

The use of solution focused approaches by Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators (SENCOs) and school staff in supporting pupils with Behavioural, Emotional and Social Difficulties (BESD): A Collaborative Action Research Approach.

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degree of Doctor of Educational, Child and Community Psychology,
June 2015.

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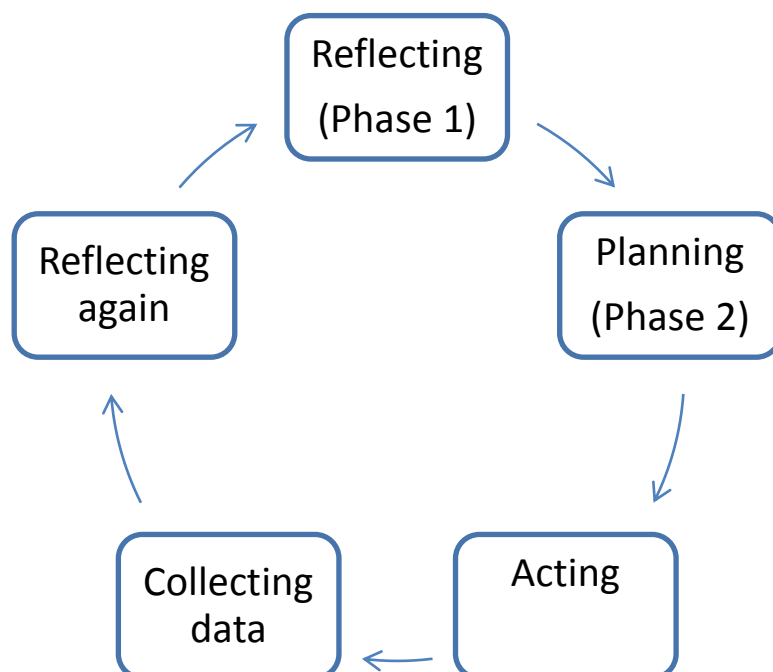
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Overview

This study was split into two phases: phase one (described in paper one) and phase two (described in paper two). The research design used approaches from Collaborative Action Research, and I took on the role of the facilitator. The study used planned and frequent reflections of the participants' professional practice and of new practices to enhance outcomes. I worked in collaboration with Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators (SENCOs), facilitating the meetings with teachers and teaching assistants (TAs) when using solution focused approaches (SFAs) for supporting pupils with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties (BESD).

The process of reflecting on current practice was explored through a series of semi-structured and focus group interviews with the participants (phase one). This was then extended in phase 2 which aimed to explore ways in which the SENCOs could incorporate continuous reflections with fellow members of staff to inform and enhance practice using SFAs.

Figure 1: Approaches adopted from the Collaborative Action Research Cycle



Adapted from Schmuck (2006)

There are few studies (Simm and Ingram, 2008; Brown et al, 2012) which have focused upon how SENCOs can play a role in working collaboratively with school staff (teachers and TAs) using SFAs. SFAs have been increasingly adopted in educational practice over the years. This study aimed to examine how the use of SFAs may affect the practice of SENCOs when they collaboratively work with teachers and TAs to meet the needs of pupils with BESD. A solution-focused approach may be used as a flexible method for supporting pupils with BESD, whilst at the same time serving as a preventative strategy for challenging behaviour.

Data collection for phase one included semi-structured interviews of the six SENCOs who agreed to partake (for phase one and two of the study). Data was also gained from a focus group interview of eight teachers as well as a focus group interview for six TAs. Data analysis for the semi-structured and focus group interviews used thematic analysis (using Braun and Clarke's six stages, 2006).

Data collection for phase two included field notes, reflective accounts from participants, group evaluation of the implementation of the jointly formed Action Plan and semi-structured interviews of the Collaborative Action research approach. Data has been analysed using thematic analysis and the realistic evaluations framework, developed originally by Pawson and Tilley (1997).

Research design: Collaborative Action Research

This study used approaches from collaborative action research which examined the effects of using SFAs on the practice of SENCOs. The overall aim sought to establish collaborative enquiry with myself as the facilitator and the SENCOs in their role with other members of staff. The collaborative work aimed to support SENCOs and staff learning in order to gain a greater understanding of contextual issues and concerns that impact on daily classroom practice, as well as the knowledge generated by teachers within the collaborative inquiry communities (Goodnough, 2010). CAR has been identified as incorporating reflections, contributions and a sustained dialogue. Emphasis is placed upon the contextual and communicative conditions which are important for establishing research partnership.

My involvement as the researcher

My role as the researcher was to facilitate and guide the participants in their adoption of SFAs in relation to their practice as a SENCo as well as working with fellow member(s) of staff. I defined my role with the participants from the outset as:

- Encouraging collaboration with one another during the study.
- Guiding group tasks and providing a range of probing questions in order to adopt the SFAs.
- Exploring continuous reflective accounts with the SENCos and school staff through visits to each school following each session.

Reflection is frequently referred to during the course of this research. Bond (1985) describes reflection as an important human activity which enables people to recapture their experience and evaluate it. The participants as well as myself as the facilitator were involved in a reflexive process whereby the reflections made were acted upon following the meetings with other staff members as well as the group evaluation. Reflexive analysis has been described as entailing a continuous examination of the practice of research, revealing its assumptions, values and biases (Wilkinson and Wilkinson, 1988).

Model of supervision used during the facilitation meetings

Given my awareness of the often complex process of supervision, which includes differing expectations of the process, I was keen to alleviate any tension which may have led to the with-holding of information as well as the desire to give the “right answer”. There are a variety of conceptualisations which emphasise the need to respond flexibly to the supervisee (Callicott and Leadbetter, 2013). To ensure an effective and good supervisory relationship, as the facilitator I encouraged participants to be open and honest. It was important for trust to develop, for example through ensuring confidentiality of responses as well as enhancing feelings of safety and security (Scaife, 1993).

The model of supervision adopted follows what Scaife (1993) refers to as a General Supervision Framework. As the facilitator, I adopted a supervisory role; this incorporated informing and assessing, enquiring, listening and reflecting. The focus of the discussion included actions, events, knowledge, thinking, planning and feelings. Session meetings involved such a discussion and were audio- recorded with the consent of the participants.

Many Collaborative Action Research projects are long-term and are sustained over a number of years where trust is built between the researcher and the participants (Oja and Smulyan, 1989). Collaborative relationships can be complex in nature and may pose difficulties in conducting research if roles are not clearly established from the outset. I have worked closely with the SENCOs as the Trainee Educational Psychologist (TEP), within the two learning communities concerned. This allowed me to build a trusting relationship with the SENCOs which otherwise would have been difficult to attain. In briefing the participants prior to commencing the study, I emphasised that my role was not to direct and instruct, but to facilitate meetings to gain reflections and views. I clarified that I would collate ideas for the action phase and support the participants during the implementation of the targets drawn from the action phase. This was done to enhance staff learning and professional development through a process of collaborative enquiry (Kemmis, 1982).

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Abbreviations

BESD - Behavioural, Emotional and Social Difficulties

SEBD - Social, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties

EBD - Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties

DfE - Department for Education

CYP - Children and Young People

CAR - Collaborative Action Research

IBP - Individual Behaviour Plan

SENCo - Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator

LSA - Learning Support Assistant

TAs - Teaching Assistants

RQ - Research Questions

SFBT - Solution Focused Brief Therapy*

SFA - Solution Focused Approaches*

EP - Educational Psychologist

TEP - Trainee Educational Psychologist

PSP - Primary Support Partnership

*please note SFA is referred to for its use in educational practice

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Paper 1: The experiences and views of Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators (SENCOs), teachers and teaching assistants in responding to and supporting pupils with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties (BESD).

Abstract

Children and young people (CYP) who have been identified in school as experiencing behavioural, emotional and social difficulties (BESD) and who present with challenging behaviour are commonly offered interventions as a supportive strategy. Responding to challenging behaviour in school settings may vary between schools and typically may be reflected in the behavioural policy of the school. The question arises as to whether supporting a CYP with BESD and responding to the challenging behaviour they may present, is being done in a consistent manner, or whether the two are distinctly considered as an approach to “managing needs” as they arise.

This phase of the CAR approach explored staff views and experiences on supporting and responding to CYP who experience BESD. I sought to explore the current practice of staff members (SENCOs, teachers and TAs) so that insights could be gained on how the needs of CYP with BESD are being met in schools.

Through a series of semi-structured and focus group interviews with the staff, themes from responses revealed interesting findings regarding staff perceptions relating to the emotional needs of CYP and the impact of a diagnosis and parental anxieties. The teaching assistants’ valuable contribution to supporting CYP experiencing BESD as well as class teachers expressing how challenging behaviour impacts on their self-esteem were also key findings in this study. The salient themes have been discussed in detail with reference to psychological theory, as well as implications for phase two.

Key words: Behavioural emotional and social difficulties (BESD); challenging behaviour; exclusion; inclusion; interventions; behaviour management; behaviour policies; school ethos.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Rationale

In a drive to significantly reduce the number of exclusions in primary schools in an area of the south-west of England, the Primary Support Partnership (PSP) has been devised offering funding by the local authority to support schools in the area. The overall aim of the PSP is to facilitate the development of universal interventions across the communities of primary schools and to encourage collaborative work between schools. Some examples of such provisions include staff training in the use of SFAs, the use of the Circle of Adults approach as a joint problem solving method and using appreciative enquiry techniques (see Appendix 5).

How do the objectives relate to this study?

The key question raised from the objectives of the PSP, following monthly meetings with a range of professionals to represent the core strategic group, emerged as: *What is the best way for responding to and supporting children with challenging behaviour?*

Offering support to children and young people who experience BESD and responding to any challenging behaviour they present, may be done in schools. For example, the implementation of a behaviour policy based upon rewards and sanctions is often used as a strategy by schools to respond to behaviour in general. Behaviour support for children who may be perceived as having BESD may come in the form of specific targeted interventions.

The question arises as to whether the responsive strategies for challenging behaviour and the behavioural support interventions (targeted at meeting behavioural, emotional and social needs) are viewed by SENCOs, teachers and TAs as two separate concepts requiring their own “approach” or if a more consistent approach can be implemented.

This study forms the first part of the Collaborative Action Research (CAR) approach where there is an exploration of the experiences and views of SENCOs and school

staff (teachers and TAs) in how they support and respond to the needs of children with BESD who present challenging behaviour in school.

1.2 Gaps in the literature

There appears to be a lack of government guidance with regards to the preventative strategies for pupils with challenging behaviour and how this can be linked to how schools can support such pupils who may have BESD. Both may be done in schools, that is, the implementation of a behaviour policy based upon rewards and sanctions and also interventions to support pupils with BESD. The question arises as to how preventative strategies for challenging behaviour and behavioural support interventions for such pupils, are viewed by SENCOs, teachers and teaching assistants (TAs) and the implication this may have on how school staff approach and intervene with this prominent issue in schools. Furthermore, it raises the question as to how the intervention to support a CYP's behavioural, emotional and social needs translate when they are included back into the class setting. There is a risk that *supporting* and *responding* to CYP with BESD needs to be different, rather than how they can link to facilitate one another for a consistent approach to behavioural issues in a responsive manner.

1.3 Selected literature

The following section critically examines a selection of studies which have considered challenging behaviour of CYP, the term *BESD* as well as the preventative strategies and the use of interventions adopted in schools. A full literature review has also been completed (see Appendix 28).

Defining challenging behaviour

SEBD, EBD, BESD?

CYP who exhibit challenging behaviour, both in school and at home, are typically referred to as having emotional, social and behavioural difficulties. Differing references for describing children who display challenging or disruptive behaviour in schools reflects the implications for research, practice and policy arising from the varying terminology.

The use of the terms behavioural, emotional and social difficulties (BESD) or SEBD (social, emotional, behavioural difficulties) or EBD (emotional behavioural difficulties), have also been criticised for being too vague and for not offering any indication on how the child might behave or the reasons for any particular behaviour (MacLeod, 2010). The terms are often used interchangeably, but all refer to the difficulties experienced by CYP in terms of their emotional, social and behavioural expressions which may manifest as “challenging behaviour”.

MacLeod (2010) describes challenging behaviour as,

“A social event that will have meaning(s) for the individual and be made sense of by those around him or her in different ways”. (p 95)

The complex task of defining emotional, social and behavioural difficulties poses challenges for the validity and utility of the term. Critics have questioned the definition of “normal” (for example MacLeod, 2010) and also whether labels actively contribute to the development of the problems i.e. is it the effect of stigmatisation.

Those who may be described as being “challenging” may also be described as being vulnerable (O’Brien, 2005). The lack of clarity is further compounded by the increasing number of related medical syndromes associated with a particular

behaviour and with terms such as “disengaged”, “disaffected” or “disruptive”. These terms have been associated with diagnosed disorders such as Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD) and Conduct Disorder (CD) (Lloyd, 2003).

The Special Educational Needs Code of Practice (DfE, 2014) has now broadened certain areas of Special Educational Needs (SEN) and replaced the behavioural, social and emotional category with social, emotional and mental health needs. The aim of the replacing the term *behavioural* with *mental health needs* is to place a greater emphasis on the underlying needs of young people, removing the emphasis on behaviour (NASEN, 2014). Cole et al (2005) considered children with BESD as having significant mental health difficulties. The terminology used by individuals (staff and parents) may reflect an individual judgment with maybe one or more people expressing a particular concern. The way in which individuals actively and socially construct the world usually reflects this notion. This study accounts for the varying interpretations of “challenging behaviour” and part of the data collection and analysis involves a collective definition. This is particularly useful for phase two, when the participants are asked to think about a CYP who would fit this description.

In the guidance Pupil Behaviour in Schools (DfE, 2012, page 33) it describes the characteristics of pupils with BESD as:

“Emotional difficulties, behavioural difficulties, emotional and behavioural difficulties, social problems, challenging behaviour associated with learning difficulties and mental health problems.”

The extent to which these terms are easily discriminated by those working with CYP in an educational setting remains uncertain. As there is no formal assessment of BESD, it may be even less clear on what the appropriate strategies to support children or young people presenting with challenging behaviour might be. This will be explored further in the study.

I have used the term BESD to refer to CYP experiencing difficulties in terms of behavioural, emotional and social expressions. This term is referred to by the DfE (2012) for CYP experiencing such difficulties. Although the SEN Code of Practice (DfE, 2014) is now referring to social, emotional and mental health needs (not behavioural), this became statutory in September 2014 (prior to the data collection

for phase one). Views on the change in reference to BESD are nevertheless explored further with the participants.

Policy and educational practice in relation to staff practice of children with BESD

The Steer Report (DfES, 2005) attempted to update the perceptions of child and adolescent behaviour in schools (DfES, 2005). It emphasised the need for a change at the school and classroom level, by, for example, proposing “positive learning behaviour” rather than focusing on misbehaviour. The report also placed emphasis upon the quality of provision for children with BESD, proposing that a shared language be adopted around behaviour for professionals. Recent government policies indicate a move away from this effort of focusing practice concerning child and adolescent behaviour (DfE, 2010; DfE, 2012).

The guidance entitled “*The importance of teaching*” (DfE, 2010) avoids any elaboration on the possible underlying causes for challenging behaviour, for example unmet mental health needs, which may be linked to BESD (Armstrong, 2014). Furthermore, the guidance itself pushes for,

“A culture of discipline and respect, punishment for poor behaviour, exercise of authority by teachers; strengthening measures for excluding children.” (page 32)

The terms *poor behaviour*, *disruptive* and *fear of bullying* are referred to in the guidance (DfE, 2010) along with “challenging behaviour”. The guidance itself refers to the need for a culture of respect and safety, zero tolerance for bullying, clear boundaries, good pastoral care and early intervention. It also mentions reviewing the exclusion process as well as emphasising that the decision for pupil exclusion by the head teacher is not undermined.

In outlining the above, a number of recommendations were given for tackling challenging behaviour. These included increasing the authority of teachers to discipline pupils by strengthening their powers to search pupils as well as for issuing detentions and using force when necessary. Additionally, the expectation is that head teachers will take a strong stand against bullying.

Much of the underlying message concerns the authority and powers for teachers to tackle disruptive and poor behaviour, without fear of repercussions. For example quicker issuing of detention (rather than the existing requirement to give 24 hours notice to parents), allowing physical restraint when it is needed and a rethink on the independent appeals process regarding exclusions for serious offences (scrutinising how children and young people excluded for serious offences are reinstated back into schools), (DfE, 2010).

The guidance also mentions alternative provisions and improving the quality of the provision for children and young people who have been excluded. There is an acknowledgement that alternative provisions serve to meet the needs of vulnerable children and young people. It does however tend to separate excluded pupils from its reference of vulnerable groups. Rather the term “vulnerable group” is used to refer to children or young people who are or have been ill, those who are too scared to attend school or teenage mothers. In light of the SEN Code of Practice (DfE, 2014), it may be appropriate to expand the reference to vulnerable groups to include children and young people experiencing behavioural, social and emotional difficulties, as the category of “mental health” is a new addition to the previous Codes of Practice (now referred specifically to as social, emotional and mental needs).

Measures to promote good behaviour refer to having clear, simple rules, rewards and sanctions, encouraging pupils to take responsibility for improving their own behaviour as well as providing pastoral support (DfE, 2014).

Behaviour policies and their use in schools

The guidance published by the Department of Education, *Behaviour and Discipline in Schools*, (DfE, 2014), offers advice to head teachers and school staff on how to develop school behavioural policies. It emphasises that teachers have the power to discipline pupils for misbehaviour which occurs in school and sometimes outside school. Schools are encouraged to create their own behaviour policies, and this may vary between schools. The guidance states that a behaviour policy should promote good behaviour, self-discipline and respect, interventions for bullying and for ensuring pupils complete the assigned work.

Both the guidance on Behaviour and Discipline (DfE, 2014) and the guidance on the Importance of teaching (DfE, 2010), place an emphasis on the consequence of disruptive behaviour and rewards for encouraging good behaviour. The language used refers to the power and control handed back to the teachers, which implies a perceived sense of break-down in communication between the teacher and the CYP in question. Prevention and early intervention are also salient points raised, with a general outline of behaviour management strategies which could be adopted. There is very little mention on how the CYP is reintegrated back into school, or the use of any type of intervention approaches which schools may typically seek to support a CYP experiencing BESD.

Using interventions to support children with BESD

Early intervention for preventing school exclusion has been a prominent concern for schools as it has been well documented in the recent government guidance (DfE, 2010; DfE 2014). Maguire, Macrae and Milborne (2003) argue that there is a need for early intervention where schools can target “at risk” children as well as prevent the damage of exclusion through promoting emotional, social and mental health in children and young people. There have been studies which have made the link between problems such as emotional, social or educational dilemmas and exclusions (Ball, Maguire and Macrae, 2000; Macrae, Maguire and Ball, 1997; Maguire et al 2003).

Little (1996) put forward that the consequences of any intervention can take time to be realised and that this may even be delayed for several years. The need for viewing schools as places which support emotional growth and emotional literacy has been well documented (Maguire et al, 2003; Sharp, 2001; Elias et al, 1997).

Social and emotional competency is the ability to understand, manage and express the social and emotional aspects which enable the formation of relationship learning and the demands of growth and development (Elias et al, 1997). Improving the links with families as well as enabling children and young people to feel empowered, for example has been mentioned as making a positive difference in schools (Maguire et al 2003).

Maguire et al (2003) suggest that holistic, educative approaches, such as the use of a “Worries Box” or School Councils, are strategies which not only work to reduce exclusions in schools, but also support the emotional needs of all children. They go on to argue that policy changes need to recognise this and that this would serve as a form of prevention rather than an “institutional cure” for preventing exclusions. There is yet to be a holistic approach which could be considered as a long-term attempt at understanding the possible reasons behind the challenging behaviour.

The skills and qualities associated with effective teaching contribute to the development of the child or young person’s social and emotional competencies (Cooper and Cefai, 2011). It has also been suggested that teachers should receive pre-service and in-service training in such approaches and for adopting rigorous evaluation to enable the effectiveness of the intervention.

Cooper and Cefai (2011) argue that the importance of teacher empathy and personal warmth in relation to CYP experiencing BESD cannot be over-emphasised. The authors further claim that part of a “BESD toolkit” is the need for teachers to have robust strategies for setting behavioural boundaries and for maintaining a CYP’s engagement. Cooper and Cefai (2011) reviewed a number of behavioural and cognitive behavioural approaches for facilitating positive behaviour management. They emphasised the importance of the teacher in influencing the pupil’s experience by preventing problems from developing and intervening when they arise, as well as understanding peer influence and the way in which BESD can conceal other learning difficulties.

Educator perspectives of children with BESD

Poulou and Norwich (2002) looked at the relationship between the perceptions of school staff of children with BESD and the decisions they made in their practice. They reported a number of cognitive responses displayed by teachers. These included the perceptions of the nature of the difficulties, an evaluation of their self-efficacy, a sense of personal responsibility for positive outcomes, which all contributed in predicting a teacher’s disposition for helping a child with BESD. It was suggested by the authors that initial teacher training and professional development should involve enabling a flexible positive attitude among teachers towards children

with BESD. They stressed that an emphasis should be placed upon an individual's perception of their self-efficacy.

The theory of planned behaviour (TPB) had also been put forward to probe the possible relationship between teacher attitudes towards an individual or group activity will have an influence on their subsequent conduct with that group (Ajzen, 1991). In terms of perceived behavioural control, it is the extent to which the educators may estimate their behaviour as having an effect on a given situation. This would also depend upon their awareness of the factors that they can or cannot influence (shaped by social norms, experience and social structure of the school system itself) (Armstrong, 2014).

Macfarlane and Woolfson (2013) studied teacher attitudes towards behaviour of children with BESD in mainstream schools. They suggested the TPB provides a useful general explanatory framework. In particular it provides an insight into understanding the variation of attitudes towards children with BESD, and how such attitudes, whether positive, negative or ambivalent can predict inclusive practice.

Initial teacher training, specifically in relation to fostering a positive sense of self-efficacy has been linked to attitudes and pre-dispositions towards inclusion (Poulou and Norwich, 2002; Macfarlane and Woolfson, 2013). Teacher self-efficacy has been related to the effort teachers invest in teaching, the goals they set, the persistence and their resilience during set-backs (Tschannen-Morn and Woolfolk Hoy, 2007).

Teachers may be seen to play a key role in the initial identification, referral and child or family support mechanisms for the CYP in question. It is essential therefore to gain a deeper understanding of how teachers perceive children with BESD as their perceptions are likely to influence their daily interactions with such children, consequently playing a key role in the decision making process about the CYP in question. The TPB puts forward that an individual's attitudes towards a person (for example a child or young person with BESD) is highly likely to influence their subsequent actions (Ajzen, 1991). CYP who present with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties, have been described as some of the most professionally challenging but rewarding individuals to work with (Armstrong, 2014).

Educators' views on the parents of children with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties may also pose implications for how parents and professionals work in partnership. Broomhead (2014) found the parents of children with BESD were deemed to experience chaotic, dysfunctional home circumstances with no boundaries set in place, by educational practitioners. The practitioners felt that this contrasted with the structure, routine and stability offered in schools. Broomhead (2014) found that the "tacit acceptance" of parental norms potentially hindered advocacy for children with BESD, raising questions of whether inclusion was at the top of the agenda for children with BESD. It would nevertheless be important consider the other factors which may impact on home-school liaison such as the attempt made by both in communicating with one another, a parent's perception of the support offered by school and also the level of involvement in their children's education.

Inclusion of pupils with BESD.

As has been mentioned, closely associated with educators' perspectives of children with BESD is the practice of inclusion within the school community.

The implications of diagnoses of disorders such as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and Autism, which has been classified as a high incidence form of BESD (DfES, 2001), have been the psychopathologising of children into certain categories (Graham, 2008). This in turn can be seen to inform school policy and institutional practices, with offers of an "alternative provision" focused on by recent policy initiatives for SEND (DfE, 2010; DfE, 2012). This further raises the question as to whether the existence of Special Schools, Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) and other alternative provisions, are compatible with the notion of inclusion for CYP with ADHD and other categories of emotional, social and behavioural difficulties.

The shift towards policy initiatives such as school league tables, rather than the child's interest per se, has been regarded as a factor in influencing permanent exclusions from mainstream provisions (Armstrong and Hallett, 2012). The term *cognitive dissonance* has been used to describe this conflicted self-awareness (Grieve, 2009).

Glazzard (2011) explored the barriers to inclusion from the perspectives of teachers and TAs. Evidence collected from focus group interviews suggested varied practices within the school (ranging from highly inclusive to highly exclusive) for children with additional needs (including those with BESD). While some teachers worked hard towards developing effective inclusion for children with additional needs, other teaching staff displayed negative attitudes towards these children. Glazzard (2011) found that attitudes towards inclusion, beliefs about role definition, teaching style, the role of the TA and one to one support, were among the factors influencing the perceived inclusion of children with additional needs in mainstream settings.

Macleod (2006) argues that punitive approaches to challenging behaviour are counter-productive, as they construe a pupil is deliberately causing trouble. Punitive or *reactive* approaches have been associated with cultural or political pressures for it gaining popularity (Parsons, 2005). Macleod (2006) explored the views of young people; data suggested that the views held by adults on the causes of troubling behaviour has a direct impact on the experience of the young people. Young people can be seen as being passive victims who may need help, or as being responsible for their own behaviour therefore need punishing for negative behaviour. They could even be viewed as sufferers of a medical condition who require treatment (MacLeod, 2006).

1.4 Research Aims

The research aims for the first phase of this study were:

- To identify the definitions SENCOs, teachers and teaching assistants give to the term “challenging behaviour”.
- To identify the preventative strategies adopted in schools in response to the behaviour of children with BESD, in a rural area of south west England.
- To identify the use of interventions by SENCOs, teachers and teaching assistants in supporting children with BESD, in a rural area of south west England.

1.5 Research Questions

Research Question 1

How do SENCOs, teachers and TAs define challenging behaviour and the characteristics and needs of CYP with BESD?

Research Question 2

What are the experiences of SENCOs, teachers and teaching assistants in supporting and meeting the needs of pupils with BESD?

Research Question 3

What are the experiences of SENCOs, teachers and teaching assistants in responding to children with BESD who present with challenging behaviour?

Chapter 2: Methodology

2.1 Research design

This research study adopted qualitative methods for data collection. Phase one was exploratory, as the data included the views and experiences of the participants. The data gained from phase one was then used to inform the formation of the action framework which was developed in the second phase of this study (described in paper two).

Phase one gained the perceptions, experiences and views of the participants. By adopting an interpretive design, as the researcher, I sought to understand the subjective world of the individuals, where reflections are analysed from the viewpoint of the individual (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2003). As a small scale action research approach, this study explored actions and meanings rather than causes.

2.2 Philosophical underpinnings

As an exploratory design, the experiences, perceptions and views of the participants were gained. This takes on a social constructionist position, where the ontological perspective would assert *reality* is based on a subjective interpretation, where human realities cannot be mapped in a definitive way (Norwich, 2000). The epistemological perspective would therefore be viewed in terms of the discourse about the world (social processes of communication, conflict and negotiation). This position puts forward that there is no objective knowledge and understanding. Rather it is based upon the subjective interpretation of experiences, views and perceptions of the individuals.

2.3 Participants

All the primary schools who were listed as working together as part of the Primary Support Partnership (PSP) were sent a letter addressed to the head teacher explaining the rationale of the study as well as the nature of involvement from the school staff (SENCOs, teachers and TAs) (see Appendix 2).

It was anticipated, given the number of SENCOs from the two learning communities (where one SENCO may cover up to four small primary schools), that between six to

eight SENCOs would be able to participate in the study for both phases. The number of SENCOs who did confirm their participation totalled six.

A focus group interview was planned for teachers and a separate one for a group of TAs. Their participation was for phase one of the study only, as an exploration of their experiences in schools was required. I anticipated six teachers and six TAs would participate. The total number of teachers who did participate was eight and the number of TAs was six.

2.4 Procedure

Letters were sent to the primary schools in the two learning communities working as part of the PSP, addressed to the head teachers. The two learning communities involved were in a rural area of the south west of England (see Appendices 2 and 3). The number SENCOs within the two learning communities to cover the SENCO role in all the primary school totalled eight, as some SENCOs had the role for a number of schools which formed part of a federation (typically four schools). The SENCOs were also approached on an individual basis so the nature of the study and their potential involvement could be explained in more detail.

Six SENCOs from the eight agreed to take part for both phases of the study. The semi-structured interviews took place in SENCOs' designated school and lasted between one to one and a half hours.

The SENCOs were debriefed again prior to gaining written consent (See Ethical considerations section). Interviews were audio-recorded, ready to be transcribed verbatim for the data analysis.

Following the recruitment of the SENCOs for both phases of the study, the schools were approached regarding the teacher focus group and the TA focus group. One school, who was keen to adopt the use of SFA in the school made arrangements for the teachers and TAs to be available (after school) to participate in the focus group interviews.

The focus group interviews took place on different days after school. The teacher focus group lasted for one and a half hours and the TA focus group, for one hour.

As with the interviews for the SENCoS, the focus group interviews were audio-recorded so that they could be transcribed verbatim.

Semi-structured interviews (with each SENCo)

The semi-structured interviews aimed to seek the views and experiences of each SENCo who all agreed to participate in phase two. A semi-structured approach for the interview was adopted as it allowed participants to have the opportunity to elaborate on their views if they wanted to. A structured more formal style, using closed questions would have been more appropriate for a study aiming to gain an overall picture of the population studied. As this was a small scale research study, it was more appropriate to use a semi-structured method, as it incorporated a more conversational form, allowing for a certain degree of steering (in relation to the research topic), but where the discussion was within a broader area, appropriate to the participant (Pawson and Tilly, 1997).

Semi-structured interviews also allow for a set of prepared questions to be asked, with the opportunity for the participant to elaborate on their response using probe questions. Probe questions may be in the form of asking *Can you go over that again? Or what is your personal view on that?* (Robson, 2011). The interviewee is then able to expand on responses when the researcher feels he/she has more to give.

Using responses from individuals based on their experiences and perceptions can be seen to assert that there can be no objective “factual” descriptions of the social world. Using the interview method, Finlay (1998) puts forward that multiple realities exist rather than a single reality. This perspective endorses the positive impact of subjectivity (rather than viewing it in terms of bias or subjective interpretation). During the semi-structured interviews, engaging in reflexive activity directly allows the researcher to identify with the participants. The researcher is then able to better understand the views of the participants.

Interview schedules were formed using Tomlinson’s Hierarchical focusing method. (Tomlinson, 1989). This is described in the next section.

Teacher and TA focus group interviews

A focus group interview was used for a group of eight teachers and a separate one for a group of six TAs. Focus groups were used with each set of participants as it allowed for the interaction within the group to help guide the discussion (Cohen et al, 2003). The discussions were led by the participants with an overall topic and guiding questions (which were also semi-structured) in relation to the research questions and interview schedules (please refer to the next section for details on the interview schedules).

The use of focus groups involves a technique of using an in-depth group interview where participants are selected because they are a purposive sample of a specific population. One distinct feature of a focus group interview is its group dynamic, allowing for a range of data generated through social interaction of the group (Thomas et al 1995). Focus groups could provide information about a range of feelings individuals have regarding certain issues, as well as illuminating differences (Rabiee, 2004). The role of the interviewer could be regarded more in terms of the “group moderator”. This may involve the skills of managing existing relationships or to create an environment where participants feel relaxed and are encouraged to explore feelings, views and ideas about certain issues (Rabiee, 2004)

Interview schedule: Tomlinson’s hierarchical focusing (1989)

The interview schedules (see Appendix 1) were formed based on Tomlinson’s Hierarchical Focusing method (Tomlinson, 1989) for both the semi-structured interview and the focus group interviews. Given the interpretive nature of the study through the exploration of people’s views and experiences, this could lead to great variation in the extent to which people distinguish what are facts and what are values (Tomlinson, 1989). Using hierarchical focusing as an interview method allows for reflexivity. It incorporates the use of openness-closeness, from an open general, conceptual approach which allows the participant to contextualise their accounts.

Tomlinson’s hierarchical focusing method uses evidence of specific facets of active cognition. The idea is that concept-driven (top-down processes) from the perceiver interacts with data-driven or bottom-up processes grounded in external reality. Many such processes occur beyond the reach of conscious awareness (Tomlinson, 1989).

The use of interviewing as a method of data collection is done so by a way of eliciting cognitive resources (Powney and Watts, 1987).

The strategy used for hierarchical focusing (Tomlinson, 1989), is summarised in Figure 2. Figure 3 summaries the overarching concepts this study sought to explore in relation to the research questions. Figures 4, 5 and 6 highlight each concept being broken down further (top-down); questions were formed as open ended as possible to allow for a bottom-up data analysis, fulfilling the openness-closeness idea behind the method.

Figure 2: Method for Tomlinson's hierarchical structure (1989)

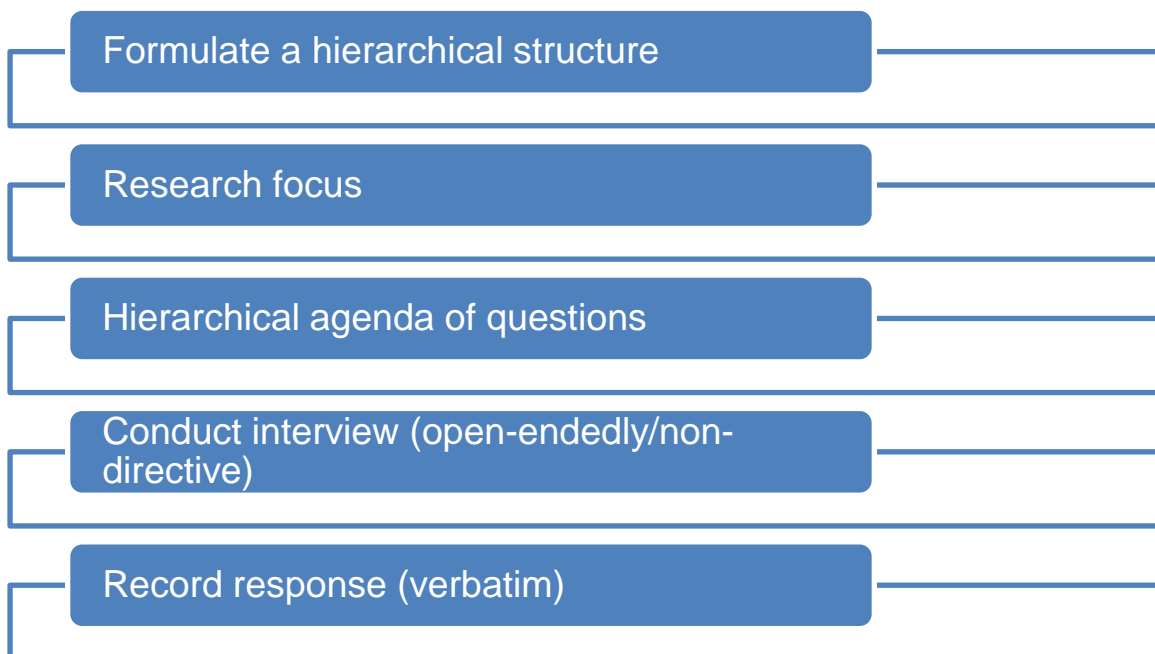


Figure 3: Overarching key concepts (from interview schedule based on Tomlinson's Hierarchy)

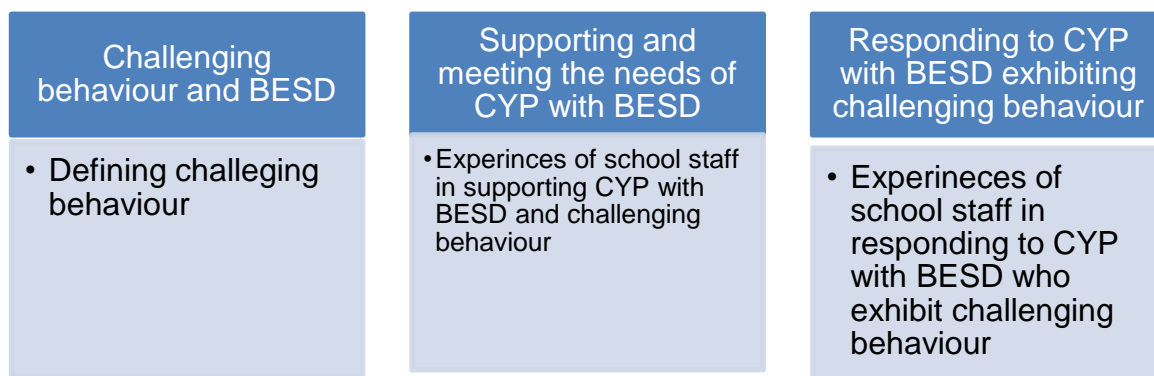


Figure 4: Hierarchical structure: Challenging behaviour and BESD

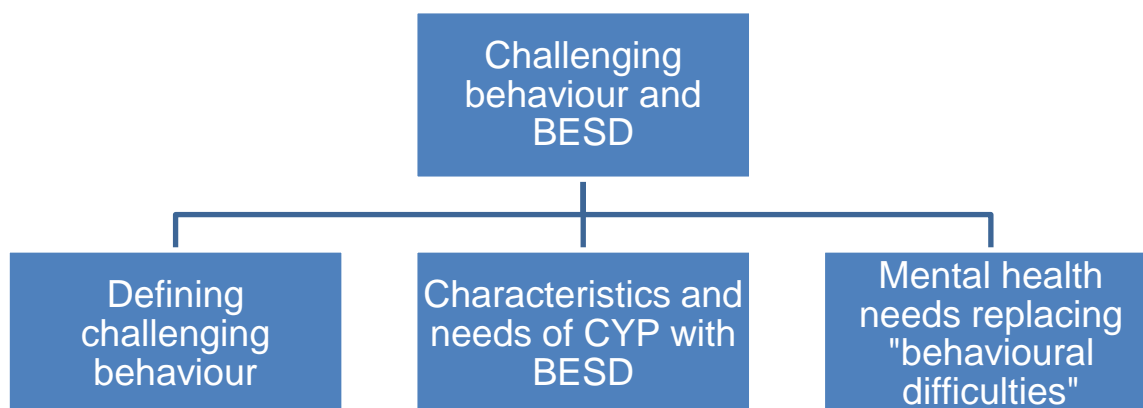


Figure 5: Hierarchical structure: Supporting CYP with BESD

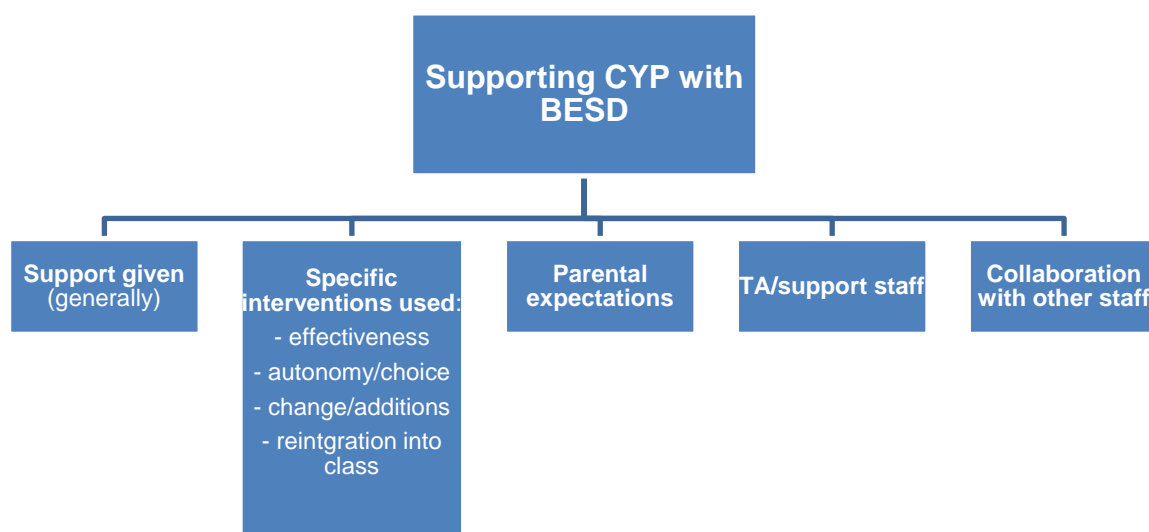
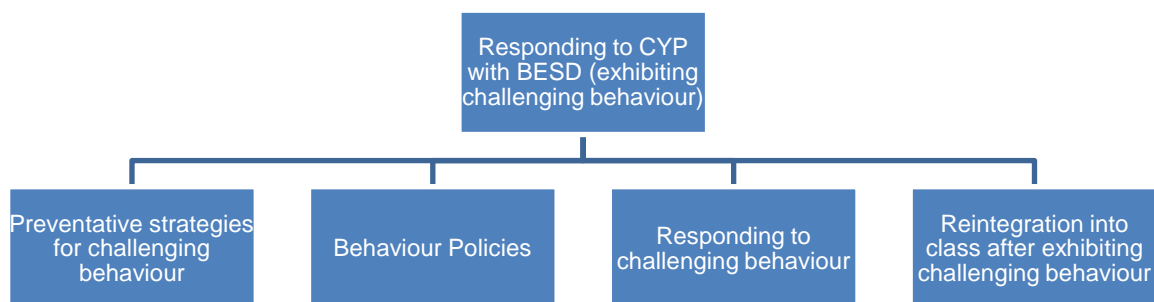


Figure 6: Hierarchical structure: Responding to CYP with BESD who exhibit challenging behaviour



2.5 Ethical considerations

Prior to the participants commencing with the CAR approach, a summary describing action research was given to those who expressed an interest in partaking (for phase one and phase two) (see Appendix 4). As with the initial letter sent out to each

school, the rationale, nature of involvement and expected timescale of the study was also given to each potential participant. Ethical clearance to commence with the study was also gained from the University's Ethics Committee (see Appendix 29).

Written and signed informed consent was gained from all participants prior to commencing the data collection (see Appendix 26). Given that some of the data (from the teacher and TAs focus group responses) was used to inform the planning/action phase (phase two), participants were made aware of this from the start. Participants were reassured that their responses would remain anonymous, so that individuals as well as school identities could not be revealed at any point.

Chapter 3: Data Analysis

3.1 Thematic analysis

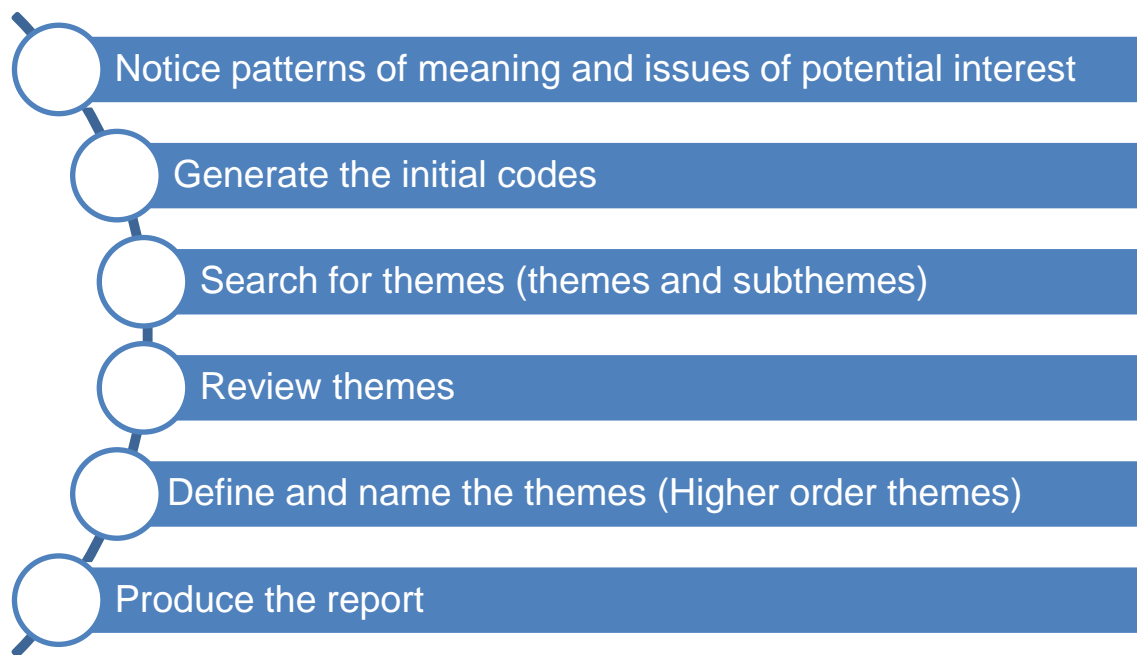
Thematic analysis, using Braun and Clarke's six stage thematic analysis framework (Braun and Clarke, 2006) was used to analyse the data from the semi-structured interview as well as the focus group interviews (see Figure 7). The themes derived from the responses of the teacher and TA interview (for defining *challenging behaviour*) were used to inform the second part of the study (phase two), as part of the *action framework*.

The data from the interview responses forms the first part of the CAR approach - reflecting on current practice. The need for a structure for thematic data analysis has been emphasised by Braun and Clarke (2006). The use of the hierarchical focusing method (Tomlinson, 1989) offers the initial structure. The key concepts (Figure 3) provide frameworks (Figures 4, 5 and 6) for the themes derived from the data to be organised against. The six stages used during the data analysis are shown in Figure 7 on the next page.

Quotations from the transcripts have been used in the *Findings* section. Reference has been made according to the participant code (i.e SENCo 1, SENCo 2 etc). Please refer to Appendix 13 for the descriptions of the SENCos.

The higher order themes have been given in the Finding section following analysis using Braun and Clarke's six stage thematic analysis. Examples of the initial coding with corresponding transcripts are given in Appendices 6, 7 and 8. Following refinement of the initial coding, higher order themes were defined (please refer to Appendix 30 which highlights how this was done). Appendix 31 provides a glossary summarising the terms used in the data analysis section.

Figure 7: Braun and Clarke's six stage thematic analysis framework (2006)



Chapter 4: Findings

In this section the higher order themes identified from the data sets are given for each of the research questions and are then discussed in more detail. The concepts, as used in the initial hierarchical design of the interview schedules (Figure 3) (top down process) are also given. Examples of transcripts along with the initial codes which have been identified from the data are given (in relation to bottom up processing) (see Appendices 6, 7 and 8).

In the tables below, for each corresponding research question the higher order themes are given according to the staff member and in relation questions asked during the interview (which centred on the concepts from the hierarchy for each research question).

4.1 Research Question 1

How do SENCos, teachers and TAs define challenging behaviour and the characteristics and needs of CYP with BESD?

Table 1: Higher order themes - defining challenging behaviour and characteristics and needs of CYP with BESD

Concept from hierarchical structure	Staff member	Higher order themes
Defining challenging behaviour	SENCos	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Disruption and non-compliance. - Staff feeling challenged.
	Teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Manipulative behaviour - Disruptive, low self-esteem - Effect on teacher: negative
	TAs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Risk to others; violence and aggression; withdrawn

Concept from hierarchical structure	Staff member	Higher order themes
Characteristics of CYP with BESD	SENCOs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Effects on emotional well-being - Unpredictability - Lack of resilience
	Teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Social and emotional issues - Low self-esteem - Behavioural expression
	TAs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Emotional expression; anger - Behaviour impacts socially
Mental Health needs replacing “behavioural difficulties”	SENCOs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - An inclusive term - Risk of stigma - Parental anxieties.
	Teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Parental anxieties - Preference for the term “behavioural difficulties” - “Mental health needs”: diagnostic tool.
	TAs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Behavioural difficulties: a phase for CYP - Mental health needs: a new label
Other: Causes/triggers of challenging behaviour	SENCOs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Unsettled home-life - Cognition and learning difficulties - Overall engagement with school
	Teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - CYP: the need for control - Attention seeking
	TAs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Impact of challenging behaviour on TAs - Anger from CYP - Lack of control

Defining challenging behaviour and characteristics of CYP with BESD

A common theme running through the responses from the staff interviews (SENCOs, teachers and TAs) was the notion of “disruption” being perceived as challenging. This was repeatedly referred to in terms of disrupting the CYP’s own learning as well as that of others. Teachers referred to CYP who exhibited challenging behaviour as being “manipulative” in terms of pursuing the behaviour until they got their own way. The impact of challenging behaviour on teachers’ self-esteem was further mentioned, as teachers expressed the negative impact it had on how they felt.

“...I think sometimes what is not considered is the impact it has on us as teachers...it is really hard on our self-esteem as well...I mean at this stage of the year (summer term) I am physically and mentally exhausted; I feel I have tried every strategy possible...” (Teacher focus group interview).

Outward expression of aggression, violence and withdrawn behaviour was a description the TAs used to define challenging behaviour. This could relate to how TAs support CYP who exhibit challenging behaviour through their frequent reference to spotting and pre-empting the triggers (see Table 2 “TA role” and Table 3 “Response to challenging behaviour”).

There was invariably the recognition of the impact of emotional well-being and challenging behaviour, as SENCOs tended to use the term “unpredictable”. Teachers referred to emotional “issues” as low self-esteem. More specifically TAs referred to CYP experiencing BESD as expressing their anger which had an impact both socially and emotionally. For the TAs this was also in terms of a realisation that the behaviour tends to communicate meaning.

The SENCOs’ description of CYP experiencing BESD related to a lack of resilience of CYP, whereas the teacher referred to them as having low self-esteem.

“Mental Health Needs” replacing behavioural difficulties in the SEN Code of Practice (2014)

Staff were asked about their views on the elimination of the term “behavioural difficulties” and it being replaced with “mental health needs”. Teachers and TAs were not aware of this, but did voice concerns regarding parental anxieties and the potential stigma associated with mental health needs.

Some SENCOs also expressed similar concerns regarding parental anxiety, but for one SENCO in particular this was a positive move towards being more “inclusive and embracing”. This could relate to the position and role of staff in identifying and co-ordinating support for CYP with additional needs (DfE, 2014).

The TAs’ view of behavioural difficulties was described as being a “phase”: something CYP would learn to grow out of and not necessarily a description of mental health needs. The term mental health needs was viewed more as a label or diagnosis by teachers and some TAs.

Other: Causes/triggers of challenging behaviour

Throughout the interviews occasional reference was made to the causes and triggers of challenging behaviour. The SENCOs addressed this in terms of the surrounding factors which included home-life, school engagement as well as the recognition of difficulties experienced with learning.

“...within the experience across the federation...the main cause I would say would have to be around a child who is emotionally upset....through some relational aspect at home or something to do with their home situation or past history. Or in a more general sense, it could be disruption because the child is bored of a lesson, or is not engaged...” (SENCO 1).

Teachers’ views on the causes/triggers of challenging behaviour focused more on what the behaviour is communicating from the point of view of the child: for control or attention seeking. Similarly TAs commented upon the presentation of anger and the CYP having a lack of control.

4.2 Research Question 2

What are the experiences of SENCOs, teachers and teaching assistants in supporting and meeting the needs of pupils with BESD?

Table 2: Higher order themes - experiences of school staff in supporting and meeting the needs of CYP with BESD

Concept from hierarchical structure	Staff member	Higher order theme
Support (general)	SENCOs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Rewards/sanctions - Rules, boundaries - Staff awareness - Safe space
	Teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - One to one adult support - Staff awareness
	TAs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Support CYP: listen, talk through problems - Use of Thrive techniques
Specific interventions	SENCOs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Rewards/sanctions - Thrive approach - School Ethos - To build relationships - Teacher skills regarding target setting
	Teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Thrive approach - Individual timetables - Individual Behaviour Plan (IBP) with rewards and sanctions
	TAs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Allocated time to use the Thrive approach - Support CYP with social and emotional needs - Time needed to implement interventions -

Concept from hierarchical structure	Staff member	Higher order theme
Parental involvement and expectations	SENCOs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Range of parents with varying backgrounds (“socio-culture”) - Parental anxieties - Varying expectations
	Teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Varying parental involvement - Some seek a diagnosis - Some parents – young and inexperienced
	TAs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Class teacher liaises with parents - TAs liaise on an informal basis
TA role	SENCOs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Up-skilling TAs - Attachment figure - Deliver interventions
	Teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - TAs: a valuable source of support - Spot the triggers and manage them - Attachment figure
	TAs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Anticipate the triggers - Give CYP time - Flexible response
Collaboration with other staff	SENCOs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No set time; more an informal chat - Training days/meetings
	Teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Time is the main factor - Need more information regarding interventions
	TAs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Limited time to collaborate - Regular meetings needed

Support (generally)

The use of rewards and sanctions were viewed as a mechanism and intervention for supporting CYP with BESD by the SENCO and teachers. The TAs commented on support involving listening, talking through problems as well as using “Thrive approaches” (Sunderland, 2013).

Staff awareness was viewed as general support by SENCOs and staff – an important factor which may be determined by the level of collaboration between staff members.

For SENCOs, teacher and TAs the Thrive approach and the use of one to one adult support were viewed as the main interventions to support emotional wellbeing. Nevertheless, for some schools the Thrive approach had not been adopted, as highlighted by one SENCO in particular, the level of need was deemed low, as well as the school ethos encompassing a supportive approach for meeting the social and emotional needs of all children.

“...I think for the Federation of schools the level of need is generally low....our school ethos has a positive impact on behaviour, so I think that is why we haven’t bought into Thrive as well...” (SENCO 6).

The Thrive approach was mentioned by all staff members for being a specific intervention for supporting CYP with social and emotional difficulties. Thrive is an intervention programme, widely used in the south-west of England, aimed at helping children to develop their social and emotional well-being.

Parental involvement

Both the SENCOs and teachers mentioned the “range” of parents encountered with varying expectations of support the school would offer. One SENCO made particular reference to the influence of the parents own “socio-cultural” background and how their own experience of growing up may impact on the nature of the upbringing of their own children.

“....the parents really fall into different groups. There are those that think the school can fix it all; there are the overly anxious parents who don’t see their child as part of a community; those who are just not engaged; those who are co-operative and those who are overly protective and anxious.....” (SENCO 5).

“...culturally their understanding of relationships and the way the school community works are so different...they almost operate in their own socio-culture and don’t necessarily value the whole stability of the family; their behavioural norms are different...sometimes so different that they don’t know where we are coming from...” (SENCo 1).

Given that the TAs support children with BESD on a one to one basis (delivering interventions such as Thrive), they nevertheless described their liaison with parents as being on an “informal basis”. Parental anxieties as well as those seeking an answer or a diagnosis was highlighted by all staff as well as the observation of some parents seeking help due to them being “young and inexperienced.”

TA role

The TAs themselves described their role as being able to spot the triggers of challenging behaviour as well as being able to respond in a flexible manner. Unlike the teachers and the SENCOs they did not mention the term “attachment figure”. This raises the question of what TAs are expected to do in their role when supporting and responding to the needs of CYP with BESD, as well as their own awareness of their role.

“....we are very lucky here as we have got very good TAs. They are able to step in at a point before it escalates ...they know the triggers. They know the child well so they also help with transitions...” (Teacher focus group interview).

Some SENCOs mentioned “up-skilling” TAs and it became apparent that teachers relied on the extra adult in the class to be able to pre-empt and manage challenging behaviour.

Collaboration with staff

Staff were asked whether they had the opportunity to meet with other members of staff to liaise and discuss cases of CYP who experienced BESD. SENCOs, teachers and TAs all mentioned that there was no set time or meetings arranged for this.

“...if we need to meet it is usually during lunchtimes...there’s lots you really feel you have to share and want some support with, but it is very snatched ...you don’t feel as if you are doing it properly.” (TA focus group interview)

“...I think it is important for us to know the other children different people are supporting because sometimes a child will come with a difficulty and we’d need to know how to support him or her...” (TA interview focus group interview)

Teachers and TAs in particular mentioned the need for regular updates, opportunities to share information (regarding particular interventions) yet there was a lack of time to do this.

4.3 Research Question 3

What are the experiences of SENCOs, teachers and teaching assistants in responding to children with BESD who present with challenging behaviour?

Table 3: Higher order themes - preventative strategies and responses of school staff to CYP with BESD exhibiting challenging behaviour.

Concept from hierarchical structure	Staff member	Higher order theme
Preventative strategies for challenging behaviour	SENCOs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Rewards and sanctions - Rubber boundaries - Clear expectations
	Teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Distractions - Compromise - Rewards and sanctions
	TAs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Peer support - One to one support
Behaviour policy	SENCOs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Flexible behaviour policy - Making exceptions - Sanctions - Positive talk - School Council: rules
	Teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Graduated warning (traffic light system) - Behaviour log - Sanctions
	TA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Use of rewards and sanctions - Whole school approach

Concept from hierarchical structure	Staff member	Higher order theme
Response to challenging behaviour	SENCOs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Varying response depending on the class teacher's style - Use of the behavioural policy
	Teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Removal from the class - Time-out encouraged - Ignoring the behaviour - Raised voice
	TAs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - One to one support - To notice the triggers
Reintegration of CYP after exhibiting challenging behaviour back into class	SENCOs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Clear expectations for rejoining the class - Teacher style: welcoming or abrupt/reprimand
	Teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reintegration when CYP is ready
	TAS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - One to one support

Preventative strategies for challenging behaviour

As with the key concept "Support given generally", SENCOs and teachers mentioned preventative strategies for challenging behaviour as incorporating rewards and sanctions. One SENCO in particular used the term "rubber boundaries" – that is the use of rules with clear boundaries, which would also allow for exceptions to be made based on the circumstance. The circumstance would take into consideration the background of the CYP, which indicates an awareness on the part of the SENCO about the reason behind the behaviour.

"...It's having those "rubber boundaries" and realistic expectations...responding to need at that time...it's about having those clear boundaries without jumping to

conclusions when there is challenging behaviour; just being flexible in your approach to how you manage each situation as it comes..." (SENCo 5).

Rewards were used to describe the encouragement of positive behaviour and sanctions for the removal of negative behaviour.

Similarly, teachers used the term "distractions" and "compromise" so that CYP are not in confrontation with the class teacher. Both could be viewed in terms of a responsive or reactive strategy, which may not necessarily address the reason for the challenging behaviour in the first place.

Preventative strategies were viewed of as support by the TAs, both peer support and that offered one to one by an adult.

Behaviour policies

TAs referred to the specific use of rewards and sanctions when the term behavioural policy was mentioned; this was in terms of the whole school approach to behaviour management. Teachers similarly mentioned the use of the behavioural policy in terms of sanctions, warnings and through maintaining a behaviour log. For SENCos, the behaviour policy incorporated the use of positive talk as well as being flexible where exceptions could be made.

Response to challenging behaviour and reintegration back into class

The class teachers' "response" to challenging behaviour could be termed as reactive; that is to say the removal of the CYP from the class setting; time-out method when the CYP is seen as "needing it"; ignoring the behaviour as well as raising their voice. In contrast, TAs' response could be described as being a supportive figure for the CYP to turn to; somebody who will listen to them and talk through their problems. The SENCos commented on a class teachers' response to challenging behaviour in terms of the style each teacher may adopt, acknowledging the variation that may exist. This style would also influence the way in which the CYP is reintegrated back in class (if they are asked to leave the class setting), which could be welcoming or more reprimand-type reintegration, with a reminder of the class or school rules.

Most staff mentioned that for rejoining the class there was an emphasis on how CYP are expected to behave. It would also be dependent on the CYP themselves and whether they were ready to rejoin the class.

Chapter 5: Discussion

This section has been structured in accordance with the key findings for each of the three research questions. These are discussed as salient findings and also in relation to the implications for paper two. The methodological limitations for paper one are also discussed.

5.1 Research Question 1

How do SENCOs, teachers and TAs define challenging behaviour and the characteristics and needs of CYP with BESD?

Understanding emotional needs

The SENCOs and teachers used the term “emotional well-being and low self-esteem” when describing CYP experiencing BESD. The importance of emotional growth and well-being for CYP has been well documented with an emphasis on emotional literacy from an early age (Daunic et al, 2013; Cook, 2015).

Given staff awareness of emotional needs, challenging behaviour was viewed in terms of CYP being disruptive, non-compliant and an outward behavioural expression of anger, violence and unpredictability. The teachers also made reference to such CYP as having low self-esteem.

Behaviour was viewed by TAs and teachers as an “expression” of the underlying emotional needs. Nevertheless, just by having an awareness of emotional needs does not imply that this is applied pragmatically to support CYP experiencing social and emotional difficulties. The importance of this awareness and support has been emphasised in a number of studies (Poulou and Norwich, 2002; Cooper and Cefai 2011). Links have been made between the skills and qualities associated with effective teaching which would contribute to a CYP’s social and emotional competencies (Cooper and Cefai, 2011). The importance of social and emotional competency has been linked to the interventions put in place by school for CYP to develop (Elias et al, 1997).

The term “mental health needs” was viewed by staff as a move towards the unknown in terms of the anxieties of parents of CYP with BESD. The staff, in particular the SENCos, did voice their understanding for the move, yet the preference for the term “behavioural” was still articulated, particularly among the teachers and TAs. TAs viewed challenging behaviour as a “phase” CYP pass through, raising questions as to whether they were aware of any possible mental health needs for the CYP.

Emotional needs and mental health needs seemed to be viewed as two separate concepts, with a strong emphasis on behaviour as an outward expression of emotional needs. This could be viewed as being contrary to the points raised in the SEN Code of Practice (DfE, 2014), which suggests the term mental health needs removes the emphasis on behaviour (NASEN, 2014). The likelihood of parental anxiety was also mentioned by teachers and SENCos concerning the term mental health needs in the new SEN Code of Practice (DfE, 2014).

Using, defining, labelling....the meaning for staff

In terms of describing the characteristics of CYP who may be experiencing BESD, staff acknowledged the emotional needs, and the possibility of low self-esteem. Most staff acknowledged the difficulties in giving weight to the presentation of challenging behaviour relating solely to emotional, social or behavioural difficulties, but did acknowledge the effect difficulties in each area may have on behaviour. For example the TAs acknowledged the social impact of emotional difficulties which manifest in behaviour which can be described as challenging. The complex nature of defining BESD reflects the very fact that every individual is different as is their level of vulnerability (O’Brien, 2005). The difficulty in defining BESD (Macleod, 2010), also raises questions about the usefulness of such a term or whether the move to replace the term “behavioural” with “mental health needs” (DfE, 2014), is a positive move or if indeed there is a medical diagnosis which may even be the underlying cause for the presenting behaviour (Lloyd, 2003). The possible stigma this may hold is discussed in the section which follows.

5.2 Research Question 2

What are the experiences of SENCOs, teachers and teaching assistants in supporting and meeting the needs of pupils with BESD?

General support for CYP who experience BESD

Support was conceived by the staff in terms of adult support for the CYP in question, typically given by the TA. There was less of a distinction made from the point of view of the SENCOs (with the exception of one SENCO), in terms of *support given* and *responding to challenging behaviour* (that is the use of rewards and sanctions as well as offering a safe space) for CYP experiencing BESD.

Studies which have looked at the support and interventions for CYP with BESD, put forward the use of whole school approaches (Maguire et al, 2003), which is embedded in the practice of teachers. Only one SENCO mentioned the use of a whole school ethos approach, which they described as being embedded in teacher practice and skills. This school used no specific intervention, nor had the staff received Thrive training. Overall they regarded the level of need for CYP with BESD and challenging behaviour as being low.

For specific interventions all staff reported (again with the exception of one SENCO) the use of the Thrive approach. Thrive has been described as being,

“.....a systematic approach to the early identification of emotional developmental needs in children so that differentiated provision can be put forward in place quickly by the adults working most closely with the child.” (Sunderland, 2013 page 4).

As a widely regarded intervention for supporting emotional well-being in schools for this area of the south west of England, there has been a great amount of investment in training school staff and is often the first strategy schools will adopt for a CYP who is thought to be experiencing BESD.

Target setting and IBPs were said to be formed on the basis of rewards and sanctions and for one SENCO, the use of an IBP was viewed as a deterrent for negative behaviour and used as a sanction.

Role of the TA

The role the TAs play, particularly for the class teacher, in supporting CYP identified as experiencing BESD was emphasised by the class teachers as being “invaluable”. Both the teachers and the SENCOs viewed TAs as “attachment figures” responsible for delivering specific interventions such as Thrive. Noticeably TAs themselves did not define themselves as attachment figures, suggesting their preference for offering support without the CYP becoming overly reliant on them as the “key adult”. The role of an attachment figure, who would be seen to have the strategies to support the CYP in question appropriately, may be viewed as demanding role. TAs voiced the need for collaboration and regular meetings. A model of supervision which would be able to address the challenges they face on a daily basis in a constructive collaborative manner may serve to address this; phase two considers how this can be done in schools between staff members.

Collaboration

Staff members all commented on the benefits of collaboration and opportunities to discuss individual cases of CYP who are experiencing BESD. The opportunity for collaboration depended very much on time. The only formal and designated time for meeting with other staff members, for SENCOs and teachers, was during In Service Training days (INSET) as well as staff training days. TAs reported no formal time set to liaise with the class teacher or SENCO. This was reported to be done on an informal basis. The most adult support offered to a CYP with BESD was reported to be the TA, who would typically support that CYP on either a one to one basis or as part of a group.

The role of supervision and support is something to be explored further (in the next phase of the study). Given the role of support for some TAs is specifically on a one to one basis with the CYP, TAs may feel challenged at times, working under pressure to ensure not only the safety of the CYP, but for that of others as well as being able to manage situations when the CYP presents challenging behaviour.

Teacher self-efficacy has been described as being a judgement of a teacher’s capabilities to bring about desired outcomes of a student’s engagement (Tschannen-Moran and Hoy, 2001). The teachers’ comments reflect the amount of ownership TAs have in pre-empting and responding to the challenging behaviour within the

class setting. This brings into question whether teachers felt efficacious enough to take on this role, given their lack of involvement with specific interventions such as Thrive and also their role of having to teach a whole class.

Collaborative working, which will be explored in more detail in phase two, is a method in which staff are able to offer support to one another, if given an allocated time slot on the timetable. Teacher confidence and self-esteem was shown to increase in studies following mentoring and supervision sessions (Elliot, Isaacs and Chugani, 2010) and also following Teacher Support Teams (Norwich and Daniels, 1997).

The implications for a longer term model of collaborative working will also be explored in phase two, particularly in relation to the role of the SENCo as being the “co-ordinator” for this.

Staff perceptions of parental involvement and expectations

As mentioned, SENCos and teachers in particular raised the point regarding parental anxiety over the change in the term behavioural to mental health needs. The teachers also mentioned those parents who may even seek a diagnosis or some sort of “label” as an attempt to alleviate anxiety.

Comments were made by both the SENCos and the teachers regarding the type of parents they encountered: from those of a “different” socio-cultural background, to those who are inexperienced and young. Liaison with the key person (more often the TA) was on an informal basis, whereas with the SENCos this was done through formally arranged meetings with parents. It is likely that the class teacher and TA would know the CYP more than the SENCos.

Parental involvement for supporting the emotional and social needs of CYP appears to be a prominent issue within schools, and this is highlighted by the perception and experiences of school staff in relation to parental involvement.

5.3 Research Question 3

What are the experiences of SENCOs, teachers and teaching assistants in responding to children with BESD who present with challenging behaviour?

Preventative Strategies and responding to challenging behaviour

Preventative strategies for challenging behaviour were described in terms of rewards and sanctions by SENCOs and class teachers, with one SENCO mentioning the use of “rubber boundaries” which would allow for exceptions to be made. Teachers also mentioned the use of distractions and compromise strategies, which can be viewed as an ad hoc reaction to the behaviour as it presents itself. The preventative strategies mentioned seem to reflect the nature of the behaviour policies described by the staff in each school: to encourage positive behaviour through rewards and to discourage negative behaviour. This reflects the emphasis placed on classroom behaviour management in school. This is similarly reflected in government policies which place emphasis on discipline in schools and the “power” given to teachers to discipline and “punish” poor behaviour (DfE, 2010).

There was little mention of emotional support from the SENCOs or the teachers when asked about preventative strategies. There was an emphasis on “positive talk” as well as reacting flexibly, yet this followed in line with having clear expectations, the use of sanctions as well as maintaining a behaviour log (which summarises a chronology of negative behaviour). The inclusion of CYP who may be experiencing BESD has been documented (Maguire et al 2003; Sharp, 2001; Ellias et al 1997), where the importance of the support for emotional growth is highlighted. The Steer Report (DfE, 2005) highlighted the importance of positive behaviour management and classroom behaviour management and has been said to reflect a number of perspectives which may underpin behaviour management (Hart, 2010). However the link with emotional support was only apparent for the TAs, who specifically mentioned preventative strategies for challenging behaviour as including supporting the CYP on a one to one basis or through peer support. This could be a reflection of the role identification of TAs and the support they offer through direct interventions or through pre-empting the triggers for a particular CYP.

Responding to challenging behaviour encompassed a similar approach to the strategies outlined in the behaviour policies of the schools: the use of rewards and sanctions. Noticeably, for teachers there was mention of a “raised voice” which may indicate teachers reacting immediately and feeling challenged, with possible implications on their self-efficacy. Links have been made between self-efficacy and an individual’s coping behaviour and work performance measures such as adaptability (Stajkovic and Luthans, 1998).

The style of the teacher (in terms of their response to challenging behaviour and in the inclusion of the CYP) was commented on by the SENCOs as having an influence on how ready and engaged a CYP would be to rejoin their class (if for example they are sent out). The style they adopt could relate to their own perceptions of CYP with BESD and the decisions they make which relate to their educational practice. It could also be reflective of the initial teacher training and professional development they received, and could even indicate a teachers’ disposition for helping a CYP with BESD (Poulou and Norwich, 2002).

5.4 Methodological Limitations

There are a number of potential methodological limitations which should be taken in to account when considering the findings. Firstly, the teacher and TA responses gave useful insights into the day to day support offered to CYP experiencing BESD. A greater exploration of teacher and TAs views and experiences through conducting two focus groups for each, could have added more data for phase two of the study.

It would have been useful to carry out a survey of the staff members, to gain insights into their role, the number of years in that role as well as any particular approaches or interventions they found useful for working with CYP with BESD. SENCOs completed a survey in phase two, but this may have been useful information from all staff members.

The range of staff interviewed in phase one included teachers, TAs and SENCOs. Another group of staff who could have provided very useful insights is the senior management team staff (head teachers, deputy heads). This would relate in particular to areas such as the school ethos and behaviour policies as well as SEN funding and resource allocation (for example of support staff).

Chapter 6: Conclusions and implications for Paper 2

The importance of having a definition for challenging behaviour was to highlight the range of interpretations school staff hold and how it may even affect their own practice. An exploration of the needs of CYP with BESD has similarly uncovered staff perceptions of the emotional needs as well as the usefulness of a “label” or diagnosis.

The school staff, SENCOs, teachers and TAs, have indicated a recognition for the impact of a label; that is to say on parental anxieties as well as the anxieties which may be experienced by the CYP in question. TAs are viewed by SENCOs and teachers as valuable figures in responding to and supporting a CYP with BESD, with reference to TAs as being “attachment figures”. The extent to which teachers are involved in supporting and responding to the needs of CYP with BESD directly is varied; much of the emphasis was placed on TA support. This may have implications for how included a CYP feels when re-entering the class after an intervention and/or leaving the class after exhibiting challenging behaviour.

The desire and need for a collaborative working practice between staff members was clear. There seemed to be communication between staff on an informal basis, with no set time or plan for a discussion. IBPs and target setting were very much viewed in terms of protocol and routine, regularly reviewed and updated accordingly. IBP, target setting and collaboration are areas which, with a defined and meaningful structure, could potentially enhance staff practice. This is dependent upon staff availability and time; a lack of time to meet regularly was mentioned on a number of occasions by staff.

Perceptions of role definition in terms of responsibilities in supporting CYP with BESD became apparent through the course of the interviews. SENCOs talked in terms of arranging and allocating resources and interventions, teachers implementing the behaviour policy within the class setting and the TAs’ role defined more in terms of offering direct support through interventions such as Thrive, as well as pre-empting and responding to incidences of challenging behaviour. This could be reflective of expectations from government policies (DfE, 2010) with proposals advocating the handing back of power to teacher in terms of discipline. It could be questioned whether this may drive a wedge between realising, acknowledging and responding accordingly to the presenting needs of CYP experiencing BESD and

behaviour management policies. Role definitions may be seen to play a part in how supporting CYP with BESD, and responding to CYP who present with challenging behaviour are done in school by different members of staff.

The scope and need for a collaborative, consistent approach to support and respond is apparent. This was recognised by staff members themselves. Enhancing potential outcomes for the CYP, offering clarity regarding the usefulness of “role definitions” as well as focusing on teacher-self-efficacy are all areas which could be the focus of the collaboration between staff members. Adopting a holistic approach for information sharing and sharing good practice may be the first step in working to achieve this.

Phase two aimed to adopt a consistent, collaborative approach, by using Solution Focused approaches (SFAs) with staff members. In particular, SENCOs were to adopt the approach to use alongside fellow members of staff, to support a CYP who had been identified as having BESD.

Paper 2: Implementing change: collaboration between SENCOs and school staff in supporting children and young people with BESD using solution focused approaches.

Abstract

The use of solution focused approaches (SFAs) in educational practice is on the increase, being implemented in a range of contexts. Originally based on solution focused brief therapy (SFBT) (de Shazer, 1985), emphasis is placed upon the solutions and in thinking about the future, steering away from talking about the past and the problem.

This paper describes the second phase of the CAR approach. The aim of this phase was to use SFAs with SENCOs who participated in phase one of this study. As the Trainee Educational Psychologist (TEP) working within the two learning communities, I facilitated and supported SENCOs on implementing SFAs. They did this firstly in relation to their own practice, and secondly with another member of staff (a teacher or a TA) for supporting a CYP identified as experiencing BESD and challenging behaviour.

The procedure involved the SENCOs attending three sessions which took place between September 2014 and February 2015. Following each session the SENCOs were assigned a task, typically involving them to use SFAs on their own practice as well as with other staff members. I visited each SENCO following the sessions to support them in discussing their reflections as well as during the meeting with the other members of staff they intended to support. The final session involved a group evaluation, in which experiences were shared and a plan was formed in preparation of the next cycle of the action research approach.

Data collection included semi-structured interviews with each SENCO, a group evaluation as well as an analysis of the SENCOs' individual reflections (accounts kept throughout the study), using thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Higher order themes were then grouped according to context, mechanism and outcome themes, which draws upon elements of realistic evaluations (Pawson and Tilley, 1997).

The findings revealed insights into the enabling factors as well as challenges encountered by the SENCOs. Implications for future research in this area are also discussed.

Key words: Solution focused brief therapy, solution-focused approaches, collaboration, challenging behaviour, behavioural social and emotional difficulties, reflection

Chapter 7: Introduction

7.1 Rationale

Collaborative practice between school staff is an area which has received limited research attention, particularly for supporting CYP with BESD. The use of action research in school settings is well documented, yet there is further scope to explore the collaborative nature of action research, in particular in terms of the role the SENCo can play in co-ordinating this, with the support of a TEP. Phase one of this study explored in depth the experiences and views of school staff – teachers, TAs and SENCos, in their role of responding to and meeting the needs of CYP who may experience BESD and present with challenging behaviour. The second phase extends this – using the active involvement of the SENCos (who also participated in phase one) to work collaboratively with teachers and TAs in supporting a CYP whom they would consider experiences BESD. The longer term objectives for the schools who agreed to partake in the study links with that of the Primary Support Partnership (as described in phase one) – to develop initiatives which would encourage collaborative practice between primary schools which can be sustainable and effective in bringing down the number of exclusions in primary schools.

7.2 Gaps in the literature

There has been limited research looking at how SFAs are used in schools by staff members, firstly to enhance collaboration between staff and secondly to support and respond to a CYP who may be identified as experiencing BESD and who exhibits challenging behaviour.

Solution focused approaches have been widely used in education in a range of contexts. Using the approach for challenging behaviour and for supporting CYP with complex needs could be used as an approach to bridge the gap between reacting to challenging behaviour and for regularly supporting CYP who experience BESD. Additionally it may allow for a member of staff to develop their own solutions rather than exploring current difficulties (Redpath and Harker, 1999).

This area of research is of paramount importance in education as the impact of challenging behaviour on staff morale, other CYP as well as for the future educational placement for the CYP in question, becomes highly significant.

7.3 Selected Literature

The following section critically examines a selection of studies which have adopted the use of SFAs (based upon SFBT techniques, originally devised by de Shazer 1985), including the use in schools. The adoption of action research is also examined, particularly when this is collaborative. A full literature review has also been completed (see Appendix 28)

What are Solution Focused Approaches?

Solution focused brief therapy (SFBT) following its application at the Family Therapy Centre in Milwaukee by de Shazer (1985), has been successfully applied to changing child and adolescent behaviour problems (Conoley et al, 2003). Since its development in the 1980s, SFBT has become a widely used therapeutic approach practiced in a broad range of settings (de Shazer, 1985). It has also become widely accepted among social workers and also in education, given its focus on strengths and solutions rather than deficits and problems.

The original ideas stemming from SFBT include:

- An emphasis on the past detail and the problems is not needed for the development of the solution
- There are always exceptions when the problem is less
- Individuals have the resources to solve their problems
- Problem-free talk (following an identification of the problem)
- Small changes can lead to a widespread change

(Rhodes and Ajmal, 1995).

In a systematic review on the outcomes of SFBT for a range of uses, Gingerich and Peterson (2012) found strong evidence that SFBT is an effective treatment method for a wide variety of behavioural and psychological outcomes. The authors based their findings on comparing alternative treatment for conditions such as depression in terms of the number of treatments the individuals required. It could however be argued that that there would need to be consideration regarding the populations

studied as well as the varying severity of the problems each treatment group experienced.

Theoretical basis for SFAs

Solution focused brief therapy (SFBT) is rooted in systems theory, which proposes that change is part of a system which will create a ripple effect of change throughout the entire system (de Shazer, 1985). The theory adopts the perspective that change and growth are viewed as an inevitable, on-going phenomenon and that there needs to be an awareness of the mechanisms which prevent it.

Social realities, including much of the human experience, are created through the use of positive language (de Shazer, 1994). The meanings we develop about ourselves and about the events which occur around us play a significant role in what we imagine is possible and the scope for change. Encounters which are constructed become the framework within which change occurs (Gingerich and Wabeke, 2001).

SFBT is not a theoretical model; the ideas from systems theory and constructivism provide a conceptual framework for understanding how change takes place, not necessarily how or why dysfunction occurs. The model therefore allows itself to be easily adaptable to multiple contexts and issues (Burgs and Mayhall, 2002).

The approach itself can also be considered in terms of self-efficacy; that is in regards of one's judgement of his or her capabilities to bring about a desired outcome (Tschannen- Moran and Hoy, 2001). Bandura's Social Learning Theory similarly offers a conceptual framework about beliefs and how they produce diverse effects (Bandura, 2001). Estimating the effect a person's behaviour has on a given situation, in terms of perceived behavioural control can also be applied to SFBT approaches.

The existential approach (Fernando, 2007) accounts for the freedom that human beings have to choose what sense to make of their circumstances. Similarly, the humanist theory emphasises the idea of a client-centred approach, incorporating the idea of self-actualisation – the belief that people will tend to this state when exposed to relationships which are genuine and empathetic (Rogers and Freiberg 1994). In parallel with the humanist theory, the existential ideas purport that individuals are encouraged to get in touch with their "real" selves and to make a deliberate choice in

accordance with their real self. The approach proposes that when people are able to consider themselves with their own feelings and emotions, they are also able to see their potential to improve (Fernando, 2007). Both theories can be applied to the basic tenets of SFBT teachings; this is by encouraging individuals to look closely at themselves and the resources they have to make a change in their lives for the better.

Use of SFAs in schools

Solution focused approaches have increasingly been used in educational practice (Rhodes and Ajmal, 1995; Redpath and Harper, 1999 and Simm and Ingram, 2008). The approach itself has been applied to different contexts, for example increasing academic attainment (Burns and Hulusi, 2005) as well as for negative behaviour in schools (Vallaire-Thomas et al, 2011).

Burg and Mayhall (2002) used techniques of solution focused skills for advising “undecided students”. The techniques they used included: goal setting, scaling questions, pre-suppositional questions, the “miracle” question and positive feedback. Solution-focused advising is a model which emphasises the importance of a student’s strength. In this respect, it is a short-term, goal-focused method used for creating positive change. It would however seem appropriate to take into consideration the teacher’s influence upon the effectiveness of such an approach, for example considering the level of encouragement students received from the school.

Franklin, Moore and Hopson (2008) conducted a study in which 67 children identified as needing support for behavioural related problems, were offered SFBT. Staff were offered in-service training. Outcomes which were measured using a pre- and post-test follow-up design revealed SFBT to be effective in improving internalising and externalising behaviour problems. Following their study, Franklin et al (2008) put forward that in order to maximise the SFBT model’s effectiveness in school, the entire school culture, norms and practices would also need to change. However, the use of a quasi-experimental design lacks the individual experiences of the children, which could have given useful insights as to what it was about the SFBT they found particularly useful.

The use of SFBT in school settings has demonstrated positive outcomes in increasing self-esteem and positive attitudes (Littrell et al, 1995). SFBT has also been associated with positive academic and behavioural outcomes (Newsome, 2004).

Working on What Works Well, (WOWW), a programme developed by Berg and Shilts (2004), was developed on solution-focused principles. The programme was devised to help improve teachers' perceptions of their classes being more manageable. The WOWW programme is based on SFBT tenets; it looks for exceptions to the problem and thinking about past successes. It entails the active involvement of an individual in recognising their strengths in managing discipline problems, by collectively recognising the positive behaviour rather than turning attention to the negative discipline problems (Kelly and Bluestone-Miller, 2009).

Education: using SFA in practice

The use of SFA by Educational Psychologists (EPs) has been studied by Redpath and Harker (1999). They describe the application of the approach in five key areas: working with the individual pupils, consultations with teachers, meetings, group work and training. Positive feedback was gained from both the individuals and the psychologists. Stobie, Boyle and Woolfson (2005) conducted a literature review which considered the use of SFA by EPs and similarly reported claims of its effectiveness.

There have been a limited number of studies which have considered the effectiveness of the approach when used by school staff (Kelly and Bluestone-Miller, 2009; Simm and Ingram 2008) particularly its impact on the practice of key staff member such as SENCOs.

Simm and Ingram (2008) used SFA as part of a CAR study with school staff. Much of their data focused upon the experiences of school staff using CAR on their practice rather than how SFA may have had an impact on their practice. Nevertheless it highlights the potential use of CAR in enhancing outcomes for school and CYP; a move towards breaking down the power differentials within an educational setting (Somekh, 2002; Atweh, Kemmis and Weeks, 1998).

Burns and Hulusi (2005) describe a Learner Support Centre set up to meet the needs of individual pupils, increase success and to promote inclusion and reduce exclusion. With the intention of including all staff, Burns and Hulusi (2005) used SFA which actively involved teachers for managing difficult behaviour. As an action research study the authors anticipated teachers would adopt elements of the approach to everyday practice. Positive feedback was gained from the pupils following the six weeks of SFA sessions, as well as gaining positive feedback from the teachers that behaviour had improved. SFAs were used with 900 pupils in group work as well as through teacher involvement. In order to evaluate its effectiveness, consideration would need to be taken regarding how regularly the teachers used the approaches, given that the group work using SFA ran for six sessions.

There is a point to be made nevertheless regarding the long-term effectiveness of SFA. An exploration for this would entail on-going feedback from school staff regarding the effect of using SFA in their setting.

Use of Solution-focused approaches for emotional, social and behavioural difficulties

When faced with challenging behaviour, schools sometimes focus their efforts on reducing or eliminating the problem behaviour, implying that there may be something that needs correcting (Murphy, 1994).

Pragmatically, a solution-focused model would suggest it is more productive to increase existing successes, no matter how small, to stop the problem developing. The solution-focused model includes viewing the individual as resourceful and capable of improving their lives, a focus on the present and the future and the belief that a small change can make a difference, eventually leading to a resolution (de Shazer, 1985; Berg, 1991; Miller, 1997). Conceptually, a SFA has been described as being simple and pragmatic, yet in its application may pose as more challenging (Murphy, 1994). The approach itself requires a shift in the way problems are viewed, and our ability to do this may vary between individuals.

SFA have also been used to support children in schools who present as having mental health problems in school settings (Gingerich and Wabeke, 2001). Given the shift in emphasis from viewing challenging behaviour in schools as a “behavioural difficulty” to *mental health needs* (DfE, 2014), this would seem a relevant area for

applying SFA in schools settings. A common application of SFA in schools has been for behavioural disorders. This includes CYP who have received a formal diagnosis for Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) as well as other disorders such as Oppositional Defiance Disorder (ODD) and conduct disorder, which is typically characterised by anti-social behaviour (Gingerich and Wabeke 2001).

One of the characteristics of CYP who experience emotional and behavioural difficulties has been described as being more impulsively emotional and less able to regulate their behavioural responses (Cross, 2011). The importance of children's emotional responses plays a crucial role in social development, mediating psychopathological difficulties (Melnick and Hinshaw, 2000). Emotional responses and peer interaction of children with emotional, social and behavioural difficulties has been said to be crucial for the formation of peer relationships. Similarly the importance of the effects of deficits in regulatory behaviours on mental health outcomes in later life, has also been emphasised (Viraro, Brendgen and Wanner, 2005).

Positive Behaviour Support (PBS), developed by Vallaire-Thomas, Hicks and Growe (2011) is a school based intervention which includes the application of evidence based strategies and systems to help in school, for establishing a positive school culture and a decrease in problem behaviour (Vallaire-Thomas et al, 2011). In a longitudinal, multi-case study, the authors used an action research design to apply SFBT and social skills instructions to reduce discipline referral rates. As a multi-case study, it would be difficult to ascertain whether other factors such as staff turnover would also play a role in the number of discipline referral rates.

Solution Focused Coaching

As the popularity of using SFAs in schools rises, many schools have been increasingly adopting Solution focused coaching training for teachers and students alike. Solution focused coaching has been increasingly adopted in educational practice over the years (Williams, Palmer and O'Connell, 2011). Solution focused coaching is based on the principle that the coachee has the solution to their own problem (Gavriel, 2014). Some critics of the approach have pointed out that there is a risk that a *solution* may not be identified or achieved, especially when the problem is beyond their control and not fully explored. There is also little systematic

evaluation on how SFA and coaching is being applied in schools and what the outcomes may be (Ellis, 2013). The approach itself encourages an individual to not focus on the problem, but more on future outcomes and solutions. By not fully exploring the problem, a person may still feel the issues are unresolved (Walsh, 2010). Nevertheless, the approach itself is not discounting the problem; on the contrary the current situation and issues are explored (Rhodes and Ajmal, 1995).

What is used in this study?

This study adopted four key principles of Solution Focused Brief Therapy (de Shazer, 1985), and is referred to as Solution Focused Approaches (SFA).

- (1) Preferred future
- (2) Best hopes
- (3) Building on success (including the use of rating scales)
- (4) Next steps (short-term, future targets).

It is not a form of Solution focused coaching, even though it could be argued that the process of facilitating the school staff draws on elements of this. Rather, as a collaborative action research approach, it required the use of reflection, planning, acting and observing and reflecting again. The SENCOs continuously reflected upon their practice in order to enhance outcomes.

It was intended that the key principles would provide a clear and simple framework for the participants to use themselves and with fellow staff members. The use of SFA varies widely between disciplines such as counselling, therapy, social work and education (Iveson, George and Ratner, 2012). They could be adopted in terms of the four key principles in a flexible manner (Berg and Shilts 2004; Brown, Powell and Clarke, 2012) or by using SFBT techniques as a universal approach, as founded by *BRIEF* (an approach adopted from Solution Focused Brief-Therapy) in 1989 as an independent training, therapy and consultation agency (Ratner, George and Iveson, 2012).

7.4 Research Aims

The research aims for the second phase of this study were:

- To develop an intervention programme using solution-focused approaches (which was based upon techniques used in Solution-Focused Brief Therapy, de Shazer, 1985), with SENCOs and school staff, for meeting the needs of CYP with BESD.
- To evaluate the process of implementing solution-focused approaches by SENCOs who worked collaboratively with school staff and the implications for future practice.

7.5 Research Questions

Research Question 1: How useful do SENCOs feel SFAs are when working in collaboration with other staff members for meeting the needs of a CYP with BESD* and challenging behaviour*?

Research Question 2: What effect has using SFAs had on the SENCOs in their practice when working with other staff members for meeting the needs of CYP with BESD and challenging behaviour?

* *BESD* refers to CYP experiencing behavioural, emotional and social difficulties

* *Challenging behaviour* was defined by the participants (SENCOs, teachers and TAs from phase one). In phase two a collated definition was formed by the SENCOs based on the definitions given by staff members from phase one.

Chapter 8: Methodology

8.1 Research Design

As the second phase of the CAR approach, the method for data collection incorporated the following stages:

- *Planning* (following a discussion of reflections from phase one)
- *Acting* (putting a plan into action)
- *Observing* (maintaining continuous reflective accounts relating to practice)
- *Collecting data* (feedback from participants)
- *Reflecting* (as a group)
- *Planning for the next cycle* (as a group)

This part of the study involved my facilitation of group sessions. As mentioned, my role was made clear from the outset: to support and guide, but not to give direct instruction.

8.2 Philosophical Underpinnings

This phase of the CAR approach adopts a pragmatic realist position. Knowledge is constructed by the participants through practical interactions. This is classed as a pragmatic realist approach as knowledge becomes a tool for dealing with reality. The position asserts that language cannot be compared with reality or knowledge; it is in relation to the world (Rotry, 1979).

8.3 Participants

The six SENCOs who participated in phase one also consented to taking part in phase two. Three of the six SENCOs had a full-time role as a SENCO, while the remaining three SENCOs had other teaching duties, therefore the amount of time allocated for SENCO related work varied. Prior to commencing with the study all SENCOs were asked to complete a survey which included questions relating to prior experience (as both a SENCO and class teacher) (see Appendix13).

8.4 Ethical considerations

Following the guidance from the British Psychological Society (Code of Ethics and Conduct, 2009), the study was designed to ensure there was mutual respect and confidence in the research undertaken. All audio-recorded interviews were stored on a password protected computer.

All the participants were informed about the objectives and nature of their involvement prior to commencing. Signed consent was gained and participants were reassured that they were able to withdraw at any point during the study. Participants were made aware that their responses would be anonymous so that they could talk freely and openly without the fear of their identities being revealed. Participants were also informed that they had the opportunity to read any material before and after the submission of the study.

8.5 Method

The method for data collection was on-going, involving three designated sessions to facilitate and support the participants in their reflections as a group (collaboratively). As a small-scale study, my involvement as the researcher and facilitator remained throughout the duration study. This included:

- (1) Facilitating the three designated sessions for collaboration with the participants.
- (2) Visits to each of the participants' schools following each session to offer individual support and supervision for reflecting on practice.
- (3) Being available for the participants as well as school staff whom they selected to work with (following session 2), particularly if they had any questions or queries.

8.6 Procedure

Session	Content
<p data-bbox="185 342 341 376">Session 1</p> <p data-bbox="185 506 480 539"><i>Planning a change</i></p>	<p data-bbox="560 342 1407 432">The first part of session one involved introductions and getting to know one another and their SENCo role.</p> <p data-bbox="560 454 1407 600">Following on from this we reviewed some key points which were discussed during the semi-structured interviews in Phase one (“reflection”).</p> <p data-bbox="560 674 1407 1037">The second part of session one involved an introduction on Solution Focused Approaches. Some SENCos mentioned they had come across the approach, while for others it was a new approach (see Appendix 12). The SENCos had an opportunity to practise the four key principles (in pairs) by reflecting upon how they could use them in their role as a SENCo.</p> <p data-bbox="560 1111 1407 1200">As the facilitator, I recorded responses as the session progressed.</p> <p data-bbox="560 1274 1407 1364">Individual targets were developed, using SFA, which were to be implemented in practice by the SENCos.</p> <p data-bbox="560 1438 1407 1800">TASK: SENCos were asked to maintain a reflective account on how they used the four key principles in their role as a SENCo. This was discussed in session two (Appendix 15a). The time scale for doing this was four weeks. At the end of the session I arranged dates for visiting each SENCo in their school, to facilitate and support their on-going reflective accounts (Appendix 14).</p>

Session	Content
<p data-bbox="177 210 555 248">Session 2</p> <p data-bbox="177 322 555 524"><i>Acting and observing the process and the consequences of the change</i></p>	<p data-bbox="555 210 1415 801">The first part of this session was a group discussion and feedback from session one. SENCOs returned the proforma and any additional notes in relation to their reflective accounts. I shared with the group the key ideas which were generated from Phase one, regarding the definition of challenging behaviour. SENCOs were asked to discuss a definition (two groups of three). After re-joining as a group, a “collated definition” of challenging behaviour was formed using ideas from the SENCOs, teacher focus group responses and TA focus group responses (Appendix 10).</p> <p data-bbox="555 815 1415 1240">As a group we talked about how we could use some of these approaches with teachers and TAs. The SENCOs then wrote <i>Key points for discussion</i> in a plan ready for working with a member of staff in their school (Appendix 15a and 15b). TASK: Using the collated definition of challenging behaviour, the SENCOs were set the task of working with a member of staff and CYP who they believed presented as challenging and with BESD.</p> <p data-bbox="555 1254 1415 2031">ACTION PLAN: Areas for discussion were collated, and using SFA, targets were to be implemented in practice following a case to work with. At the end of session two, I arranged dates to visit each SENCO and the staff member they chose. This was to facilitate and support a meeting using SFA and to discuss a CYP who was identified as presenting as challenging and with BESD. SENCOs and the staff members were asked to keep reflective accounts on which key principle/s they used and any reflections they had on the use of this. It was arranged that the SENCO and staff member would meet on a weekly basis to discuss the support for the CYP using SFA as weekly targets (see Appendix 16a, 16b, 17 and 18). The time scales for completing this was between five to six weeks.</p>

Session	Content
<p data-bbox="188 215 344 246">Session 3</p> <p data-bbox="188 324 539 465">Reflecting upon practice: evaluating the use of SFAs</p> <p data-bbox="188 600 539 689">Plan for cycle 2 of the CAR approach</p>	<p data-bbox="566 215 1401 414">The final session was a group evaluation with the SENCOs on the use SFAs with the staff member concerned, in relation to a CYP identified as presenting with challenging behaviour and BESD.</p> <p data-bbox="566 488 1401 638">A number of key questions were used to guide this discussion (see Appendix 24, 25). The discussion was also used to plan changes in the use of SFAs.</p> <p data-bbox="566 712 1401 855">TASK: SENCOs were to implement the changes discussed and were encouraged to maintain accounts reflecting upon on how they experienced the use of SFAs.</p>

Following the completion of the sessions, I conducted semi-structured interviews with each SENCO so the individual experiences and views of the use of SFA could be explored in more depth. The key themes arising from both the group evaluation and the semi-structured interviews are discussed in the *Findings* section.

Chapter 9: Data Analysis

The data sources for this phase of the collaborative action research approach came from:

- Field notes and researcher reflections (see Appendix 11)
- Audio transcriptions of the sessions
- Reflections from the SENCOs- session 1, session 2 (see Appendices 15-18)
- Reflections from the staff members working with the SENCOs
- Thematic Analysis of the interview responses
- Group evaluation on the experiences of using SFAs
- Survey data: the SENCOs' prior experience (see Appendix 13)

Data from the above has been analysed using elements from an approach, *Realistic Evaluations* (Pawson and Tilley, 1997). The basic premise underlying realistic evaluation is that researchers bring knowledge from a wide range of contexts in which they are working. They can create theories about “what works” and this may not be the same as the participant’s views. Pawson and Tilley (1997) have explained the use of theory in evaluations: this related to mechanisms which may generate improvements in outcomes in the context they are placed. The key emphasis is on: context, mechanisms and outcomes.

Chapter 10: Findings

The data gained from the feedback from the participants which is analysed in this section, comprised of the following:

- Semi-structured interview responses
- A group evaluation
- Individual reflections (on going) from the SENCos and staff members.

The higher order themes (following thematic analysis of the interview data) have been grouped according to *context themes*, *mechanism themes* and *outcomes themes*. This is based upon a realistic evaluation approach (Pawson and Tilley, 1997).

Figure 8: Colour coded higher order themes for grouping according to context, mechanism and outcome:

Context
Mechanism
Outcome

Table 4: Summary of themes from SENCo interviews

Key concept (as identified from the interview schedule)	Higher order theme/s
Expectations of SFAs	Expected SFAs to provide a framework and structure using positive language.
Usefulness of SFAs	Empowering with the use of shared goals. Objective and refocuses.
Opportunities to use SFAs	Adapted to different situations When situations are at "crisis point".

Key concept (as identified from the interview schedule)	Higher order theme
Usefulness of defining challenging behaviour	<p>A broad, open, fluid definition is needed</p> <p>Variable definition allowing for reflection</p>
Case selection	<p>Based on staff practice</p> <p>Concern regarding the behaviour of the CYP</p> <p>Complexity due to diagnosis</p>
Working with the staff	<p>ENABLING FACTORS:</p> <p>Staff willingness and having shared goals.</p> <p>School Ethos using SFAs.</p> <p>CHALLENGES:</p> <p>Changing staff perceptions</p> <p>Parental co-operation</p> <p>Lack of time</p>
Future use of SFAs	<p>INSET training needed especially for TAs and NQTs</p> <p>SUSTAINABILITY OF COLLABORATION:</p> <p>Manageable and necessary</p> <p>Depends on role definition for SENCos</p> <p>Not realistic – lack of time</p>
Other/Miscellaneous	<p>Long-term effectiveness of the approach: moving from reaction to understanding</p> <p>A positive impact for the CYP</p>

Table 5: Themes from the group evaluation and individual reflections

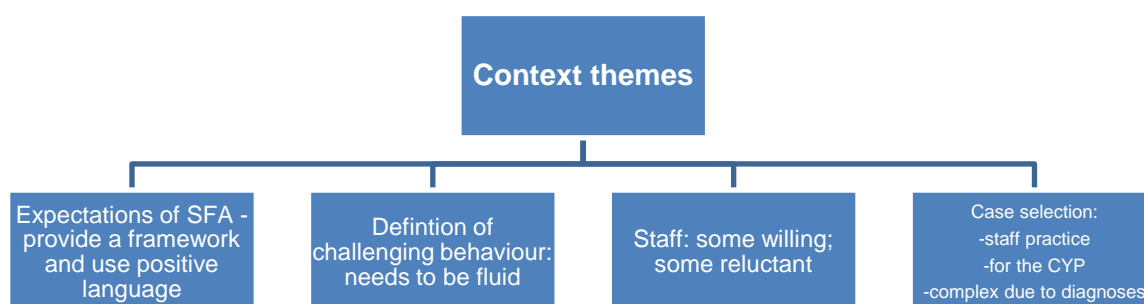
Key concepts (as identified from probe questions)	Higher order theme
Staff willingness	<p>Willingness and engagement</p> <p>Problem-focused and reluctant</p>
Experiences working with staff	<p>Shared values and goals</p> <p>Difficulties related to staff pressures and complex cases</p>
Changes in CYP (in terms of behaviour, motivation and engagement)	<p>CYP – became more engaged, challenging behaviour lessened, positive self-perception</p>
Planning a change	<p>Need training/INSET; time to build trust and to embed the approach</p> <p>Acknowledgment of the problem and sensitive dialogue</p>

10.1 Research question 1

How useful do SENCOs feel SFAs are when working in collaboration with other staff members for meeting the needs of a CYP with BESD and challenging behaviour?

In this section context and mechanism themes are discussed, relating to how SFA were used by the SENCOs.

Figure 9: Context themes from data analysis



Expectations of SFA – a framework and use of positive language

Two of the SENCOs (who worked as part of the same Federation of schools) mentioned that there were similarities between their own approach and SFAs. The expectations prior to using the approaches in practice, was the use of positive language explicitly with the CYP within a formalised framework.

“.....I think once I started to talk about it, lots of the little bits are quite similar to what I would do in a class room and what most of the teachers would be doing in the

classroom, so I felt like it would be just focusing in on it a little bit more. To focus on specific things....and to break something down into smaller steps...” (SENCo 2).

“...optimistic that you formalise something if you have a framework for something it helps you to refer back to it...it helps to keep things moving forward...the framework appealed to me...you think of those ideas but often you are wondering,...with a framework you have something to come back to...” (SENCo 5).

There were variations in the responses regarding their anticipation for the effectiveness of the approaches; some SENCos anticipated it to become embedded into practice, whereas for others it was important to use SFA to solve behavioural issues as and when they were encountered.

Definition of challenging behaviour: to be fluid

To gain an understanding about how useful the process of collaboratively defining challenging behaviour was, I asked the SENCos their views on the usefulness of having a collated definition. This could be viewed in terms of a “context” theme as well as an “outcome” theme, yet given that the SENCos formed and used the definition prior to working with other staff members, I deemed it to be more appropriate as a context theme.

“...I don’t have a set fixed definition of what it is...I think it is quite important to work with what people’s perceptions of it is; I think that is more important than my understanding of it. So it might not be the definition of what I would have written but I was comfortable with it and it makes sense to use one that comes from people you are working with...” (SENCo 1).

Most SENCos mentioned the usefulness of the definition as it allowed for a reflection on the reasons behind the challenging behaviour. Some SENCos related challenging behaviour in terms of how it impacted on the member of staff. This indicated that there was an acknowledgment of the variation in responses to presenting behaviour from the perspective of the staff member. The SENCos mentioned the need for the definition to be “fluid”, accounting for the various interpretations individuals have regarding the term “challenging”. The SENCos also

pointed out that cases would regularly need revisiting, as the circumstance for the CYP may change, which may have an impact on the CYP.

Staff: variable in terms of willingness

The SENCOs were asked about how willing they believed staff members were in adopting SFAs to their practice. Variable feedback was gained; some SENCOs believed staff members were willing and co-operative, while others viewed the staff members as reluctant to take on another approach. One SENCO in particular mentioned the TA she worked with interpreted the challenging behaviour as a direct challenge to her as the staff member. This, for the SENCO, hindered the process of exploring the possible reasons for the CYP's behaviour.

"...Others find it quite hard...to not take a child's behaviour personally; I think when staff do that they find it harder to find reasons for the child's behaviour...almost quite a narrow minded approach...they find it hard to see the bigger picture." (SENCO 1)

There was an overall sense that staff willingness and the relationship the SENCOs had with the staff member contributed to their final case selection. This was one concern raised by a SENCO during session two.

Case selection:

Staff practice and CYP.

The case selection varied between the SENCOs. Session two gave SENCOs an opportunity to discuss cases (anonymously) which they deemed appropriate, that is for a CYP who would be considered as experiencing BESD as well as presenting with challenging behaviour. Some chose the case as it related to an area of need for staff development. One SENCO was keen to support a Newly Qualified Teacher (NQT) for her general class management as well as to build a positive relationship with a CYP who presented as "challenging" in her class, while remaining sensitive to how the NQT may feel if given the support.

".....basically, I knew that was a difficult class, I also knew that XX was the king pin in the class...so you think it is something useful to the teacher as an NQT – her values

and practice. It is about being tactful...I've sat in the classroom, and in my head, and thought...you make this worse... Usually she would say don't do this...and then an immediate reaction – rather than reminding him of his target. The minute you say don't do that you are in confrontation...the child is wanting your attention....and he/she will know exactly how to get it...but obviously I would never say that aloud to her, because I would be doing the same to her as she would be to the child...you have to model it..." (SENCo 6).

Most SENCos did mention that the CYP's presenting difficulties and the impact this had on the staff was the main reason for their case selection.

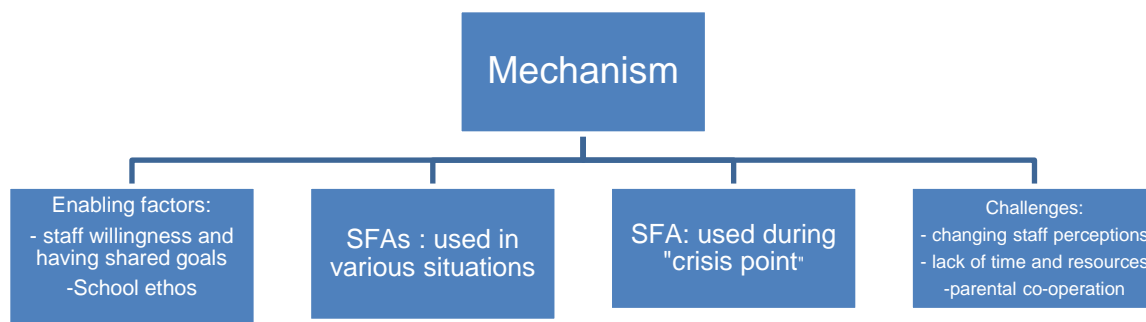
Complex due to diagnoses

For one SENCo in particular, there was an acknowledgment of the complex nature of the background regarding the CYP. The CYP had a diagnosis of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and Asperger's Syndrome. He had also experienced two years of bullying at a previous school.

".....I think it was the child really I thinkhe was not just a behaviour child, the behaviour that he exhibited was mainly to do with his medical diagnosis of ADHD and Asperger's...this then led into the behaviour which most of the time he had no control over...it was quite a difficult case really; even though he says to you about how wonderful everything is, he would still punch a Year 7 girl for not opening the door...It is not a conscious decision of being challenging..." (SENCo 4).

The nature of the case drew the SENCo's attention and thoughts on using SFAs with staff and the CYP explicitly.

Figure 10: Mechanism themes from data analysis



Enabling Factors:

Staff willingness and having shared goals

From individual feedback and the group evaluation, the SENCOs reported that an enabling factor for using SFAs was staff willingness to receive advice and support when working with a CYP who experienced BESD. Some SENCOs expressed that they wanted to formalise the approach through introducing it in an INSET session.

“...I think it has led to improved dialogue...it leads to a more equal perception of status amongst the people involved...a shared responsibility with shared goals.”
(SENCo 1).

There was shared dialogue throughout the process of using SFAs in practice between the SENCOs and schools staff, who were working towards “shared goals”.

School ethos

Specific mention about the school ethos and an “enabling factor” in the use of the approach was mentioned by two SENCOs who worked in the same Federation of schools.

“...it is embedded in the class anyway...nothing drastically different for children...it reflects the school ethos. I think that I agree with it personally. As a school it follows our ethos and is similar to how we deal with behaviour problems. Preferred Future and Best Hopes for the children rather than starting with the problem...” (SENCo 6).

The school ethos also resonated with the concept of having shared goals and objectives.

Use in various situations

Feedback from the SENCos who gave overall positive feedback regarding the use of SFA (from both individual feedback and the group evaluation), highlighted the use for different situations. This included supporting other members of staff as well as for CYP with other needs such (for example for CYP identified as making slower academic progress).

“...I just use them all the time, because they work and you just kind of tweak it to fit the child or the situation you are working in...I know teachers , especially when you get the BST ...and they say do this and this and this, and they (staff) say we do all that already...I know there is that attitude a bit so you just have to say “well have you tried...” it has made a difference to how teachers respond...” (SENCo 6).

“..... I have actually used the framework in other parts of my life...just that idea of structuring it...and thinking about where would you like to be...it is quite liberating that process...it untangles you from the problems and difficulties you have faced...once you do that you open up possibilities. I am doing it in other aspects of my life ... other professional capacities...every time you get blocked with things or when the problems outweigh...it's being flexible...” (SENCo 5).

“...I tried it out on my husband!...I asked him what he would like...what would you prefer?” (SENCo 1).

“...I think it can be linked into a spiritual way of thinking ...it's leading me in a certain amount of fate...creating and working your way to “well that happened” and ultimately this is where we are going, the root is still this - the way I would like to be. I think it can enable you to think positively. I think with children you are supporting

them to develop their outlook to life. I think parents may focus a lot on the problem...” (SENCo 3).

SENCoS specifically mentioned the use of SFA in their personal life, indicating their perception of SFAs as universal and flexible.

Use during a “crisis point”

SFAs were adopted by some SENCoS as a final strategy or during a crisis situation. One SENCo mentioned using SFAs as a “leveller” – to be able to start again when the CYP was ready and when other strategies had little impact.

“...it is really great when you are at a crisis, or where you are headed to a place where things are not progressing...it’s a useful thing to use to bring things forward. It does provide a good line leveller.” (SENCo 5).

An interesting comment made from a SENCo was the use of SFA during “crisis” situations, such as when the CYP had been excluded.

“...I think we use solution focus as well with reintegration (after exclusion)...which is your preferred future, what is your best hope...and then say to the parent what do you want for your child - it is quite solution focused, and then what you do is you get, you put in next step...going on report so we can monitor on what is happening. Building on success ...you always build on success...we’re never always negative....we are positive. Making sure there is always a bit of a positive in there.” (SENCo 4).

The approach was seen as useful in terms of reintegrating the CYP back into the class setting, adopting an overall positive approach.

Challenges

Changing staff perceptions

One of the main challenges which seemed to be encountered when using the approach with some staff members was the reluctance to change perceptions in

trying a new approach. Some SENCOs commented upon how the teacher or TA became “defensive”.

“...in terms of limitations you are thinking in terms of changing perceptions which is a challenge...it is not a quick-fix process...people aren’t always ready for it as they want to spend time on talking about what has gone wrong...coming across too upbeat and positive may even get on people’s nerves...” (SENCo 2)

“...I was quite surprised when I made up a Behaviour Plan after one particularly bad session he had, and spoke to the teacher about it and then quickly knocked up something - I was surprised the teacher went on the defensive...I was taken aback ... I thought “that wasn’t the intention”...” (SENCo 1).

The “defensive” reactions from the teacher seemed to have been unanticipated by the SENCo.

Lack of time to embed the approach into practice

For the SENCOs who had not been aware of this approach, they reported needing more time to fully embed the approach into their practice. This was particularly the case for one of the SENCOs who was new in her role, mentioning she wanted to feel fully competent and confident before she used it with fellow staff members. For another SENCo it related more to feeling able and confident enough to be able to talk through difficult questions with a teacher who would have a greater amount of background information on the CYP in question.

“...I would have liked to have really embedded it in myself; it feels like I have been playing catch up all the time; now through the understanding of it, if someone was to ask me what is the approach I would struggle to explain it specifically, although I would be able to give examples...” (SENCo 3)

“..I need time to embed the approach...if there are any difficult questions...with a student I could do it more confidently, but with a member of staff, they may have thought about it in a lot more depth...difficult questions...I need to be bit more confident about what I will be discussing and how I will be discussing it with that member of staff”. (SENCo 4)

Feeling fully confident that the approach had been embedded in their practice was an important component as to how the SENCOs would use the approach with other members of staff.

Parental co-operation

An awareness of the complex situations for some CYP in terms of home –life and differing parenting styles was expressed by two of the SENCOs.

“ ...it appears to show failure...but in fact I don't think the methods fail at all. It's more that we don't get in there soon enough, that we haven't enough counselling resources. There is actually a cultural gap between school expectations and positive parenting... it is so different to that of the parents themselves. There are also more complex psychological issues in the whole family dynamic and the individual people involvedI cannot see any one thing working well unless a whole family therapy approach is in there somewhere.” (SENCO 1).

In another interview with a SENCO, reference was made to the “language of projection” and some of the “hurdles” a CYP may come across.

“...it's language of projection, what they would like to be like; for XX in particular, he would like to have friends, to be able to get on. He doesn't want to hurt our feelings. When you unpick the hurdles that he comes across: he says “well dad says I'm going to be like this” or “I am told that this is what I am like, I can't help the way I am”. ...He comes up with that one; so there's this language that is already being instilled in him...” (SENCO 3).

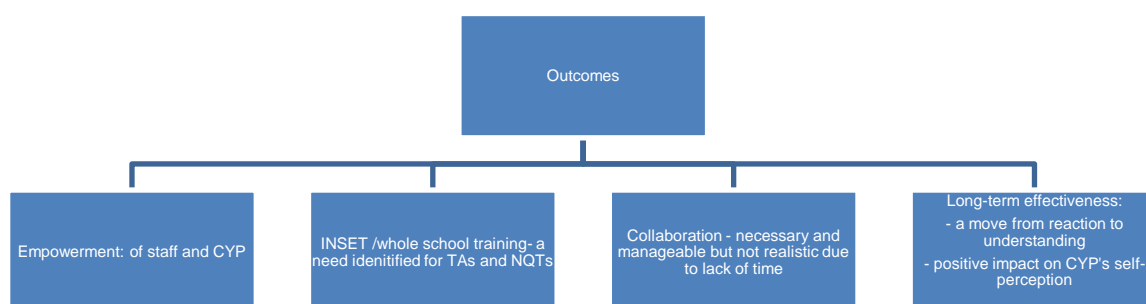
Parenting style and co-operation was mentioned within the same context, with a belief that without positive parenting and co-operation with school initiatives, it was difficult for the SENCO to anticipate change.

10.2 Research Question 2

What effect has using SFAs had on the SENCoS in their practice when working with other staff members for meeting the needs CYP with BESD and challenging behaviour?

The themes discussed in this section relate to the outcomes of using the approach on the SENCoS' practice.

Figure 11: Outcome themes from data analysis



Empowerment of staff and CYP

The outcome of making a change was reported by one SENCo in particular. This related to an NQT who had been supported by the SENCo using SFA to enable her to manage the class more effectively. The SENCo identified one particular pupil in her class and worked collaboratively with the CYP and the teacher.

“...so I think it is something useful to the teacher as an NQT – her values and practice...it will become embedded in her behaviour management” (SENCo 6).

All but one SENCo commented upon the positive effect using SFA had had directly on the CYP:

“...for the child, it empowers them to make the right choices, rather than just the adult telling them how to behave....it is a really good skill set for them, and as time goes by we will see less and less bad behaviour from certain groups of children....” (SENCo 5).

For the exception, the SENCo made the decision to use SFA with the teacher and the parent, and not explicitly with the CYP. She mentioned that the use of SFA did not take place as anticipated, reporting that the teacher and the parent became defensive and the parent in particular being “un-cooperative”. Nevertheless, her personal reflections highlighted her implicit use of SFA with other staff member as well as in other areas of her life.

INSET for staff

Two out of the six SENCos, who had positively viewed SFAs as holistic and adaptable, mentioned the need for an INSET for all staff members. One SENCo in particular mentioned that staff need to feel that it is a universal approach which is not targeted at anyone in particular. As an outcome and future plan, this was discussed during the group evaluation. INSET was planned to introduce SFA across two federations of schools (which would total eight small Primary Schools – four in each Federation) for all staff members. Additionally, creating a simple handout or a pamphlet was agreed upon during the group evaluation. This would summarise the four key principles, providing a quick and easy guide for staff members to use, which would include key questions as prompts for further discussion.

Collaboration: necessary, may not be realistic

All six SENCos stated the value of the collaboration with other staff members. Most viewed this as necessary and crucial for supporting a CYP with challenging behaviour. This was specified in terms of setting targets, outcomes and interventions. The need for collaboration between staff was mentioned in Phase 1 by both teachers and TAs; they expressed the value of being able to liaise with one another. However with no allocated time to do so, this presented as an existing barrier, particularly for SENCos who were also class based.

The positive impact of collaborative practice was voiced by the SENCOs in terms of the impact it had on TAs:

“...the TAs were very open to it....also given the fact that they would have a set time to discuss the particular child...that was very important to them...working together is invaluable, as long as you can come up with the best hopes together, and review it again a week later, it is quite a good time limit and it keeps you accountable...” (SENCO 3).

The uncertainty about time allocated for work related to the SENCO role was also mentioned in terms of the “unrealistic” model of collaborative practice.

For some SENCOs who had other roles within the school they reported a lack of time to meet on a weekly basis.

“...I think it is probably effective but I don't think it is realistic...I think XX is a very lucky person (those who have just the SENCO role)...that they can just do that. I don't see my LSAs from one day to the next, just because, one because it is a bigger school than a small Primary; two they are all off with students – a timetable they stick to...but yeh with the role...attendance, behaviour, safeguarding...and I do a third teaching...” (SENCO 4).

It was anticipated following session two, that the SENCOs and staff members would be able to meet for half an hour on a weekly basis to discuss the CYP in question. Three of the six SENCOs had other roles within the school; this included teaching, pastoral support as well as monitoring attendance and behaviour.

Long-term effectiveness

Moving from reaction to understanding

In terms of how the SENCOs viewed the effectiveness of SFAs with the CYP who experiences BESD, there was an acknowledgement that SFA allowed staff members to understand why the behaviour was occurring rather than reacting to it.

“.....I think they (class teachers) can be very reactionary...you almost need to take a breath and think, well what is actually going on here...acknowledging the problem and think about why the child is behaving as he is...” (SENCO 1)

The SENCOs' view of the class teacher being reactionary to the presenting behaviour resonated closely with their understanding of the need to acknowledge the problem.

Positive impact on CYP

The SENCOs acknowledged the potential positive impact using SFA had on the CYP experiencing BESD. One SENCO in particular mentioned how SFA offers "positive affirmation" and a positive image for the future and for long-term core beliefs.

"...I think when you talk about the end, a solution and getting to your best hope and getting to where you want to be, it puts into their head a positive image they're attaining to, rather than the problem, it gives them a visual of a positive nature... I think that's really nice, I see that working with XX; I see him smiling and noticing it...almost like positive affirmation for them- having not done it very often they're still seeing what that would look like for them...it's really nice. It's showing them that they could be in that position even if they have never been...it's giving it some weight, some reality. And then it's stepping back and saying ok then what is our journey to get there? This is possible, this is where we need to get to...it certainly gives them hope." (SENCO 3).

Using SFA for a particular CYP seemed to have enabled a reflection on the potential positive impact of the approach.

For a CYP who was described as having a complex history of bullying coupled with a dual diagnosis of ADHD and Asperger's Syndrome, the impact of SFA was evident to staff:

"...by having the visualisation on a scale XX has been able to see where he is...I have written at the end that he has made the associations himself; he said, I moved from here to there...he has made the connections....he has linked the connections to his behaviours....he identified the changes in his life at the moment in real life and actions. He makes the links between the positive behaviours and the positive experiences; he said to me he identified himself he was at a good place..." (SENCO 4).

This SENCO particularly referred to the CYP as noticing the change in his behaviour himself by linking the positive behaviours to the positive experiences.

Individual reflections from the SENCOs

As a small scale study, which has considered the experiences of the participants in depth, I have included a selection of their individual reflections on the process throughout (see Appendices 15-18). Themes from these reflections were coded and included with responses from the semi-structured interviews and group evaluation (forming the higher order themes which were grouped according to context, mechanism and outcome themes).

As this study was a collaborative action research approach, it incorporated my involvement in gaining individual accounts of on-going reflections, facilitating meetings with SENCOs and other staff members as well as holding the three sessions described in the Methods section. The on-going written reflective accounts, using a framework and probe questions to guide the reflections allowed for a focus during the meetings between myself as the facilitator and the SENCOs as the participants (as well as staff members following the session two task). All the SENCOs managed to maintain reflective accounts (albeit in varying levels of depth) as well as some staff members following session two. Reflections included SFA in relation to SENCO practice, SFA discussion with teacher/TA, key reflections and points for discussion and on-going/continuous (5 week block) reflections from the staff member e.g the TA.

Chapter 11: Discussion

The findings from phase two are discussed in this section. This section will also draw upon findings from phase one of this study, which formed this first stage of the CAR approach (“reflecting on current practice”).

11.1 Research Question 1

How useful do SENCOs feel SFAs are when working in collaboration with other staff members for meeting the needs of a CYP with BESD and challenging behaviour?

Context and mechanism themes data analysis revealed insights into how useful SENCOs found SFAs when working collaboratively with other staff members for supporting CYP with BESD and challenging behaviour. The context themes represented the circumstance each SENCO worked within; some may be considered as *mechanism themes* (such as “staff willingness”). I found when attempting to group the themes there was quite a significant overlap for some. For this reason the context and mechanism themes have been discussed according to how *useful* SENCOs found SFAs.

The mechanism themes are discussed in relation to the meanings they reflect for the usefulness for the SENCOs and in particular reflect the realistic evaluation concept of what works for whom and in which circumstance. Throughout this discussion, reference is made to appropriate psychological theory which is used to illustrate the point further.

Expectations of SFAs and Staff willingness

The SENCOs mentioned that they expected a formalised framework to structure conversation using positive language. The use of a framework offered the SENCOs a practical tool to use with other staff members, and along with the use of positive language. It could be argued that this also provided the SENCOs with a more “credible” intervention to approach staff, in anticipation for a response or reaction to

the approach itself. Staff willingness varied between the SENCOs' experiences. The more willing TAs were very much in favour of collaborative working (as identified by the SENCOs), and valued the time allocated for collaboration regarding a child whose behaviour was particularly challenging for staff. The support offered enabled the staff members to feel there was a shared responsibility, and the pressure of one person to manage the challenging behaviour of the CYP was eased.

Some staff members were reported to be more defensive and less co-operative. This raises question as to how SENCOs approach a staff member, particularly for one whom they feel could benefit from an approach such as SFA. It is likely that some members of staff may have felt "targeted" particularly if issues around their practice had been raised in the past. One of the SENCOs, who was aware of the sensitive nature regarding teacher's practice, acknowledged this in her reflection and pointed out that she remained tactful throughout the course of the meetings. Feedback from this particular teacher was positive and the SENCO mentioned that the teacher even thanked her for her support. The positive feedback is important in how well the SENCOs felt they had managed to work collaboratively with the staff member; as one SENCO mentioned, the defensive nature of the teacher she was working with was unanticipated. This could also relate to how self-efficacious the member of staff felt embracing a new approach as well as the perceptions of role definitions (Burton and Goodman, 2011).

The use of SFA resonated closely with the school's vision for some of the SENCOs, particularly for maintaining positive behaviour management without the need for specific interventions such as Thrive. Studies have highlighted the influence and importance of factors within the school ethos and their effect on reducing exclusions and for improving behaviour management (Osler, 2000; Munn, Lloyd and Cullen, 2000). For the SENCOs who reported the approaches were similar to what they would typically adopt, they mentioned they were also able to use the approaches with different cases and staff members across the school.

Case selection and defining challenging behaviour

For some of the SENCOs, the use of a definition for challenging behaviour from phase one and its use in phase two changed in terms of how it applies to CYP with BESD as well as its usefulness. SENCOs were asked to think about a CYP whom

they considered having BESD and presenting as challenging in class, by using a collated definition of challenging behaviour, formed by definitions given by teachers, TAs and SENCos (Appendix 10). There was a recognition in phase two that the definition would vary according to who felt challenged by the behaviour presented by the CYP as well as the different reasons for the behaviour. It was felt the definition should be broad ranging to account for this, as a fixed definition would not suit all cases. Parallels can be drawn from the difficulty in defining BESD as the term “behavioural emotional and social difficulties” has been mentioned as being defined in imprecise terms (Cole and Visser, 2005).

The case selection for using the SFA was to support a staff member in meeting the needs of a CYP with BESD and challenging behaviour. The decision to use SFA could have been based upon wanting to improve staff practice, to use the approach explicitly with the CYP or both the staff member and CYP - a decision made by each SENCo. For many of the SENCos the case selection was to support both the staff member and the CYP with BESD. There was a recognition that the approach would serve to improve the practice of the staff member as in the case of supporting TAs as well as an NQT. The idea that the SENCo would “model” how to work with a CYP using SFA gave an insight into how they perceived their role; for example in terms of teaching the NQT explicit skills.

The development of TA practice was seen more broadly in terms of how to build a positive relationship with the CYP in question. Feedback from one SENCo who worked with two TAs was that their willingness contributed to the successful outcomes of the approach; the SFA were used to develop TA practice as well as explicitly with the CYP. Staff noticed a change in the behaviour and responses of the CYP in question. It could be argued that giving the TAs more ownership with a flexible approach, which they can use and adapt to their own practice, enhances self-confidence and efficacy in making a difference to a CYP.

Support using SFA for the CYP who experienced BESD tended to be for a CYP who had a long history of challenging behaviour, whose behaviour had been challenging for a number of staff members over the years as well as for CYP who were viewed as having “complex issues” associated with their challenging behaviour. The SENCos’ perceptions of what caused challenging behaviour (as explored in Phase one) were reported to have played a role in the case selection. As the social

constructivist theory would emphasise, there is the importance of culture and context in understanding what occurs in society and then constructing knowledge based on this understanding (Kim, 2001).

Shared goals and dialogue

The use of shared goals and having a shared dialogue was described by most of the SENCOs as being a positive step forward in collaborative practice. In phase one, staff members (teachers, TAs and SENCOs) mentioned this is what was needed, but was not formalised. Having a discussion around the “preferred future” and “best hope” as outlined by SFBT (de Shazer, 1982) enabled dialogue to begin between staff members, particularly in relation to the outcomes for the CYP.

The responsibility for responding to challenging behaviour in schools does not tend (as was not described by the participants) to be the responsibility of one professional. Behavioural policies allow a universal approach to behaviour management, but the support offered following challenging behaviour for a CYP who experiences BESD, may rest on one professional such as the TA. The TA, in phase one was described as delivering specific interventions as well as responding to challenging behaviour (in identifying the triggers and responding thereafter). For the class teachers and SENCOs support and response was much in terms of the behavioural policy of the school, liaison with parents and, for the SENCOs in particular, arranging support from other agencies such as Behaviour Support Teachers (BST) and Educational Psychologists (EP).

Feedback from the SENCOs highlighted the usefulness of having a shared dialogue. One SENCO mentioned it led to the “equal perception of status” of staff when responding to challenging behaviour. The importance of support between staff members for enhancing the outcomes of CYP has been documented; Norwich and Daniels (1997) found that teachers who formed part of a Teacher Support Team (TST) reported feeling more confident, which in turn led to some improvement in the behaviour and learning of some children.

The importance of the relationship between staff, expectation of support from the SENCOs as well as role definitions can all be seen to play a part in some of the reported feedback of staff being defensive and uncooperative. Three of the six

SENCOs (who were full-time SENCOs), mentioned how they were aware of staff members perceptions of them in terms of the SENCO “not fully being aware” of the situation, and approaching the case in an overly optimistic manner. One SENCO mentioned how she thought this would start to “get on their nerves”, indicating the potential strained relationships within schools which already may exist between the staff members.

11.2 Research question 2

What effect has using SFAs had on the SENCOs in their practice when working with other staff members for meeting the needs CYP with BESD and challenging behaviour?

Outcome themes data analysis revealed insights into the effects of using SFA on SENCO practice when working with other staff members.

Empowering staff

The positive impact on the confidence of teachers and TAs to respond to the presenting needs of CYP with BESD, was reported by some of the SENCOs. A key component to this outcome was staff willingness to adopt a new approach as well as being prepared to meet weekly in collaboration with the SENCO, for planning how SFAs would be adapted for the CYP in question.

For staff members who were less engaged and co-operative, the effect of using SFA was more uncertain. One of the SENCOs mentioned that staff wanted to be heard about the nature of the problem. Given the emphasis SFA places on “problem-free” talk (de Shazer, 1985), this made it more difficult for her to liaise with that staff member.

The relationship between SENCOs and the staff they work with appears to be a key factor in how receptive they will be in embracing a new approach, particularly one which would require frequent collaboration. Building a positive rapport could incorporate being tactful and sensitive in communicating the support offered, as one SENCO mentioned throughout her work with an NQT. As another SENCO reflected, exploring the problem in some depth prior to introducing solution was important for

the staff members she worked with, particularly given her role as a SENCo across a Federation of four schools.

Positive effects on the CYP

All the SENCos who worked with the staff members and CYP (using the approach explicitly with the CYP), acknowledged the positive effect it had on the CYP. Small changes such as noticing the child smiling a lot more were reflected upon by one SENCo in particular. She commented on SFAs giving a positive future and “some weight and reality” for the child in question.

For one CYP, making the links between positive behavioural experiences was viewed as a significant step forward in changes to his responses in class (as this was previously described as regular “outbursts of anger”). As humanist theory (Rogers and Frieburg, 1994) and existential theory (Fernando, 2007) put forward, individuals make changes through getting in touch with their real selves. For this CYP in particular, it was reported by the TA and SENCo that he developed a positive self-perception and image throughout the use of SFAs.

The SENCo role

Much of the SENCos’ views on the sustainability of collaborative practice seemed to correspond with the amount of time they were allocated for SENCo related work. Not surprisingly, those who had a full-time role as a SENCo viewed this model of working as sustainable and realistic, whereas those with other roles in the school such as class teacher or lead for pastoral support, viewed it as desirable but “unrealistic”. For the SENCos with a full-time position for work relating to children with additional needs, there was a realisation that their time was divided between a number of schools, therefore their understanding of the situation would depend upon the information they received from the school, parents and through work with the CYP. Additionally, some SENCos expressed the high expectations for meeting the needs of children with additional needs being the responsibility of the SENCo only, which, for them, was a factor to overcome for successful collaboration to take place. SENCos with full time roles also expressed their awareness about staff sensitivity and the defensiveness that made collaboration more difficult.

The use of SFA with parents and staff members proved quite a challenge for one SENCo in particular. The views on the “causes” or reasons behind the behaviour, for example home-life, appeared to correspond with the lack of co-operation in using this approach. As noted by Broomhead (2014) the “tacit acceptance of parental norms” could potentially hinder the advocacy of children with BESD; this also raises questions regarding the barrier this may pose for collaboration with parents, as SENCos typically working in liaison with staff, children and parents alike.

11.3 Methodological limitations

Having completed both phases of the CAR approach a number of potential methodological limitations have been identified which should be accounted for when considering the findings. For those SENCOs who had first been introduced to this approach or who were new to the role, they expressed time as a challenge they faced, particularly in how confidently they were able to use the approach with a fellow member of staff.

Given the large geographical area the two learning communities encompassed, this proved difficult for all the SENCOs to attend the final group evaluation session (albeit all the SENCOs attended sessions one and two). As such two sessions took place in each learning community. The collaboration between the SENCOs was therefore reduced to taking place over two sessions; I did however feedback to the SENCOs who attended the second group evaluation session the main points of discussion of the first group evaluation session (this was audio-recorded and key points were drawn out).

Chapter 12: Conclusions for phase one and two

This study adopted a collaborative action research approach and has explored collaborative enquiry with the aim of developing reflective practice for improving staff practice and as well as for improving the outcomes for CYP with BESD. The value of collaborative action research has been highlighted throughout the course of this study, as insights have been gained relating to staff practice by SENCos implementing and reflecting upon the use of SFAs, collaboratively with fellow SENCos as well as staff members within their school setting.

Phase one of this study explored staff views and experiences for supporting and responding to CYP with BESD who exhibited challenging behaviour. There was an identification of the emotional needs of the CYP in question as well as the potential impact of a diagnosis or “label” associated with the change of terminology to “mental health needs” in the SEN Code of Practice (DfE, 2014), particularly for parents. The teachers’ reliance and value of a one to one TA to support and respond to a CYP with BESD, was apparent; furthermore, the impact of challenging behaviour on a teacher’s self-esteem and confidence was apparent as well. These findings were important for the guidance I offered as the facilitator for the three sessions. I was aware of the varying roles of the SENCos (that is the amount of time each SENCo had to commit to the study), thus adapted my support and facilitation to the needs of each SENCo.

As well as gaining such insights, the varying experiences of each SENCo have demonstrated *enabling factors* as well as *challenges* when using SFAs with other staff members, CYP and in one case with parents.

Using SFA with existing approaches to support CYP with BESD and challenging behaviour was described as a good starting point when all else had been exhausted. Outcome themes gave insights into the use of SFAs with CYP explicitly; that is to say it could empower CYP in terms of developing a positive outlook for the future as well as for developing a positive self-perception. SENCos reported the use of SFAs with other members of staff depended very much on their willingness (from the beginning) as well as their willingness to change their perceptions to be able to adopt a new approach (mainly being less problem-focused). Collaborative practice was viewed favourably among the SENCos, yet the reality of it occurring on a regular

basis was influenced by factors outside the control of the SENCo, particularly if they were class based or had other roles within the school.

The use of elements from realistic evaluations (Pawson and Tilley, 1997), enabled more clarity to be drawn on the context each participant worked within, the mechanisms or “processes” which the participants worked through and the reported outcomes of using the approach. As has been mentioned, I was drawing upon elements of the approach and not seeking to find causal relationships (as realistic evaluations can seek to do using “CMO” configurations).

Chapter 13: Implications for future research

Feedback from the SENCOs after the data collection for this study was complete was positive. Some of the SENCOs mentioned how they have sustained their reflections given the positive outcomes they had observed (some in relation to staff practice, for others for the CYP). Future research could consider the use of collaborative research itself on improving staff relationships; this was an area which could have been explored further if there was scope to do so. Given some SENCOs, particularly those who had a full-time SENCO role, sensed staff members feeling defensive or sensitive to the offer of support, the rationale for such a study would stand, particularly if this could enhance staff learning as well as for improving outcomes for CYP. The future role definition of the SENCO could also be explored in more detail, as this was one element the participants mentioned was “continuously changing”.

My role as the facilitator in this study also gives useful insights into the future of EPs working collaboratively with staff members, particularly in the capacity of action research. The enthusiasm and willingness from the SENCOs to not only improve their own practice, but that of other staff members, was a promising and positive step towards achieving reflective practice in education. Given some of the limitations and challenges mentioned such as time, the SENCO role can be viewed as one which is a vital one between staff, parents, CYP as well as other professional such as EPs.

The positive outcomes mentioned by some of the SENCOs related directly to the use of SFAs for CYP experiencing BESD. An area to extend upon this could be to consider the effect on a CYP’s resilience. During the group evaluation one SENCO raised an interesting point about using SFA as a group approach, so that all staff members feel it is a universal approach, and not “targeted” at any one member of staff in particular. One impact of using SFA as a group means that it becomes less personalised for the staff member concerned, which may suit some staff members, but maybe not for others.

Collaboration between teachers, TAs and SENCOs was seen as a necessary step forward for joint working with CYP with additional needs. The use of supervision for school staff, commonly used in EP practice is an area future research could explore, with scope for EPs initiating a “model” of supervision to be carried through by SENCOs as a sustainable approach. The supervision model could focus on the current practice of the staff member, and could incorporate SFAs within each

session. This again would require staff to be released from class, but if head teachers viewed this as part of the staff's Continuing Professional Development (CPD), it could be put forward as a viable investment of time.

From my reflections as the TEP working within the learning communities as well as feedback from the participants, a longitudinal study using collaborative action research in the future would serve as more beneficial for all participants involved, particularly for allowing them time to embed the approach. This study has provided useful insights into the some of the challenges faced on a day to day basis with staff members being able to liaise and collaborate. Nevertheless, the benefits of collaboration were communicated by all the SENCOs who participated: indicative of its requirement in schools. I feel there is much scope for future EP practice in this area, particularly when using collaborative action research, which could be taken on by the school staff once they feel it is really embedded in their practice.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Interview schedule for Paper one

Interview Schedule

Research Question 1

How do SENCOs(/teachers/TAs) define “challenging behaviour”?

- 1.1 How would you define “challenging behaviour” in general terms?
- 1.2 What would you say are the main characteristics of children with BESD (i.e in terms of behavioural, emotional and social difficulties)?
- 1.3 What are your views on the elimination of the term ‘behavioural’ from the new SEN code of practice?

Research Question 2

What are the experiences of SENCOs (teachers/TAs) in supporting and meeting the needs of children with BESD?

- 2.1 What support do you give (generally) to a child with BESD?
- 2.2 What interventions (specific) are used by staff?
- 2.3 What do parents generally expect in terms of the support the school can offer?
- 2.4 What is the main role of a one to one support or a general teaching assistant, in terms of supporting a child with BESD?
- 2.5 Are staff members able to collaborate with one another?

(Encourage participant to expand...)

- 2.6 What are your views on the effectiveness of the support and interventions currently being used?
- 2.7 Is there any active involvement of the child in the Individual plan/target setting?
- 2.8 How are children with BESD who are taken out of the class, reintegrated back into the class?

Research Question 3

What are the experiences of the SENCOs (teacher/TAs) in responding to pupils with BESD?

3.1 What strategies are adopted to preventing challenging behaviour?

3.2 What does the behaviour policy of the school outline for preventing challenging behaviour?

3.3 If a child is asked to leave the classroom after exhibiting challenging behaviour, how are they reintegrated back into the class?

Appendix 2: Letters sent out to the schools



15/06/14

Dear _____

My name is Sobia Khan and I am a Trainee Educational Psychologist working with the [REDACTED] [REDACTED] learning communities. I am currently involved in working on a research project which aims to support SENCOs in the use of Solution Focused Approaches with teachers and teaching assistants. This will specifically relate to work with children with behavioural, social and emotional difficulties (BESD) and challenging behaviour.

The research project is working in line with one of the aims and objectives of the Primary Support Partnership: *“to use a solution focused support group among SENCOs.”* The project itself will be collaborative action research, which will involve myself as the Trainee Educational Psychologist working closely with SENCOs in the two learning communities, in using Solution Focused Approaches with staff to support pupils with BESD and challenging behaviour.

The research project will be split into two parts. The first part will involve an exploration of the experiences of teachers, teaching assistants and SENCOs in how they support children with BESD and challenging behaviour and the preventative strategies used in class. The second part of the project will focus upon working collaboratively with SENCOs in supporting teachers and teaching assistants in using Solution Focused Approaches with children with BESD and challenging behaviour.

The main aim of the collaborative action research project is to support SENCOs in working in collaboration with teachers and teaching assistants using Solution Focused Approaches for pupils with BESD and challenging behaviour. Please refer to the attached timetable which highlights the involvement from the staff.

I would be grateful for your school's participation in this project, as I hope you see the value in the research as well as how the aims complement those underlying those of the Primary Support Partnership. If you would like your school staff to be informed and involved with the project, please contact me using the details below. If you would like to discuss this further please do not hesitate to contact me.

I hope to hear from you soon,

Best wishes,

Sobia Khan

Trainee Educational Psychologist

Tel: XXXXXXXXXX

E-mail: XXXXXXXX or XXXXX

Appendix 3: letters sent out to the parents



13.11.14

Dear parent/guardian,

My name is Sobia Khan and I am completing the Doctorate in Educational, Child and Community Psychology at Exeter University. As part of my Doctorate degree I am conducting a piece of research exploring the use of Solution Focused approaches for improving the behavioural outcomes for children in Primary Schools (for children who may have behavioural, emotional or social difficulties).

As a brief outline, Solution Focused approaches have been used to encourage people to focus on their strengths and to describe their preferred future. By detailing the skills and resources that already exist, such descriptions can be used to make suitable adjustments to the current situation. I have been involved in facilitating the use of Solution focused approaches with staff members (specifically SENCoS) and it is planned that the approach will be used with other staff members to support children in school for improving their behavioural outcomes.

This research will involve the class teacher or teaching assistant working with your child using the approach described above as part of an "Action Plan", running between November 2014 until January 2015. As a Trainee Educational Psychologist I will be facilitating the use of Solution Focused approaches and will meet with the class teacher or teaching assistant as well as the SENCo, to discuss how this approach is taking form. These meetings will be audio-recorded; you can be assured that your child's identity will remain anonymous at all times and that all the information gained will be confidential.

You will have the right to withdraw your child from partaking in this study at any time, and if you request, any information that has been collected will be destroyed. If you are happy for your child to be involved as part of this research study, I would be very grateful if you could indicate so by signing the attached consent form.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study, please feel free to contact me on the details given below.

Many thanks for your time.

Best wishes,

Sobia Khan.

Trainee Educational Psychologist (Exeter University).

Email: XXXXX

Tel: XXXXXX

Appendix 4: Overview of the research

The use of Solution-focused approaches by SENCOs and school staff in supporting pupils with Behavioural, Emotional and Social Difficulties: An Action Research Study.

The Primary Support Partnership

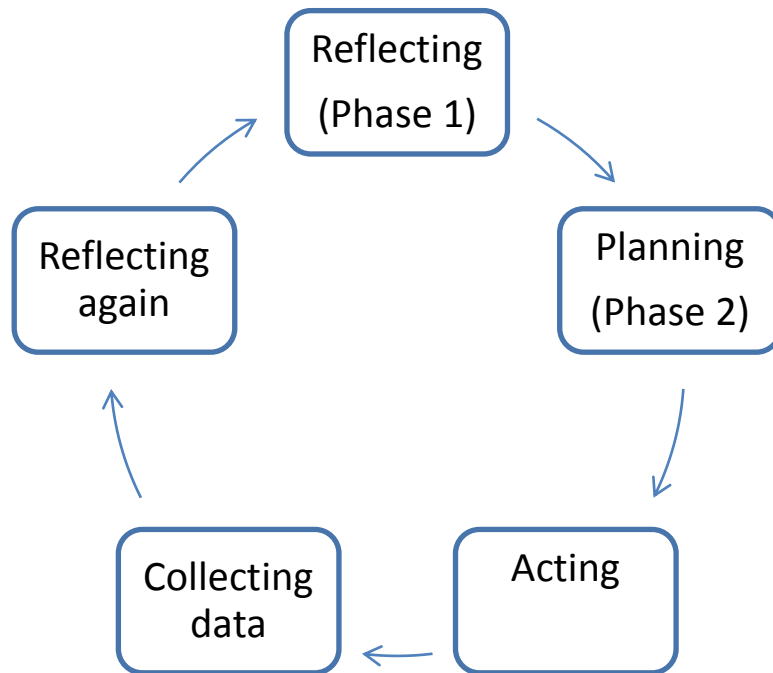
Two learning communities in Devon are to receive funding as part of the *Primary Support Partnership* agenda, in the drive to bring down the number of exclusions in primary schools. This agenda is specific to Devon and funding has been offered by the Local Authority for all learning communities. The overall aim of the Primary Support Partnership is to facilitate the development of universal provisions across the communities of schools and encourage collaborative work between schools. Some examples of such provision include: training staff in solution focused approaches, the use of the “Circle of Adults” approach as joint problem-solving and using Appreciative Enquiry.

Part of this money can be used for training and research purposes. One of the *Key Aims* outlined in the Expression of Interest document for the two learning communities concerned, is:

“to create systems for collaborative working across the learning communities “

- *Solution focused support group for SENCOs*

COLLABORATIVE ACTION RESEARCH CYCLE:



Phase 1: Reflecting upon experience of the preventative strategies used for pupils with challenging behaviour and how this can be linked with how we can support such pupils, who may have BESD.

Phase 2: Planning how we can use Solution Focused approaches for supporting pupils with BESD (working on a plan with teachers and/or TAs).

Phase 1

Participants	Data collection	Duration	Possible dates
SENCOs	Semi-structured interviews	30-45 minutes	June/July 2014 (after school – I will visit you at your school)
Teachers/TA	Group interview	1 hour	June/July 2014 (after school – I will visit you at your school)

Phase 2

Participants	Sessions	Possible dates	Duration and venue
SENCOs	<p><u>Session 1: Reflecting</u></p> <p><i>Reflecting upon the responses from Phase 1, this session will draw upon the key themes to begin planning a change. It will also introduce Solution Focused Approaches (SFA) and how we can use them in our practice.</i></p> <p><i>TASK: to keep a reflective account on how we use SFA in our practice.</i></p>	September and October 2014	1-1.5 hours after school; the group of SENCOs will meet at a specified school for session_1
	<p><u>Session 2: Planning a change</u></p> <p><i>As a group, the SENCOs will meet, with myself as the facilitator, and we will collaboratively form an Action Plan for change using SFA. This will focus upon how SFA can be used with teacher and TAs as well as setting targets for the teacher/TA to use SFA with the pupil identified.</i></p>	November 2014	1-1.5 hours after school; the group of SENCOs will meet at a specified school for session_2

Participants	Sessions	Possible dates	Duration and venue
	<p><u>Acting and observing</u></p> <p><i>Working with a teacher and/or teaching assistant, to use SFA to support an identified pupil with BESD/challenging behaviour. This could be in the form of identifying what is working well at the moment and setting solution focused targets for the pupil. I will work with the SENCO, teacher and TA collaboratively to support this.</i></p> <p><i>TASK: SENCOs are to keep a reflective account.</i></p>	<p>(implementation will be for two months to allow for seeing the effects of the SFA; I will visit SENCOs on an individual basis to offer support and to gain feedback)</p>	<p>Venue: at the SENCO's own school setting</p> <p>Time: November-December</p>
	<p><u>Session 3: Group Reflection.</u></p> <p><i>As a group reflect upon the process of using SFA and how this has impacted on your practice. Also, share experiences of participating in an Action Research study.</i></p>	<p>January 2015</p>	<p>1-1.5 hours after school; the group of SENCOs will meet again to reflect collectively and share their experiences (at a specified school).</p>

Appendix 5: Primary Support Partnership objectives.

Primary Support Partnerships – Expression of interest

Extended second form (d5)

<p>Anticipated geographical coverage / participating schools /other organisations as appropriate</p> <p>Note: In order to achieve complete geographical coverage across [REDACTED], the anticipated 15 centres will need to <u>average</u> around 22 schools – this number may be influenced up or down by size of school, levels of need and geographical issues. However don't let this put you off initially as there are various models emerging with various options for addressing this issue</p>	
Lead head teacher	[REDACTED]
Contact Name and Position:	[REDACTED] [REDACTED]
Address:	[REDACTED] [REDACTED]
Email:	[REDACTED]
Phone:	[REDACTED]
Date	[REDACTED]
School	[REDACTED]
Key aspects	<p>Enhancing provision across all schools (training, sharing experience, expertise and practise)</p> <p>Additional support across or between schools</p> <p>Multi-agency and cross phase links</p>
<p>Key aims (vision!)</p> <p>An overview of what you wish to achieve/provide in terms of meeting needs, over the next 3 years: building on existing skills, strengths and strategies and ongoing training and support.</p> <p><i>You may wish to consider an audit of needs, existing skills and strengths</i></p>	<p>1. <i>To secure and embed a consistent approach to meeting the social and emotional needs of children and families using the THRIVE ftc approaches</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To train two Thrive ftc trainers to deliver CPD and on going Thrive FTC training across the learning communities To train two Action Plan Mentors to support Thrive Practitioner colleagues in schools across the partnership To train two family Thrive practitioners to provide a shared approach to family support based on Thrive

	<p>FTC approaches</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a system for Supervision across all areas of professionals – eg Heads, SENCOs, teachers, teaching assistants and family workers. <p>2. To create systems for collaborate working across the learning communities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SENCO Network Meetings to keep informed and up to date • Multi agency services team (MAST) Meeting • Solution focused support group for SENCOs/Heads • Explore the creation of a collaborative (Secondary LAP type) ‘Alternative Curriculum Group’ for pupils at risk of exclusion
<p>Key objectives, performance indicators, success criteria, data collection</p> <p>(First try!) Your first thoughts on this section will help clarify the main areas in which your partnership hopes to make a positive impact. Your ideas will contribute to a wider discussion and to a small number of measures that will be common to all Primary Support Partnerships. You may wish to have some of your own that reflect local circumstances. We are interested in what works!</p> <p><u>Examples to promote discussion</u> Reductions in behaviour related ‘critical incidents’ at school, percentage of time spent in/out of planned class activity. CPD support for quality inclusive/universal provision. Achievement of individual targets included in personal plans, academic progress measures, pupil attitude and engagement, parental satisfaction and engagement.</p>	<p><i>As a minimum starting point the LA will continue collecting and using comparative data relating to fixed term exclusions, permanent exclusions and persistent absence. (Systems and provision that facilitate a zero exclusions being a medium term objective)</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <i>1. Reduction in permanent exclusions</i> <i>2. Reduction in fixed term exclusions</i> <i>3. Reduction in ‘critical incidents’</i> <i>4. Increase in collaborative working to share good practise and information in a ‘SENCO Network Meeting’ with EP</i> <i>5. Increase collaborative working to problem solve – to include ‘Supervision’ and a Secondary LAP style meeting with EP</i> <i>6. Development of Thrive ftc trained people working across the community to up skill and maintain Thrive development for all staff.</i> <i>7. Development of Thrive ftc for the wider community and increase parental involvement by training Thrive Family Workers</i>

Appendix 6: Excerpt from transcripts for the “definition of challenging behaviour” (Paper one) with the initial coding

Transcript example	Initial coding
<p><i>....I would say challenging behaviour is being noncompliant...behaviour that disrupts the rest of the children from learning; any physical behaviour as in towards staff, other children or property or even in the language they use....</i></p> <p><i>...I would say, children who are negative about themselves ..they may take themselves off site and cause disruptioni think it is the impact it really has on the teacher....if the teacher is finding it a challenge</i></p> <p>(Teacher focus group)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Disruption - Negative self-image - Teacher feels challenged
<p><i>.... I think I would say it is behaviour that puts others at risk, I mean seeing violence or aggression...also language, I think children who are using bad language....</i></p> <p><i>...it can also be a lack of communication, those that just shut down on you, that is so challenging. I think that can be challenging because you just don't get an answer so you can't get to the bottom of it....</i></p> <p>(TA focus group)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - puts others at risk -violence and bad language -lack of communication
<p><i>....I would say behaviour beyond that expected of children in the class as a normal range of behaviour, if we are talking in the school context. I think it can be slightly different in the home situation, because there are other emotional factors that come into play there. From the school's point of view I would say behaviour which disrupts or upsets the lesson</i></p> <p>(SENCo interview)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -disrupts others - behaviour beyond “normal” expectations

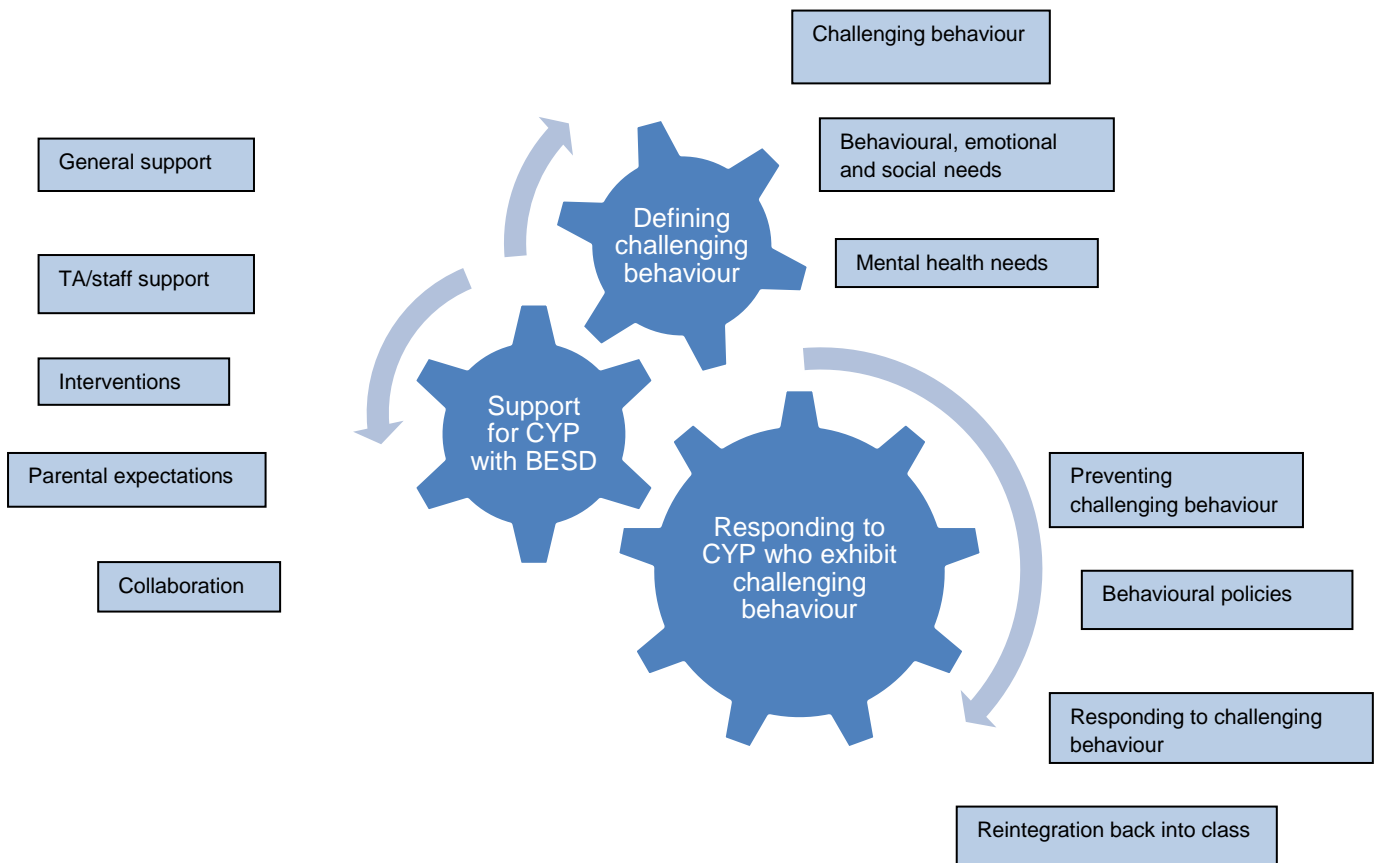
**Appendix 7: Excerpt from transcripts for “support offered to CYP with BESD”
(Paper one) with initial coding**

Transcript	Initial coding
<p><i>...Our children seem to be lucky because at the moment most of them seem to have one to one TAs..</i></p> <p><i>...I think those who exhibit more physical behaviour attract more support, those with low self-esteem and who go off-site, that is when support is given...</i></p> <p><i>...it is valuable when you do have that extra support assistant...to be able to go and work with that child so that you are able to focus on the rest of the class, even if that is taking them out of the classroom..</i></p> <p>(Teacher focus group)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Valuable TA support - Attachment figure - Most children have one to one if they need it - Teacher able to focus on rest of class
<p><i>....quite often as TAs it's about being a supportive friendly figure...someone they can go to when they need to talk understanding and listening, just having the time to do that; she has 30 other children.</i></p> <p><i>...as a TA, you generally have a better idea of what is going on than the teacher because you have more time with the child.....</i></p> <p>(TA focus group)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - TA : a supportive figure - Understanding role - Able to give time
<p><i>...usually there is an in-house policy for supporting a child facing a difficult situation...if this has happened more than once there will actually be a plan in place for that child...but the general policy covers time-out, what happens when a situation happens outside in the playground...we follow the school rules about what happens when there is a behavioural upset....</i></p> <p>(SENCo interview)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Use of policy adopted in school - Time-out - School rules

Appendix 8: Excerpt from transcripts for “preventative strategies for challenging behaviour” (Paper one) with initial coding

Transcript	Initial coding
<p><i>...We use a lot of distraction as well as lots of rewards for good behaviour...Distraction just before – when you can see it build up.</i></p> <p><i>...it’s putting things into place, one boy in my class thinks it is the end of the world if he cannot be at the front of the line. It’s just letting him know, preparing him...pre-empting...</i></p> <p>(Teacher focus group)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Use of rewards - Distractions - Pre-empting
<p><i>...well we have put in place the Circle of Friend, we have a range of tools to help, we might go to the Thrive room. If I see XX get angry or start to shout, I will approach him and kneel down – get to his level, then just sort of talk really calmly and quietly ...he tends to calm down after that...</i></p> <p><i>...it takes a while because when he explodes it’s all of a sudden, at first I would think whoa...what’s just happened here, what’s triggered that...it’s trying to nip a lot of it in the bud...try to pre-empt it...</i></p> <p>(TA focus group)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Use of interventions - Talking calmly - Pre-empting triggers
<p><i>...we have a point system for rewards...house points and groups. Lots of positive talk, we push positive talk, praise by the teacher. The teacher tends to give the rewards and praise and sometimes the children even praise one another. If there is an incident at break or lunchtimes, there will be a one to one interview to get to the bottom of it; it will be reprimand type talk...using a whole school policy..</i></p> <p>(SENCo interview)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Use of behavioural policy - Positive talk - Reprimand type talk

Appendix 9: Conceptual map for Paper one



Appendix 10: Themes for discussion (from TA and teacher group interview)

Themes from the TA focus group interview:

(general)

- Defining challenging behaviour:

Behaviour that puts other children or adults at risk of being hurt. Violence; the use of bad language. Children who disrupt other children's learning. Lack of communication; shut down – when they won't communicate – that's really hard to deal with. Then we don't know what the problem is...it's really hard.

Possible causes? All seems different for different children given their different backgrounds. It's very difficult to pinpoint. Especially if they don't speak. Something may have happened over the weekend and they would still hold it in their head.

Themes from the teacher focus group interview:

(general)

- Defining challenging behaviour:

I would say... challenging behaviour is non-compliance; behaviour which is disruptive to others; physical aggression : even in the language they use. Children who are negative about themselves, and say "I can't do this". "I don't want to try"... behaviour which takes them off-site.

Possible causes? Emotional immaturity low-self-esteem, being "manipulative" and getting their own way (at home and at school). Attempting to control others (by trying to make themselves feel better). Changes; in particular transitions – if something hasn't gone their way.

Appendix 11: Excerpt from field notes as the facilitator

-SENCo responses often consider the holistic picture: parental involvement, staff views and collaboration, emotional needs of the child, other professional involvement. Thinking in terms of the eco-systemic model: the micro- and macro- "cultures" and how the child is placed at the centre.

- As a contrast to this - teachers: more on the management, role, response, and the possible within-child causes for challenging behaviour. Challenging behaviour is referred to in its broadest definition - as how the behaviour is challenging for the teacher and their self-esteem. Teacher self-efficacy theory explanation.

- TAs tended to talk in terms of how the view is from the child's point of view : use of Thrive as an intervention and how it is used to respond to children presenting with challenging behaviour.

- Behaviour and learning is very much linked - specifically in relation to interventions. Support was referred to many times in relation to rewards and sanctions.

- From the SENCo's point of view, responses from behaviour is in accordance to what many have caused it; from emotional upset to "off the wall" behaviour. Presenting behaviour as such would determine what intervention is put into place eg extreme aggression - CYP would stand outside the office. Emotional upset may require an intervention such as withdrawal from the classroom.

- There is an emphasis on the school ethos which tends to the social and emotional needs of all children as a basic requirement. Emphasis is placed upon understanding and sometimes allowing for exceptions to be made. One SENCo talks about exception being made in relation to responses to challenging behaviour - this was referred to a having "rubber boundaries".

- Much emphasis was placed upon PHSE as a curriculum subject to support CYP (as an intervention) for a school which did not take up Thrive as an intervention to support CYP with social and emotional needs. Emphasis was placed upon building skills of resilience and independence. Different SENCo have different number of years experience as SENCos. For a recently qualified teacher who had adopted the SENCo role, the participant expressed the difficult she faced in being a SENCo for a school she did not work in (part of the Federation of schools). As a full-time class teacher and SENCo, the participant described the role as being an isolating one.

Strengths were identified in particular TAs in supporting children with BESD - used as a source of general support for challenging behaviour throughout the school

-SENCos tended to talk about preventative strategies in terms of a general class approach (one rule for all). Reflective practice: identified when one SENCo used the term "icebergs" to liken the complex nature of some of the challenging behaviour exhibited. Acknowledgement was made for the pressures faced by the class teachers to achieve certain levels.

- Attention seeking - a behaviour which expressed that something was not quite right for them. Behaviour which communicated meaning, specifically, for action
- Smaller school - have a joint effort in spotting the tell-tale signs of a child's distress for example not playing with peers or a death in the family/parental separation. For those who expressed less need for behavioural interventions, (reactive to presenting needs?)

Appendix 12: Session one hand-out

Solution Focused Approaches: Session 1.

BACKGROUND TO SOLUTION FOCUSED APPROACHES.

- Solution focused approaches have been adopted across a range of disciplines, drawing on a range of sources. Some of these including: family therapy, hypnotherapy and philosophy – all of which are aimed at developing a different approach to problem-solving.
- The origins of the approach stem from Solution Focused Brief Therapy (SFBT) (de Shazer and Berg, 1986). As an approach it attempts to enable people to build changes in their lives in the shortest possible time. It is based on the assumption that change comes from two principles sources: from encouraging people to describe their preferred future and, and from detailing the skills and resources they have already demonstrated (instances of success in the present and past). From such descriptions, clients are then able to make the adjustments to what they do in their lives.
- A solution focused approach takes the principles ideas from SFBT. It holds the view that the way clients talk about their lives and the words and the language they use, can help them to make useful changes. A solution focused approach may incorporate the “Miracle Question”. Clients are asked what would they notice that would be different if their best hopes are realised (if a miracle happened and they had not realised this e.g. if they were asleep)
- An illustration of the basic principles of the original ideas stemming from solution focus brief therapy, as summarised by Rhodes and Ajmal (1995) are:
 - An emphasis on the past and on details of the problem are not needed for the development of solutions.
 - There are always exceptions when the problem is less or absent.
 - Individuals have the resources to resolve the difficulties they face.
 - Small changes can lead to a widespread change.
 - Problem-free talk (after the concern has been identified).
 - Identifying exceptions or whenever the concerns are less.

KEY PRINCIPLES:

Using Solution Focus Approaches in practice:

- BEST HOPES: what do you want?

-PREFERRED FUTURE: How will you know that you have got what you want?

- BUILDING ON SUCCESS: what are you doing that is working well?

- NEXT STEPS – small signs

TASK.

Individually, think about these questions:

- What is the best outcome would you like as a SENCO?
- How would you know (in the future) that you have got what you want?
- What things can you think of that you are currently doing that are working well?
- What would be the first small sign to tell you that things have moved forward?

(Appendix 12: Session one hand-out)

SOLUTION FOCUSED APPROACHES INTO PRACTICE : TASK

Over the next 4 weeks, keep a reflective account of a situation in which you are able to apply some of the ideas discussed which have demonstrated the use of a Solution Focused Approach. Attached is a proforma which you can use as a guide for your reflections:

<p>➤ <i>What outcome would you like to see?</i></p>	
<p>➤ <i>How do you know, in the future, that you have achieved this?</i></p>	

<p>➤ <i>What is the first sign which would indicate this?</i></p>	
<p><i>Please feel free to make any additional comments as part of your reflections on using SFAs.</i></p>	

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**Please note, that if the situation involves the mentioning of individual pupils that this is recorded anonymously (e.g child A). For future work (with teachers and TAs where cases will be discussed), parental consent will need to be gained beforehand. Thank you.*

Appendix 13: SENCo survey responses

SENCO	No years in SENCo role	Class teacher	School phase	Number of schools as a SENCO (if federated)	Training for BESD	Previous SFA training	Peer support or supervision
1	7 to 8 years	No – full time SENCO	Primary	3	Yes - SEAL	Yes – an introduction	Yes – SENCo forum
2	Less than one year	Yes – Year 6 class teacher	Primary	1	NO	No	Informally
3	3 years	No – other pastoral support roles	Primary	1	Thrive	No	Yes – within a team of staff for pastoral support
4	3 years	Yes – just one day a week	Primary and Secondary (Academy)	1	Through SENCo certification only	Yes- basic SF coaching	Informally
5	8 years	Not class teacher; full-time SENCo	Primary	4	Yes: Thrive	No	Informally
6	16	No – full-time SENCo	Primary	4	SEAL and CAPs	No	informally

Appendix 14: Example of a SENCo's reflections following session one.

15.09.14

TASK.

Individually, think about these questions:

- What is the best outcome would you like as a SENCO?

I hope to have a clear picture of the whole school regarding the following points:

1. Slow movers
2. Interventions in place
3. How interventions are working
4. Planning for differentiation, G&T and SEN
5. Staff skills and deployment
6. Good working relationship with all staff
7. Next steps action plan
8. Deep understanding of the data pro

- How would you know (in the future) that you have got what you want?

I would be able to regurgitate an accurate picture, to an Ofsted inspector or leader within the academy, at any given time.

- What things can you think of that you are currently doing that are working well?

Developing relationships with staff.

Beginning to develop an awareness of the whole picture considering strengths and areas for improvement within the school.

- What would be the first small sign to tell you that things have moved forward?

An improvement in staff utilisation and systems that can be seen by planned interventions actually taking place.

Focus 1 – Myself:

How will I become a good SENCo in this school? How will I have a clear understanding of the whole picture, the resources, the school needs, the children, the next steps?

How will I arrive at this solution?

Focus 2 – Class 2, supporting teacher and child with ASC

How will I support the teacher in feeling she is able to support the child and class in sustaining a learning environment?

Appendix 15 (a): Session two handout

SESSION 2: SOLUTION FOCUSED APPROACHES IN PRACTICE.

RECAP:

SOLUTION FOCUSED APPROACHES:

- BEST HOPES
What do you want?
- PREFERRED FUTURE
How will you know you have got what you want?
- BUILDING ON SUCCESS
What are you doing that is working well?
- NEXT STEPS
What are the small signs to indicate change?

WRITE DOWN A DEFINITION OF CHALLENGING BEHAVIOUR IN PAIRS:

AGREED GROUP DEFINITION:

Appendix 15 (b): Session 2 – transcript of part of the discussion:

SESSION 2: SOLUTION FOCUSED APPROACHES. (13.11.14)

Defining challenging behaviour:

XX: also...diagnosed condition (ASC) pre-warnings; at the lower end challenging behaviour: the child who hasn't got the ability to verbalise what they want so they will shout or scream UP TIL THE YEARS 9,10,11 when they make that chose.

XX:In our school the behaviour for teachers to deal with is the ones just being recognised now.... Persistent, but the teacher doesn't know how to deal with...especially when there's little support or there's a few with challenging behaviour. Once just assessed, with support you can support.

XX: point blank refusal to do something...seems to be a cross over - a lot of year 7s begin to do this; they find it really hard - they can't cope with all the movement and all the teacher.

Please write down a definition in your own terms for "challenging behaviour".

Feedback:

- Persistent disruptive, aggressive, attention-seeking behaviour; disrupts others' learning because of their own behaviour. Disrupts the learning of other; risk of harm to other pupils or staff.*

How have you find using Solution focused approaches:

XX: listed all the thing of what a "good" SENCO

What's working well: developing relationships with other staff...

Whole-school action plan is being re-written: so I'm a little in limbo. School improvement plan.

I'm a new SENCo in this school: reflecting on my previous experience: I want to hit the ground ; coming in after 2 years : I'm a little rusty. Sitting down and chatting to others really helps.

XX: I think I always try to use it; it can be very difficult because it's putting in the strategies for doing the very small things first. I had a 100 day plan: I think now I don't even think about my role as SENCO - because everything's so reactive; everything does become solution focused... It's flexible; you're the sounding board for the LSA or pupil.

XX: Small signs: An LSA has had seen lots of positives; who would I choose: can be a dilemma: would I choose somebody who is struggling: how would they take it? They may be very negative...self-fulfilling prophecy; working relationship - how would it be affected? It's hard to broach the subject...

SK: maybe approach it via "working with the child with BESD".

XX : Staff - Circle of adults

SK: e-mail key reflection / potential point for discussion with teacher/ta.

Appendix 16 (a): Example of a SENCo's reflections following session two.

ACTION FRAMEWORK USING SOLUTION FOCUSED APPROACHES: SENCo's PLAN

(please use initials of staff and children only as consent has not been gained yet)

POSSIBLE TEACHER/TA: A POSSIBLE CHILD: TJ

CONCERN/ISSUE: Aggression, to staff & children
Refusal to work & behave in circle time
Overweight & foot-splay
Mimics father's behaviour & swearing,
Wants adult attention but then will not follow rules.

- TJ has social skills but is actively pushing boundaries & ruling roost at home.
- PSF approach needed over long term with family situation needing proper support.
- May end up in further proceedings
- Not a failure of approach but a lack of resources & counsellors to fully work with family & child

Appendix 16 (b): SENCo's key reflections and plan for working with staff member

13.11.14
Solution Focused Session 2

ACTION FRAMEWORK: SESSION 2 : Using solution focused approaches with teachers and teaching assistants.

KEY REFLECTION	POTENTIAL POINT FOR DISCUSSION WITH TEACHER/TA
Dialogue approach with children in class - how to move away and tell TJ positively what to do	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • what to say to other children? • how can we use buddies? • is there a strategy card - suitable for all children • can we send 'play with parent' games home
Talking about problem in terms of possible solutions - how to maintain positivity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • anger/impulse strategies + symbols - suitable for all. • 'hard' rules for all. • 'Proud' book, home → school
Whole staff involvement so that everywhere TJ goes he is supported. - how to have joint cooperation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • all staff maintain chronology & think how each problem might have a preferred solution. • how can we support each other
MTA's - how can they be included in discussion?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ? chart for playtimes on clipboard. + stickers etc • ensure comments part of overall discussion
How to maintain continuity with parents as a collaborative rather than confrontational IAC meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • how to involve Craig in dialogue - • how to be positive in playground at hometime in front of other parents

Appendix 17: Examples of weekly reflections from the SENCos

SENCO Collaborative Action Research
December 2014 - February 2015

<p>Week beginning: 25/2/2015</p> <p>Solution Focused Approaches used (probe questions):</p> <p>What's changed since we started?</p> <p>what's helped?</p> <p>Who's been affected?</p> <p>What next?</p> <p>How?</p>	<p>Reflection:</p> <p>→ "I can take a joke better." "less angry". "More friends".</p> <p>→ "Me and you getting along, coming down to the small playground. Helping people".</p> <p>→ "My class, they know I'll be calm and relaxed".</p> <p>→ Try and keep my scores where they are now. Not let them go back towards the middle.</p> <p>→ Staying relaxed. Getting used to peoples angriy me. Treat people how you want to be treated.</p>
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I can go to Harley and say, "you can tell me your problems".

People can be horrible to me / him. If it's not that bad I can deal with it myself. If it's bad I can tell a teacher.

Appendix 18: Examples of a SENCo's weekly reflections

SENCO Collaborative Action Research
December 2014 - February 2015

<p>Week beginning:</p> <p>Solution Focused Approaches used (probe questions):</p>	<p>Reflection:</p> <p>Js believes his time reflecting via the scales has made him aware of where he 'is'.</p> <p>He is keen to point out how his positive actions affect his self-perception.</p> <p>He is quick to identify the change in his scale scores and can identify how this connects to new positive situations (friendships, "feeling chilled").</p> <p>He can also attribute these changes in his own scores and attitudes to behaviours he is displaying.</p> <p>He is also very aware that the places he identifies himself on the scale <u>now</u> are good places to be and he is keen to <u>stay</u> there.</p>
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- He links his behaviours to his PCP.
- Identified his own changes. Both scores and examples.
- "If things go wrong, I have to build the relationships back up with the people + teachers in my class."

Own solution →

"I'm more than an angry person."

Appendix 19: Additional reflections made by the SENCOs

Although there was a blip in behaviour today - both J + class teacher were in a more positive place. They both realised that sometimes things do go wrong but they were both able to move on after lunch + enjoy the afternoon.

Tuesday CIC meeting

Everyone commented on how J's behaviour is better. Both Social Worker + carer were very positive about the positive way that J is being handled at school. Both say he is presenting as a happier, confident boy. At home he is calmer.

For J the solution focussed approach has been pretty positive. He has been able to find good things about himself. This has impacted on his learning, he is being noticed by his teacher, which is what he craves + is realising that he actually enjoys his work! Especially maths where he is trying to get to the challenge task. Now he is no longer using his behaviour to get his teacher's attn he is having a lot more successes + this has increased his motivation.

I have constantly reminded J + the teacher that it is OK for things to go wrong as long as the general trend is improving - which I think it is!

Appendix 20: reflections made by the SENCo when working with the class teacher

Week 2

SENCo / Teacher.

SENCO Collaborative Action Research
December 2014 - February 2015

<p>Week beginning: 19 Jan 2015.</p> <p>Solution Focused Approaches used (probe questions):</p> <p><u>What has gone well this week?</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - much better - trying hard to listen - praising him for putting his hand up - getting on with his work. <p>Have you noticed any positive behaviour from J this week?</p> <p><u>Examples:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Time limit then back to check. - Really kind to his brother - modelling positive behaviour. <p><u>What has been different?</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - furniture + chr. have been moved around. - spread chr. out so more difficult to annoy others - behaviour management is more positive <p><u>What has been happening that you would like to see continue?</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - taking a board sanctions 	<p>Reflection:</p> <p>Wow! What a difference!</p> <p>Following last weeks very negative session CT was able to list a list of positive behaviours.</p> <p>Really taken on board looking for good behaviour.</p> <p>Using different strategies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I'll come back in 2 mins + see how you are getting on. <p>More conscious of positive language - keeping focussed on the preferred feature.</p> <p>Interestingly, the class teacher is able to identify that behaviour is different, can list positive behaviours but cannot say how her own behaviour has impacted on the charges.</p> <p>Not able to recognise that how she says things + what she says can make a huge difference to a child.</p>
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How confident are you feeling with dealing with J.



- struggling to sit still.
- better in English after break.
- inside voice.



Appendix 21: Excerpt from a transcript of session one visit to a SENCo

SENCo: "for me, to see a child's behaviour change after this intervention would be an interesting exercise, because it is a debate I have with teachers - that they haven't time for this, that and the other. A slight doubt that maybe it may not work anyway. I thought having a child with behavioural needs, and seeing if something comes out of something involving that child and i wouldn't like to say what or how.... I would have to record that as something in a continuous record during the time I spend with him...just to see if anything useful will come out of that.

The other case I would like to use it for is a straight-forward reading intervention with a child who is really getting left behind, but really in my mind because they not receiving the intervention - mainly because TAs report they haven't had time for this that or the other....."

Appendix 22: Excerpt from a transcript of session two visit to a SENCo and staff member

TA: " I think initially the transition, once we sort of did the honey-moon period...but then it was becoming critical - he (the child) was putting himself in really unsafe situations...so i feel that we have hit that critical point and we have addressed it. He is doing quite well at the moment

I think it was just that initial ...lots of changes, then to have a change of TA. It was pushing teacher and myself and him thinking, "OK, if I do this, what will you do?"

SENCo: there is still a lot of non-compliance, him refusing to do things...

TA: I feel now, we have a good relationship, and with the class teacher. At the beginning we were all finding out feet really. Now, I think it was something dad bought up...if you tackle him, he will just go....so it's distraction.

SENCo: really? That is a big change from how he was in Year 1....

Appendix 23: Key concepts and corresponding interview questions (Paper two)

Interview questions	Key concept
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What were your expectations for using SFAs in relation to your role as a SENCo? • Had you used or come across these approaches before? 	Expectations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How useful did you find SFAs? Did it add or improve anything in relation to your role as a SENCo? • As a group, we have used the four key principles of SFAs (preferred future, best hopes, building on success and next steps). Is there any particular principle you found most useful? If so, please explain. 	Usefulness of SFAs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have you been able to use those approaches regularly or more often? If so, why? If not, why? 	Opportunities for using SFAs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We used a collated definition of challenging behaviour, after discussing the definition given by teachers and teaching assistants. We then used this for selecting a case. How useful did you find this definition? Did it add anything to you own definition of challenging behaviour? 	Usefulness of defining challenging behaviour

Interview questions	Key concept
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What factor/key aspects did you consider for your case selection: (a) in terms of working with a TA/teacher (b) in terms of the CYP? 	Case selection
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How useful did you find the approach when working with a teacher or TA (or maybe both)? • Did you face any challenges? • Have you had any positive feedback from the teacher or TA? 	Working with the staff
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you feel working one to one, in close collaboration with a teacher or TA is (a) a sustainable model of working for a SENCo? (b) effective for changing practice? (c) something you would strive to do in the future? • Do you think you might use SFAs in the future with other staff members? Are there any other approaches you may wish to use with other staff members ? If so, please describe. 	Future use of SFAs

Interview questions	Key concept
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are your views on the appropriateness of this approach for improving the situation for CYP with BESD? • What are your views on the long-term effectiveness of this approach? • Have there been circumstances when using SFAs has been possible? What factors do you think made using SFAs possible? 	Other/Miscellaneous

Appendix 24: Group Evaluation: session outline

12.02.15

Group Evaluation:

Using solution focused approaches (SFA)

Structure of the session:

1. Overview of the use of SFA so far
 2. Sharing experiences...
What has made the implementation of SFA possible?
What challenges did you face (if any)?
 3. TASK: reflecting in pairs
 4. Planning a change...Cycle 2 of the study
 5. Any other comments
-

GROUP EVALUATION

In pairs, please answer the following questions on the A3 sheet provided. Try to give as much detail as possible. We will come back as a group to collate all the responses.

How readily/willing were staff to adopt the solution-focused approaches (SFA) to their practice?

What has your experience been in working one to one with another member of staff for a particular child?

Have you/staff/parents noticed any changes in the child's behaviour? Their engagement in class?
General motivation?

Please write down any changes you would make, in light of your experience using SFA, to the second phase of this study.....

Appendix 25: group evaluation themes

Group Evaluation responses: themes

Probe question/key concept	Themes from group responses
How readily/willing were staff to adopt the SFAs to their practise?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Willingness to try something new• Reluctance to try – staff claiming they have already done it• Tendency to be problem focused• TAs reporting it is similar to the other approaches they use• Leadership acknowledged and valued the approach
What has your experience been when working one to one with another staff member?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Staff pressure of SATS, teaching other responsibilities• Needs to be a follow-up for it to be used again• Increased dialogue with staff• Shared issue, shared goals• Needs to be used in NQT training• Difficult to use for more complex cases• Other staff members became positive too• Need to include more teacher in the process• Some struggled with a new concept

Probe question/key concept	Themes from group responses
<p>Have you/staff/parents noticed any changes in the CYP's behaviour? Their engagement in class? Their general motivation?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents noticed a change in behaviour • CYP wants to please • CYP notice change in himself • CYP much more engaged • Challenging behaviour has lessened • CYP start the day more positively • Encouraged the active involvement of the CYP • Positive impact on self-perception
<p>Please comment on any changes you would like to make in light of your experiences using SFAs, for the second phase of the cycle.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Choose a TA who is in a different class (to ensure there is no pressure or feelings that they are being observed) • Ensure staff feeling it is a universal approach to improve practice • Language used by SENCOs needs to be sensitive to convey the message • Run an INSET first to prepare the staff • For the staff who are willing: to pick areas carefully (i.e. depending upon their confidence, self-esteem) • Allowing time for building up trust or using alternative narratives. • Acknowledging the problem still exists so that staff feel they have been heard.

Appendix 26: Consent forms - staff, parents, children



GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

Title of Research Project: *The use of Solution-focused approaches by SENCOs and school staff in supporting pupils with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties: An Action Research Study*

CONSENT FORM- STAFF

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

I understand that:

there is no compulsion for me to participate in this research project and, if I choose to participate, I may at any stage withdraw my participation and may also request that my data be destroyed

I have the right to refuse permission for the publication of any information

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

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

all information I give will be treated as confidential

the researcher(s) will make every effort to preserve my anonymity

.....
(Signature of participant)

.....
(Date)

.....
(Printed name of participant)

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

Contact phone number of researcher(s): 07878 093717

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

Sobia Khan,
Trainee Educational Psychologist
sk422@exeter.ac.uk
07878 093 717
OR

Dr Andrew Richards Margie Tunbridge
A.J.Richards@exeter.ac.uk; Margie.Tunbridge@exeter.ac.uk
Research Supervisor

* 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



GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

Title of Research Project: The use of Solution-focused approaches by SENCOs and school staff in supporting pupils with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties: An Action Research Study

PARENTAL CONSENT FORM

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

I understand that:

there is no compulsion for my son/daughter to participate in this research project and, if he/she chooses to participate, I may at any stage withdraw their participation and may also request that my data be destroyed

I have the right to refuse permission for the publication of any information about my son/daughter any information which my son/daughter 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 is given, may be shared between any of the other researcher(s) participating in this project in an anonymised form

all information my son/daughter gives will be treated as confidential

the researcher(s) will make every effort to preserve my son's/daughter's anonymity

(Signature of participant)

(Date)

(Printed name of participant)

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

Contact phone number of researcher(s): 07878 093717

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

Sobia Khan,
Trainee Educational Psychologist
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OR

Dr Andrew Richards Margie Tunbridge
A.J.Richards@exeter.ac.uk; Margie.Tunbridge@exeter.ac.uk
Research Supervisor

* 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



CHILDREN'S CONSENT FORM

Hello,

My name is Sobia Khan and I am a trainee Educational Psychologist. I am interested in how children learn, think and feel. I have been doing some work in your school with some of the school staff.

I am doing a project in your school which may involve some of your time. You may be asked to work with your class teacher or teaching assistant and will be thinking about your skills and strengths which can be used while you are at school and also at home.

When I write up my project I will not use any children's names or the name of the school.

If you would like to take part in the project, please write your name on the line below. You may tell an adult at any time if you do not want to take part or if you change your mind.

Thank you for your time.

From,

Sobia Khan.

I would be happy to take part in this project

Name: _____

Appendix 27: Group definition of challenging behaviour

SENCO GROUP DEFINITION OF CHALLENGING BEHAVIOUR (November 2014)

“Challenging behaviour....the child who hasn't got the ability to verbalise what they want so they will shout or scream It is persistent, but the teachers don't know how to deal with it...especially when there's little support or there's a few with challenging behaviour. ...It is point blank refusal to do something.....It is a reaction to something that makes the child feel negative...when someone responds unexpectedly and their response has an impact on others around them in a negative way.....challenging behaviour is also an action or inaction preventing engagement in learning.”

Appendix 28: Literature Review

Literature Review

Introduction

The support offered to pupils with Behavioural Emotional and Social Difficulties (BESD) is of paramount importance to parents, educators, policy makers and the young people themselves. One may ask how this is taking place given the great emphasis and importance placed upon encouraging positive behaviour in the classroom by the government (DfE, 2014). Additionally, the responsibility for school staff who work directly with pupils with BESD may be crucial for ensuring both preventative strategies for challenging behaviour are in place as well as the support pupils with BESD require in order to gain access to their education.

This study aims to seek an insight into the experiences of Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators (SENCOs), teachers and teaching assistants (TAs) in the implementation of preventative strategies for challenging behaviour as well as the support offered to children with BESD. The following literature review will critically examine previous studies which have considered the support and inclusion of pupils with BESD. It will also consider the role of school staff (SENCOs, teacher and TAs) for supporting children with BESD as well as how the implementation of Solution focused approaches have been applied in the field of education.

Government initiatives and guidance for behaviour in schools

In state funded primary schools in England the percentage of children with a statement for Behavioural Emotional and Social Difficulties (BESD) was 18.4 % in 2013 (DfE, 2013). There has been a range of published guidance from the government for schools on behaviour and attendance, (DfES 2003; DfES, 2004; DfE 2013). The government has also published guidance in relation to parental responsibility, (DfE, 2013). The latter highlights how schools are to address attendance and behaviour in schools, and has suggested this could be in the form of parenting contracts, parenting notices and parenting orders (DfE, 2013). Behaviour policies in schools, as proposed by the Department for Education (DfE, 2012),

reflects the key decisions which are made regarding the standard of behaviour expected of pupils, how the standard is achieved, school rules, disciplinary measures for anyone breaking the rules and rewards for good behaviour. In addition to this behaviour policies include measures to prevent bullying. Head teachers publish behaviour policies in writing to school staff, parents and pupils at least once a year (DfE, 2012).

In the government report, *Pupil Behaviour in Schools in England* (DfE, 2012), the characteristics of pupils showing challenging behaviour include: those with SEN, those joining the school at times other than the usual times, looked after children and children with poor language and social skills (DfE, 2012). Other groups who have been described as having higher levels of misbehaviour and poor social/behavioural outcomes include: those from disadvantaged families or with multiple risk-factors and those from disadvantaged neighbourhoods (DfE, 2012). The term BESD has been described as being imprecise (Cole and Visser, 2005). Behaviours which have typically been characterised for those with BESD are: hyperactivity, lack of concentration, presentation of challenging behaviour and being disruptive and disturbing (SEN Code of Practice, 2010). In the most recent guidance for schools, *Behaviour and Attendance* (DfE, 2014), the key points summarise the power to discipline pupils for misbehaviour. The document states that head teachers and the governing body are to ensure that the behaviour policy is “strong” and that support staff are to also play a role in the management of behaviour, including in the implementation of rewards and sanctions (DfE, 2014).

In their submission to the Houses of Commons Select Committee, the British Psychological Society (BPS, 2005), stated that pupils who exhibit problematic behaviours cannot be classified as a homogenous group. They can fall into eight categories: delinquency, emotional difficulties, behavioural difficulties, emotional and behavioural difficulties, social problems, challenging behaviour associated with learning difficulties and mental health problems. The Special Educational Needs (SEN) Code of Practice (DfE, 2014) aims to broaden certain areas of SEN. There will be a replacement of behavioural, social and emotional category with social, mental and emotional health. It is intended that this will place a greater emphasis on the underlying needs of young people and removes the emphasis on behaviour (NASEN, 2014). This will inevitably have an impact upon the way in which teachers and school staff will be required to support children in this category.

For the purpose of this study, the term BESD will refer to children and young people who may display any of the following characteristics:

“emotional difficulties, behavioural difficulties, emotional and behavioural difficulties, social problems, challenging behaviour associated with learning difficulties and mental health problems.” (DfE, 2012, page 33).

Additionally, BESD will refer to one specific group of children who fall in the category of exhibiting challenging behaviour. The term *challenging behaviour* will be explored further with the participants who participate in this study.

Supporting pupils with BESD

The consequences of problematic, challenging behaviour during childhood/adolescence are likely to result in few or no educational qualifications in later life, with a higher risk of having a conduct disorder (Richards et al, 2009). The most common reason for all exclusions is persistent disruptive behaviour (DfE, 2012).

The strategies used for *preventing* challenging behaviour which may be displayed by pupils with Behavioural, Emotional and Social difficulties (BESD) and those *supporting* children with BESD, in practice, may be viewed as two distinct ideas. Questions arise regarding the extent to which the preventative strategies for challenging behaviour complement and support how the needs of pupils with BESD are being met, and how this is reflected in the behaviour policy and practice of the school. In their document *Behaviour and discipline in school- a guide for Head teachers and School Staff*, (DfE, 2013), the process of how schools are to manage behaviour and also support pupils with BESD are not clearly stated in the guidance (DfE, 2013). There is more emphasis placed upon responding to the presenting behaviour, rather than looking at support mechanisms which can be implemented by schools.

Often the focus on the behaviour in schools means that teachers are more likely to identify *behaviour problems* than emotional ones (CAMHS, EBPU et al, 2011). There is also a lack of research about what is known about effective support practices adopted by teachers and the strategies for support children and young people actually receive.

From the government guidance published by the Department for Education (DfE), schools are expected to create their own “behaviour policy”. The governing body is responsible for setting up general principles which inform the behaviour policy and this is usually in consultation with the Head teacher, school staff, parents and pupils (DfE, 2012). Head teachers are then responsible for developing the behaviour policy in the context of this framework. Key decisions are made regarding the standard of behaviour expected of the pupils, how the standard is achieved, school rules, disciplinary measures for anyone breaking the rules and rewards for good behaviour. Additionally, behaviour policies have to include measure to prevent bullying, with the head teacher publishing the document in writing to the school staff, parents and pupils at least once a year (DfE, 2012).

“Classroom behaviour management” has been referred to by Hart (2010) as a generic term which can apply to a range of perspectives. Hart suggests that it may not necessarily refer to how behaviour is changed or shaped which would imply an element of control. The different perspectives referred to by Hart (2010) reflect various psychological theories underpinning behaviour management. Hart (2010) explored the views of EPs about effective classroom behaviour management. From thematic analysis of the interview data with the EPs, he identified a number of psychological functions as an approach to effective behaviour management. Determining what is effective practice by the teachers themselves in the classroom and the perceived effective practices by the EP, may differ. Additionally, the difficulty with determining a psychological theory to shape strategies for promoting positive behaviour “management” is precisely in the terminology used: one cannot escape from the fact that “management” refers to a mechanism of control.

As this study will focus upon pupils with BESD, I have chosen not to consider a generic class management approach; rather I feel it is more appropriate to acknowledge that varying needs of pupils with BESD and therefore refer to the term “preventative strategies” to challenging behaviour adopted in the class setting. In essence, preventative strategies focus upon the responses of the teacher/TAs to the pupils who exhibit challenging behaviour as they occur in the classroom, and in effect account for the fact that it may be more complex than viewing this as management.

A widely used approach for supporting pupils with BESD in the class is the use of the Circle of Friends approach. This approach originated in North America as a way to include children with disabilities in mainstream schools (Pearpoint, Forest and Snow, 1992). It involves establishing a friendship circle around a child who is isolated (the focus child). This circle is organised after the children in the class discuss the focus child (the focus child is not present). Volunteers are sought during this discussion. The focus child and the volunteers then meet to carry out activities, problem-solving tasks and discuss the difficulties facing the focus child regarding friendships.

Circle of Friends approach has been described as facilitating the integration of children and young people who are deemed as neglected or rejected by their peers (Barrett and Randall, 2006). This is done through structured activities which are intended to promote social inclusion and the establishing of friendship groups. Newton, Taylor and Wilson (1996) suggest that there are benefits for all the children in the class. Based upon observations and data from teacher's notes and reports, Newton et al (1996) argue that following the Circle of Friends approach the children in the class demonstrated increased empathy, improved listening skills as well as the ability to identify feelings and behaviour. However, as Barrett and Randall (2006) point out the subjective experiences of those who are not directly part of the circle are not taken into account. The 'whole class' understanding of the approach in effect could determine the acceptance or rejection of the focus child in question.

Smith and Cooke (2000) used an adapted version of the Circle of Friends approach to facilitate the inclusion of a Reception class child among his peers. The authors justified using an adapted version of the original model of the Circle of Friends Approach as an attempt to focus more on the communicative function of behaviour (for example environmental change, the development of appropriate reinforcement, teaching new skills and the identification of reactive strategies). Smith and Cooke (2000) place an emphasis on developing an individualised approach to meeting the needs of the pupil. In this respect, one may question the extent to which this was an adapted version of the Circle of Friends approach. It could also be argued that the involvement of the rest of the children in the class may have been variable.

The effects of the increase in the use of positive verbal statements in responding to pupils with challenging behaviour has been studied in schools (Swinson and Knight, 2007; Hayes, Hindle and Withington, 2007). Hayes et al (2007) conducted an action

research study in a secondary school as part of a “strategy for change” over an eighteen month period. They aimed to challenge and enable teachers to modify their behaviour in order to increase the number of positive feedback statements made within the classroom. Part of the data gained were from observations of pupils’ behaviour, in addition to questionnaire and focus group interviews. Hayes et al, (2007) suggested from their findings that there was evidence of a change in teacher’s behaviour and information about attitudes to the “change process”. Throughout the study causality is assumed: that it is the teacher who can make changes to the behaviour that is presented as problematic. A further somewhat precarious assumption the authors make is that if the behaviour does not improve, then it is the teacher who may be contributing to its maintenance. The approach adopted by Hayes et al (2007) poses weaknesses in several areas; assumptions of a causal link, a lack of appreciation for the eco-systemic factors which may be influencing the behaviour (for example a disruptive home life) and the ethical dilemma of teachers feeling a sense of blame or responsibility if the approach does not work.

Inclusion of pupils with BESD

The government’s drive to increase opportunities for children with a Special Educational Needs (SEN) – including those with BESD, came with the expectation that all teachers should be trained to appropriately identify and meet the needs of pupils with BESD (DfES, 2001). The SEN label itself gives rise to a range of educational needs and as Goodman and Burton (2010) have mentioned the term BESD can have a number of different interpreted causes. The complexity of being able to identify the educational and psychological needs of the SEN of pupils can raise questions regarding the training of teachers to cater for all types of SEN (Goodman and Burton, 2010).

Teachers may be faced with a dilemma – on the one hand they are faced with the pressures of raising standards while on the other hand they are required to develop inclusive practice. There may be great variation in the experiences of children and young people with BESD in the education system. This reflects the complex system within which the inclusion of children with SEN operates (Goodman and Burton, 2010).

Fletcher-Campbell (2001) conducted a meta-analysis study on three research projects which looked at the integration of pupils in mainstream schools (those with SEN), the education of looked after children and the education for those pupils who are 'disaffected' with school and are the centre of problems associated with disruptive behaviour, poor attendance, truancy and exclusion. A complex picture emerged regarding the *reasons* for exclusion and the potential causes (for example home life, expectations and school experiences). Fletcher-Campbell (2001) acknowledged that the reality may be extremely complex with a number of interpretations. Tensions were identified to exist between the varying perspectives, for example of pupils, teachers, parents and the Local Authority. The tensions centred around key notions such as: economy and resources, the varying needs of the pupils and the choices and beliefs of the varying stakeholders (Fletcher-Campbell, 2001). Fletcher-Campbell (2001) attempted to summarise the main factors which contributed towards inclusion. They did this by using the interview responses (parents, pupils, teachers and the Local Authority), about the perceived causes of exclusion in the first place. However, a criteria for inclusion based upon this approach is quite simplistic and does not give credit to the potential interplaying factors which may be involved as well as the complexity of the cause itself.

The frequent preference of teachers in mainstream schools for favouring exclusions has been identified, above taking the time to acknowledge and understand the reasons behind the presenting behaviour which is perceived to be challenging (Broomhead, 2013). This further highlights the lack of time teachers have to explore some of the reasons behind children's' challenging behaviour as well as the possible limited training they have to support children with BESD, who present having challenging behaviour (Hastings and Brown, 2002).

A possible determining factor regarding the strategies adopted for meeting the needs of children with challenging behaviour, is the support and guidance available to teachers and other school staff within one school setting. Norwich and Daniels (1997) reported that teachers who formed part of a Teacher Support Team (TST) within the school, gave positive feedback of the TST experience as it led to increased confidence of the teachers and some improvement in the behaviour and learning of the children concerned. TST support was used to provide emotional encouragement, specific approaches to behaviour management, specific teaching strategies and for consulting others. It does nevertheless raise the question as to

whether groups such as the TST can be sustained and resourced within the school setting, given the time pressures and other commitments of teachers and the perceived value of TST by the senior management team (that is, by head teachers).

Teacher self-efficacy

Teacher self-efficacy has been defined as being “a judgement of his or her (the teacher’s) capabilities to bring about desired outcomes of student engagement” (Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy, 2001, page 783). Self-efficacy has also been linked to an individual’s coping behaviour and work performance measures such as adaptability (Stajkovic and Luthans, 1998). Disruptive pupil behaviour has been linked to teacher burnout (Brouwers and Tomic, 2000). The concept of “burnout” is important in education. Teacher burnout has been found to be linked to reduced personal accomplishment and has been described as being a person’s negative self-evaluation in relation to his/her job performance. Bandura’s Social Learning Theory and self-efficacy beliefs relate to the notion of burnout. A conceptual framework is provided about efficacy beliefs, structure, function and processes and how they produce diverse effects (Bandura, 2001).

Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy (2001) have put forward an integrated model which reflects the cyclical nature of teacher efficacy. This relates to self-efficacy theory which states that people function as anticipative, purposive and self-evaluating regulators of their motivation and actions (Bandura, 2001). They propose that a teacher’s efficacy judgement is the result of the interaction between a personal appraisal of factors that make teaching difficult and the self-perception of teaching capabilities. Brouwers and Tomic (1998) found evidence to support this model whereby high levels of challenging behaviour led to a low level of teacher efficacy in class management. This in turn led to a high level of teacher burnout, which in turn led to an increase in challenging behaviour. In effect this further reduced teachers’ perceived self-efficacy.

Teacher confidence and self-efficacy has been found to increase following mentoring and supervision activities within schools (Elliot, Isaacs and Chugani, 2010). Elliot et al (2010) also found that head teachers are in a particularly good position to encourage the implementation of such sessions. This also raises the potential for collaboration between staff members in supporting one another for cases related to

challenging behaviour, with the possibility of the SENCO co-ordinating and implementing sessions to facilitate this.

The role of the SENCO and school staff in supporting pupils with BESD

In school settings the responsibility of implementing targets to facilitate the inclusion of pupils with BESD often lies with the SENCOs and Teaching Assistants (TAs) (Burton and Goodman, 2011). Furthermore, school based opportunities for the professional development of TAs, many of whom may work closely with pupils with BESD, may reside with the SENCO. Burton and Goodman (2011) explored the perceptions of SENCOs on the inclusion of pupils with BESD. The difficulty often occurs when deciding what the term “inclusion” actually refers to, with the case often put forward as a human right of young people and children with a SEN to have the same access to educational opportunities as other pupils (UNESCO, 1994).

Through a series of semi-structured interviews with SENCOs and support staff, Burton and Goodman (2011) explored the perceptions on the inclusion of pupils with BESD. Participants included staff from schools where the GCSE grades were below the national average. They found that both the SENCOs and the support staff felt unappreciated in their role. Participants did tend to emphasise the factors which underlie BESD (such as social deprivation, and familial instability) as well as how events (to trigger the presenting behaviour) occur outside the classroom.

The authors’ findings suggest that through the creation of a nurturing environment with staff exhibiting caring attitudes, positive relationships could be formed with both students and their parents. Nevertheless, Burton and Goodman (2011) concluded that the long term motivation and effectiveness of SENCOs and TAs is likely to be compromised by a lack of recognition, heavy workload and inadequate financial reward. This raises the issue of how schools are able to foster collaborative working environments so that school staff (including teachers, TAs and SENCOs) can develop recognition for their work. Collaborative work could provide opportunities for school staff to share their ideas as well as for offering support to one another.

Re-thinking the role of the SENCO

SENCOs are said to hold the responsibility of the day to day implementation of legislation for supporting pupils who have been identified as having a SEN (Cole, 2005; Burton and Goodman, 2011; Griffiths and Dubsky, 2012). The perception of SENCOs being part of a senior management team varies widely (Layton, 2005), despite the Labour government's ambition in the *Removing the barriers to achievement* paper (DfES, 2004). The paper states:

“We want schools to see the SENCO as a key member of the senior leadership team.” (DfES, 2004, page 58).

However the subsequent Coalition government who came into power in 2010, did not refer to the SENCO role as “senior management”. Rather, in the SEN Code of Practice (DfE, 2014) they make reference to “Area SENCOs”.

“ Area SENCOs are to provide advice and guidance to early years providers on the development of inclusive early learning environments. The Area SENCO helps make the links between education, health and social care.” (DfE, 2014, page 89)

This raises the issue of whether there still remains scope for SENCOs to deliver training as well as any form of supervision on behalf of the senior management team. In particular this would be pertinent if there are expectations for developing whole-school strategies for early assessment and identification of pupils who are likely to experience difficulties.

In a review of the literature, Cole (2005) identified the areas which highlight the evolving, complex and demanding role of the SENCO. These included: the operational role (relating to demanding range of tasks), lack of power and resources, training, professional development and professional status and the strategic aspect of the role (for example implementing policies). The SEN Code of Practice (2001) (DfES, 2001), stated the role of the SENCO was to work in collaboration with the head teacher and governing body in determining the strategic development of children with SEN. One specific description given is for SENCOs to:

“contribute to the in-service training of staff and to liaise with colleagues.” (DfES, 2001).

With the new SEN Code of Practice (DfE, 2014) to become statutory in September 2014, the role of the SENCo may also require clarification. Although there is no particular mention in relation to a specific role for SENCOs within the staff setting, particularly for collaborative work with colleagues, the draft SEN Code of Practice (2014) does state that:

“SENCOs have the responsibility for co-ordinating provision for children with SEN and for ensuring that children with SEN take part in activities of the school together with children who do not have SEN as far as possible.” (DfE, 2014, page 89).

There is more emphasis on the co-ordination of provision for children with SEN, as the draft Code of Practice (DfE, 2014) introduces the new concept for Local Authorities to provide a *local offer*. This relates directly to the provisions and services the Local Authority can offer to schools, in relation to education, health and social care. Joint planning is also a key idea in the draft Code of Practice as statements for children with SEN are to be replaced with a single Education Health and Care plan (EHC plan). Inter-professional collaboration between education, health and social care professionals is anticipated for the new plan, which gives rise to a possible new interpretation of the SENCo role in schools. Joint planning itself within the school may include collaborative work between SENCOs and other staff members. Given the well-defined role of the SENCo in the previous Code of Practice in 2001 (DfE, 2001), the terms *training*, *collaborative work* and more recently *joint planning* indicate a pivotal role for the SENCo to be in a supportive role to other staff member in the school setting.

The next section examines studies which have used *solution focused approaches* in schools. The potential use of adopting solution focused approach is discussed for supporting children with BESD, and the potential role SENCOs can play to implement this in practice. The use of the *problem-solving model* will also be examined as a comparative approach to using a solution focused approach.

Solution focused approaches

The use of solution focused approaches was mentioned in the Primary National Strategy (DfES, 2004) but clear links were not been made by the DfES for teachers (universally) to refer to or access. It was given in the Primary National Strategy (DfES, 2004) as a strategy – not an overall ethos or approach for responding to challenging behaviour. It is possible that the intention was for the implementation to be more on the management of the presenting behaviour. Reference has been given to adopting a *personal approach* (specific to the teacher in question), but this could imply that some teachers are innately better at good behaviour management than others. Additionally, subsequent government policies relating specifically to behaviour and attendance (DfE, 2014), do not refer at all to the use of solution focused approaches. In contrast, there is an emphasis on discipline, punishing poor behaviour, as well as behaviour and sanctions (DfE, 2014, pages 6-9).

Given the complexity of the needs of pupils with BESD, the application of solution focused approaches does not imply a one-fit-all approach. Rather, a solution focused approach would allow teachers and TAs to develop their own solutions rather than exploring current difficulties (Redpath and Harker, 1999). The use of a solution focused approach is based upon solution focused brief therapy (de Shazer, 1985). Although it has its origins in family therapy, it has also been used in work with individuals, families and schools (Rhodes and Ajmal, 1995). Initially used in family therapy, the approach is supportive and non-judgmental and enables clients to see themselves as having control over the positive changes that can occur in their lives (Redpath and Harker, 1999). A central feature is the detailed description of people's goals and also gaining an awareness for the potential for change (de Shazer, 1985).

Redpath and Harker (1999) investigated the way in which Educational Psychologists (EPs) apply solution focused approaches to their work; in particular for: casework, teacher consultation, group-work, meeting/interagency meetings, strategy meetings and in-service training. For the latter, application in in-service training, the authors found a shift away from the training as an information-giving process, to a situation where those who were being trained generate their own ways of coping and tackling areas of difficulty. In such a case, the EPs moves away from being seen as the expert and more towards being viewed as the facilitator.

The authors acknowledged the challenge for EPs to remain optimistic within a problem driven environment. There may be further scope to evaluate the impact of such an approach on the role of the EP.

Solution focused approaches can be used to empower SENCOs and teachers to seek solutions for themselves rather than focusing on the problem. An illustration of the basic principles of the original ideas stemming from solution focus brief therapy, as summarised by Rhodes and Ajmal (1995) are:

- An emphasis on the past and on details of the problem are not needed for the development of solutions.
- There are always exceptions when the problem is less or absent.
- Individuals have the resources to resolve the difficulties they face.
- Small changes can lead to a widespread change.
- Problem-free talk (after the concern has been identified).
- Identifying exceptions or whenever the concerns are less.

A solution focused approach could be used as part of a 'reflection' on the effectiveness of what is currently being used. A solution focused approach, as incorporated as action research, serves to be a move away from the problem-solving model, such as that put forward by Monsen and others (Monsen, Graham, Frederickson, and Cameron, 1998). The next section explores how a problem-solving approach may differ from a solution-focused approach, drawing upon the use of both by EPs in their practice.

A comparison of problem-solving frameworks with a solution focused approach

The Problem-Solving framework (Monsen, Graham, Frederickson, and Cameron, 1998) is a structured nine stage model aiming to reduce the complexity of a problem. The rationale behind the problem is sought and emphasis is placed upon generating the initial guiding hypothesis with other professionals and stakeholders.

In comparison, for a solution focused approach, assumptions are not made with regards to teachers feeling there is a problem; rather there is an emphasis placed upon areas which can be built upon (based upon what is currently working well) (Rhodes and Ajmal, 1995). There is also a move away from viewing 'within-child' concerns and looking more widely at the environment.

Problem-solving frameworks aim to be systemic in nature so that hypotheses are generated for ill-defined problems (Kelly, 2006). Woolfson, Whaling and Stewart (2003) introduced the *Integrated Practice Model* whereby an additional transactional layer (of eco-systemic problem-solving) was added to the original model introduced by Mosen et al (1998). This in turn aspired to foster collaboration so that EPs work in a more systemic manner.

Kelly (2006) used semi-structured interview and postal questionnaires to examine the experiences of ten EPs in their use of the Mosen Problem-Solving model. One participant described the benefit they saw in using a solution focused approach to draw people's attention on action and to empower clients in a way that the Mosen model does not. They further stated that the Mosen model itself was helpful in their training and practice and can successfully be applied with different levels of practice (for example, individual, family or school). Other comments regarding the Mosen model was that it tended to add to the already "messy" problem(s). It may be that there are benefits which can be drawn from both models: solution focused approaches could be effective if used in a systemic, collaborative way (as is implemented in the Mosen and Integrated Framework model). Likewise, the Mosen problem-solving model could benefit from adopting a solution focused element whereby positives are drawn from the discussion rather than just centring upon "the problem". This leads onto the possibility of such a model, a solution focused, collaborative model, being used in schools for meeting the needs of children with BESD. The role of the EP could be to facilitate the implementation of Solution-focused approaches in schools so that it is used in a collaborative manner by the school staff (SENCOs, teachers and TAs).

Solution Focused Approaches in Education

Solution focused approaches have been used widely in educational practice (Ajmal and Rhodes, 1995; Redpath and Harper, 1999; Simm and Ingram, 2008).

EPs work at both an individual level (for example direct work with a child) and at a systemic level (with teachers and parents) (Murphy, 1994). One may question at what level (individual, group or organisational) the most effective intervention will be for assisting schools who may have a high need for behaviour support. The extent to which the intervention is sustainable as well as the role of staff members in co-ordinating the delivery of an intervention, may also be questioned (Cole, 2005).

There is a limited range of studies which have assessed the effectiveness of solution focused approaches in schools (Stobie, Boyle and Woolfson, 2005). Stobie et al (2005) conducted a small-scale computer-mediated exploratory survey examining how solution focused practice is evaluated. They placed emphasis on evidence-based practice where there is a practitioner-research orientation. The participants were EPs using solution focused approaches in their practice. With a limited questionnaire response rate from the EPs (through EPNET questionnaire survey), analysis and conclusions would be difficult to draw upon. A more in-depth form of data collection, for example from focus group interviews, may have provided a more appropriate form of evaluation or feedback (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2003).

Evidence-based practice using solution focused approaches, would look for what in particular led to a 'change' and the evidence to support such claims (Redpath and Harper, 1999). This is further supported by Stobie et al (2005) who suggest what is now needed is the EP focusing upon interventions with a research orientation. This could be in the form of gathering data from a solution focused protocol. Stobie et al (2005) found from the qualitative responses that the EPs found empowerment of the clients towards a reconstruction of themselves the most effective approach to change. Three themes arose from this analysis: personal agency, process and methods/techniques. This gives us a useful insight into the experiences of the EPs, as the themes deriving from each category forms an important part of the reflective process for the EP.

Brown, Powell and Clarke (2012) conducted a study which attempted to examine the effectiveness of a programme which adopted approaches from solution focused brief therapy. The programme, entitled Working on What Works (WOWW), was originally developed by Berg and Shilts (2004) and was put into practice by Brown et al (2012) in order to examine its effectiveness. Targets were set in an attempt to improve

behaviour and relationships in the class. The approach itself implemented positive feedback to the child whose behaviour was causing concern and focused upon collaborative goal setting to build positive relationships within the class. There was a removal of what has not worked. Results were based upon observations of pupil ratings (of targets) with follow-up semi-structured interviews for an evaluation of the programme by the teacher. The initial reason for conducting the study arose from a consultation meeting with the authors and the class and head teacher of the school, given concerns regarding the behaviour of a Year one/two class. The objectivity of the interpretation of the findings may be called into question given the reason for the proposed intervention to take place. That is to say, the extent to which the authors wanted to prove the WOWW programme worked in the class setting, could be questioned. Brown et al (2012) justified conducting this study on the basis that few studies have looked at testing its effectiveness.

Part of the intervention involved pupils, who were aged between five and six years old, to rate themselves daily on a scale based upon a daily target. Given the age of the children, it may be called into question the extent to which the children fully understood the task. The authors also mentioned that a behaviour support teacher worked with the children for one hour per week on *social skills*. This raises the question as to the extent to which the involvement from the behaviour support teacher played a part in the subsequent scoring the children gave in relation to their daily target. The sustainability of this approach, that is, using rating scales on a daily basis is also questionable as is the long term impact of this approach. Brown et al (2012) acknowledge that it may be difficult to specify the length of time for evaluating the effectiveness of such a programme to take effect. They also note the implications for EP practice and suggest that a more realistic and sustainable model maybe to offer training to staff members (for example, SENCOs or Deputy Head Teachers), who can play a co-ordinating role for training within the school. This therefore would incorporate EP involvement at a systemic level.

Collaboration in schools

As has been mentioned in the previous sections, collaboration between staff members can prove successful in raising confidence to contribute to the

improvement of pupil behaviour, therefore enhancing staff self-efficacy (Norwich and Daniels, 1997; Elliot et al, 2010).

A behaviour support initiative, named *Research and Development in Organisations* (RADIO) was an evaluation study which considered the effects of changing off-site behaviour support to in-school support (Timmins, Shepherd and Kelly, 2003). The researcher and the behaviour support teachers worked together to design major aspects of the research process. They aimed to have the research outcomes informing educational practice and to give a reflective element to the study. Timmins et al (2003) found that the RADIO approach provided a framework for involving stakeholders in the research process. They proposed its collaborative orientation further promoted engagement from the behaviour support teachers, which may not have necessarily took place prior to the study.

Timmins et al (2003) attempted to distinguish the RADIO approach from collaborative action research on the grounds that it accommodates both positivist and interpretivist approaches to research. However, collaborative action research can also adopt both approaches and a strict positivist or interpretivist stance is rarely adopted in research today. A mixed methods approach can use scientific and interpretivist methods at different stages of inquiry (Tashakkori, 2003), which is something collaborative action research can also adopt. Collaborative action research has been used by Somekh (2002) to reflect the way in which we construct our world. Somekh (2002) quite usefully questions the epistemological position which underpins collaboration in schools. This point is not fully acknowledged by Timmins et al (2003) when justifying their use of the RADIO approach in preference to collaborative action research. They put forward, as one of their key aims, to develop partnerships and identifying the school's needs. However given the fact that they also incorporate the stages of planning and reflecting, which are also the stages involved in collaborative action research, a clearer distinction between RADIO and collaborative action research would have been useful.

Collaborative action research has been implemented in schools as an attempt to break down the power differential construed in the educational community (Somekh, 2002; Atweh, Kemmis and Weeks, 1998; Simm and Ingram, 2008). Simm and Ingram (2008) used solution focused approaches as part of a collaborative action research study with class teachers and SENCOs. They aimed to use collaborative

action research to implement change at an individual and organisational level. The analysis of the data focused upon how the participants found the process of using solution focused approaches while being part of an action research study. In their reference to the type of study it was, Simm and Ingram make reference to it as *Solution-Focused Action Research*. They did not refer to the study as action research in their initial description to school staff. This would be important ethically, especially if school staff feel uncertain about what an action research study involves. This could in effect be described as deception if informed consent was not gained and if participants were not informed about the full scope of the research.

The involvement of SENCOs in an action research study using solution focused approaches: Gaps in the literature

Studies have considered how solution focused approaches have been adopted in schools as well as the role of the EP in facilitating its implementation (for example Rhodes and Ajmal, 1995). There has been however very little research as to how SENCOs can co-ordinate solution focused approaches in collaboration with teachers and TAs for supporting pupils with BESD and the potential pivotal role of the SENCO at a systemic level (such as supporting teachers and TAs in its implementation).

The present study aims to actively involve SENCOs in using solution focused approaches in a collaborative manner, so that teachers and TAs can be empowered to implement the approach in the classroom. A solution focused approach, it is anticipated, will serve to support pupils with BESD as well as being used as a preventative strategy for challenging behaviour. As an action research study, the effect of implementing solution focused approaches by SENCOs (with teachers and TAs) on their practice will be examined.

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Appendix 29: Ethics Forms

MSc, PhD, EdD & DEdPsych theses.



Graduate School of Education

Certificate of ethical research approval

MSc, PhD, EdD & DEdPsych theses

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

For further information on ethical educational research access the guidelines on the BERA web site: <http://www.bera.ac.uk/publications> and view the School's Policy online.

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

Your name: Sobia Khan
Your student no: 620027406
Return address for this certificate:
Degree/Programme of Study: Doctorate in Educational, Child and Community Psychology
Project Supervisor(s): Andrew Richards
Your email address: sk422@exeter.ac.uk
Tel: 07878 093717

I hereby certify that I will abide by the details given overleaf and that I undertake in my thesis to respect the dignity and privacy of those participating in this research.

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

Signed: S. Khan date: 23/5/14

Chair of the School's Ethics Committee
updated: March 2013

Certificate of ethical research approval

TITLE OF YOUR PROJECT: The use of Solution-focused approaches by SENCOs and school staff in supporting pupils with Behavioural, Emotional and Social Difficulties: An Action Research Study.

1. Brief description of your research project:

Paper 1: This study aims to seek an insight into the experiences of Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators (SENCOs), teachers and teaching assistants (TAs) in the implementation of preventative strategies for challenging behaviour as well as the support offered to children with Behavioural Emotional and Social Difficulties (BESD). This will be the stage of reflection on current experience for the first stage in the action research design.

Paper 2: This paper will involve the collaborative formulation of an *Action framework* with the SENCOs, using solution focused approaches. The SENCOs will then implement targets set from this framework based on working with teachers and/or teaching assistant in the use of Solution focused approaches for supporting pupils with BESD and challenging behaviour. I will support the SENCOs in the duration of them completing their tasks. The final stage will involve a reflection on the process (of implementing Solution focused approaches with other staff members as well as a reflection on the action research process itself).

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

The participants in this study include: SENCOs, teacher and teacher assistants working in mainstream primary schools in the county.

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

3. Informed consent: Where children in schools are involved this includes both headteachers and parents. Copy(ies) of your consent form(s) you will be using must accompany this document. A blank consent form can be downloaded from the GSE student access on-line documents. Each consent form MUST be personalised with your contact details.

- The involvement of the participants will be on a voluntary basis. I intend to approach the schools of the teachers, teaching assistants and SENCOs first through contact with the Head teachers in order to outline the study and to provide a summary of the expected level of involvement (with approximate date and times).
- Once I have heard back from the schools who are interested in participating in the study, I will outline their rights, as participants, to withdraw at any point during the study as well as reassure them that all the information they provide will be anonymised and that only myself as the researcher will know the identities of those involved.
- I will read through the points on the consent form (attached) prior to participants signing the form, and will ask the participants if they have any questions regarding their involvement. I will additionally indicate my contact details so that the participants are assured they can contact me if at any point they have any questions regarding the nature of the study and their involvement.

Chair of the School's Ethics Committee
updated: March 2013

4. **anonymity and confidentiality**

- As mentioned, participants will be assured that all the information they provide will be confidential and anonymous, and that only I as the researcher will have access to the identities of those involved.
- All the information that the participants provide will be coded as numbers/letters so that anonymity is protected and that confidentiality is maintained. It will also enable me to make the appropriate comparisons of responses across the different phases of the study.
- All records of the data from the interview transcripts, reflective journal accounts and from individual feedback will be held securely on an encrypted computer, which only I have access to.
- Participants will be informed that they can access the information they provide at any point during the study and that a summary of the findings will be given at the end of the study.

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

- **Semi-structured interviews.** Prior to commencing with the semi-structured interviews with the SENCOs, I will ensure that participants are comfortable with the use of a Dictaphone for recording the interview. Participants will have the option to opt out of being recorded if they are uncomfortable with this; this will ensure they are not placed under any unreasonable pressure or stress. I will ensure that participants are informed that all the notes and transcripts taken during and after the interview are confidential and anonymous. They will be further assured that nobody else will have knowledge of their name or the name of the school. Participants have the right to withdraw at any point during the study, and they will be made aware that if they do choose to opt out of the study, this will have no implications for them in the professional role.
- **Focus-group interviews.** Prior to commencing the focus group interview, I will ensure that participants are made aware that their responses within the group will be kept anonymous, and may not refer to any individual, and that should they wish to discuss an individual as part of the focus group then they would need to seek consent from the parent/parents of the child. The aim of the focus group will be made clear from the beginning and participants will be assured that if there are any issues raised during the interview which causes any harm or stress, that I will, as the researcher, be able to offer support in relation to the issue raised. Participants will be reminded that they are free to withdraw from the study at any point if they want and that this does not have any implication on them in their professional role. Prior to commencing the interview, if there are any cases of children which may be discussed during the group interview, participants will be informed that the names will need to be changed or referred to as Child A or B. This is for confidentiality and anonymity of the cases of the children concerned.
- **Reflective journal accounts.** During the implementation of the action framework, the SENCOs (in paper 2), will be asked to keep a reflective account on how the implementation of the targets from the framework are impacting upon their practice. If there are any issues or concerns that they feel they would like to discuss, I will ensure that they are aware that they can discuss this further with me or a Senior member of staff, if they wish to do so. As this is a personal reflection, it may raise some issues relating to professional practice, experiences of stress or relationship issues with fellow staff members. It is therefore important that participants feel they can be as open and honest as possible, with support available if they need it.

- **Feedback accounts.** During the second phase of the study (paper 2), I will be visiting the SENCOs at their setting to gain feedback on the implementation of the target(s) of the action framework, as well as to offer support and guidance. This will also serve as an opportunity to discuss any issues of concern/stress if the SENCOs feel they need this. They will be reassured that anything they say will be confidential unless it is concerning a child regarding a safe guarding concern, in which case information will need to be passed onto the Safeguarding officer of the school.

6. **Give details of any other ethical issues which may arise from this project - e.g. secure storage of videos/recorded interviews/photos/completed questionnaires, or**

- All records of data (transcripts, field notes, reflective accounts, audio recordings) will be stored securely.
- At the end of the study, or if at any point a participant withdraws from the study, the data gained will be destroyed.
- The names of the participants will only be identifiable by me as the researcher. Once the data from the interviews has been transcribed, information will be kept on an encrypted computer and any notes relating to the interviews will be destroyed.

7. **special arrangements made for participants with special needs etc.**

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

- As a Trainee Educational Psychologist (TEP) I am currently working with the schools concerned. Therefore, I am aware of the nature of my involvement as 1) a TEP working with current cases and 2) a researcher.
- I am aware that consent from a parent to work with me or for their child to work with me as an educational psychologist in the school is different from consent to take part in this research, and both processes need their own individual consent form. I will ensure that I keep the two aspects of my work in the schools discrete.
- I am therefore vigilant of the need to maintain anonymity of the cases (if they are discussed).

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

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

This project has been approved for the period: June 2014 until: 31 August 2015

Appendix 30: Data analysis: examples of how higher order themes were defined from the raw data.

Example 1: Defining challenging behaviour and CYP with BESD

Higher order theme <i>(participant code)</i>	Description (following refining of the initial coding)	Examples from interview transcripts
<p>Disruption</p> <p>Participants: <i>SENCo 6</i> <i>SENCo 4</i> <i>SENCo 1</i> <i>Teacher focus group</i> <i>TA focus group</i></p>	<p>Disruption was frequently referred to describe behaviour which participants viewed as disrupting (for their own learning as well as for other CYP). Disruption was discussed as a presenting behaviour which could reflect a negative self-image as well as the teacher feeling challenged.</p>	<p><i>“...I suppose it’s non-compliance and being disruptive...behaviour which disrupts the rest of the children from learning...behaviour which can take them off-site.” (Teacher focus group)</i></p> <p><i>“...from a school’s point of view challenging behaviour disrupts or upsets the lesson and education of other children.” (SENCo 1)</i></p>
<p>Violence and aggression</p> <p>Participants: <i>Teacher focus group</i> <i>SENCo 5</i> <i>SENCo 3</i> <i>TA focus group</i></p>	<p>An outward expression of violence and anger were typically referred to by participants (to staff and other CYP). Such behaviour was described in terms of putting others at risk. Challenging behaviour was viewed in terms of behaviour which was very challenging involving physical violence.</p>	<p><i>“...It could be moving things, unpredictable movements, threatening or actually hurting peers or adults...” (SENCo 3)</i></p> <p><i>“...Behaviour that puts others at risk...other children and other adults. Seeing violence, aggression and language, using bad language.” (TA focus group).</i></p>

Example 2: TA role

Higher order theme (participant code)	Description (following refining of the initial coding)	Example from the interview transcripts
<p>Attachment Figure</p> <p>Participants: <i>Teacher focus group</i> <i>SENCo 1</i> <i>SENCo 2</i> <i>SENCo 6</i></p>	<p>The TA role was often described in terms of a supportive figure as well as a person who offers one to one attention (with the reference “attachment figure” being made by the teachers and some SENCos). The SENCos described how TAs can build up a one to one relationship with a CYP, and that they are in a better position to resolve issues in the class (compared to the class teacher).</p>	<p><i>“...It’s that attachment figure...the safe person who can give them one to one attention...it’s saying, I’m here if you want to talk to me, a safe person...”</i> <i>(Teacher focus group)</i></p> <p><i>“...If a student has a meltdown, there is usually a key person they can talk to ...someone they have built a connection with...”</i> <i>(SENCo 1).</i></p>
<p>Anticipate Triggers</p> <p>Participants: <i>TA focus group</i> <i>Teacher focus group</i> <i>SENCo 3</i> <i>SENCo 6</i></p>	<p>The TAs were viewed as being important figures in the class who would be able to pre-empt any triggers which may cause challenging behaviour. As the additional adult in the classroom, the TAs were seen by the teachers and TAs as being able to spot triggers before they manifested into behaviour which was described as</p>	<p><i>“I think they help anticipate when they (CYP) are likely to be triggered by certain things...”</i> <i>(SENCo 3)</i></p> <p><i>“...You’ve generally got a better chance of knowing what’s going on as the TA.... spotting any triggers.”</i> <i>(TA focus group).</i></p>

	challenging and disruptive.	
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Appendix 31: Glossary of terms used for data analysis.

Term	Meaning
Quotations	Direct quotes have been used from the interview transcripts (which were transcribed verbatim)
Participant code	Identification of where the quotation came from (given anonymously as SENCo 1, 2 etc)
Initial coding	After re-reading the interview transcripts, initial codes were generated
Higher order theme	Higher order themes were formed following a refinement of the initial codes (please also refer to Appendix 30)
Themes from group evaluation	Significant themes following the transcription of the group evaluation session
Key concepts	Formed using Tomlinson's Hierarchical Focusing method based on the <i>conceptual map</i> (please refer to Appendix 9). For paper 2, key concepts related to the interview questions asked