Exploring the social support of children in key stage two: The development of a new tool (SOPSS) to elicit children's perceptions of their social support.

Submitted by

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I certify that all material in this thesis which is not my own work has been identified and that

no material has previously been submitted and approved for the award of a degree by this

or any other University.

Abstract

Social support, and in particular perceived social support, has been established in past research to be related to many areas of functioning. Positive perceptions of social support have been associated with; happiness; well-being; mental health and, in children, school attainment. However, the majority of past research has been conducted in the USA, and little research has looked at perceived social support in the UK. Therefore, an in depth exploration of the perceptions of social support of children, within key stage two in the UK was undertaken to establish children's viewpoints. This exploration indicates that children in the UK perceive social support from a wide range of sources, some of which have not been discussed in previous literature. These sources include an extensive range of family members, friends, and people in the community, as well as toys and animals. The style of support which children value is also wide ranging; it includes the desire for a sense of being seen and heard; their needs being responded to; time and attention being provided in a fun and interactive way; and having shared experiences or interests with their supporters .

The exploration of perceived social support in the UK informed the development of a new scale of perceived social support (SOPSS). This scale has been initially piloted in a small group of children, appropriate adaptations have been made and a large scale pilot has been completed. The analysis of the SOPSS initially provides some good evidence that it is a reliable and valid tool. Although further refinement is required, as well as validation in a larger and more diverse population, the tool initially appears to be a valuable addition to the existing social support literature.

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Abbreviation	Definition
SEN	Special educational needs
EP	Educational Psychologist
SSSC	Social support scale for children
SSSS	Student social support scale
CASSS	Child and adolescent social support scale
SSQC	Social support questionnaire for children
KS2	Key stage two (children aged 7-11 years)
SENCo	Special educational needs coordinator
OFSTED	Office for standards in education, children's service and skills
FSM	Free school meals
KMO	Kaiser- Meyer-Olkin measure
SOPSS	Scale of perceived social support
PCA	Principle components analysis

Chapter 1   Introduction

1.1 Current context

At the time of conducting this research, the profession of educational psychology and legislative changes relating to special educational needs (SEN) are undergoing a period of great change. The Children and Families Act (2014) led to a reprioritisation of the emphasis of statutory work; this has meant that there is now more of a focus upon person centred practice and ensuring that the child or young person's voice is heard, and acted upon during statutory processes. Children and their families are now involved in the statutory educational processes much more fully than previously, and this shift fits well with the role of Educational Psychologists' other work; to be an advocate for the child and to work alongside children, schools and families (Fallon, Woods, & Rooney, 2010). The elicitation of child viewpoints and perspectives is therefore a current priority in statutory work for SEN.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) directs adults to ensure that they listen to children's opinions and to remember that children have a right to be heard, particularly in matters concerning them. It also guides adults to ensure that children have the opportunity to say what they think and have their perspectives taken into account when decisions are made regarding them.

The Foresight Project on Mental Capacity and Well Being (2008), by the UK government, cited social support as one of the five main factors for the promotion of positive mental capacity and well-being in both children and adults. Therefore it is important that children's

perspectives are taken into account when considering social support. The many implications of social support across wide areas of children and young people's lives will be discussed in Chapter 2. These include the relationship between children's social support and their; happiness; emotional well-being; school contributions; academic/school attainment; mental health outcomes; as well as the protective effects of positive social support in times of hardship. Although past literature has gaps which will be addressed through the current project, there is indication from the past literature that social support as an area for research is vital, given the implications that it has across many areas of functioning.

Educational Psychologists (EPs) are in a unique position, in that they have access to a child's home and school life, and are often able to work from an eco-systemic perspective; considering all areas of a child's experience and how this may be affecting their functioning in school and at home. There is some disparity between how the role of the EP is viewed by EPs themselves, as opposed to professionals who may work with them. For example Ashton and Roberts (2006) found that from an EP perspective, valuing the views of pupils is an often-cited benefit of the work of EPs. However, from the school perspective, the ability to highlight areas of need was found to be most valued. Therefore, when EPs are able to both promote children's voices, while also highlighting their needs, this may bring satisfaction to the EP as a professional and the school as an institution.

1.2 The importance of student voice and experience.

Guess and Bowling (2014) state in their review of literature about teacher student relationships that

"…further study focused on student perceptions would strengthen the literature base that reflects student voices and experiences" and "Inclusion of student input inherently communicates that students, themselves, have worthy views, strengths, and important messages for adults who are listening" (p.205).

Tangen (2009) emphasises that students are experts, who should be consulted when schooling and education are discussed. Kellett and Ding (2006) also emphasise the need to include children's voice in research:

"Children are themselves the best source of information about matters than concern them….so collecting data directly from children is preferred as secondary sources may not be able to orient sufficiently to the children's perspective" (p165).

The literature emphasises the need for children and young people to have their voices heard. Dubow and Ullman (1989) elicited network members, and the type of social support which they provided, from elementary school children in the USA. They also emphasised the need for researchers to be conscious not to impose their own factors on the child's thinking and to allow children's perspectives to be heard (Dubow & Ullman, 1989).

The existing research into social support has not explored the personal experiences and understanding of social support of children between 7 and 11 years old. It cannot be assumed that experiences of social support can be generalised across age groups, as there

may be developmental differences; it has also been established that there are likely to be cultural differences in perceptions of social support; this will be discussed below. Phase one of this research intends to establish the understanding and experiences that children have of social support in the UK. The second phase of research will use this knowledge to develop a scale of perceived social support for children in the UK. Students will be involved in the pilot testing to ensure that it reflects their experiences, preferences and understanding of social support.

1.3 Personal interest

As well as the contextual and legislative rationale to support the elicitation of children's perspectives, this project also came from my own personal interests. Given my previous roles working in schools as a member of support staff I have been interested in the differences that may occur in the relationships between adults and children. I noticed that the school ethos can restrict relationships between staff and students; certain power dynamics may prevent open and honest discussion of personal issues between children and their teachers. I began by considering the need to investigate the relationships between teaching assistants and the children they support. But I soon realised that an extension into the wider support that children perceive may bring a more valuable and holistic exploration of their experiences.

I have always held the opinion of children in high regard and this is an integral part of my role as a Trainee EP. Since being on placement I have also become fascinated by the school

or adult perspectives of children's worlds and how different the viewpoint of a child can really be. Once they are provided with the appropriate tools, means and space to communicate these opinions, children can bring insightful and valuable contributions, which should be valued by adults.

I hope that greater understanding of children's perceptions of social support will inform the development of a useful scale, which will be produced and initially validated in a sample of children aged 7-11 years. I also believe that such a scale could be used dynamically; as a talking point while working with children.

1.4 Thesis overview

In Chapter 2 the relevant literature will be discussed over both phases of the project, to provide a theoretical context, empirical evidence and justification for the current research. This will be followed by an overall methodology section for both phases of the research. The project will then be divided into two sections; one for each phase of the project, with individual methods, analysis, results and discussion sections. The two phases of the research will then be drawn together in the overall discussion in Chapter 6 where future research ideas will be given and an evaluation and description of the impact of the research will be described.

1.5 Aims and objectives

The first phase of the research project is exploratory in nature. The participants are children in Key Stage two (KS2) of primary school (aged 7-11 years old). The research questions are:

- RQ1: How do KS2 children experience social support in the UK?

    o RQ2: From what sources do KS2 children perceive social support to be available?

    o RQ3: What types of social support do KS2 children perceive from these sources?

- RQ4: What changes do KS2 children feel could be made with regards to their social support?

The second phase of the project uses the knowledge gained in phase one to develop a scale of perceived social support (SOPSS) for children aged 7-11 years. This is piloted with a representative group of children in KS2. The research questions are:

- RQ5: What should be included in a new SOPSS for KS2 children?

- RQ6: How should a new SOPSS be structured?

- RQ7: How can the new SOPSS be refined?

- RQ8: What is the initial validity and reliability of the SOPSS?

- RQ9: Does the SOPSS have an underlying structure that 'makes sense'?

Chapter 2   Literature review

Searches for literature were carried out in; EBSCO e-journals; Science Direct; Taylor and Francis online; British Education Index; Education Research Complete and The University of Exeter electronic catalogue. Appendix 1 contains a full list of the databases and search engines which were used to gather the literature reported in this review, as well as the search terms. Boolean operations were used to search for variants of these terms (for example child* to indicate child/children/childhood, and so on). The geographical location of the research was not restricted, as a great deal of the social support literature has been conducted in the USA.

In online databases, papers which resulted from these search terms, linked to further relevant literature; for example links suggesting 'other research like this' made connections to further papers which may or may not have included in the results from the key search terms in Appendix 1. Individual journals which are related to the field (for example, Educational Psychology in Practice) were also specifically searched to ensure a full coverage of the existing literature. The literature originates from a range of disciplines including psychology, education, nursing, health care, social care and sociology; the majority of the literature being from psychology and education.

2.1 Definitions and models

2.1.1 Definitions

Social support can be defined as "information leading the subject to believe that he is cared for and loved, esteemed, and a member of a network of mutual obligations" (Cobb, 1976). Social support is a complex and multi-faceted concept. I will discuss the established definitions relating to social support, in terms of the content/type of support, the source of the support and whether support is perceived, available, or received / enacted, as these are the three areas commonly discussed in the literature.

2.1.1.1 Social support types

House (1981) defined four types of support, which are still commonly accepted in current research. These are: emotional, instrumental, informational and appraisal support. Tardy (1985) elaborated on these categories and provided the following definitions:

- Emotional support can be considered to be the provision of love and empathy.
- Instrumental support involves giving up time to help, or lending resources.
- Informational support includes giving advice or providing information.
- Appraisal support refers to feedback on performance, such as "well done".

All four support types will be discussed in this review and investigated during the research.

2.1.1.2 Social support sources

Social support sources can be described as formal or informal. Formal support usually comes from professional services, whereas informal support usually relates to personal assistance from members of an individual's social network (Spilsbury & Korbin, 2013).

Tardy (1985) evaluated measures of social support for adults, and gave examples of the source. This was referred to as the 'network' and included: family, close friends, neighbours, community, co-workers and professionals. This network spans formal and informal sources of support. It may be that children also have similar breadth in their network (as co-workers may be equated to peers or classmates). Pollard and Filler (1999) researched the social influences in the lives of children and constructed three clusters of influence: homes, parents and siblings; school, playground and peers; and classroom interactions with their teachers. They explained that:

" … much of that which the children brought to school learning and social contexts in terms of expectations, interests, talents and personal and social resources was derived from and shaped within a wider field of family, home and community relationships, activities and cultural experiences" (p.293).

Therefore, there is an indication that children should be viewed as a member of a wider context; not only as a student within a school system. This position also fits with Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory which highlights the importance of looking at the whole system around the child and not only interactions between aspects of

their school life. However, much of the current research investigating perceptions of social support of young people has focussed on school and close family support.

Existing scales of perceived social support could be criticised for not taking account of wide sources of support. Zimet, Dahlem, Zimet, and Farley (1988) and Dubow and Ullman (1989) emphasised the importance of considering a breadth of support sources for individuals. In an exploratory aspect of their research, Dubow and Ullman (1989) uncovered support sources of elementary school children (equivalent in age to children in primary school in the UK). They noted that children mentioned a wider network of support (than the typical parent/teacher/sibling/friend distinction) and included therapists, coaches and friends of their parents among their network members. However, such breadth of support is rarely mentioned in the literature; further discussion of existing scales can be found in section 2.2.

2.1.1.3 Application of social support

Social support is a complex concept. The source and types of support have been mentioned, it is now important to consider whether these support sources and types are applied. There are three aspects to this issue:

- Availability of social support
    - Measurement of the size of the support network (often from parent's perspective)
- Enacted/ received social support
    - Past evidence of social support; by considering times when social support was provided.

- Perception of social support

  - The way in which an individual views their support; the personal experience of an individual's social support. This can therefore involve past experience, but also predictions about possible future events.

Availability of social support has commonly been researched in terms of measuring the size of the support network. For children, this measurement may be described by adults in their lives, rather than from the child themselves. Historically, children were not even considered to have an individual social network as the interaction of their parents was thought to be more relevant (Belle, 1989). However, the number of sources of support does not develop understanding of whether the support is used or valued. Also, reports from adults do not show whether the children themselves would be able to access the support, or whether they are aware it is available to them. This measurement of social support fails to acknowledge the child's voice or experience.

Enacted social support involves analysis of past events to see whether support was received. This has the benefit of considering those sources of support which the person is not only aware of, but that they are able to access. However, knowledge of enacted social support requires accurate recall of the event (which may be difficult for both children and adults). Enacted research also neglects to look at whether the support was wanted. For example, relatives arriving on the doorstep would be recorded as having received support, but this does not show the value of this interaction for the individual concerned. Thus, it ignores the individual experience and perspective. Cross cultural research has even indicated that enacting support may have more negative effects in certain cultures, as the feelings of

dependency and guilt which may arise, can outweigh the benefits that the support is intending to bring, therefore affecting a person's self-esteem (Kim, Sherman, Ko, & Taylor, 2006). Furthermore, there is a need to research social support in relation to positive events (for example, having people to celebrate success with), as well as in times of stress or hardship. Often research focuses upon the need for social support in negative times, rather than the support that can be enjoyed during positive experiences.

Perceived social support can be defined as "The individual's beliefs about the availability of varied types of support from network associates" (Gottlieb & Bergen, 2010, p. 512) . Perceptions of social support can cover all four types of support described by House (1981) as well as informal and formal sources. Glazer (2006) reviewed research with adults, and emphasised that the perception of social support is more of a buffer in times of stress, than is actual receipt of support. The protective effects of social support also appear to arise from perceiving its availability, rather than actually accessing the support when required (Gottlieb & Bergen, 2010). Taylor et al. (2004) also report that "these findings suggest that as a resource, social support may sometimes be more beneficial in its perception that in its use." (p.355.). Chu et al. (2010) state that "Research from adult literature recognized [sic] perceived support as a better measure when evaluating the association between social support and well-being" (p. 672). Therefore, the perception of social support was found to be more important in adult literature than the reality of the support enacted. Also, quantifying sources of support does not necessarily reflect the reality of the experience for the individual. Therefore, the aspect of social support which will be investigated with children is their perception of social support. It is hoped that a rich exploration of the

experiences that children have of social support, will inform the development of a useful

and practical tool.

2.1.2 Theoretical social support models

There are two commonly posited models for the positive effects of social support: the main

effects model and the buffering model. These were developed in relation to adult social

support literature.

The main effects model considers social support to have a beneficial impact, regardless of

whether the person is under stress. Whereas, the buffering hypothesis theorises that social

support gives a protective effect to the person in times of challenge or stress (Cohen &

Wills, 1985). The protective effect described by the buffering hypothesis may come in two

forms.

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1) Social support availability→ appraisal of stress → event viewed as less stressful

2) Appraisal of stress → event appraised as stress inducing → social support enactment →
necessary resources available to overcome stress
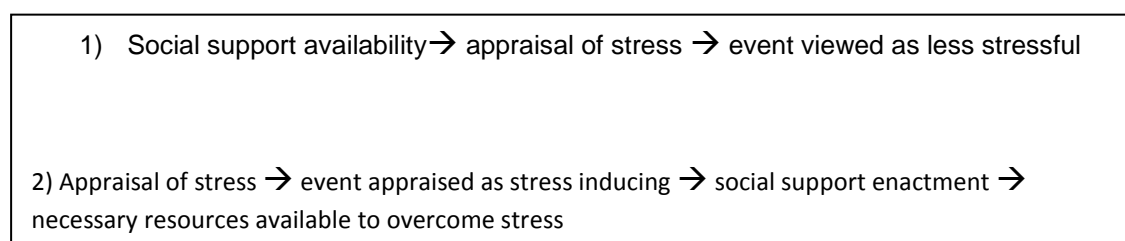
Figure 1: Two theoretical pathways of the buffering hypothesis

Figure 1 gives the two examples of the theoretical pathways involved in the buffering

hypothesis based on the work of Cohen and Wills (1985). It may be that having a network of

social support leads stressful events to be viewed as less stressful, resulting in more positive

outcomes for the individual. Alternatively, the event may be viewed as stressful, but the

availability of social support provides the individual with sufficient resources to cope with the stress, which would also result in more positive outcomes. It has been suggested theoretically that social support becomes particularly important in times of stress or threat (Ikiz & Cakar, 2010). However, difficulties with the conceptualisation and measurement of social support have meant that the evidence for the direct effects or the buffering hypothesis have been mixed (Cobb, 1976; Cohen & Wills, 1985).

2.2 Measures of perceived social support

Although some established measures of perceived social support exist for children, these have mostly been developed, and validated, in the USA. It cannot be assumed that these measures are therefore reliable or valid for UK populations of children. Little research has investigated the cultural differences in the nature of social support specifically in children or young people. However, some of the cross cultural research with adult populations will be presented. This research indicates that cultural differences may exist, and therefore scales or measures established in a different population cannot be assumed to be valid for a novel cultural context.

Goodwin and Hernandez Plaza (2000) researched perceived and received social support in Spanish and British populations of undergraduate students. Significant differences in social support according to cultural background were found and the importance of the impact of cultural values on social support was emphasised. Kim, Sherman, and Taylor (2008) reviewed cultural differences in social support in Asian, Asian-American and European-American populations; they also found evidence of cultural variations. This research was

with adult populations, it did not include British participants and it did not research perceived social support. However, this gives further indication that there may be cultural aspects to social support which should not be overlooked or ignored. Also, Taylor et al. (2004) researched social support across Korean, Asian, Asian-American and European-American populations which indicated significant differences in social support seeking, and its negative and positive impact across cultures. Glazer (2006) and Kim et al. (2006) also discussed the importance of cultural effects upon social support. Therefore, literature has established (for adults in certain cultures) that there are significant resulting differences in perceptions and access of social support.

Not only is it important to consider the implications of using a measure that has been validated in another country, there are also further improvements which could be made to these measures. Bokhorst, Sumter, and Westenberg (2010) highlighted the need for future research which looks at the relative influences of social support from different contexts of social life. It can be argued that the existing measures of perceived social support for children tend to focus on a small number of possible sources of support. Also, as has been mentioned previously, little research has gained a deep understanding of children's experiences of social support.

Three commonly used scales to measure perceived social support in children are: the Social Support Scale for Children; the Student Social Support Scale; and the Child and Adolescent Social Support Scale. More recently the Social Support Questionnaire for Children has been developed.

The Social Support Scale for Children (SSSC)

The SSSC was originally developed by Harter (1985) and the scale and manual has since been updated (Harter, 2012). The scale elicits perceptions of support from four sources: parents, teachers, classmates and close friends and allows children to state whether or not they have a 'close friend' to support them. The four subscales elicit views based on different types of support, depending on the source. The question format has been criticised (Kerres Malecki & Elliott, 1999) for its complexity. The question structure may be confusing for students as it entails choosing one of two statements and then rating the single statement as "really true for me" or "sort of true for me". The SSSC has had reliability and validity established. It has been validated in American school samples from grades 3-8 (equivalent to years 4 to 9 in the UK); 90% of the students were Caucasian and the neighbourhoods that the schools were in were described as "lower middle to upper middle class" (p9, Harter, 2012). The SSSC has not been validated in other cultures, however Lipski, Sifers, and Jackson (2014) further established its reliability and validity with 6-15 year old American students. In this study, 85% of the students were Caucasian and the sample was representative of the ethnic composition of the geographical area. However, in their concluding comments Lipski et al. (2014) stated that one of the significant limitations of their study was a lack of diversity in their sample. Therefore, although this scale has appropriate checks for reliability and validity, it may be that it does not include all of those sources of social support which are important to children from diverse backgrounds; furthermore, it cannot be assumed to relate to the experiences of children in the UK.

The Student Social Support Scale (SSSS)

The SSSS consists of a 60 item scale (Kerres Malecki & Elliott, 1999). Students rate how available and important the support is. Although the SSSS does cover the four types of

support discussed by House (1981) the sources are limited to support from parents,

teachers, classmates and close friends. The reliability and validity of the SSSS is good, these

checks were again established with American students from grades 6-12 (equivalent to

years 7-13 in the UK). Reliability analysis indicated a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.97 for

the overall 60 item scale, and strong internal consistency of subscales was established

(Kerres Malecki & Elliott, 1999). Test-retest reliability for the entire scale was also

established with a sample of 51 students (r= 0.75) and for subscales between 0.63 and 0.74.

Principal components factor analyses were also conducted, and a four factor solution was

deemed most appropriate, which supports the use of the subscales pertaining to teacher,

parent, classmate and close friend support. Rueger, Malecki, and Demaray (2010) also found

further evidence of internal consistency reliability for each of the four subscales in their

sample of 636 participants in 7th and 8th grade in the USA.

The Child and Adolescent Social Support Scale (CASSS)

The CASSS is also frequently used in research. The CASSS added to the SSSS as it provided a

shorter measure of social support where statements are rated on both frequency and

importance of support. The CASSS covers five support sources: parents, teachers,

classmates, school and friends (Kerres Malecki & Kilpatrick Demary, 2002). Rueger et al.

(2010) provided further evidence for the reliability and validity of the CASSS. In Rueger et al.

(2010), a five factor model relating to the source of the support, as well as internal

consistency reliability was established to be "very strong" or "excellent" in a sample of 636

participants, which suggests that the subscales are related to one another, but are

measuring distinct constructs.

Social Support Questionnaire for Children (SSQC)

The SSQC is a 50 item scale (Gordon-Hollingsworth et al., 2016) and assesses social support from five sources (peers, relatives, parents, non-relative adults and siblings), it is an important addition to the previous scales, as it was validated in more diverse a population, and was also established as an appropriate measure to use when helping children in times of trauma. However, again this scale was developed and validated in America and although reference was given to the view of children and parents in developing the scale, there was no use of exploratory qualitative work.

The construction and validation of the SSSS, the SSSC, the CASSS and the SSQC have been well established in past research. However, this has taken place using samples of American students, whose perceptions of social support may be culturally different from those of children living in the UK. Therefore, it is not appropriate to use these scales with children in the UK without further validation.

Gottlieb and Bergen, (2010) state that:

> *"…any sensitive and comprehensive inquiry into social support must first map the participants' larger social field to ensure that all potentially relevant sources of support are taken into account". (p.512).*

However, it cannot be assumed that the sources and types of support perceived by children in another culture are the same as those sources in the UK. It is important also to consider wider sources of support, as current research has not included community, neighbours, or formal sources of support outside of the school (such as youth worker, social workers, childminders etc). Once sources and types of support have been established in phase one of the research, this will inform the scale development in phase two. Previous empirical evidence will also be used to guide this exploration.

Typically, scales aim to quantify human experience; however, the intention of this project is to develop a measure which could also be used dynamically, as a starting point for discussion with children. Snoeren and Hoefnagels (2013) state that:

"The assessment of constructs such as social support and stress at particular developmental stages, especially among primary school children, is lagging behind, so it is necessary to develop reliable instruments for children worldwide…" (p.474).

Therefore, there is an argument within the existing literature for the development of such a scale.

The intention of the research is to extend knowledge of the perceived social support of children in the UK. There has been little research pertaining to perceptions of social support in the UK with any group. The development of knowledge will then contribute to the initial production of a scale of perceived social support for children. This will be of benefit, as previous scales of perceived social support for children have been developed and validated abroad and have not been based upon in depth qualitative exploration of children's experiences.

2.3 The importance of social support

As adults, it is clear that the support we receive from others has an impact upon us, and the same is likely to be true for children, for example Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2007) emphasised the importance that social relationships have as protective factors in children's development.

There are a number of key areas which have been found to be related to children's social support, each of which will be discussed in turn and supported by relevant research, I have categorised these as relationship to:

- Happiness and well-being

- The protective effects of social support

- School contributions and achievements

- Mental health

2.3.1 Happiness and well-being

Ikiz and Cakar (2010) researched perceptions of social support with 257 teenagers in Turkey, they demonstrated a statistically significant positive correlation between self-esteem and perceived social support from friends, family and teachers, with no significant gender interaction. Similarly, Chu, Saucier, and Hafner (2010) conducted a meta-analysis of social support research with children and adolescents. They found a small positive association

between social support and well-being. Social support generally was more strongly associated with self-concept, whereas perceived social support had a stronger association with well-being (Chu et al., 2010). It is important to note that these relationships are indicative of a correlation between factors, which does not indicate a causal relationship. However, the meta-analysis contains a large data set (246 studies) which enhances the validity of the research.

When young people are asked about their support, they feel that social support or social relationships can influence their well-being, happiness and adjustment. Holder and Coleman (2009) researched happiness with children aged 9-12; they found that social relationships at this age significantly correlate with, and predict, children's happiness. Therefore, these are clearly an important factor in children's lives. Guess and Bowling (2014) conducted a review of literature which looked at teacher-student relationships and levels of care in the USA. The review showed that teenagers highlighted adult support as being a significant predictor of their well-being. Therefore it is not only relationships with peers or friends that are important. Furthermore, Popliger, Toste, and Heath (2009) also found that for students with emotional or behavioural difficulties, there was a positive relationship between their perceptions of domain specific social support and adjustment in that area of their life. Therefore, although many of these studies cannot attribute causation, there are associative relationships between children and young people's perceptions of their social support and their happiness and well-being.

Prunty, Dupont, and McDaid (2012) sought the voices of young people with Special educational needs (SEN) in mainstream and special schools. The importance of supportive relationships with staff and fellow students appeared to facilitate their enjoyment of school

life. Uusitalo-Malmivaara et al. (2012) also looked at the perceptions of school and used qualitative and quantitative approaches to learn about SEN students' experiences. Uusitalo-Malmivaara et al. (2012) noted that the happiness of these students was primarily determined by their social relationships. Also, students believed that more friends would make them happier. Sylvester, Donnell, Gray, Higgins, and Stalker (2014) also investigated the quality of friendship and peer support for disabled pupils. The majority of those involved in the research indicated that: more friends, more peer support, and more help to develop new friendships, would improve their experiences of school. Therefore, although measures have established a correlational (rather than causal) relationship between social support and well-being, when young people's experiences are explored, across groups of children with a range of needs, attributions are made between their happiness, or well-being, and their social support or relationships.

Demaray, Malecki, Rueger, Brown, and Summers (2009) also researched perceived support of children and adolescents and established that a significant relationship existed between perceived frequency of social support and global self-concept. Higher frequency support from peers was significantly associated with higher academic self-concept, social self-concept and positive self-image. Also, the importance that the participants placed on socially supportive relationships with teachers was significantly related to global self-concept (Demaray et al., 2009). Furthermore, Verschueren, Doumen, and Buyse (2012) found that academic self-concept in children also related to teacher-child relationship quality. Perceived self-efficacy has also been found to be positively associated with perceived social support in teenagers. Furthermore, school experience and perceived social support were found to predict teenagers' perceived self-efficacy (Adler-Constantinescu,

Beşu, & Negovan, 2013). However, not all research has found a significant relationship between perceived social support and self-concept. Research with gifted adolescents in America did not find a significant relationship between perceived support and self-concept (Rinn, Reynolds, & McQueen, 2011). However, this may be due to the subset of gifted students recruited from summer programmes; alternatively, there may not be a relationship between perceived support and self-concept in gifted students.

Overall, there is evidence to support a relationship between perceived social support and: well-being; happiness; self-esteem; enjoyment of school; positive self-image and perceived self-efficacy in young people. The research has also spanned students of primary and secondary school age and those with, and without, disabilities or SEN. As yet, these relationships are associations, so it cannot be said that social support causes these positive outcomes to increase.

2.3.2 The protective effects of social support

Some research indicates that perceived social support may have a protective effect in times of challenge. Manetti and Schneider (1996) reported that measures of social support were associated with positive school adjustment for children whose mothers were experiencing stressful life events. Stressful life events were reported via a 57 item self report scale and were defined as "a life event classified as posing a marked or moderate long term threat" (p106, Manetti and Schneider, 1996). Also, Guest and Biasini (2001) found that for children living in poverty, social support was significantly associated with their self-reported self-

esteem, regardless of the levels of stress that the children were experiencing. The levels of stress experienced by the children were self-reported through the COPES assessment, which consists of 60 items relating to daily hassles and stressors, which may be experienced by children; these were rated as to their occurrence over the previous two months. Therefore, this research indicates that social support can be a protective factor in times of stress for children.

Spilt, Lier, Leflot, Onghena, and Colpin (2014) provided evidence that supportive individual relationships with teachers can compensate for negative peer relationships and therefore *partially* protect children's social self-concept from the effects of rejection by peers. Such research gives some support to the buffering model of social support, where social support gives some protection from negative outcomes of stressful life events. However, the research relates to general measures of social support rather than the children's own perceptions or experiences of their support; research into children's personal perceptions of support in times of challenge has not been covered during the current literature search.

2.3.3 School contributions and achievements

Danielsen, Wiium, Wilhelmsen, and Wold (2010) researched perceptions of support from teachers and classmates in 13 year old students in Norway. Perceived teacher support was found to be strongly positively associated with student's self-reported motivation in learning. The perception of support from classmates was moderately related to self-reported academic motivation. Therefore, there is some indication that perceptions of social

support in young people are associated with higher motivation in academic situations, which has implications for academic achievement. It would be beneficial to know whether this academic motivation actually results in gains in educational attainment.

Gristy (2012) conducted qualitative research. This was carried out in a rural secondary school, in the UK. The research found that emotional support and 'protection' from peers was vital in motivating reluctant students to attend school. It also had implications for supporting teenagers' well-being more generally. Despite the research being conducted in a small community, from which the results cannot be generalised, it is important to be aware that young people often place great importance on support from peers. Gristy (2012) emphasised that the need for peer support, may not always be fully appreciated by those in charge of schools. Therefore, it is important that the students themselves are heard, so that aspects of support which they deem to be most valuable are made known to schools. Qualitative research with children and young people is relatively uncommon in social support research; therefore Gristy's study is a valuable contribution to the field. Furthermore, if social support has implications for well-being and school attendance, there is a clear link between the priorities of schools and Educational Psychologists (EPs).

Rosenfeld, Richman, and Bowen (2000) researched social networks in high school students and found that those students who perceived high support from parents, teachers and friends had: better attendance at school; spent more time studying; had greater school satisfaction; were more engaged in school; had higher self-efficacy and attained higher marks. In comparison to those students who did not perceive all three sources of support. Rosenfeld et al. (2000) concluded that although teachers were particularly important, it was the combined effect of social support from multiple sources which greatly enhanced

positive school outcomes. Therefore, although this research took place in the USA and involved secondary school aged students, the combined effect of multiple sources of perceived positive social support may be valuable for other groups of students. Once again, this research was correlational, and so causation cannot be attributed. Also, Estell and Perdue (2013) found that child perceptions of peer support positively predicted their affective engagement in school. This remained true even when parental and teacher support and child characteristics were taken account of. This research was again conducted in the USA, and is one of the few longitudinal studies in this area. The longitudinal design means that predictions could be made about the affective engagement of the students, according to their perceived peer support.

Demaray, Malecki, Davidson, Hodgson, and Rebus (2005) looked at student adjustment and the relationship with perceptions of social support over time (with 10-12 year old students in USA). The 29% of social support scores which changed over time were further analysed. It was found that perceptions of parental social support were a significant predictor of student adjustment. Specifically, parental support was a significant predictor of emotional symptoms and clinical maladjustment scores a year later. Overall, there is an indication that student perceptions of their social support have implications for their attendance, engagement, or achievement in school.

2.3.4 Mental health

Research has also found links between perceived social support and mental health

outcomes. Paulson and Everall (2001) conducted in depth interviews with 10 teenagers aged

12-19 years who had experienced suicidal thoughts, feelings or behaviours. This study found

that one of three factors (which were related to the greatest risk of suicidal behaviours) was

having few, or no, social supports. Also, increased social support, and having someone to

listen to them, was reported to be one of the three factors which most contributed to the

teenagers overcoming suicidal ideation. This research was small scale and in depth; it is of

benefit as it establishes the young person's voice and opinions regarding their experiences

in times of great difficulty. The young people themselves highlight the importance of social

support for their mental health.

Gülaçtı (2010) reported that perceived social support from family members was a significant

predictor of subjective well-being (for university or high school students). Perceived or

received social support from a special person, or a friend, were not found to be significant

predictors of well-being. Gülaçtı (2010) stated that "perceived social support is more

determinative [sic] than received social support on mental health." (Gülaçtı, 2010, p.3845).

In focus group interviews with 15-19 year old students in Spain, a dual role of social support

was highlighted. Students viewed social relationships as both a form of support and a

possible stressor (Camara, Bacigalupe, & Padilla, 2014). Also, the adolescents stated that

overall, emotional support was the most important support type for them. This research

also emphasised the differences in perspective according to the gender and culture of the

participants (Camara et al., 2014). Therefore, culture and gender must be acknowledged in social support research.

2.3.5 The relevance of social support for: Educational Psychologists, children, families and schools.

As has been discussed, research has indicated that there is a relationship between young people's perceived social support and many aspects of life. Connections have been found to: well-being, self-esteem, academic self-concept, happiness, mental health outcomes, academic achievement and enjoyment or attendance at school. Currently there is a great deal of emphasis upon promoting children's well-being and mental health; school is not simply about academic achievement, but also promoting positive outcomes across children's lives. One interesting aspect which is specific to perceived social support is that children may not feel there is adequate support, but there may be many sources and types of support available to them. If this is the case, it may be possible to work with systems and people around the child, to help to enhance perceptions of their social support.

Some research has found that classroom and teaching practices may even be able to affect perceptions of social support. If this is the case, then this has important implications for the teaching profession and for EPs. Natvig, Albrektsen, and Qvarnstrom (2003) found that in classes of 13-15 year old students in Norway, there were significant relationships between methods of teaching, and the perceived social support of the students. In particular, there were associations between group work, class discussion and perception of social support.

Also, an increase in the amount of class participation, related to significant rises in the perception of social support from peer group and teachers. Demaray et al. (2005) also suggested that adapting classroom practices may be beneficial for students' perceptions of social support from classmates. Therefore, there is some indication that for young people, the teaching methods they experience in the classroom relate to their experience of social support.

Demaray et al. (2005) emphasised the need to enhance the amount of social support which teenagers perceive from their parents (in America). This is in order to increase the effect of supportive parents upon the psychosocial outcomes of their children. This is potentially another application for EPs. The authors also give implications for the classroom: more interactive peer engagement in learning is suggested to improve student perceptions of peer support; furthermore, bringing awareness to school staff of the importance of a supportive school environment is also suggested. There is also indication from qualitative accounts from students (Brady, Dolan, & Canavan, 2014) that structured peer support programmes may enhance student perceptions of support. These programmes were also related to a reduction in stress levels in times of transition from primary to secondary school. Although this reported research took place with different populations of students worldwide, there may be similar implications for school practices in primary schools of the UK.

Another consideration for the current project is the development of children's understanding of social support. The majority of previous research has involved secondary age students, whereas the current research is conducting research with significantly younger students. Bigelow and La Gaipa (1975) researched children's descriptions of

friendships in students aged 6-13 years old. They found that certain dimensions of

friendship emerged, or were spoken about at different ages. Therefore there is indication

that the cognitive development of the child will impact their perceptions of (or at least the

way they describe) their friendships. There may therefore be elements of social support

which do not arise for children until they are older and their cognitive development is more

refined.

Chapter 3   Methodology

3.1 Philosophical orientation of the research.

Underlying all research are assumptions that are based upon the philosophical standpoint of the researcher. This is divided into two core aspects: ontology and epistemology. Epistemology can be thought of as how we know the things that we know; ontology relates to the nature of reality. Traditionally, research has been divided into quantitative and qualitative approaches. At times purist researchers from these perspectives have asserted that quantitative and qualitative methods should not be mixed (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004), as one approach signifies the belief that human experience can be measured, while the other emphasises the interactive and contextual nature of experience.

However, the current research entails mixed methods research and is conducted from a position of pragmatism. Pragmatism as an approach to research, views the experience and the reality of the world as being interlinked. Therefore, rather than viewing the world as existing separately from the individual (i.e. it is possible to measure the world, as reality exists outside of the person); or viewing the world as being constructed from our individual interpretations or conceptualisations of it; pragmatism sees the two as being irrevocably connected (Morgan, 2014). In a pragmatic approach, it is acceptable to assert both that there is a single "real world" and that every person has their own individual interpretations of that world (Alexander, 2006).

Based on the Pragmatic approach to research, abduction, and inter-subjectivity informs the methods used in the current project (Morgan, 2007). Initially knowledge will be generated

from a detailed exploration of the individuals' perceptions of their social support; this understanding will inform the production of a scale, which in turn will then be assessed for reliability and validity in a larger population (abduction, or the move between developing knowledge and testing that knowledge). Through the research process across two phases there will be a connection made between the knowledge gained within phase one and the initial testing and validation of that knowledge through the evaluation of the new tool (phase two). Furthermore, inter-subjectivity relates to the understanding that individuals will have their own interpretation of the world (the phase one exploration) whist also acknowledging that it may be possible to create some level of objective interpretation of that individual's world (through the development of the phase two scale). The relationship to transferability will be discussed in Chapter 6, as the approach does not assume that this work can be generalized to other populations.

The mixed methods approach also allows researchers to select the most appropriate tools to answer their research questions, rather than being bound within a selection of available tools from the quantitative *or* qualitative approach (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). These pragmatic foundations have led to appropriately considered procedures for data collection, in order to allow the research questions to be fully and appropriately addressed within this project.

Creswell and Clark (2011) described six typologies of mixed methods research design. The current project falls within the 'exploratory sequential design' where the initial qualitative exploration of perceived social support is conducted and analysed; this then builds to the quantitative data collection and analysis. The interpretation of the combined mixed methods research is then given to draw the two phases of the project together. Creswell

and Clark (2011) describe one example of the 'exploratory sequential design' as being where qualitative exploration of an experience, led to the development of a quantitative tool; this description fits with the current project's approach and structure. Such an approach is detailed as being of benefit when the variable is unknown; in this instance although the variable of perceived social support has been researched in other populations, it is effectively 'unknown' within children in KS2 in the UK. This is followed by development and testing of an instrument, based upon the qualitative exploration. Both of these descriptions align with the current research.

3.2 Ethical considerations of phase one and phase two

Ethical approval for the project as a whole was obtained from the University of Exeter Ethics Committee (see Appendix 2 for a copy of the certificate of ethical approval).

The Head teacher or a member of the senior leadership team from each primary school was approached and invited to take part in the research; these were schools that I had developed a professional relationship with through my Trainee EP placement. A meeting with appropriate staff from each individual school was then held to explain the study and answer any questions or queries, as well as to define roles and expectations. These meetings always involved the Head teacher, but also included the Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCo), Deputy Head Teacher, or Key Stage leader depending on who the Head Teacher felt was most appropriate to support the research on a practical level. Four primary schools and one junior school confirmed that they would like to take part in the research.

Written informed consent was obtained from a parent or carer of each child who participated in the research. Consent forms were sent home to all students within key stage two of these schools. All children whose parents returned consent forms were invited to take part in either phase one or phase two of the research (although a number of children had moved school and therefore unfortunately could not be part of the research by the time it took place). The consent form detailed the background to the research, how the information would be used and stored, and explained that students could chose to withdraw from the project at any point. (see Appendix 3 for a copy of the consent form). Contact details for the researcher and supervisor were also included, should any queries arise. One parent made use of this contact information to detail the support that they felt their child might require to fully participate. On the consent form, details of any additional needs of the students were sought, to ensure that appropriate support was in place where needed. These individual children were then discussed with the SENCo of the school, so that I could support them fully during the research. The SENCos were also asked whether any of the other children would benefit from additional support, if so, this was put in place. Adaptations during phase one included the use of simplified language, opportunities to have an adult label people on the Field Map worksheet (see Appendix 6) and additional time. Examples of the additional support or adaptations that were made during phase two of the research can be found on page 97.

Verbal informed consent was also given by each individual student in the 'focus groups' and the scale development groups, an information sheet detailing the project was read aloud to each group at the start of the session (see Appendix 4). All students were then asked whether they had questions and whether they would like to stay in the group, or return to

their classroom. All children chose to consent to the research. During the 'focus groups' any child who appeared unsure or uncomfortable was again offered the chance to return to their classroom; again no children chose to leave the group, although one child asked not to talk about her experiences in front of the other students. This student was offered a range of options as an alternative, including talking to me 1:1 (either with, or without the audio recording), discussing her experiences with a familiar member of school staff, or writing down her contributions. The child decided that she wanted to stay in the session and listen to her peers and she wanted me to have her Field Map worksheet, but she did not want to talk about her experiences in more detail; these requests were honoured. During the scale development sessions, all children were monitored to ensure that they were comfortable with the sessions and additional support was given to any child who requested it, or appeared to need help. One child who had not been discussed with either the SENCo, or highlighted by a parent, struggled with keeping track of which line to respond on. In this case I stayed next to the child while reading each item to the group and supported them to move a piece of paper down the page after each answer, so that the next item was showing for each response; this appeared to be due to a lack of confidence, rather than a lack of understanding of the process. A number of other children required extra time to respond to items and in many of the groups the rate of item delivery was slowed down to account for variation in the children's needs.

Given the topic, consideration was given to the emotions that this work may bring up for the children taking part, particularly for those participating in the more in depth 'focus groups'. Therefore a key adult was assigned within each school, to be available to talk to any children who felt upset by the content of the sessions. Although it was reported to me that children

did talk about the sessions with a key adult in two of the schools, this was not due to any

form of upset, but involved children sharing their experience and enjoyment of the sessions.

Group agreements were also confirmed at the start of each session, to ensure that ideas

shared within the group remained confidential.

Chapter 4   Phase one

4.1 Phase one methodology

4.1.1 Sample

A total of 31 children took part in 'focus group' sessions. 16 children were male and 15 were female. Due to the opportunity sampling, none of the phase one participants were on the school's SEN register. They were recruited across five schools within one local authority in the South West of England. Information from OFSTED indicates that 4/5 schools in this study have a proportion of students eligible for pupil premium that is average or below average; one school's proportion of pupils eligible for pupil premium is described as being well above average. The proportions of students who are on the SEN register are: below average in one school, average in another school and three schools have an above average proportion of students with SEN. The children's ages ranged from 7.0 (7 years, 0 months) to 11.0 (11 years, 0 months) at the time of completing the focus group; the mean age being 9.2 (9 years, 2 months).

4.1.2 Procedures

'Focus group' sessions were selected as the method for phase one data collection. Selection of small groups was to allow for free discussion and sharing of ideas. Dockrell, Lewis, and Lindsay (2000) describe how such groups can elicit the discussion of new ideas or developments in a topic; this was a key aspect of the research, to gain a full understanding of children's experiences.

"The focus group method is good for giving confidence to individuals within the group and allowing the children to set part of the agenda." (p.132, Greig, Taylor & MacKay, 2007)

This was an important consideration, as an exploratory piece of work, it was vital that categories and concepts originated from the children themselves, rather than solely from the researcher's existing knowledge. It is however, acknowledged that the research tools used did direct the children to consider certain aspects of social support and therefore, the research is always impacted to a certain degree by the researcher's presence and ideas.

A small age range is suggested as preferable in focus groups using children, and therefore, groups were selected from within classrooms, to ensure there was not an undue imbalance in power between participants (Greig et al., 2007). Groups varied randomly in terms of their proportion of each gender, but all children were familiar with the others who were in their group.

Piloting testing of the methods was undertaken with one group of six children; these were from one school and the group contained four boys and two girls it was decided that the initial group size was a little too large, as not only did the group run for longer than

expected, it also appeared that it was more challenging for all the children to be heard.

Therefore, the final groups ran with typically four children at a time. Additional examples of

data collection methods were trialled, but these did not add to the data collection methods

described in answering the research questions. These methods included salmon lines,

drawings, card sorting activities and structured group work activities.

The position of the research was to learn from the children involved; therefore their three

assumptions underlay the research; all children are 'smart, make sense and want to have a

good life' Graue and Walsh, (1998). Building of sufficient rapport with every child was

necessary for them to be able to trust that I was truly able to listen to their perspectives and

experiences, without judgement. Fraser (2003) suggested that children themselves are the

most knowledgeable about their own lives and should be involved in decisions, and this

viewpoint was constantly at the forefront of my mind while conducting this research.

It is established in research with children that it is preferable for the researcher to work on

their level, sit with them rather than stand above them, and use their own familiar

resources (Holmes, 1998) in order to minimise power imbalances. It is also important that

the researcher does not fall into a role of authority and it is beneficial to use activities or

stimuli which are familiar as part of their typical daily activities (Greig & Taylor, 1998).

Children should be given hands on activities, (drawing, toys and so on); rather than being

expected to simply sit and discuss or answer questions, in the same manner that adults

would participate in research (Lewis, 2000). Therefore, taking these needs into account, the

use of additional resources as prompts for children's discussion was deemed to be of value.

A flexible and open method was needed to direct children's thinking, without adding too

many boundaries or rules into how they could use the resource.

An adaptation of the Four Field Map (Sturgess, Dunn, & Davies, 2001) or Five Field Map (Samuelsson, Thernlund, & Ringström, 1996) was used as a tool to promote involvement in the focus groups. It has been described as an appropriate tool to use with even very young children (aged 4-5 years) to help understand the distance or closeness in their relationships to others. Previous research has also indicated that the 'map' approach has been an enjoyable experience for children completing it (Sturgess et al., 2001) as well as it being an appropriate tool to consider a child's own perspectives of their social network (Samuelsson et al., 1996).

4.1.2.1 'Focus groups'

Phase one data collection involved the use of 'focus groups'. Children in each group were selected from within the same classroom in order to minimise classroom disruption and power imbalances between age groups. Once a classroom had been selected (usually on the basis of the timing of the visit and whether the children were in the classroom) individual participants were randomly selected from the list of participants who had consented to take part. If a child who had been randomly selected was unavailable, the next child on the list was invited in their place. Details of the age distribution of the children who participated can be found in Appendix 16.

These groups comprised three or four children and lasted between 35 and 60 minutes, depending on the nature of the group. The 'focus groups' took place within a quiet room of

the children's school during teaching time; groups were not run if they would be interrupted by the children's typical break times. In total, ten focus groups were run during phase one of the research.

Each 'focus group' was run on the same basic structure; however a flexible approach was taken in line with the exploratory nature of the research. To some extent the sessions were guided by the children themselves. Please see Appendix 5 for the topic guide which was used as a reference point during the groups; this is an outline of the structure and areas to cover, which can be beneficial in qualitative group work to ensure similarity of coverage across sessions (Ritchie, 2003). Each session began with the information sheet being handed out, and read aloud to the group. An opportunity was given to ask questions and verbal informed consent was obtained from each child. It was made clear to every child that they could leave the session whenever they wanted to, or could take part and speak as much, or as little, as they wished. All children were also given an information sheet, which they could choose to take home with them after the session. The sessions were audio recorded using a dictaphone.

4.1.2.2 Worksheets

The Field Map comprises six concentric circles. The child then marks where different people would be in relation to the central point (where the central point is those people closest to them and the largest concentric circle contains those people who are least close to them).

Please see Appendix 6 for an example of a sheet which was completed by a female student aged 8 years, 3 months. Typically, the Field Map divides the concentric circles into sections to denote certain sources of support, as well as giving each level a label to describe it. In this case, a blank version of the map was used; concentric circles remained but all other aspects were left to individual interpretation of the child. This was due to the exploratory nature of the study; labelling sections for certain types of support may have constrained the children's thinking. Furthermore, whereas previous studies have questioned a child directly about their relationships to certain people, this study aimed to collect information relating to *any* source that they viewed as supportive and therefore, direct questioning was not used, as it may have affected the exploration of the child's experience.

Firstly, the children were asked to draw a figure to represent themselves in the central circle. Each child was given a range of colourful sticky dots which they were asked to use to represent people who are important to them and who support them in some way. It was suggested that they write names next to each dot and as a group we may ask them further questions about the important people in their lives. Once the children had drawn themselves in the centre circle, they were asked to guess what certain positions on the sheet represented; the children's own vocabulary was used to reaffirm the difference between a placement next to their drawing, or on the outside circles. Each group was then given some time to work on completing their sheets; time given varied depending on the group dynamic.

Once the children came to the end of their worksheet, time was given to each child to describe their sheet and experiences to the group. All children were invited to ask questions or comment and the researcher also joined in with the discussion, every child was given

time to 'lead' the discussion according to their experiences. At times, notes were also made on the children's sheets (with verbal consent from the child) to aid clarity. Questions guided the children to speak about areas related to the research questions, although it was not firmly structured, so children were given the opportunity to cover other areas, depending on where their discussions led them. For example, some children were asked: 'What makes you feel close to X?'; 'In what way does X support you?'; 'Can you give us an example of when they made you feel X?'. At the close of each session, children were asked how they had found the session and whether they had any more questions about the research. They were also given the name of a key adult within school who was available to talk with them about the research, or their experiences, at a later time, if needed.

4.2 Analysis of phase one data

All dictaphone audio recordings of the 'focus group' sessions were transcribed by the researcher. The six-stage thematic analysis detailed by Braun and Clarke (2006) was used to structure the analysis, a summary of which can be found in Appendix 7.
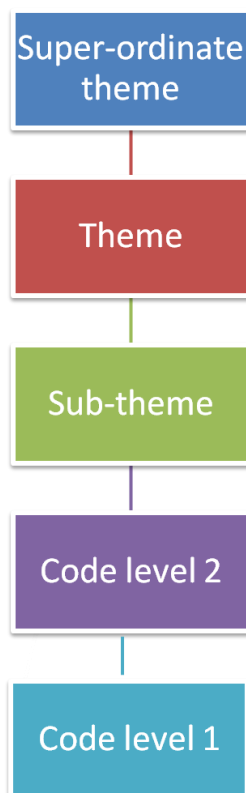
Figure 2: Structure of analysis

Initially, the transcripts were read and re-read and notes were made on initial thoughts and

feelings about the data. Once familiarity with the data was established, the transcripts were

entered into the NVIVO 10 At this point, each transcript was read through systematically,

generating possible codes and adding to each one as it emerged from the data. The

transcript from each 'focus group' was returned to after every complete read through, until

the point at which no additional codes were generated. Once the initial codes were

established, these were organised into potential sub-themes and themes; at this stage the

naming of theme, sub-themes and codes remained flexible and open. Once codes and sub

themes were organised under themes, the entirety of the data set was returned to, to

ensure adequate and accurate coverage of the data. At this point, clearer definitions were

given to each of the super-ordinate themes and themes and clarity as to the name to

encompass each set of data were created. Data were once again read and re-read to ensure that all names of codes/ sub-themes/ themes and super-ordinate themes encompassed all available data. When adaptations were made to names or definitions, all data were returned to, to ensure that it reflected the data within it. Furthermore, where fragments of conversation were coded and then re-coded, the context of the statement was re-read to ensure that the entire meaning of the statement was checked and incorporated. The coding analysis ended at the point at which further refinements did not add anything substantial to the analysis and the coding frame fitted the data well. See Appendix 7 for examples of the process of analysis, and Appendix 8 for an example of the transcription coding.

The sixth stage of the analysis is the production of the report. Analysis is said to continue until the point at which the report is completed, as during writing the analysis continues as the researcher interprets and makes sense of the themes and codes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This occurred throughout the write up of the analysis, as changes in the specificity of the theme names and definition of the themes and codes themselves were adapted. The results will be structured according to each of the four super-ordinate themes.

Figure 2 shows the way in which the analysis was structured. Therefore, codes, which were then organised into wider themes, were still adapted once they had been incorporated into the wider theme and super-ordinate themes. The analysis was not a one way process, rather it was cyclical and during each phase of analysis, adaptations were made to all levels of the analytic structure.

An example of the coding process is given below in Figure 3 , and a visual display of the entire process of coding can be found in Appendix 8.

(Support source)   (Dependability)

Family   **When sad / bad happens**

Close family

Researcher: So **Mum and Dad** are right in the circle with you, they are the closest. What made you put them there?
Child: Um, when I'm **finding something hard**, they support me, **even if I'm not doing very well,** they still tell me like I'm doing amazingly and stuff and they help me with other things too.
Researcher: What kind of things do they help you with?
Child: Like, my homework, I'm not very good at getting it done. Um, things like...playing sport; **if I'm not doing very well**, they'll say like, *"keeping on going"* and **that like supports me a lot**, because it like it just **makes me feel like I've got someone there.**
Researcher: They give you encouragement.
Child: I've got, like backup.

Encouragement
(Affection)

Understood
Notices needs
(Consideration)

Reliable
(Dependability)

Figure 3: Example of coding process

4.3 Phase one results

The findings will be divided into each of the key themes that emerged from the data. The

super-ordinate themes are; Source of support; Support style; Change and Method. Each of

the super-ordinate themes will be discussed in turn with reference to each of their

underlying sub-themes. It is acknowledged that thematic analysis entails subjective

interpretation by the researcher, and therefore my own experiences, history and

perspective will shape the outcome of the themes and the overall analysis. Pseudonyms

have been used to protect the confidentiality of the children involved in the research. Visual

displays of the levels of analysis of each theme can be found in appendices 9-12.

4.3.1 Super-ordinate theme: Sources of support
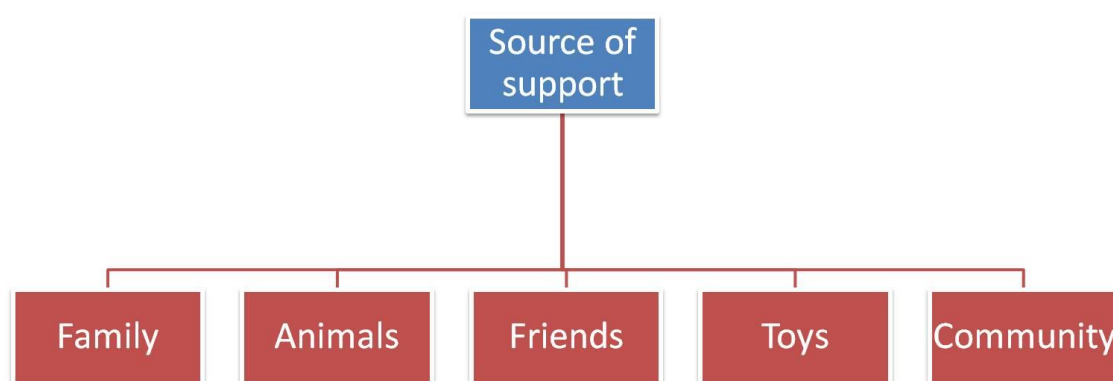
Figure 4: Source of support themes

The first super-ordinate theme has been named 'Source of support'. Source of support is a

typical category from previous social support research. As this research was exploratory in

nature, all analysis was conducted in an inductive manner; themes emerged from the data,

rather than being constructed from existing literature. This approach resulted in the super-

ordinate theme of 'Source of support', with five themes below it. Each of these themes will

be discussed in turn.

4.3.1.1 Theme: Family

The theme of 'family' encompassed support from a range of family members. The analysis led to two sub-themes of 'close' and 'extended' family. The children often discussed their perceptions of support from parents and siblings; Jamie and Seb both describe an example of close family support.

Jamie (boy, aged 7): My Mummy and Daddy. Because my Mum and Dad are quite close into the circle, because my Mum keeps my uh, she really makes me laugh and have fun and she gets some money and she makes me laugh. And for dessert, when she goes to Sainsbury's, sometimes she buys us chocolate cake or a lollypop. My Daddy, when I will say to my Dad, can I download an app on my tablet, he always says yes.

Seb (boy, aged 8): I've got Janet, she's my Sister, she gives me things and helps me, things like that...

Both Jamie and Seb mention that their close family members give them items; having a sense of humour, generosity and thinking about the child's needs are also described. These aspects of support will be given in more detail under the super-ordinate theme of support style.

Grandparents (as part of extended family) were also an important source of support for children, for example Jenny and Ruth said:

Jenny (girl, aged 8): My Grandma is one of the closest ones. Well I'm seeing her today and she always buys me clothes, a lot, most of them really.

Ruth (girl, aged 10): My Grandma and Granddad are really kind, they never like it when I'm upset, they spoil me ... And um, like, both of them they just want to take care of us and they like having sleeping [sic], they like when we spend the night at their house and she knows exactly what we like as well. She gets even the special little tiny cereal boxes...

Again, there are a range of examples of support given by Grandparents, including buying them things, understanding their needs and preferences and giving them emotional support.

Extended family also included cousins, aunts and uncles.

> *Jess (girl, aged 7): My Aunt and Uncle. that I really like. They are just really kind and every time I see them, they bring us presents and …We do conkers together and stuff like that.*

Jess also described being given items by extended family, as well as sharing enjoyable experiences with them.

4.3.1.2 Theme: Animals

The theme of 'animals' did not have any further divisions, as there was rarely a distinction made by the children in terms of the type of animal, or whether they were pets, or owned by another person. Dogs and cats were the most commonly cited animal which the children felt supported by; horses, guinea pigs, rabbits and even fish and chickens were also mentioned. As a source of support, animals were described as being reliable, and always available, they were often considered the most important source of support for the children.

Jo (girl, aged 10): My dogs are really sweet. When I've had a hard day and I come home, she's like waiting for me, by the door.

Ben (boy, aged 8): The closest one to me is my dog, Snoopy.

Frankie (boy, aged 10): Did you know, if you are feeling sad or worried and you stroke your cat, it calms you down. And plus my cat is really good, I feel like she's talking to me like when she sits on my bed purring.

Jenny (girl, aged 8): I've got my dog, Penny.......she's the closest out of everyone. Well, when I'm sad and I go up to my room, I go up to her and she's always lying on my bed. Then I cuddle her and she's really nice and um, she's really old, she can't really move very well. But she's kind.

Jack (boy, aged 8): My dog is definitely closer than anyone.

The closeness that children described as having with animals as well as them being available and waiting for them is an interesting aspect of the support. Pets were often highlighted as a source of support when children were feeling unhappy, and often the interaction with an animal was highlighted as a key mechanism to them feeling better.

4.3.1.3 Theme: Friends

The theme 'friends' was discussed frequently, children often mentioned how the friendship had initially developed, therefore six sub-themes of friends were generated from the data.

These sub-themes of friendships were: Best friends; School friends; Club/team mates; family friends; friends' family members; and Holiday friends (see Appendix 10).

Children perceived distinctions in support from friends who were their 'Best' friends. Typically, these friendships were longer in duration that those who were considered 'just' school friends.

Liam (boy. Aged 8): I'm going to start with my best friend......and we've always been friends, since we were in pre-school.

Otis (boy, aged 9): He's my best friend, the first person who was my first ever friend that I had.

Matthew (boy, aged 9): there's Poppy, which has been my friend since I was born.

Seb (boy, aged 8): My best friend, my 'bestest' friend, he comes round my house a lot and we play together loads, we chat together loads.

The majority of friends were those who they attended school with, but the source of support also extended out to those with whom they attend clubs or teams. Sharing of an interest and joint celebration seemed to be important, particularly in sports teams.

George (boy, aged 10): Pierre he's one of my rugby mates. Er, he helps me if I get hurt, or if I score, he celebrates.

The remaining sub-themes included: family friends; friends' family members; holiday friends and school friends. Detailed analysis of what made a friendship will not be discussed as this relates to the support styles which will be discussed later. However, friendships often described having people who were available to them, on their side, and who would offer help, particularly if they were hurt, or 'stuck' with a task. The enjoyment of fun shared activities was also key to those they described as a friend.

4.3.1.4 Theme: Toys

Support from toys was also regularly mentioned. Distinctions were not made between the type of toy, therefore 'toys' as a whole includes all varieties of toys and comforters. Children perceived the support received from inanimate items like special toys as comparable to the support received from people or animals.

Jack (boy, aged 8): He's like my little toy companion, he makes me happy.

Frankie (boy, aged 10): So in the middle, is me and blanky. They are my favourite...well and my Mum and Dad, and Granny and Granddad.

Katie (girl, aged 9): Then there is also my teddy bear, who I've had since I was very, very, small who I still talk to at bed time

Jo (girl, aged 10): And Simon [teddy], he was my first ever one. He's been with me through bad times and good times.

Similarly to their responses to animals, children saw toys as another source to talk to, or to comfort them as well as their being a sense that children felt animals and toys were both 'always' available to them. Jo didn't expand upon her meaning of 'bad times and good times' although many of the children were emphatic that their pets or toys were equally supportive as people (or at times more so). This is an interesting consideration, given that animals and toys are unable to provide tangible support, or practical help. Perhaps for children the availability and consistency is therefore the most important aspect for them in judging their support.

4.3.1.5 Theme: Community

The theme 'community' included four sub-themes (detailed in Appendix 11). These were: Neighbours; Adults in school; Clubs and Tuition and Other Professionals. Social support was received from a range of 'community' adults: including paramedics, medical staff, godparents, teachers, neighbours and team coaches or leaders.

Interestingly school staff were the most contentious group mentioned, with children generally having strong feelings (sometimes positive, sometimes negative) about the level of support received in school.

Some children indicated that teachers did not help enough, or at all in some cases.

Ruth (girl. Aged 10): Basically the teachers are there [pointing to outer edge of worksheet], because I used to get really worried about these lessons, now I'm fine with them but when I did get worried, they like literally

just kind of ignored me, they didn't do anything to help Miss Thomas and Mr Thornton were the ones who tried the most, but after a while they got fed up I think as I didn't get better, and so I was by myself.

Whereas others felt that teachers tried their best to help them.

Beth (girl, aged 11): And Miss Piper because, when I was, last year, when um my mum and dad split up (but they are ok now, they are back together and they are fine). She um, yeah, really helped me. And when my sister came to this school and my granddad died, she helped my sister, they wrote like a book and it was about friendship and stuff.

Adults who ran clubs, or tutored the children were particularly important to some groups.

Jo (girl, aged 10): I like dancing, I go to a dance class. My dance teacher, she's really nice. She goes through it lots and she doesn't get cross with me.

Jenny (girl, aged 8): well, I go to dance class every Friday and I used to go with Mary, my friend, but she left, so Sarah (dance teacher) always made me feel comfortable, because I'm not really that comfortable without any friends there.

Researcher: What does she do, that makes you feel more comfortable there?

Jenny: Well, she. She puts me in the front row, so that I'm closer and I can watch a bit more. And um when we do concerts, she says like you can introduce the concerts, and that means that I can build up my confidence.

Similarly to that described by Jenny; adults who were involved in clubs or tuition were often perceived as important in helping the child to become more confident or happy in whatever the activity or subject was. There was also a sense that children who attended clubs and tuition valued the more dedicated adult interaction that was not always felt to be available, particularly within schools.

4.3.2 Super-ordinate theme: Support style
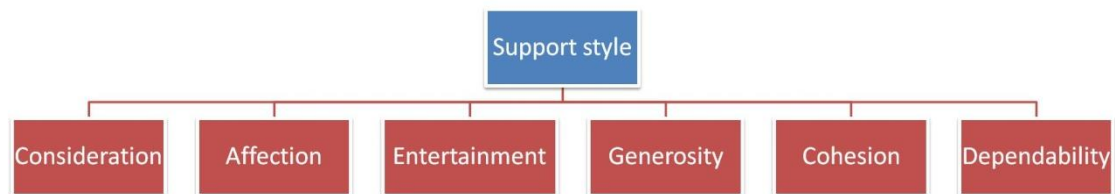
Figure 5: Support style themes

The second super-ordinate theme of 'Support style' includes six themes, each of which will be discussed in turn. Figure 5 details each of these themes. A more explicit figure showing each of the theme, sub-themes and codes for Support style can be seen in Appendix 12.

Although support 'type' had previous been used in the literature to describe how people are supported, support 'style' was a more accurate reflection of that which had been discussed, as many more aspects of the supporter themselves were considered, rather than only the practical nature of the support.

4.3.2.1 Theme: Consideration

This theme encompasses children's feelings that they are thought about, they feel that this is the case when people listen to them, notice them (for example offering help when the child is struggling), understand them and think about what they might need or want. When people consider these needs, children report that they feel well supported by those around them.

Having other people think about the child and consider what they might prefer (particularly in relation to the food that is made or bought) was frequently mentioned. For example, both Jamie and Seb indicated that it made them feel well supported when adults made special efforts to give them food they enjoy.

> *Jamie (boy, aged 7): When I ask, what's for tea? It's always something that I like.*

> *Seb (boy, aged 8): I've got my nan on here, she's the one that makes the cakes!*
> *I don't like cake, well I like, like cornflake cakes, and she makes them.*
> *Researcher: So she makes you the ones you like.*
> *Seb: Yeah, they are brilliant*

Alfie and Beth talked about a member of school staff, who is flexible in the way they support the children. Again, the example shows how the adult considered their needs and the situation and responded in a way that made the child feel understood, supported and valued.

Alfie (boy, aged 10): She understands like how you're feeling and stuff

Beth (girl, aged 11): Yeah and if you like don't want the teacher or someone to know, she lets you go outside and sort it out with your friends

Researcher: So she listens to what you need.

Alfie: Yeah and she makes me feel better.

When children feel that other people understand them and can empathise with them, this also makes them feel supported. Milly describes how not only one person, but 'most of' her family are able to see how she is feeling. This makes her feel well supported by them.

Milly (girl, aged 11): was really nice; she was really good at understanding people. Most of my family actually, they are really good at understanding people. Like they look at you and they can see, they can understand how you're feeling.

The feelings of being understood, also led on to other people then helping the child to resolve a challenging situation. So the combined effect of another person noticing, then understanding and then responding was key for many of the children involved. Having someone to act for them, when the child does not feel able to do so, was important. Both Martha and Ruth talked about this.

Martha (girl, aged 7): He always helps me when I'm not feeling happy and when my Brothers are annoying me he tells them to stop it, when I can't tell them

Ruth (girl, aged 10): ..if I was alone, or didn't have anyone to play or something, she would come right over and ask if I was ok, just like check.

It was also valued by many children that they were not only considered when they were present, but that other people thought about them, and their needs when they were apart. The children were often able to realise the effort that other people went to, for example India discussed how support can come from those far away, and she values the effort that is put into making sure a card arrives in time.

Sophia (girl, aged 8): When my Mum goes [on holiday] with her friends, she always gets me like something and she got me and my Brother, these really nice sweets and I got a bath bomb.

India (girl, aged 10): And she sends a birthday card, but she sends it like two days before or a week before, so I always have it.

Overall, the Consideration theme highlights the need for children to feel they are noticed, understood and that other people will act to meet their needs. Food was a recurring example of how valued adults were when they ensured the child had food they enjoyed.

4.3.2.2 Theme: Affection

This theme relates to physical interaction, encouragement and praise felt by the children, as well as knowledge that they are loved. The affection theme also indicates a need for access to physical affection on the children's terms.

Alfie and Beth both valued the ways in which positive praise and encouragement helped them to feel well supported. Children often discussed the need for others to praise their *efforts* as well as their achievements.

> *Alfie (boy, aged 10):.....even if I'm not doing very well, they still tell me like I'm doing amazingly and stuff and they help me with a lot of other things too.*

> *Beth (girl, aged 11): ....they are like really nice, and if I got 'worker of the week' or something, they are like 'well done!' and when I get like a good school report or something...*

Access to physical affection was very important to children, indeed a number of children mentioned a lack of hugs and closeness in their families, which they would like to increase. Children also found that toys and animals were particularly helpful in terms of providing some physical interaction and that with toys and animals, this affection was always available, Sam's description relates to affection with the family dog.

> *Sam (boy, aged 10): ...we were like exceptionally close, she used to sit down when I was there and I'd cuddle her and that.*

> *Chris (boy, aged 10):...and she's nice for hugs. I love hugging my Mum.*

When children such as Chris were struggling, the use of encouragement from others was often key in helping them to move forward in a situation. Value was also placed on others being there for happy times as well as during challenges.

Chris (boy, aged 10): she's always there if I'm feeling down in the dumps or nervous, she says " Come on, don't care about what other people think, just be you!"

Overall the affection theme is based around children receiving physical affection and interaction from others, as well as feeling loved and valued by those around them (in both positive and negative situations). The use of praise and encouragement also helped children to feel supported.

4.3.2.3 Theme: Entertainment

When the children talked about the way they are supported by people in their lives, this often related to enjoyment experienced with others. Having a sense of humour and 'a laugh' with someone was frequently given as a reason for the child feeling supported by them or feeling able to go to them for help, as well as playing together or enjoying games and trips. Therefore this theme is entitled Entertainment; the use of jokes and laughter in times of upset was a particular approach enjoyed by many of the children.

Supporters were often valued for their ability to 'cheer up' the children, particularly at difficult times.

Katie (girl, aged 9): They can be annoying sometimes, but then they can be really fun and like, you can be angry, but then they will be happy and crazy and funny and cheer you up.

Beth (girl, aged 11): They came round and um, that was when my Nan had cancer, and they came round and they cheered me up so much, because they are really funny.

Researcher: They made you laugh, even when you were sad.

Beth: Exactly.

The importance of sense of humour in everyday situations also added to their feelings of closeness to those in their lives.

Ruth (girl, aged 10): And she is just really funny! She's always just like really cheerful, she doesn't let anything get in her way and I like that about her.

Spending time doing pleasurable activities together and others putting in effort to enjoy time with them was valued.

Tom (boy, aged 7): My Mum spends time with me and if we are not really doing anything, my Mum takes me to the skate park.

Tasha (girl, aged 7): Aunty L, she came down too and climbed up and had a picture with us on a tree and she does lots of things to play with me.

The theme of Entertainment details the importance that children place on enjoying life with people around them, to enable them to feel well supported.

4.3.2.4 Theme: Generosity

Children often described generosity, with gifts, items, or spending time or giving effort as evidence of support from those around them. Many were aware of the effort put in by people who travelled a distance to see them. Or who may have spent time giving them help with something difficult. There was also emphasis placed upon people giving children nice items, which gave a sense of making them feel special.

Thoughtfulness was valued, whether through a nice present, as described by Jenny, or through invitations to be involved in enjoyable activities, such as the effort that Ruth talked about.

Jenny (girl, aged 8) Poppy got me this stone and it had a heart on it and inside it said friend, like a pebble, I really love that.

Ruth (girl, aged 10): .....if she books horse riding she always asks me to come and she just always wants to spend time with me and with my Brother.

Children also placed emphasis on others spending time with them; which was often more valuable than being provided with gifts or resources. Children were aware when other people made a special effort to help them,

Katie (girl, aged 9): At first at football I wasn't too good, but he sort of like helped me and taught me some stuff, how to like kick the ball and fully and keepy-uppy and things. He spent time helping me with my football.

They were also aware of the extra effort that some people made to be able to spend time with them, and gave this as additional evidence for their feeling well supported. Milly describes how she feels her relatives are particularly supportive due to the distance they need to travel to see her, as well as the thoughtfulness of them joining her to celebrate her birthday.

Milly (girl, aged 11): Well, when they come down, when it's my birthday, like last Saturday I think it was. They came down and said happy birthday and got me cards and presents and stuff. But they come down really often, even though they live quite far away and yeah. Like I always, always see them and yeah it's really far to come...from [location].

4.3.2.5 Theme: Cohesion

This theme is related to cohesion between the child and the person who provides them with support. Children enjoy being supported by others who share something with them; whether this is shared experiences in the past, enjoyment of a hobby together, or sharing characteristic with them. Jamie details how special habits he has with his Grandmother makes him feel well supported by her; Jamie demonstrates pride in there being a 'secret room' which is reserved for them and Liam talks about a prized tractor which also is a special and treasured item. Children also enjoy the habits that come in certain relationships and this predictability helps them to feel well supported. Both Jamie and Jo talk about things that they 'always' do with certain people and again this was commonly mentioned in the research.

Jamie (boy, aged 7): She lives on a farm and then if it's a really sunny day, ... she lets us see the horses and she's got a secret room, and upstairs there's a door with a lock and she only lets us in it and when we go up the stairs there's a table tennis room and spiders in the window. And when we go for tea, she always gives us steak and chips.

Jo (girl, aged 10): He helps me with like homework and he does reading with me. And we always go swimming, every weekend.

Liam (boy, aged 10): He made us something like that. So he made a little tractor and we could drive it. We went to the park and back and it was especially for us. It's got a brake and a horn and it's got lights and it's got a little trailer.

Children also value the duration of the relationship and regularly talk about how long they have held on to certain friendships. The sharing of skills and experiences also make them feel that the relationship is valuable. Robbie demonstrates a certain level of pride in the skill of his friend and in the similarity between them. Alfie and Chris both value having people share their interests and indicate that they value the time and support given, due to the knowledge the person has of the activity. Sharing the experience is important to them.

Robbie (boy, aged 10): I've known him my whole life, he's athletic, like me, he's the quickest in the school.

Alfie (boy, aged 10): He's trained me really well, because he was really good when he was my age, so he knows, because he's become a professional footballer, he told me what he did a lot when he was like me. He practiced a lot.

Chris (boy, aged 10): I said I'd like to get into rugby and he said "that's a brilliant idea" and he found a place and he was up for that because he used to be a rugby player.

Feeling similarity, shared experiences or shared interests or habits between the supporter and the child was the main concept underlying the Cohesion theme.

4.3.2.6 Theme: Dependability

The final support style theme is titled 'dependability' this is the children's beliefs that the person supporting them will always be there for them and are available in any circumstance. There is also a belief that the other person is trustworthy.

Otis and Katie mention the way in which people are valued for their ability to 'always' be there for them.

Katie (girl, aged 9): They are really nice friends; they are laughing with me all the time, smiling and always there for you.

Otis (boy, aged 9):..like, when I'm not very happy, or I don't feel well, they always like comfort me. They'll probably cheer me up and like talk to me.

Trust, and the way that other people will keep information to themselves was also valued, Alfie talks about sharing difficult feelings with others.

Alfie (boy, aged 10): Um, they like help with stuff I'm finding hard. And I can like trust them and tell them things that are like bugging me and stuff.

Jess also gives a sense that those around her are available; perhaps even when she herself does not realise or acknowledge that she needs support. Jess describes how her friend helps her to feel better, even when Jess herself is unaware that she needs support at this time.

Jess (girl, aged 7): She helps me a lot, this morning in maths, I was feeling a little bit upset and Flora said, "do you want some help" and I said no thank you, but then she helped me a little bit and said something nice to make me feel better.

Overall, six key themes resulted from the analysis in relation to the style of support which was valued by the children. When support is available from others who are dependable, generous, entertaining people, who are affectionate and considerate of their needs children feel well supported; value is also placed upon sharing similarities with their supporters, which enhances their feelings of closeness.

4.3.3 Super-ordinate theme: Change
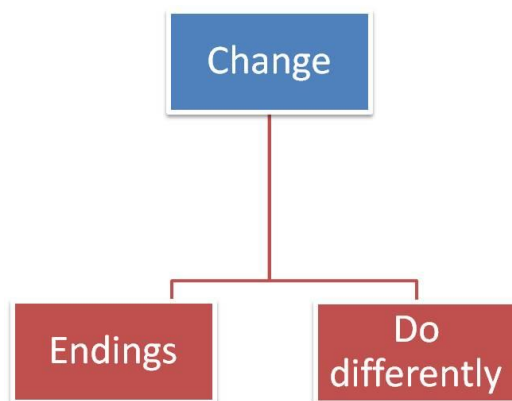
Figure 6: Change themes

The super-ordinate theme of change, relates to two themes; Endings and Do differently.

4.3.3.1 Theme: Endings

The endings theme details the way in which children discuss support or relationships that are no longer available to them. Full exploration of this theme and its sub-themes is beyond the scope of this project, as it was an unexpected direction that children led the discussion to. However, a short summary of the main findings will be detailed.

Two sub-themes emerged from the ending theme: real and imagined endings. Real endings related to children's discussion of past losses in relationships; either due to relationships breaking down, geographical distance or bereavement. Children often felt unsure whether people who had passed away could be included on their worksheets; but when given freedom all children chose to include deceased people or animals, often stating that it was

important to include them as they were once a good source of support. Losing accessibility to valued sources was also discussed, which may be due to children being less able to control when they might travel to see others. For instance, grandparents being moved into care homes which were further away from the home, and friends moving away with their families were mentioned as key life events and the loss of the support was clearly still in children's minds, even years later.

Imagined endings were the second sub-theme. This entailed a sense of great anxiety from the children surrounding possible death of loved ones who support them. Children were very aware of people they considered 'old' who support them and discussed the fears they had surrounding their possible deaths. Full exploration was beyond the scope of the current project, however this could be a development for future work in considering children's support and the changes in support around significant life events.

4.3.3.2 Theme: Do differently

The 'Do differently' theme relates to the ways in which children can imagine their support could be improved. There are a number of sub-themes.

Children often described not seeing certain people enough, or little time being spent with them, which made them feel less well supported by them.

Milly (girl, aged 11): Um, John and Lucy, they are twins. They [sic] my Cousins. Coz, um. I don't really know them well. Some of my Cousins I've seen them before, but I've not really seen them. They could be really nice, but I don't know.

There were also times described when the child did not feel understood by those around them.

Frankie (boy aged 10): I just think because I am in a group and because we are good, we don't get attention, other people get stuck and put hand up, but then people say "you can't have help, you can work it out" but sometimes the whole table gets stuck!

Others being irritating, unkind or unreliable were also often mentioned as reasons for a person not feeling well supported.

Alfie (boy, aged 10) Oh yeah! Um, well. When people have arguments, and if you're like, you feel like they are not listening to you. Like when you have an argument with friends, and they are all like blaming on you and like, you feel really left out and stuff, yeah. And like, they don't listen to you, like they won't like hear what you're saying.

However, a number of children also said that they didn't need anything to change in their support.

Sophia (girl, aged 8): No, coz they do too much for me anyway, so I don't really want any more help

Researcher: Can you tell me a bit more about that?

Sophia: They just basically spend money on my presents, on me. All the adults basically spend money on my Cousins and my Brother and Tommy [dog] and me and buy stuff and that's why I like having Mothers day and Fathers day because then I can get them a present, instead of them trying to get me a present and they cook my tea, and everything like that....

4.3.4 Additional Findings: Super-ordinate theme: Method
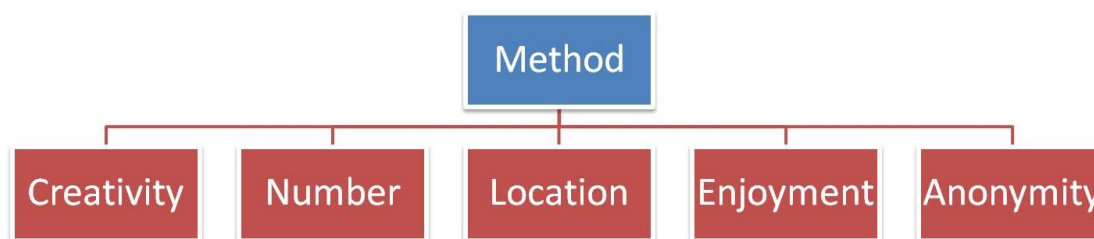
Figure 7: Method themes

The final super-ordinate theme is 'method' this relates to discussion that the children had about the focus group sessions and the materials used. Detailed discussion of this theme is beyond the scope of this paper, however some key interesting findings will be discussed; Figure 7 shows the five sub-themes underlying 'method'.

Children placed value on the flexibility and creativity that was possible during the research, for example they discussed their own preferences and approaches to use of the available methods and highlighted how they were often 'made' to complete tasks in a certain way, without being able to use their own approaches to a task in school. There was discussion relating to the positioning and categorisation of support sources; for example some students preferred to group 'friends', while others felt each friend provided a different type of relationship and so should be marked on the worksheet individually. Children also discussed their interpretations of different locations for stickers on the worksheet; some children felt that they wanted to include people who were not at all supportive (but perhaps the child felt they should support them) while others preferred to display the positive relationships and did not like to mention those people in their lives who were not

supportive, or helpful. Overall, children consistently enjoyed the use of the field map as an approach; they commented that it allowed them to remember all the people who supported them; it helped them to think about who was the most / least supportive and they appreciated the time that they were each given to discuss their individual experiences. A number of children brought up that they did not feel adults always took the time to really listen to them and that the research allowed them to feel heard. The final aspect of the 'method' theme related to the appreciation that children had in knowing their individual experiences would not be discussed outside of the group. In this instance they commented that they felt more comfortable talking about their support and may have 'changed' their answers if key people would have had access to their opinions.

4.4 Phase one discussion

A review and interpretation of the phase one results is presented here. This will be followed by a critical analysis of the study and suggested improvements. The implications for EP practice and direction of future research will be discussed in the overall discussion (Chapter 6) as these will connect both the phase one and phase two results to practice in the profession.

Phase one of the project aimed to explore the perceptions that children hold of their social support; thereby gaining and understanding of the sources of support that children feel are available to them, and the types of support that come from these sources. Exploration of how this support could be improved, or be different was also conducted, as well as touching

on whether the methods used are a useful approach for research or practice work with children of this age range. 'Focus group' sessions, were used to answer these research questions. The children themselves could both discuss as a group, as well as each individual child being given their time to speak about their experiences. The children demonstrated enjoyment of the sessions.

The previous chapter detailed five main sources of support: family; friends; animals; toys and community. These themes included step family, godparents, parents, siblings and extended family, animals, and (soft) toys (or comforters, often from their infancy). The community theme included adults from within school, but also extended to medical professionals, coaches and tutors, and adults from their neighbourhoods. Children felt it was important to describe where their friendships originated and this included neighbourhood friends, family members of friends and those who attended clubs with them, some children also mentioned friendships which developed on holidays, particular importance was given to 'best' friends and the duration of their friendships was often key in justifying why they felt well supported by the person. For example, friends who they had known since infancy tended to be described as knowing everything about them and understanding them well, which meant such friends were often key in supporting them effectively and knowing what to do to help them, even in difficult situations. Therefore, the present exploration showed that children have a wide range of sources of support which have not all been discussed in previous literature; certainly the support of animals and toys has not been described in any of the literature from the literature search. This may be because the existing literature mostly resulted from adult populations, whose needs and views regarding support sources may be quite different from those of children. Adults may

also be less open in their thinking; for instance animals arose as a source of support for children despite the reference to 'people who support you'. It is likely that this phrasing may have constrained thinking in some populations.

The breadth of sources which emerged from this exploratory work is in contrast to those described in previous research. Typically, previous research has focussed upon a small number of sources of support and such research has looked at the connections between social support and other areas of functioning rather than exploring all possible sources of support for children. For example, Ikiz and Cakar (2010) utilised a social support scale validated in Turkish populations, which addressed support from friends, family and teachers; Holder and Coleman (2009) used support from friends, family and peers and Prunty et al. (2012) looked at relationships within the school environment. Sylvester et al. (2014) also researched friends' and peers' support. Therefore, although the current research did confirm that sources such as friends and family were important to children, there are also additional sources of support that have been found to be valued. Furthermore, although school staff or teachers are commonly used as an example of support in children's lives, this was not a consistent finding in the current research. Although some children valued teacher support, others also felt 'let down' by staff in schools, who were described as not having enough time to help the children while in school, either with school work, or other issues. Therefore, further exploratory research may benefit from looking at these relationships in more detail. This result could be due to the particular sample used, as (Sammons et al., 2008) found that year five pupils entitled to free school meals (FSM) had more positive views of teacher support for pupil learning, than did children from more wealthy backgrounds. This may go some way to explaining the differing opinions of the

children, as perhaps the backgrounds or more complex needs of the children influence the support received from teachers; if teachers have limited time to give, support may be provided to children who are more 'needy' first. Given that diversity in the current sample was limited, this may have impacted the findings.

In previous research such as that by Danielsen et al. (2010) there has also been restrictions on the support sources when looking at their impact on certain domains; for instance the use of support from those present in school when considering the effect on academic achievement. Danielson et al.'s research may have overlooked the dynamic nature of support; children in the current study reported that they could seek support for academic skills from alternate sources (e.g. parents or siblings) if support from teachers or peers was not available to them. Therefore, there is flexibility in children's access to social support in a way that has previously not always been considered. Limiting social support to its impact to within certain domains may have meant the complexity and eco systemic nature of social support and its impact has not been fully investigated previously. Whereas the current exploration has allowed the flexibility in children's approaches to seeking support to be demonstrated.

This exploration revealed both informal (from personal network) and formal (professional) sources of support, it was emphasized by Spilsbury and Korbin (2013) both are important for obtaining a full picture of a person's experiences. Therefore it is of benefit that children discussed both types of sources within the 'focus group' sessions. Similarly to research that was conducted in an exploratory manner in the USA by Dubow and Ullman (1989), the current project uncovered many wider sources of support which children felt were important to them, than had been researched previously. Dubow and Ullman (1989) found

that in addition to typical support source, children in the USA mentioned therapists, coaches and friends of their parents as sources of support, which is similar to those wider sources mentioned in this study. Pollard and Filer (1999) also described how social influences for children originate from both school and wider contexts, which was certainly confirmed in the current study. It certainly appears that the use of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) eco-systemic perspective has been of great benefit to ensure that children were given the opportunity to consider support at all levels and environments in their lives. Some children even mentioned in-direct support, such as the way in which Head Teachers may keep the whole school safe; even though the child may not have a personal relationship with that member of staff.

Therefore, overall the exploration from Phase one has confirmed previous research relating to sources of support, it has also extended the breadth of support sources that children perceive. In particular animals and toys as support sources remain unique to the current project and wider community sources may benefit from further exploration as although they have been previously considered, they are not addressed in depth in the majority of the past research.

In line with previous research, the exploration of children's perceptions of their social support related to both the source and type of support. The use of the term 'style' was more appropriate for the current study than the previously used 'type' of support, as more interactive factors were present in the children's descriptions of the support; there was more focus on support being provided through the interactive relationships with others.

A theme of particular interest to those working with children is 'consideration'; this theme is an addition to the four themes described by House (1981), as it entails the way in which children desire to be heard and taken account of by the people in their lives. This includes

the children feeling that other people notice them, listen to their needs, understand them and think about them. It may be that this style of support is particularly significant for children, who are likely to be in positions lacking power, relative to adults. This would mean that for children, being considered is essential to get their needs met, whereas for adults this is less vital given that they can meet their own needs if others do not consider them. Advice for conducting research with children emphasises the need for children to feel truly heard and represented during studies, yet perhaps in other areas of life the importance of this for the child needs to be highlighted (Alderson, 2001; T. Greig, 1998; Silverman, 2013).

There are also overlaps between the styles of support already established, and those that emerged from the current study. House (1981) detailed 'emotional support' which shares similarities with the 'affection' support style; whereas the adult literature may relate to empathy, the children in this instance talked about physical contact and interaction which made them feel well supported. This may be a reflection of the stage of development that the children are at, where affection is shown in more tangible ways, rather than 'empathy' which is more abstract concept. The 'appraisal' support type detailed by House which relates to feedback being given, was also important to children and was incorporated as part of the 'affection' theme.

Another change in the support styles detailed by this study related to the 'entertainment' theme. Children emphasised the importance of enjoyable relationships with others, allowing them to feel valued and supported. Being given opportunities to have fun with others was a key aspect of feeling they had access to support. This went beyond the 'giving of items' detailed in House's 'instrumental support' theme; as rather than the support

relating solely to being given items or resources, children valued the interaction and sharing of the enjoyable experience as well as the use of humour.

The 'instrumental' support defined by House also overlaps with the 'generosity' theme from the current research; both of which include not only the provision of tangible gifts or items, but also indicate that time given up to support is of benefit. This is consistent with the generosity theme in the current project and children discussed not only face to face time given to them, but also additional effort (e.g. travel or making an item for them) that certain support sources gave to them. For the children, being given time and effort to help them with a hobby or skill was particularly valued.

The final two themes of 'cohesion' and 'dependability' are new and add to the previously defined types of support. 'Cohesion' relates to the importance for children of feeling similar to those around them; they benefit more fully from support when they feel a connection to the supporter; and some sharing of interests, experiences or characteristics is a beneficial addition to their relationships 'Dependability' is the final theme that has emerged from the phase one analysis, this emphasises the need that the children have for their supporters to be trustworthy and consistently available to them. Similarly to the 'cohesion' theme, this aspect of support for children did not arise in the literature search for this research.

Overall, when comparing the support types/ styles within the adult literature to the current study, although there is overlap, there are also key differences. It appears that these differences may relate to the position of children within society; they are dependent upon others in ways that adults are not; and may hold relatively little power. Many of the support styles which made children's experiences more positive involved a sense of being seen and heard, and their needs being responded to; time and attention being provided in a fun and

interactive way allowed the children to be able to value the support from those around them. A degree of shared experience with their supported was also valued.

Overall the phase one research has added to the existing field, as it has explored perceptions of social support with a new population, in a new location which has not been investigated in this manner previously. The established literature highlighted the need for a more clear understanding of social support and its meaning and structures, (Dubow & Ullman, 1989; Guess & Bowling, 2014; Shevlin & Rose, 2008; Tangen, 2009). This has occurred in the current work, where a rich description of the sources and support styles that are important to children in key stage two in the UK has been given. It also highlights the need that any further research with children relating to their social support is not skewed by theories derived from adult populations; although there are similarities there also appear to be significant differences.

4.4.1 Phase one: Strengths and Limitations

It is important to consider the benefits and limitations of the study. Any piece of work which involves a single time point, will only give perspectives from a certain period in these particular children's lives. It is also important to remember that discussions occurred within school and had these been held in another setting (a community centre, or play scheme) the results may have been different. It is likely that the context of the discussion being held within school may have influenced the children's thinking.

The interactive nature of the research means that my own background, beliefs and experiences will have been an integral part of the project; not only impacting the way that sessions were run, or the course of questioning that occurred, but also the later analysis of the transcripts. Therefore, this is acknowledged as an integral part of the exploratory method.

The children had space and time to direct the discussion and consider their own experiences and feelings relating to their social support; this in itself may not necessarily generalise to a wider population, but it does bring a rich and enlightening picture of how these particular children perceive their social support. The children valued this approach, as will be detailed below and the methods used elicited the desired information meaning the research questions were addressed. The children were very capable of expressing their views, and many valued the opportunity for their perspectives to be sought and heard. The children overwhelmingly expressed their enjoyment of the session and the majority of them also wanted the session to continue, or for another session to be arranged in the future.

 They also expressed their appreciation at feeling listened to, and having time given to listen to their opinions.

Thank you for taking up your time to listen to us [Chris, boy aged 10 to researcher]

George (boy, aged 10) Um, YOU! [regarding people who provide support] Coz [sic] you're helping me right now and um, you're very kind and um, you understand people and you take time to listen to what we say.

Not only were the methods valuable and appreciated by the children, the results also added to the existing literature. Previously, an exploratory and child focussed research project has

not been undertaken with this age group, in the UK, focussing upon perceived social support.

The flexible nature of the approach allowed children to consider all possible sources of support; indeed new sources were elicited from this open method. There were no boundaries for the children and this gave them freedom to consider their opinions in full; the anonymity further allowed them to be honest and to trust in the methods used, and in the researcher. There were also reports from the participants that it was unusual to have the undivided attention of an adult, and to be given the freedom to approach a task without significant constraints. All of these aspects indicate that the desired child centred style of research was achieved, with the elicitation of children's views and perspectives being key to exploring their experiences and perceptions of their social support.

There were also some improvements which could be made to the study. Due to the geographical location within which the research took place, the sample was not as diverse as had been hoped for. Anecdotally, schools based within more deprived areas tended to decline the invitation to partake in the research, citing the amount of interventions and projects already occurring to be a barrier to their participation (although analysis of this has not been undertaken and is more an individual perception from myself as a researcher). The population may also be affected by the opt-in nature of participation; those who returned consent forms may be a self selecting group and not even necessarily representative of the school as a whole.

In terms of the priorities for the 'focus groups' more time could have been spent exploring the changes that children would like in their social support. Of the research questions, this was explored in the least depth as children tended to find it easier to discuss the sources

and styles of support. It may be that the methods selected did not fully engage the children in this aspect of the research; therefore future research could look at this in more detail, perhaps with a different approach to the data collection. It may also be that this lack of discussion was partially due to the developmental stage of the participants; as Piaget's concrete operational stage (7-12 years) indicates that use of abstract or hypothetical constructs is still challenging at this developmental level (Greig, 1998). Furthermore, Bigelow and La Gaipa (1975) found that children's descriptions of friendship changed with age, with more dimensions of friendship being discussed with each year of development. This is also a consideration for the scale development generally, as it may be that aspects of social support perceived by older children in the study would not be considered relevant by younger students, due to their developmental level at the time of the research.

The methods selected were intended to be accessible to a range of backgrounds and needs; however, these methods also have limitations. Additional support was given to children who needed it, including access to alternate forms or recording, or adapted worksheets as required. However, despite these adaptations the methods were still necessarily verbal in nature, and therefore those children with poorer verbal skills may have been less able to fully portray their views. Consideration could be given in future research as to how to gain the views of children with these needs; perhaps through using more artistic or visual methods to contribute their experiences.

Despite pilot testing the methods, there were also time constraints relating to the focus group sessions; in the majority of focus groups, the time given was more than adequate, however in some groups I did feel there was more in depth exploration that could have occurred if additional time was available. In some groups, there was also some degree of

power imbalance between children, as more confident children tended to talk for greater

proportions of the sessions, this may also have skewed the impressions I gained of the

children's experiences. Despite these limitations the work has made some addition to the

existing field and has also developed key areas for the direction of future research, which

will be discussed in Chapter 6.

Chapter 5   Phase two

5.1 Phase two methodology

5.1.1 Construction of the Scale of Perceived Social Support (SOPSS).

The purpose of the two phases of this research is that they are interlinked: the development of the SOPSS for children is based upon the analysis of the exploratory study within phase one of the project. The research questions for the construction of the scale in phase two are; what should be included in a new SOPSS for KS2 children?; How should a new SOPSS be structured?; and how can the new SOPSS be refined? Initially, each of the four Super-ordinate themes of the phase one analysis were considered, in order to determine the coverage of the new scale.


Figure 8: Four super-ordinate themes from phase one

Figure 8 details the four super-ordinate themes which resulted from the analysis of the focus groups within phase one of the project. The theme of 'method' relates specifically to the methods used in data collection, therefore this is not relevant to the scale development.

The theme of 'change' relates to adaptations to social support that the children would like, therefore although this information may shape the development of the scale, this will be an indirect influence.

The two remaining super-ordinate themes of 'source of support' and 'support style' were considered for inclusion in the scale. Interestingly, during phase one, children did not feel that a certain style of support was needed from a specific person, so long as it was supplied by someone.

Jack (boy, aged 8): It doesn't matter if everyone isn't nice, but someone should be nice to me.

Also, if children did not receive a certain type of support from an individual, they could seek this support from someone else.

Jenny (girl, aged 8): I don't need hugs from him anyway, cos [sic] I get them off of [sic] my Gran.

Even if a support style (e.g. help with school work) was not supplied by the assumed source (school staff), children could see that the help could be gained elsewhere (for example through parental help at home, or through peers or tutors).

Furthermore, although previous scales have attempted to incorporate both the source and the style of support, this necessarily means that they are lengthy, given that certain styles of support from each different source need to be investigated (Malecki & Elliott, 1999). Furthermore, novel sources of support were uncovered in the current research, meaning a scale would need to be even lengthier to incorporate all new sources and styles of support relevant to the target population of children. In the current study, it was decided that the

style of support would be specified and children could report on the basis of receiving this

from any source. This would overcome the complexity of other scales, while also allowing

the children to consider all possible sources of support, without limitations. Therefore, the

number of items could be restricted to those which covered each theme of support style

from the analysis of phase one. This not only allows a shorter scale to be developed, it is a

more inclusive method of application for children in all sorts of life situations. For example,

previous scales (such as the SSQC) become more complex when they need to account for

whether or not children have siblings, but past scales have not necessarily been developed

with vulnerable groups in mind. For instance children living in alternate family types; home

educated children; or those in care may not have certain support sources in their lives.

Giving them the freedom to consider any sources of support, rather than specifying who

should support them and in what way, allows them to still fully consider their social support,

even if it does not come from the 'typical' sources. Furthermore, it does not restrict children

from including other sources of support and it makes no assumptions about those people

who individual children value. As the sample were not as diverse as had been hoped, certain

figures relating to religion or certain ethnic backgrounds may not have been fully accounted

for. Allowing children to consider the support style, rather than the specific source of

support may make this instrument more applicable to different contexts.
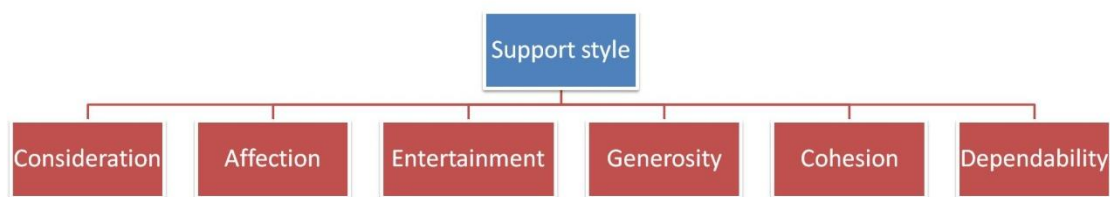
Figure 9: Support style themes

"The boundaries of the phenomenon must be recognised so that the content of the scale does not inadvertently drift into unintended domains." DeVellis (2012). Bearing this statement in mind, I refer back to the definition of social support used for this project: "information leading the subject to believe that he is care for and loved, esteemed, and a member of a network of mutual obligations"(Cobb, 1976, pg.300). Whilst the source of support has been discussed in paper one, the definition of perceived social support being used for this project does not dictate that the source of the support must be defined. Therefore, the production of the scale came from each of the six themes of support style.

Each theme was taken one by one. Lists of questions were produced, which related to the individual theme and all of its subthemes. Once a range of questions had been produced this was reduced through the use of a 'checklist' for developing 'good' scale items (see Appendix 13) this checklist was adapted from information derived across a vast range of literature. Items were selected pertaining to each subtheme of the six support style themes detailed in Figure 9.

5.1.2 Pilot testing and structure and format of items

The initial draft scale was piloted with ten children; the instructions were read aloud, and there was then a chance for focus group style discussion; adaptations were made to the instructions as a result. Each item on the scale was then read to the children in the pilot study and items were discussed one by one; wording was changed to clarify the item meaning, and the scale was further reduced to include only items which 'made sense' to the children. Each descriptor and connection between the questions and the themes or subthemes can be found in Appendix 14. The initial adapted scale after pilot testing can be found in Appendix 15.

Options were given for the response format of the questions; either in terms of level of agreement with the statement, or how frequently / consistently the type of support was available. The group felt that level of agreement (e.g. Definitely agree/ Mostly agree and so on) was not clear. The agreed preferred format related to how often each form of support occurred. It was mutually agreed that a word change should be made to the selection of possible answers (from 'mostly' to 'often'). A number of adaptations to the wording of individual items were also made to aid clarity and to fit with the response format. Notes were made regarding all changes that had been jointly agreed within this session. Once the changes were made to the scale, the same group were shown the scale and agreed that it was easy to read and made sense to them, thereby supplying face validity. This group did not give any examples of items which could be added or taken away – they concluded that the questions gave good coverage of their perceptions and experiences. The scale was also

shared with five KS2 Primary school teachers, who also agreed that it appeared to be appropriate, and made sense; no further adaptations were made at this point.

It is important that the readability of every item is appropriate for the given sample (Neteyemer, 2003). Therefore, the ATOS reading analysis was run on all scale items. An ATOS readability level of 2.9 resulted. This is equivalent of an average 1st grade student reading level (between the 50th and 75th centile) in the USA, or an age equivalent of an average 6-7 year old student. Therefore the readability of the items was deemed appropriate for the desired KS2 population.

5.1.3 Sample

Unfortunately, by the time phase two of the project began, one school was no longer able to accommodate the project, due to issues unrelated to the project. This meant that 65 children, whose parents had consented, could not participate in the phase two research. Due to the time in the school year that this occurred, it was unfortunately not possible to find an alternative school to participate in the project, although a number of alternative schools were contacted. Phase two was therefore completed in four of the five schools who participated in phase one. After pilot testing, the scale was completed by 201 children. When returned, 10 of the questionnaires could not be used, due to children completing multiple answers to questions, or returning incomplete questionnaires. This resulted in a final sample of 191 questionnaire responses. (98 female, 93 male, mean age of 9.13).

Details of the children's age, gender and special educational needs can be found in Appendix 16.

5.1.4 Procedure

The questionnaire was completed in a quiet room within the school. Typically, groups of 5-10 children completed the scale at a time. However, some group sizes were as small as two children, to ensure that adequate and appropriate support could be given to children who had been identified by either their parent, or the school SENCo, as having special educational needs. Any children, who were identified as potentially needing additional support, were discussed with the school SENCo to ensure that they were able to access the session. The adaptations to ensure inclusivity of all children whose parents had returned consent forms included:

- Enlarged sheets for those with visual impairments.

- Small group sizes; for example with only one peer.

- Adult support which consisted of each item on the scale and possible responses being pointed to as they were read aloud.

- Adult support to complete the 'all about me' section of the scale.

- Additional time.

The nature of the sessions, where all items were read and time given for the whole group to respond benefitted many of the children, with or without special educational needs. Many children commented that the session was 'easy' due to not having to do any reading unless

they wanted to and due to the responses being easy to highlight, without having to 'write

lots'.

Every group was run by the researcher, this was to maximise school participation in the

research, and to ensure that a standard delivery of instructions were given, it also meant

being on hand to ensure all children were well supported. During data collection it also

emerged that the children felt more at ease having an unknown adult complete the scale, as

given the subject matter, they felt relief at knowing their answers would not be seen by

anyone who knows them. This may have been different had they been collected in by a

member of school staff and it is important to be aware of the effect my presence may have

had on the responses.

 The instructions and background information were read aloud to every group, as was the

information sheet. The children were given opportunities to ask any questions, and were

asked whether they were happy to take part; verbal consent was obtained from all children.

The questions were read aloud one at a time; children were encouraged to put their hand

up if they had any questions, or needed help. Children were asked to answer all items, but if

they questioned whether they could miss a question out, they were reminded that they

could complete as much, or as little of the questionnaire as they wanted to. Sessions were

run within typical lesson times, and did not overlap with break times. Children were asked

to fill in their details on the final page; they were assured that this was to check their names

against the consent forms and was not to attach their answers to their name.

Once all children in the session had handed in their questionnaires, they were asked as a

group whether they had any comments about the scale. The majority of children reported

enjoying the task, some made specific comments about individual questions and others

shared some of their thoughts about the format of the scale. In all sessions, many children reported finding the questionnaire 'easy' and 'fun'.

5.2 Analysis and results of phase two data

Having addressed the research questions relating to the construction of the scale, the analysis of the scale will be described. The research questions to focus this analysis are; what is the initial validity and reliability of the SOPSS? And; does the SOPSS have an underlying structure that 'makes sense'?

5.2.1 Sampling

This resulting sample size is smaller than was planned. There is much debate as to the appropriate sample size necessary for principal components analysis; the debate being between an absolute sample size, and an appropriately high item to subject ratio. Kass and Tinsley (1979) state that the generally accepted values range from 5-10 subjects per item, with a minimum of 100 participants; therefore the current example meets both of these thresholds. In this instance the item to subject ratio is 1:8.3, and Comrey (1973) described a sample of 200 as being 'fair' in scale development.

5.2.2 Data scoring

Each returned scale was entered by hand into Excel, where it was visually screened for missing data, or errors in data entry. It was imported into SPSS for analysis. Every item was scored in the same manner, with a response of 'Never' being scored 0 up to the response 'Always' which was scored 4; possible total scores therefore ranged from 0-92, with a higher score indicating more positive perceptions of social support.   No reverse scored items were used in the scale as DeVellis (2012) suggests that the numerous opportunities this brings for mistakes outweighs any possible benefit, furthermore, Greig et al. (2007) indicate that in conducting research with children it is preferable to keep response formats consistent to aid understanding.

5.2.3 Data screening

The Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro Wilk tests of normality were both highly significant (p=.000) for these data, this indicates that the data is not normally distributed. The skew and kurtosis data for each individual scale item also indicate non-normal distributions, the full details of which can be found in Appendix 17. However, it is possible to get significant results due to the relatively large data set. Log transformation of the data did not correct this issue; therefore the original (non-transformed) data were used in the analysis. The tests used to look at the scale in more detail do not require that the data be normally distributed.

Evaluation of items:

In order to ensure that each of the scale items is appropriate for inclusion, an evaluation of the items was undertaken. It is important that scale items are highly inter-correlated; DeVellis (2012) suggests that computation of item-scale correlations will allow this to be assessed. Field (2005) suggests removing any items with a corrected item- total correlation of less than .3. This is because scores on each item should correlate with the total score of the scale to indicate that the scale is reliable. Scrutinising the items, Q1 ('I do special things with someone close to me' =.233); Q5 ('I spend time with people who enjoy similar things to me' =.298) and Q10 ('I am still in touch with people I met when I was little' =.169) were all removed from the analysis as they do not correlate highly enough with the overall scale. Interestingly, these items were also the ones most queried by children during data collection; perhaps therefore the clarity of these items was not strong enough.

Cronbach's alpha was used to measure the internal consistency (or reliability) of the scale items; this indicates whether or not individual items of a scale are all measuring an underlying construct, and whether this reliability would be improved if any of the scale items were excluded. The Cronbach's alpha for the 20 item scale (with the removal of Q1, Q5 and Q10) was α=.87 (see Appendix 23), this is considered to be a 'good' reliability coefficient (George & Mallerey, 2003). Whilst this α value does indicate good internal consistency of scale items, it does not tell us the underlying structure of the scale, which will be examined through principle components analysis. At this stage, the results indicate that no further scale items need be removed, as removal of Q4 would only increase the alpha value by.001 and removal of any other scale items would decrease, or maintain the overall Cronbach's alpha value for the entire scale.

5.2.4 Sampling adequacy – Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure

The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy was used to ensure that the sample was appropriate. The KMO value was 0.88 (see Appendix 19) which exceeds that recommended by Field (2005) who states an adequate sample would have a KMO statistic of 0.5 or above. Kaiser (1974) detailed the ranges within which the KMO would fall and described a value between 0.7 and 0.8 as 'good' and one between 0.8 and 0.9 as 'great'. Therefore, there is strong indication that despite the sample being smaller than intended; it is an appropriate sample for principal components analysis to be used.

5.2.5 Sphericity

In order to determine whether the data were appropriate to complete principal components analysis, Bartlett's test of sphericity was used (see Appendix 19). This is a measure of the correlations and relationships between variables and tests the null hypothesis that the correlation matrix is an identity matrix (if it were an identity matrix, this would mean that all variables were independent and unrelated to one another). Bartlett's test is highly significant (p=.000), which means that the null hypothesis can be rejected and we can assume that there are relationships between the scale items, which deem the data suitable for principal components analysis to be conducted.

5.2.6 Multi-collinearity

Whilst it is important that the items are related to one another, there is a range within which these correlations must fall to be suitable for principal components analysis. If items are perfectly correlated with one another, this would indicate that they were measuring the same thing, and scale items may be too similar in wording or content.

In these data the determinant is 0.002 (see Appendix 20); this is larger than the value of 0.00001 which means that multi-collinearity is not a problem in these data (Field, 2005).

5.2.7 Results and component interpretation

Principal components analysis (PCA) was used to look at the children's responses to items and the underlying structure of the SOPSS. This allows components to be inspected, which indicate the ways in which certain items on the scale cluster together to form sub-scales with particular meaning. Each component is relatively independent from other items.

The components were interpreted through the use of oblique rotation being applied to the data. Rotation of components is intended to simplify the structure and enhance the interpretability; there is a choice to be made between an oblique rotation, or and orthogonal rotation. In this instance oblique rotation was selected; firstly because this form of rotation allows some correlation between the components, and theoretically it makes sense that perceptions of social support may correlate with one another across support

types. Secondly, the solution which came from the use of oblique rotation made more theoretical sense and Field (2005) has highlighted the importance of components being interpretable and making sense to the researcher. As a result, a certain amount of subjectivity is involved in determining the type of rotation and the interpretation and naming of the resulting component structure.

It is important that the components make sense to the research in giving meaning to the clusters of scale items. As more than one component was extracted, there may be underlying subscales within 'perceptions of social support'; this would fit with the initial design of the scale, where sub themes underlay the broader conceptualisation of 'perceived social support'.

5.2.7.1 Eigenvalue and scree plot

The criterion detailed by Henry F. Kaiser (1960) was used and therefore components with eigenvalues greater than one were retained (Neteyemer, 2003. Wothington & Whittaker, 2006). The scree plot (see Appendix 21) was also visually inspected, and was broadly in line with Kaiser's (Hinkin, Tracey, & Enz, 1997) criterion; however the inflexion point was not as clear as it might have been, leaving a degree of subjectivity. Further guidelines for retaining components include that the number of components retained should account for 50-60% of the total variance, and that each component should account for at least 5% of the overall variance in order to be considered to be meaningful (Neteyemer, 2003); both of these guidelines were met in retaining five components which were determined to be

appropriate, this accounted for 55.17% of the total variance and each component

individually accounted for at least 5% of the overall variance (see Table 1 and Appendix 22).

To be able to check the fit between the data and the model, it is important that 50% or

fewer of the residuals should be greater than .05; in this instance the reproduced

correlations output indicated that 41% of the non redundant residuals had absolute values

greater than .05. This result indicates an appropriate fit between the data and the model.

Table 1: Percentage of variance explained by each component

Component number	Extraction sums of squares loadings		
	Total	**% of variance**	**Cumulative %**
1	6.31	31.54	31.54
2	1.48	7.37	38.91
3	1.16	5.78	44.68
4	1.09	5.45	50.14
5	1.01	5.03	55.17

It is also important that all components make theoretical sense to the researcher; one of the

criticisms of the usage of principal components analysis is that it does not provide any sense

of the meaning of the components that it extracts (Furr, 2010). In this instance, each of the

five components appears to 'make sense' and is therefore interpretable. This step in

principal components analysis is a subjective process (Field, 2005).

After running the principal components analysis using Oblimin (Oblique) rotation, the entire

scale yielded an alpha value of $\alpha=.87$. The mean inter-item correlation was .27, which is in

the suggested range for 'broad' constructs detailed by Clark and Watson (1995). Each of the

five underlying components will be described.

Component 1: Support in times of challenge. This is the child's belief that they are supported when things are difficult for them; either when 'bad' events occur, or when they are facing a difficult situation. α = .75 (see Appendix 24).

Component	Item number	Description	Loading
1	Q19	I can get help with my work	.815
1	Q20	When I am trying to do something hard, other people cheer me on	.603
1	Q12	If something bad happens, someone helps me	.535
1	Q22	People show that they think about me when I am not with them	.533
1	Q11	Someone notices if I don't have anyone to play with	.324

Table 2: Component 1 items and loadings

Component 2: Love and caretaking. Children feel that other people care for them and demonstrate affection for them α= .75 (see Appendix 25).

Component	Item number	Description	Loading
2	Q18	I feel loved	.786
2	Q8	When I do something well, someone is proud of me	.665
2	Q17	Someone takes care of me	.664
2	Q23	I get hugs from someone when I want them	.616
2	Q21	People spend time with me	.318

Table 3: Component 2 items and loadings

Component 3: Providing enjoyable experiences. Children believe that other people provide

positive experiences for them and this allows them to feel well supported α=.56 (see

Appendix 26).

Component	Item number	Description	Loading
3	Q7	I get given things that I like	.772
3	Q14	Someone I know makes me laugh	.661
3	Q4	I visit places I like	.636

Table 4: Component 3 items and loadings

Component 4: Positive interaction with others. Children perceive that support comes from

positive interactive relationships with those around them α=.57 (see Appendix 27).

Component	Item number	Description	Loading
4	Q2	Other people share their things with me	.837
4	Q3	People say kind things to me	.536
4	Q9	I have fun with other people	.405

Table 5: Component 4 items and loadings

Component 5: Consistency and reliability. Children feel that other people are aware of their

needs and are accessible and available to them. α=.69 (see Appendix 28).

Component	Item number	Description	Loading
5	Q13	I have people I can trust	.769
5	Q6	People understand me	.680
5	Q16	If I want to talk, someone listens to me	.411
5	Q15	I can rely on the people I know	.398

Table 6: Component 5 items and loadings

5.3 Phase two discussion

Phase two of the research aimed to develop a new instrument, which was specifically

designed to look at the perceptions of social support of children aged 7-11 years in the UK.

This work has developed a measure, which has then been explored in depth to gain

understanding of the initial underlying structure and reliability of the SOPSS; including

reducing the scale items to ensure the highest quality. Each stage of the development of the

SOPSS will be discussed and evaluated in depth. There are some promising outcomes from

the results of this study, which would be best investigated further; these posited next steps

will be described in the overall discussion, alongside the implications that both phases of the

research have for the work of EPs locally and nationally (please see Chapter 6).

Scale development is often described as a lengthy and costly process (Hinkin et al., 1997);

numerous iterations and analysis are needed, as well as large samples of representative

groups, in order to produce a worthwhile (reliable and valid) scale. The construction of the

current scale followed a subset of the flowchart below in Figure 10, taken from Simms

(2007). Evaluation of sections of this scale development will be discussed from this process.
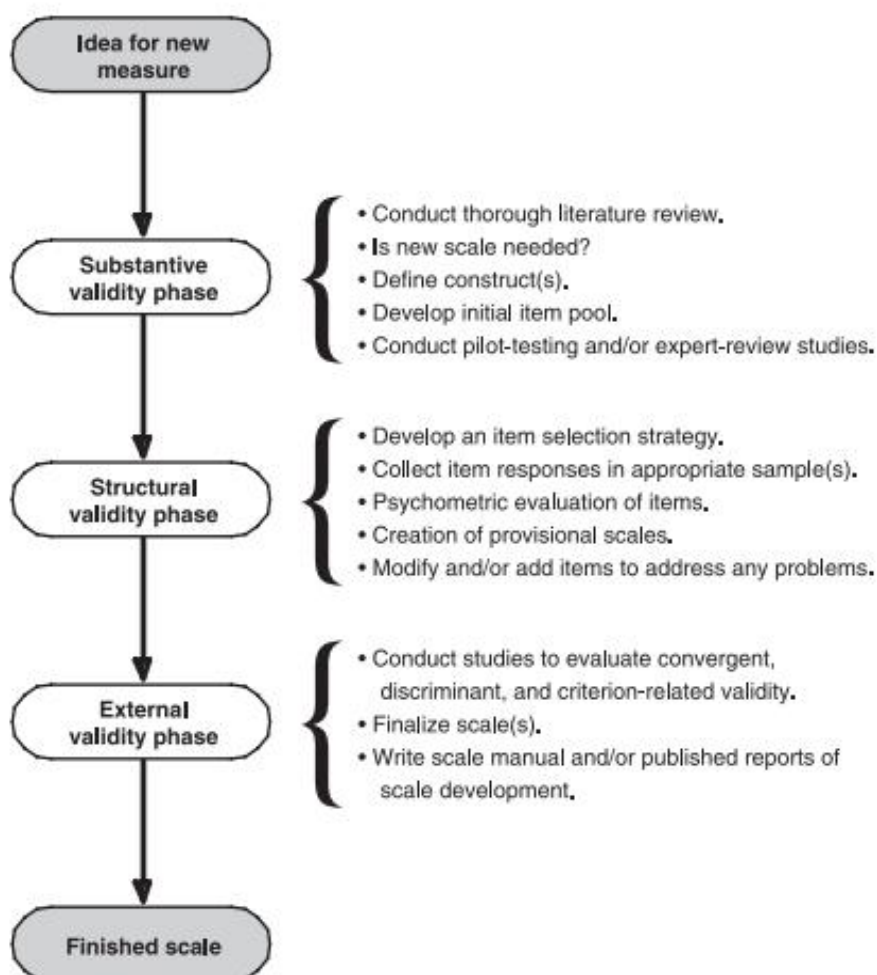
Figure 10: Flow chart of scale development (from Simms, 2007)

Simms (2007) details the importance of ensuring the construct is adequately defined, the construct of 'perceived social support' was defined during phase one of the research. When comparing these findings to the scales developed in the USA, it is clear that the sources from which children in the UK perceive support are wider than the existing scales would indicate; this may be due to cultural differences, or due to the open opportunity the children had to consider all sources from which they felt they gained support (Gordon-Hollingsworth et al., 2016; Harter, 2012; Kerres Malecki & Kilpatrick Demary, 2002; Lipski et al., 2014). Furthermore, the current study uncovered two sources of support that I have not come across in the past literature: toys and animals. Both of these were discussed as being valued by children, and for many these sources of support were deemed among the most important to them; children also did not distinguish between the support received from animals or toys and that received from people; both appeared to be equally valid to them. Had sources been derived from the existing theory or research, these would not have been included and therefore some of the child's experience may be missed. The exploration of the children's experiences has therefore added to the existing literature as children were able to explore their feelings of support, without any pre-conceived ideas or concepts restricting their thinking.

As was discussed in section 2.2, there has been criticism of previous scales for restricting the breadth of support sources which are detailed in the measure, and therefore which may not fully explore the experiences of the children involved. All four previously reported scales (the SSSS, the SSSC, the CASSS and the SSQC) gave children the opportunity to consider social support from parents, and either peers or classmates. Otherwise, there was variation in the sources that were included. Figure 11 gives a comparison of the sources of support

which were detailed in each of the scales, as well as those discussed by children in exploratory phase of the current study. For the children involved in the current study there were a wide range of sources from which they perceived social support, many of which were not tapped by any of the existing scales from the USA. These include toys, animals, and members of the community (including tutors, coaches and club leaders), as well as friendships which may have been developed with family members of school friends, on holiday, or at clubs.

The wide range of sources which were uncovered as a result of phase one, informed the scale structure. There were many varied sources of support, yet the children stated that so long as the support was received, this did not need to be provided by a specific source. Therefore, the decision was made to develop a scale pertaining to perceived social support without making specific links between the source and style of support. This has benefits for the scale production as it means that it can be more concise and does not risk multiple ideas being contained within one item. DeVellis (2012) discussed the error that can be made in developing scales where more than one idea is contained within a single scale item. An example would be 'someone notices if I don't have anyone to play with' in comparison to 'my teacher notices if I don't have anyone to play with' the second example contains two ideas; therefore if a child wanted to agree that it is noticed when they do not have anyone to play with, but that child did not feel the teacher notices, it would be difficult for them to respond to this item. Furthermore, it may be assumed from their negative response that they do not feel they are noticed when they are alone at playtime, yet it may be that another support source does notice them, which cannot be conveyed through the response to this item.

There are also benefits of producing a scale that does not specify the source of the support for children from vulnerable groups. For example, children whose parents are absent; children in care; children from traveller families; children who are home educated; those from non-traditional family structures; cared for by other family members; or who are young carers. All of these groups are vulnerable and may well receive support from EPs, yet if scales specify who provides each support type such groups are unlikely to be able to benefit from the scale's use. The current scale which considers the style of support, rather than the source would allow a wider range of children to benefit from the scale's usage (providing it is further validated in groups where such vulnerable children are represented).

Figure 11: Comparison of sources of support across scales

Scale name	Source of support							
	Parents	Relatives	Siblings	Non-Relative adult	Teachers	Peers / classmates	School friends	Close friends
SSQC	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		
SSSC	✓				✓	✓		✓
SSSS	✓				✓	✓		✓
CASSS	✓				✓	✓	✓	
Current findings	✓	✓	✓	✓	?	✓	✓	✓

In developing the initial pool of scale items careful consideration was given to the structure and response format. A Likert scale was used as the response format. These have certain limitation and benefits; if there are too many options for responding, participants may

struggle to understand the difference between ratings, while if only binary (agree /

disagree) options are given, this reduces variance in the measure meaning that more items

would be needed to establish appropriate levels of variance in the scale (DeVellis, 2012).

The number of item responses also determines whether or not participants can give

'neutral' responses; furthermore, having too many response options can increase random

error, due to participants being unclear what the subtle difference is between ratings.

Typically, Likert scales utilise between 5 and 7 response options as these are said to balance

fine-gradation, subtlety and psychometric quality (Furr, 2011). Therefore, this was the

response format used in the current scale, with five possible options. This is a strength of

the current work as the response format was clear, consistent and maintained a reasonable

range of possible responses. Whereas the SSSC (Lipski et al., 2014) can be criticised for the

complexity of the response format; the SOPSS's structure is relatively straightforward and

during all pilot sessions and data collection session there was never a query from children as

to how to answer or respond to a scale item.

The development of the item pool (within the 'substantive validity phase') linked directly to

the analysis of the data from phase one. This is a strength of the initial scale development,

as an in depth investigation of the construct of interest was made, with a sample of the

intended population. Therefore, all ideas and aspects of the construct of perceived social

support came from the children themselves. In comparison to the previous literature that

has detailed development of similar scales in the USA the current study used more in depth

and qualitative approaches (Lipski et al., 2014; Gordon-Hollingsworth et al., 2016).

Previously, questionnaire type measures have been used to collect information about social

support sources and types. However, using questionnaires may have missed certain

subtleties or nuances of the children's experiences; children are not able to share and create ideas, in the manner that was possible during the 'focus groups' in the current project (Gordon-Hollingsworth et al., 2016). Furthermore, previous theoretical developments and scale validations have been conducted within the USA; the UK literature is lacking with regards to the perception of social support in children. The exploration which informed the development of the scale in this phase of the project is a strength in terms of ensuring the developed scale items reflected the experiences of the children themselves.

The selection of items was pilot-tested in a small group of the target population to establish face validity and ensure clarity; this item pool was compared to a theoretically driven check list of appropriate characteristics of scale items, resulting in an initial full scale of 23 items. The scale's validity was enhanced by every item being checked and approved by both a pilot study and a group of key stage two teachers as it was 'seen' to make sense to members of the target group.

One criticism of this stage could be made regarding the number of scale items used in the initial scale. There was a contradiction between the needs of the children as participants and the needs of the scale development process. It is suggested that a wide range of possible items is preferable generally in scale development (DeVellis, 2012) however, researchers who detail the needs of children involved in research tend to highlight the need to keep any measures succinct, or risk children becoming bored and filling in responses 'randomly' (Alderson, 2001; Christensen & James, 2008; Shaw, Brady, & Davey, 2011). This is the response that I became aware of during the pilot testing; children became frustrated by multiple items which they said 'ask the same thing' (although the wording of items was different, it tapped the same experience) and the group consensus was that they would

leave answers blank, or would check their answer to the similar item and copy the response across. Overall, it seemed that the scale would not therefore benefit from a range of items intended to tap the same construct. However, in terms of a pure scale development procedure, this may be an area for further consideration in perceived social support research with this age group; individual scale items could potentially be improved by another approach to this dilemma where a greater range of items tapping each dimension could be used.

All data collection sessions during phase two were run by the researcher. This ensured consistency in the delivery of information, access to support and clarification, as well as being able to personally ensure that children were giving their consent to participate. As a process for data collection, this meant that it was more time consuming than posting the scale out to schools. However the benefits were that all children completing the scale received appropriate support, the ethical considerations were upheld (in that children were freely able to withdraw as wanted) and there were opportunities to follow up with children who were absent during one session at another time point. Furthermore, all data collection was complete by the end of the school term; had this been left to schools at such a busy time of year, full participant participation may not have been practical. The instructions and delivery of the scale were consistent across all groups and the environment within which it was completed was also kept consistent (e.g. quiet and individual responses, rather than being given an opportunity to confer with peers or friends).

Evaluation of existing scales from abroad could have been undertaken, however this may have missed some of the subtlety of experience of social support across cultures as novel

aspects of support would not have been uncovered were existing tools put through validation.

The analysis of the scale performance is positive. The sample was found to be appropriate for principle components analysis to be run on the data. There were significant relationships within the data, and there were no concerns with sphericity or multi-colinearity. To assess whether there were significant relationships between items within the scale item-total correlations were assessed; at this point three items were removed from the analysis, due to not significantly correlating with the total scale:

- Q1: I do special things with someone close to me

- Q5: I spend time with people who enjoy similar things to me

- Q10: I am still in touch with people I met when I was little.

Interestingly, these were also items that were mentioned by a few children to be 'tricky' to answer. Therefore there may have been a lack of clarity in these items meaning responses were not as reliable as for other items within the scale. Adaptations could be made to these items and trialled in further testing of the scale.

Following removal of the those three questions the overall internal consistency of the scale was 'good' (α=.87); furthermore in analysis of alpha values for each individual scale item, no further items were removed at this point, as they would not significantly enhance the overall alpha value. Sphericity and multi-colinearity were deemed to be appropriate in this data. These results are comparable to other validated scales in the USA; such as the SSSS.

The underlying structure revealed a five component solution to be appropriate. The underlying component structure was sought in order to gain further understanding of the

support styles experienced and this has been clearly revealed in 3/5 components; the final

two components are less distinctive, which may be partly due to the relatively low number

of items (three items) loading onto each of these components. Addressing this will be

discussed in the overall discussion (Chapter 6). The underlying structure of the SOPSS did

not match the thematic analysis of phase one, however, this is not an unexpected finding, as

given that the items are presumed to measure the overall construct of 'perceived social

support' it is challenging within thematic analysis to gain a precise organisation of the

underlying construct; hence the benefit of the use of mixed methods where this structure

can be ascertained through the statistical analysis of the scale.

The components which were revealed cannot be compared to the previously developed

scale for children in the USA; this is because whereas the current scale was determining the

component structure based upon the style of support, the USA scales have uncovered factor

structures relating to the source of support, which is not applicable in the current scale

development. Component 1 relates to the perception of support in times of challenge, this

subscale has a good level of internal consistency (α=.75) and the clarity of items loading

onto this component is strong. This is the children's' belief that they are supported when

things are difficult for them; either when 'bad' events occur, or when they are facing a

difficult situation. Component 2 is perception of love and caretaking; this also has good

internal consistency (α=.75) and can be described as children feeling that other people care

for them and demonstrate their affection for them. The third component indicates that

children are provided with enjoyable experiences; this component's internal consistency is

less strong with an alpha value of .56. Similarly component 4 has an alpha value of .57 and is

described as relating to perceptions of support coming from positive interactive

relationships with others. The final component (consistency of support) also has good internal reliability (α=.69) and relates to the idea that children feel other people are aware of their needs and are accessible.

Overall, phase two has developed an initial scale to measure the perceptions that children in KS2 have of their social support. This has been found to have good overall reliability, and three of the five subscales also have good reliability. The final two subscales' reliability is lower than would be ideal and therefore further investigation and adaptation of these subscales may be needed, as the measure is developed in the future.

The Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing (AERA, 1999) give guidance as to the validity that is required in the development of a measure:

- Evidence based on test content

- Response processes

- Internal structure

- Relations to other variables (convergent and discriminant evidence)

- Test criterion relationships

- Validity generalization

- Evidence based on the consequence of testing

The validity in terms of the test content is strong as the items were developed from in depth exploration with the target population; were selected and adapted jointly with a subset of that population and were also approved by professionals in the field. The validity in response processes has come from the child and teacher feedback relating to the scale (which will be discussed further in the overall discussion). The internal structure of the scale

is good, although there is further development needed in terms of two of the subscales. There has not been a comparison to other tests of perceived social support, as it was discussed in the introduction how these cannot be assumed to be relevant for the current population; furthermore the scale developed into a measure of the perceived style of social support and there are no other known scales which tap only this construct. The consequences of testing will also be discussed in the overall discussion. However, overall the initial validity and reliability of the proposed scale is good, and can be further addressed through the recommendations discussed in Chapter 6.

Chapter 6   Overall discussion

Both phases of the research added to the existing literature and have approached the understanding of perceived social support in novel ways. Previous research has not undertaken such a detailed exploration of children's perceived social support; and has therefore looked at the relationship between limited sources of support and other domains of children's lives. For instance Ikiz and Cakar (2010), looked at social support from friends, family members and teachers, but did not extend the sources of support to other domains of life. There has also been a tendency in past research to look at social support within schools and close family, without considering the wider network (Guess & Bowling, 2014; Holder & Coleman, 2009). Also, a number of studies focus solely on social relationships within schools and have not considered wider support; although certain support may not given within the school, it can potentially still influence experiences within school (Danielsen et al., 2010; Guess & Bowling, 2014; Prunty et al., 2012; Sylvester et al., 2014; Verschueren et al., 2012).

There has been relatively little research looking at children's perceived social support in the UK; the research conducted by Gristy (2012) is one of the only qualitative research studies which has gained student perspectives in this area, although this research was conducted with teenage participants. Whereas the focus of Gristy's (2012) research was looking at the perspectives of social relationships within school, the current project extended the investigation to all sources of support; Gristy's research was therefore not an exploration of wider sources. Both the current research and Gristy's work demonstrated the importance of peer relationships; however the current project extended this investigation beyond the

school environment. Therefore, the current research has brought about the elicitation of

children's perspectives in a manner that has not previously been detailed, and with a new

age group for UK research. Previous work has elicited student perceptions of support from

the use of static measures such as questionnaire surveys; although such approaches have

their benefits, they do not allow any additional or different sources or styles of support to

be discussed, other than those assumed to be relevant. For instance, Gordon-Hollingsworth

et al. (2016) used questionnaire measures, where each source of support was already

detailed and comments could be made on the existing source assumed by the researchers

to be valuable.   In comparison, group work allows new ideas to come to light, and to be

discussed, criticised or developed jointly (Dockrell, Lewis & Lindsay, 2000), which has

certainly been the case in the phase one research. The children involved went beyond those

sources previously discussed and talked about their support in new and unexpected ways.

In terms of sources of support, this research revealed new sources of support for children,

which were not evident in the literature search undertaken during this project. For instance,

children discussed the value that animals have in making them feel well supported; the

exploratory and open nature of the methods used allowed the children to take the

discussion in new directions. The children also discussed support from toys as being

beneficial in their lives, and support from both of these novel sources was deemed as

relevant to them as support from people. The research has also confirmed that children

perceive commonly posited sources to be supportive in the UK as well as the USA; for

instance friends, parents and siblings. In addition to those sources discussed in USA research

(such as Harter, 2012 and Zimet et al., 1988), wider family including Aunts, Uncles, Cousins

and Grandparents were valued. Children also felt that friends developed from a range of

environments provided them with support, not only the previously used distinctions between school friends/ peers but also:

- 'Best' friends

- School friends

- Club or team

- Family friends

- Family members of friends

- Holiday friends

It was important for children that friendships were not categorised just as a generic friend, rather they preferred that reference was given to the type of friendship, and 'best' friends particularly had significant meaning for them. Although, it appeared that the support received by 'best' friends was not qualitatively unique to those relationships. In addition children cited adults from the community as being supportive, including: Neighbours; Adults from school; Adults from clubs/ tuition and Other professionals (for instance nurses and doctors when children had medical needs). These extended sources of support fit with those uncovered by Dubow and Ullman (1989) who worked with elementary school children in the USA and explored a similar range of additional sources of support including 'coaches' and friends of their parents.

Overall these findings have shown that children in the UK have a wide breadth of sources of support and that some of these have not been mentioned in the literature uncovered in the current review. Therefore, although support sources from the USA were confirmed to be important to children in the UK, there were also many extensions to the children's perceived supporters.

Although phase one did not intend to investigate the relative importance of different support sources, discussion was elicited relating to how valued different sources were through the use of the Field Map data collection method. Interestingly, support from staff in school was somewhat contentious and was not as vital as had been previously assumed; for instance the CASS (Malecki & Elliott, 1999) and the SSSC (Lipski et al., 2014) specifically ask about support from teachers. This indicates how important exploratory work is, particularly when researching issues in a novel context, or with a different population. It is correct not to assume that the experiences of children in the USA and the UK would be the same as one another and similarly it cannot be assumed that the findings from adult literature can be directly applied to a child population within the same cultural context.

The understanding of KS2 children's perceptions of their social support informed the development of the scale in phase two of the project. This scale was developed with the experiences and preferences of the children at the centre of the process and as a result all items, structure and style of the scale were discussed with the pilot sample from within the intended population, as well as with class teachers. The initial assessment of this scale is positive; having removed items on the basis of the statistical analysis of the scale, the remaining items have shown an underlying structure of five relevant components; three of which have good levels of reliability and the other two have moderate reliability, which is worth investigating in more detail in future research. The overall scale has been found to demonstrate good internal consistency / reliability as well as positive face and construct validity. When compared to previously developed scales in the USA, the SOPSS has a different basic structure, as it does not attempt to include both the source and the support type within the scale. Instead it bases the questions around support style; as children

reported that as long as they were aware they could gain a certain type of support, it was not important which specific source this was available from. This is a fundamental difference between the SOPSS and some of the other existing scales; as the SSSC (Harter, 2012), the SSSS (Kerres Malecki & Elliott, 1999), the CASSS (Kerres Malecki & Kilpatrick Demary, 2002) and the SSQC (Gordon-Hollingsworth et al., 2016) all seek to understand both the source and type of support that is perceived.

6.1.1 Strengths, limitations and future directions for the current research

In terms of the exploratory research, one of the criticisms of this phase of the project was that the sessions could have lasted longer, as some children had more aspects of their social support that they wished to discuss. Loss of relationships which formally provided support was frequently raised, however, exploration of this issue was beyond the scope of the current work. It would be beneficial however to look at the impact of losses upon the child's perceived support; for instance whether this support sought elsewhere. More time could also have been spent discussing how support could be improved, in order to inform practice relating to children of this age in educational settings and at home. The inconsistency in children's perceptions of support from school staff is particularly interesting as it is often assumed to be a relevant source of support for children; further understanding of the reasons underlying these differences in perception, and more time spent considering how to improve this is a possible extension of the project for future investigation; it would also be beneficial to consider more appropriate data collections methods to support children's discussions of these issues, as this was a weakness of the current exploration.

Further research or analysis of the relative value of different sources or styles of support would also contribute to a fuller picture of the experience of the children. Again, this was touched on through the use of the Field Maps (where placement of supporters indicated their relative importance) and this information would be useful to consider further to establish which sources and styles are essential for children to perceive their support to be positive; perhaps establishing whether there is a 'good enough' or sufficient level for social support in terms of sources or styles. Further exploration of appropriate methods to uncover children's experiences of their social support would also be valuable.

It is also important to go on and further evaluate the validity and reliability of the SOPPS. There are a number of stages to this process:

- Further refinement of scale items.

- Completion of the scale by a large sample of KS2 children.

- Test-retest reliability (in a sample size of 100+, over a 6 month time period, on the recommendation of Kline, 2000).

It was not possible within the timescale of the current project to evaluate the test-retest reliability across the dimensions that Kline (2000) defined; however future research would benefit from this aspect of reliability to be further investigated across a long time period and with a large sample. It is also important that consideration is given to the items that were removed and those that were relatively weaker in the scale to see whether re-wording of these may improve the quality of the scale. Further validation in another large sample of KS2 children would benefit from more diversity in the sample and perhaps this could be attained through different geographical locations which may contain different cultural

groups. Consideration of using 'opt-out' consent forms would also be of benefit, as those who return the forms may be a self selecting group and in 'opt-out' consent, more diverse groups of children may be involved in the research. In the longer term, the scale would benefit from being finalised and then standardised; so that scores relating to high / moderate / low perceptions of social support can be established from looking at the child's individual score as well as the scale being used dynamically.

If this future standardization were to take place, the scale could be used in many domains, at a range of different levels. It is possible that the questionnaire could be used as a 'screener' for children within schools to establish whether individual children were feeling well supported. It would be useful in this context if the scale could be developed into an electronic 'application' as this would allow the scale to be completed by individual children, but through the use of an 'app' each question and response format could be read aloud to them, thereby maintaining the approach with which it has been used in the current validation. In order to get full understanding of the child's perspective however, as a tool it could be most effectively used by EPs during either casework or statutory work to establish children's views and perspectives. This is because EPs have the skills to elicit further detail from conversations with the young person. Although a static score may indicate that further support is required, a dynamic discussion around reasons for individual ratings, in combination with eliciting the sources from which support is perceived, would give a more in depth understanding of the child's lived experience. It may be that after being used as a screening tool within schools, EP support may be requested in order to explore any issues in a more detailed and holistic manner.

6.2 Impact of the research

6.2.1 Impact of the research within schools.

I was surprised to realise that my research had immediate impact upon the schools within which I was undertaking the project, even before the results have been reported back to the school staff and parents. A number of members of school staff approached me in relation to the research, to discuss how it had changed their thinking. It was highlighted that teachers and school staff felt they did not often consider the wider network of support for children; comments were made that they considered how supportive the parents of certain pupils were and noticed if a child did not appear to have established friendships, however little consideration had previously been given to who else was involved in their students' lives. One teacher commented to me that they had realised they also made assumptions about the support for their students, and had not previously considered the individual perspectives as to whether they felt well supported, but had made assumptions based on their own observations about 'availability of support'.

 In one school I was also invited to meet with both the head teacher and a member of the pastoral team, as they had seen a child who they felt very 'stuck with' had been a part of my research. Although these members of staff expected that I would not be able to share information with them, they wondered whether there would be a retrospective way of gaining permission for the information to be shared from my involvement. As part of the ongoing work they were doing with the child, they had become aware that they had not

looked at his own perceptions of his life and experiences and felt that the measure I was developing might help them enhance their understanding. Given the trust that the children had placed in the research process, I did not feel that ethically it would be appropriate to share any information about this child, even if further consent was sought. However, this gives some positive feedback as to the potential utility of the scale.

School members of staff, such as Head teachers and Class teachers were also keen to hear about the point at which the scale would be validated and could be used by them independently; as they believed it could give them new insight into children's lives in a way that they had not previously considered. They also felt that understanding of any gaps in support, particularly for vulnerable students, could allow them to target interventions in school. In one school, a teacher told me that they felt the scale would be useful at the start of the school year, to get a better understanding of the students in their class and to allow them to give time or additional support to any students who did not perceive their support to be positive. It was interesting that these discussions were initiated by school staff, as I was leaving after having completed sessions with their students. Staff members felt that they were already considering ways that social support could be targeted in PSHE classes, or circle time lessons, as a result of becoming aware of perceived social support as an area of children's lives. Positive feedback also came from all schools, particularly during the 'focus group' research that children had enjoyed the sessions, felt listened to and wanted me to return to speak to them again. It was common for children to report that they had 'fun' during the research and many children also asked whether they could come and have another session. A number of comments were made that they enjoyed having time to talk and to be heard by an adult and many children felt that it was an unusual, but enjoyable

experience to have such attention given to them either at school or at home. Kellett and Ding (2006) emphasised the importance of collecting information directly from a child's perspective (rather than making assumptions based on adult viewpoints); not only did this approach add knowledge to the existing literature, from the feedback it is clear that talking directly to the children was very much appreciated, but was not considered a typical situation for children to be in. There are clear implications from the comments that children may not always felt they are truly heard, or given the time to fully express their views, which has implications for children within home, school or wider community environments; not only listening to a child, but truly hearing what they have to say is essential, as well as not making assumptions as to a child's perspective.

In one school, the SENCo was prompted to reconsider the needs of a particular child, following the response of a parent to being offered the chance to participate in the project. Rather than not returning the consent form, it was returned, with the entire detail scribbled out and a statement written across it in bold letters (signed by the parent) saying that they would not under any circumstances allow their child to participate. This reaction to the research has meant that the SENCo has become more aware of this child and their family and are conscious that they might need to consider what might be happening to create such a strong response to the offer of participation.

Another interesting and unexpected pattern, which would be valuable to consider in schools was that children demonstrated relief and openness when they were told that nobody that knows them would have access to their data. Children often demonstrated concern in both phases of the work, that if people they knew would have access to their discussion or scale responses, they would adapt these so as not to 'hurt people's feelings'. This also means that

the results found in this research, are authentic opinions, but that in other realms, children may not have felt able to talk so openly about their experiences. It is also an important reminder that in working with children it should always be ensured that they truly understand the manner in which any information they give to an adult will be used, so that they are fully informed before agreeing to complete an activity. Indeed, recent research by Ruiz-Casares and Thompson (2016) has discussed in detail the challenges of ensuring children are truly giving informed consent when participating in research. They suggest that the use of visual informed consent forms, developed by children, may be a more appropriate method to gain informed consent, than verbal or written methods. Although it seemed that the children involved did understand that information would remain confidential and did give informed consent, it may be that for some of the children involved benefit would have come from additional visual consent forms to support their understanding of the research process.

6.2.2 National impact

In terms of the impact of the current research for the practice of EPs nationally, there is a clear remit in terms of the statutory work which is carried out by Local Authority based EPs. The Children and Families Act (2014) and the new SEN 0-25 code of practice both emphasise the need for statutory processes to fully engage children and their families. Thereby giving a new child centred approach to the introduction of the Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) processes. Not only does the current work answer the given research questions, it also highlights the benefit that children feel when they are given flexible and open opportunities to be heard and to do things 'their way'; comments which stuck with me came

from children who discussed how adults ask them to do things in a certain way, and are often inflexible in their approach, unwilling to discuss other ways of doing things and want the children to 'complete the task' without question, rather than be creative and complete the task in their own way, or with their own ideas. This has implications for person centred practice where EPs may be able to bring additional insight as to the experiences of the child through the discussion of their perceived social support. The use of the tool dynamically may be an appropriate first step to allow children to consider the types of support that they have available to them, and those which they feel they require additional support. This is an aspect of children's lives that is not formally discussed during EHCP needs assessments, however given that any additional funding could be used to give more support for children, or to develop their skills in social relationships, the use of the SOPSS could potentially be a beneficial addition to the usual exploration of children's views.

6.2.3 Impact on my professional practice

Although further work needs to be undertaken in order to fully validate the scale in a wider population, this work has contributed a novel tool which can be used dynamically with children (i.e. not in a standardised or 'scored' manner). The use of sentence starters and prospective techniques can be beneficial in the work of EPs to develop new understandings of the child's lived experience. Many of the tools that I use in my work as an EP relate to 'talking point' items, rather than standardised scales. I feel that the SOPSS could be used in this regard until the point at which further validation is complete. Often the dynamic use of static tools is valuable as it can give a non-threatening tool to initiate discussion of sometime sensitive issues. Therefore, the use of this scale in my practice will be valuable in

its current form to talk to children about their experiences and perceptions of the social support from those around them. The use of the field map as another tool for discussion has also been of value; particularly in its blank form as an alternative for a scaling type approach to discussion of social support. Overall the research has made me more aware of children's individual perceptions and how these can be elicited in an appropriate manner. Furthermore, the results have made me consider my use of language more carefully when working with others; the use of the phrase 'people who help you' was regularly part of my vocabulary, but on reflection, after becoming aware that children view pets and toys as sources of support, my language use was at risk of constraining the children's thinking.

Personally, conducting this research has impacted upon my practice and professional standpoint in unexpected ways. Although I believed myself to be a child centred practitioner, the comments and enjoyment reported by the children involved has made me reassess and reconsider my own practice. At points where perhaps I felt I had listened to children and appreciated their view, I may not always have given them as much space and flexibility to truly portray their experiences. Furthermore, whereas I am aware of reporting back next steps and ideas to the adults involved in casework with a child, I am not always as consistent in my explanations and delivery to the child themselves. How much importance for the children stemmed from truly feeling listened to, considered and appreciated by those around them made me reflect that I could enhance my practice in this area. I plan to ensure that the child themselves is given more opportunity to be involved in discussion of steps forward; or at least that they are given a clearer understanding of the ways in which the adults intend to support them, as a result of the EP involvement and exploration.

I plan to feedback to all schools on the findings of my research, I believe that this will allow enhanced understanding of children's experiences within school settings, even if initially only on a small scale. In further applying my work to the profession I will seek opportunities to share my research both within my new team and within the local authority where the research took place; this may influence practice of EPs in the locality. In the future I would like to continue to develop this scale, alongside my role as a local authority EP in line with the next steps for future development, which have already been discussed. It is also important to me to acknowledge that this research of children's perceptions of social support, as well as ways of eliciting their views, will go on to implicitly influence me throughout my practice as a professional Educational Psychologist.

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   10.1207/s15327752jpa5201_2.

Appendices

Appendix 1 Sources and search terms used in the literature review

Search engine/ database	Key words (with Boolean operators, in multiple combinations)	
EBSCO E-journals	Social support	Childhood
Science Direct	Perceived/perception	Social world
Taylor and Francis Online	Children	Social network
British Education Index	Students	SEN
Education Research Complete	Young people	Adolescents
British Library EThOS	Friendship	Teenagers
SAGE Open	Support	School
University of Exeter catalogue search	Culture	Measurement
	Scale	Relationships

Appendix 2 Certificate of ethical approval

GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

UNIVERSITY OF EXETER

St Luke's Campus
Heavitree Road
Exeter UK EX1 2LU

http://socialsciences.exeter.ac.uk/education/

CERTIFICATE OF ETHICAL APPROVAL

Title of Project: Exploring the social support of children in key stage two (7-11 years). The development of a novel tool to elicit children's perceptions of their social support.

Researcher(s) name: Sadie Mattinhouse

Supervisor(s):   Tim Maxwell, Shirley Larkin

This project has been approved for the period

From: 01/09/2015
To: 30/10/2016

Ethics Committee approval reference: D/15/16/01

Signature: Date......05/08/2015................
(Dr Philip Durrant, Chair, Graduate School of Education Ethics Committee)

Appendix 3 Parental information sheet and consent form

Information sheet – please keep this sheet for reference.

Exploring the social support of children in key stage two (7-11 years).

The development of a novel tool to elicit children's perceptions of their social support.

My name is Sadie Mattinhouse and I am Trainee Educational Psychologist. I am starting my third and final year of my doctorate and this research is being conducted as part of my thesis. I am currently on placement with LOCAL AUTHORITY and have a full and clear DBS certificate. My doctorate is being completed at Exeter University.

Details of Project

This project is split into two parts. Children will be randomly selected to take part in each section.

Part one: I will be researching children's social support; who is important in their lives and how do these people help them? I will be working with groups of 3 -4 children and some children will also meet with me individually, if they need extra help to answer questions. The children will be asked to draw pictures, work with a partner and talk to me about the important people in their lives. I will then randomly choose some of these children to ask some extra questions about what they think about the questionnaire which I develop.

Part two: using the information from part one of my study, I will develop a questionnaire designed to look at what children think about the support that is available to them from other people. Children who take part in this section of the study will be asked to fill in the questionnaire.

The information from this research will be written into my thesis for my doctorate. When I write about my research, all participants will be anonymous, so nobody will know which information was said by which child. Your child and your child's school will not be named in my thesis.

Please note: while I am talking to the children, I will audio record the sessions using a Dictaphone; this is in order to ensure I do not miss any important information. The files from this Dictaphone will be transferred and stored on a password protected computer.

Contact Details

For further information about the research, please contact:

Name: *Sadie Mattinhouse*

Postal address: Haighton 2.22, College of Social Sciences and International Studies, St Luke's Campus, University of Exeter, Heavitree Road, Exeter, EX12LU

Email: *sm602@exeter.ac.uk*

If you have concerns/questions about the research you would like to discuss with someone else at the University, please contact:

Dr Tim Maxwell, Haighton 2.22, College of Social Sciences and International Studies, St Luke's Campus, University of Exeter, Heavitree Road, Exeter, EX12LU. (01392) 725 984.

Please return this consent form to your child's school as soon as possible.

Consent

I have been fully informed about the aims and purposes of the project.

I understand that:

- It is not compulsory for my daughter / son to participate in this research project and, if s/he does choose to participate, s/he may at any stage withdraw* their participation;
- If my daughter/son decides not to take part in the research, any information from them will be removed from the research. However, once the data has been made anonymous, it will no longer be possible to remove their data.
- I have the right to refuse permission for the publication of any information about my daughter / son;
- any information which my daughter / son gives 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 my daughter / son gives, may be shared between any of the other researcher(s) participating in this project in an anonymised form;
- all information my daughter / son gives will be treated as confidential;
- the researcher(s) will make every effort to preserve my daughter's / son's anonymity.
- My child may be randomly selected to take part in phase one or phase two of the research.

*Note: * when research takes place in a school, the right to withdraw from the research does NOT usually mean that pupils or students may withdraw from lessons in which the research takes place.*

_____   _____

(Signature of parent / guardian)   (Date)

_____

(Printed name of parent / guardian)

_____   _____   _____

(Printed name of child)   (Date of birth of child)   (Year group)

Does your child have any additional needs, which it is important for me to be aware of?

No ☐   Yes ☐

Please detail additional needs
here:_____
_____
_____
_____

(I will work with the school to ensure that children with additional needs are able to participate in the research)

Appendix 4 Information sheet for children

UNIVERSITY OF
EXETER

GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

Information sheet for students
(This information will be read to each group of children who are take part in the research)

Why am I here?

My name is Sadie Mattinhouse, I am training to be an Educational Psychologist, I work with lots of children and families in schools. I need to do some research for my course and I sent letters out to the parents of children in your school. Someone who looks after you has said it is ok for you to work with me.

Do I have to talk to you?

No, you can stop talking to me at any time, all you have to do is tell me. You won't be in trouble and no one will make you talk to me if you don't want to.

What are we going to do?

Some children have been picked at random to talk to me (group 1). Other children have been picked at random to fill in a questionnaire (group 2).

Group 1: we will do some activities in small groups, some of them will be drawings, some will be writing and some will be talking to me, or to other children in your group. I want to hear about all the important people in your lives. I also want to hear about why these people are important, who they are, how they help you and how this help makes you feel.

Group 2: I will ask you to fill in a questionnaire. A few of you will come and speak to me to tell me what you think of the questionnaire and whether you would change anything about it.

Who will hear about the things I tell you?

- I will only tell people about things you say if I think you might get hurt, or someone else might get hurt.
- When I write about the things lots of children tell me, I won't use their real names and I won't tell people the name of your school. This means anything you tell me will be confidential.
- We will agree in our small groups that we won't talk to other people about the things other students say during the work.
- After I have spoken to lots of children, I will write about what I have found out. It is helpful for adults to understand how children feel. The things I learn from you will be written into a thesis. This is like a big project, which gets marked by my university.

What if I feel upset?

- Sometimes talking about important people can be upsetting or difficult. In every school there is an adult who will be happy to talk to you if you want to. In your school
  _____ has said they are happy to talk to any children. This adult can also speak to me and ask me any questions you might have.

Revised March 2013

Appendix 5 Topic guide

<u>**Topic guide**</u>

<u>Prior to session:</u>

*print copy of info sheet for each *write name of school contact on bottom

<u>During session:</u>

1. Dictaphone – start recording
2. Hand out info sheets
    a. Read info sheet –point out information sharing agreement
3. Scene setting and ground rules – expectations

(E.g. one person talks at a time/ be polite/ everyone's ideas are interesting / no right or wrong / encourage others to join in / be honest / would like everyone to join in)

- Questions?
- Worries?
- Happy to stay? (remind can leave at any time, with no implications)
- Verbal consent from each child

1. Individual introductions
    a. Sticker each and pencils – I do one too
    b. Name and something(S) they like to the tape and their age

2. Hand out circle sheets and sticker dots

3. We are going to talk about:

    a. Important people in your life
    b. Who make you happy
    c. Who help you
    d. Who make you feel good
    e. How you are supported by others

4. Everyone is different
5. Learn from you, want to know what you think
6. Non-one except people in this room will know that you have said these things
7. Show examples of the sheet

Time given to work on sheets → Joint discussion of children's experiences.

Close with thank you and time for further questions. Check they are happy to be involved and for me to keep their sheet.

Appendix 6 Example of completed Field Map worksheet

Completed worksheet, female student aged 8.3
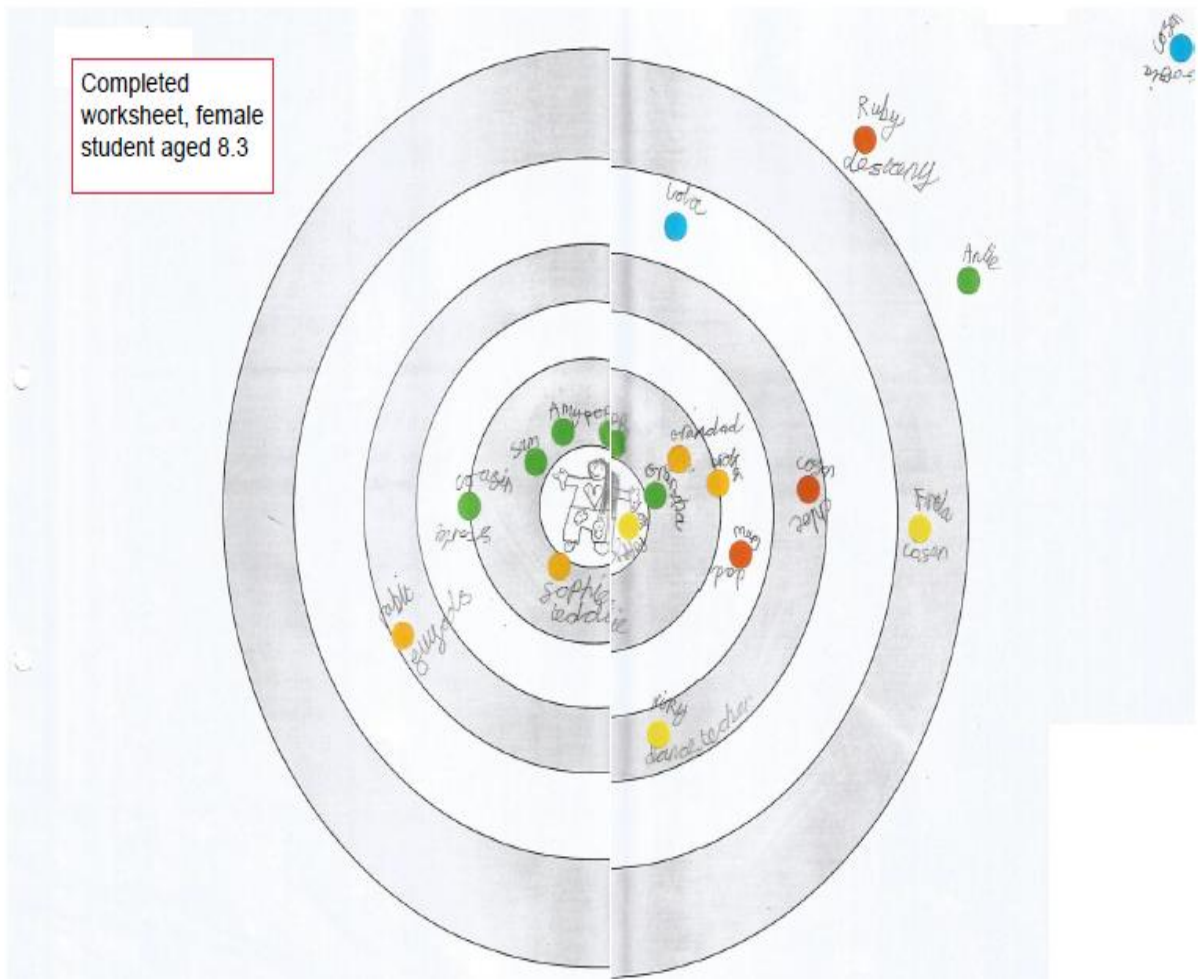
Appendix 7 Guide to process of thematic analysis

The six stage process of thematic analysis.

Table taken from Braun and Clarke (2006), p.35.

Table 1: Phases of Thematic Analysis

Phase	Description of the process
1. Familiarising yourself with your data:	Transcribing data (if necessary), reading and re-reading the data, noting down initial ideas.
2. Generating initial codes:	Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code.
3. Searching for themes:	Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.
4. Reviewing themes:	Checking in the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (Level 1) and the entire data set (Level 2), generating a thematic 'map' of the analysis.
5. Defining and naming themes:	Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells; generating clear definitions and names for each theme.
6. Producing the report:	The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis.

**Appendix 8 Example of the coding process**
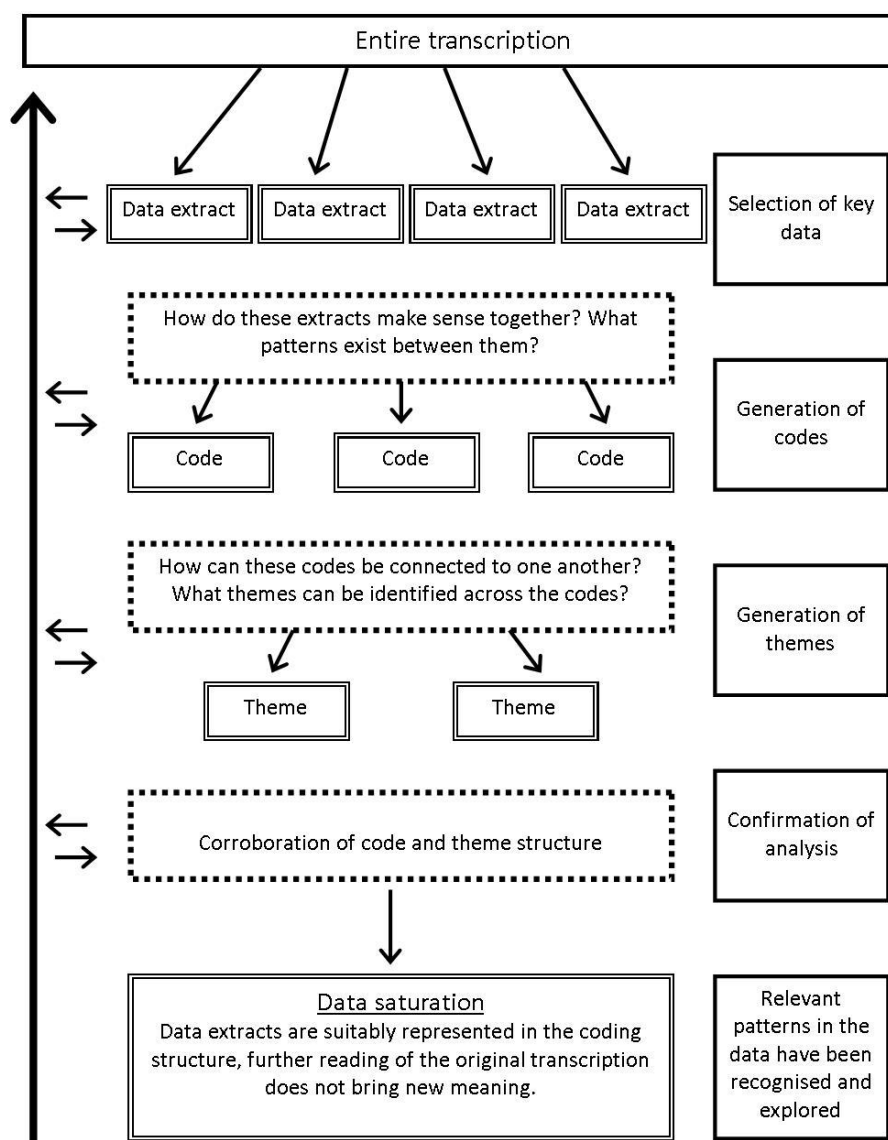
Appendix 9: Family levels of analysis

Super-ordinate Theme	Source of support
Theme	Family
Code level 3	Close / Extended
Code level 2	Biological / Step / Aunt/Uncle / Cousin / Grandparent
Code level 1	Parents / Siblings / Partners of close biological family
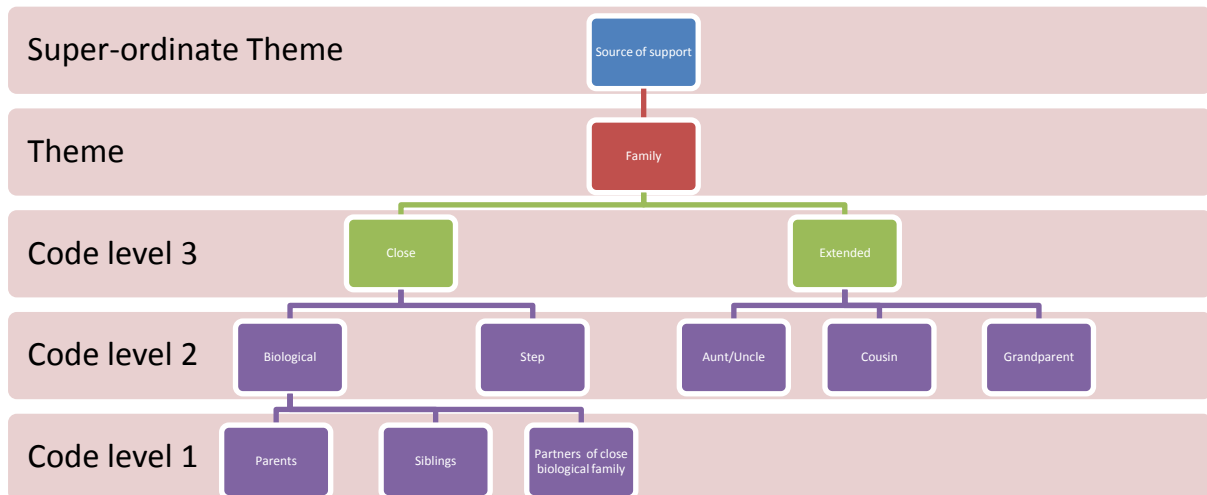
Appendix 10: Friends levels of analysis

Super-ordinate Theme	Source of support
Theme	Friends
Code level 3	Best / School / Club / team / Family friends / Friends' family member / Holiday / Other
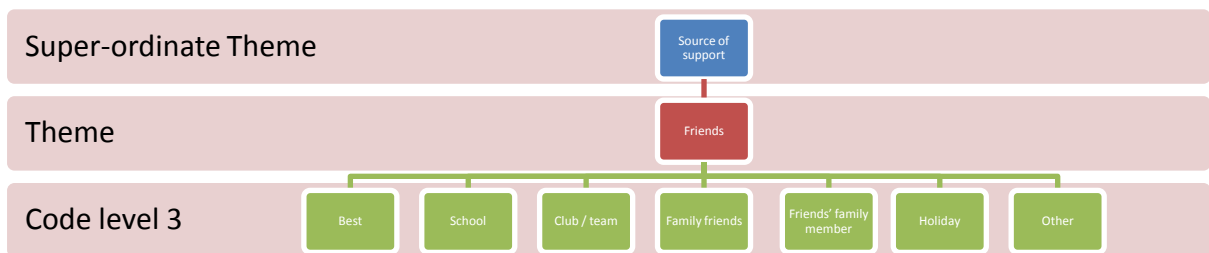
Appendix 11: Community levels of analysis

Super-ordinate Theme	Source of support
Theme	Community
Code level 3	Neighbours · Adults in school · Club/ tuition · Other professionals
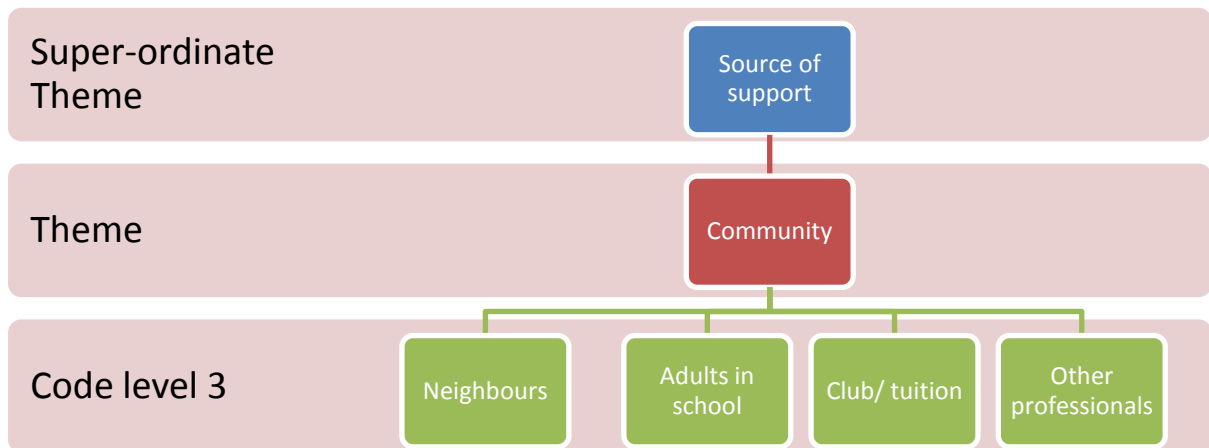
Appendix 12 Support style levels of analysis

Super-ordinate theme			Support style			
Theme			Affection			
Sub-theme	Physical interaction	Encouragement	Compliments	Praise	Love	

Super-ordinate theme			Support style		
Theme			Entertainment		
Sub-theme	Fun	Sense of humour	Taken on trip		

Super-ordinate theme			Support style			
Theme			Generosity			
Sub-theme	Given item	Time and effort	Learning	Practical help	Sharing items

Super-ordinate theme			Support style			
Theme			Cohesion			
Sub-theme	Shared interests	History	Special habits	Similarity with source

Super-ordinate theme	Support style		
Theme	Dependability		
Sub-theme	When negative event	Reliable	Trust

Appendix 13 Checklist for strong scale items

Criteria	Criteria met?
1. Item is clear and unambiguous	
2. Wording is concise	
3. The item's reading level is appropriate for the (average ability of) target audience	
4. The item contains one piece of information or idea and is not double-barreled	
5. It does not contain multiple negatives	
6. The phrasing 'makes sense' with the possible responses	
7. There is not a mixture of positively and negatively worded items across the scale	
8. Sentences starters used are varied (if many items share the same starting phrase, this can lead to meaningless correlations between items)	

Appendix 14 Link between theme and scale items

Super-ordinate theme of Support Style		
Theme	**Sub theme**	**Question (number in scale)**
Consideration	Listened to	If I want to talk, someone listens to me (16)
	Noticed	Someone notices if I don't have anyone to play with (11)
	Understood	People understand me (6)
	Thought of	People show that they think about me when I'm not with them (22)
Affection	Physical interaction	I can get hugs from someone when I want them (23)
	Encouragement	When I am trying to do something hard, other people cheer me on (20)
	Compliments	People say kind things to me (3)
	Praise	When I do something well, someone is proud of me (8)
	Love	I feel loved (18)
Entertainment	Fun	I have fun with other people (9)
	Sense of humour	Someone I know makes me laugh (14)
	Taken on trips	I visit places I like (4)
Generosity	Given item	I get given things that I like (7)
	Time and effort	People spend time with me (21)
	Learning	I can get help with my work (19)
	Practical help	Someone takes care of me (17)
	Sharing items	Other people share their things with me (2)
Cohesion	Shared interests	I know people who enjoy similar things to me (5)
	Shared History	I am still in touch with people I met when I was little (10)
	Special habits	I do special things with someone close to me (1)
Dependability	When sad or bad happens	If something bad happens, someone helps me (12)
	Trust	I have people I can trust (13)
	Reliable	I can rely on the people I know (15)

Appendix 15 Adapted scale after pilot testing

What do you think of your social support?

Instructions

I am a researcher from the University of Exeter and I want to know how children aged 7 to 11 years old feel about their social support (the way that other people help you and support you). I have already spoken to some children about this and someone at home has signed a form to agree that you can help me. You don't have to fill this in and you can tell me or your teacher if you don't want to. You can also ask for help if you need it.

I won't tell anyone who knows you, your answers. I want to know what you <u>really really</u> think so that I can learn how to help other children. There are no right or wrong answers, it is just what you think and it isn't a test.

How to answer the questions

There are 23 questions to answer. Please can you **circle one answer.** If you make a mistake, just put a cross through it and circle the right answer.

Some children told me that animals and special toys help them. So if the question says 'someone' you could answer this about an animal, toy, or person, or a mixture.

1. **I do special things with someone close to me**	Always	Often	Sometimes	Hardly ever	Never
2. **Other people share their things with me**	Always	Often	Sometimes	Hardly ever	Never
3. **People say kind things to me**	Always	Often	Sometimes	Hardly ever	Never
4. **I visit places I like**	Always	Often	Sometimes	Hardly ever	Never
5. **I spend time with people who enjoy similar things to me**	Always	Often	Sometimes	Hardly ever	Never
6. **People understand me**	Always	Often	Sometimes	Hardly ever	Never
7. **I get given things that I like**	Always	Often	Sometimes	Hardly ever	Never
8. **When I do something well, someone is proud of me**	Always	Often	Sometimes	Hardly ever	Never
9. **I have fun with other people**	Always	Often	Sometimes	Hardly ever	Never
10. **I am still in touch with people I met when I was little**	Always	Often	Sometimes	Hardly ever	Never
11. **Someone notices if I don't have anyone to play with**	Always	Often	Sometimes	Hardly ever	Never
12. **If something bad happens, someone helps me**	Always	Often	Sometimes	Hardly ever	Never
13. **I have people I can trust**	Always	Often	Sometimes	Hardly ever	Never
14. **Someone I know makes me**	Always	Often	Sometimes	Hardly	Never

laugh				ever	
15. I can rely on the people I know	Always	Often	Sometimes	Hardly ever	Never
16. If I want to talk, someone listens to me	Always	Often	Sometimes	Hardly ever	Never
17. Someone takes care of me	Always	Often	Sometimes	Hardly ever	Never
18. I feel loved	Always	Often	Sometimes	Hardly ever	Never
19. I can get help with my work	Always	Often	Sometimes	Hardly ever	Never
20. When I am trying to do something hard, other people cheer me on	Always	Often	Sometimes	Hardly ever	Never
21. People spend time with me	Always	Often	Sometimes	Hardly ever	Never
22. People show that they think about me when I'm not with them	Always	Often	Sometimes	Hardly ever	Never
23. I get hugs from someone when I want them	Always	Often	Sometimes	Hardly ever	Never

About you

What is your name?

How old are you?

Which school do you go to?

Please tick a box. I am a......

Boy	Girl	I don't want to say

Thank you very much for filling in this questionnaire!

Appendix 16 SEN needs and ages of children who participated

Phase 1:

Age	Frequency
7	6
8	9
9	5
10	9
11	2

Phase 2:

Age	Frequency
7	16
8	47
9	53
10	46
11	29
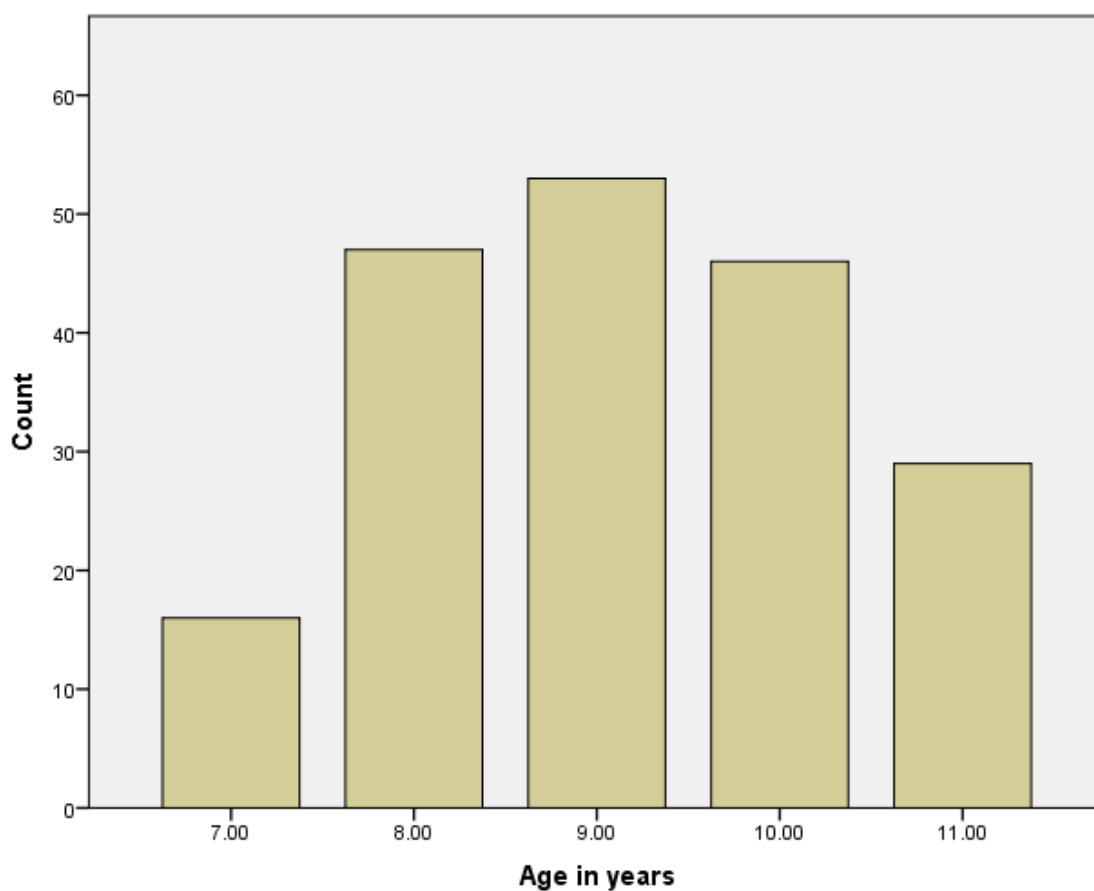
Need	Number of children this category applied to
Communication and interaction	4
Cognition and learning	5
Social, emotional and mental health	4
Sensory and / or physical	3

Appendix 17 Tests of normality for each item

Tests of Normality

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov[a]			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Q1 I do special things with someone close to me	.215	190	.000	.875	190	.000
Q2 Other people share their things with me	.219	190	.000	.886	190	.000
Q3 People say kind things to me	.252	190	.000	.873	190	.000
Q4 I visit places I like	.212	190	.000	.884	190	.000
Q5 I spend time with people who enjoy similar things to me	.207	190	.000	.858	190	.000
Q6 People understand me	.217	190	.000	.884	190	.000
Q7 I get given things that I like	.204	190	.000	.881	190	.000
Q8 When I do something well, someone is proud of me	.357	190	.000	.706	190	.000
Q9 I have fun with other people	.313	190	.000	.752	190	.000
Q10 I am still in touch with people I met when I was little	.251	190	.000	.814	190	.000
Q11 Someone notices if I don't have anyone to play with	.159	190	.000	.912	190	.000
Q12 If something bad happens, someone helps me	.213	190	.000	.848	190	.000
Q13 I have people I can trust	.347	190	.000	.726	190	.000
Q14 Someone I know makes me laugh	.331	190	.000	.742	190	.000
Q15 I can rely on the people I know	.233	190	.000	.832	190	.000
Q16 If I want to talk, someone listens to me	.211	190	.000	.892	190	.000
Q17 Someone takes care of me	.404	190	.000	.627	190	.000
Q18 I feel loved	.357	190	.000	.654	190	.000

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	Q1 I do special things with someone close to me	Q2 Other people share their things with me	Q3 People say kind things to me	Q4 I visit places I like	Q5 I spend time with people who enjoy similar things to me	Q6 People understand me	Q7 I get given things that I like	Q8 When I do something well, someone is proud of me	Q9 I have fun with other people	Q10 I am still in touch with people I met when I was little	Q11 Someone notices if I don't have anyone to play with	Q12 If something bad happens, someone helps me	Q13 I have people I can trust	Q14 Someone I know makes me laugh	Q15 I can rely on the people I know	Q16 If I want to talk, someone listens to me	Q17 Someone takes care of me	Q18 I feel loved	Q19 I can get help with my work	Q20 When I am trying to do something hard, other people cheer me on	Q21 People spend time with me	Q22 People show that they think about me when I'm not with them	Q23 I get hugs from someone when I want them	Totalscore
N Valid	191	191	191	191	191	191	191	190	191	191	191	191	191	191	191	191	191	191	191	191	191	191	191	191
Missing	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mean	2.58	2.41	2.79	2.68	2.31	2.70	2.66	3.34	3.35	2.32	2.12	2.94	3.34	3.32	3.08	2.55	3.48	3.39	2.75	2.54	3.13	2.49	2.80	66.2408
Std. Error of Mean	.066	.068	.068	.074	.066	.073	.067	.071	.059	.087	.090	.074	.067	.065	.064	.071	.066	.072	.087	.085	.063	.086	.098	.87652
Std. Deviation	.908	.941	.933	1.025	.919	1.005	.931	.977	.818	1.207	1.247	1.027	.926	.905	.885	.987	.917	.998	1.204	1.177	.874	1.191	1.355	12.11310
Variance	.824	.885	.882	1.050	.844	1.010	.866	.955	.669	1.456	1.555	1.055	.857	.819	.782	.975	.840	.996	1.450	1.386	.763	1.420	1.837	146.742
Skewness	-.378	-.288	-.532	-.512	-.470	-.503	-.273	-1.477	-1.240	-.831	-.122	-.738	-1.332	-1.280	-.672	-.403	-1.892	-1.931	-.667	-.538	-.631	-.601	-.789	-.797
Std. Error of Skewness	.176	.176	.176	.176	.176	.176	.176	.176	.176	.176	.176	.176	.176	.176	.176	.176	.176	.176	.176	.176	.176	.176	.176	.176
Kurtosis	.230	.142	-.186	-.159	-.243	-.163	-.229	1.648	1.373	-.220	-.300	-.086	1.150	1.180	-.128	-.111	3.101	3.533	-.487	-.464	-.306	-.448	-.609	.041
Std. Error of Kurtosis	.350	.350	.350	.350	.350	.350	.350	.351	.350	.350	.350	.350	.350	.350	.350	.350	.350	.350	.350	.350	.350	.350	.350	.350
Range	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	57.00
Minimum	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	29.00
Maximum	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	86.00
Skew	-2.147	-1.635	-3.03	-2.91	-2.674	-2.86	-1.553	-8.37	-7.05	-5.07	-0.682	-4.2	-7.58	-7.28	-3.82	-2.29	-10.8	-11	-3.79	-3.06	-3.59	-3.42	-4.49	
Kurtosis	0.8274	0.4063	-0.532	-0.453	-0.693	-0.466	-0.655	4.698	3.922	-0.629	-2.657	-0.246	3.285	3.373	-0.367	-0.316	8.859	10.09	-1.391	-1.324	-0.874	-1.279	-1.739	

NB: the following appendices show the SPSS output following the removal of three scale items (as detailed in the analysis section).

Appendix 18 Inter-item correlations

Correlation Matrix

a. Determinant = .002

Appendix 19 KMO and Bartlett's test

KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.877
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	1097.855
	df	190
	Sig.	.000

Appendix 20 Variance explained for extracted components

Total Variance Explained

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings[a]
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total
1	6.307	31.536	31.536	6.307	31.536	31.536	3.718
2	1.475	7.373	38.909	1.475	7.373	38.909	3.802
3	1.155	5.775	44.684	1.155	5.775	44.684	3.207
4	1.091	5.454	50.138	1.091	5.454	50.138	2.577
5	1.006	5.029	55.167	1.006	5.029	55.167	3.294
6	.914	4.569	59.735				
7	.848	4.240	63.975				
8	.796	3.982	67.957				
9	.760	3.802	71.759				
10	.726	3.629	75.388				
11	.690	3.449	78.837				
12	.620	3.099	81.935				
13	.612	3.058	84.993				
14	.552	2.761	87.754				
15	.493	2.467	90.221				
16	.485	2.424	92.644				
17	.455	2.276	94.921				
18	.405	2.023	96.944				
19	.335	1.677	98.621				
20	.276	1.379	100.000				

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

a. When components are correlated, sums of squared loadings cannot be added to obtain a total variance.

Appendix 21 Scree plot for PCA
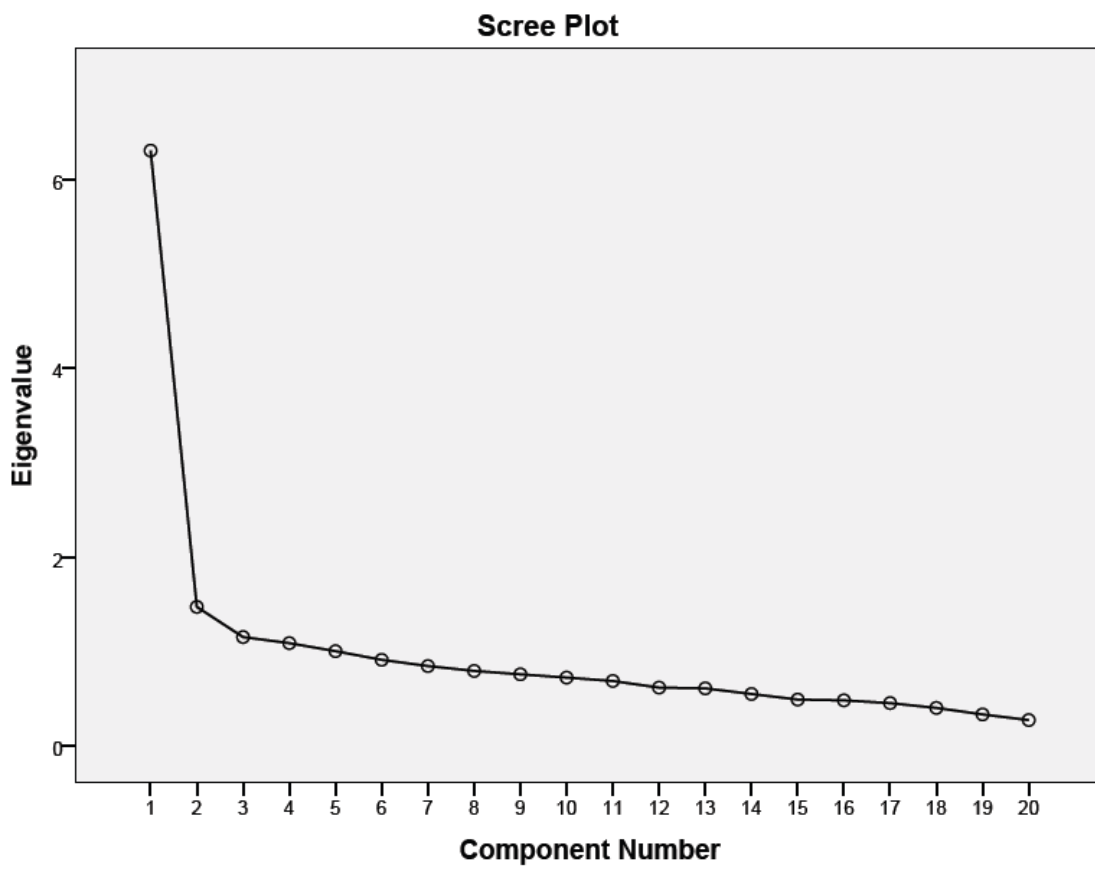
Appendix 22 PCA Pattern matrix

Pattern Matrix[a]

	Component				
	1	2	3	4	5
Q19 I can get help with my work	.815				
Q20 When I am trying to do something hard, other people cheer me on	.603			.322	
Q12 If something bad happens, someone helps me	.535				
Q22 People show that they think about me when I'm not with them	.533		.317		
Q18 I feel loved		.786			
Q8 When I do something well, someone is proud of me		.665			
Q17 Someone takes care of me		.664			
Q23 I get hugs from someone when I want them	.430	.616			
Q21 People spend time with me		.318			
Q7 I get given things that I like			.772		
Q14 Someone I know makes me laugh			.661		
Q4 I visit places I like			.636		
Q11 Someone notices if I don't have anyone to play with	.324		.336		
Q2 Other people share their things with me				.837	
Q3 People say kind things to me				.536	
Q9 I have fun with other people				.405	
Q13 I have people I can trust					.769

Pattern Matrix[a]

	Component				
	1	2	3	4	5
Q6 People understand me					.680
Q16 If I want to talk, someone listens to me	.314				.411
Q15 I can rely on the people I know					.398

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.
Rotation Method: Oblimin with Kaiser Normalization.

a. Rotation converged in 17 iterations.

Appendix 23 Reliability for entire scale

Reliability Statistics		
Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.879	.882	20

Item-Total Statistics

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance If Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Squared Multiple Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha If Item Deleted
Q2 Other people share their things with me	55.41	120.603	.322	.195	.879
Q3 People say kind things to me	55.03	117.031	.503	.363	.873
Q4 I visit places I like	55.14	120.648	.286	.197	.880
Q6 People understand me	55.12	119.045	.368	.237	.877
Q7 I get given things that I like	55.15	119.231	.396	.250	.876
Q8 When I do something well, someone is proud of me	54.48	116.198	.523	.396	.872
Q9 I have fun with other people	54.47	117.414	.567	.391	.872
Q11 Someone notices if I don't have anyone to play with	55.71	112.778	.524	.371	.872
Q12 If something bad happens, someone helps me	54.88	115.102	.545	.410	.872
Q13 I have people I can trust	54.48	118.261	.448	.343	.875
Q14 Someone I know makes me laugh	54.49	117.669	.492	.358	.874
Q15 I can rely on the people I know	54.73	115.742	.610	.456	.870
Q16 If I want to talk, someone listens to me	55.26	113.676	.640	.498	.869
Q17 Someone takes care of me	54.34	116.934	.523	.456	.873
Q18 I feel loved	54.43	117.167	.462	.388	.874
Q19 I can get help with my work	55.06	115.425	.435	.306	.876
Q20 When I am trying to do something hard, other people cheer me on	55.27	114.189	.499	.357	.873
Q21 People spend time with me	54.69	118.287	.480	.306	.874
Q22 People show that they think about me when I'm not with them	55.33	111.916	.587	.439	.870
Q23 I get hugs from someone when I want them	55.02	110.709	.546	.455	.872

Appendix 24 Reliability for component 1

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.745	.749	5

Item-Total Statistics

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Squared Multiple Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
Q19 I can get help with my work	10.09	11.797	.455	.212	.721
Q20 When I am trying to do something hard, other people cheer me on	10.30	11.505	.515	.282	.698
Q12 If something bad happens, someone helps me	9.90	11.869	.577	.339	.681
Q22 People show that they think about me when I'm not with them	10.36	11.441	.514	.273	.699
Q11 Someone notices if I don't have anyone to play with	10.73	11.273	.499	.262	.705

Appendix 25 Reliability for component 2

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.745	.752	5

Item-Total Statistics

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Squared Multiple Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
Q18 I feel loved	12.73	9.139	.537	.312	.690
Q8 When I do something well, someone is proud of me	12.78	9.168	.551	.316	.686
Q17 Someone takes care of me	12.64	9.407	.556	.333	.686
Q23 I get hugs from someone when I want them	13.32	7.531	.537	.294	.703
Q21 People spend time with me	12.99	10.312	.411	.183	.733

Appendix 26 Reliability for component 3

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.559	.564	3

Item-Total Statistics

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Squared Multiple Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
Q7 I get given things that I like	6.00	2.421	.371	.150	.456
Q14 Someone I know makes me laugh	5.35	2.385	.414	.176	.393
Q4 I visit places I like	5.98	2.289	.329	.111	.528

Appendix 27 Reliability for component 4

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.566	.569	3

Item-Total Statistics

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Squared Multiple Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
Q2 Other people share their things with me	6.14	2.087	.346	.120	.513
Q3 People say kind things to me	5.75	1.976	.399	.164	.427
Q9 I have fun with other people	5.20	2.287	.387	.153	.454

Appendix 28 Reliability for component 5

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.689	.692	4

Item-Total Statistics

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Squared Multiple Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
Q13 I have people I can trust	8.34	4.741	.472	.252	.624
Q6 People understand me	8.98	4.810	.382	.154	.685
Q16 If I want to talk, someone listens to me	9.13	4.300	.544	.337	.576
Q15 I can rely on the people I know	8.60	4.779	.502	.271	.608