced by SO's. This therefore links to the earlier point about differing approaches to eliciting voice based on participant characteristics.

School staff frequently reported using a range of methods within the interview data, however did not always agree with the introduction of more novel methods used within PCRs such as the visual annual review (Hayes, 2004). The SENCO within the interview referred to this as a method that '*resembles something that is participatory and isn't really*'. This suggests professionals may be sceptical of using new methods within practice as they fail to see how this empowers CYP within meetings and acts as a participatory approach to eliciting voice. This SENCO felt examples of these methods remain adult-led and is impeded by the power dynamics within a school setting, therefore criticising the suggestion made by Hayes (2004) that visual ARs allow for CYP to have control over their meetings. Professionals therefore seemed cautious in utilising a diverse range of methods to elicit voice and reported using commonly known methods such as questionnaires, conversations and observations.

(iii) The need for further methods

The literature has highlighted a range of methods and tools available for SEND professionals to utilise within their daily roles, however the particular methods employed within an establishment such as a school is dependent on a range of factors. Interviewees acknowledged methods that were not currently used within their practice but felt would be beneficial with certain pupils, however some methods were referenced to be '*quite expensive*' (Head Teacher) or time-consuming to implement and therefore not accessible.

The need for a range of methods to elicit voice were clearly expressed within phase one, however accentuating this needs to be on a practical level. A SO felt the LA could offer a wider range of methods to be used with pupils of varying levels of need yet needed to be consistent and practical in order to be successful. These findings added support to the existing literature that further methods to elicit voice are needed to support SEND professionals, yet consideration needs to be taken when designing methods to ensure it suits the needs of both the user (the professional) and the consumer (the CYP). LAs and schools also need to provide the resources, training and time to learn how to implement these methods effectively.

(iv) *Relationship between method and level of need*

Majority of participants did not indicate a pattern linking different methods to particular need, as they felt it was individual to the CYPs mood and willingness to engage at the time of asking. Using multiple methods were most widely reported by participants and therefore consistent with the literature as the most effective way to elicit voice (Clark & Moss, 2001). The EP who was interviewed explained how observations of the CYP are combined with cross-referencing with adults who know them best, whilst carrying out informal conversations with the CYP. This approach allows for a level of consensus due to the triangulation with multiple sources and confidence that a CYPs views are representative of what they actually feel. It also allows the professional to feel more confident in the views that are elicited as part of the EHCP and AR.

6.2.4. *What enabling factors help to elicit the views of the CYP?*

Within the findings, the school professionals reported using a higher number of enabling factors in comparison to the LA professionals. School staff showed a strong awareness that CYP should dictate if they wish to share their views, how they do this and when they do this; professionals should therefore be flexible around the needs and wishes of CYP. LA professionals do not often share this level of flexibility due to the restrictions of statutory deadlines, opportunities to meet CYP and time allocated during assessments. However, as seen in figure 4.18, the findings identified notable enabling factors that can support the process of eliciting views, which is consistent with past literature.

(i) *Familiar and trusted adults*

The key enabling factor reported by school staff was utilising familiar adults who have established relationships with the CYP to support when eliciting voice. This enabling factor also reached consensus within the Delphi method as a way to overcome limits to participation. Schools have the advantage that their daily role fosters this type of relationship, whereas LA professionals tend to only meet a CYP once and therefore cannot often ascertain views with the same ease and level of

certainty as the school professionals. Due to the established relationship between school staff and CYP, LA professionals referenced that school staff may therefore be best suited to elicit voice.

This enabling factor however does not always support schools in eliciting voice of all CYP. Pupils with SEMH needs are argued to be the '*least listened, empowered and liked group of students*' (Cefai & Cooper, 2010, p.184) and often report poor relationships with their teachers, therefore they may feel more comfortable sharing their views with a professional they have not met before. Past literature has identified that school staff need to provide child-friendly and emancipatory approaches to eliciting views of CYP with SEMH needs and encourage them to feel confident to voice their concerns (Kennedy, 2015). This fosters positive teacher-student relationships, but only when teachers see the significance and value of eliciting voice as a crucial element within daily teaching (Cefai & Cooper, 2010). Therefore, being a familiar adult to a CYP can be an enabling factor in certain situations, but this is dependent on various factors such as the needs of the CYP, the environment and the approach of the professional towards including CYP in decision-making processes.

The awareness of being a new adult as a potential barrier to eliciting voice was acknowledged by LA professionals and positive solutions to overcome this were suggested. An EP suggests sending a picture to the CYP, so they can become 'familiar' with the professional they are meeting beforehand, with a brief description of the process. This was incorporated within the document of good practice; feedback from LA professionals felt this was a positive step towards supporting CYP through the process of EHCPs and could be implemented easily within their role.

(ii) *Fostering decision-making*

As identified in the literature, CYP with SEND remain on the periphery of decision-making (Pearlman & Michaels, 2019; Rose, 2005) and the focus has been on encouraging opportunities for CYP to be fully involved in decisions that are being made that affect them (Ofsted, 2010). The participants were advocates of ensuring CYP felt engaged in their meetings and many suggested that they should have a say

in who attends the meeting, where it is held, and how it is held, in order to foster full participation within their EHCP and AR (Barnes, 2002).

Some school staff reported high levels of participation where students have a say on the set-up of their ARs, whilst others expressed this as a good idea but not currently done within their establishment. Again, LA professionals have a notable disadvantage in comparison to school professionals as they often cannot control certain aspects of their encounters with CYP. For example, meetings are often held in schools or within the home, where the layout is often mediated by the gatekeepers. LA professionals are therefore limited in their ability to create an environment based on the CYPs wishes, whereas schools on the other hand have the benefit of accommodating the needs of CYP and tailoring the environment based on their views (Hagner et al, 2012).

The resounding message throughout literature around pupil participation has concluded that it is as a professional responsibility to foster decision-making processes from an early age and on a regular basis. Schools have daily opportunities to involve CYP in decision-making processes within every-day scenarios, which in turn promotes confidence in CYP being involved in the larger decision-making scenarios that affect them (Fayette & Bond, 2018). LA professionals do not have the same breadth of opportunities to foster decision-making in every-day choices and therefore need to find alternative enabling factors to support decision-making in the EHCP and AR process.

6.2.5. What barriers have been identified when trying to elicit the views of the CYP?

The barriers to eliciting voice from the SEND perspective remained a focal interest of this study and the findings highlighted key areas for policy and practice to develop ways to overcome the limits to participation. LA professionals in particular were more likely to identify barriers within their role to eliciting voice. Interestingly the quantitative data suggested minimal concerns around the barriers to eliciting voice, whilst the qualitative data clearly resonated a breadth of difficulties that professionals

experience in eliciting voice. Figure 4.17 summarises the barriers experienced by both professionals and CYP.

(i) *Time, capacity and bureaucracy*

The literature identified that despite a professional rhetoric on the importance of consulting with children, in practice this proves to be problematic and may not be at the forefront given the statutory deadlines and standards professionals are required to meet (Cremin, Mason & Busher, 2011). The findings were clear about the difficulties that professionals have in eliciting voice due to the restraints of their daily role. Both samples expressed the difficulty in ensuring a person-centred approach to each meeting given the high numbers of their caseload.

The school professionals struggled to invest successfully in PCRs given the financial strain, training and time commitment that comes with arranging this. Similarly, the LA professionals reported capacity as the biggest barrier to eliciting voice as they cannot practically meet every child on their caseload and meaningfully elicit voice. The number of pupils that require an EHCP or AR cannot be changed, however what can change is the professional approach and management of this. As discussed in the literature, eliciting voice would not be a time-consuming process if built into the curriculum (Smith & Sanderson, 2009) and embedded within every assessment. If professionals view this as a 'priority' in the same way they view the statutory deadlines, then pupil voice would be part of every interaction and therefore not an additional task to be completed.

The discrepancy therefore comes back to the ambiguous language of the CoP, where the statutory aspect of an EHCP does not clearly dictate eliciting voice as mandatory to the assessment. Language such as 'should' opens up professional interpretation of consultation, as opposed to clear guidelines of how to consult. The conceptual difficulty of separating the 'needs' of CYP' and the 'needs for a particular service' is the biggest barrier that professionals face (Parry-Jones & Soulsby, 2001). Despite professional inclination to ensure person-centred approaches, the high workload of LA professionals (Hellowell, 2015) and burnout rates amongst teaching staff (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2007) will remain a consistent barrier within SEND.

The approach to SEND assessment and reviews should be 'needs-led' as opposed to 'service-led', and whilst professionals clearly acknowledge and welcome this, the practicality of this proves to be difficult given the bureaucracies of LA and school establishments (Parry-Jones & Soulsby, 2001).

(ii) *Power dynamics*

Despite the reiterations of the code placing emphasis on involving CYP in decision-making, the EHCP and AR process still remains largely adult-led. The existing power dynamics between an adult-child relationship as described by Lundy (2007) can impact a professional's ability to meaningfully elicit voice. Participants reported they felt the process was dictated by adults based on their timing and capacity, whereas it should be the CYPs choice '*because it doesn't have to happen at a time dictated by an adult*' (SENCO). However, managing this can be difficult given the previous barriers mentioned of time, capacity and deadlines.

Historically, meetings held at school with parents and professionals is associated as a negative experience for CYP; '*the school and the parent come together to talk about what's not working for the child*' (Head Teacher). The lack of ownership that CYP have over meetings that involve decisions around their life pervades the literature; professionals within this study acknowledged the barrier of power dynamics and advocated for professionals to step back and allow CYP to set the agenda and lead the meeting (Willow et al, 2004).

Another adult-child dynamic that can impact eliciting voice includes the parents, where both samples reported them as gatekeepers within their role. Literature has often focused on parental views of the EHCP process (Adams et al, 2017) and that at times can overpower the needs of CYP. Professionals often struggle with trying to remain person-centred in meetings whilst acknowledging and addressing the views of the parent/carer. The conflicting views of various gatekeepers within meetings can lead to tensions for the SEND professionals involved and may result in the CYPs voice not being at the centre. In these instances, the voice of the CYP is drowned out by the louder voices around them. A constant narrative is therefore required by SEND professionals to ensure the CYP is at the centre, despite the barriers they may face.

(iii) Lack of meaningful participation

The findings showed professionals failing to provide multiple opportunities for meaningful engagement. Both samples quite often disagreed with offering CYP a choice of how they would like to share their views, therefore suggesting this is dictated by the professional. This was highlighted in the literature review as one of the ethical barriers in eliciting views due to the complex power dynamics within a school context, where the relationship between teacher and pupil entails a pupil is expected to listen to teacher's instruction (Lundy, 2007; Scott-Barret, Cebula & Florian, 2019), and be involved in reviews without the choice to participate (Lewis, 2010; Bradwell, 2019). Many professionals expressed the view that CYP are not invited to the meeting or only attend part of the meeting for their own benefit, as they may find it a stressful experience, or the adults cannot speak freely with the CYP present. A SO stated that CYP were only present at 10% of ARs they had attended, which indicates the lack of participation within this particular authority.

Another ethical quandary within literature is whether CYP with needs such as PMLD can express their views in a meaningful way. Harding (2009) deliberates the complexities of gaining consent from CYP with complex needs due to adults interpreting their behaviour as an indication of their preferences, however stresses that it remains important for adults to attempt to involve them as far as possible. This is consistent with the language within the CoP yet remains ambiguous as to what extent professionals try to involve CYP with complex needs. Ware (2004) questions the extent to which it is possible to ascertain the views of CYP with PMLD and perhaps professionals need to acknowledge the reasonable limits to participation of this small cohort of CYP with high and complex needs.

The findings therefore support the views depicted by Lewis (2010); the dissonance professionals experience between advocating the voice of the CYP against the various barriers against them has led to a 'moral crusade'. Despite the professional rhetoric on the importance of PCR, the cumulative difficulties mentioned above lead professionals to struggle to manage an impractical task of not only eliciting the voice yet ensuring that it is meaningful and accurate. The LA and school systems need to be evaluated within the wider context; England is one of the few countries known for not embedding the UNCRC within daily practice (Payne, 2017). The CoP may

mandate professionals to promote the importance of pupil voice, but this is not consistent with societal expectations where the voices of CYP with SEND remain silenced in regard to decision-making (Fox, 2015). Phase one identified areas of importance that can be supported within establishments however it is clear a cultural shift is required before professionals can be supported on a systematic level.

6.3 Summary of Phase two and answers to the research questions

Phase two of this study aimed to explore the views of SEND professionals on the issues raised in phase one and develop a consensus on how CYP could meaningfully engage in their meetings. The Delphi method developed consensus on the characteristics required for meaningful participation and provided actionable solutions to the perceived barriers as recommended by the professionals themselves.

The end product was a document of good practice that could be trialled within LAs and schools as a guide when eliciting the voice of CYP.

As described in chapter 5, the main findings were:

- SEND professionals are aware of the barriers that inhibit their ability to meaningfully capture voice;
- Practical solutions were identified by all panellists to overcome the limits to participation, where the most significant way is to implement creative methods, and;
- The Delphi method was successful in developing professional consensus on the characteristics of meaningful participation and contributing towards developing a document of good practice.

This thesis will now discuss the key findings and the relation to the research questions within phase two. In this way, a clear discussion and conclusion can be drawn around the professional consensus on eliciting voice in a meaningful way.

6.3.1. *What are the identified characteristics of best practice for professionals within SEND to elicit the voice of the CYP within EHCP assessments and ARs?*

Despite the individual needs of CYP with SEND, the expert panel identified key principles that may enable a CYP to express their voice during assessments and ARs. Although key practices and conditions for eliciting voice was the least mentioned theme within the initial dataset from round one, panellists did comment on characteristics they felt entailed meaningful participation for CYP.

(i) *Principles for eliciting voice*

The conditions that can enable a CYP to express their views can be seen in two ways; factors that can be easily controlled by an adult such as the environment and approach used with CYP, and the other as more abstract conditions that are individualised to the CYP. For example, fostering a warm environment for CYP supports them to feel safe within their surroundings and enable them to express their views. The concept of feeling safe is likely to be individualised for each person, as one pupil may feel safe meeting a new professional, whilst others may not. However, panellists agreed a CYP feeling safe was a key condition that must be implemented prior to eliciting voice. A distinctive view was also raised by the family support worker, which was that ensuring a positive environment between professionals could be a way for a CYP to feel safe to share their views. This was the first comment that mentioned the relationship between the professionals amongst each other, as opposed to the relationship with the CYP, and provides a unique perspective when approaching the topic of pupil voice. The relationship amongst professionals is just as important as the relationship with the CYP.

The relationship with the CYP however was a significant principle mentioned by panellists, and also identified within phase one of the study. Building rapport with a CYP was a determining condition to meaningfully eliciting voice and reached consensus within the Delphi method. The findings corroborate the literature that building positive relationships support CYP to feel accepted and consequently comfortable to express themselves (Rose & Shelvin, 2017). As discussed above, school staff have the opportunity to develop this relationship through their daily

interactions, and therefore this may be harder for LA professionals to achieve due to their limited time to establish relationships. The expert panel consisted of six LA members who felt building rapport was a key factor and therefore despite the difficulty they may face in developing this, all panellists agreed this condition was needed for a professional to elicit the voice of a CYP meaningfully and thus remains a focus for LA professionals to implement when eliciting voice.

However, not every panel member mentioned key practices and conditions in eliciting voice and therefore they may not feel as confident in identifying these. The low response may arise from misunderstanding of the question or a lack of clarity. Although the pilot study was a way to refine questions, the likelihood still remains that individual panellists may have interpreted a question in a different way and the meaning could have been misconstrued. One panellist wrote '*I hope I have understood this question*', which suggests confusion when answering this either due to the ambiguity of what constitutes 'key principles and conditions to elicit voice' or a flaw within the questionnaire itself.

(ii) *Defining what is 'meaningful'*

As discussed within the literature review, the concept of what constitutes 'meaningful' is an individualised experience; what is meaningful to one person may not necessarily be to another, and therefore a professional's approach can be dependent on what they define as meaningful. In order to identify the characteristics that constituted meaningful participation, the term 'meaningful' needed to be operationalised.

The first question within round one asked panellists to define meaningful participation within EHCP meetings and ARs. The key phrases and characteristics that were most frequently referenced ranged from arbitrary factors such as '*attendance at meetings*', '*drawing pictures of what they like*' and '*commenting on their experiences*', to more consequential factors such as a '*CYP feeling comfortable*', '*experiencing ownership*' and '*seeing change happen*'. The latter are not exemplifying practice that a professional can easily implement but rather a result of a professional engaging in a multitude of conditions beforehand in order for a CYP to feel that way. For example, in order for a CYP to see change happen, a professional

must first *'listen to the CYPs views'*, *'hear what support they would like to have'* by providing *'future focused questions on what they would like to achieve or change'* and then *'see change happening as a result'*. These were all characteristics suggested by the panellists that cumulatively can support a CYP to meaningfully engage within EHCP meetings and ARs.

An EP within the expert panel identified that asking a CYP their likes and dislikes is not meaningful. This corroborates the differentiation mentioned above between a 'preference' and a 'view' (Pearlman & Michaels, 2019). Panellists felt meetings needed to reflect change for the CYP and using the opportunity to identify what the CYP would like to happen. As discussed above, phase one identified that LAs and schools do not tend to ask higher order questions that facilitate change. Although panel members have identified this as a way to achieve meaningful participation, it is clear from the questionnaire data in phase one that future-focused questions are seldom achieved in practice. This item also did not reach consensus and therefore was not part of the document of good practice, but it is worth noting that facilitating change was often referenced within this study as a step forward towards achieving meaningful participation.

The only item that reached consensus was for a CYPs views to be listened to; the Delphi method therefore identified this as the most important characteristic for professionals to consider when eliciting voice. The qualitative data within round three of the Delphi method provided examples of ways a professional could do this such as writing the views down in the exact wording, so the CYP knows their views have been listened to. Phase one did identify professionals felt listening to the CYP remains an integral component within the process and therefore remains as the most important condition when eliciting voice.

6.3.2. *What were the practical solutions identified to overcome the barriers to eliciting voice?*

The panel experts all acknowledged a range of barriers in eliciting voice, many being similar to those raised within phase one. Positively, the most mentioned theme within phase two was how to overcome the limits to participation. All panellists reported a

range of solutions they felt were able to be implemented within their role on a practical level, where the most significant solution was to implement creative methods to support professionals when attempting to elicit the voice of CYP.

(i) *The barriers to eliciting voice*

Panel members were aware of the barriers in eliciting voice, which has been a consistent message throughout this thesis. The most significant barriers to eliciting voice that reached consensus were a CYPs language and cognitive ability and their anxieties and fears.

Quite often professionals are unaware of the preferred communication styles of the CYP they work with (Sloper, 2006) or are not trained on particular methods. One panel member stated that without appropriate communication, you cannot elicit the voice of CYP, and therefore remains a significant barrier in eliciting voice. Similarly, the anxieties and fears associated with meetings was referenced within phase one due to the negative associations of meetings for CYP. Professionals therefore need to focus on how to amend this preconceived opinion and promote meetings as a constructive experience aiming to support CYP and hear their views on decisions that affect them.

Although limited time and capacity did not reach a level of consensus, professionals have referenced this barrier throughout both phases of the study. A panel member felt the barriers discussed above could be alleviated if they had more time with the CYP. For example, if a professional had more time to elicit the views of a CYP, they could speak to adults who know them well to understand their communication system, create resources tailored to their individual needs, invest time to build rapport with the CYP and thoroughly explain the process in order to alleviate any anxieties and fears the CYP may have. However, limited time and capacity is a recognised barrier for SEND professionals and therefore unlikely to be improved given the current restraints within education (Hellowell, 2015), rather the focus should be on how voice can be meaningfully captured despite the barriers within the field.

The findings did suggest that CYP can contribute to their meetings, albeit partially. This includes sharing their views beforehand but not physically attending or being

involved in part of the meeting in order to alleviate the anxieties and fears they may have, and to accommodate to their language and cognitive ability. Although an ideal scenario would involve complete participation for all CYP during their assessments and reviews, the reality is this is very unlikely given the multiple barriers that exist in their day-to-day life. As Taylor (2007) stated, '*partial participation is still significant and valid and worth the investment of time and effort required*' (p.209).

(ii) *Overcoming the limits to participation*

Despite the recognition that the barriers can inhibit a professional's ability to elicit voice or a CYPs willingness to express themselves, the focus within the Delphi method was ways to overcome the barriers within practice. Panel members felt professionals '*go over and beyond*' to support CYP during the process and that CYP can always be involved in some way or another.

Round one of the Delphi method ranked creative methods as the most important way to overcome the limits to participation. This was consistent between rounds and was the only factor that reached consensus as a result of the group-ranking process. Creative methods were also frequently referenced within the qualitative data in round one and therefore there was initial agreement amongst panellists that implementing creative methods is a viable solution to the barriers in capturing voice. However, this remains a general approach to eliciting voice and professionals require specific details about how to be creative or what counts as creative in order to be successful and implement on a practical level.

Past literature has identified that adaptations can be made to methods of consultation to support the needs of CYP, such as using technological methods such as 'Skype' to elicit voice (Hudson, 2006). Panellists mentioned using technology, virtual options and multiple opportunities to elicit voice. For example, a CYP could just '*send you emojis if that's what they like doing*' as a way to express themselves in a manner in which they are comfortable with. This is a practical solution that caters to the time constraints of a SEND professional as virtual options can be implemented at any time; it also resolves other barriers such as a CYPs language ability, anxiety of the meeting and lack of resources, as using a variety of technological mediums can cater to the individual needs of a CYP.

6.3.3. *How can the findings from the Delphi process develop professional practice?*

The Delphi method aims to develop group consensus through the use of multiple iterations (Hsu & Sandford, 2007). By ranking the top three most significant/important factors within a given problem, panellists are constantly assessing factors they deem to be a priority. Panellists expressed similar viewpoints from round one, which would be expected as all panellists were SEND professionals and are likely to share a similar ethos towards inclusive practice. There were slight discrepancies in the priorities listed by different members, which allowed for the wide range of items developed for round two. The iterations within each round began to converge towards a shared group opinion on how to overcome the limits to participation and by the end of round three, a selected range of factors had reached consensus. This was translated within the document of good practice to share the findings of this study within the wider context of SEND professionals, in order to support their role in eliciting the voice of CYP with SEND.

(i) Developing group consensus

Through the iterative process of the Delphi method, this study identified nine items that reached consensus in regard to pupil voice. Seven of these were ranked as most important and two were seen as least important.

When panellists were asked to rank the top three items within each question, a clear shift in opinion occurred after each iteration. The feedback within the Delphi method after each round of questioning led to panellists shifting their views on what they felt were the most important factors in eliciting voice. Some items remained the most important/significant factor throughout each round where consensus increased between iterations, and therefore it was expected for them to reach consensus. However, certain items showed a shift in convergence throughout the iterations; the shift in opinion suggests that when panellists are given feedback, they begin to reassess their initial ranking and begin to converge towards a consensus (Hsu & Sandford, 2007). This showcases the effectiveness of the Delphi method in achieving its aim to converge group opinion.

The qualitative aspect of the Delphi method also identified further factors within each theme, however it would be impractical to condense all the findings within a useable document. Offering too many solutions can become overwhelming when reading guidance and therefore becomes ineffectual. By choosing to frame the document of good practice around the seven items that reached consensus as most important, it became compact and easier to read, and thus more likely to be implemented within practice.

(ii) *Document of good practice*

The document of good practice was based upon the findings of phase two however were supported by the questionnaire and interview data. By developing a compact guide for professionals, the aim of this thesis was to support SEND professionals to consider a range of factors prior to eliciting voice during EHCP assessments and ARs. The document is short and summarises each theme on one page, with suggestions from the panel members of good practice to help overcome the limits to eliciting voice.

The document contains direct quotations by panellists in order to develop a sense of empowerment for SEND professionals; as the guidelines have been suggested by professionals who have experienced the difficulties in eliciting voice, others may feel motivated to implement the suggestions within practice as this resonates with their own professional experiences.

The document was only shared with selected members within the panel to gather feedback and make improvement. Feedback provided by panellists were all positive and felt the document could be implemented within their team. Future recommendations will be discussed below but the aim is to implement the document within LAs and schools as an additional resource to support professionals within their daily role. Although the findings are based on the views and opinions of one LA, they aim to be generalised to the wider community and may be adapted in other settings.

6.4 Evaluation of the study

6.4.1. *Strengths of the study*

The methodology chapter discussed the advantages and disadvantages of each method used within this thesis and the contribution this study has made to existing knowledge will be discussed below. However, when evaluating the strengths of this thesis overall, the study was an empowering experience for the participants involved and has shed light on the views and opinions of SEND professionals, a cohort often neglected within literature (Hellawell, 2015; Fayette & Bond, 2018). This study did not aim to criticise the roles carried out by SEND professionals, rather to highlight the concerns of those at the forefront in order to support them on both a policy and practical level.

(i) *Range of viewpoints*

This study successfully explored the opinions of two distinct groups of professionals who work with CYP with SEND; LA professionals who elicit voice as part of statutory processes, and specialist school staff who communicate with CYP on a daily basis. Within these two broad sample groups, there were participants with a range of roles who contributed to the findings. Although this study did not delve into the differences of opinion between roles at such depth, there was a clear pattern that emerged from the analysis based on participant characteristics.

Certain roles expressed specific views and approaches to pupil voice, for example, EPs showed a strong rhetoric about prioritising views of CYP and having a range of methods at their disposal, which is consistent with the literature (Fox, 2015). Alternatively, SO's who coordinate EHCP assessments often reported not meeting CYP, having high caseloads and struggling to meaningfully elicit the voice of CYP. This adds to the body of literature that this role accompanies both bureaucratic burdens, as well as moral burdens, due to the barriers of high caseloads and tensions between what 'should' be done and what 'ought' to be done (Lewis, 2010). As described by Hellawell (2015), the demands placed on frontline professionals may seem justified when focusing on the bigger picture of supporting CYP with SEND, however it is known to cause stress and anxiety to individual professionals and therefore support is required to help alleviate this.

(ii) *Triangulation of data*

The use of a mixed-methods approach allowed for the same questions to be asked within multiple contexts. Key questions such as the enabling factors and barriers to participation were asked in both phases to all participants, and findings suggest similar barriers were experienced by all. This triangulation of data adds further depth to the conclusions drawn; the barriers reported within this study were similar to those identified within existing literature and thereby corroborates findings that professionals face a range of barriers when eliciting voice and require practical solutions to overcome this (Harding & Atkinson, 2009; Lundy, 2007; Pearlman & Michaels, 2019).

It is important to note that this does not assume validity of the claims; although the mixed methods approach allows for a fuller understanding of the views and opinions of SEND professionals, it does not add to the accuracy of the findings (Fielding & Fielding, 1986).

(iii) *Empowering experience*

An intention of this study from the onset was to explore the perspective of the SEND professional. Despite the demands placed on frontline professionals, there is a lack of empirical research to support practitioners on how to manage the high workloads and stress associated with the role (Fayette & Bond, 2018; Hellowell, 2015). The focus is often on CYP and parent/carers, however, to my knowledge the views and opinions of those on the frontline have not been captured within this context. Phase one successfully identified a range of factors that support professionals in their role, along with the barriers they face in eliciting voice, and therefore captured the views of professionals in their daily role. The interviews also explored this in-depth and allowed participants to reflect on their practice and discuss the barriers they face.

Hearing the views of SEND professionals was the first step within the study, the second was to then acknowledge the barriers and work with the professionals to highlight ways this could be overcome. By engaging in a collaborative and participatory approach, the Delphi method allowed SEND professionals to express their views on an individual basis, whilst also allowing for a group consensus to be formed. Panellists developed solutions based on practicality and accessibility within

their role and therefore the document of good practice encapsulates solutions that can be easily implemented on a daily basis, as detailed by SEND professionals themselves. By providing solutions from those on the frontline who have first-hand experiences on the barriers to eliciting voice, the findings are likely to be more relatable to other practitioners to implement in their daily role.

This study provided a space and opportunity for SEND professionals to engage with the challenging issue of pupil voice and engage in joint critical reflection about their work. The document of good practice was devised on the feedback of the panellists and direct quotes were used to exert their ownership within the process. This was made clear both within the document itself and within the feedback, in order to ensure panellists knew that their contributions to the study resulted in the end product. The study aimed to be conducive to empowerment of SEND professionals and allow an opportunity to contribute towards a resource that can better support professionals during their role and feel confident to elicit the voice of CYP.

I also felt my 'insider role' added to the experience; as a SEND professional, I felt my presence within the study allowed participants to be honest about the hardships of eliciting voice, as they felt I could relate to their experiences. The anonymity of the Delphi method also allows an avenue for professionals to express how they feel without any fear of repercussions or judgment. These combined factors led the document of good practice to be based on the honest perceptions of SEND professionals.

(iv) Reflection and feedback

A positive by-product of this study was the reflective process that participants voluntarily engaged in as a result of the questions. Participants in both phases appeared to reflect on their practice and approach to pupil voice. The questions allowed for professionals to evaluate the effort they make to include the voice of CYP, and how they felt they could improve. One EP felt the questionnaire made her realise she is better equipped at eliciting the voice of CYP who are verbal, and therefore wanted to improve her practice to supporting those who are non-verbal.

'I think that means possibly at the moment I'm not always doing justice to more vulnerable CYP in terms of including their voice, which is something I find quite

uncomfortable to reflect on. It makes me want to focus on enhancing my skills in exploring the voice of CYP who are far less likely to have had their voices listened to in the past'.

Quite often, in demanding roles such as these, professionals can carry out tasks as part of their daily work without reflecting on how they could improve (Hellawell, 2015). Participating in research and engaging in exercises to think about your professional role is beneficial in allowing individuals to step back and question whether they are carrying out their duty to CYP, and most importantly remind themselves that it is important to always remember why they elicit the voice instead of carrying out tasks that become '*second nature*' (SO). The study was therefore beneficial in allowing professionals time to reflect on their practice and participants felt this was beneficial in supporting future practice.

'I hadn't really considered some of these ways of collecting views and haven't done a lot of things like asking for their views on what support they would like - it was useful seeing this in the survey and I plan now to do this more going forward' (Trainee EP).

6.4.2. Limitations of the study

Despite the wider benefits of the findings, the study does have its limitations that I hope future studies will consider when researching within this area or utilising similar methods.

(i) Sample size and Generalisability

When examining the findings, it is important to consider the sample of participants in the context of all professionals who work with CYP with SEND, in order to determine the relevance of the findings within the context the sample was drawn. The most significant limitation of this study as discussed within chapter 3 was the small sample size within phase one and lack of even responses from both sample groups.

There are 152 LAs in England and over 1000 specialist schools within England, with hundreds of professionals who contribute to the EHCP and AR process. This study contains a small sample of both of these groups, and although similar views were expressed within both phases of the study, there was still some variability within the

findings. This suggest that whilst the findings from the sample may be somewhat reflective of LA professionals and specialist school staff, it is unlikely they are representative of all professionals in this field. Caution should therefore be taken when interpreting the findings from this study and applying this within a wider context.

There was no clear indication of why a low response rate occurred within the questionnaire responses, as discussed within the methodology chapter this is likely to be due to the demands within both establishments that may limit their availability to engage in research projects. Other studies that have utilised the same sample have experienced similar problems; Adams et al (2017) conducted the largest survey of EHCPs however found that the availability of contact details for LAs limited the extent to which robust results for each authority could be gained. Perhaps with a longer period for data collection, the questionnaire could be more reflective of all the LAs and schools within England and generate findings on a larger scale. Other factors that may have mitigated against the small sample size could have included contacting all specialist schools in England as opposed to a selected few and making use of social media to contact participants.

(ii) Contradicting views

As discussed above, triangulating data is a key strength of mixed-method approaches and allows the researcher to make conclusions with confidence, based on consistency between findings. However, there were some discrepancies within the data. For example, majority of professionals disagreed with the barriers referenced within section E of the questionnaire, however reported these same barriers within the qualitative data. It is unclear why professionals expressed opposing views within different methods, it may possibly be due to the disadvantages of using questionnaires where participants may answer incorrectly either due to respondent fatigue or social desirability bias (De Vaus, 2013). The contradictory findings therefore hinder the reliability of the findings as there is no way to ascertain the participants consistent opinions on pupil voice.

(iii) *Missing key services*

The three key services within an EHCP are education, health and social care. This thesis included the views and opinions of LA and school professionals and therefore all three methods incorporated the education and social care perspective, albeit a small number of responses. The questionnaire was not sent to health professionals for a variety of reasons including lack of accessibility and existing demands associated with the role; although health professionals may be interested in research projects that aim to improve practice, they are often '*too busy*' to participate (Williams, 2020). This difficulty in ascertaining commitments from key services in EHCPs has been discussed within the literature, where SENCOs have commented on the lack of collaboration between health and social care to the EHCP process (Boesley & Crane, 2018).

As there was no representation of health workers who contribute to EHCPs and ARs, conclusions cannot be made for this sub-group of professionals. It is possible health professionals who work with CYP with SEND may face a different set of barriers within their daily role, which has not been captured within the findings of this study. Without representing all three services, the findings do not represent the views of all SEND professionals who contribute to the EHCP process.

(iv) *Missing the voice of CYP*

Arguably the biggest limitation of this study is the lack of pupil voice. This study has explored the views and opinions of SEND 'experts' who support CYP to have their voices heard yet it is vital to remember that CYP remain as the '*experts in their own lives*' (Clark & Statham, 2005) and their voice is notably missing from this study.

The literature review has criticised past policy documents, reports and research for not including the views of CYP on decisions that affect them (Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2009; Ofsted, 2010). This study has explored the views of SEND professionals and has not encapsulated the views of other key agents such as parent/carers and most importantly, the CYP. This was a barrier acknowledged from the offset of this study; I was aware of the consistent message throughout the literature review around the lack of pupil participation within policy and research, whilst engaging in the same behaviour within my study. This was a

limitation I was uncomfortable with but had to outweigh how best to reach the overall aims of this study.

It is important to note that this study focused purely on the SEND professional perspective due to the lack of research to support them in their role (Fayette & Bond, 2018). As a SEND professional myself, I felt more support is needed to support the practitioner role through clear guidance and protocols in order to ensure the voice of CYP are at the centre of all assessments and meetings. As the aims of this study was to explore the SEND perspective on eliciting voice, develop an agreed set of characteristics of meaningful participation, and generate practical solutions to overcome the limits to participation, I chose to only include professionals at this point in order to establish the barriers as perceived by them.

However, any research that aims to improve practice should involve the views of CYP and their feedback should drive all policy and procedures put into place. With a longer period of data collection, this thesis would have sought feedback from CYP on their views of the EHCP and AR process, factors that support them to express their views and the barriers they face. Although suggestions for future research will be discussed below, the rights of CYP should continue to be upheld and their views should be integral to all research studies.

6.5 Contribution to knowledge

6.5.1. Originality of the study and significance to existing literature

The SEN framework in place acknowledges the benefits of hearing the autonomous voice of CYP and although progress has been made in promoting the importance of pupil voice, the limited evidence to date shows a mixed picture of how effective the rights of CYP are being valued as per the UNCRC (1989). The enabling factors and barriers identified within the study resemble those acknowledged within the literature (Lewis & Porter, 2007) and therefore this adds weight to the conclusion that there are various barriers experienced by CYP when expressing their views within decisions that affect them (Scott-Barret, Cebula & Florian, 2019; Harding & Atkinson,

2009), and by professionals when attempting to elicit their voice (Cremin, Mason & Busher, 2011; Lundy, 2007).

SEND professionals experience high levels of moral stress (Hellawell, 2015) and there is a lack of research identifying how they can be supported within their role. Due to the lack of understanding around the barriers they face, there is in turn an absence of solutions that can be implemented within daily practice to support the process of eliciting pupil voice. This study has produced an in-depth understanding of the views and opinions of LA professionals and specialist school staff about their approach to eliciting pupil voice, the factors that support their role along with the factors that encumber their role. By exploring the SEND perspective, a baseline of discussion was established with professionals within a given area and solutions were suggested to overcome the limits to participation. To my knowledge, this is the first study that has explored the views of 'front-line' SEND professionals to this depth and established a group participatory approach to develop guidelines and better professional practice.

There are various agencies and local charities who advocate the participation of CYP by working with LAs, the NHS and schools through training programmes. For example, the CDC mentioned earlier develop toolkits for SEND professionals to use and factsheets to identify solutions based on the CYPs feedback. However, the focus has often been based on the LAs performance and thereby using deficit-based language (Children's Rights Alliance, 2009). This study acknowledges similar barriers to participation as mentioned by the CDC, yet approaches this from the perspective of the SEND professional, whilst suggesting practical solutions to overcome this and therefore is a unique contribution to the existing body of knowledge on the barriers to participation.

The findings also contribute to knowledge about professionals' self-efficacy and how this supports their role in eliciting voice. Section B of the questionnaire evaluated the participants perceived self-efficacy when working with CYP with SEND. The tests of correlation showed a relationship between self-efficacy and the effort made to elicit pupil voice. This is consistent with the literature (Sharma, Loreman & Florian, 2012) and therefore adds value to the body of knowledge around self-efficacy in professionals and how this may act as an enabling factor.

As a result of this study, a document of good practice has been developed off the feedback from the professionals themselves. Many LAs and schools develop their own document within their establishments, however by creating a document that can be applied for all professionals within various roles, the document also extends to Education, Health and Social Care, therefore benefiting the SEND service as a whole.

The present study therefore makes a significant and original contribution to the field of pupil voice, specifically for CYP with SEND within the context of their EHCPs and ARs, as it implies there are practical actions that can overcome the inevitable barriers that arise when capturing voice due to the complexities and individual needs of CYP with SEND. By listening and understanding the views and opinions of professionals on the 'front-line', collaborative approaches can both empower and motivate professionals to acknowledge the barriers in eliciting voice and actively implement solutions.

6.5.2. Contribution to methodological knowledge

This study also successfully contributed to the methodological knowledge of the Delphi method. Although this is not the first time the Delphi has been implemented within education (Green & Birch, 2019), it has seldom been used within the context of SEND. In addition to developing consensus, the Delphi also acts as a collaborative group approach to provide solutions to problems within a given field. This study therefore raises awareness of the pertinent issues and tensions within statutory work, whilst collectively developing solutions based on participant feedback.

Each round successfully developed a convergence of opinion between panellists and a shift in judgments can be seen as a result of the final rankings. When compared to other group methods such as DBR, the Delphi was an easier method to learn, implement and analyse with ease. I would therefore advocate this method within future research when attempting to reach consensus or identifying solutions to perceived problems within a given field

On a practical level, the Delphi can be difficult to implement due to time commitments of professionals within education who often have high demands within their role. However, when implementing the classic method which is carried out virtually, it is a strength of the Delphi that it can be implemented at any time and place. It also generates a wealth of information that can be analysed at different levels. The anonymity of the method also is advantageous when discussing problems within a given area or team; panel members are more likely to be honest when they feel it is via an anonymous method (Davidson, 2003).

A possible limitation to my contribution to methodological knowledge could be my lack of prior experience using the Delphi method. A researcher must be familiar with the method and confident when implementing and analysing in order to produce high-quality research (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). It is possible that my lack of familiarity with the Delphi could affect the quality of the findings, and therefore impact the contribution of this research.

6.5.3. *Implications for practice and policy*

The duty of a SEND professional could be summarised within three aims; protect CYP, promote participation, and provide appropriate provision (UNCRC, 1989). This thesis made it clear that the aim of '*participation*' lags behind the other two and it is by acknowledging this difference that work can be collectively carried out towards ensuring participation is at the forefront of every assessment, AR, and interaction with a CYP.

The findings have implications for practice and policy in the following ways. Policy makers need to further examine the barriers faced by SEND professionals when considering statutory timelines and duties. The high workload and burnout rates associated with the role often leave professionals unable to meaningfully elicit the voice of CYP whilst meeting statutory deadlines. Policy makers can therefore use the barriers identified within this study for further discussion with SEND professionals, in order for them to feel heard within their daily role.

The solutions generated by the SEND professionals within the document of good practice can also be utilised when considering the barriers to participation. As the solutions have been suggested by SEND professionals themselves, the findings may be relatable to others and can support LA professionals and school staff when eliciting the voice of CYP. Although the document of good practice was not based on a representative sample as it was localised to one local area and therefore I would be cautious in making any assumptions, the document was supported by the findings within the surveys and questionnaire data carried out on a range of SEND professionals who were geographically dispersed and therefore the document could be accepted as a foundation in which further empirical evidence can be sought. The document of good practice produced can be implemented within LAs as part of their local offer and act as both a guide and reminder for SEND professionals to consider their approach when eliciting the voice of CYP. The aim of the document was to improve practice and the feedback suggests this may be a useful tool for SEND professionals to use within their daily role, and therefore holds the potential of national relevance.

Ancillary findings drawn from phase one also highlighted a difference in approach to pupil voice based on the role of the SEND professional; this is something that needs addressing on a practice level. If the expectation is all SEND professionals have a duty to elicit voice, then equal training and resources need to be provided in order to successfully do so, along with clear role responsibilities and duties to ensure the voice of CYP are part of the assessment and review process.

As discussed above, participants who took part in the questionnaire reflected on their practice and felt it was a positive reminder to pay particular attention to ensuring person-centred approaches within their role. If this same message can reach SEND professionals on a national level, then we can work towards a cultural shift by improving participation, meaningfully engaging CYP and ensuring a person-centred approach.

6.5.4. *Recommendations for future research*

As discussed in the methodology chapter, the small sample size and uneven responses between the two sample groups limit the claim of generalisability of the findings. This study has highlighted the barriers experienced by a selective group of SEND professionals within a given time, however exploring the barriers in greater depth could provide further insight into the limits of participation. Therefore, longitudinal studies that track the consistent barriers professionals experience may be beneficial for policy makers.

There is a clear message from past research that workload stress within LAs and high teacher burnout negatively impact their roles working with CYP (Hellawell, 2015), and therefore any potential solutions to support professionals must consider their views on how they could positively benefit from any recommendations in place. It would become ineffectual if any recommendations for SEND professionals adds additional stress and burdens to their already challenging roles and therefore careful thought must go into any suggestions made at a strategic level.

The findings have shown the views and opinions of SEND professionals from different parts of England, with differing roles and years of experience. These differences raise a number of potential avenues for future research, for example, carrying out the questionnaire with a larger sample, comparing the views between LA professionals and specialist schools, comparing the views of different roles within the LA, or utilising the Delphi method on a wider scale. I feel these potential patterns are worth exploring due to experiences from my own professional practice; my role as both a LA officer and specialist school staff has highlighted differences in the approach to eliciting voice based on factors such as role and ethos of the establishment. The findings in this study suggest a possible relationship and therefore with a larger sample, this could be explored further.

Future research could also implement the document of good practice on a wider scale to evaluate its efficacy. I plan to implement this document within my local area to determine how successful and useful LA professionals find it, however without branching out, I run the risk of repeating what other LAs are doing; creating a document used only by one LA and then not following this up. It would be beneficial

to implement to all LAs and schools as an additional resource that can be used during EHCP assessments and ARs, and as part of wider policies in place such as the participation strategy. Future research could implement the document within additional LAs and school in order to evaluate the practicality and effectiveness of the suggestions; refinements can be made based on feedback and produce an empirically grounded document of national relevance.

A key finding that came from the analysis was the need for creative methods to be available to LAs and schools to implement when eliciting voice. Literature has focused on using technology such as videos to facilitate self-reflection and enable the student voice in regard to their education, where findings have been positive as a way for CYP to feel empowered and in control of decisions regarding them (Van der Kleii, Adie & Cummin, 2017). A possible area for future research could entail developing technological resources collaboratively with SEND professionals, that could benefit their practice. In this scenario, it would be crucial to involve CYP and gather their feedback on the accessibility of any resource used to elicit their voice. Any follow up as a result of this study should involve CYP, in order to gather their views on the suggested methods. It is possible that a method that may work for the professional will not work for the CYP.

As discussed within 6.4.2, this study focused purely on the views of SEND professionals in order to better practice, but it had the supplementary intention to support CYP and ensuring their voice is heard. Research should continue to advocate for the rights of CYP and shed light on how this can be improved. The more research that is done on CYPs rights and the barriers they face, the more people will talk about the barriers, reflect on practice, and hopefully, the more people will listen. Future research could gain the views of CYP with SEND on the barriers they face during EHCP assessments and ARs, along with their feedback on the document of good practice. Although this document is aimed for professional use, the findings could be used as a foundation to discuss these barriers with CYP and if they face similar or differing barriers than professionals do. Feedback on solutions from the perspective of the CYP would add immense value to the document.

The ultimate goal remains to ensure CYP's voices are heard and acted upon; all future research should continuously strive to reach this goal.

6.6 Conclusion

6.6.1. *Concluding thoughts*

This thesis did not seek out to analyse the quality of EHCPs in terms of eliciting pupil voice, nor did it aim to criticise SEND professionals on how effectively they are doing this. Instead, this study provided a unique insight into the thoughts, views and opinions of SEND professionals who are at the ‘front-line’ of eliciting pupil voice and aimed to collaboratively improve practice for professionals.

A goal of the pragmatic approach is to understand and resolve perceived problems within real-life application. I was aware of the problems within the field from my own experiences, but the findings validated the difficulties in eliciting pupil voice is a nationwide barrier for a variety of SEND professionals. The legislations dictate the importance of involving CYP in their EHCP assessments and ARs, however the lack of guidance on how to do this meaningfully often leaves professionals not fulfilling their professional and moral duty to CYP by ensuring a person-centred approach. The collective findings showcase the varying views and opinions of SEND professionals, but the overall message remains the same; there is a clear rhetoric that involving CYP and including their voice should be integral to the process.

Phase one of this study successfully identified the barriers within the field and phase two was able to generate solutions as a response to the findings. I felt the consensus developed within the Delphi method highlights how CYP can meaningfully participate and share their views. The solutions suggested by the panellists were all deemed to be positive and easily applicable within their role, and I would hope the next step would be to implement this within daily practice. As a SEND professional, I would find the document of good practice a useful resource when carrying out assessments and ARs. It serves both as a practical guide and a visual reminder that the barriers can be overcome when a professional engrains eliciting voice as a vital part of the process and is committed to ensuring the voice of CYP is heard.

Studies within social sciences carry a form of social justice; this study confirms the message that CYP are often left unheard in regard to decisions that affect them, and it is our role as adults in their life to provide them with an avenue to share their voice.

The findings from this study confirm that there are solutions to the limits to participation; it now takes professional action to implement these into fruition.

6.6.2. Contribution to personal development

Navigating a four-year thesis as a distance-based student is not an easy task, but through the virtual accessibility of catalogues, databases and software, I was able to gain knowledge within this area, learn new methods and successfully analyse my findings. This experience has taught me the importance of self-perseverance and organisation; working against your own deadlines and updating your knowledge requires a considerable drive, and by standing on the shoulders of giants, I was able to build my knowledge of how to successfully complete this thesis.

I came to this research as an LA professional passionate about SEND and silently advocating the rights of the CYP I work with. This thesis allowed a platform to transform those thoughts into actions. By speaking with other SEND professionals and capturing their views, I realised the problem was bigger than I originally thought. The barriers I faced when attempting to elicit voice was experienced by all from varying roles, despite years of experience and professionalism. Positively, all professionals understood the importance of hearing the voice but felt the multiple barriers made this impractical task unmanageable.

Despite the focus of this study being on the professional perspective, this study aims to better practice, so the end result is for CYP to be heard. This study is a small but significant step towards advocating their rights to express their voice. In order to authentically hear the voice of CYP, professionals need to firstly acknowledge its importance, listen wholeheartedly, and implement change on behalf of the CYP. As key adults in their lives, we have both a professional and moral duty to overcome any barriers that may arise in order to ensure meaningful participation to every meeting, assessment and decision made that affects them. As a SEND professional, I leave this study with the knowledge that there are ways to overcome the limits to participation, which will now be at the forefront of every interaction I have with CYP. It is my wish that any professional reading this will do the same.

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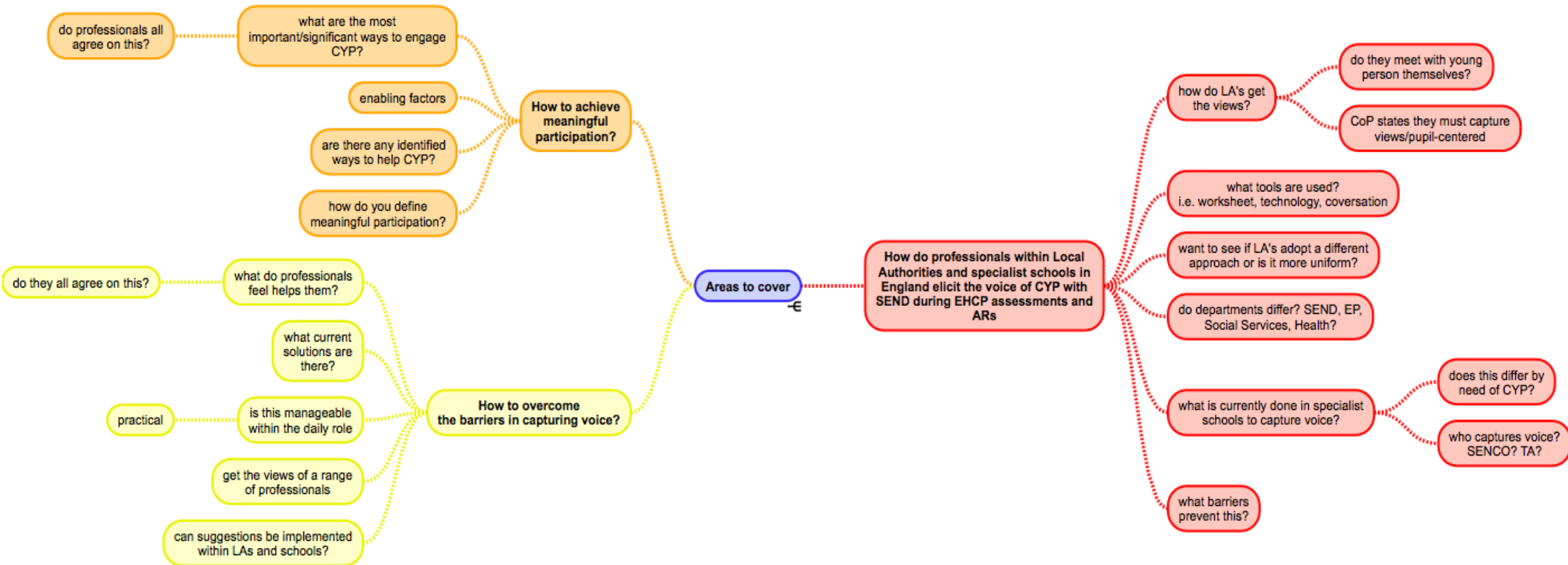
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Appendices

Appendix 1: Mind-map of research aims and questions



Capturing the voice of children and young people during statutory EHCP assessments and annual reviews

Why is it important to elicit the voice of those with non-verbal communication?

The SEND reforms (2014) renewed focus on capturing the views of children and young people.

The SEND Code of Practice (2015) states that Local authorities '**must** have regard to the views, wishes and feelings of the child, child's parent or young person, their aspirations, the outcomes they wish to seek and the support they need to achieve them' (p.147).

However, there is no specified way to do this. A survey by Adams et al (2017) reported that 44% of parents felt that their child had been asked if they want to take part, however only 19% felt their child was given choices on how to take part, in order to cater to their needs.

An integral part of SEND assessments for an EHCP and reviews of these plans involves capturing the child or young person's views as part of this process and ensuring this is encapsulated in the document, regardless of their needs. I am, like you, a professional within the Local Authority working with children and young people during EHCP assessments and reviews. I have identified the difficulty of capturing the voice of those who are non-verbal. This prompted me to conduct this survey.

What is this survey?

This survey aims to explore the methods and approaches used in Local Authorities (LA's) to elicit the voice of children and young people who have Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and are in receipt of an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP), particularly those individuals who primarily use non-verbal means of communication. I would like to know the approaches and existing methods used within your LA during EHCP assessments and annual reviews.

How would you benefit from taking part?

This research aims to examine good practice and so benefit LA's and schools when working with children and young people in order to gain their views as part of the EHCP process. Your views and practices as a professional within the LA are very important as they can be integrated with those of others to get an overview of what is and can be done to improve practice. The findings can be shared to your Local Authority, which may improve practice within your profession.

What if I need more information?

Further details can be found in the information sheet, please read through this thoroughly before you agree to take part. This research is being done as part of a research thesis with the University of Exeter, Graduate School of Education.

How to answer the survey

Please read the instructions on how to answer each question:

Most of the questions can be answered by ticking the box that indicates your view,

As shown here.



Please answer the questions in relation to your role within the LA, if the question does not apply to you, you will be told to skip to the next question.

The survey looks at the professional's role in both EHCP assessments and annual reviews. The majority of questions will ask for your view on how strongly you agree or disagree. Some questions ask about your personal views or ask for specific examples. The survey will take approximately 20-25 minutes. Your responses will be **confidential**, and your Local Authority will not be named.

There is no right or wrong answers. If there any questions you do not wish to answer or feel unable to answer then please tick 'neither agree nor disagree' and move on. If the question does not apply to your role, then please tick 'Not Applicable'.

Thank you for taking part in this survey.

Contact Details

For further information about the research or to complete the survey via telephone please contact:

Name: *Pooja Sharma*

Telephone: + 44 (0) 7810070621

Email: *ps440@exeter.ac.uk*

If you have concerns/questions about the research you would like to discuss with someone else at the University, please contact:

Prof Brahm Norwich (b.norwich@exeter.ac.uk, 01392 724805)

Dr Alison Black (a.e.black@exeter.ac.uk, 01392 724938)

What is your position in the Local Authority (LA)? _____
How long have you worked for your present LA? _____
Which LA do you currently work for? _____

If you are actively involved in the assessment for an Education, Health and Care Plan for a child or young person with SEND (i.e. those who write the EHCP and those who conduct assessments and produce reports to contribute to the EHCP), please continue to Section A and work through all the sections.

If you are only involved in the review process of the EHCP, please skip to Section B and continue through the sections.

Section A

To what extent do you as a professional agent within the LA explore the views of the child or young person in relation to their statutory EHCP assessment?

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Not Applicable
1. Including the views of a child or young person (CYP) is part of our whole service approach to SEND						
2. Gaining the views is an important and integral part of the EHCP process						
3. Gaining the views of the CYP is always done as part of our assessments for an EHCP						
4. I will try to find out how the CYP communicates best						
5. I usually meet with or observe the individual child or young person face to face						
6. I will usually use existing reports of the CYP's views instead of visiting them						
7. I will use existing reports to cross-reference my observations/meetings						
8. I offer support to the CYP in sharing their						

views, such an advocate or mediator						
9. I use communication aids such as electronic devices, Picture Exchange Communication Systems (PECS), sign language						
10. I use visual aids such as pictures and symbols						
11. I have had adequate training from my LA to access the views of CYP						

What views do you aim to elicit from the child or young person?

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Not Applicable
12. I usually ask the CYP if they would like to give their views for my report/ EHCP						
13. I give the CYP the choice of how they would like to share their views <i>e.g. in person, give their views beforehand, drawing</i>						
14. I usually ask the CYP's likes and dislikes in school for my report/ EHCP						
15. I usually ask the CYP's likes and dislikes outside of school for my report/ EHCP						

16. I usually ask the CYP's interests and hobbies as part of my report/ EHCP						
17. I usually ask the CYP's wishes about their future schooling as part of my report/ EHCP						
18. I usually ask the CYP's wishes about their future job as part of my report/ EHCP						
19. I usually ask the CYP's views on their current school support for my report/ EHCP						
20. I usually ask the CYP's views about the learning support they want for my report/ EHCP						
21. I usually ask the CYP's views about the classroom environment for my report/ EHCP						
22. I usually ask the CYP's views about their placement for my report/ EHCP						

Please provide any other details of the views you aim to elicit from the child or young person.

Section B

How confident are you in your statutory process to explore the views of the child or young person?

This section helps to gain a better understanding of the strengths and difficulties that professionals in the LA may experience when working with children and young people with non-verbal communication. Listed below are different scenarios and statements in relation to including the views in the plan or a report and around annual review meetings. Please rate how confident you are for each statement by writing the appropriate number, please use only units of 10. Your answers will be kept strictly confidential and will not be identified by name.

Rate your degree of confidence by recording a number from 0 (not confident at all) to 100 (highly confident I can do this) using the scale given below:

0	10	20	30	40	50	60	70	80	90	100
Not confident at all			Moderately confident				Highly confident			

- Include child or young people’s views in my plan/report _____
- Elicit pupil voice regardless of need _____
- Enabling pupil participation in meetings _____
- Make the effort to listen to the CYP _____
- Provide an appropriate environment for the meeting _____
- Listen to the child or young person’s views _____
- Understand non-verbal communication methods used by the child _____
- Use alternative communication methods with the child _____
- Identify when I need to involve someone else to help with communication _____
- Making the meeting a positive experience _____
- Giving the pupil time to think about what they want to say _____
- Giving opportunities to ask further questions _____
- Sum up the main points of the meeting clearly _____

Please provide any other details in how you feel about exploring the views of the child or young person in relation to their statutory EHCP assessments.

Section C

What methods or tools are used to enable the child or young person to express their views during assessments or reviews?

Research has highlighted three kinds of methods when exploring the views of the child, as shown in the table below. The following questions look at if and when you use each type of method on a scale of 'usually Always' to 'never. Please place a tick to indicate your view.

METHOD			
	Direct	Prompted	Mediated
Examples:	Children asked directly for their views in talk or writing	Some cue or prompt is used to assist children to express their views	Alternative methods or media used to support communication
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● questionnaires ● conversations ● interviews ● post views in box ● diary / log 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● sentence completion ● video replay of teaching / learning situation ● report back observations of child interacting ● photos of different settings ● other materials that enable comparison ● information from completed questionnaire 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● drawings and paintings ● photos ● making video ● making poster ● role-play

Based on MacBeath, Demetriou, Ruddock and Myers (2003) *Consulting Pupils: a toolkit for teachers*.

DIRECT METHODS	Almost Always	Sometimes	Every Once in a While	Rarely	Never
How often do you use the following to gain the views of the CYP through direct methods?					
23. I use a questionnaire that asks about their views					
24. I have a conversation with them about their views (informal)					
25. I interview them about their views (formal)					
26. I ask the CYP to post their views into a box					

27. I ask the CYP to keep a diary or a log					
---	--	--	--	--	--

Can you give an example of the needs and descriptors of the CYP that you tend to use a direct method of consultation? (I.e. high capabilities, learning difficulties)

PROMPTED METHODS	Almost Always	Sometimes	Every Once in a While	Rarely	Never
How often do you use the following to gain the views of the CYP through prompted methods?					
28. I use a sentence completion prompt that asks about their views					
29. I watch videos of them in their learning environment					
30. I observe the CYP and report on my observations					
31. I look at photos of the CYP in different settings					
32. I use other materials that can help me compare their views					
33. I ask questions based on a completed questionnaire					

Can you give an example of the needs and descriptors of the CYP that you tend to use a prompted method of consultation? (I.e. high capabilities, learning difficulties)

MEDIATED METHODS	Almost Always	Sometimes	Every Once in a While	Rarely	Never
How often do you use the following to gain the views of the CYP through mediated methods?					
34. I ask the CYP to draw a picture or a painting					
35. I ask the CYP to take photos of their views					
36. I ask the CYP to make a video of their views					
37. I ask the CYP to make a poster of their views					
38. I use role play with the CYP to access their views					

Can you give an example of the needs and descriptors of the CYP that you tend to use a mediated method of consultation? (I.e. high capabilities, learning difficulties)

	Almost Always	Sometimes	Every Once in a While	Rarely	Never	Not Applicable
39. I use multiple methods to access the views of the CYP						

Please list any other methods you use when you wish to get the views of the CYP, and the situation in which you may use it.

Section D

How do you help elicit the views of the child or young person during your statutory process?

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Not Applicable
40. I take advice on how best to communicate with the CYP from those who know them well						
41. I ensure the venue of the meeting is comfortable and accessible for the CYP						
42. I adapt the paperwork or information so it is accessible for the CYP I.e. social stories, Easy Read, Talking mats.						
43. I meet with the CYP more than once so they feel comfortable with me						

Please provide any other details in what factors you feel enable pupil voice:

Section E

What do you feel is a barrier in accessing the views of the child or young person during the statutory process?

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Not Applicable
I do not manage to elicit views when:						
44. the CYP experiences anxiety or lack of self-confidence						
45. the CYP is too young to share their views						
46. the CYP does not have a well-formed view to share						
47. the CYP is not in the right frame of mind to discuss their views at the time						
48. I do not have the resources or skills to respond to a CYP						
49. The Gatekeeper (i.e. parent/carer, school staff) does not invite the CYP to the meeting						
50. The adult gives the views on behalf of the CYP						
51. I have limited time to gather their views						

Can you identify any other barriers you have experienced when attempting to access the views of the CYP:

What approaches and methods are there available to you to help overcome these barriers?

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Not Applicable
52. I make the CYP and Gatekeeper aware that it is their right to participate and be included						
53. I build positive relationships with the gatekeeper so they understand the importance of supporting all children to be heard						
54. I explain the context and purpose of the meeting to the CYP						
55. I adapt the resources/materials for the meeting so it is accessible for the CYP						
56. I make the meetings less formal and more engaging for the CYP						
57. I explain to the CYP the decisions from the meeting and the next steps						

Please provide any other ways you attempt to overcome any barriers when eliciting pupil voice:

Thank you for taking part in this survey.

I may wish to contact you to further to discuss your views in more detail. Would you be willing to be contacted for an interview to discuss your views?

Please tick one answer

Yes

No

If you answered **yes**, please can you provide your contact details below.

Please write your name/alias:

Please write the best number to contact you on:

Please write your email address:

Capturing the voice of children and young people during statutory EHCP assessments and annual reviews

Why is it important to elicit the voice of those with non-verbal communication?

The SEND reforms (2014) renewed focus on capturing the views of children and young people.

The SEND Code of Practice (2015) states that “Early years providers, schools and colleges should “take steps to ensure that young people and parents are actively supported” in contributing to needs assessments, developing and reviewing education health and care (EHC) plans” (p.147).

However, there is no specified way to do this. A survey by Adams et al (2017) reported that 44% of parents felt that their child had been asked if they want to take part in their EHCP, however only 19% felt their child was given choices on how to take part, in order to cater to their needs.

An integral part of SEND assessments for an EHCP and reviews of these plans involves capturing the child or young person’s views as part of this process and ensuring this is encapsulated in the document, regardless of their needs. I am, like you, a professional working with children and young people during EHCP assessments and reviews. I have identified the difficulty of capturing the voice of those who are non-verbal. This prompted me to conduct this survey.

What is this survey?

This survey aims to explore the methods and approaches used in schools to elicit the voice of children and young people who have Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and are in receipt of an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP), particularly those individuals who primarily use non-verbal means of communication. I would like to know the approaches and existing methods used within your establishment during EHCP assessments and annual reviews.

How would you benefit from taking part?


This research aims to examine good practice and so benefit Local Authorities and schools when working with children and young people in order to gain their views as part of the EHCP process. Your views and practices as a professional within a specialist setting are very important as they can be integrated with those of others to get an overview of what is and can be done to improve practice. The findings can be shared to your school, which may improve practice within your profession.

What if I need more information?

Further details can be found in the information sheet, please read through this thoroughly before you agree to take part. This research is being done as part of a research thesis with the University of Exeter, Graduate School of Education.

How to answer the survey

Please read the instructions on how to answer each question:



Most of the questions can be answered by ticking the box that indicates your view, As shown here.

Please answer the questions in relation to your role within your establishment, if the question does not apply to you, you will be told to skip to the next question.

The survey looks at the teaching professional’s role in both EHCP assessments and annual reviews. The majority of questions will ask for your view on how strongly you agree or disagree. Some questions ask about your personal views or ask for specific examples. The survey will take approximately 20-25 minutes. Your responses will be **confidential**, and your school will not be named.

There is no right or wrong answers. If there any questions you do not wish to answer or feel unable to answer then please tick ‘neither agree nor disagree’ and move on. If the question does not apply to your role, then please tick ‘Not Applicable’.

Thank you for taking part in this survey.

Contact Details
For further information about the research or to complete the survey via telephone please contact:

Name: *Pooja Sharma*
Telephone: + 44 (0) 7810070621
Email: *ps440@exeter.ac.uk*

If you have concerns/questions about the research you would like to discuss with someone else at the University, please contact:
Prof Brahm Norwich (b.norwich@exeter.ac.uk, 01392 724805)
Dr Alison Black (a.e.black@exeter.ac.uk, 01392 724938)

What is the name of your school? _____
How long have you worked for your present school? _____
Which is your role within the school? _____

Is your school a:

Specialist Setting

Mainstream with a Resource Base attached

What is the primary need of your school/base? _____

If you are actively involved in the review process for an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP), please proceed to Section A and continue through the sections.

Section A

To what extent do you as a professional agent within the school explore the views of the child or young person in relation to their EHCP review?

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Not Applicable
1. Including the views of a child or young person (CYP) is part of our whole school approach to SEND						
2. Gaining the views is an important and integral part of the EHCP review						
3. Gaining the views of the CYP is always done as part of our reviews for an EHCP						
4. I will try to find out how the CYP communicates best						
5. I usually meet with or observe the individual child or young person face to face to get their views						
6. I will use existing reports from other staff members to cross-reference my observations/meetings						

7. I offer support to the CYP in sharing their views, such an advocate or mediator						
8. I use communication aids such as electronic devices, Picture Exchange Communication Systems (PECS), sign language						
9. I use visual aids such as pictures and symbols						
10. I have had adequate training from my school to access the views of CYP						

What views do you aim to elicit from the child or young person?

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Not Applicable
11. I usually ask the CYP if they would like to give their views for the review						
12. I give the CYP the choice of how they would like to share their views <i>e.g. in person, give their views beforehand, drawing</i>						
13. I usually ask the CYP's likes and dislikes in school for the review						

14. I usually ask the CYP's likes and dislikes outside of school for the review						
15. I usually ask the CYP's interests and hobbies for the review						
16. I usually ask the CYP's wishes about their future schooling as part of the review						
17. I usually ask the CYP's wishes about their future job as part of the review						
18. I usually ask the CYP's views on their current school support for the review						
19. I usually ask the CYP's views about the learning support they want for the review						
20. I usually ask the CYP's views about the classroom environment for the review						
21. I usually ask the CYP's views about their placement for the review						

Please provide any other details of the views you aim to elicit from the child or young person.

Section B

How confident are you in your statutory process to explore the views of the child or young person?

This section helps to gain a better understanding of the strengths and difficulties that school staff may experience when working with children and young people with non-verbal communication. Listed below are different scenarios and statements in relation to including the views in the plan or a report and around annual review meetings.

Please rate how confident you are for each statement by writing the appropriate number, please use only units of 10. Your answers will be kept strictly confidential and will not be identified by name.

Rate your degree of confidence by recording a number from 0 (not confident at all) to 100 (highly confident I can do this) using the scale given below:

0	10	20	30	40	50	60	70	80	90	100	
Not confident at all					Moderately confident					Highly confident	
Include child or young people’s views in the review											_____
Elicit pupil voice regardless of need											_____
Enabling pupil participation in meetings											_____
Make the effort to listen to the CYP											_____
Provide an appropriate environment for the meeting											_____
Listen to the child or young person’s views											_____
Understand non-verbal communication methods used by the child											_____
Use alternative communication methods with the child											_____
Identify when I need to involve someone else to help with communication											_____
Making the meeting a positive experience											_____
Giving the pupil time to think about what they want to say											_____
Giving opportunities to ask further questions											_____
Sum up the main points of the meeting clearly											_____

Please provide any other details in how you feel about exploring the views of the child or young person in relation to their statutory EHCP review.

Section C

What methods or tools are used to enable the child or young person to express their views during assessments or reviews?

Research has highlighted three kinds of methods when exploring the views of the child, as shown in the table below. The following questions look at if and when you use each type of method on a scale of 'usually Always' to 'never'. Please place a tick to indicate your view.

METHOD			
	Direct	Prompted	Mediated
Examples:	Children asked directly for their views in talk or writing	Some cue or prompt is used to assist children to express their views	Alternative methods or media used to support communication
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● questionnaires ● conversations ● interviews ● post views in box ● diary / log 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● sentence completion ● video replay of teaching / learning situation ● report back observations of child interacting ● photos of different settings ● other materials that enable comparison ● information from completed questionnaire 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● drawings and paintings ● photos ● making video ● making poster ● role-play

Based on MacBeath, Demetriou, Ruddock and Myers (2003) *Consulting Pupils: a toolkit for teachers*.

DIRECT METHODS	Almost Always	Sometimes	Every Once in a While	Rarely	Never
How often do you use the following to gain the views of the CYP through direct methods?					
23. I use a questionnaire that asks about their views					
24. I have a conversation with them about their views					
25. I interview them about their views					
26. I ask the CYP to post their views into a box					

27. I ask the CYP to keep a diary or a log					
---	--	--	--	--	--

Can you give an example of the needs and descriptors of the CYP that you tend to use a direct method of consultation? (I.e. high capabilities, learning difficulties)

PROMPTED METHODS	Almost Always	Sometimes	Every Once in a While	Rarely	Never
How often do you use the following to gain the views of the CYP through prompted methods?					
28. I use a sentence completion prompt that asks about their views					
29. I watch videos of them in their learning environment					
30. I observe the CYP and report on my observations					
31. I look at photos of the CYP in different settings					
32. I use other materials that can help me compare their views					
33. I ask questions based on a completed questionnaire					

Can you give an example of the needs and descriptors of the CYP that you tend to use a prompted method of consultation? (I.e. high capabilities, learning difficulties)

MEDIATED METHODS	Almost Always	Sometimes	Every Once in a While	Rarely	Never
How often do you use the following to gain the views of the CYP through mediated methods?					
34. I ask the CYP to draw a picture or a painting					
35. I ask the CYP to take photos of their views					
36. I ask the CYP to make a video of their views					
37. I ask the CYP to make a poster of their views					
38. I use role play with the CYP to access their views					

Can you give an example of the needs and descriptors of the CYP that you tend to use a mediated method of consultation? (I.e. high capabilities, learning difficulties)

	Almost Always	Sometimes	Every Once in a While	Rarely	Never
39. I use multiple methods to access the views of the CYP					

Please list any other methods you use when you wish to get the views of the CYP, and the situation in which you may use it.

Section D

How do you help elicit the views of the child or young person during the review?

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Not Applicable
40. I take advice on how best to communicate with the CYP from those who know them well						
41. I ensure the venue of the meeting is comfortable and accessible for the CYP						
42. I adapt the paperwork or information so it is accessible for the CYP I.e. social stories, Easy Read, Talking mats.						
43. I meet with the CYP more than once so they feel comfortable in sharing their views						

Please provide any other details in what factors you feel enable pupil voice:

Section E

What do you feel is a barrier in accessing the views of the child or young person during a review?

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Not Applicable
I do not manage to elicit views when:						
44. the CYP experiences anxiety or lack of self-confidence						
45. the CYP is too young to share this						
46. the CYP is not in the right frame of mind to discuss their views at the time						
47. I do not have the resources or skills to respond to a CYP						
48. The Gatekeeper (i.e. parent/carer) does not wish to invite the CYP to the meeting						
49. The adult gives the views on behalf of the CYP						
50. I have limited time to gather their views						

Can you identify any other barriers you have experienced when attempting to access the views of the CYP:

What approaches and methods are there available to you to help overcome these barriers?

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Not Applicable
51. I make the CYP and Gatekeeper aware that it is their right to participate and be included						
52. I build positive relationships with the gatekeeper so they understand the importance of supporting all children to be heard						
53. I explain the context and purpose of the meeting to the CYP						
54. I adapt the resources/materials for the meeting so it is accessible for the CYP						
55. I make the meetings less formal and more engaging for the CYP						
56. I explain to the CYP the decisions from the meeting and the next steps						

Please provide any other ways you attempt to overcome any barriers when eliciting pupil voice:

Thank you for taking part in this survey.

I may wish to contact you to further to discuss your views in more detail. Would you be willing to be contacted for an interview to discuss your views?

Please tick one answer

Yes

No

If you answered **yes**, please can you provide your contact details below.

Please write your name/alias:

Please write the best number to contact you on:

Please write your email address:

Appendix 4: Information sheet and consent form used in the pilot questionnaire



An exploration and design of approaches used to elicit the voice of children and young people during statutory assessments and reviews (old title)

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide to participate, it is important to understand why the research is being conducted and what your participation entails. Please take time to read the following information carefully. Please ask if there are any aspects of the project that are unclear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you would like to take part in this research.

Details of Project

This project is part of a PhD thesis in Education, exploring pupil voice within special educational needs and disabilities. This project aims to explore the ways children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities share their views. Not all children and young people can verbally say their likes, dislikes, and hopes for the future; therefore this project aims to look at if these children get the same chance to do this, and how it is done. By exploring the ways different Local Authorities and Schools elicit the voice of the child or young person, this project aims to adapt an innovative method to use as part of statutory assessments and reviews within the Local Authority.

Why have I been chosen?

For this study, I am seeking the views of different Local Authorities who seek pupil voice during assessments from children and young people who have predominately non-verbal means of communication. I am also interested in how the voice of the child is elicited during annual reviews of Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs). Your Local Authority was randomly selected to fill out a survey around your views on pupil voice, and if you choose to, a follow up observation or interview will be held. The hope is that by conducting surveys and interviews on a wide range of Local Authorities within the UK, the fullest possible picture of how pupil voice is elicited can be explored, with the hope to improve practice.

Do I have to take part?

This has been sent to you as a professional within the Local Authority who work with children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities, as you are involved in statutory assessments and/or annual reviews of EHCPs. It is your decision to take part in this study. You can decide to stop participating at any time. You do not need to answer questions that you do not wish to. If you are happy to take part, then you will be asked to sign a consent form. You can ask any questions before, during and after the study. Any individual can withdraw at any time without any given reason.

What will happen in the study?

The study will involve a survey in which you will tick on how much they agree or disagree with a statement around pupil voice. Some questions involve written answers. There is an option at the end of the survey in which you may agree to being followed up via an interview or observation. If this is the case, then I will contact you to arrange this and follow up on the questions asked within the survey.

What are the risks and benefits of taking part?

Every effort will be made to preserve confidentiality, your Local Authority will not be mentioned by name and you will be anonymous. Other than this, there are no known risks to taking part. The benefits are helping to create a picture of how pupil voice is explored within the UK. Your participation, as part of this study, will benefit the research within special education needs and pupil-centered planning.

Confidentiality

The results of the survey will not be used other than for the purposes described above and third parties will not be allowed access to them (except as may be required by the law). Should you opt-in for a follow-up interview or observation, the interview tapes and transcripts will be held in confidence. If you request, you will be supplied with a copy of your interview transcript so that you can comment on and edit it as you see fit (please give your email below so that I am able to contact you at a later date). Your data will be held in accordance with the Data Protection Act.

Anonymity

The data from the survey will be held and used on an anonymous basis, with no mention of your name or your place of work. The data from all interviews and observations will be anonymous.

Data Protection Notice

The information you provide will be used for research purposes and your personal data will be processed in accordance with current data protection legislation and the University's notification lodged at the Information Commissioner's Office. Your personal data will be treated in the strictest confidence and will not be disclosed to any unauthorised third parties. The results of the research will be published in anonymised form.

Who is funding and organizing the research?

The research is funded by the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities team within the Local Authority of Slough. Members of the Education department at the University of Exeter are organizing the research.

What will happen to the results of this research?

The results of this research will form the basis of a PhD Thesis from the University of Exeter. If you wish to obtain a copy of the published results, please inform the researcher. The study will take place over the next few years after which time the published results will be publicly available.

According to University policy, transcribed research data should be kept for a minimum of three years after publication. All notes made during observations and interviews by the researcher will be destroyed after write-up.

If you agree to participate in this project, the research will be written up as a thesis. On successful submission of the thesis, it will be deposited both in print and online in the University archives, to facilitate its use in future research.

Contact Details

For further information about the research please contact:

Name: *Pooja Sharma*

Postal address:

Telephone: 00 44 (0) 7810070621

Email: *ps440@exeter.ac.uk*

If you have concerns/questions about the research you would like to discuss with someone else at the University, please contact:

Prof Brahm Norwich (b.norwich@exeter.ac.uk, 01392 724805)

Dr Alison Black (a.e.black@exeter.ac.uk, 01392 724938)



Consent Form

I have been fully informed about the aims and purposes of the project.

I have read the information sheet and understand how I can ask further questions about the study.

I understand that:

- there is no compulsion for me to participate in this research project and, if I do choose to participate, I may withdraw at any stage and any data will be destroyed;
- any information which I give will be used solely for the purposes of this research project, which may include publications or academic conference or seminar presentations;
- this project has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through the University of Exeter Graduate School of Education Ethics Committee
- 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, kept securely and what will happen to the data at the end of the project;
- the researcher(s) will make every effort to preserve my anonymity and the anonymity of where I work.
- I have the opportunity to review and comment on any analysis before publication, and how to raise a concern.

I agree to:

- Voluntarily take part in the survey.

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(Signature of participant)

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(Date)

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(Printed name of participant)

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(Email address of participant if they have requested to view a copy of the interview transcript.)

.....
(Signature of researcher)

.....
(Printed name of researcher)

One copy of this form will be kept by the participant; a second copy will be kept by the researcher(s). Your contact details are kept separately from your interview data.

Appendix 5: Information sheet and consent form for the LA professionals



An exploration and design of approaches used to elicit the voice of children and young people during statutory assessments and reviews (old title)

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide to participate, it is important to understand why the research is being conducted and what your participation entails. Please take time to read the following information carefully. Please ask if there are any aspects of the project that are unclear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you would like to take part in this research.

Details of Project

This project is part of a PhD thesis in Education, exploring pupil voice within special educational needs and disabilities. This project aims to explore the ways children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities share their views. Not all children and young people can verbally say their likes, dislikes, and hopes for the future; therefore this project aims to look at if these children get the same chance to do this, and how it is done. By exploring the ways different Local Authorities and Schools elicit the voice of the child or young person, this project aims to adapt an innovative method to use as part of statutory assessments and reviews within the Local Authority.

Why have I been chosen?

For this study, I am seeking the views of different Local Authorities who seek pupil voice during assessments from children and young people who have predominately non-verbal means of communication. I am also interested in how the voice of the child is elicited during annual reviews of Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs). Your Local Authority was randomly selected to fill out a survey around your views on pupil voice, and if you choose to, a follow up observation or interview will be held. The hope is that by conducting surveys and interviews on a wide range of Local Authorities within the UK, the fullest possible picture of how pupil voice is elicited can be explored, with the hope to improve practice.

Do I have to take part?

This has been sent to you as a professional within the Local Authority who work with children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities, as you are involved in statutory assessments and/or annual reviews of EHCPs. It is your decision to take part in this study. You can decide to stop participating at any time. You do not need to answer questions that you do not wish to. If you are happy to take part, then you will be asked to sign a consent form. You can ask any questions before, during and after the study. Any individual can withdraw at any time without any given reason.

What will happen in the study?

The study will involve a survey in which you will tick on how much they agree or disagree with a statement around pupil voice. Some questions involve written answers. There is an option at the end of the survey in which you may agree to being followed up via an interview or observation. If this is the case, then I will contact you to arrange this and follow up on the questions asked within the survey.

What are the risks and benefits of taking part?

Every effort will be made to preserve confidentiality, your Local Authority will not be mentioned by name and you will be anonymous. Other than this, there are no known risks to taking part. The benefits are helping to create a picture of how pupil voice is explored within the UK. Your participation, as part of this study, will benefit the research within special education needs and pupil-centered planning.

Confidentiality

The results of the survey will not be used other than for the purposes described above and third parties will not be allowed access to them (except as may be required by the law). Should you opt-in for a follow-up interview or observation, the interview tapes and transcripts will be held in confidence. If you request, you will be supplied with a copy of your interview transcript so that you can comment on and edit it as you see fit (please give your email below so that I am able to contact you at a later date). Your data will be held in accordance with the Data Protection Act.

Anonymity

The data from the survey will be held and used on an anonymous basis, with no mention of your name or your place of work. The data from all interviews and observations will be anonymous.

Data Protection Notice

The information you provide will be used for research purposes and your personal data will be processed in accordance with current data protection legislation and the University's notification lodged at the Information Commissioner's Office. Your personal data will be treated in the strictest confidence and will not be disclosed to any unauthorised third parties. The results of the research will be published in anonymised form.

Who is funding and organizing the research?

The research is funded by the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities team within the Local Authority of Slough. Members of the Education department at the University of Exeter are organizing the research.

What will happen to the results of this research?

The results of this research will form the basis of a PhD Thesis from the University of Exeter. If you wish to obtain a copy of the published results, please inform the researcher. The study will take place over the next few years after which time the published results will be publicly available.

According to University policy, transcribed research data should be kept for a minimum of three years after publication. All notes made during observations and interviews by the researcher will be destroyed after write-up.



Consent Form

I have been fully informed about the aims and purposes of the project.
I have read the information sheet and understand how I can ask further questions about the study.

I understand that:

- there is no compulsion for me to participate in this research project and, if I do choose to participate, I may withdraw at any stage and any data will be destroyed;
- any information which I give will be used solely for the purposes of this research project, which may include publications or academic conference or seminar presentations;
- this project has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through the University of Exeter Graduate School of Education Ethics Committee
- 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, kept securely and what will happen to the data at the end of the project;
- the researcher(s) will make every effort to preserve my anonymity and the anonymity of where I work.
- I have the opportunity to review and comment on any analysis before publication, and how to raise a concern.

I agree to:

- Voluntarily take part in the survey.

.....
(Signature of participant)

.....
(Date)

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(Printed name of participant)

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(Email address of participant if they have requested to view a copy of the interview transcript.)

.....
(Signature of researcher)

.....
(Printed name of researcher)

One copy of this form will be kept by the participant; a second copy will be kept by the researcher(s).
Your contact details are kept separately from your interview data.

Appendix 6: Information sheet and consent form for the school professionals



An exploration and design of approaches used to elicit the voice of children and young people during statutory assessments and reviews (old title)

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide to participate, it is important to understand why the research is being conducted and what your participation entails. Please take time to read the following information carefully. Please ask if there are any aspects of the project that are unclear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you would like to take part in this research.

Details of Project

This project is part of a PhD thesis in Education, exploring pupil voice within special educational needs and disabilities. This project aims to explore the ways children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities share their views. Not all children and young people can verbally say their likes, dislikes, and hopes for the future; therefore this project aims to look at if these children get the same chance to do this, and how it is done. By exploring the ways different Local Authorities and Specialist Schools elicit the voice of the child or young person, this project aims to adapt an innovative method to use as part of statutory assessments and reviews within the Local Authority.

Why have I been chosen?

For this study, I am seeking the views of different Schools who seek pupil voice during assessments from children and young people who have predominately non-verbal means of communication. Your school was randomly selected to fill out a survey around your views on pupil voice, and if you choose to, a follow up observation or interview will be held. The hope is that by conducting surveys and interviews on a wide range of schools within the UK, the fullest possible picture of how pupil voice is elicited can be explored, with the hope to improve practice.

Do I have to take part?

It is your decision to take part in this study. You can decide to stop participating at any time. You do not need to answer questions that you do not wish to. If you are happy to take part, then you will be asked to sign a consent form. You can ask any questions before, during and after the study. You can withdraw at any time without any given reason.

What will happen in the study?

The study will involve a survey in which you will tick on how much you agree or disagree with a statement around pupil voice. Some questions involve written answers. There is an option at the end of the survey in which you may agree to being followed up via an interview or observation. If this is the case, then I will contact you to arrange this and follow up on the questions asked within the survey. The observations will consist of observing reviews or staff gathering views of the child for this review. Consent from parents and the Head teacher will be sought, I would also ask the child or young person if they are happy for me to be in the room.

What are the risks and benefits of taking part?

Every effort will be made to preserve confidentiality, your school will not be mentioned by name and you will be anonymous. If the child or young person is not happy to have me in the room observing, I will leave and not conduct the observation. Other than this, there are no known risks to taking part. The benefits are helping to create a picture of how pupil voice is explored within the UK. Your participation, as part of this study, will benefit the research within special education needs and pupil-centered planning.

Confidentiality

The results of the survey will not be used other than for the purposes described above and third parties will not be allowed access to them (except as may be required by the law). Should you opt-in for a follow-up interview or observation, the interview tapes and transcripts will be held in confidence. If you request, you will be supplied with a copy of your interview transcript so that you can comment on and edit it as you see fit (please give your email below so that I am able to contact you at a later date). Your data will be held in accordance with the Data Protection Act.

Anonymity

The data from the survey will be held and used on an anonymous basis, with no mention of your name or your place of work. The data from all interviews and observations will be anonymous.

Data Protection Notice

The information you provide will be used for research purposes and your personal data will be processed in accordance with current data protection legislation and the University's notification lodged at the Information Commissioner's Office. Your personal data will be treated in the strictest confidence and will not be disclosed to any unauthorised third parties. The results of the research will be published in anonymised form.

Who is funding and organizing the research?

The research is funded by the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities team within the Local Authority of Slough. Members of the Education department at the University of Exeter are organizing the research.

What will happen to the results of this research?

The results of this research will form the basis of a PhD Thesis from the University of Exeter. If you wish to obtain a copy of the published results, please inform the researcher. The study will take place over the next few years after which time the published results will be publicly available.

According to University policy, transcribed research data should be kept for a minimum of three years after publication. All notes made during observations and interviews by the researcher will be destroyed after write-up.

If you agree to participate in this project, the research will be written up as a thesis. On successful submission of the thesis, it will be deposited both in print and online in the University archives, to facilitate its use in future research.

Contact Details

For further information about the research please contact:

Name: *Pooja Sharma*

Postal address:

Telephone: 00 44 (0) 7810070621

Email: *ps440@exeter.ac.uk*

If you have concerns/questions about the research you would like to discuss with someone else at the University, please contact:

Prof Brahm Norwich (b.norwich@exeter.ac.uk, 01392 724805)

Dr Alison Black (a.e.black@exeter.ac.uk, 01392 724938)



Consent Form

I have been fully informed about the aims and purposes of the project.

I have read the information sheet and understand how I can ask further questions about the study.

I understand that:

- there is no compulsion for me to participate in this research project and, if I do choose to participate, I may withdraw at any stage and any data will be destroyed;
- any information which I give will be used solely for the purposes of this research project, which may include publications or academic conference or seminar presentations;
- this project has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through the University of Exeter Graduate School of Education Ethics Committee
- 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, kept securely and what will happen to the data at the end of the project;
- the researcher(s) will make every effort to preserve my anonymity and the anonymity of where I work.
- I have the opportunity to review and comment on any analysis before publication, and how to raise a concern.

I agree to:

- Voluntarily take part in the survey.

.....
(Signature of participant)

.....
(Date)

.....
(Printed name of participant)

.....
(Email address of participant if they have requested to view a copy of the interview transcript.)

.....
(Signature of researcher)

.....
(Printed name of researcher)

One copy of this form will be kept by the participant; a second copy will be kept by the researcher(s). Your contact details are kept separately from your interview data.

Appendix 7: Example Interview schedule

Interview schedule: Schools

Thank you for meeting with me.

Intro questions

1. Could you tell me a bit about your role within the school?
2. Why were you interested in teaching in SEN/specialist schools?
3. How long have you been teaching in a specialist setting?
4. How have you been involved in the EHCP and annual review process?

Section A

5. Why do you feel it is important to include the views of the CYP in their reviews?
6. What are the main views you aim to elicit?
Prompts: mention the views they agree, and disagree with- why?
7. How do you feel CYP need support to get their views across?
Prompts: mention a mediator or advocate

Section B

8. What skills do you feel are important to have when talking with CYP to get their views?
9. What attitude do you feel is needed when approaching CYP to get their views?
10. How do you feel a staff member can become more confident in their ability to elicit views?
11. What do you feel is the purpose of the annual review in regard to the CYP?
12. How can CYP participate in meetings?
13. What can make it difficult for the CYP to participate or share their views?
Prompts: environment
14. How could meetings in your school be changed in order to improve participation?
Prompts: how could it be more inclusive? Any comments they have made

Section C

15. What methods do you most commonly use to elicit the views?
16. You mention you **rarely/never/sometimes** use direct methods such as talking, interviewing, asking them to keep a diary etc., why is that?
17. How do you access the views of pupils who use predominately non-verbal means of communication?
18. Do you feel the CYP needs to be prompted to get their views across?
Prompts: you mainly answered using prompted methods, how do you know when they need a prompt?
19. For CYP with greater needs, what do you feel is the best way to know their likes and dislikes?
20. Are there any methods you feel could be utilised in the school that aren't already?

Section D

21. What helps the CYP feel comfortable to share their views?
22. What advice would you give a staff member if they were to try discussing a pupils view?

Section E

23. What do you feel can be barriers for CYP expressing their views?
Prompts: you mentioned xxx, time, relationship, all factors
24. If the pupil's level of their learning difficulty means they cannot express themselves in any way, how would you convey their views in a meeting or in their plan?
25. How can the meetings be adapted to cater to the CYP?

Appendix 8: Information sheet and consent form for the interviews



INFORMATION SHEET AND CONSENT FORM FOR RESEARCH

Title of Research Project

An exploration and design of approaches used to elicit the voice of children and young people during statutory assessments and reviews (old title)

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide to participate, it is important to understand why the research is being conducted and what your participation entails. Please take time to read the following information carefully. Please ask if there are any aspects of the project that are unclear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you would like to take part in this research.

Details of Project

This project is part of a PhD thesis in Education, exploring pupil voice within special educational needs and disabilities. This project aims to explore the ways children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities share their views. Not all children and young people can verbally say their likes, dislikes, and hopes for the future; therefore this project aims to look at if these children get the same chance to do this, and how it is done. By exploring the ways different Local Authorities and Specialist Schools elicit the voice of the child or young person, this project aims to adapt an innovative method to use as part of statutory assessments and reviews within the Local Authority.

Why have I been chosen?

For this study, I am seeking the views of different Local Authorities and Specialist Schools who seek pupil voice during assessments and reviews from children and young people who have predominately non-verbal means of communication. As you chose to complete the survey sent to you, and agree to being interviewed, I am now seeking to explore your approaches to pupil voice in a deeper context. The hope is that by conducting these interviews on a wide range of specialist schools and local authorities, the fullest possible picture of how pupil voice is elicited can be explored, with the hope to improve practice.

Do I have to take part?

It is your decision to take part in this interview. You can decide to stop participating at any time. You do not need to answer questions that you do not wish to. If you are happy to take part, then you will be asked to sign a consent form. You can ask any questions before, during and after the study. You can withdraw at any time without any given reason and your data will be immediately destroyed.

What will happen in the study?

This will involve an individual interview. The interview will involve an informal discussion about your views on pupil voice, current methods and approaches used within your establishment and how you feel it could be improved. The discussion will be based around the answers you gave within the survey. The interview will be open to whatever you feel comfortable discussing and can last for as long as you want it to. You do not have to answer a question if you do not wish to.

This will be audio recorded in a private room. The conversation will be secured in a password protected file. I will delete the recordings as soon as I have transcribed it. If you would like a copy of the transcript, I am happy to provide this.

What are the risks and benefits of taking part?

Every effort will be made to preserve confidentiality, the school/LA will not be mentioned by name and you will be anonymous. Other than this, there are no known risks to taking part. The benefits are helping to create a picture of how pupil voice is explored within the UK. Your participation, as part of this study, will benefit the research within special education needs and pupil-centered planning.

Confidentiality

The results of the survey will not be used other than for the purposes described above and third parties will not be allowed access to them (except as may be required by the law). Should you proceed with the interview, the interview tapes and transcripts will be held in confidence. If you request, you will be supplied with a copy of your interview transcript so that you can comment on and edit it as you see fit (please give your email below so that I am able to contact you at a later date). Your data will be held in accordance with the Data Protection Act.

Anonymity

The data from the survey will be held and used on an anonymous basis, with no mention of your name or your place of work. The data from all interviews and observations will be anonymous.

Data Protection Notice

The information you provide will be used for research purposes and your personal data will be processed in accordance with current data protection legislation and the University's notification lodged at the Information Commissioner's Office. Your personal data will be treated in the strictest confidence and will not be disclosed to any unauthorised third parties. The results of the research will be published in anonymised form.

Who is funding and organizing the research?

The research is funded by the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities team within the Local Authority of Slough. Members of the Education department at the University of Exeter are organizing the research.

What will happen to the results of this research?

The results of this research will form the basis of a PhD Thesis from the University of Exeter. If you wish to obtain a copy of the published results, please inform the researcher. The study will take place over the next few years after which time the published results will be publicly available.

According to University policy, transcribed research data should be kept for a minimum of three years after publication. All notes made during observations and interviews by the researcher will be destroyed after write-up.

If you agree to participate in this project, the research will be written up as a thesis. On successful submission of the thesis, it will be deposited both in print and online in the University archives, to facilitate its use in future research.

Contact Details

For further information about the research please contact:

Name: *Pooja Sharma*

Telephone: 00 44 (0) 7810070621

Email: ps440@exeter.ac.uk

If you have concerns/questions about the research you would like to discuss with someone else at the University, please contact:

Prof Brahm Norwich (b.norwich@exeter.ac.uk)

Dr Alison Black (a.black@exeter.ac.uk)



Consent Form

I have been fully informed about the aims and purposes of the project.

I understand that:

- there is no compulsion for me to participate in this research project and, if I do choose to participate, I may withdraw at any stage;
- I am being voice recorded during my interview, which will be destroyed after it has been typed up;
- any information which I give will be used solely for the purposes of this research project, which may include publications or academic conference or seminar presentations;
- 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 the anonymity of where I work.

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(Signature of participant)

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(Date)

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(Printed name of participant)

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(Email address of participant if they have requested to view a copy of the interview transcript.)

.....
(Signature of researcher)

.....
(Printed name of researcher)

One copy of this form will be kept by the participant; a second copy will be kept by the researcher(s). Your contact details are kept separately from your interview data.

Appendix 9: Excerpt from the interview transcripts

Interviewer- okay and do you feel those meetings can be changed in any way to improve participation for the young person?

SENCO- yes, it is something, there are couple different ways of doing them, the practicalities of it, we have 185 children on roll, and the practicalities are we need to review them each review, so we allocate an hour per meeting, and we split that up so we do 60 per term, we condense that to a two week period. So the practicalities are we need a room, we need the people, were tight on resources to make sure that happens, and getting the parents there in the first place is sometimes a challenge, getting the children there for 10 minutes, 15 minutes, at the end, to talk about what the **adults** have discussed, that can be a challenge as well. But it, there is another way I've seen it done, where somebody comes in and has charts up on the wall and big paper, and nobodies at a table, we're all sitting round in a circle and watching this show, and all the things that are working well, I don't feel that is, necessarily, participatory approach but it, in its worst instance it resembles something that is participatory and isn't really, it is still the person at the front who's doing all the talking and leading it, and expecting responses that are then written up on the wall. It can be, something that is really getting people's views, but often it doesn't, it just doesn't do that. It kind of pretends to be. So I think the participation is not necessarily that, our meeting, it's the wider involvement. So if you ask somebody how are they getting on, what do they think about this, then theres somebody sat there, a teacher or parent or whoever else, who is speaking on their behalf, not just what they think should be said but because they know that young person.

Interviewer- okay and in terms of the methods, what motivated you to create the forms you sent me?

SENCO - because the previous ones weren't really fit for purpose. You know we were asking what have you done this year, and we'd get a picture, a photo of them, painted a picture or doing something like that, and then a comment about what they enjoyed, or what they done. So it's looking at the more fine-grained things, and trying to get their views on the way things are and the way things should be.

Interviewer - and how successful have you found it to be?

SENCO - (pause) how do you measure the success of it? Like what are we, it's successful in that we get more information, I suppose we could act on it more, if we've got children who are saying that they are unhappy, then we can try to address that with them, I don't think we really measure the success of it.

Interviewer- and if a pupil is non-verbal or are unable to complete this kind of format, how would you feel their views can be best elicited?

SENCO - so I mentioned before about using video, and the talking mats type of approach, you're using a sorting activity with symbols, things that are good, things that are bad and things you are not sure about. That's the way we've moved towards. (phone interruption) so we changed this format, so we're not asking the same question year on year on year, because we kind of already know that, it's more focusing on what's good, what's not good, at home and at school, and what are your dreams for the future. If a child can write, they write their answers down, if they're not able to write, then we've got the bank of symbols we can use, or we can have an adult who can record their answers on their behalf based on observations or conversation they're having with them.

Appendix 10: Concept mind-map of key ideas emerging from the interviews



Appendix 11: Information sheet and consent form of the Delphi Method



Title of Research Project

An exploration and evaluation of the methods and tools used to elicit the voice of children and young people during statutory assessments and reviews (old title)

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide to participate, it is important to understand why the research is being conducted and what your participation entails. Please take time to read the following information carefully. Please ask if there are any aspects of the project that are unclear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you would like to take part in this research.

Details of Project

This project is part of a PhD thesis in Education, exploring pupil voice within special educational needs and disabilities. This project aims to explore the ways children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities share their views as part of their Education, Health and Care Plan assessment and annual reviews. Not all children and young people can verbally say their likes, dislikes, and hopes for the future; therefore, this project aims to look at if these children get the same chance to do this, and how it is done. By exploring the ways professionals within the Local Authority and Specialist Schools elicit the voice of the child or young person, and what barriers they face, this project aims to produce a document of good practice that professionals can use in their consultation process for statutory assessments and reviews.

Why have I been chosen?

For this study, I am seeking the views of professionals within the local authority and specialist schools to gather their expert opinion on pupil voice during assessments and reviews. You were chosen as a professional within the local area who work with children and young people with SEND, and are familiar with the EHCP and annual review process. I would like to get your opinion on how pupils are currently consulted and the barriers that they may face to share their views, along with the barriers you may face as a professional. The hope is by understanding your opinion and the opinions of other professionals within the area, the fullest possible picture of how pupil voice is elicited can be explored, with the hope to improve practice.

Do I have to take part?

It is your decision to take part in this study. You can decide to stop participating at any time. You do not need to answer questions that you do not wish to. If you are happy to take part, then you will be asked to sign a consent form. You can ask any questions before, during and after the study. You can withdraw at any time without any given reason.

What will happen in the study?

The study will involve an initial survey of questions to gather your views. These questions are based on a survey and interviews I have done with professionals from different local

authorities and schools, not your one. You can write as much as you would like for each question, I have limited it to up to four points so you do not feel you have to write a lengthy response. You will then meet with other professionals in the local area who have agreed to take part in the study and have a discussion around these questions. This discussion will be voice recorded for the purpose of analysis. This will only happen once. After this, all correspondence will be via email. I will summarize the responses from the initial conversation and send you a table. I will ask you to rank these from examples of best practice from 1 as least important to 10 as most important when consulting children and young people. I will then get these answers from everyone involved in the initial discussion, summarize it again and send you another table. You will do the same thing. I will then pick the top three practices identified by everyone and send you a final three questions to give your opinion on. The questions will be dependent on what everyone thinks are important characteristics of best practice. These three questions will form a document that highlights best practice and aims to support professionals to elicit the voice of the child, this document will be sent to you as you have contributed to producing this through your professional opinion.

What are the risks and benefits of taking part?

Every effort will be made to preserve confidentiality, the school/LA will not be mentioned by name and you will be anonymous. The views produced from the questions will be anonymous and no one can be identified through the discussion. I understand it requires taking time out of your day to participate, I have tried to make it as quick and easy as possible so you do not feel it to be a time-consuming task. You can withdraw at any point of the study.

The benefits are helping to create a picture of how pupil voice is explored within the UK. Your participation, as part of this study, will benefit the research within special education needs and pupil-centered planning by helping to produce a document that can be used within LAs and schools to help elicit pupil voice and keep pupils at the centre of EHCP assessments and reviews.

Confidentiality

The results of the Delphi method will not be used other than for the purposes described above and third parties will not be allowed access to them (except as may be required by the law). All of your opinions will be confidential and will not be attributed to you during the discussions or the write up. Your data will be held in accordance with the Data Protection Act.

Anonymity

The data from the Delphi method will be held and used on an anonymous basis, with no mention of your name or your place of work.

Data Protection Notice

The information you provide will be used for research purposes and your personal data will be processed in accordance with current data protection legislation and the University's notification lodged at the Information Commissioner's Office. Your personal data will be treated in the strictest confidence and will not be disclosed to any unauthorised third parties. The results of the research will be published in anonymised form.

Who is funding and organizing the research?

The research is funded by the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities team within the Local Authority of Slough. Members of the Education department at the University of Exeter are organizing the research.

What will happen to the results of this research?

The results of this research will form the basis of a PhD Thesis from the University of Exeter. If you wish to obtain a copy of the published results, please inform the researcher. The study will take place over the next few years after which time the published results will be publicly available.

According to University policy, transcribed research data should be kept for a minimum of three years after publication. All notes made during observations and interviews by the researcher will be destroyed after write-up.

If you agree to participate in this project, the research will be written up as a thesis. On successful submission of the thesis, it will be deposited both in print and online in the University archives, to facilitate its use in future research.

Contact Details

For further information about the research please contact:

Name: *Pooja Sharma*

Postal address:

Telephone: 00 44 (0) 7810070621

Email: *ps440@exeter.ac.uk*

If you have concerns/questions about the research you would like to discuss with someone else at the University, please contact:

Prof Brahm Norwich (b.norwich@exeter.ac.uk)

Dr Alison Black (a.black@exeter.ac.uk)



Consent Form

I have been fully informed about the aims and purposes of the project.

I have read the information sheet and understand how I can ask further questions about the study.

I understand that:

- there is no compulsion for me to participate in this research project and, if I do choose to participate, I may withdraw at any stage and any data will be destroyed;
- the initial conversation will be voice recorded and transcribed;
- any information which I give will be used solely for the purposes of this research project, which may include publications or academic conference or seminar presentations;

- this project has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through the University of Exeter Graduate School of Education Ethics Committee
- 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, kept securely and what will happen to the data at the end of the project;
- the researcher(s) will make every effort to preserve my anonymity and the anonymity of where I work.
- I have the opportunity to review and comment on any analysis before publication, and how to raise a concern.

I agree to:

- Voluntarily take part in the study

.....

(Signature of participant)

.....

(Date)

.....

(Printed name of participant)

.....

(Email address of participant if they have requested to view a copy of the interview transcript.)

.....

(Signature of researcher)

.....

(Printed name of researcher)

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

Appendix 12: Information sheet and consent form used in the pilot Delphi method



Title of Research Project

An exploration and evaluation of the methods and tools used to elicit the voice of children and young people with communication during statutory assessments and reviews (old title)

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this pilot study. Before you decide to participate, it is important to understand why the research is being conducted and what your participation entails. Please take time to read the following information carefully. Please ask if there are any aspects of the project that are unclear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you would like to take part in this research.

Details of Project

This project is part of a PhD thesis in Education, exploring pupil voice within special educational needs and disabilities. This project aims to explore the ways children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities share their views as part of their Education, Health and Care Plan assessment and annual reviews. Not all children and young people can verbally say their likes, dislikes, and hopes for the future; therefore, this project aims to look at if these children get the same chance to do this, and how it is done. By exploring the ways professionals within the Local Authority and Specialist Schools elicit the voice of the child or young person, and what barriers they face, this project aims to produce a document of good practice that professionals can use in their consultation process for statutory assessments and reviews.

Why have I been chosen?

For this study, I will be seeking the views of professionals within the local authority and specialist schools to gather their expert opinion on pupil voice during assessments and reviews. This pilot aims to test out the method, known as the Delphi Method. This method will be used in the research study so the pilot aims to evaluate the process and questions, so I can refine them as needed.

Do I have to take part?

It is your decision to take part in this study. You can decide to stop participating at any time. You do not need to answer questions that you do not wish to. If you are happy to take part, then you will be asked to sign a consent form. You can ask any questions before, during and after the study. You can withdraw at any time without any given reason. As this is a pilot study, the results of your answers will not be used for the purpose of the research, only to evaluate the effectiveness of the method and refine as needed.

What will happen in the study?

The pilot study will involve an initial survey of questions to gather your views about pupil voice. These questions are based on a survey and interviews I have done with professionals from different local authorities and schools. You can write as much as you would like for

each question, I have limited it to up to four points so you do not feel you have to write a lengthy response. We will then meet up and have a discussion around these questions. This discussion will be voice recorded for the purpose of analyzing the method; the recording will not be used in the study as it is a pilot and does not contribute to the research project. I will then use this data to summarize your views into a table.

What are the risks and benefits of taking part?

As this is a pilot study and the views you share will not be used within the analysis. The pilot serves to test the method and questions, and get feedback on whether this should be amended in any way. Your views produced from the questions will be anonymous and no one can be identified through the discussion. I understand it requires taking time out of your day to participate, I have tried to make it as quick and easy as possible so you do not feel it to be a time-consuming task. You can withdraw at any point of the study.

The benefits are helping to create a picture of how pupil voice is explored within the UK. Your participation, as part of this study, will benefit the research within special education needs and pupil-centered planning by helping to produce a document that can be used within LAs and schools to help elicit pupil voice and keep pupils at the centre of EHCP assessments and reviews.

Confidentiality

The results of the Delphi method will not be used other than for the purposes described above and third parties will not be allowed access to them (except as may be required by the law). All of your opinions will be confidential and will not be attributed to you during the discussions or the write up. Your data will be held in accordance with the Data Protection Act.

Anonymity

The data from the Delphi method will be held and used on an anonymous basis, with no mention of your name or your place of work.

Data Protection Notice

The information you provide will be used for research purposes and your personal data will be processed in accordance with current data protection legislation and the University's notification lodged at the Information Commissioner's Office. Your personal data will be treated in the strictest confidence and will not be disclosed to any unauthorised third parties. The results of the research will be published in anonymised form.

Who is funding and organizing the research?

The research is funded by the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities team within the Local Authority of Slough. Members of the Education department at the University of Exeter are organizing the research.

What will happen to the results of this research?

The results of your participation in the pilot will not be used in the PhD thesis. It will be evaluated for the purpose of refinement to the method and questions, in order to prepare and practice for when the method is used with LA professionals and schools. The recording of the pilot will be destroyed after the completion and submission of the thesis.

Contact Details

For further information about the research please contact:

Name: *Pooja Sharma*
Telephone: 00 44 (0) 7810070621
Email: *ps440@exeter.ac.uk*

If you have concerns/questions about the research you would like to discuss with someone else at the University, please contact:

Prof Brahm Norwich (b.norwich@exeter.ac.uk)
Dr Alison Black (a.e.black@exeter.ac.uk)



Consent Form

I have been fully informed about the aims and purposes of the pilot.

I have read the information sheet and understand how I can ask further questions about the study.

I understand that:

- there is no compulsion for me to participate in this research project and, if I do choose to participate, I may withdraw at any stage and any data will be destroyed;
- the initial conversation will be voice recorded and transcribed;
- any information which I give will be used solely for the purposes of analysis as part of the pilot;
- this project has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through the University of Exeter Graduate School of Education Ethics Committee
- If applicable, the information, which I give, may be shared between any of the other researcher(s) participating in this project in an anonymized form;
- all information I give will be treated as confidential, kept securely and what will happen to the data at the end of the project;
- the researcher(s) will make every effort to preserve my anonymity and the anonymity of where I work.
- I have the opportunity to review and comment on any analysis before publication, and how to raise a concern.

I agree to:

- Voluntarily take part in the Pilot study.

.....
(Signature of participant)

.....
(Date)

.....
(Printed name of participant)

.....
(Email address of participant if they have requested to view a copy of the interview transcript.)

.....
(Signature of researcher)

.....
(Printed name of researcher)

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

Appendix 13: Full data set from round one of the Delphi Method

Meaningful Participation

CYP's views are listened to
Questions are future focused on what they would like to achieve or change
CYP's views are made clear even if an adult disagrees with it
Attend either all or part of meetings
CYP understands and feels involved in process
CYP feels comfortable to talk openly
Have a say on decisions being made
Comment on what support they would like to have
Help set targets
Share their hopes for the future
Draw pictures of things they like
Share their own experiences of schools
See change happen
CYP are explained clearly the purpose of meetings
Shared ownership
Engaged in plan to ensure it is relevant to them

Key practices and conditions in capturing voice

Capture their voice in private room
Build rapport with the CYP
Member of staff or family there to make them feel comfortable
CYP feels safe
Capture views first
Fully explain the purpose of why you capture their views
CYP made to feel welcome
CYP knows they can leave when they wish
IT equipment needed to facilitate getting their voice e.g. video recording
Guidance on how to gather views

Enabling Factors

share views over time e.g. a scrapbook
use different methods based on understanding
check CYP is happy with what you have written
Have adults in the room that know them well and can advocate for them
Familiar and trusted staff
Triangulate information from different reports to get understanding of what they feel beforehand
Allocating time out of the assessment to get their views
Use mediums such as drawing
Simplified language in paperwork
Spend time with pupil
Understanding how they communicate best beforehand
Show interest in their hobbies

Organise meeting before to ensure child is at centre
Key adult who can add extra information to child's views
Using photos for choice
Visual communication strips

Barriers

CYPs language ability
Limited time to elicit views
Paperwork
Reluctance to engage
Pupils with PMLD
Parents preventing pupil from attending or saying what they think
Not understanding why you are asking for views
Not inviting pupils to meetings
Age – too young to express self
CYPO saying what they feel they have to say
Lack of resources to elicit voice of other abilities and ages
Less flexibility in meetings and assessments
Not comfortable meeting new people
Low attendance at school
Anxiety around sharing views
Speech and language needs
SEMH needs
Not having correct communication tools to speak with the CYP
Lack of motivation to engage
Lack of aspirations
Can't understand format of questions
Lack of knowledge from professionals
Large caseloads

How to deal with limits to participation

Try different approaches
Check they are happy with what you have written
Ask adults who know them best
Be open to changes
Write a letter to the CYP explaining why you will meet them
Write a letter after to explain how their views have helped
Prioritise capturing views first
Have a range of tools when visiting such as pictures
Get a TA to get views if you are unable to
Using technology or recordings – virtual options
Creative methods
Ensure all professionals know how important it is to get views
Share best practice
Utilise key members to help alleviate anxieties
Gather views before meeting if they don't want to attend
Explain decisions made after the meeting
Add visuals into review paperwork

Child friendly assessment or paperwork to be made available
Schools to capture voice throughout the year so it is not a one off
Withdraw from learning task to complete their views
Pupils sign what an adult has written if they are happy
Make clear where information has come from and who said what
Case worker should be child's advocate
Have templates/proformas/materials that can be used
Develop ways to capture voice with other professionals
Get views at different times and different moods to see it is actually how they feel
Always invite the CYP

Appendix 14: Questionnaire used in round two of the Delphi Method

You have identified these as characteristics of 'meaningful participation' of a CYP with SEND, how would you rate these in order of importance, from a scale of 1 as 'most important' characteristic and 5 as the 'least important' characteristic?

CYP express their likes and dislikes

e.g.

- CYP draw pictures of things they like
- share their own experiences of schools

CYP feels comfortable to talk openly

CYP understands and feels involved in process

e.g.

- CYP attends either all or part of meetings
- Shared ownership
- CYP are explained clearly the purpose of meetings
- Engaged in plan to ensure it is relevant to them

CYP's views are listened to

e.g.

- CYP's views are made clear even if an adult disagrees with it

Questions are future focused on what they would like to achieve or change

e.g.

- Share their hopes for the future
- Have a say on decisions being made
- Comment on what support they would like to have
- Help set targets
- See change happen

You have identified the following as key practices and conditions to elicit pupil voice, how would you rate these in order of importance, from a scale of 1 as 'most important' and 5 as 'least important'?

Build rapport with the CYP

e.g.

- CYP made to feel welcome
- Fully explain the purpose of why you capture their views
- CYP knows they can leave when they wish

CYP feels safe

e.g.

- Member of staff or family there to make them feel comfortable
- Capture their voice in private room

Follow guidance on how to gather views

IT equipment needed to facilitate getting their voice e.g. video recording

Prioritise capturing views first in any assessment

You have identified these as important enabling factors to elicit the voice of CYP. How would you rate these in order of importance in enabling the voice of the child, where 1 as 'most important' enabling factor and 7 as 'least important' enabling factor?

Capture views over time e.g. a scrapbook

Check CYP is happy with what you have written

Doing work before meeting the CYP

e.g.

- Triangulate information from different reports to get understanding of what they feel beforehand
- Organise meeting before to ensure child is at centre
- Understanding how they communicate best beforehand

Have familiar and trusted staff

e.g.

- Have adults in the room that know them well and can advocate for them
- Key adult who can add extra information to child's views

Have methods available to use

e.g.

- use different methods based on understanding
- Use mediums such as drawing
- Using photos for choice
- Visual communication strips

Prioritise getting views

e.g.

- Allocating time out of the assessment to get their views
- Spend time with pupil
- Show interest in their hobbies

Simplified language in paperwork

You have identified the following as significant barriers to eliciting the voice of the child. Please rate these barriers in order of importance, as 1 as 'most important' barrier and 7 as 'least important' barrier.

CYPs language and cognitive ability

e.g.

- Pupils with PMLD
- too young to express self
- Speech and language needs

CYP's anxieties and fears

E.g.

- Not comfortable meeting new people
- Anxiety around sharing views
- SEMH needs
- CYP saying what they feel they have to say

CYP's understanding of assessments

e.g.

- Not understanding why you are asking for views
- Can't understand format of questions

Gatekeepers

e.g.

- Parents preventing pupil from attending or saying what they think
- Not inviting pupils to meetings

Lack of resources

e.g.

- Lack of resources to elicit voice of other abilities and ages
- Lack of knowledge from professionals
- Not having correct communication tools to speak with the CYP

Limited time to elicit views

e.g.

- Paperwork
- Large caseloads
- Less flexibility in meetings and assessments

Pupils reluctance to engage

e.g.

- Lack of motivation to engage
- Lack of aspirations
- low attendance at school

You have identified the following as ways to deal with the limits to participation. How would you rank the following, where 1 is 'most important' factor and 8 as 'least important' factor.

<p>Ask adults who know them best e.g. - Utilise key members to help allay anxieties - Get a TA to get views if you are unable to</p>
<p>Child friendly assessment or paperwork to be made available e.g. - Add visuals into review paperwork</p>
<p>Creative methods e.g. - Using technology or recordings – virtual options - Have a range of tools when visiting such as pictures - Try different approaches - Develop ways to capture voice with other professionals who work with them - Have templates/proformas/materials that can be used</p>
<p>Decision- making e.g. - Explain decisions made to the CYP after the meeting</p>
<p>Prioritise capturing views first in an assessment e.g. - Withdraw from learning task to complete their views - Ensure all professionals know how important it is to get views - Gather views before meeting if they don't want to attend - Always invite the CYP</p>
<p>Schools to capture voice throughout the year so it is not a one off e.g. - Be open to changes - Get views at different times and different moods to see it is actually how they feel</p>
<p>Share best practice</p>
<p>Transparency e.g. - Write a letter to the CYP explaining why you will meet them - Write a letter after to explain how their views have helped - Check they are happy with what you have written - Make clear where information has come from and who said what - Pupils sign what an adult has written if they are happy</p>

Capturing the voice of children and young people for their Education, Health and Care Plans and Annual Reviews

A guide for Schools and Local Authority SEND professionals



This booklet provides actionable guidance for SEND professionals and provides solutions for the perceived barriers in eliciting the voice of Children and Young People (CYP) during their Education, Health and Care plan (EHCP) assessments and Annual Reviews (AR).

It has been put together based on the analysis feedback from a panel of experts using the Delphi method. The panel members consisted of a range of professionals within one local authority (LA) and specialist school. They shared their opinions on how professionals can meaningfully elicit the voice of CYP. Questionnaires and interviews have also been carried out with professionals from different LAs and schools in England. The analysis forms the basis of a doctoral thesis.

The SEND professionals prioritised different items that they recognised to be important factors to consider when eliciting voice. These items were then ranked through a series of rounds based on the perceived level of importance. Group consensus was developed on the important and significant characteristics to consider when eliciting the voice. The panel then provided their views on how these characteristics could be carried out within practice.

This booklet will provide guidance for SEND professionals within five distinct areas relevant to EHCP assessments and ARs. These included Meaningful participation; key practices and conditions in capturing voice; enabling factors; barriers; and how to overcome limits to participation.



Why capture the voice of CYP?

Involving CYP in decision-making such as their EHCP and AR carries many benefits:

- Encourages CYP to be active members of society
- Increase confidence, self-respect, competence and achievement within schools
- Promotes a feeling of empowerment and being valued within society
- More likely to secure positive outcomes

Legislation and policy also requires that assessments remain child-centred and the views of CYP are gathered:

- The United Nations Conventions on the Rights of the Child (1990) Article 12 states that a “*child who is capable of forming his or her own views have the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child*”. Article 13 goes on to state this can be in any medium they prefer, not just vocal speech.
- The Children and Families Act (2014) state that CYPs views, wishes and feelings must be taken into account, and the importance of their participation in decisions relating to them.
- And most importantly for SEND professionals, the SEN Code of Practice (2015) states;



9.21 *Local authorities **must** consult the child and the child’s parent or the young person throughout the process of assessment and production of an EHC plan...local*

authorities must have regard to the views, wishes and feelings of the child, child’s parent or young person, their aspirations, the outcomes they wish to seek and the support they need to achieve them.

What are the difficulties in ensuring person-centred approaches?

Majority of professionals who work with CYP will feel that a CYPs voice is crucial to any assessment, review or meeting, and will strive to achieve a person-centred approach in their daily role.

‘a child should feel listened to and their opinion valued and respected...they should see change happening as a result’ (SENCO)

However, this is not always possible for a number of reasons. Professionals who work in LAs and schools can encounter a number of barriers that prevent their ability to meaningfully capture the voice of CYP during assessments and reviews. This includes barriers that affect their role as professionals, such as:

- The pressure of the 20-week deadline when conducting assessments
- High work-load and limited capacity
- Time constraints
- Lack of resources
- Lack of training on how to elicit voice

As identified by SEND professionals, ***‘it’s not feasible and it’s not possible to go to every review or meet every single child and get their views myself’ (SEND Officer).***

There are also identified barriers for the CYP themselves in expressing their views, this includes:

- Cognitive and language ability
- Meeting new people
- Anxiety or fear of the meeting
- Not understanding the meeting or why they are giving their views
- Too young to express themselves

This booklet therefore addresses the most significant factors that support eliciting voice and also the barriers that prevent this.

Meaningful Participation

‘One of the main barriers is not gathering in a way that’s meaningful’ (EP)

When asked what ‘meaningful participation’ meant within EHCP assessments and ARs, the panel members felt the three most important characteristics to achieve this includes:

1. CYPs views are listened to
2. CYP understands and feels involved in the process
3. CYP feels comfortable to talk openly

Professionals can promote meaningful participation by:

- The CYP views are written down and discussed within the meeting
- Use the exact wording the CYP has used
- Their views are incorporated within their targets and outcomes e.g. if a child does not want to make friends, then their outcome should not be about developing friendships
- Explain the purpose of meetings beforehand so they know why they are being asked for their views
- If they don’t attend, get their views beforehand and provide feedback after the meeting



“a simple explanation sheet could be a useful tool to share with the CYP before gaining their views outside of the meeting, so they are aware of the purpose of the meeting”

Majority of panel members believed that it was most important that professionals ensure that the CYPs views are listened to. The CYP will know it is THEIR meeting and every view and opinion they share has been heard and considered by all those in the room.

Key practices and conditions in capturing voice

When asked what are the key practices and conditions needed to capture voice, the panel members felt the three most important characteristics to achieve this includes:

1. CYP feels safe
2. Build rapport with the CYP
3. Follow guidance on how to capture views

Professionals can create conditions for CYP to share their voice within meetings in the following ways:

- Gather views in an environment they feel safe in
- This may be one to one with an adult they trust
- Build rapport and meet them before if possible - however this is not always feasible and therefore professionals should aim to build this relationship during the meeting:
 - Talk to them, not about them
 - Be interested in their hobbies
 - Provide fun activities to engage them
 - Find out their likes beforehand to use as a conversation starter

“CYP should be able to share prior to and separate from the meeting where they feel safe to share their views and ask any questions they may have”



The majority of panel members believed it was most important that professionals ensure that the CYP feels safe and professionals build rapport with the CYP. Where possible, rapport should always be built beforehand. However, this can also be established within meetings by addressing the meeting to the CYP and ensuring their involvement within each step.

Enabling Factors

When asked what are the most significant enabling factors that support professionals to meaningfully elicit voice, panel members felt the three most significant factors were:

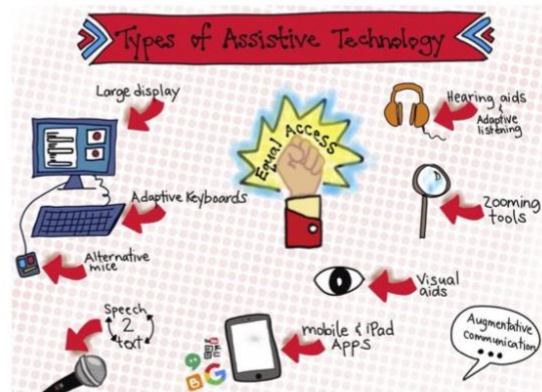
1. Do work before meeting the CYP
2. Prioritise getting their views
3. Have methods available to use

Professionals can utilise these enabling factors and ensure the following:

- Read all paperwork before meeting the CYP, this can be used as conversation starters and shows the CYP you are interested in what they like
- Find out how they communicate beforehand so any resources required can be gathered
- Find out the best time of day to meet the CYP and who they may want there
- Allocate a specific time period within the meeting to listen to the CYPs views and discuss this openly with them
- Have lots of resources with you e.g. pictures, visuals, iPad.

'The views of the young person are, or should be, at the centre of all of the plan, their views should be prioritised. If you have prepared by doing the work before the meeting you should be able to get the best out of the meeting'

The majority of panel members believed it was significant to prioritise getting views. If the views of CYP is seen as a compulsory part of the process, as opposed to optional, professionals will always ensure this is done in every assessment and review.



Barriers

When asked what are the most significant barriers to eliciting voice of CYP, panel members felt the three most significant barriers were:

1. CYPs language and cognitive ability
2. CYPs anxieties and fears
3. CYPs understanding of assessment

These barriers often make it difficult for a professional to ensure a person-centred approach. However, there are possible solutions to these barriers that professionals can use to ensure the voice of CYP are heard:

- Have age-appropriate resources e.g. visuals, communication aids
- Ensure you speak to someone who knows that pupil well and can provide information on how best they communicate
- Provide fun and engaging activities
- If they are anxious, write a letter beforehand with your picture explaining why you are going to meet them
- Check with familiar adults on the views gathered
- Offer an advocate

“The ideal is: observation over time, talking to a range of people familiar with the CYP, using a range of resources, asking the same question in different ways, and checking what you think with people familiar with the CYP”



The majority of panel members felt the most significant barriers to eliciting voice was the CYPs language and cognitive ability, along with their fears and anxieties. However with preparation and planning, professionals can always try to get the voice of the CYP in some capacity

How to overcome the limits to participation

Finally, panel members were asked how professionals could overcome the limits to participation and the barriers in eliciting voice. They felt the ways to do this included:

1. Creative methods
2. Ask adults who know them best
3. Child friendly assessments or paperwork

Professionals can utilise these enabling factors and ensure the following:

- Provide a range of proformas/templates to use
- Have as many methods as you can available and find the right one for the CYP
- Make it colourful, personal and child-friendly
- Use technology e.g. skype in a meeting, emojis
- Multiple opportunities to provide their voice, not just one day. This can be done virtually if time is a barrier.

“with technology continuously changing and new communication methods being made for our CYP, using these creatively can benefit in practice”



The majority of panel members felt it was most important to use creative methods to gather views. There are many established methods to capture voice e.g. one page profile, talking mats, PATH etc. However, by thinking ‘outside of the box’, we can find new and creative ways to engage CYP and provide opportunities to engage in their EHCP assessments and ARs, and overcome the limits to participation.

Appendix 16: Certificate of Ethical Approval



GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

St Luke's Campus
Heavitree Road
Exeter UK EX1 2LU

<http://socialsciences.exeter.ac.uk/education/>

CERTIFICATE OF ETHICAL APPROVAL

Title of Project: **An exploration and design of approaches used to capture the voice of children and young people with non-verbal means of communication during statutory assessments and reviews**

Researcher(s) name: **Pooja Sharma**

Supervisor(s): Brahm Norwich
 Alison Black

This project has been approved for the period

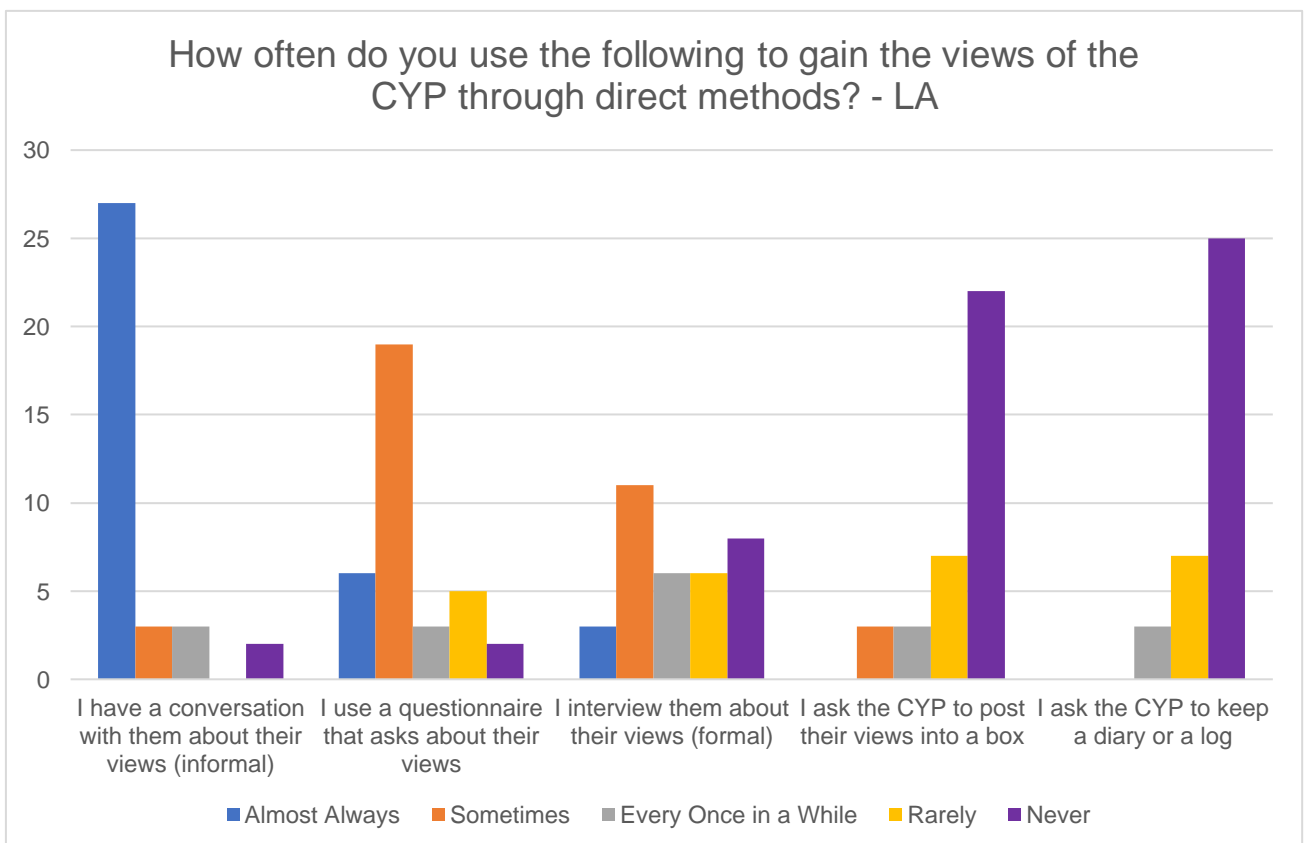
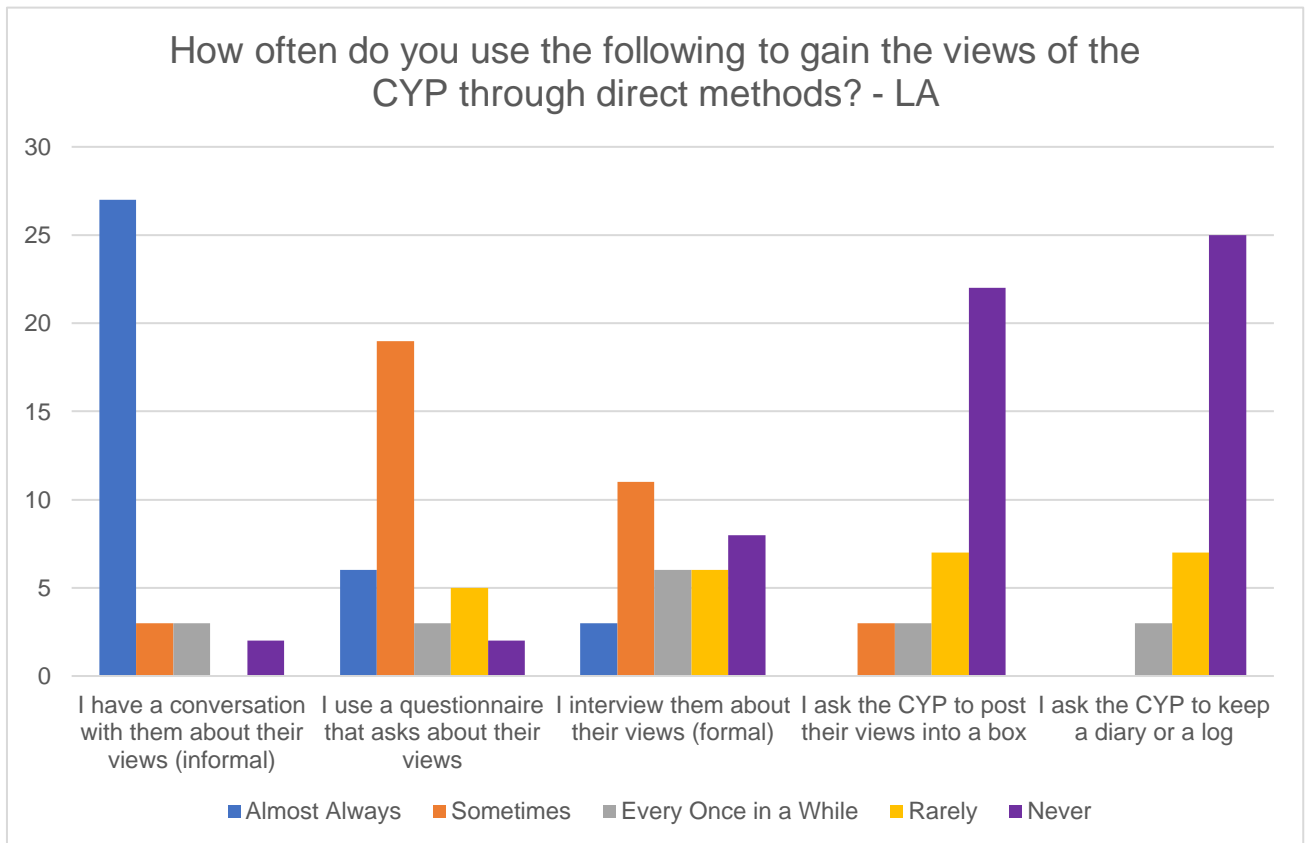
From: **01/07/2018**
To: **01/09/2021**

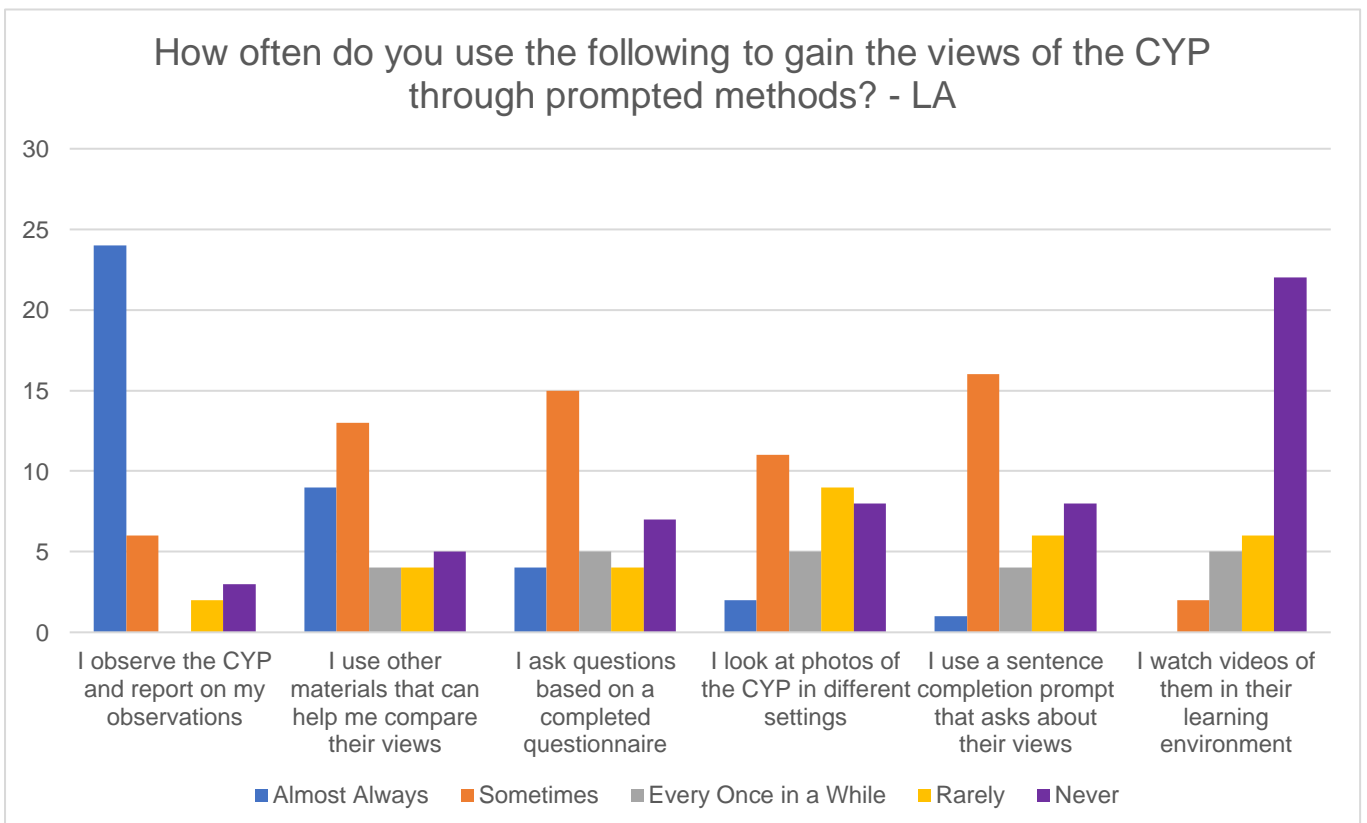
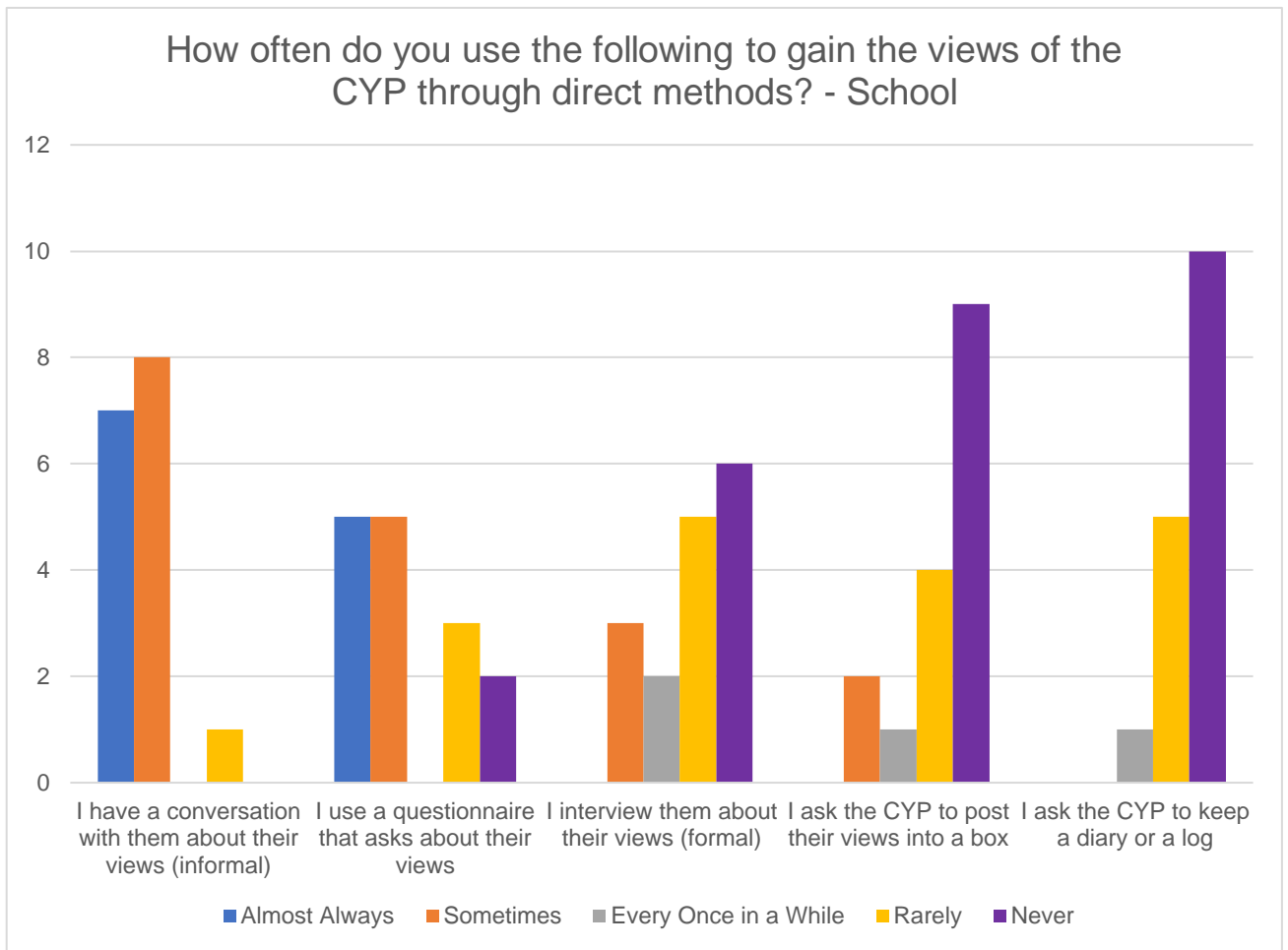
Ethics Committee approval reference: D/17/18/53

Signature:  Date: 27th June 2108
(Professor Dongbo Zhang, Graduate School of Education Ethics Officer)

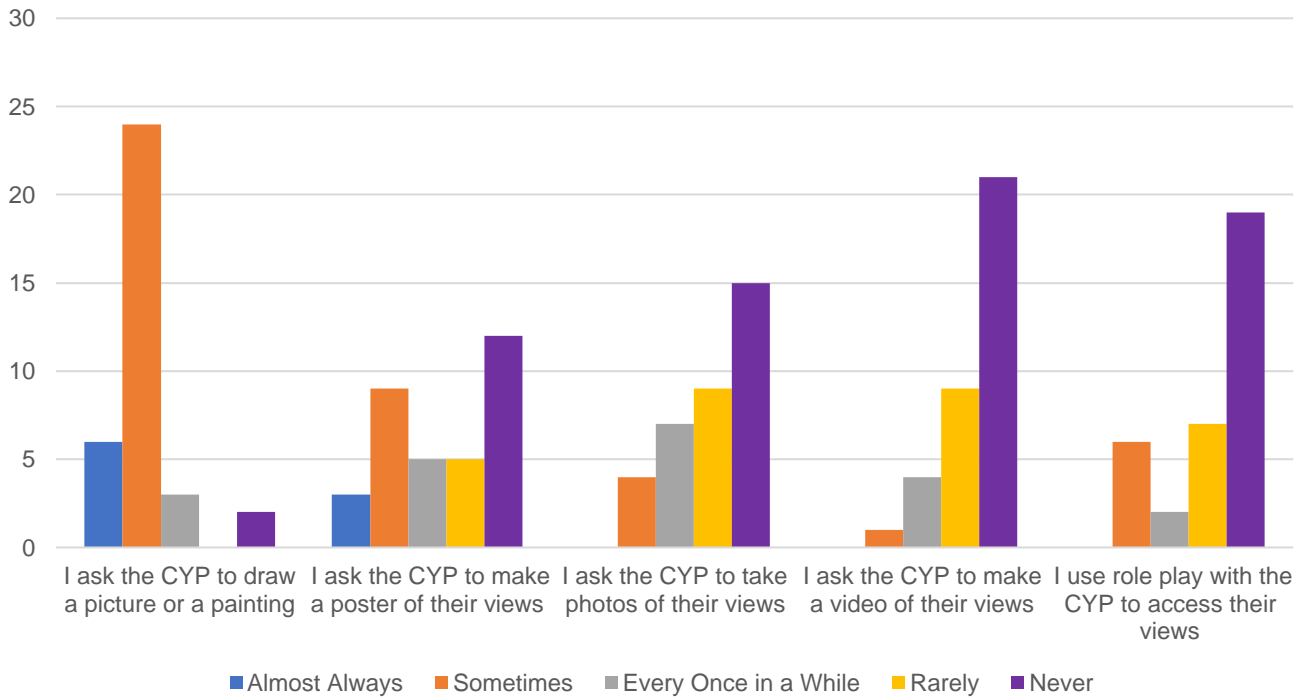


Appendix 17: Bar charts of how often each method was used

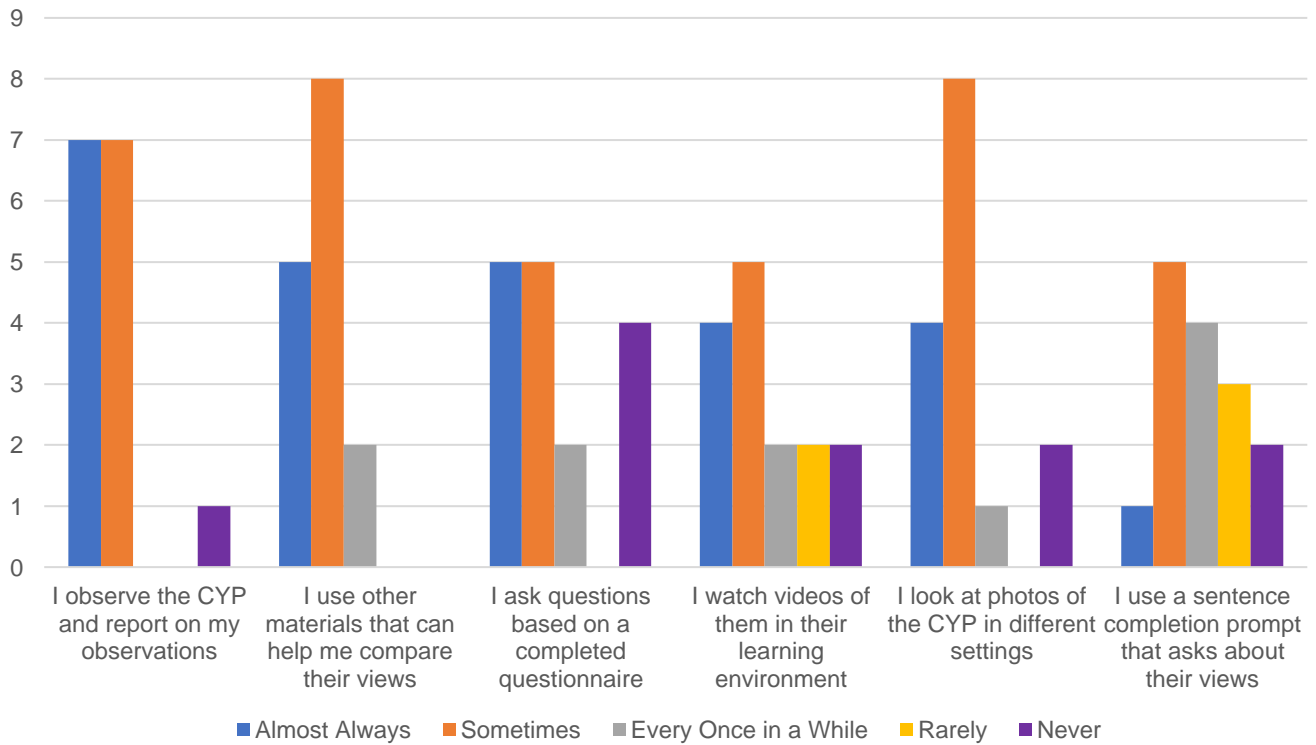




How often do you use the following to gain the views of the CYP through mediated methods? - LA



How often do you use the following to gain the views of the CYP through prompted methods? - School



How often do you use the following to gain the views of the CYP through mediated methods? - School

