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Learning about the social contexts which children and young people associate with their strengths: Applying a situated form of strength-based assessment to educational psychology practice

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Learning about the social contexts which children and young people associate with their strengths: Applying a situated form of strength-based assessment to educational psychology practice

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Abstract

This thesis research explores how we might learn more about the social contexts which children and young people associate with their strengths. It was carried out as a three phase action research project, by the author in his role as an educational psychologist working in schools. In the first phase a method of assessment was trialled, with a sample of eight children and young people. Using this method, participants were able to identify social contexts which they associated with specific strengths. In the second phase, three detailed case studies were carried out in which representations of identified strength-based contexts were developed, drawing on concepts from situated/ situative learning theory and critical realism, in combination with the meanings expressed by school staff and children and young people. Using these representations, it was possible to understand strengths from a situated point of view in which they were characterised as forms of participation afforded within distinct educational practices. One of the advantages of this approach was that it highlighted aspects of practice which allowed forms of strength-related participation to happen. In the final phase, these representations were presented back to school staff in the form of illustrations/ boundary objects which allowed further discussion about practices and potential actions that might stem from this contextualised assessment.

Three overall contributions of this work are: (1) it shows the possibility of taking a situated view of strengths-based assessment – a field which usually takes a more individualising position; (2) it draws attention to the conceptual compatibility and synergy that can occur when ideas from situated learning and critical realism are used together; (3) it offers an alternative vision of the practice of educational psychology, in which assessment is weighted towards the identification (and thereby extension) of positive practices, rather than the continued scrutiny of an individual's problems.

Dedication

This work is dedicated to all the people, children, young people and adults, who have inspired me during my career.

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Finally, I would like to say thank you to the children, young people and school staff who were participants in this project.

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Chapter 1

Introduction to the thesis

The overall aim of this thesis was to explore how we might learn more about the social contexts which children and young people associate with their strengths. This chapter acts as an introduction to the work and also an account of my own experience and how I became interested in carrying out research in this area.

1.1 My professional journey

I have worked as an educational psychologist (EP) in two local authorities in England for over twenty years. My work has involved visiting schools and other educational settings, carrying out assessments, consulting with parents and teachers to develop effective plans for children and young people (CYP[1]), and helping to review the impact of intervention. During this time, I have also worked as an academic and professional tutor on the initial training course for educational psychologists at the University of Birmingham. Through my training and experience as a practitioner and a tutor I was aware of the dominant frameworks for professional EP practice which have existed during this period. Most of these have built on a long-standing belief in the profession about the virtue of problem-solving models (Cameron and Stratford, 1987; Thacker, 1982). Over the years such models have become more elaborate as they endeavour to map all the dimensions of a problem before arriving at a holistic, multi-level hypothesis about maintaining factors and possible sites for intervention (Monson & Frederickson, 2008; Woolfson, Whaling, Stewart & Monsen, 2003).

Early in my career I was attracted to this systematic way of working, which gave me a sense of purpose in the often complex and hard to understand situations I faced. However, gradually I began to see limitations to this approach. Essentially, in this way of working, the assessment stage involved a thorough search for all the difficulties, all the things that were not as they 'should be'. This meant getting a clear idea of all the things that a child or young

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[1] Within this thesis, depending on the context of use, I sometimes use the abbreviation CYP to stand for 'children and young people' or in the singular, 'child or young person'.

person found difficult about learning or behaving 'appropriately' at school, it meant observing lessons to see how things might be better organised for children, it could involve interviewing parents to find out more about the difficulties they faced at home with parenting. I tried to supplement this style of work with some solution-focused enquiry (De Shazer, 1985; Rhodes & Ajmal, 1995), but the dominant aspect remained a clarification of deficits so that appropriate remedies could be found – in some ways quite similar in this respect to the medical practice of disorder diagnosis and treatment. I became accustomed to building rapport with pupils, so they would offer me some words about difficult matters, I became conscious of the potential for blame to circulate as different parties subtly manoeuvred conversations to assign causal factors elsewhere, for example, teachers blaming the child or the home background, families blaming the school.

It was through the accumulation of practice situations - where a hitherto unrecognised (pupil, family or school) strength made a significant difference to the outcome of some work, that I slowly became interested in this side of my work. Simultaneously an interest in community psychology also guided me in this direction. Reading an early text by Julian Rappaport (1977) I noticed how a strength-based approach with community partners was talked about as a form of empowerment. Literature searches led me on to Dennis Saleebey's book about strength-based approaches to social work (Saleebey, 2009) and then to my first encounter with a strength-based assessment tool which could be used by an educational psychologist, the Child and Adolescent Strengths Assessment or CASA (Lyons, Uziel-Miller, Reyes & Sokol, 2000).

My experiences of using this assessment tool with young people who had become disaffected with education gave me my first taste of the power of strength-based approaches. In the past I had found these students some of the most difficult to engage, they had often opted out of school attendance altogether because of their negativity or resignation. Using the CASA as an interview schedule I noticed a difference in the way such pupils responded to questions. The atmosphere in the room brightened, they relaxed and were more willing to talk than I had expected. Such positive effects on engagement are frequently mentioned in the strength-based literature (e.g., Rawana and Brownlee, 2009; Tedeschi and Kilmer, 2005). I was able to use identified strengths to help design new

approaches for children at school. Some of my early work in this area I wrote up and published in Bozic (2013).

I became interested in how far I could work within this paradigm, given the professional remit I held – which was often to certify that children had enough difficulties to qualify for extra provision, or were in need of another kind of placement.

Later when the Code of Practice for the statutory assessment of children with special educational needs was redesigned (DfE, 2015), I was pleased by the greater emphasis on the identification of strengths in the assessment process.

Nevertheless, I also began to see some pitfalls in the use of strength-based assessment, sometimes reducing it to a search for an individual's talents, which did not relate to what was going on around them. I became interested in extending strength-based assessment to include a greater appreciation of the contexts in which strengths emerged and were sustained in children's lives. By learning more about these contexts it might be easier to identify what others could do to support a child's strengths in the future.

1.2 An interest in context

I was already aware of how useful it could be in my work as an educational psychologist to move to broader more social levels of analysis, using frameworks such as Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological theory, or those which looked at issues from an organisational psychology point of view (e.g., Schein, 1997). Such frameworks could draw attention to the influence of social structure and culture on a child's life, for example through the way a school class or family interacted together or the influence of a school's structure or culture. They could help me to identify and consider how other factors, beyond the child's internal psychology, might be relevant in planning assessment and intervention.

I had also maintained an interest in the relationship between social context and child development from earlier in my career when I applied Vygotsky's sociocultural theory to the use of educational technology with children with multiple disabilities (Bozic & Murdoch, 1996). Educational psychology training had introduced me to cultural historical activity

theory (Engeström, 1987). However, it was another branch of sociocultural theory which held my attention more strongly. I had become very interested in the development of situated learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991) and communities of practice theory (Wenger, 1998). I could see the potential of applying this theory to many of the routine cases I encountered in my educational psychology work. Its attention to the detail of what happened when groups of people interacted together in social settings seemed to fit very well with the day to day focus of my work in schools. I was also interested in the way this perspective theorised identity as emerging from these patterned social situations. This seemed to hold the promise of explaining how an individual's psychology might be interrelated with the social context.

As I became more engaged in thinking about strength-based approaches to working with children and young people and how these might be contextualised, I began to reflect on how this might be done by applying the framework of situated learning or communities of practice theory. A situated form of strength-based assessment would highlight how strengths arose and made sense within patterned forms of social interaction or practice. This kind of assessment would be less prone to being reduced to the individualising search for talents. In addition, through these means it might be possible to create a form of educational psychology practice that was more emancipatory for children and young people – because, rather than beginning with the specification of difficulty, it would advance from the study of practices which were optimal for them. These were the ideas which motivated my initial research proposal. Such a stance, researching how EP practice might be different, aligns this project with other work, where in various ways, attempts have been made to revise the professional work of educational or school psychologists (e.g. Gillham, 1978; Prilleltensky, 1991; Leyden, 1999; Billington, 2014; Claiborne, 2014; Williams et al, 2016).

1.3 Taking a critical realist ontological/ epistemological perspective

While working at the University of Birmingham, via contact with Realistic Evaluation (Pawson & Tilley, 1997), I had also become aware of the social science research philosophy of critical realism (Bhaskar, 1989). This seemed to fit naturally and complement a situated learning perspective. Critical realism was a perspective which, like situated learning,

recognised the importance of social and material context on human life. And also, like situated learning it offered a strong endorsement of the capacity for individuals to exercise agency within the social structures which they found themselves. I chose to adopt and apply critical realist philosophy within my research project and I believe at times this perspective has helped to develop further insight into my work.

Social constructionism (Burr, 2003) would have offered an alternative to taking a critical realist stance. Social constructionism has been described as seeing social properties being "constructed through interactions between people, rather than having a separate existence" (Robson, 2011). While accepting that the meanings and significance of the social world are mediated by language and culture I was attracted by the idea that social contexts, such as the way school lessons were organised, had an enduring character which was broadly agreed by participants and less influenced by the vicissitudes of social interaction than a social constructionist stance might imply. It was the 'reality' of these social contexts which I was interested in exploring and this seemed more in agreement with the critical realist view of real social objects (Sayer, 1992).

A critical realist position implied an epistemology, or approach to knowledge creation, which involved building theoretical models to represent the nature of reality (Bhaskar, 1989). It was methodologically eclectic in the way it did this (Sayer, 1992). The idea of building models to better understand practice was compatible with my intention to shed light on what happened when I adopted a contextualised strength-based approach within my own work as an educational psychologist. It also seemed to fit well with the action research nature of this enterprise which I discuss below.

1.4 The methodology of action research

For me, the process of carrying out this PhD research project has been more than a piece of academic work – it has also been a way of sustaining a careful exploration of what happens when I develop and introduce a new approach into my work as a practicing educational psychologist. I therefore conceptualised the overall research methodology as a form of action research.

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007, p.297) describe action research as "a powerful tool for change and improvement at the local level." It may be seen as a systematic way for people to research and act on problems which concern them. There is a genre of action research which is concerned with how change can be achieved for groups or within institutions and some researchers have associated action research with collaboration or participative approaches involving collective self-enquiry (Kemmis and McTaggart, 1988). Nevertheless, this is not the only view on the nature of action research and there has been a strong movement, particularly within the teaching profession, which sees action research as something that can be carried out by individual practitioners (the so-called 'teacher-as-researcher' movement), as a way of improving their practice (Ebbutt, 1985; Hopkins, 2014) or as a form of professional development (Oja and Smulyan, 1989). Action research provides frameworks for thinking more deeply about one's professional work, planning and carrying out changes to practice and researching the effects of these changes.

So, my own research study may be seen primarily as a piece of action research in which I systematically introduce and study the effects of applying contextualised methods of strength-based assessment into my work as an educational psychologist. The study is divided into three phases. Each phase represents a complete cycle of action research which has moved through planning to intervention and review. Successive phases build on what has been learnt from previous phases so that overall the study might be seen as a spiral of three completed action research cycles.

1.5 The phases of the project

The three phases of the project are outlined below and each is reported within its own chapter in the thesis. Each of these chapters begins with a literature review section which leads to phase-specific research aims and research questions:

Phase 1 (Chapter 2), focuses on the rationale for, and development of, a contextualised form of strength-based assessment. An assessment tool called the Context of Strength Finder is designed to identify contexts where children and young people's strengths are evident and to provide some information about the nature of those contexts. The phase 1

research aim is to trial the use of this assessment tool and explore how it worked within my practice as an EP.

In the second phase of the project (chapter 3) there is a more detailed examination of contexts which three different children or young people associate with strengths. It is in this phase of the project that situated learning is used to help make sense of each context. The aim of phase 2 is to explore what happens when a situated learning framework is applied to understand strength-based situations. The method of investigation is designed to be compatible with everyday educational psychology work in that it involves the common practices of observation and interview: observation of a context and then interviews with the child or young person and a key person from the context.

Following the development of an analysis of how strengths might be understood as forms of situated participation, the third phase of the project (chapter 4) takes the resulting representations back to the adult participants within each context. Phase 3 has three aims: to see how school staff respond to the situated representations; to explore how they make sense of the strength-based situation in relation to other areas of a CYP's life, and to consider how such ideas might be used as a basis for action/ intervention.

Each phase of the research project was carried out, analysed and then written up in draft form at the time it was executed. The write-up of each phase therefore records an account of my research activity at the point it was done, based on the research literature that was available to me at that point in time. It was not supplemented at a later date by any further literature that may have become available after the phase was completed. It was important to handle the write up in this way so that my thinking and decision-making as an (action) researcher was recorded as it had unfolded at the time. However, in the concluding chapter (chapter 5) I report the re-running of literature searches to examine additions to the literature that have been made in the intervening time and consider their relationship to my study.

Chapter 2

Phase 1: The assessment of strength-based contexts

2.1 Introduction

This chapter of the thesis focuses on the first phase of the research project. This comprises an exploratory study of an assessment tool which I designed, called the Context of Strength Finder or CSF. The purpose of the CSF was to enable children and young people to identify contexts in which their strengths were present.

In order to set the scene for why I was motivated to design the CSF, the chapter begins with an historical overview of the profession of educational psychology and some of the forces which have affected it over the course of the last thirty to forty years. This account draws attention to the dominance of a problem-solving orientation to practice, but also considers how certain counter trends have emerged in recent years.

There is then a literature review into the range of strength-based assessments which have been developed and could be used by educational and school psychologists. This review is specifically concerned with the scope of such assessments and ultimately their limited ability to inform us about the contexts in which children's strengths are expressed.

This is followed by an account of how the CSF was developed and the design of the research study which explored its use with a sample of children and young people who I worked with in my role as a practising educational psychologist. The phase 1 research aim and questions can be found at the start of the methodology section.

2.2 The professional practice of educational psychologists

<u>2.2.1 The dominance of problem solving</u>

The profession of educational psychology is just over one hundred years old. Cyril Burt was the first British educational psychologist to be appointed in 1913. Employed by London Council he was asked to "report on problematic cases referred by teachers, doctors or

magistrates for individual investigation" (Rushton, 2002). An interest in the problems and difficulties of children has continued to characterise the work of educational psychologists so that a recent book about the profession (Birch, Frederickson and Miller, 2015) quoted the Department of Education website as saying that educational psychologists,

> "EPs work in a variety of ways to address the problems experienced by children and young people in education." (p.6)

The site of much educational psychologist work remains the educational setting: nursery, school or college. The ways that problems are addressed can involve combinations of assessment, consultation, intervention, training and research (Scottish Executive, 2002). Much work, for example consultation or training, is aimed at applying ideas from psychological theory and research to help others (teachers, parents, etc.) to become more successful in the way they work with children and young people.

While the focus on problem solving has remained a key theme in educational psychology practice (Pearson and Howarth, 1982; Cameron, 2006), the models that educational psychologists use to guide the way they think about problems have evolved and grown more complex. Modern problem-solving frameworks such as Problem Analysis (Annan et al., 2013) or the Interactive Factors Framework (Frederickson and Cline, 2009) are ecological in orientation and try to represent problems as caused by the influence of forces at different levels of analysis from the intra-individual level, through interpersonal and environmental levels. This has been a deliberate attempt to avoid problems always being located within the child and to highlight the importance of educational and family context factors (Wicks, 2013).

2.2.2 The statutory role of educational psychologists

The 1981 Education Act established that a statutory part of the educational psychologist's role was to carry out assessments to identify the special educational needs (SEN) of CYP (Frederickson & Miller, 2008, p.8), which could then be represented in Statements of SEN. This role was maintained by successive iterations of legislation (DfEE, 2014, 2001).

The 1981 Education Act defined children to have SEN if they had a learning difficulty which meant that they needed special educational provision. A learning difficulty being something which arose when a child had, "a significantly greater difficulty in learning than the majority of children of his (sic) age" (HMSO, 1981, p.1).

Frederickson and Cline (2015) talk about two different ways in which one might study the nature of SEN, which parallel medical and social models of disability. The former looks at individual differences between children and the second considers the nature of the environmental demands on an individual and whether these are inappropriate. Frederickson and Cline (2015) propose that the way that SEN was defined in the 1981 and 1996 Education Acts has remained largely unchanged in the more recent 2014 Children and Families Act. For the educational psychologist the focus remains on the problems or difficulty that children experience in their education.

However, the 2014 Children and Families Act (DfE, 2014) did make some alterations to the way SEN was assessed. Statements of SEN were replaced with Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) which were meant to provide a more holistic account of a young person's needs, including social care and health needs alongside educational ones. The legislation applied to a wider age range, 0-25 years and there was greater recognition that within the assessment process it was important to consider the strengths and competences of CYP as well as their difficulties. This message appeared at different points throughout the document and subsequent Code of Practice (DfE, 2015). For example, in the description of the progress check at age 2 (para 5.23); the nature of SEN support in schools (para 6.52) and the assessment and planning process for an Educational, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) (para 9.22).

2.2.3 Traded services

In 2010 the severe impact of global economic problems led the British government to implement a policy of large cut-backs to the funding of public services in the UK. This in turn meant that funding for local authority educational psychology services was reduced and many services began to adopt a 'traded model' of service delivery in which part of the

income to sustain the service was generated by selling packages of educational psychologist time directly to schools (AEP, 2011). There has been little research to investigate the impact of this move on the nature of educational psychologists work in schools. However, one piece of research interviewing educational psychologists in a metropolitan service, after the switch to traded services, suggested that educational psychologists were more conscious of not offending schools by working in ways which might be objected to by staff (Islam, 2013).

Whether taking more account of the views of schools as purchasers of educational psychology services will increase the focus on problems that need solving, or whether it will remain possible in this new climate to look more broadly at alternatives to problem-focused practice, remains to be seen.

2.2.4 Alternatives to a problem-focused approach

In creating this overview of the development of British educational psychology practice and highlighting the dominance of a problem-focused view, one should not ignore the presence of several alternative strength-based perspectives which have influenced practice, especially in the period from the 1990s onwards.

Solution-focused approaches are one of the most influential of these perspectives, originating from the therapeutic approach developed by Steve De Shazer and his colleagues in the 1980s (De Shazer, 1985, 1988). De Shazer's view was revolutionary because he claimed that problems were not necessarily best addressed by examining them more and more closely. Instead he advocated that clients should be encouraged to imagine a future without the problem and be asked to think more about the 'exceptions' when the problem was not affecting their lives. This positive view could then form the basis for goal-directed change. Solution-focused approaches came to the attention of educational psychologists in the UK during the 1990s and were applied in different aspects of their work, including assessment and consultation (Stobie et al, 2005). Since that time solution-focused approaches have continued to form a distinctive strand of practice within educational psychology and been applied at different levels of analysis including individual, class and whole school (Daki & Savage, 2010; Brown et al., 2012; Morgan, 2016).

Resilience theory and research has offered a further important set of ideas which support a strength-based perspective.   Research in this area has highlighted how many children survive and prosper despite experiencing adversity and risk (Werner & Smith, 1982, 1992; Rutter, 2000). It has shown how protective factors can support children and buffer the effects of adversity. Those writing in this tradition are able to use research studies to identify lists of protective factors at individual and environmental levels which support positive psychological development (Benard, 2004; Maston, 2006). The clear message is that we should focus on creating social and educational environments which allow for the growth of these positive qualities. It is a perspective which has received attention in educational psychologist professional literature in the UK (e.g., Honey et al., 2011; Toland & Carrigan, 2011).

A third strength-based approach can be found in the positive psychology movement which encourages psychologists to move away from an over-riding concern with human difficulties and deficits (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). From its inception, at the start of the 21st century, the positive psychology movement has been particularly interested in states of wellbeing and the development of positive individual traits such as courage, perseverance and wisdom, as well as the types of institution that help people to flourish (Kristjansson, 2012). From that time much has been published about how positive psychology can be applied in educational contexts (e.g., Furlong et al., 2014). More specifically within the domain of educational psychologist practice there have been publications about how positive psychology might be applied to assessment (Liddle & Carter, 2015), intervention (e.g., Critchley & Gibbs, 2012) and frameworks or approaches to practice (Joseph, 2008; Noble & McGrath, 2008).

Finally, a strength-based practice movement emerged in the human services in America in the late 1980s and early 1990s, which built on notions of empowerment taken from writings within early community psychology. The emphasis was less about professionals dictating how problems could best be addressed and more about learning how ordinary people managed their lives.

> "On the one hand it (the empowerment agenda) demands that we look to many diverse settings where people are already handling their own problems in living, in order to learn about how they do it…. On the other hand, it demands that we find

ways to take what we learn from these diverse settings and solutions and make it more public, so as to help foster social policies and programs" (Rappaport, 1981, p.15).

The concept of empowerment fed into Dennis Saleebey's (1992) book *The Strength's Perspective in Social Work*, in which he critiqued what he saw as a professional obsession with 'problems, pathologies and deficits' and articulated a different view of how the social work professional might engage in a collaboration with clients which empowered them and built on their strengths. A similar theme permeated the research on family support programmes carried out by Carl Dunst and Carol Triette (Dunst & Trivette, 1987; Dunst, Trivette & Deal, 1994). The discovery of child and family strengths was also a central part of the wraparound process which was developed to support children and families with complex emotional difficulties in the USA (VanDenBerg & Grealish, 1996).

As the 1990s came to a close, American school psychologists began to explore how ideas from these perspectives might be harnessed to create a new form of strength-based assessment. This is the topic which I will explore more fully in the literature review below.

2.3 Literature Review - Strength-based assessment

2.3.1 Nature of the literature review

In this literature review I look at the nature of strength-based assessment with children and young people and the way it has been applied by educational and school psychologists. Within this section I examine what is meant by strength-based assessment and the nature of the assessment process. I consider the range of qualities which different strength-based assessments examine, before looking more closely at the extent to which such approaches inform us about important context factors which support the development and expression of strengths.

Please note that in this section I talk about school psychologists as well as educational psychologists. The job 'school psychologist' is used in North America and Australia to describe a very similar role to that of the British educational psychologist.

The literature search strategy I adopted was as follows. I used the research databases ERIC (22.7.15, 18 hits), British Education Index (22.7.15, 6 hits) and PsychInfo (22.7.15, 22 hits). I also lodged an alert based search with ZETOC.

The search terms I used was 'strength-based' + 'assessment' in the title field.

My inclusion criteria were as follows:

- Source must be relevant to the practice of educational or school psychologist (i.e. feasible to use with regard to children or young people in a school setting);

- Source must be either from a peer-reviewed journal or an examined thesis.

After my initial search I used Google Scholar to draw out any citations of papers that were of particular importance. I also scrutinised the reference list of papers for sources which had been drawn on by this literature and which might be worth reading.

2.3.2 Defining strength-based assessment

Towards the end of the 1990s and into the first years of the new century a new interest in strength-based assessment emerged within the literature on American school psychology and child and adolescent mental health (e.g., Jimerson, Sharkey, Nyborg & Furlong, 2004; Rhee, Furlong, Turner & Harari 2001; Lyons et al., 2000; Epstein and Sharma, 1998). Its origins were diverse, for example authors made reference to developments in American social policy which favoured the assessment of strengths, a general recognition of the value of moving away from a deficit orientation to a more holistic assessment of the person and the gathering impact of resilience theory (Jimerson et al., 2004). Perhaps because of this eclectic mixture of influences the definitions of strength-based assessment that were offered differed in various ways.

A prominent and much cited definition is that offered by Epstein & Sharma (1998) who describe strength-based assessment as:

> "The measurement of those emotional skills and behavioral skills, competencies and characteristics that create a sense of personal accomplishment; contribute to satisfying relationships with family members, peers and adults; enhance one's ability

to deal with adversity and stress; and promote one's personal, social, and academic development." (p.3)

This definition focuses on the skills, competencies and other within-person characteristics of the child or young person. Nevertheless, others writing at the time (Rhee et al., 2001; Lyons et al., 2000) were more heavily influenced by resilience theory and had been convinced by research which had shown how some children could 'beat the odds' and overcome adversity if there were sufficient protective factors in the social environment around them. Hence Rhee et al. (2001) claimed:

"By conducting strength-based assessments, school psychologists recognise the importance of ecological and contextual variables, which leads to a deeper, and arguably, a more appropriate understanding of the youth and his or her social resources." (p.10)

The heterogeneity in definition is reflected in an important paper published a few years later by Jimerson et al. (2004) which described four different models or ways of conceptualising strength-based assessment. These were: models which were interested in the promotion of well-being and assessed perceptions of quality of life or happiness; others that focused more on the assessment of positive traits such as 'character strengths' and were associated with the nascent positive psychology movement; a third group which while also focusing on within-child characteristics, was especially sensitive to those characteristics which research suggested were associated with coping with challenge; and fourthly, approaches which looked beyond the individual to assess the availability of protective factors and resources within the family, peer group and local community.

While the diversity of perspectives reflected in Jimerson et al.'s account of strength-based assessment may seem to confuse rather than clarify the nature of the term, maybe it is wiser to be accommodating in definition. After all there are many different forms of 'deficit assessment', why should there be any fewer ways of conceptualising strength-based approaches?

2.3.3 Formal vs informal methods of assessment

Published literature pertaining to the assessment of strengths in CYP by educational or school psychologists often describes formal means of assessment - using checklists and rating scales (Nickerson & Fishman, 2013; Jimerson et al., 2004). Indirect modes of

assessment predominate in this literature. Strengths are identified through interviewing a teacher, parent or the child themselves, rather than, for example, directly observing strengths in action.

Within this genre of assessment, measures are often standardised and designed to have 'strong psychometric properties'. Research is undertaken to demonstrate that scales have sufficient levels of reliability (e.g., Epstein, Harniss, Pearson & Ryser, 1999) and validity (e.g., Epstein, 1999; LeBuffe & Shapiro, 2004). It is interesting to note what validity can mean in this context. Efforts to ensure good content validity can lead to parents and professionals being offered the chance to suggest emotions or behaviours which reflect childhood strengths (e.g., Lyons et al., 2000; Epstein, 1999). Additionally, construct validity (the relationship between a measure and underlying theory) is sometimes invoked to support the value of strength-based assessments. For example, LeBuffe & Shapiro (2004) go to great lengths to show that children's scores on the Devereux Early Childhood Assessment reflect what resilience theory would predict given the presence of risk and protective factors. Assessment designers feel more confident if their measures also show convergent validity – that is the scores obtained on a new scale correlate with scores obtained on existing measures of strength (e.g., Merrell, Cohn & Tom, 2011)

Statistical techniques refine the nature of scales. Factor analysis can be used to judge whether strengths tend to co-occur and can be referred to as examples of categories (e.g., Merrell et al., 2011). The standardisation of checklists and rating scales mean that the strengths that a child displays can be compared to norms. Within this formal approach lie assumptions about the nature of strengths: that they represent meaningful and general qualities amongst the population for which the scale is used, that the range of selected strengths is sufficient to capture the qualities that clients would deem as their strengths. For this reason, some standardised scales still allow opportunities for unique client strengths to be added (Buckley & Epstein, 2004).

At the informal end of the continuum some argue that it is best not to prejudge the nature of strengths and to offer clients complete freedom to identify strengths meaningful to them. Wilding & Griffey (2015) highlight how easy it can be for strength-based assessment tools, including those from the field of positive psychology to contain cultural assumptions about

the nature of strengths. They argue that it may be safer to take a social constructivist approach and see strengths as qualities which come into being through the shared and local production of meaning. In this case less pre-structured approaches to assessment would be preferable, such as 'creative labelling', a technique suggested by Wong (2006). Here the role of the practitioner is to listen carefully and help elicit the unique strengths of the client. This seems to share some ground with other less structured and content-free approaches that have been influenced by solution-focused brief therapy (Colville, 2013; De Jong & Miller, 1995).

In my own work as an EP, I have found it helpful to position myself at a half-way point between formal and informal methods of assessment. A place where I try to remain sensitive to the unique strengths of the CYP I meet, but use the questions and topic material from more structured assessments as helpful prompts to ensure the assessment is as comprehensive as possible (Bozic, 2013). This stance is similar to that described by Rawana & Brownlee (2009) who have also found that "the interview process can be enhanced by adding information from structured questionnaires" (p.257).

In the next section I discuss some of the topic areas that published assessment tools have tended to focus on.

2.3.4 What counts as a strength?

When Dennis Saleebey, one of the leading voices in the strength-based movement in social work, first spoke of strengths in clients, he saw no need to restrict the range of qualities which might be perceived as such, "almost anything could be considered a strength" Saleebey (1997, p.50). However, as strength-based assessment has made the transition to the field of educational and school psychology there has been a trend to focus on particular topic domains. It is interesting, for example, to observe how many of the measures that have been designed to date, reflect an interest in strengths associated with social-emotional functioning. Does this reflect something important about strengths in children and young people? Or does it reflect the concern of a specific professional group?

A selective focus may also reflect an underlying theoretical orientation. For example, strength-based assessment measures from the field of positive psychology are often concerned with positive emotional states or on qualities which have some kind of moral dimension (character strengths) (Kristjansson, 2012). And, those that have drawn from resilience theory are preoccupied with the protective factors, which that field has highlighted as being particularly significant - although, this has drawn the criticism that such attributes may only reflect the strengths needed in adversity and not be inclusive of more mundane positives (Rawana & Brownlee, 2009).

There is an advantage in taking a more partial approach to strength appraisal. It means that assessment designers can justify their selection of strengths on an evidence base, which it is claimed show these characteristics to be associated with better developmental outcomes (e.g., Morrison, Brown, Incau, O'Farrell & Furlong, 2006; Scales, 2011). Although what is meant by 'better' developmental outcomes may be contested as representing an ableist assumptions of what is to be considered normal or desirable (Davis, 1995). From this point of view it would be better to allow clients to decide for themselves what will count as a strength in their lives – and not restrict such choices to a pre-determined list of categories.

In the next section I explore another dimension which distinguishes the way that strength-based assessment measures have been designed, the extent to which they have focused solely on characteristics internal to the child or, alternatively, allowed positive aspects of the social ecology to also be defined as strengths.

2.3.5 Strength-based assessment – a within person approach?

A number of published strength-based assessments have taken a within-child approach. One of the first to do this was the Behavioral & Emotional Rating Scale (BERS) created by Epstein & Sharma (1998), later revised and re-standardised as the BERS-2 (Buckley & Epstein, 2004). The original BERS was a 52 item rating scale which could be completed by parents or teachers to assess a young person's strengths. It was heralded by Epstein (1999) as a way of improving the reliability and validity of strength-based assessment. The 52 items could be grouped into five different categories: intrapersonal strengths, affective

functioning, interpersonal strengths, family involvement and school functioning. Although names of some these categories may suggest they are assessing the presence of factors outside the individual, the items within them are all worded as qualities possessed by the individual child or young person. For example, within the category 'Interpersonal strength', example items include: 'kind towards others', 'considers consequences of own behaviour' and 'loses a game gracefully'.

A similar approach is found in other rating scales that have been developed since this time. For example, the Devereux Early Childhood Assessment (DECA) (LeBuffe & Naglieri, 1999) and Devereux Student Strengths Assessment (DESSA) (LeBuffe, Shapiro & Naglieri, 2009) – both of which are informed by resilience theory, but restrict their scope to the assessment of within-child protective factors and coping mechanisms; the Social-Emotional Assets and Resilience Scales (SEARS) (Merrell et al., 2011) which in its teacher version (SEARS-T) allows a child's strengths to be grouped in four categories: responsibility, social competence, self-regulation, and empathy; and the preschool version of the BERS, the PreBERS, which includes a category to do with school readiness.

To these can now be added a host of within-child measures developed as products of the positive psychology movement. Perhaps the most prominent of these is the Values in Action Inventory for Youth (VIA-Y) (Park & Peterson, 2006) which uses a self-report format to assess the presence of 24 character strengths (e.g., creativity, authenticity, kindness, etc.), which can be grouped under six main virtues (Wisdom and Knowledge, Humanity, Courage, Justice, Temperance and Transcendence). Other positive psychology strength-based assessment measures are available to assess qualities such as hope, optimism and gratitude – see Lopez & Snyder (2003).

Despite the sense of positivity and optimism that one might expect to arise from assessment of an individual's strengths there are potential problems with an individualising approach. Wilding & Griffey (2015) highlight the way that an over-emphasis on the presence (or absence) of internal strengths can easily start to share characteristics of a deficit approach - where the main aim is to help the individual to change – to make better use of latent strengths or grow new ones. Illuminating the characteristics of individuals may mean less attention is paid to the opportunities or limits which the wider social environment places on

strength development. The result of careful assessment could then simply amount to recommendations on how coaching might help an individual to improve their profile of strengths, rather than look more critically at how the context could be adjusted.

2.3.6 Strength-based assessment – including enabling features of the environment

As Jimerson et al. (2004) indicated there is a genre of strength-based assessments which, has paid attention to the supportive resources or protective factors in the ecology around a child or young person. Often this is done in combination with scrutiny of internal factors. The internal and external factors that are chosen reflecting those identified in the broader literature on resilience (Benard, 2004). Examples include: the Child and Adolescent Strengths Assessment (CASA) created by Lyons et al. (2000) which examines strengths at the family, school/ vocational, psychological, peer and community levels; the Assets Interview (Morrison et al., 2006) and the Devereux Child/ Adolescent Strengths Checklist (DCASC) reported by Woodland, Porter & LeBuffe (2011).

One of the most well known assessments in this genre is The Developmental Assets Profile (DAP) (Scales, 2011; Search Institute, 2005). The profile is linked to the field of Positive Youth Development which is interested in the bidirectional influence between CYP and their context. The DAP is the successor to a similar tool which was developed by the Search Institute called Profiles of Student Life: Attitudes and Behaviour. The 58 items of the DAP can be divided into two categories: internal and external assets – those provided by the individual CYP and those provided by the social environment and culture (Scales, 2011, p.622).

With these assessments it is more common to find items worded in ways which go beyond the attribution of individual competence. Items may denote relational strengths such as 'has strong positive relation with at least one parent' or 'has close friends' (CASA), positive features of school, 'What is your favourite part of school?', 'how does the teacher help your child succeed at school?' (Assets Interview) or access and engagement with community resources, 'Participates in group activity (e.g., sports, choir, clubs)' or 'Belongs in a faith community' (DCASC).

Nevertheless, it does seem hard for assessment designers to move away from I-statements when creating these tools. For example, on the CASA all eight items on the school/ vocational section really deal with internal skills ('I work hard', 'I speak well') rather than features of the school's organisation, which may be seen as supportive. A similar issue seems to affect the DAP where items for external factors include 'I seek advice from my parents' (Support factor) and 'I feel safe at school' (Empowerment factor), instead of perhaps 'my parents can provide me with advice' or 'it is safe at school'. Where items begin with 'I' the attribute can easily be seen as something to inculcate in the child, rather than the system.

However, an interesting feature of the DAP is that items can be regrouped to highlight the context in which strengths are displayed: personal, social, family, school and community. A similar interest in the contexts where strengths are evident is seen in a new strength-based assessment tool, the Strengths Assessment Inventory (Brazeau et al., 2012).

2.3.7 My professional interest in context

From my experience as an educational psychologist I have long been fascinated by the way that children and young people's strengths can be exhibited in some contexts but not others. We quickly learn that a child can behave very differently when taught by different teachers, or when in the home as opposed to the school context. If we think about strengths in terms of external resources or protective factors, again these will vary in availability across the environments a child enters. In some contexts there will be social interaction and a teaching approach which suits a child, in another there will be other qualities. From this point of view, it seems very important that assessment tools are context-sensitive and able to identify the ways in which situations are related to the presence of both internal and external strengths (Bozic, 2013).

Much of my work in schools as an educational psychologist has been organised around a consultative model (Wagner, 2000) where I have worked indirectly, encouraging and advising teachers and other school staff in their work with pupils, rather than trying to effect change directly with the children themselves. Through my training and professional

development, I am familiar with the notion of taking an ecological view of assessment (Ysseldyke, Lekwa, Klingbeil & Cormier, 2012; Kelly, Woolfson & Boyle., 2008). I was curious to know more about the specific contexts which might be promoting strengths in the CYP with whom I was working. If I could locate such social contexts might they not teach me something important about the child concerned? Working in this way might lead me towards a more systemic or social level of practice, where I helped school staff to develop better contexts for learning, rather than focusing solely on the child.

2.3.8 Strengths: context-specific or general?

Despite my own experience of strengths in children being very much situation or context specific this did not seem to be reflected in many of the strength-based assessment tools I came across.

At a very simple level rating scales like the BERS-2 or the SEARS only require a single response for each item. For example on the SEARS-T, Merrell et al. (2011, p.230) explain:

> "Items were rated using a 4-point rating format where raters are asked to estimate how true the items have been for this child during the past six months: *never true, sometimes true, often true, or always/ almost always true.*"

The fact that items can be rated 'sometimes true' or 'often true', does seem to imply that characteristics (such as 'Comfortable talking to others') may be present in some situations but not others. However, there is no further information from the assessment tool about the kind of situations where this characteristic might be more likely to be seen.

As Brazeau et al. (2012, p. 385) point out:

> "An additional challenge arises in explaining assessment results to clients and their families. Relaying to a client that they have strengths in the area of 'interpersonal strengths' may not be particularly useful without elaboration on the context within which this strength becomes apparent."

The situation is a little better when it comes to assessment tools that have been designed to identify supportive or enabling features of the social environment. For example, those such as the CASA or DCASC or Assets Interview. Here there is an ecological orientation which typically divides the assessment into sections which consider individual, family, peer, school

and community strengths/ assets. From the results of the assessment it is possible to divine whether a child has more strengths in say the family as opposed to the school arena. In a multiple case study I carried out, as part of my practice in schools, I presented six children's profiles in this way, using a combination of the CASA and the Assets Interview (Bozic, 2013). Charting the results of strength assessment in this way allowed the identification of classes of context associated with a favourable number of strengths which could then be utilised in planning. For example, for one child, peer level strengths were particularly evident (e.g., positive activities undertaken with other young people), so it was decided to utilise other pupils within an intervention.

However, although offering useful information about the prevalence of strengths at differing levels of ecology these measures are still unable to tell us anything about how individual level strengths might be distributed across different contexts.

This problem was addressed by Rawana and Brownlee (2009) when they introduced the idea that strengths could be organised according to domains or 'areas of functioning that the child engages in on a regular basis'. They suggested these could include contextual domains – general areas of activity (peers, family/ home, school, employment and community) and developmental domains (personality, personal and physical care, spiritual and cultural, leisure and recreation).

> "Organising information about identified strengths into domains of functioning provides the child and the family with a framework for understanding which areas in the child's day-to-day functioning are going well, areas where the child might be choosing not to express or develop strengths, and areas where the child might be struggling." Rawana & Brownlee (2009, p.257)

As mentioned above, Rawana and Brownlee have now taken this approach one step further by embedding it within a new strength-based assessment called the Strengths Assessment Inventory – Youth (SAI-Y) (Brazeau et al., 2012). The domains chosen to represent different areas of functioning are slightly altered, but the principle is similar: that elicited strengths can be associated with particular types of context (family, school, home, free time, friends, etc). This is similar to the DAP where all items can be re-grouped into the categories of personal, social, family, school and community.

These developments in the format of strength-based assessment show an interesting and perhaps growing awareness of the importance of context in the elicitation and development of strengths. However, they are still unable to offer a detailed account of the specific nature of the social contexts where strengths are evident: the nature of the joint enterprise, the interactions, relationship or resources which are used in these contexts, for example.

To learn more in this regard it can be argued that further conversations are necessary. As Rawana and Brownlee (2009, p.257) put it, the assessment,

> "sets the stage for having conversations about different strengths, as well as conversations about why strengths may be revealed in some areas but not in others."

This situation led me to reflect on whether it might be possible to devise a more context-sensitive form of strength-based assessment for use with CYP. Such an approach would not only be able to help CYP identify the strengths that they felt were present in their lives, but would also provide a systematic way of discussing the nature of the contexts or situations where these strengths were evident. Knowing more about these places: what happened within them; how they were organised and so on, would be likely to help in designing future contexts for the CYP concerned.

In the following section I describe how I designed such an assessment tool.

2.4 The development of Context of Strength Finder (CSF)

In this section I describe the development and structure of the Context of Strength Finder (CSF). This is a checklist and interview method which I developed, in order to identify the contexts in which CYP noticed the presence of strengths in their lives. There is an account of the structure of the CSF and the literature that was drawn upon to create it. This section culminates with a research plan to investigate the use of the CSF in my practice as an EP.

2.4.1 Purpose of the CSF

In designing the Context of Strength Finder (CSF), I extended the checklist method used by existing approaches to strength-based assessment, so that a strength could be linked to a context where it was perceived to be present. In order to identify contexts in which more than one strength might be operating, I devised a card sorting exercise with a pack of small cards: each card represented a specific strength, cards could be grouped together to indicate how they combined in a particular context.

At the outset it was decided that the CSF would be designed to be used directly with CYP – rather than with an adult who knew them well. The reason for this was to preserve the advantages of increased engagement which has been noted when strength-based assessment tools are used directly with CYP (McCammon, 2012; Jimerson et al., 2004).

It was decided that the CYP would be asked to select from a set of pre-determined strengths, rather than given a completely free rein in thinking of unique strengths in their lives. This was in order to retain some of the advantages of resiliency based methods of assessment, which located strengths at different levels of ecology (e.g., Lyons et al., 2000). Also, as the procedure was one which it was intended to fit within the everyday educational psychologist practice of school visiting - which is undertaken within certain time constraints - it was also thought to be expedient if the strength identification phase of the assessment was not too open-ended and could be carried out within a limited amount of time (about 20 minutes). Having said this, it was acknowledged that some opportunity for the CYP to identify unique strengths of their own would be important – so as to prevent the oppression

by theory described by Wilding & Griffey (2015) and others. Therefore, some capacity for this was also built into the assessment – see below.

2.4.2 Strength selection

The strengths that were chosen for use in the CSF were drawn from six different levels of analysis: personal/ psychological; personal skill-based; family; peer; school; and community (see Table 1).

The 24 individual strengths were largely drawn from resilience theory and represented a series of protective factors which have been associated with the mitigation of risk factors (Maston, 2006; Bernard, 2004; Walsh, 2003; Fraser, 1997). The first set of psychological strengths included: the capacity to deal with adversity, have a sense of humour, solve problems, and carry out tasks independently. Following this academic / vocational strengths were a sample of the skills one might learn in an educational setting. Family strengths focused on the quality of family relationships, communication and connectedness – drawing from the ideas found in family resilience theory (Walsh, 2003). Peer strength were chosen to sample the extent of social support from friendship groups and other CYP. School strengths were worded to detect high quality adult-CYP relationships within school, the experience of meaningful activities, high expectations, and clear and fair boundaries. Community strengths explored participation in local organisations and helping others.

A checklist was created with the 24 selected strengths, and space within each category for the CYP to add strengths of their own (Appendix A1). This was done in the following way. At the end of each level of the assessment, the CYP was asked if s/he could think of any other strengths like this which they would like to add to the checklist. For example, "Can you think of any more personal/friendship/family etc. strengths that you might have, which I haven't mentioned so far?" If the CYP could think of others, these were added to the checklist for them to rate and a card with this strength was added to the cards used in the assessment.

The CYP could rate each strength on the checklist as definitely present, sometimes present, or not present. This allowed some indication of partial strengths.

Table 1. CSF Strength items

Psychological strengths	Peer strengths
1. I can cope in difficult times	13. Other children/ young people like me
2. I have a sense of humour	14. I enjoy doing things with other children / young people
3. I solve problems	15. I have a close friend
4. I can do things by myself	16. Other kids think I'm cool
Academic/ vocational strengths	**School strengths**
5. I write well	17. There is a teacher who cares about me
6. I read well	18. I have done special things at school
7. I speak well	19. Teachers believe I can do well
8. I can make things	20. Pupils are treated fairly in my school
Family strengths	**Community strengths**
9. I get on well with my mum/ dad	21. I take part in sports
10. My family listen to me	22. I belong to a youth club
11. My family does things together	23. I go to a church/ mosque/ temple
12. I get on with my brother/ sister	24. I help people in my community

2.4.3 Context identification and exploration

At the end of the strength identification phase all of the identified strengths were placed on the table in front of the CYP in the form of cards. These cards had a green face to indicate 'definitely present' and an orange face for 'sometimes present'. The CYP was then invited to think of a situation where two or more of these strengths were present at the same time. They were encouraged to physically move cards together which represented a particular

situation (Figure 1). It was thought that this process would help to identify more potent contexts (i.e. ones where several strengths were present) and by virtue of the accumulation of the strengths themselves, reveal more about the nature of the context (e.g., so this is not only a time when you show a sense of humour, it is also when your family are doing things together and listening to you).

Figure 1. CSF strength cards (Pilot version)
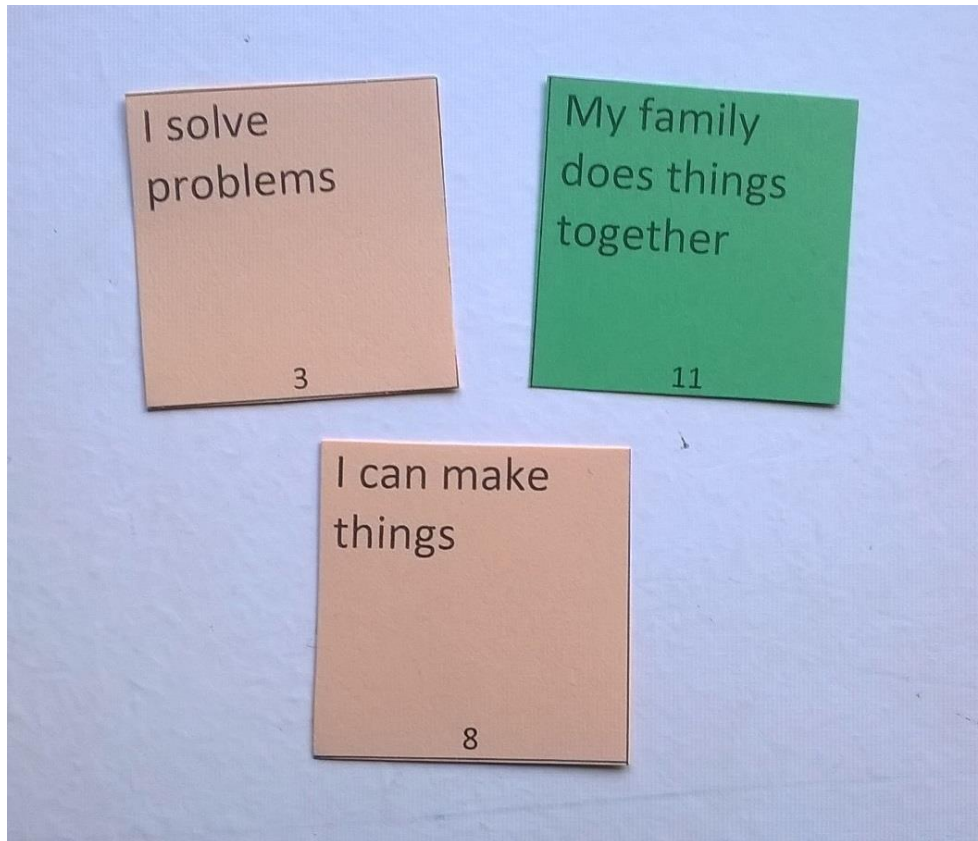
In thinking about ways of asking further questions to learn more about an identified context, I made reference to a theoretical framework which offered a way of conceptualising learning from a social point of view. Situated learning and the communities of practice framework (Wenger, 1998) seemed to have the conceptual range to encompass the nature of a participant's strengths or competences in terms of the social opportunities afforded within a context. At a broad level such an orientation is interested in the kind of practice that goes on in such contexts, the way that people relate to and interact with one another, the social norms and expectations which develop and the kind of artefacts and ways of encoding meaning which exist within the context (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). It seemed that this perspective might be useful in developing a short series of follow-

up questions in order to augment my understanding of the contexts identified by CYP. The following questions were inspired by Etienne Wenger's (1998) indicators of a communities of practice (a form of situated learning) and seemed to represent a spread of qualities which it would be worth knowing about in a social context:

1. Who belongs in this situation? Who does not belong?

2. How long have you been doing this together?

3. Describe a typical occasion when you have done this together.

4. What can you do in this situation? What can x do in this situation?

5. Would there be a way of behaving that wasn't right in this situation?

6. Are there special pieces of equipment that you use together?

7. In this situation do you use any special words or have any special ways of doing things

2.4.4 Piloting

I found opportunities within my own EP practice to pilot an initial version of the assessment with two young people of secondary school age during October 2015. This resulted in some small changes to the detail of the assessment administration. For example, specific record forms were developed to record what the CYP said (Appendix A2).

Also, at this stage a pictorial version of each strength item was created for use with CYP whose reading skills were not developed enough to read written labels on the cards or the checklist (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Pictorial version of strength cards
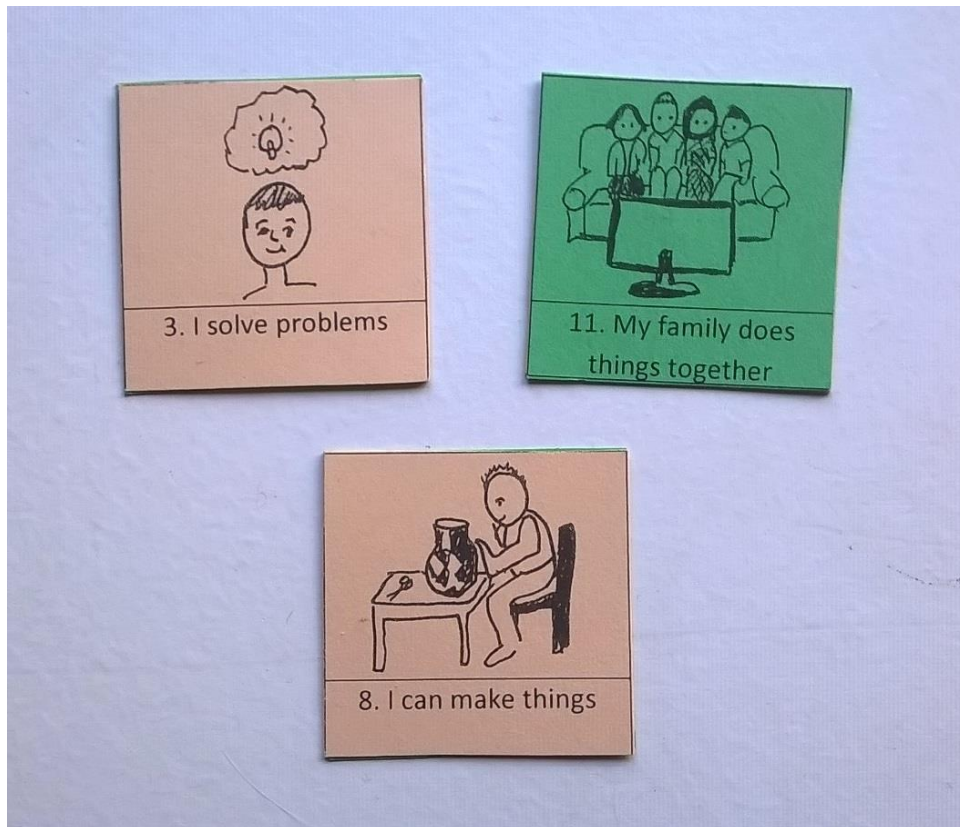
2.4.5 Phase 1 Study Aim

Having created the CSF, I aimed to explore what happened when I used it with CYP I encountered during my practice as an EP. The design of this study, which forms phase 1 of my PhD research, is presented in the next section.

2.5 Methodology

In this section I outline the overarching research aim and research questions of the phase 1 study, discuss my philosophical stance and the chosen methodology. The research was carried out within my practice as an educational psychologist and below I describe how I understand it as a piece of action research in which I have carried out a multiple case study. There is a discussion about reflexivity and ethics within the research process. The children and young people who took part in this research are described and then there is an account of the research procedure and the sources from which data was gathered. Finally, there is a description how data drawn from each case was analysed.

2.5.1 Research aim and questions

The main research aim of the phase 1 study was to trial the use of the Context of Strength Finder (CSF) and explore how it worked within my practice as an educational psychologist. There were two main research questions which stemmed from this aim. The first focused on the extent to which using the CSF allowed the identification of CYP's strengths and contexts where they appeared; the second explored the significance of learning about the contexts of strength. The two research questions were worded as follows:

RQ1 How far can the Context of Strength Finder allow CYP to identify strengths and relate these to specific contexts in their lives?

RQ2 What is gained/ problematic in using the CSF to learn about the *context* in which strengths are present in a CYP's life?

2.5.2 Philosophical stance

Within the social sciences there are different philosophical views about the nature of research and each view has implications for the way studies are designed, carried out and analysed. In this section I consider some of these positions and explain the critical realist stance taken in this study.

Broadly speaking perspectives differ on several dimensions including assumptions that are made about the nature of social reality and the way it should be studied (Burrell and Morgan, 1979). Positivist approaches, for example, claim that objects of study in the social world have an independent status from our thoughts and can be studied through observation and experiment. Whereas interpretivist approaches prioritise the meaning that individuals place on events and therefore seek to gain knowledge through talking to people about their perspectives and studying the way meaning arises between people in interaction.

Robson (2011) describes how a middle ground between these extremes is emerging within the so-called pragmatic approach, which for example, sees knowledge "as being both constructed and based on the reality of the world we experience and live in." (p.28) Whereas some proponents of a pragmatic approach prefer to abandon philosophical justification and just get on with the research, others have seen how it might be consistent with taking a realist or critical realist stance to the social world (Robson, 2011, p.30).

A critical realist perspective endorses the view that there is an objective reality (intransitive dimension) made up of objects and structures which exist independently of our thoughts about them and affect the way we live (Sayer, 2000). In the social world these objects and structures are of a social nature, created by people and their practices and institutions. The belief that the social world has an objective reality, which lies outside of our constructions, differs from an interpretivist view. However, critical realists say this reality can only be known and represented through the transitive knowledge that we build up about it.

A further distinctive feature of the critical realist approach concerns how it views causation (Maxwell, 2012). In contrast to a positivist view, which sees causation in successions of cause-effect patterns and ascribes a rather deterministic character to human action, a critical realist perspective, while seeing such action as operating within the force field generated by social structure, accepts human agency and sees causation located in the reasoning that people use to inform their actions. It thus becomes legitimate to explore why people acted in certain ways by asking them to describe their reasoning at these times. Sayer (2000) explains that although this kind of data may be fallible it at least offers the possibility of a fuller understanding of the mechanisms at play.

I have applied this philosophy to my own work in the following way. When I visit a setting and work with other people (e.g., practitioners and/or CYP) I propose that a temporary social object is created which is constituted by our interactions and joint activity. By bringing a new assessment approach, such as the CSF, into our work, it may create mechanisms which allow this social object to respond in new ways.

From a critical realist position, objects/ structures are thought to possess power, which is not exercised inevitably, but relies on the presence of conditions. Rather than seeing human actors as context-free figures whose actions can be studied in isolation – it directs attention to the structures within which people operate, institutional and role structures for example, which impact on the way that their agency must be understood. The goal of much critical realist research is to develop theory which explains the local contextual conditions in which causal mechanisms are activated.

In the context of this study this aspect of critical realism places a responsibility on me to reflect on the forces operating on me as an educational psychologist and how these placed opportunities and limitations on my thoughts and actions (echoing ideas I had already had about the way expectations of my role could affect my capacity to use strength-based methods – see section 1.1). It legitimises the close scrutiny of individual cases in order to learn about the way that forces of structure and agency play out.

2.5.3 Action research methodology

Taking an action research methodology allowed me to focus on an aspect of my own practice which I wished to study and develop. The overall shape of an action research project is often described as a sequence of stages involving planning, acting, observing and evaluating/ reflecting (Cohen et al., 2007). Action research planning involves a thorough examination of the current situation (Lewin, 1946) – for my phase 1 study this is contained within the literature review. Planning leads to a plan of action – in this phase of the study the plan of action is represented within the new form of context sensitive strength-based assessment, The CSF, which is described at the end of the literature review. It is the next stage of acting, or implementation, which is the subject of this methodology section and

involves the systematic monitoring and evaluation of the CSF in use. The stage of reflecting and evaluating will be undertaken in the findings and analysis section and discussion sections.

In order to be systematic in monitoring and evaluation, action researchers can be methodologically eclectic and draw on the full range of research techniques and methods (Cohen et al., 2007, p.309). For the purposes of my own study it seemed helpful to draw upon the field of case study design to help conceptualise the nature of the research plan. This was because I foresaw that I would be using the context of strength finder procedure with a sequence of individual children and young people – each forming a new case.

2.5.4 Case study design

Thomas (2011a, 2011b) contrasts two different ways of carrying out research in the social sciences, reductionist approaches which break things down into their constituent parts and holistic approaches such as case study which investigate phenomena in their entirety. He associates reductionist approaches with the quest for predictive theory and general laws. This is based on the idea of inductive generalisation, whereby patterns of results in a sample are inductively generalised to a wider population. However, Thomas (2011a) uses arguments from MacIntyre (1985) to argue that generalisation and prediction are not possible in the social sciences as they may be in the natural sciences. There are a greater number of forces impinging on people, including research findings themselves, and this results in a complex multi-layered form of contingency which renders prediction impossible. In addition to this, Flyvbjerg (2001) discusses the differences in the objects of study of the natural and social sciences. In the social sciences research must take account of the 'self-interpretations' of the people who are the subjects of study as well as the self-interpretations of the researcher. Both are part of the context which is being studied. Together these two types of self-interpretation have been termed the 'double hermeneutic' Giddens (1982).

So what can case study research achieve? Its proponents claim it is still worthwhile to investigate and more fully understand the complexity of a single case. Yin (2009) describes it as an empirical inquiry which:

> "investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real life context" (p.18).

Thomas (2010) argues that there is special value in presenting the detail of single cases in their context. "Its validation comes through the connections and insights it offers between another's experience and one's own" (p.579). There are parallels with the critical realist stance described above: a phenomenon can only be understood if we also appreciate the context of which it is a part. Yin also contrasts case study with positivist experimental method, which takes the opposite point of view and attempts to understand a phenomenon by removing it from its context.

Flyvbjerg (2001) extends this argument by applying the Dreyfus model (Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 1986) to professional learning. From this, he argues that initial levels of performance are based on rules and context-independent knowledge, the kind of knowledge found in textbooks. However, higher levels of proficiency only arise once practitioners begin to gain concrete experience – the highest level expertise only reached "on the basis of intimate knowledge of several thousand concrete cases" (p.71). Nevertheless, carefully selected case studies can aid in the development of competence (level 3 in Dreyfus model). They are well suited to providing concrete context-dependent knowledge. It is this kind of competence which helps practitioners learn how to apply skills in the more complex situations the real world presents, and, in my view, it may serve as a reasonable goal for this current study of context sensitive strength-based assessment.

Although it may be inadvisable to try to separate phenomenon from context, Thomas (2011b) points out the need to draw boundaries around what will be seen as a case. In my own study I believe this should not be reduced to the notion of the child who is the subject of the assessment. it should include the educational psychologist with his/her rationale, reasons and feelings as well as what happens when the CSF procedure is used.

Thomas (2011b) and Yin (2009) both describe the variety of different forms that case study can take. Using Thomas' categorisation scheme, I would characterise my own phase 1 study

as having an exploratory purpose because I am interested in knowing more about what happens when I carry use the CSF in my role as an EP. It would be a form of *multiple* case study which although focusing on the detail of individual cases is also alive to patterns across cases.

2.5.5 Reflexivity

Reflexivity refers to the way in which the researcher's own experiences and position in the social world impacts on the research process. First of all the researcher's background , education and role encourage him/her to be sensitive to certain topics as worthy of research. Then when carrying out research, the researcher's role will be interpreted by participants within the research process and may influence how they act and react to the enquiry. Taking this view, means that we cannot accept the idea that the researcher is some kind of neutral observer who is independent of the scene being observed. Instead, to fully understand the meaning of any reported research we need to understand the way that reflexivity affected the process. In order to address reflexivity, Stones (1996) argues that the researcher needs to make his or her presence visible and influential within both the empirical and the reporting phases of the project.

Bringing one's thinking into the analysis offers a way forward here, as in a sense there is no escape from subjectivity – it is impossible to stand outside one's self - it is best to be as open as possible about the stance that one has taken and the way that one's biography and role may have affected the research process. Then it remains for the reader to judge the overall value and meaning of what has been reported.

Within the phase 1 study I have tried to address reflexivity in different ways. During the literature review I have made reference to how my own practice experiences have influenced my understanding and interest in the field and therefore shaped the design of this study. In thinking about the empirical design of the study I have sought to include my own reflections on the research process as part of the data gathering exercise – and signposted them as my reflections. During the analysis and interpretation phase I will seek

to be conscious of how my own role and social position as 'educational psychologist' may have affected the events I describe.

A further way in which reflexivity enters this research concerns the way in which strengths and situations are identified. In privileging what the CYP say are their strengths and the situations where they feel these strengths are present, I have aimed to allow their perspective to be significant in the assessment process – albeit with the caveat that I have initially offered them a pre-selected set of strengths to choose from (see section above on the development of the CSF). I would like to claim this attempt to build knowledge from the bottom-up, rather than diagnosing strengths from the top-down, is a way of addressing some aspects of the much-critiqued power imbalance which can be present when the researcher's/ professional's view counts as the only authority.

2.5.6 Ethical issues

A number of ethical issues were considered prior to carrying out the research. Reference was made to the following documents: the British Psychological Society (BPS) Code of Human Research Ethics (BPS, 2010) and the British Educational Research Association (BERA) Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research (BERA, 2011).

An important concern was how to effectively inform participants of the nature and purpose of the study. An added complexity was that I was carrying out the research within my ordinary professional work and therefore needed to somehow explain the distinction between my role as educational psychologist and my role as researcher (see information about dual roles, paragraph 12, BERA, 2011). This was resolved by carrying out the assessment work with the CSF within my usual practices as an educational psychologist (for which the usual consent had already been obtained) but then at the end of this process explaining to participants that I was carrying out research into the use of the strength-based assessment and inviting them to give consent for the information obtained through this assessment to be included in the research. Mindful of the professional power that my role conferred (BPS, 2010, p.20) I stressed to the child or young person (and to a parent/ carer if the child was under 16 years of age) that they were under no obligation to agree to

participate and whether they did or not would not affect whether I continued to work as their EP.

Explaining the nature of the research to participants and to their parents (when they were under 16) necessitated the development of participant information sheets for both groups (see Appendix A3). Care was taken to ensure the use of language was appropriate for the intended audience. In the case of younger child participants, a pictorial version of the participant information sheet was created. The information sheet included a summary of the nature and purpose of the research, what would happen to the data collected and details about withdrawal from the project.

The right to withdraw from research projects is an important element the BPS ethical framework. In this project participants were given this opportunity up until the time when the data would begin to be analysed (April 2016). As recommended by the BPS document (BPS, 2010, p.9) this limit to withdrawal was made clear to participants.

Having read the information sheet, participants and parents (of those under 16) were given the opportunity to give or decline consent for participation in the project. Written consent was obtained by signature from both CYP and parents. Following the BPS (2011) guidance, this was stored under the same conditions of confidentiality as participant data.

Confidentiality was maintained in the following way. No names and personal identifying information (e.g., date of birth) was recorded on the assessment records arising from use of the CSF. Instead a code was allocated to each participant and a document was created containing a table of code – personal identification correspondences. This document was stored in a locked cabinet together with the signed consent forms, participant data being held in a separate secure area. When data from participants was prepared for publication/ PhD write-up, no identifying information was included. Each participant was given a pseudonym and care was taken to disguise any details about the school or people mentioned in my account of each case.

This phase of the project was granted ethical approval by Manchester Metropolitan University Ethics Committee (see Appendix A3).

<u>2.5.7 Sample</u>

The sample of participants within this study was a subset of CYP who had been referred under the usual Educational Psychology Service (EPS) referral systems – i.e. via schools or the local authority (LA) – during the period from November 2015 – April 2016. EPS referrals from schools arise from a traded form of work in which schools have purchased a certain number of hours of educational psychologist time. At planning meetings, a member of school staff (usually the Special Needs Coordinator) will highlight pupils who it is felt would merit from educational psychologist involvement. There is some negotiation and prioritisation of cases given limits on educational psychologist time. EPS referrals from the LA are requests concerning statutory processes (e.g., requests for psychological advice for statutory assessment) or requests for involvement with preschool children. Since the revision of the SEND Code of Practice (DfE, 2014) statutory assessments can be requested for CYP up to the age of 25.

Within this research context, I restricted my work to CYP who I felt would be able to understand the assessment process and for whom a strength-based assessment of this type seemed to have some rationale. My rationale for carrying out an assessment with the CSF was recorded on the diary sheet for each case.

In total the CSF approach was attempted with twelve CYP – this represented about 25-35% of the total number of CYP I would have had involvement with in that time period. The CYP for whom I would not have considered the CSF would include preschool children or young children without sufficient communication or language skills (which makes up a significant part of my case load) as well as those for whom my negotiated brief did not provide any justification to use such an assessment – for example if I was asked to review progress in a meeting with a teacher or comment specifically on some other area of a CYP's functioning.

Of the twelve I attempted the approach with, two refused to participate, one declined to give consent for her data to be used in the study and for another I was unable to contact parents to gain consent in the necessary time frame. The final sample of eight CYP is summarised in the Table below. As can be seen all were male (reflecting the imbalance of genders referred to our service) and five out of eight were of British Muslim ethnicity. Participants ranged in age from 6.9 to 19.2.

Table 2. Phase 1 Sample

Participant	Gender	Age at assessment (years. months)	Referral source
Aabid	M	6.10	School
Ben	M	19.2	LA
Cemal	M	15.3	School
Dayyan	M	16.1	School
Ethan	M	14.6	LA
Frank	M	10.8	School
Ghalib	M	11.8	School
Ibrahim	M	6.9	LA

2.5.8 Procedure

Following my decision to use the CSF in my work with a CYP, I used the following procedure:

1. I arranged to meet the CYP in a quiet room, in which confidentiality could be maintained. This was usually in a school setting but in the case of Ben, in his home.

2. I asked the CYP to rate whether they perceived the strengths from the CSF to be present in their lives (definitely present, sometimes present, not present). They could do this by using a checklist or by selecting cards which represented strengths. Card background colour indicating a definite strength (green) or sometimes strength (orange). From time-to-time I asked for an example or further details of a particular strength.

I recorded responses on Record Sheet 1 (RS1) (Appendix A2).

3. I invited the CYP to think of a situation (context) from their lives in which one or more of the identified strengths was present. They did this by moving selected cards around a table top. They were then asked seven follow-up questions about this context – see section 2.4.3.

The CYP's responses were recorded on Record Sheet 2 (RS2) (Appendix A2).

If time allowed a second context was elicited.

3. Following this process I completed a Participant Details sheet (Appendix A2) to record the context of practice within which the assessment took place and any follow-up reflections.

2.5.9 Research questions and data sources

Every time the CSF was used, data to address each of the research questions was gathered from the following sources:

Table 3. Phase 1 Research questions and data sources

Research Question	Data source
RQ1: How far can the Context of Strength Finder allow CYP to identify strengths and relate these to specific contexts in their lives.	CSF Record Sheet 1: • Responses to strength items CSF Record Sheet 2: • Identified situation
RQ2: What is gained/ problematic in using the CSF to learn about the *context* in which strengths are present in a CYP's life? .	CSF Record Sheet 2: • Identified situation. • Responses to follow-up questions. Participant Details Sheet: • Reason for educational psychologist involvement • Rationale for use of strength-based assessment • What happened box • Further thoughts box

<u>2.5.10 Analysis</u>

2.5.10.1 Cross-case analysis to answer RQ1

RQ 1: How far can the Context of Strength Finder allow CYP to identify strengths and relate these to specific contexts in their lives.

For each CYP a set of seven criteria were examined to check the extent to which the CSF process had been able to identify meaningful strengths and situations. The following criteria were used:

1. On at least 80% of items the CYP could give a meaningful response – i.e. 80% of responses could be coded as definite/ sometimes/ not present on RS1 response sheet.
2. The CYP varied their response to items using all three possibilities: definite/ sometimes/ not present.
3. Evidence of meaningful comments about strengths in comments column on RS1 response sheet?
4. Were unique strengths/ competences identified by the CYP?
5. Is there at least one situation identified on RS2 response sheet?
6. Situation clearly situated in time (past, current, future)?
7. Location of situation clear (i.e. in school, family, local community, etc.)

2.5.10.2 Case study analyses to consider RQ2

RQ 2: What is gained/ problematic in using the CSF to learn about the *context* in which strengths are present in a CYP's life?

The analytic aim here was to gain a holistic understanding of how using the CSF to learn about the context of strengths was significant.

For each CYP a storyboard was created on a large piece of paper containing the following information:

1. Reason for educational psychologist involvement
2. EP rationale
3. The strengths elicited
4. Summary of situation
5. EP notes on what happened in the assessment
6. EP further thoughts

Post-it notes were added to the storyboard which represented further 'noticings' (Thomas, 2011b, p.185) about what was gained/ problematic in using the CSF to learn about the context of strengths (See Figure 3 for photograph of an example storyboard from study).

Figure 3. Photograph of example storyboard
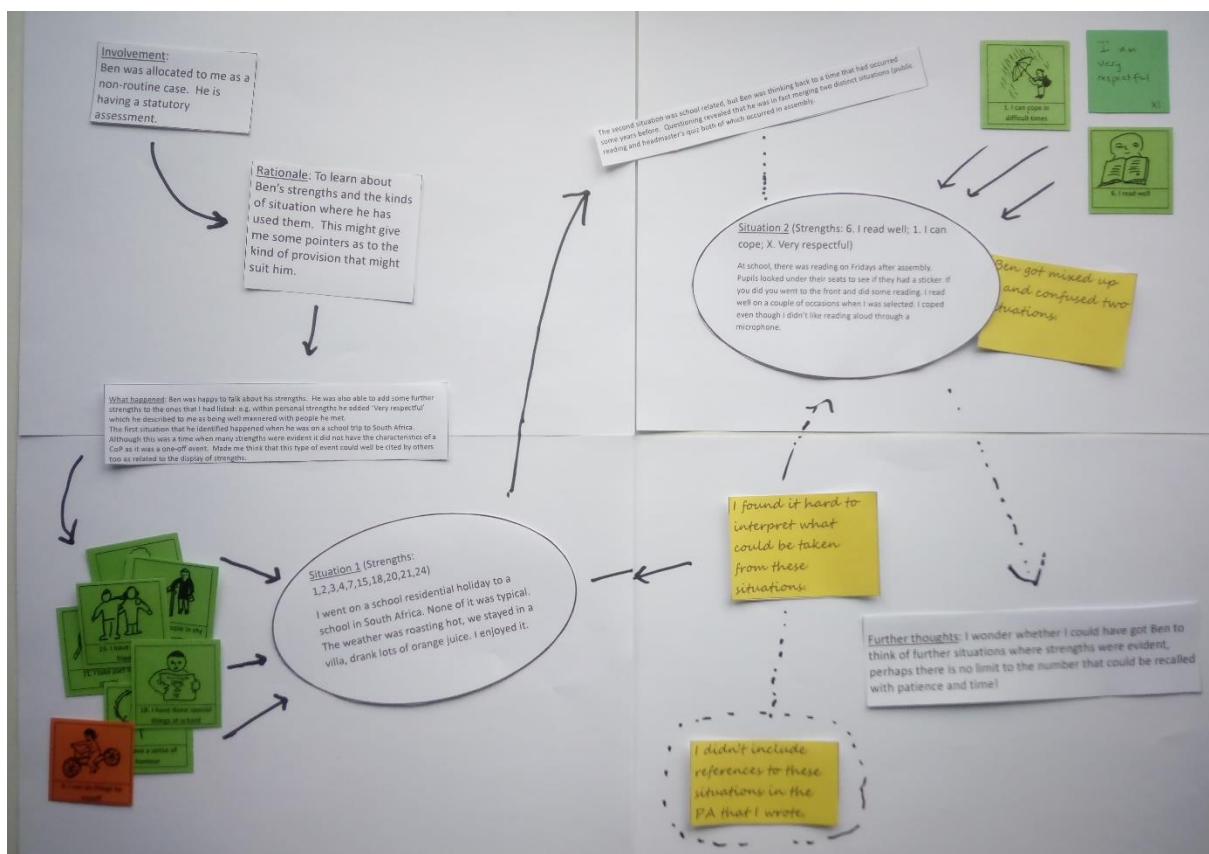
Thomas (2011b, p.185), like Flyvbjerg (2006), proposes that narrative may offer a particularly good way of representing the outcomes of case study research. He builds on ideas from Bruner (1991) to suggest strategies for constructing a narrative. For example, these include being sensitive to 'questioning and intelligent noticings', and to moments of surprise and serendipity.

I created a narrative for each case, which integrated the data from the storyboard and developed it through further analytical thinking of my own.

Each narrative was divided into the following sections. The first two sections drew exclusively on the data collected at the time of the assessment:

I.   Beginnings – information about how EP involvement came about;

II.   The assessment process – what happened when the CSF was used and my immediate reflections at the time.

There are then further sections to the narrative which are based on analysis and interpretation carried out later during the analytic phase.

III.   Analysis based on further noticings about what was gained/ problematic in using the CSF to learn about the context of strengths;

IV.   Further development of my analysis – not always present if noticings seemed to have covered all the points.

2.5.11 Validity and generalisability

In this section I will describe how I have positioned myself with regard to questions of validity and generalisability. I draw on Maxwell (2012) in order to maintain a critical realist view of these terms.

In this study I felt it was important to address the potential charge of subjectivism and the criticism that the research may be designed and analysed in ways which support my own prior assumptions. This is perhaps more pertinent in a piece of action research, where the subject of the research is the practice of the researcher themselves. Of course my own presence in the research process cannot be neutral and my own role, background and

interest will influence the design and focus of the research and affect the way that participants are likely to react to me. The inevitability of this, and how to manage it, are discussed in the section on reflexivity above. Nevertheless, beyond this, I believed it was still important that the collection and analysis of data was bound by certain rules which meant that the research process was not dominated by my own perspective.

2.5.11.1 Interpretive validity

Maxwell (2012) proposes that interpretive validity refers to the extent that research reflects the meanings expressed by participants. Case study researchers explain that accounting for the data generated from the field acts as a corrective force to their own initial hypotheses and results in revisions to preconceived ideas about the phenomena being researched (Flyvbjerg, 2006).   Within this study I have made efforts to show how the analysis was based on data gathered directly from the CYP themselves during the CSF assessment process. This data was recorded on the record sheets used at the time of the assessment and was returned to during the analysis phase to ensure my emerging analysis remained consistent with what was recorded at the time.

A further source of data gathered at the time of the assessment concerned my own statements about the nature of the work, its rationale, what happened during the assessment and my reflections immediately after the assessment. This information was contained within a diary sheet for each case. This data was also used within the analytic process as a record of what happened at the time. During the analysis I continually checked to ensure this contemporaneous information was accurately reflected in any further interpretations that I make about the meaning of the assessment. I wanted to avoid the incursion of inaccurate post-hoc ideas which did not relate closely to the meanings expressed by participants at the time.

It could be argued that even this data, based on my own observations at the time, may still be skewed towards particular details and issues that I hoped the research would demonstrate. I accept that this level of subjectivity may have been present – part of what I

was bringing to the study – however, by being contemporaneous, this level of selection/ interpretation etc., was constrained by being tied to the events that took place.

2.5.11.2 Theoretical validity

Maxwell (2012) argues that theoretical validity is to do with assessing the appropriateness of the theoretical constructions used by the researcher. For him, the purpose of theory is to go beyond the descriptive and offer some kind of (contextualised) explanation of a phenomenon. In this phase of the study I have equated such theoretical constructions with what Thomas (2010, p.577) has referred to as phronesis and he argues, others have called by other names (e.g., middle axioms, schema, local hermeneutics). Phronesis is a contextually specific form of 'practical theorising' which Thomas (ibid., p.578) describes as 'about understanding and behavior in particular situations'. In this respect it is consistent with critical realism in stressing the importance of context in understanding human action (Sayer, 2000).

For Thomas (2010) the validity of phronesis is based on the extent to which it allows others to make connections or draw insights about the subject of the research. It is the researcher's story of the phenomenon or their narrative which is important here.
I have sought to display my phronesis or understanding of each case in terms of narratives which can be read and related to by the reader. I hope that that such displays will be useful to others as they seek to understand the phenomena under investigation and make sense of it in relation to their own experience and context.

2.5.11.3 Generalisability
I have followed Maxwell (2012) in not expecting simple forms of external generalisation from the case studies carried out in this phase of the project. This position is also in agreement with Thomas (2010) who argues that the inductive form of generalisation, in which findings can be generalised to a wider population, is not possible within case study research. He is more accepting of looser generalisation or softer forms of theorising which

helps to make sense of a phenomenon without making strong predictive claims in the way that harder forms of theorising do (Flyvbjerg, 2006).

I suggest that while the specific content of the research may not be generalizable, because it deals with the particular details of individuals' lives, the process by which this content has been discerned may prove to be useful in similar contexts – for example, where other educational psychologists are working in similar ways with CYP in schools and other settings.

2.6 Findings and Analysis

2.6.1 The success of the strength finder resource in allowing CYP to identify strengths and situations where they are exhibited

Research question 1 focused on examining the extent to which using the Strength Finder with CYP participants allowed meaningful strengths and situations to be identified. Table 4 shows how each participant's responses on the CSF were rated on seven criteria (see section 2.5.10.1).

Table 4. Responses to the CSF

	Strengths					Situations			
	On at least 80% of items the CYP could give a meaningful response	The presence of definite/ sometimes/ not present	Evidence of meaningful comments about strengths	Unique strengths identified	At least one situation is identified	Situation(s) clearly situated in time (P=past, C=current, F=future)	Location of situation clear (S=school, F=family, C=community)
Aabid	1	0	1	0	1	1 (C)	1 (F)
Ben	1	1	1	1	1	1 (PP)	1 (CS)
Cemal	1	1	1	1	1	1 (C)	1 (F)
Dayyan	1	1	1	1	1	1 (FC)	1 (SC)
Ethan	1	1	1	0	1	1 (CC)	1 (SS)
Frank	1	0	1	0	1	1 (P)	1 (S)
Ghalib	1	1	1	0	1	1 (CC)	1 (SS)
Ibrahim	0	1	1	0	1	1 (C)	1 (S)

Table 4 shows that seven out of eight participants were able to give a meaningful response to at least 80% of strength items – although two participants did not use the full range of possible responses. All eight could give meaningful comments about strengths they identified themselves possessing. However, only three participants added their own unique strengths to the ones supplied. These participants (Ben, Cemal and Dayyan) were older than the rest of the sample. The unique strengths that were added by them were: 'Being very respectful', 'cooking', 'good relationship with grandparents', 'mentoring other children', 'advising friends about problems', 'Hands on work'.

Table 4 also shows that all eight participants were able to identify specific situations.

Four participants identified two situations, and four identified one.

Situations were predominately in the current time (eight). Three were remembered from the past and one was an imagined future situation.

Eight of the 12 situations were based in a school setting, two in family setting and two in the wider community.

2.6.2 Case level analysis exploring what was gained/ difficulties in using the CSF to learn about context

Each narrative below is divided into sections (i) to (iii) and sometimes (iv), reflecting the analytic process described earlier in Section 2.5.10.2.

2.6.2.1 Aabid

i) Aabid was a 6 year old boy with a physical disability who was being educated in a mainstream primary school. He had some physical weaknesses but generally managed movement around school. He had a pre-statutory plan, put together by school staff, external professionals and parents, which clarified ways of supporting him to achieve educational targets. The plan focused on things like ways of improving his handwriting skills and helping him to navigate crowded areas at school. Prior to the plan being reviewed, a specialist teacher, asked me to see Aabid so that I could contribute to the review meeting

that would be held in school that term. I anticipated that I would be asked to comment on whether I felt Aabid's difficulties were sufficient to warrant a statutory assessment, which would be a potential outcome of the meeting. I decided that prior to the meeting in addition to other methods of data gathering, I would carry out an assessment with the CSF to help me get to know Aabid and learn where he felt he was doing well. I thought this might help me to gain insight into the situations that suited him at school.

ii) In my notes on the assessment process I recorded that Aabid engaged well. He was very chatty and I needed to work hard to keep his attention focused on the activity. He labelled all but three of the 24 strengths as ones he had and I felt this might need some further interpretation or discussion with others.

Aabid was able to identify a situation in which he used four of his strengths. This was when he read to his mother at home and involved strengths: 6 (Read well), 7 (Speak well), 10 (Getting on well with mother/ father) and 11 (Family doing things together).

At the review meeting. I noted that the strength-based information I had collected affected the dynamics of this meeting – generating a more positive view of Aabid – as most of the talk at the start of the meeting had been about his physical difficulties. It allowed his mother to expand on some of the details of what happened at home, and picked up on Aabid's interest in making things as something which could be developed at school to help him practice certain physical skills. I also recorded that it would be helpful to have a further session with Aabid to explore other situations in which he used his strengths at school.

iii) Following the work with Aabid I reflected that during the review meeting I had found it easier to talk about the strengths that he had identified, rather than the situation he had chosen. Could this be because I was less practised at drawing out the implications of a context? (This was the first time I had used the CSF within the main study.) Or could it be something to do with the way that strengths seem to possess a more general nature – things that can be applied in different places, whereas contexts are predominately local and specific? Perhaps I needed some kind of framework which would help me see the important elements within the context that Aabid had chosen. I noted that he had identified a context from home, one in which he was receiving personal attention from his mother. I recalled

how enthusiastically he had enjoyed the personal attention I had given him during the assessment process.

iv) I had wanted to gain some insight into the situations that suited him at school. To simply report that he seemed to enjoy a context where he received close personal attention seemed rather trite. But maybe this was because it didn't fit with my preconceived ideas of what I wanted to find out from the assessment. On the other hand, in the meeting his mother had mentioned how Aabid would do special things with another member of the family, who was a trained teacher. I knew that the family had been worried about Aabid for a long time, it seemed likely that they invested time in supporting him as much as they could at home. Aabid may well be very familiar with such encounters and they may be times when his qualities (e.g., reading well) are affirmed. I need to acknowledge that this line of thinking is rather speculative – although it is based on information gained from the review meeting. What it perhaps does present is a hypothesis about situations in which Aabid is likely to feel comfortable. A hypothesis which could then be checked, verified or modified by talking to others or carrying out observations. And, it's interesting to think that this hypothesis about Aabid's preferences does run a little counter to the expectation on children at school as they grow older – that they will become more independent. So maybe the CSF had been useful in helping me to think about a context in which Aabid felt competent – but it was not necessarily the type of context which one would wish him to remain within. This represents a surprising thought for me, because I had assumed that contexts in which the child felt competent and recognised themselves as having strengths might be something which we would aim to move towards.

2.6.2.2 Ben

i) Ben was allocated to me as a non-routine statutory assessment. This meant that the local authority had agreed to his assessment but there was no educational psychologist currently involved with him, so the work had to be handed out on a rota system. At 19 years of age, Ben was older than most young people I work with – although this age is going to become more familiar as the latest Code of Practice extends the remit of statutory assessment to 25 years of age.

Ben was currently out of education and employment. He had a diagnosis of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and had been a pupil at a special school for children with emotional and behavioural difficulties (EBD), but had struggled to find direction since leaving there. His mother wanted him to have an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) to support him to go to college.

As I had no knowledge of Ben I decided to use the CSF alongside other assessments (of literacy and numeracy) to give me some idea about the kind of educational provision that might suit him.

ii) Ben was happy to talk about his strengths and added some further strengths to the ones I had on the list. The first situation that he identified was when he was on a school trip to a foreign country. This experience sounded very much like a holiday and involved hot weather, recreational pursuits, staying in a villa, etc. I could see that it might be difficult to draw out experiences from this that would help me think about his future education provision. I asked him to think of a second situation where strengths had been evident and he chose another one from several years before when he had been at school. It involved an activity that took place in assemblies each week, where at the end of the assembly, the head teacher asked all the pupils to look under their seats to see if they could find a 'winning ticket' that had been stuck there. If they found one they had to go to the front and read a passage from a book. Ben remembered how he had once found a ticket under his chair and had had to read at the front. He had been pleased with himself because he had done this well despite not liking reading aloud.

iii) I noted at the time that Ben was trying to remember the school-based situation he found it difficult to separate it from the memory of another event that took place in assemblies – this perhaps highlighted a disadvantage of drawing on situations from the past.

Overall, I had found it hard to interpret the significance of the contexts that Ben had mentioned. The first a holiday-style situation was far away from typical school experience. The second situation was from a school and perhaps reflected a delight in performing successfully to others, or was it simply a moment when he received positive feedback within an educational context and really valued the experience? It was hard to tell and perhaps because of this ambiguity I noticed that afterwards my psychological report on Ben

contained no reference to his strengths or these situations – I had slipped back into the familiar style of describing his difficulties and the provision needed to meet these.

iv) Looking back, I wonder whether there is a connection between Ben's contexts. Perhaps, he is simply describing moments when he was happy. Although maybe not quite the same as the peak experiences described by Maslow (1964) as "moments of highest happiness and fulfillment", they have something in common with them. They can indeed be times when you feel relaxed and your strengths are validated. As with Aabid, my dissatisfaction with what Ben said was to do with it not reflecting the elements of an effective learning experience, which could be applied elsewhere. This dissatisfaction betrays my own hope that the assessment would provide easy insights about an educational context that would suit him. But Ben had been out of education for some time, and besides his time at school had been problematic.

I began to see that the significance of the contexts which Ben identified might be more apparent in the way they contrasted with more recent periods of his life, in which there seemed to be less evidence of positive experiences. The possibility of this contrast was one I only thought of later, but it would have been interesting to explore it sensitively with Ben on another occasion.

2.6.2.3 Cemal

i) Cemal was a fifteen year old boy nearing the end of his time at secondary school. A dispute had arisen between Cemal and his mother, and the school's SENCO, about whether Cemal had been diagnosed with dyslexia. Cemal and his mother were under the impression that a diagnosis had already been made, but there was nothing in the school records to suggest it had. In order to resolve this problem I suggested to the SENCO that I could carry out some assessments myself and following the procedure for dyslexia identification in my team, could suggest a brief intervention which could clarify the nature of Cemal's literacy difficulties.

Alongside the literacy assessments I decided to use the CSF to gain a fuller and more holistic view of Cemal.

ii) Cemal said that he enjoyed the CSF assessment and he told me a lot about how he saw his strengths. The strength-based situation that he described was playing monopoly or card games with his two brothers and two uncles (who were a similar age to him) and talking 'brother to brother stuff'. This situation involved the strengths of getting along well with his brothers, his family listening to him, humour and doing things by himself.

iii) The situation that Cemal described seemed to relate closely to two unique strengths which he had added to the list earlier: I can mentor children; and, advising friends about problems. I started to get the feeling that Cemal felt most competent and happy in those social interactions where he could support others or receive empathy from them. The situation alone didn't give me this insight, it was when I put it in combination with the unique strengths he had added.

Certainly I felt I was getting a stronger and more rounded view of Cemal than I would have gained through just using the literacy assessments to pinpoint his reading and writing difficulties. Unfortunately we ran out of time because I only had about 20 minutes left to do this after all the literacy assessments were over. I think there was scope for much more exploration and probably far more situation spotting. Immediately after the assessment I felt nervous that my work had strayed away from the purpose of looking more closely for signs of dyslexia. In my reflections I commented that I could have steered the assessment and encouraged Cemal to identify a situation where he wrote well (he had rated himself as sometimes writing well). On reflection these notes remind me of the tension that I can sometimes feel under in schools to produce something that is perceived to be useful within a given time period. Especially since the advent of trading where schools pay for your services as a psychologist you do not wish to be seen to be somehow using time to deviate beyond what has been requested.

As there was a degree of tension between home and school it was a little tricky to discuss this new understanding of Cemal that I had gained. However, I added a paragraph in the dyslexia report which was based on it:

> A strength-based assessment, which I carried out at the same time as assessing Cemal's literacy skills, revealed a number of strengths. In particular Cemal reported that he finds fulfilment in mentoring other children and advising his friends about problems. Solving problems through talk seemed to be an important part of Cemal's identity and may be

something which he could pursue in future work. It could also be the case that this interest in interaction could be harnessed to help Cemal improve his literacy skills, for example by being part of a mutual support group.

2.6.2.4 Dayyan

i) I was asked to help a school manage the behaviour of a 16 year old young man who was described as a very disruptive pupil who refused to stay in lessons and often wandered around the corridors. I learnt that Dayyan had been referred to the local Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS), his family were known to Social Care and a family support worker had been involved in the past. As a result of Dayyan's reported distractibility (staff thought he might have ADHD) – I decided the CSF might be a good way of engaging with him.

ii) As it turned out Dayyan concentrated very well on the CSF assessment, we worked together for a significant amount of time and he was able to identify two situations where strengths were evident. One of these was a weekly practical lesson in which he would be able to engage in 'hands on work' – a unique strength he had added to the strength list. He could describe this lesson in a very detailed manner, so it was a surprise to me when he said that it was in fact an imaginary scenario, based on similar classes from the past. The second situation was an account of visiting the local mosque with a friend and reading the Koran in Arabic. This involved sitting quietly with about ten other young people and reading while under the supervision of a sheikh (mosque cleric).

In my notes I recorded that the use of an imaginary situation was not necessarily problematic as it could highlight ideas for how present arrangements could be changed.

At the end of the interview with Dayyan I was unable to meet with the SENCO to discuss what had been said. I wrote to her instead detailing the work I had done with Dayyan and making some tentative suggestions:

> I found it interesting that Dayyan described a situation at the mosque where he is supervised in a group of ten to undertake a reading task. Could there be elements here that might be incorporated into lesson planning for Dayyan (e.g., further opportunities for supervised small group activities in more peaceful parts of the school?

In my notes I recorded that I felt uncomfortable supplying feedback to the SENCO in written form – concerned that it could be perceived as emphasising the way the environment might be adopted for Dayyan and irritating staff who has been stressed and struggling with his behaviour for so long. Introducing strength-based information into a problem-focused context seemed likely to produce resistance. Perhaps something more subtle was needed, for example bringing staff and Dayyan together to discuss the meaning of the assessment and how it might inform a new phase of planning.

iii) The mosque situation touched on another issue though – here Dayyan was describing an ability to concentrate and maintain discipline over a period of time which was very different to how he presented at school. Was this a consequence of the deference and respect that he felt on entering the mosque or were elements of this activity transferable to school, as I had suggested in my report? In any case it seemed to create a more nuanced view of this young man, who in some situations may well be able to control his distractibility.

2.6.2.5 Ethan

i) I was asked to carry out another non-routine statutory assessment. The pupil concerned was Ethan, a fourteen year old boy who was educated in a mainstream secondary school in a neighbouring local authority. Ethan has a diagnosis of autistic spectrum disorder. A large number of reports had been copied to me detailing the assessments of various professionals. Many different tests had been used to document the low level of skill that Ethan demonstrated in different areas (literacy, language, etc.). I decided it would be useful to find out a little about his strengths by using the CSF.

ii) At the school, before I could begin my assessment with Ethan, I was presented with a panel of staff who worked with him and wanted to emphasise how much support he needed and how appropriate it would be for him to have an EHCP. This is a normal dynamic that I experience as an educational psychologist where staff see me as a gate-keeper to additional resources. Once that was over, the SENCO said she would stay with me during the assessment because she expected Ethan might be very anxious about meeting me.

Ethan responded well to the CSF assessment and was able to nominate two separate situations where strengths were present. The first was football practice on Fridays and the second was when he was asked to write something in English lessons.

I found it interesting that Ethan's account drew attention to a similarity in the way the sessions were organised. In both the teacher predictably did something at the start of the session which helped the pupils know how to begin. In football practice the teacher put cones out and there was practice on footwork; and before writing tasks, the English teacher wrote a starter sentence on the board, which could be copied. I could see why such a tactic might suit Ethan as it would get him off to a good start and lessen any anxiety he might have about what to do first.

After Ethan had left the room the SENCO said she had been pleased and surprised by how much Ethan had said. However, what she had taken from his account of the English lesson was different to mine, she had been worried that Ethan hadn't mentioned the presence of a teaching assistant who was meant to help him in that lesson and she wanted to check what was happening there. I thought that this highlighted that Ethan was only telling a partial picture of the contexts and it might well be useful to do follow up observations to see what other details were present.

iii) It wasn't just the strength-based assessment which had led me to think about the value of starting lessons in a predictable format, but also knowledge of strategies I had picked up from working as EP.

iv) From my perspective, this had turned out to be the most straightforward case so far. The kind of situations that Ethan had described related to learning experiences at school and he was able to identify features of them which could be transferred into other contexts. It made me think that observing situations that worked well for a CYP could be quite rewarding for the teaching staff involved as well, supporting and encouraging them in how they adapted their approach for different children.

2.6.2.6 Frank

i) Frank was a ten year old boy whose behaviour was problematic for school staff to handle. He displayed a very short concentration span and a tendency to avoid academic tasks. He had been given a diagnosis of ADHD many years before. The SENCO had been unsure how she could gain Frank's views on learning, so I thought using the CSF might be a useful option.

ii) Frank completed the assessment process with me. He paused for some seconds before deciding whether something was a strength. On three occasions he told me "I don't want to answer that one", he claimed the other 21 items were all definite strengths. Frank was able to describe a positive situation: A good day working in the classroom. This turned out to have been a memory of being in a previous class at school. He was able to articulate some interesting features about this class: "there was quite enough time to make a good amount of work", "the teacher liked it, she said good words 'well done' and other good words, I got a sticker, I was proud'."

Afterwards I met with his current class teacher and teaching assistant to discuss how to improve the situation. I was worried about how to talk about Frank's positive account of being with another teacher, I didn't want to damage his current teacher's confidence.

iii) Looking back the conversation I had with Frank's class teacher and his teaching assistant was rather awkward. They had a quite negative view of him and I felt some resistance as I started to share what he had said.

As with Ethan, I had noticed things in Frank's account which resonated with extracts from my experience as an EP. For example, it is quite common for children with SEN to struggle to finish work in lessons and this can lead to a perpetual feeling of not accomplishing tasks and quite possibly a loss of self-belief or desire to begin work. There were also references to the importance of receiving praise and positive feedback about work.

Frank's positive responses to the majority of strength items might have reflected some degree of social desirability bias, especially as he seemed to prefer not to give an answer rather than say something wasn't a strength. However, this had not affected the value of what he had offered as a situation of strength.

iv) In both Frank's case and Ethan's, useful information had been gained when I used the prompts on Record Sheet 2 to ask about things that they and others (e.g., the teacher) did in the identified situation.

2.6.2.7 Ghalib

i) The SENCO from a secondary school asked for me to see Ghalib (age 11) because she thought he might be autistic. As an educational psychologist I am not in a position to diagnose autism, but by exploring the common deficits associated with this condition I could contribute towards the momentum for a referral to specialist medical practitioners who could. Ghalib had been observed to say very little to staff since his arrival at the school the previous term. One-to-one conversation with a stranger can be a difficult experience for some children, so I though using the CSF could be a way of helping to shift the focus to the cards on the table and help Ghalib say a few words to me. I thought this might allow me to begin to judge how he communicated and perhaps begin to consider if there was evidence of autism.

ii) Ghalib did interact with me during the assessment, marking qualities he saw as his strengths and sometimes elaborating on an item. Being able to speak was the skill which school were most concerned about and as Ghalib had rated 'I speak well' as a definite strength, I asked him to think of a situation where this happened in school. He identified his literacy lesson and described the kind of interactions he had in that context.

iii) This made me think that Ghalib's communication problems might not be as general as had been feared – he seemed able to speak in some situations but not others. It also suggested that if I wished to carry out a strength-based observation, then this lesson would have been the obvious place to do it. It would make sense to study the social arrangement of pupils and approach of the literacy teacher in order to better understand what worked best for Ghalib.

iv) This was another case where I felt some degree of tension in pursuing a strength-based line. The SENCO was very interested in confirming that Ghalib was autistic and I think she might have been happier for me to catalogue some of his difficulties around school, rather

than study where he was coping. I therefore did not rush into suggesting an observation of the literacy lesson. On the written record of my visit I made a more in-direct suggestion:

> As we still trying to understand the nature of Ghalib's difficulties it would be useful to gain further information about how he is functioning in different lessons, perhaps through some kind of round-robin proforma?

2.6.2.8 Ibrahim

i) Ibrahim was six years old and educated in a primary school in a neighbouring authority. He had a Statement of SEN for language and learning difficulties which needed to be translated into the new format of an EHCP. Also, it seemed from the paperwork that his school no longer felt able to meet his special needs and wanted him to be considered for alternative, probably special school, provision.

I felt using the CSF might be successful with Ibrahim because of the visual nature of the materials – bearing in mind he had significant language difficulties. The materials could also give me some ideas about what he felt was working for him and what he felt his strengths were. This would be important for different reasons. There was a need to record strengths on the EHCP in a way which there wasn't with the old Statements. Also, by locating situations in which Ibrahim believed his strengths were present, I might be able to focus some attention on what the school were doing well and perhaps increase their confidence in meeting his needs.

ii) The administration of CSF was a little trickier than usual. There were items that Ibrahim seemed to have difficulty understanding, particularly in the school section. Nevertheless, on other occasions, when I asked follow-up questions, he responded in ways that did indicate understanding. For instance, he rated himself as definitely able to solve problems. I asked him to give me an example and he said, "I helped someone who fell on the playground".

Ibrahim did offer a situation when I asked him the question "Can you remember a time when you write well?" He said, 'In Maths'. However, he was unable to tell me what sort of writing he did in maths.

iii) There were definite limits to how far I could interpret what Ibrahim had said about the situation of strength. It might have been useful to carry out an observation to see what kind of writing he did in maths and learn more about this area of strength. His teacher had mentioned Maths as a lesson where she and her assistant had managed to differentiate materials for Ibrahim.

Later it occurred to me that Ibrahim mentioned a situation earlier in the assessment which I might have followed up. When saying that 'making things' was sometimes a strength he mentioned that he could make pictures at home. It might have been wiser to pursue this opening rather than seek to get him to talk about a school-based situation.

Although use of the CSF did little to change the way the subsequent decisions unfolded for Ibrahim – he did transfer to special school – but as a consequence of the use of the CSF, I was able to include some positive details about his competences in the report I produced:

> When asked whether he could write well, Ibrahim answered 'a little bit'. Classroom staff told me that Ibrahim can sometimes record ideas using pictures and drawings as an alternative to writing. Ibrahim told me that he draws pictures at home.

2.7 Discussion

In this discussion section I consider some of the more general points which emerged within the study findings and analysis. Section 2.7.1 addresses issues relevant to research question 1 (How far can the CSF allow CYP to identify strengths and relate these to specific contexts in their lives?). Sections 2.7.2 to 2.7.5 then expand on issues relating to research question 2 (What is gained/ problematic in using the CSF to learn about the *context* in which strengths are present in a CYP's life?). These sections also act as a reflection phase of the action research process, enabling me in my role as EP, to think about what has been learnt from this phase of the study. In section 2.7.6 I begin to look forward to the next phase of the research project.

2.7.1 Strengths and their contexts

The results suggest that the list of strengths on the CSF were meaningful to the majority of the CYP in the sample. This could be inferred from the way they expanded on the meaning of strengths, when asked to give an example. These examples highlighted the particular sense that CYP made of specific strength items. For example, Cemal, in describing the limits of his ability to cope in difficult times, vividly linked this partial strength to the dyslexic problems he had reading print, "It depends how stressful, for example in exams I can feel like tearing up the page." Only Ibrahim failed to rate 80% or more of the strengths. His language comprehension difficulties seemed to make it hard for him to understand some of the items – even when they were presented in pictorial form.

Most of the CYP showed some variety in the way they rated strengths, using all three categories – not present, sometimes, definite. However, two pupils (Aabid and Frank) didn't distinguish between sometimes and definite strengths. This might cast some doubt on whether these two were responding in a meaningful way. However, both added comments which suggested that they understood the meaning of items.

It was notable that only the three older CYP in the sample took the option of adding further unique strengths of their own. This was a disappointing aspect of the results and suggests

that younger children need more support in allowing them to think beyond the categories that an adult suggests to them.

Switching to identified contexts, the CSF was successful in providing a means by which CYP could locate contexts in their lives which were associated with two or more strengths. The majority of these were within school settings, although sometimes they related to family or community settings. The analysis of identified contexts raised a number of interesting issues and some further questions, which I explore below.

2.7.2 Interpreting the meaning of contexts – Possibilities and problems

My experience of using strength-based assessment in the past had led me to become curious about the possible benefits of knowing more about the contexts when strengths were present for a CYP.

The findings from a number of the case studies (e.g., Dayyan, Ethan, Frank) did highlight important aspects of the school environment which seemed to support the expression of strengths. Ethan, for instance, mentioning how the teacher started a session in a predictable way, or Frank describing being praised by the teacher for the work he had produced and having time to complete tasks. This is information which simply could not be obtained from the standard strength-based assessments tools. By drawing attention to the supportive nature of key contexts, ideas about positive change did not start and finish with ways the individual could make better use of their strengths (Wilding & Griffey, 2015), but also drew attention to forms of social interaction and the way that activity was structured.

Use of the CSF also drew attention to the context dependent nature of strengths (Brazeau et al., 2012). This was especially notable at times when CYP reported strengths in areas that may have surprised their teachers. For example, Dayyan saw himself as someone capable of doing things by himself (strength 4), something which would have puzzled staff who witnessed his involvement in disruptive behaviour and tendency to become distracted from his class work. However, he associated this strength with a context outside of school (the mosque) and with a future lesson in which he imagined himself involved in construction-based work. Similarly, Ghalib's claim that 'other CYP like me' (strength 13), may have

seemed anomalous to staff who saw him as very quiet and rather isolated at school. However, linking this strength to his experience of playing football with other boys at break time may have highlighted a context where he was approved of by his peers. The contextualisation of strengths reminds us that all of us behave differently in different contexts (Hand & Gresalfi, 2015) and to propose a single context-free representation of a CYP may be a misleading path to follow.

My initial aim had been to locate contexts in which strengths were present so that I could learn something from these situations which could be applied elsewhere, for example, in parts of the CYP's school day. I intended to 'zoom-in' and look more closely at the nature of an identified context. However, I sometimes found that the contexts that CYP mentioned did not seem to have straightforward implications for school or college life – this seemed the case with Aabid and Ben, and to a certain extent Cemal. Perhaps it was because they mentioned situations from outside any current educational setting, and in Ben's case, from a few years previously.

In these cases I found myself making sense of the identified context by 'zooming-out' and seeing it in terms of other features of the CYP's life. This happened in my analysis of the situations that Aabid, Ben and Cemal described. In Aabid's case I hypothesised about how the shared reading activity with his mother might resemble other situations where he received close adult attention. In the case of Ben, I made me think about how the significance of Ben's happy memories of a school trip to South Africa might contrast with some of the more problematic times he had experienced since then. And, with Cemal I could make sense of the significance of the shared game playing times with his brothers by relating it to the unique strengths he had told me about, to do with listening to others and helping them solve problems.

Zooming out and thinking about the identified context in relation to other things I knew about the child seemed to give me an interesting insight into the CYP. It provided a second way of interpreting the meaning of identified contexts. I began to see that in every case I could choose to move my analytic focus inwards or outwards in this way. This was an unexpected finding and one which I wanted to continue to explore in future phases of the research project.

The analysis of contexts also raised some interesting questions about the significance of what was described. Firstly, how desirable is a context? – is it something to move towards or away from, or use as a basis, or learn from? I had perhaps assumed, before doing the research, that contexts which supported strengths would always be positive places, but looked at from a developmental or educational position they may represent stages along a continuum. Aabid's context, involving the close personal attention he received from a caring adult, may not be a situation which could be held up as a target for future activity in school. Rather might it not be seen as the precursor for the development of other, more complex forms of social interaction?

Secondly, how important is the identified context? How central is it in the CYP's life – are we right in taking a lot of import from it? Perhaps this is an argument for eliciting more than one context and exploring different contexts in conjunction with each other, or is it simply that the context represents a starting point for investigation and further information could be obtained through observation or interview.

And thirdly, is it possible to simply learn more detail about contexts by talking to other people about them and visiting them? This would be helpful as some of the accounts that CYP could give me about certain situations felt a little partial and in need of further elaboration.

2.7.3 Problems and reframing strategies

The seeming contradiction of being asked for evidence of where a child is struggling and instead exploring the situations that are working for a child. This was a contradiction I felt in many, if not all of the cases, almost like a sense of guilt. With Aabid I suspected the specialist teacher wanted me to comment on whether his difficulties merited requesting a statutory assessment. In the case of Ghalib I knew the SENCO would be interested in whether I thought he might have autism. It is not surprising I was being asked these things as educational psychologists have a long history of being chroniclers of children's difficulties and needs. In addition, educational psychologists often make an important contribution to

the regulation of statutory assessment, for example, commenting on whether children's difficulties are severe enough to warrant a statutory assessment.

I felt this gravitational pull towards exploring what children could not achieve and yet I tried to resist it for long enough to get some idea of the situations that suited them. How could I justify this? The focus on difficulties and needs is a complete orientation which has a kind of inevitable logic about it. But this logic does not necessarily question whether if things were arranged differently in the school the child's needs would be perceived differently. It doesn't consider that the child's day is made up of many different encounters and contexts, some more successful, some less. Why not study the ones that are successful and learn something about these which might help us make the rest of the day more successful?

Over forty years ago, sociologists of education were studying how practices within schools could result in children being labelled as deviant (Hargreaves et al., 1975). Such studies were sensitive to the way in which a child's identity as deviant could arise through the way they were talked about and reacted to by teaching staff, and how such identities solidified over time and became the received wisdom about the nature of certain pupils, as 'troublesome', 'difficult', or 'slow' etc. Such themes about the way that children can be understood in the schools is echoed in contemporary research (Pearson, 2016; Harwood & Allan, 2014; Orsati & Causton-Theoharis, 2013; Maclure et al., 2012; Billington, 2000).

Orsati & Causton-Theoharis (2013) argue that terms like 'challenging behaviour' are social constructs which depend on the rules established to govern particular social environments and the relationships within them. Therefore, a behaviour problem isn't something which is inherent within the pupil. They show how the language that teachers use can work in an oppressive way. Children labelled as having challenging behaviour are often excluded from mainstream education. Orsati & Causton-Theoharis (2013), like the sociologists of education, claim the label has more than a categorising effect, its stigma and associated shame has the potential to impact on the way the child understands themselves.

Indeed, the toleration of pupil difference may be less now than it was, due to structural forces which have been acting on schools over the last two decades. The marketization of education and emphasis on standards, it has been argued, means that schools are forced to prioritise academic achievement and exam success – and therefore less willing to

accommodate children who challenge the smooth running of lessons or are deemed to drain resources which could be used elsewhere in the school (Pearson, 2016, p.21).

Harwood & Allan (2014) document a further trend over recent years: to view children's problems at school as the sign of mental health difficulties. At primary school, for example, Harwood & Allan argue that there is a particular interest in scrutinising children to see whether they will fit into the school system – "they become subject to a whole regime of practices" (p.86), which propel children towards medical diagnoses and understandings of their behaviour. The educational psychologist will be one of the key figures here, it highlights the likelihood that we will be consulted to legitimise such ways of understanding children's differences.

These views are also consistent with a critical realist perspective of social reality which see intimate connections between structural conditions and the mechanisms which are more likely to be triggered in social objects such as schools and classrooms.

It seems highly likely then, that at the point when an educational psychologist becomes involved some ways of understanding or talking about a child will already be circulating in the school or setting concerned. Such representations may offer compelling views of a child which highlight difficulties and problems. The way that an educational psychologist reacts to such assessments will be of interest (Bozic & Leadbetter, 1999).

An examination of the literature suggests a common element to how this situation is managed. Many approaches seem to invite a re-framing or altered way of looking at a child's difficulties. For example, despite taking a problem-solving ethos, modern frameworks of educational psychologist practice are designed to take an ecological perspective, encouraging the EP, and others, to think of the different levels of influence that may be affecting the CYP - environmental as well as individual - which it might be hoped would act against simplistic within-child formulations (Wicks, 2013).

Harwood & Allan (2014) describe accounts of how educational psychologists and other professionals have managed to work in ways which resist medicalized representations of pupils – often re-casting difficult behaviour as the result of social factors such as disordered attachment or trauma, as opposed to individual psychopathology. Pearson (2016) considers

the implications of using different ways of talking about behaviour and Orsati & Causton-Theoharis (2013) highlight an alternative form of discourse around building relationships with children.

In common with other forms of strength-based assessment, the CSF offers a further way of altering the way that a CYP is viewed, allowing the contemplation of strengths as well as the things that are more difficult. Given the concern that negative labels can be internalised by CYP (Harwood & Allan, 2014; Orsati & Causton-Theoharis, 2013; Hargreaves et al, 1975), the CSF provides an interesting way of locating situations in which the child occupies a more positive identity. It provides information about contexts which may be useful in planning (see below) and gains information from the CYP themselves – something which can counter adult ways of construing (Pearson, 2016).

2.7.4 Engaging with staff

A critical realist view proposes that social practices have an existence which is independent of the researcher (Sayer, 2000). Such a stance has the advantage of forewarning us that teachers and other participants in schools will be involved in pre-existing modes of social organisation. Within such practices there will be expectations about how children should behave and the likelihood that some will be deemed as problematic or in need of remedy.

Practitioners who use strength-based or solution-focused approaches may need to defend against the charge of being excessively optimistic or taking a Pollyanna-like attitude (Clarke, 1997). In using CSF I did not want to be seen to be ignoring the genuine concerns of teaching staff, parents or the young people themselves. I was also aware that in many cases there were advantages in CYP having needs recognised and addressed, for example, through targeted interventions or through the statutory assessment system (DfE, 2015).

In all the cases I worked on within this multiple case study, I also took notice of information about pupil difficulties and sometimes still carried out assessments to look at specific problem areas – for example, checking for limitations in Ben's basic literacy and numeracy skills, as well as exploring his strengths. Often there was more than enough information detailing the extent of a CYP's difficulties without me having to add to it in any way. This

was the case with Ethan where there was already a large number of reports from specialist teachers detailing limitations in his literacy and language skills. Indeed, this often seems to be the norm in my experience of practice, where at times one can feel overwhelmed with the amount of negative information. Unfortunately, the problem-solving nature of common educational psychologist practice frameworks, often contributes to the accumulation of negative assessment information, detailing dimensions of the problem and so forth (Bozic, 2013). Using the CSF helped to give me a different view of the child than I would have got by only looking at problem dimensions.

The CSF is aligned to an inclusive orientation (Ainscow et al, 2006), looking at how a context can work for a CYP and perhaps how other contexts may be adapted to better suit them. Perhaps to this extent it reflects my own values, as I was trained in an era when inclusive education was held as an ideal following the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994). Nevertheless, the research reported in the case studies shows that the CSF's deployment within situations which have been characterised as problematic was not always straightforward. From a critical realist point of view one might ask how far the conditions around the practice of being an educational psychologist permitted this kind of strength-based work?

There were some areas where its use did align with existing perspectives, for instance during statutory assessments (DfE, 2015). Here a context sensitive strength-based approach had advantages when thinking about future provision after statutory assessment. It had the potential to highlight ways of working successfully with CYP which could be used elsewhere (e.g., Ethan). These were evidence-based, rooted in actual work with the child concerned rather than general ideas about 'good practice' taken from the literature. It therefore could add unique information into the how-to or recommendations for provision section of an assessment.

However, within collaborative consultative work (Nolan & Moreland, 2014; Wagner, 2000) I felt there remained challenges about how best to introduce a strength-based line of enquiry, when negative formulations had already developed. How far could the results of the CSF be directly introduced to challenge the formulations that had already arisen? In the

case of Ghalib I judged that the time was not right to challenge the prevailing view, but then withholding strength-based ideas means that such formulations remain marginalised.

My work with Dayyan prompted me to think that a possible way forward here would be to host a meeting in which the CYP and a key staff member were present. The information from the CSF could then be used as a way of presenting a counterweight to prevailing concerns and might serve as a means of carving out a new way forward. Another possibility would be to involve the key-teacher in exploring the strength-based situation with me through the collaborative enquiry and observation.

2.7.5 Research limitations

There were limitations in the study which should be noted. Some of these have been alluded to in the discussion already, such as the problem of interpreting the significance of a single context and issues around managing the movement away from problem-focused approaches. In addition to these it should be added the CSF was used selectively with CYP who it was felt had the language and communication skills to participate in this kind of assessment. It was therefore not available for younger CYP or those with lower levels of language and communication skill. One possible way around this would be to use the procedure in an indirect way, allowing a adult who knew the child well to identify strengths and contexts – although this would mean losing the element of child's voice which is present in the current tool.

A further limitation is one which relates to all work that is carried out on behalf of individuals. Despite broadening the focus to consider context it is still about helping individuals and might be viewed as an expensive use of resources. For every child helped there are hundreds in a typical school who are not part of that process. In time it may be possible that patterns of context features will be seen to be positive for a number of CYP, but this would require further research.

<u>2.7.6 Next steps: Developing the framework for understanding a context</u>

All the CYP interviewed were able to identify contexts in which strengths were present. However, I found the meaning of these was not always easy to interpret. Further enquiry would help to build a clearer picture of the significance and nature of the contexts. The follow-up questions which CYP were asked drew attention to interesting features of the contexts. These questions were loosely designed around a situated model of learning (See Methodology section above). Reflections from phase one indicated that it may be helpful to use a more detailed conceptual framework from situated learning to examine the nature of positive contexts more fully.

A situated learning perspective could be a particularly well suited for this purpose:

- This kind of framework can provide a conceptually coherent way of analysing learning contexts, drawing our attention to particular features (Nasir & Hand, 2008). This could help in learning more about the important ingredients within a strength-based context.

- Theories of situated learning make a link between engagement in a social context or practice and the development of participant identity (Hand & Gresalfi, 2015; Wenger, 1998; Lave & Wenger, 1991). This would help us to understand the options for strength-based identity development which might be present in certain contexts. It could also support consideration of how a CYP's identity is constituted through contact with many different forms of context, both in time and space – and this would relate well to the analytic approach of zooming-out which I described earlier.

- Situated learning has the potential to be sensitive to positive cultural contexts outside of school which could be used to support school (Nasir & Hand, 2008). There are published examples of initiatives which have sought to bring elements of a community context into the school (Moll et al., 1992).

- Research in situated learning has studied the relationship between different contexts and how elements of practice found within one can be bridged to another (Wenger, 1998). This would be important to consider if we were to try to apply approaches from a strength-based context in other parts of a CYP's life.

2.8 Conclusion and implications for phase 2

Thus concludes phase 1 of this research project. Using the CSF within everyday educational psychologist practice has shown that many CYP referred to the attention of an educational psychologist are able to identify contexts in their lives where strengths are present. It has been argued that while the status and nature of these contexts needs some further elaboration, they provide some interesting hypotheses about the CYP concerned and what may work to promote their learning. One of the key issues to emerge is how such an approach to practice can be introduced into schools in a way which allows it to be accepted by staff, who may have already formed negative views of a CYP. Another is whether it would be possible to harness theoretical ideas from situated learning to gain a more detailed understanding of the nature of strength-based contexts.

Chapter 3

Phase 2: Applying situated learning to study contexts of strength

3.1 Introduction

This chapter contains the second phase of the research project. Following the completion of phase 1, I was at a point where I had addressed my initial research questions about using a contextualised form of strength-based assessment (see section 2.5.1), but new issues had emerged. The research in phase 1 had shown that with a sample of CYP drawn from my usual case load, I was able to use the CSF to identify strength-based contexts – situations which the CYP associated with the presence of strengths. I had been able to learn something about the nature of these contexts by asking the CYP some questions about them. These questions had been guided by concepts from situated learning/ communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998).

I was interested to learn more about the identified contexts by visiting them and studying how they operated. Firstly, because by learning more about what seemed to work well for CYP I thought I would be better placed, as their educational psychologist, to suggest ways of developing the practices around them. And, secondly because I was curious how far I could apply theoretical ideas from situated learning and communities of practice in a more comprehensive way, to help make sense of these contexts and explore what the value of such a conceptualisation might be. These elements are addressed in phase 2.

A further question which had emerged from phase 1 was how to make a strength-based approach acceptable, when working with staff who - influenced by the pressures of the systems they worked within – may already have started to adopt deficit accounts of the CYP concerned. Addressing this question was delayed until later in the project when I began to contemplate how to use assessment information with staff to create ideas for interventions (see phase 3).

In visiting and studying contexts I was interested in designing a research approach that would be compatible with working within the constraints of a local authority educational psychology service. That is, to contain the work within a time frame typical of customary EP

practice (3-6 hours work) and use methods (e.g., observation and interview) which would be analogous to those already commonly used. This was because I was interested in developing a method which I (and perhaps others) might use after I had completed my doctoral studies.

In this chapter, I begin by exploring the nature of situated learning and the communities of practice framework in order to specify some of the main components of social context envisaged by this theoretical perspective, particularly when it is applied to work with children and young people. I then consider some of the possibilities opened up by applying a situated learning perspective to strength-based assessment. Within the methodology section I layout the phase 2 research aim and research questions. I describe the approach and method I developed to study strength-based contexts. The approach is examined through the findings from three case studies which are analysed and discussed in the remaining parts of the chapter.

3.2 Situated Learning and Communities of Practice – a literature review

In the literature review that follows, I begin by attempting to capture the historical background and origins of the situated approach to learning. I then focus on two foundational books which set out and defined the nature of situated learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991) and the communities of practice framework (Wenger, 1998). I consider the main concepts which stemmed from these works, with attention to subsequent critiques and complementary ideas of other academics and researchers who took a practice orientation to the study of learning. In particular, how James Greeno and colleagues developed their own take on situated learning, which they describe as the situative perspective (Greeno, 1997; Greeno & MSMTAP Group, 1998; Greeno & Gresalfi, 2008; Greeno & Engeström, 2014).

Greeno, an American academic and researcher, has been a major theoretical figure in this field since the 1980s. His career is distinctive because he made the transition from studying learning from the cognitive paradigm to becoming convinced that the situated perspective

had advantages (Greeno, 1997; Green & Nokes-Malach, 2016). He has published a great deal on situated learning over his career and has applied it to school learning contexts (e.g., Greeno & Gresalfi, 2008; Greeno, 2006).

In addition to the above, I carried out computer-based searches to locate studies which had focused on applying situated learning/ communities of practice/ situative approaches to research with children and young people. Abstracts of identified papers were read and where relevant they were added to a folder of significant works. Details of these literature searches are contained in Table 5.

Table 5. Phase 2 literature searches

Date	Database and search term (Ti refers to Title includes)	Results
March 2016	Proquest Ti ("situated learning") AND (ti(classroom) OR ti(child) OR ti(young person) OR ti (pupil) OR (ti (adolescent)))	7
March 2016	Proquest Ti("communit* of practice") AND (ti(classroom) OR ti(child) OR ti(young person) OR ti (pupil) OR (ti (adolescent)))	49
March 2016	Psych Info Ti("communit* of practice") AND (ti(classroom) OR ti(child) OR ti(young person) OR ti (pupil) OR (ti (adolescent)))	13
March 2016	Proquest Ti(situative learning)	30
March 2016	Psych info Citation searches for various papers found through searches	uncounted

3.2.1 Origins

Historically, during the 1970s and 80s a cognitive approach which modelled human learning

and cognition on an information processing or computer metaphor was dominant in psychology (e.g., Lindsay & Norman, 1977; Neisser, 1967). The cognitive approach focused on internal cognitive structures and made assumptions about the universality of mental processes (Greeno & Nokes-Malach, 2016; Engeström, 1987). However, also during this period situated accounts of learning and cognition began to emerge in North America and Western Europe (see reviews by Greeno, 2015; Rogoff & Chavajay, 1995). Situated views challenged the cognitive paradigm by drawing attention to the significance of context in cognitive development and learning. Research which took a cross-cultural approach to the study of cognition showed how the experience of formal schooling affected the way people responded to experimental cognitive tasks (e.g., Cole & Scribner, 1974). For example, linking the ability to remember items in free recall tests (Cole et al., 1971) or solve logic problems (Scribner, 1975) to having participated in formal schooling (Rogoff & Chavajay, 1995). Alongside this, developmental psychologists became aware that children were able to perform at higher cognitive and communicative levels when based in familiar real life contexts rather than the laboratory (Rogoff, 1984). It was a time when Vygotsky's work was being translated from the Russian (Vygotsky, 1978; 1987). There was a growing interest in the Vygotskian view that cognitive development was inextricably related to the social arrangements and conditions within which it originates. Gradually a perspective was forming which could challenge cognitive psychology and the dominant acquisition metaphor of learning which had concerned itself more exclusively with how an individual mind processes and represents information (Sfard, 1998; Paavola & Hakkarainen,2005).

Research studies which took a more situated perspective, for example, those reported in the book *Everyday Cognition* (Rogoff & Lave, 1984), highlighted how contexts such as the organisation of the workplace, the demand of grocery shopping or the interpersonal nature of learning, affected the nature of cognitive functions developed. Sfard (1998) described situated approaches as subscribing to a participation metaphor which equated learning with becoming more able to participate in the activities of a community and saw cognition in social rather than individual terms (Salomon, 1993).

3.2.2 The publication of *Situated Learning, Legitimate Peripheral Participation*

In 1991 Lave & Wenger published a book which represented a concise theoretical statement about the nature of situated learning at that point. It drew on detailed ethnographic studies of apprenticeship learning in different non-institutional settings by researchers from a range of fields including anthropology, psychology and other social sciences. Lave & Wenger (1991) has been very heavily cited since and has become an important foundation on which subsequent situated work was based. Below I expand on some of the main aspects of the theory presented in this book, before considering how it has been developed and critiqued.

Lave & Wenger (1991) saw situated learning as a perspective which contrasted with dominant (cognitive) theories of learning which took the individual as the unit of analysis and focused on the internalisation of knowledge. Their theory expanded the focus of research to go beyond the characteristics of individuals, their behaviour or cognitions, and gave primacy to the wider practices within which the individual was embedded including social activities, interaction and patterns of discourse. It meant a shift in the way learning was understood and researched and this shift was hotly debated in academic journals (Anderson, Reder & Simon, 1996; Greeno, 1997). The idea of individual minds neatly containing all necessary cognitive information was challenged by this new paradigm, which saw knowledge distributed through the structures of practice and activity that people commonly engaged in. As Paavola & Hakkarainen (2005) summarise it,

> "Cognition and knowing are distributed over both individuals and their environments, and learning is 'located' in these relations and networks of distributed activities of participation." (p.538).

From the situated point of view, learning was primarily about an individual's increasing levels of participation within a social system rather than internal changes to the way they thought about the world.

Despite this movement towards the social nature of learning, Lave & Wenger (1991) argued there was still a clear view of the individual person (i.e. they did not just focus on the nature of social practices). However, now instead of mainly thinking about the person's cognitive processes, one thought of the learner in a more holistic light, and considered the kind of

person they were *becoming* through participation within a particular social practice. This meant going beyond the narrow learning of skills and attending to changes in the learner's identity as a whole.

> "As an aspect of social practice, learning involves the whole person; it implies not only a relation to specific activities, but a relation to social communities – it implies becoming a full participant, a member, a kind of person." Lave & Wenger (1991, p.53)

Lave &Wenger (1991, p.31) wanted to show that situated learning was 'more encompassing' than simply 'learning in situ' or 'learning by doing'. To this end their book was an account of how through initially peripheral participation in a practice, learners gradually assumed greater levels of responsibility and recognition within a community. Understanding how learning occurred involved appreciating the ways that practice was configured to allow different forms of participation.

The structure of the social context influenced the kind of learners that emerged, but not in an overly deterministic way. They described how the meaning of situated learning was negotiated between participants so that "agent, activity and the world mutually constitute each other." (p.33)

3.2.3 Conceptualising context

Lave & Wenger (1991) characterised the nature of the social context within which learners were situated as a community of practice. Lave (1996) described such communities of practice as present whenever people were involved in interdependent activities which they engaged in for sustained periods of time. Within Lave & Wenger (1991) there is an acknowledgement that the term community of practice remained a rather under-specified notion and in need of further development.

In a second very influential book, Wenger (1998) went on to describe communities of practice in more detail. He saw them as present in many areas of social life, including families, work, education settings and informal recreational groupings. He created a theoretical framework which defined communities of practice as having three properties:

mutual engagement, joint enterprise and a shared repertoire. Later in the book (p.125)

Wenger described 14 indicators that suggested a community of practice may be present.

These included such things as 'sustained mutual relationships – harmonious or conflictual'

and 'shared ways of doing things together'.

A checklist of indicators may encourage a belief that one first needs to ascertain whether a

community of practice truly exists before being able to apply the insights of situated learning

theory. This view can be seen in the research of some who have studied classroom learning

contexts, where determining whether a community of practice was forming in a classroom

was a key part of the research task (King, 2014; Ayar et al, 2014). However, this view stands

in contrast to other sources, which have claimed that *all* forms of learning are situated (e.g.,

Lave & Wenger, 1991; Greeno & MSMTAP Group, 1998).

Further critique has come from researchers who have questioned whether the communities

of practice framework takes enough account of situations where there is a great imbalance

of power and less opportunity for genuine joint engagement (Haneda, 2006; Barton &

Hamilton, 2005; Lea, 2005). Wenger (2010) has disputed this saying that it is a misreading of

the initial theory and that communities of practice are not always harmonious places and

can be distorted by power imbalances.

Taking a different perspective, these debates have been side-stepped to some extent by

Greeno. While he still pays heed to the notion of communities of practice he has tended to

favour the term 'activity system' to describe the social context within which situated

learning takes place (Greeno & Gresalfi, 2008; Greeno & Nokes-Malach, 2016). His

definition of activity system is as follows:

> "[T]wo or more people, such as a dyad, a group, a classroom, a community, or an
> individual person working with objects and technological systems (..) Research on
> activity systems focuses on the ways the individual components act and interact with
> each other, and also focuses on larger contextualizing systems that provide resources
> and constraints for those actions and interactions." Greeno & Engeström (2014,
> p.128)

Greeno & Engeström (2014) explain that the concept of the activity system is general

enough to incorporate other ways in which social context has been understood within

sociocultural research, by for example, situated learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991) and others. Activity systems are seen as flexible entities which can be organised into different forms of *practice*. Greeno & Engeström (2014) describe analyses which use this framework to understand learning as taking a *situative* lens.

Greeno uses the concept of the activity system to examine in detail what happens within particular configurations of people and resources (e.g., Greeno & Gresalfi, 2008). Shifting the focus from communities of practice to activity systems has some interesting implications. It possibly reduces the prominence of the structural, historical and cultural forces which are present in the notion of communities of practice. So, it may be seen as in tension with the direction that Jean Lave has taken her work since 1991, as she has become more concerned with the structural and historical forces which influence social practice and identity (e.g., Holland & Lave, 2001; Lave 2011).

On the other hand, the close analysis of activity systems allows for scrutiny of different elements which may be helpful when thinking about adjustments to context. For example, inspired by the work of Gibson (1979), Greeno talks about the *affordances* provided by activity systems – that is the opportunities they provide for participants to act in certain ways. Affordance is an explanation of how an individual is able to accomplish something via their engagement with objects in the environment:

> "An affordance for an individual in an activity system includes the resources and practices of the system, that individual's access to those resources and practices, and the dispositions and abilities of the individual to participate in a way that supports his activity and learning in some way" (Greeno & Gresalfi, 2008, p.172)

Drawing on a range of research which has focused on school classrooms, Greeno and Gresalfi (2008) highlight how elements of an activity system, such as the deployment of visual resources or the style of teacher questioning, affords opportunities for different forms of pupil participation.

It seems that there is more willingness here to talk about the individual in separation from the system (what Daniel's (2008) refers to as the separability issue). When Greeno & Gresalfi (2008) discuss the analysis of classroom tasks as forms of an activity system, their inclusion of the cognitive demands of tasks and the capacity that individuals have to access

them (p.182) marks this out as a slightly less social stance than that portrayed in Lave & Wenger (1991). However, it still permits one to view learning difficulty as something to do with the accessibility or lack of affordances provided by the activity system rather than deficits within the learner.

3.2.4 Trajectories of participation

A priority of Lave & Wenger (1991) was to provide a theoretical model of situations where people became members of communities of practice: that is, how they moved towards full participation in the practices of a particular community. To do this, they introduced the concept of legitimate peripheral participation or LPP. This concept highlighted how an individual's participation in a community of practice could at first be peripheral – concerned with minor parts of the overall tasks and processes within the community. Then in time, as competence increased, the individual took more responsibility and became a full participant in the community of practice.

Wenger (1998, pp.154-5) extended the idea of trajectories of participation and described five possibilities: inbound, peripheral, insider, boundary and outbound trajectories. Inbound trajectories were ones similar to those described in Lave & Wenger (1991) in which there was a transition from peripheral to full participation. Peripheral trajectories could mean that some participants remained in a marginal position never becoming fully involved. Insider trajectories described the on-going development in participation, after full membership of a community of practice has been reached. Boundary trajectories involved participation in different communities of practice and drew their value from this multiple contact; and, outbound trajectories acknowledged that people can sometimes participate less and ultimately leave a community of practice.

Boylan (2010) argued that even with Wenger's extension to five types, these theoretical accounts of trajectories did not adequately represent the lived experience of, for example, marginal participation, suggesting that a more in depth exploration of this was needed to fully understand it in any one case.

Greeno & Gresalfi (2008) point out some further advantages of the trajectory concept. One of these is to show how it might offer an analytic tool for thinking about activity systems. One could consider the way in which affordances of an activity system influence the trajectories that learners can take.   Are such affordances well placed to create an inbound trajectory or could they sometimes act to maintain a peripheral position?

3.2.5 Participation

At this point it is worth considering in more detail what is meant by participation within the situated approach. The concept is found throughout works such as Lave & Wenger (1991) - for example in the idea of LPP where peripheral *participation* allows the learner to appreciate the nature of the community's practice (p.95). In fact, it is in the account of LPP that one gains a firmer grip on how participation is viewed. Here it is linked to arrangements in the division of labour.

> "Viewpoints from which to understand the practice evolve through changing participation in the division of labor" (Lave & Wenger (1991, p.96)

This stance on the nature of participation as the way work is divided up and shared between people suggests that it may be possible to observe. It also emphasises the way that participation is connected to power and the social structure of practice. In the case studies of apprenticeship in Lave & Wenger (1991) participation is related to overall production processes in work settings. Even at the early stages, learners can work in collaboration with more experienced colleagues undertaking meaningful roles. There is discussion of how this differs from what happens in school, when learning is mediated through the instructor's participation and view of what needs to be learnt. The resulting community of practice is made up from these pedagogical relations and the prescriptive view of the subject matter. Lave & Wenger (1991) argue that to fully understand the nature of participation ones needs to be attentive to the social relations which structure LPP.

Wenger returns to discuss participation in his 1998 book *Communities of Practice*. He keeps it at a fairly abstract level, describing participation as taking part or sharing in activity with

others (p.55) adding that it implies a degree of mutuality in that others recognise that one is participating. For Wenger participation is also about the process of negotiating meaning with one another. In addition, forms of participation affect the sort of person one becomes. Perhaps it is this kind of multi-element view of a concept which Barton & Tusting (2005) have been critical of in Wenger's writing. They claim that concepts are often presented in a way which is elusive and difficult to pin down.

In contrast, Greeno & Gresalfi (2008) are more precise and propose that there are two forms of participation which are central to learning. These are interpersonal and informational forms of participation. Informational participation is about the ways in which someone interacts with the information, principles and concepts within an activity and interpersonal participation refers to the nature of the interactions that one has with others within the activity system.

In order to shed light on the nature of interpersonal participation, Greeno & Gresalfi (2008) make use of the notion of participant structure. This is about the patterns in interaction which occur between people and have been observed to happen in different forms of teaching and pedagogy (Philips, 1972; Tabak & Baumgartner, 2004). It means that they can pay attention to some of the patterns in talk which illustrate forms of participation. By doing so they are closer to addressing critics of Wenger (e.g., Barton & Tusting, 2005) who claim his approach was light on specifying how discourse and language mediate the nature of social activity.

3.2.6 Artefacts

According to Lave & Wenger (1991, p.101) an important component of participating in a community of practice is being able to engage fully with the relevant artefacts – the objects, tools and technologies which are used within the practice. The use of artefacts is a central part of Wenger's social theory of learning. In the quote below it can be seen that he refers to a wider array of phenomena:

> "we produce physical and conceptual artefacts - words, tools, concepts, methods,

> stories, documents, links to resources, and other forms of *reification* – that reflect our shared experience and around which we organise our participation." (Wenger, 2010, p.180)

Wenger generally prefers to use the word reification to artefact. This seems to be because reification suggests a wider range of ways in which meaning can be solidified into a particular form. For example, this can happen through the formation of particular forms of discourse as well as the creation of physical objects. For Wenger (1998) it is the combined forces of participation and reification which act to create meaning within a community of practice.

Greeno agrees that artefacts play a central role in our lives in communities. Their design is imbued with knowledge and understanding and so they too can be seen as contributing to the totality of knowing within a context in which they are deployed.

> "The situative perspective views knowing as distributed among people and their environments, including the objects, artifacts, tools, books, and the communities of which they are a part." Collins & Greeno, 2010, p.336)

In referring to educational research, rather than talk about artefacts Greeno has used the term 'material and informational resources' (e.g., Greeno & Gresalfi, 2008, p.186). Such resources include the physical objects and representations which support learning. For example, Greeno & Gresalfi (2008, p.175) quote research by Moss and Case (1999) in which children are learning about fractions by being encouraged to walk partway along lines on the floor. In another example, (p.176) computer software which depicted images of different combinations of candy allowed children to interact with the display in a way which supported understanding of place value. From this point of view learning can also be seen as a progression in the way that learners engage with varying types of material resources.

3.2.7 Identity

In this section, I consider how the notion of identity has been understood within situated learning and in particular how it might be seen as related to the nature of the communities of practice or activity systems within which people are situated.

In this thesis I have adopted a view of identity which is consistent with sociocultural theorists such as Holland & Lachicotte (2007) who have traced its development through the works of George Herbert Mead and Lev Vygotsky. From this perspective, identity is seen as the sense of oneself that is formed, "in relation to ways of inhabiting roles, positions and cultural imaginaries that matter to [oneself]" (Holland & Lachicotte, 2007, p.103). A single person will form and occupy different identities, depending on the different positions they occupy within the varying social contexts of their lives. The nature of such identities is not fully determined by the social context and allows some room for creative manoeuvre.

This way of understanding identity is prominent in the research and writing of those working within the situated or situative perspective. Lave & Wenger (1991) explain how becoming a participant in a community of practice necessarily entails the development of an identity within that context.   This identity reflects the role one plays within that community, and it is something which continues to evolve through time. Lave & Wenger (1991) do not see identity as being simply imposed on one by the structural forces of the community. Rather they see it as worked out through the interplay between one's engagement in practice and one's reflection on that process.

In his 1998 book Wenger (1998, p.11) explicitly sets out to develop the concept of identity within what he now calls a social theory of learning. Again, there is the view that the meaning of one's identity within a community of practice is arrived at as an individual interprets the meaning of their position within a particular practice. This seems to have implications for how one might research such identities: it would seem to be important to go beyond observation and hear the interpretation that is being made of one's role and relation to others.

Wenger (1998.p.150) proposes that the identity that one develops within a community includes thinking about, and being thought about, as someone with specific competences or strengths. From this perspective strengths are not universal but flow from what is valued within the community and the qualities that stem from the relations among participants within this specific context.

As identity is something that stems from engagement in a community of practice, we can

develop many different forms of identity by being involved in different communities (e.g., family, work, leisure). Wenger's view is that these identities are not entirely separate from each other but influence the way we participate in any specific community of practice. There is an overall identity which he describes as a nexus of multimembership arising from our involvement in many differing communities (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015).

Greeno's work is helpful in theorising the detail of how identities may emerge when an activity system is sustained over a period of time (Greeno & Gresalfi, 2008, p.184). He argues that this may happen in a classroom, when patterns of interaction develop and individual's participation becomes relatively stable. Participant structures are one way of conceptualising such patterns (Philips, 1972; Collins & Greeno, 2010) and they may act to accustom learners to taking certain roles which over time may be described as a practice-based identity. Greeno sees the development of such patterns as being a 'two-way process' involving the opportunities and resources provided by an activity system and also the qualities that an individual is able to bring to the situation.

3.2.8 Conclusion

This draws to a close my review of situated learning and communities of practice. By considering the historical development of the field, the nature of the theory developed by Lave & Wenger (1991) and Wenger (1998) and how it has been critiqued and supplemented by others, particularly those that apply a situative perspective, it is possible to draw out certain common features that a broadly situated/ situative analysis of a social context such as a school classroom might take. It would be possible to conceptualise such a context as an activity system which was organised into different practices, and which at times might attain the status of a community of practice. Following the work of Greeno & Engeström (2014), it would be possible to conceptualise participation within such an activity system as to do with the interaction between participants and their engagement with available artefacts and reifications. Patterns in such participation could be seen as influential in the development of identities in practice.

3.3 Using a situated perspective to inform a strength-based approach within educational psychology practice

Phase 1 of this research project considered the field of strength-based assessment and ended with a question: Would it be possible to draw on a theoretical framework to shed light on how key aspects of a social context related to the presence of strengths? In this part of the review I present three benefits of using a situated learning perspective to offer this kind of theoretical view. I discuss: how a situated account can avoid an over emphasis on individualising notions of strengths; how it might provide a framework for psychologists to analyse learning contexts; and, how it could contribute a social account of identity development.

3.3.1 Avoiding the over-individualising tendency

In the review of strength-based assessment carried out in phase 1 of this research project, it was argued that many assessments focus on individual level strengths and neglect to consider strengths in the social ecology around a person. In contrast to this, a situated learning perspective accounts for an individual's growth and learning in terms of their participation within a particular social practice.

For example, in the situated account of the apprenticeship of West African tailors in Lave & Wenger (1991, p.69-72) we are not simply invited to appreciate the talent or strength involved in making a complex garment, but we see how this competence grows out of a carefully organised social practice in which opportunities for observation are combined with a managed introduction to the tasks involved. Similarly in more contemporary classroom-based research, using a community of practice framework, Evnitskaya & Morton (2011) show how pupils' capacity to carry out actions associated with scientific enquiry (observation and categorising of phenomena) are carefully nurtured within the discourse structures of a biology lesson.

The argument I am making here is that by conceptualising strengths-based assessment within a situated-learning perspective it may be possible to sustain a less individualising and more contextualised view of strengths. Dallos, Stedman & Johnstone (2014) argue that the integration of theoretical perspectives can be more powerful if it moves beyond eclecticism to a form of conceptual synthesis in which one tries "to tease out what the underlying conceptual connections are" (p.174).

Taking a situated approach would have consequences for the way we thought about the concept of 'strengths'. At an individual level, they would be thought of less as de-contextualised qualities, that a child or young person may or may not possess, and more as qualities which arise from an individual's participation in particular communities of practice or activity systems. Arguably Wenger (1998) uses the term competence to encapsulate this way of thinking about strengths. He writes about how competences emerge within the office environment at Alinsu.

> "The daily engagement of claims processors in their community of practice creates relations among them that constitute 'who one is' in the office, who knows what, who is good at what, who is cool, who is funny, who is friendly, who is central, who is peripheral." (Wenger, 1998, p.150)

From this perspective, strengths or competencies are intimately related to the nature of the social context within which they arise. It would not make sense to describe someone as having a strength without specifying the context within which that strength has meaning and is seen as something positive.

Further conceptual synthesis would affect those social phenomena which resilience theorists see as strengths or protective factors at the peer, family or school level (e.g., 'other children like me', 'my family listen to me', 'teachers believe in me'). From a situated point of view these might now be conceived of as relational aspects of specific communities of practice to which the child belongs. Strengths at the institutional or community level ('I visit a youth group') would be signs of other communities of practice which the child or young person accesses outside of the school context.

3.3.2 The analysis of positive situations

As discussed in the phase 1 literature review, historically educational psychology has been focused on addressing problems that occur in schools and other educational settings. These are often problems which teachers perceive children and young people to have with respect to learning or behaviour at school. A common response has been for educational psychologists to study the places where such problems arise. This may mean visiting a classroom to observe the nature of the difficulty. When such a visit takes place the focus of the observation is the area of difficulty and everything that contributes to it. Historically such observations have used theoretical frameworks to help the psychologist select which aspects of the environment might be best to look at in order to better understand the difficulty. For example, behavioural psychology theory can be drawn on which might encourage the observer to look for relevant antecedents or reinforcement around a problem behaviour (Kazdin, 2001).

In studying how strengths arise and are produced within learning environments we also need some kind of theoretical framework to guide our observations. Potentially one could simply identify the strengths that one wished to observe and use similar theoretical frameworks as before (e.g., behavioural psychology) to analyse how they came about. However, applying a situated perspective offers a richer insight into the meaning of the practice within which strengths emerge.

These concepts provide us with guidance on where to look when we enter a context, what might be worth attending to and recording. For example, the concepts of participation, reification and artefacts might encourage us to ask ourselves questions like: What type of participation is going on here? How do people interact with each other in order to participate in this practice? What role do artefacts and reifications play in the way participation is structured?

Additionally, there is potential to build on the interesting application of the concept of affordance (Gibson, 1979) to situated approaches. I have already mentioned how this was carried out by Greeno & Gresalfi (2008) as they considered the affordances for participation offered by different forms of activity systems and practice. This way of thinking about

situated learning has also been applied by Martin & Evaldsson (2012) who studied how the spatial and communicative aspects of a Swedish Reggio-Emilia School afforded opportunities for children to engage in participation consistent with the Reggio-Emilia pedagogy. In the context of my study, affordance could be applied to better understand what it was about practice which permitted strengths to be expressed. What aspects of an enabling practice afford the opportunity for a strength to be realised?

3.3.3 Gaining a situated view of identity

An aspect of situated theory which may have particular meaning in the use of strength-based approaches by educational psychologists, is the notion of practice based or situated-identity. This concept has an interesting appeal. While it accepts the validity of thinking about the individual and the way that a person understands themselves, it remains tightly related to the social practices within which the individual finds themselves. This means that in order to help someone build a more positive identity the necessary psychological work is unlikely to be of an individual therapeutic character. Far more likely would be a form of social psychological intervention which developed contexts which supported more positive forms of identity.

During phase 1 of the research project the discussion considered the argument that CYP referred to the attention of an educational psychologist may already be viewed in a negative or deficit way by school staff. From a situated perspective, negative forms of identity could be attributed to pupils who did not achieve or appeared to resist a successful inbound trajectory into school-based activity systems or communities of practice.

Locating situations, within their school or non-school experience, which such CYP associate with the presence of strengths may be an effective strategy for discovering contexts in which they inhabit more positive identities. How might such a CYP be talked about in such places? Would their identity in this kind of context be related to the strengths which they associate with it?

3.4 Methods for analysing contexts from a situated perspective

How might one apply theory and concepts from situated learning to better understand the nature of a social context within which a child or young person is present? One way of answering this question is to look at the methods that have been employed by research studies in this field.

A number of studies have adopted forms of ethnography in which researchers have visited specific social activities to spend time learning about practices (e.g., DiGiacomo & Gutierrez, 2016; Hand & Gresalfi, 2015; Nasir & Cooks, 2009). Sometimes the researcher remains an outsider viewing the activity of children and young people but not taking a part in this activity – for example, this is the role that Hand (2003) took when she studied the participation of three students in three different school mathematics classes using a situative lens. Other researchers have become participants themselves, for example DiGiacomo & Gutierrez (2016) describe how the researcher ran some of the after-school clubs which were being analysed.

Ethnographic studies such as these have researched many different aspects of communities of practice or activity systems involving children and young people (See Table 6).

Table 6. Ethnographic studies of situated learning

Focus of study	Sources that relate to this aspect
The nature of participation in the context (including marginalised)	Brown (2007); Hand & Gresalfi (2015); Johnson (2017); Nasir & Cooks (2009); Hand (2009); Greeno & Gresalfi (2008)
Roles of participants	Nasir & Hand (2008); DiGiacomo & Gutierrez (2015); Elliott & Dingwall (2017); Johnson (2017), Hand (2009)
'Relational resources' /scaffolding	Nielson (2008); Nasir & Cooks (2009)

Participant structure	Tabak & Baumgartner (2005); DiGiacomo & Gutierrez (2015); Hand (2009); Greeno & Gresalfi (2008)
Discourse/ interactional patterns	Evnitskaya & Morton (2011); Johnson (2017); Nasir & Cooks (2009); Hand (2009)
Use of artefacts/ reifications	Brown (2007); Evnitskaya & Morton (2011); Nasir & Cooks (2009)
Changes in participation over time; trajectories	Brown (2007); Nasir & Cooks (2009); Hand (2009); Greeno & Gresalfi (2008)
Practice-linked identities	Nasir & Hand (2008); Hand & Gresalfi (2015); Elliott & Dingwall (2017); Lave (1996); Nasir & Cooks (2009); Hand (2009); Greeno & Gresalfi (2008)
Accountability	Hand & Gresalfi (2015); Johnson (2017)

Some of the research in Table 6 employed qualitative methods which involved detailed analysis of classroom discourse (King, 2014; Evnitskaya & Morton, 2011; Brown, 2007). These utilised detailed audio-taping and transcription of what has been said during activities. This can draw attention to the way language is used in subtle ways within specific communities of practice in order to denote particular meanings. Evnitskaya & Morton (2011) highlight how certain language forms can act as reifications – i.e. solidified or congealed forms of meaning – in the case of their research these are words which are imbued with particular scientific meaning and are used by the teacher to promote a scientific way of talking in the classroom.

Other researchers have used videotaping to gather observational data (Johnson, 2017; Nasir & Cooks, 2009). Nasir & Cooks (2009) video-taped over 125 hours of athletics events in their study of the emerging identity of young people training to be hurdlers.

Alongside these technologically facilitated forms of data gathering researchers have also

used the more traditional forms of recorded interviews and paper and pencil field observations to gather information (Burgess, 2002). These briefer forms of data capture would seem to be more feasible for an educational psychologist to incorporate in his or her practice. A key question then, is could a briefer, but still valid, form of situated learning analysis be developed? It would be likely to involve qualitative or ethnographic forms of data collection (e.g., observation and interview) and would permit analysis of salient aspects of a strength-based situation using concepts from situated learning or communities of practice theories.

3.4.1 Research aim

This research takes place within my own practice as a local authority educational psychologist. The focus is on exploring what happens when a situated-learning framework is applied to better understand strength-based situations.

3.5 Methodology

In this section I lay out how the research for the second phase of the project was conceptualised and carried out. I begin by explaining how the research questions were derived from the research aim. I then discuss how this phase of the project was underpinned by a critical realist perspective and how I saw the relationship between this philosophical orientation and situated learning. This phase of the project was seen as a further iteration of an action research cycle in which a case study design was adopted. After coverage of reflexivity and ethical issues, I describe the three cases which made up the phase 2 research. The remainder of the methodology section describes the procedure that was adopted and the way that data was analysed. The section closes with a discussion of validity issues.

3.5.1 Research aim and research questions

The research in this phase of the project aimed to explore what happened when a situated learning framework was applied to understand strength-based situations. In addition, the intention was to do this using a method of data capture which would be compatible with the time constraints of my job as a local authority educational psychologist. Based on the review of literature undertaken, I divided the research aim into three subsidiary research questions. The first of these was concerned with the nature of the representation that emerged when I applied a situated learning framework to understand a strength-based context. The second looked at how identified strengths could be conceptualised using this perspective and in particular how this might be done using the concept of affordance. The third research question looked at the nature of the CYP's situated identity within a strength-based context and how this related to the strengths the CYP had associated with that context.

RQ1: What kind of representation of a strength-based context emerges when concepts from situated learning are used to understand it?

RQ2: How can strengths be understood as part of a social practice?

RQ3: How is a child's identity in a context related to their strength-based participation within that context?

Throughout the work I followed a critical realist approach which, while encouraging researchers to see the social world through the lens of theory, also demands that such theoretical construction is subject to continuous reflection and critique.

3.5.2 Philosophical stance

3.5.2.1 Critical Realism and the role of theory

The second phase of the research project maintains a critical realist philosophical position, which was first outlined in the Phase 1 methodology chapter.

Critical realist ontology proposes that there is a reality which is independent of our experience of it. This reality is made up of objects and structures which produce events under certain conditions. Critical realists call this the intransitive dimension of the world.

Theory plays a distinctive role in critical realism, it is the (transitive) knowledge that we build up about the intransitive world and which help us function within it. From this perspective it is a mistake to believe we can simply observe and study events in a neutral way as all our observations are structured by our (theoretical) conceptions of reality, they "comprise earlier, more or less hidden, everyday and/or scientific conceptualizations." (Danermark et al., 2002, p.17)

How we use concepts to represent the world is crucially important in critical realism. It means in any research it is important to be clear about the theory that is being used to understand the objects and structures within the social world - asking questions about their important qualities. By conceptualising objects and structures in ways which separate and identify their important aspects we are more likely to develop effective models of how they work (Danermark et al., 2002 p.45).

In this study, the object of study is the social context in which strengths occur. I have applied

concepts from situated learning to better understand this (social) object. To do this I followed Greeno & Engeström (2014) in envisaging the overall context as an activity system which is capable of being arranged into different forms of social practice: forms of "recurrent and inter-related goal directed activities" (Scribner, 1997, p.299). As was shown in the literature review, theories of situated learning provide an array of concepts for understanding practice: including forms of participation, reification and artefact use. Looked at through a critical realist lens, these concepts delineate the internal relations that are present within the object characterised as social practice.

However, it is not enough to simply apply theoretical concepts to gain a better understanding of the world. Theory is acknowledged to be fallible (Sayer, 2000) and it is important to critically examine the concepts we are using in real contexts, so as to build better transitive knowledge (Fletcher, 2017; Danermark et al., 2002, p.41). Therefore, in addition to applying concepts from situated learning to understand practice, I also build in checks to assess the adequacy with which such theory and concepts was able to make sense of data (see 3.5.10).

3.5.2.2 Causation: the nature of generative mechanisms

According to critical realist philosophy, objects/ structures in the social world produce events through the activation of generative mechanisms (Sayer, 2000). However, what is the exact nature of a generative mechanism? This has been the subject of ongoing debate within the literature on critical realism (Dalkin et al., 2015; Volkoff & Strong, 2013).

As the focus of research moves from macro to micro, it becomes important to see generative mechanisms as not just to do with broad structural forces in society, but as more local forms of social structure which when combined with the agency (reasoning, beliefs, actions) of individuals result in particular outcomes (Dalkin et al., 2015; Pawson & Tilley, 1997; Archer, 1995). Volkoff & Strong (2013) offer a view on mechanisms which equate them with the notion of affordance - the features of an object which permit it to be engaged with in a certain way by an agent. Whether a mechanism will be activated, or remain latent, will depend on the agency of individuals.

As discussed in the literature review, situated learning theorists have drawn on the concept of affordance in a similar way to characterise the way that practices offer opportunities for specific forms of participation (cf. Greeno & Gresalfi, 2008; Martin & Evaldsson, 2012). This overlap in the use of affordance highlights a compatibility between critical realism and situated learning theory.

3.5.2.3 The conditions that trigger a mechanism

A central plank of critical realist ontology is that the generative mechanisms that account for change only occur under certain contextual conditions (Sayer, 2000). This is because all events occur in open systems and are subject to varying contexts. It is not possible to make general predictions or deterministic laws, as positivist research attempts to do. Instead a careful analysis is made of the conditions in which mechanisms are triggered (Danermark, 2002, p.2). For this study it is therefore important to take account of the wider conditions in which mechanisms occur – it will be helpful to have a broader representation of the practice (RQ1) in order, not just to spot important mechanisms, but also to have a better appreciation of the overall conditions which are likely to be supporting the triggering of the mechanism.

3.5.3 Action research methodology

In Chapter 1 (Section 1.3) I explained that I saw my study as a form of action research based on the classic sequence of stages: planning, acting, observing and evaluating/ reflecting. Using this form of methodology gave me the advantage of being able to introduce and evaluate new ideas into my practice as an educational psychologist. The first phase of the project saw the development and use of the Context of Strength Finder and its trialling with a number of children and young people who were referred to me by the schools within which I worked. One of the outcomes of that phase of study was the conclusion that it would be beneficial to be able to examine in more detail the contexts which children and young people named as places where their strengths were evident.

Models of action research often show how the cycle of research can truly be a cyclical

phenomenon in which the completion of one cycle leads to the start of another, so that successive cycles of action research activity resemble a spiral (Altrichter et al., 2002). Phase 2 of the project can then be seen as a second cycle of action research where I conceptualised and planned how to study and learn more about strength-based contexts. It begins in the literature review, where I considered how to conceptualise contexts using the theory and concept from texts on situated learning. The methodology section then explains my plan of action for implementing this approach, the findings and analysis displaying my observations through the conceptual lens of situated learning and the discussion chapter reflecting on and evaluating what has been learnt from this process.

There is a sense though in which this phase of the research deviates from a pure form of action research which is built on changes to daily professional practice (Hopkins, 2014; Ebbutt, 1985). This is because in order to carry out detailed observations and interviews with participants about particular contexts, I deliberately moved the implementation of this phase outside the confines of the work I was commissioned to do by individual schools. This meant I could avoid being held accountable by those schools as to the length of time I was spending on such work or whether it was justified as part of the service for which they had paid.

As a consequence, it might be argued that the second phase of the action research spiral did not truly reflect the incorporation of this form of work into the pressured and tense world of authentic educational psychology practice. And this in turn, begs the question whether such activities could be sustained within the normal confines of EP practice.

As a rejoinder to this, I argue that I deliberately designed the basic data gathering activities to be consistent with the time scales and typical involvement pattern of educational psychologists undertaking assessment work in schools. The carrying out of classroom observation is a common practice, as is the interviewing of teacher and children (Frederickson & Miller, 2008). Of course the analysis of the data gathered in this way goes well beyond what would be feasible within everyday EP practice, however in real practice briefer versions of analysis (i.e. without the need for transcription) would still be feasible.

3.5.4 Case study design

A case study design is used for the second phase of the study and fits well with the critical realist perspective on the research which is described above.

Yin (2009) explains that a case study has two distinctive properties. The first of these is that the investigation concerns a contemporary phenomenon which is researched within its real life context, where there is no clear boundary between the phenomenon and its context. This is the case in phase 2 where the phenomenon of interest is both the nature of strength-based participation and the social practice (context) within which this occurs. One of the assumptions of the research is that strength-based participation is only likely to be fully understood if we take into account the detail of the context within which it occurs. To explore this idea thoroughly it is therefore important to consider the potential intertwining of strength and context and not exclude this possibility at an early stage.

The second characteristic of a case study to which Yin draws attention is that they embody situations where there are "many more variables of interest than data points". Critical realists (Bhaskar, 1989; Sayer, 2000) have made the distinction between research which seeks to operate in 'closed systems' where control over variables is sought – typical of positivist experimental design – and those which take place in the 'open systems' of society, in which it is quite possible that other influencing processes will be at play. The research in phase 2 is being carried out in the open systems of school classrooms, where many factors influence proceedings. In addition, the study of context is inherently complex with a multiplicity of factors which could be considered. One way of navigating this complexity is (as Yin and the critical realists suggest) to be guided by theoretical ideas of what could be worth examining. With my study, this has been done by drawing on concepts from situated learning to map out areas to be investigated.

Maxwell (2012) highlights a further feature of case study design which is distinctively critically realist: that it may provide an opportune way of identifying causal processes. The researcher is more likely to see causal processes by looking closely at how events occur in local contexts, rather than looking for patterns in decontextualized variables drawn from a large number of sites.

A multiple case study design was chosen so that it would be possible to apply the same situated approach to the exploration of more than one case. Using multiple cases allows the possibility of identifying differences and similarities in the way that a situated view of strengths may be understood in different contexts (Thomas, 2011).

3.5.5 Reflexivity

In discussing reflexivity in the context of phase 1 of the study I drew attention to two ways in which the researcher may inadvertently influence the research process. Firstly, the researcher's own background and viewpoint may shape the way things are carried out; and secondly the researcher's role may be understood and reacted to by participants in ways which distort what happens during the study. Maxwell (2012) writing from a critical realist perspective describes these two types of reflexivity as researcher subjectivity and research relationships. Neither process can be escaped – and instead, Maxwell argues, it is best to attempt to bring such influences into the open so that they can be understood as part of the context of the research.

To address the issue of researcher subjectivity Maxwell (2005, 2012) recommends the writing of what he calls researcher identity memos. On these memos the researcher expresses ideas about how his/her background, assumptions, values or feelings might influence the way they think about the research.   The aim being to allow one to see past these factors, but also perhaps to acknowledge more openly how they interact with the research activity.

In this phase of the study I attempted something like this by creating a reflective research diary in which I recorded my ongoing thoughts about how I was engaging with the subject of the research and sometimes questioned my own assumptions by writing about them (see extract in Appendix A4). This diary also became a resource to return to at a later date when I was interpreting the meaning of data that I had gathered.

Maxwell's second area of reflexivity, research relationships, was especially pertinent to phase two of my study – where I observed lessons and interviewed children and staff. Here,

beyond the usual relations that obtain between the researcher and the researched, and which may in themselves influence the way that people react to being participants (Mishler, 1986), lay my pre-existing role of educational psychologist that I inhabited within the schools where I carried out the research. I needed to consider how this might affect, not just my own subjectivity, but also the way that participants might view me and react to me within the observations and interviews I carried out.

To some extent I tried to address this by using language within the participant information sheets which flagged that I was carrying out the work as a researcher rather than within my educational psychologist role. Nevertheless, in all three schools in which this research was carried out I had worked for some time as an educational psychologist and had sometimes had prior encounters with the focus children as part of my educational psychology case work. It was inevitable that to some extent this role would foreshadow how I was interpreted by staff and pupils as I observed and later interviewed them.

The way I chose to address this was, again, to write about the way I thought it might be influencing the process within my reflective research diary. Then during the analysis phase I deliberately returned to these written entries to supplement the way I interpreted the data. Some of these reflections are cited within the findings and analysis section.

3.5.6 Ethical issues

The same range of ethical issues which affected phase 1 of the study were present in phase 2. However, the form that they took was sometimes a little different because of the different types of data collection that were involved.

For each case in phase 2, my intention was to observe the focal CYP and an adult key person in a social context which the CYP had associated with strengths, later interviewing them about what I had observed. Comprehensive participant information sheets and consent forms were designed for the CYP, parent/ carer and key person (Appendix A5). However, my

observation notes were likely to include anonymised references to other parties who were present in the room: other children and other members of staff. I therefore needed to gain consent to carry out the observations from a much wider range of people.

In order to achieve this in an efficient way I first gained consent for the research to take place from the setting manager – someone who occupied a management role in the organisation in which I was doing the research. As it turned out that all three social contexts were classes within different schools, in each the setting manager was therefore the head teacher. As part of my liaison with each head teacher I asked if the school could formally contact parents of all the children in the class to gain consent for my observation. I had prepared some text which could help form such a letter, explaining the nature of my research and giving parents the option to decline that any reference to their child appear in my notes. Similar letters were also created for other professionals, apart from the key person, who would be present in the room (Appendix A5).

As it turned out very few parents objected to anonymised references to their child being made as part of the research process. It was only in the third case where two or three parents did not give consent. The school decided to manage this by moving those children temporarily out of the class for the session I observed.

Bearing in mind the extent of the preparations that were necessary to achieve informed consent for me to observe and make notes about the lesson I felt that there was very likely to be some element of reflexivity operating, a raised awareness of being observed. Nevertheless, when I talked about this with staff they played this down, explaining that it was quite common for them to be observed as part of ongoing quality assurance procedures or inspections.

The same procedures to do with confidentiality and data storage, which were used to protect the data gathered in phase 1, were again applied in phase 2. Confidentiality was maintained through not recording any information that could identify individuals and using pseudonyms. All data was stored in a similarly secure way as stated in phase 1.

This phase of the project was granted ethical approval by Manchester Metropolitan

University Ethics Committee (see Appendix A5).

3.5.7 Sample

The sample of children/ young people drawn for this phase of the study were pupils who had been brought to my attention through planning meetings in schools. As in phase 1, I chose pupils who I felt would be able to understand the CSF assessment procedure and had the necessary language skills to communicate with me when I interviewed them. The three children/ young people, Jayden, Davy, Nazia (pseudonyms), were educated in alternative provision, secondary school and primary school respectively.

Case 1

Jayden was a white British boy (age 13 at time of observation). He attended an alternative provision, Apple School (pseudonym), which catered for secondary age pupils with special educational needs in the area of social, emotional and mental health difficulties. Apple school was small in size having around twenty children on roll.

Jayden had an Education, Health and Care Plan and had arrived at Apple School after previous mainstream secondary school placements had broken down. I had already been involved in doing some work with Jayden to help the school staff work out how best to cater for his emotional needs – he sometimes became angry and abusive. I thought that assessment with the CSF might identify situations where Jayden's behaviour was not a problem and that something could be learnt from studying such contexts.

Jayden associated two of his strengths, problem solving and good sportsmanship (a unique strength which he added to the list) with the PE lesson at Apple School. This was a lesson which was run by outside professionals who came from a local gym, which specialised in kick boxing. The day I observed this session it was run by an instructor who I have called Mr Gold and consisted of Jayden and nine other boys. Two male members of staff from Apple School sat at the side of the gym and I later saw their presence had a disciplinary purpose.

Case 2

Davy was a white British boy (age 11 at time of observation). He was in Year 7 at a mainstream secondary school to which he had transferred the previous September. I had already met Davy because staff had been concerned about the levels of anxiety that he displayed in school. I used the CSF because I wanted to learn about parts of the school day where strengths were present and Davy was reasonably confident.

Davy nominated Art lessons as a place where three strengths were present: I feel safe (a unique strength added by Davy), I am good at making things, and the teacher believes I can do well.

The Art teacher, Mr Hill (pseudonym), had been teaching Davy's class once per week, since the start of the school year. The class consisted of fifteen pupils, the majority of them boys. There were no other members of staff present and the lesson took place in an Art room with high tables and stools.

Case 3

Nazia was a British Asian girl (age 10 at time of observation). She was in Year 6 of her mainstream primary school. She had special educational needs in the areas of language and learning, but did not have an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP). I had been involved in Nadia's case earlier in the year to advise on whether she might now meet the criteria for an EHCP. There was also concern about how she would cope when she transferred to Year 7 – the first year of secondary school – although she would remain on the same site (primary and secondary schools shared the same campus). I felt a strength-based assessment would be useful because it could highlight how the school were currently managing her needs.

When I used the CSF she claimed that almost every item on the checklist was a definite strength (22/24). She chose English lessons as a context where many strengths were present simultaneously: writing well, doing things by myself, speaking well, other children like me, I enjoy doing things with other children, there is a teacher who cares about me, and teachers believe I can do well. However, when I asked her which teacher taught this lesson she gave me the names of two teachers who were not part of the English lesson (later I verified with

her that she really did mean the English lesson).

The English lesson was a small class of children who had all been identified as needing higher levels of support. On the day of my observation I counted ten children. It was staffed by a teacher, who I have called Ms Taylor, and two teaching assistants.

3.5.8 Procedure

The procedure for carrying out data collection in each case was as follows. Initially I observed the nominated lesson and made notes using a specially designed observation schedule (Appendix A6). Following the observation I interviewed separately the focal child and a key person (KP) – an adult who played an important role in the observed session. These were semi-structured interview guided by an interview schedule (see Appendix A7). Each interview was audio-taped and transcribed (see Appendix A8 for key to transcription symbols).

3.5.8.1 Observation schedule

The observation schedule was designed to gather information which would begin to give me an idea of the nature of the practice that was occurring in the session I was watching. It therefore contained columns for entries about forms of participation (action and interaction) engaged in by the focal child. There was also a column to record information about what appeared to be reifications (Wenger, 1998) (language forms which embodied some ritualised or specified ways of doing things) and artefacts (physical objects which appeared to mediate actions). The schedule was piloted during routine case work observations before data collection and some slight alterations were made to the wording to allow the schedule to contain notes about the actions and interactions of others in the room, if these seemed pertinent to understanding the practice as a whole.

During the lessons I tried to tentatively identify phases in what I was observing which might

constitute discrete forms of practice arrangement – these were episodes in which activity was governed by the same object and where participants related to each other in a consistent way. The meaning of what had been recorded on the observation schedule was then checked with participants during the subsequent interviews.

3.5.8.2 Interview schedule

The interview had two versions, one worded for use with the key person and the other for the CYP. Both versions were divided into the following sections:

Sections 1-2. These were designed to check whether participants recognised the same phases to the session that I had noticed and discover what each phase meant to them. There was reference to concepts from situated theory to encourage discourse about particular features but there was also freedom for participants to talk/ interpret these and talk about them in ways which were meaningful to them.

Participants were also asked about the typicality of what had been observed and the key person was asked to comment on the purpose or significance of the session (in order to get more insight into its meaning).

Section 3. This was designed to get the participants to describe how they saw the previously identified strengths being embodied within the observed lesson. Questions asked them to specify which aspects of the activity had allowed strengths to be present.

Section 4. This asked about the length of time the child had been involved in the activity and for comments on changes in the way they participated over time.

Section 5. This contained a question about the extent the child felt involved or had a sense of belonging in the session.

Section 6. Further questions were included to gain views on the nature of the identity which the child had developed during participation in the sessions through time.

The schedule was developed with the intention of gaining information to help answer the three research questions:

Section 1-2 - RQ1: What kind of representation of a strength-based context emerges when concepts from situated learning are used to understand it?

Section 3 - RQ2: How can strengths be understood as part of a social practice?

Sections 4-6 - RQ3: How is a child's identity in a context related to their strength-based participation within that context?

Prior to data collection, parts of the interview schedule were integrated into my routine work as an educational psychologist to check their accessibility.

3.5.9 Research questions and data sources

All of the data gathered informed the way that each research question was answered. However, some data had a more supplementary role for particular research questions and this is depicted in Table 7. For example, firm ideas about the nature of the strengths and the meaning of the child's situated identity were not drawn from the observation because it was important that the primary meaning of such phenomena was confirmed through interview.

Table 7. Phase 2 Research questions and data sources

	Observation	Interview YP	Interview KP	Research Diary
RQ1: What kind of representation of a strength-based context emerges when concepts from situated learning are used to analyse it?	X	X	X	(X)

RQ2: How can strengths be understood as part of a social practice?	(X)	X	X	(X)
RQ3: Is a child's identity in a context related to their strength-based participation within that context?	(X)	X	X	(X)

X= main source of evidence; (X)=supplementary source

3.5.10 Analysis

In this section I describe the process used for analysing the observation and interview data.

The observation schedule was designed to support a conceptualisation of context as a form of situated practice: I began by recording information about participation, reifications and artefact use. However, within the interview there was space for participants to talk in their own terms about how they understood the meaning of the session.

The analysis stage began with what Danermark et al. (2002, pp.88-95) describe as a process of abduction – the interpretation of a phenomena in the light of a particular theoretical frame of reference. I considered how far everything that participants had said in the interview could be made sense of by this perspective, but without forcing it to fit. I wanted the analytic process to involve the interpenetration of both my own frame of reference and the participants' understanding of events (Sayer, 1992, p.36). It was important to remain open to potential limitations in the theory I was using to make sense of this social object; theories may need alteration or supplementation, or it may be necessary to consider whether alternative theories might give better explanations (Fletcher, 2017). Furthermore, during the analytic process I also attempted to include issues of reflexivity by bearing in mind the influence of my own presence in the study and on the participants.

3.5.10.1 Analysis for RQ1: What kind of representation of a strength-based context can emerge when concepts from situated learning are used to understand it?

The analytic process described below aimed to develop a situated account of the practice in each context. It was a two step process involving coding data sources in terms of situated concepts and then carrying out connective work to re-integrate these elements into a narrative form.

Coding

In order to address research question 1, for each case, data from the interview transcripts and the observation schedule were coded using theoretical categories (Maxwell, 2012, p.113). This was carried out on the three transcriptions (interview with KP, interview with CYP and observation schedule).

The process began by using three situated codes: participation, reification and artefact use. These were applied to statements (sections of text which contained a unit of meaning - often a sentence) which could be interpreted as examples of these concepts. Where statements could not be accounted for in terms of these initial codes I considered adding additional code from the situated perspective which could account for that statement. Thus, through the coding of the transcripts a fuller set of codes evolved to represent statements from the transcripts (see Table 8). Participation was divided into independent and interactional forms, and during coding interactional participation was divided again to show who was interacting with who and who initiated the interaction. Additional codes were also added to show when the object (purpose) of the practice (O) was being spoken about, as well as reasoning (OR) related to this and mutual accountability within the practice (ACC).

A statement could contain more than one code – for example a statement about participation might contain reference to an artefact. If a statement or section of transcript could not be aligned with a concept from situated learning it was marked 'uncoded' . The prevalence of these codes was important: too many of them and it could indicate that participants were talking about the session in ways which were not easily accounted for by a situated perspective. Where it was unclear which situated code should be applied to the

same text, it was recorded as 'ambiguous', however there were very few instances of this kind. An extract of transcript and codes is presented in Appendix A9 to illustrate the coding process.

Table 8. Table of codes

Code	Description	Example
C	Independent participation (can include "doing, talking, thinking, feeling and belonging" (Wenger, 1998, p.56)) within the activity by child.	"I'm just thinking how to do it, thinking, memorising" (CYP2: 54)
K	Independent participation within the activity by key person.	"I incorporated the SPAG[2] into that" (KP3: 71)
KC	Interactional participation within the activity in which key person initiates and child/ children are in respondent role.	"I say, 'What is A?' and they know it, they know it, they know it." (KP1: 38-39)
CK	Interactional participation within the activity in which child initiates and key person is in respondent role.	"so it is difficult, like there was a lad, in that room he kept getting out of his seat, bringing me his work and show me because he always needs that reassurance" (KP2: 168-170)
XC	Interactional participation within the activity in	"TA asks YP3 what

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[2] SPAG refers to 'spelling, punctuation and grammar".

	which adult (not key person) initiates and child/ children are in respondent role.	punctuation she has used" (Obs3: 10:50)
CC	Interactional participation within the activity in which child initiates and another child is in respondent role.	"get the ball thrown to you" (CYP1:71)
R	The use of a reification – this is a language-based term/ phrase which represents a solidification of a mode of participation.	"I incorporated **the spag** into that" (KP3: 71)
A	The use of an artefact – this is a physical object which acts as a tool mediating the actions of participants.	"he gets some **other classes work** and shows us how they did it" CYP2: 46-47
O	Object (or purpose) of activity is mentioned	"the goal in the beginning was to remind them of what they've done already" (KP3: 25-26)
OR	Object Reasoning – text about the reason for the object	"because if it comes from them they'll remember it hopefully" (KP3: 30)
ACC	Mutual accountability – a statement about right and wrong in this practice / how actions can be sanctioned. What is important and what isn't, what should and shouldn't be – can reflect on both KP and child behaviour.	"that's not, that's not, that's no not really allowed" (CYP2: 67)
U/C	Uncoded – meaningful segment of text which doesn't fit within codes above.	"You know, in a way it's where they err probably because it's a visual

		subject where I can impact most (.) when I have that impact" (KP2: 112-114)
Amb	Passages which were ambiguous and could be understood by different codes.	"Because this needs to be an independent write as much as possible" (KP3: 20) (Could be coded as either ACC or O)

Coding represented a first step in understanding the situated nature of the practice. The process aimed to develop a theoretical understanding of the practice which combined situated learning theory with the meanings that were present in the practice for participants. From a critical realist view there is an assumption that, despite differences in how a practice may be experienced, there is a common and real social object which it may be possible to model through analysis. Coding what participants said about the practice into categories based on situated learning was intended to help in terms of generating a better understanding of it. For example, where there were similarities between sources it gave more confidence that what was being referred to was a real aspect of the practice. Where there were differences the meaning of these would need to be interpreted.

Inter-rater agreement

In order to assess how far the coding of extracts using ideas from situated learning was done in a defensible way, an inter-rater agreement check was carried out (McHugh, 2012). An educational psychologist colleague of mine was taught how to use the coding scheme and given some extracts from one of the transcripts to code (Appendix A10). The coding of extracts resulted in 65% agreement with my own coding. This was rather low, but it appeared that a fair proportion of disagreement centred on distinguishing between the

object of practice (code O) and reasoning about the object of practice (code OR). When these two categories were collapsed the inter-rater agreement rose to 81%.

Tabulation of codes and further analysis

For each case study, the results of coding of the two interviews and the observation were placed in matrix display for each distinct phase of the observed session. The initial analysis of coding focused on the adequacy of the theoretical coding of statements. This looked at the following factors:

I.   Any ambiguities or limitations in the coding scheme.

II.   The proportion of statements that were un-coded.

III.   Whether uncoded statements related to other (non-situated) of theorising of what was happening in the session.

Then patterns in the table of codes were examined with the following prompts:

IV.   Were there similarities in the patterns of the coding across different data sources?

V.   Were there differences in the patterns of the coding across different data sources?

VI.   Were some forms of codes absent?

VII.   How might the above be accounted for?

Connective work

Following Maxwell (2012, p.115) the next phase of analysis sought to use connective strategies to create an overall narrative representation of each phase of the practice, showing the relationship between coded statements.

In order to build a narrative account of each phase which highlighted relationships between coded statements the following questions were asked:

I.   Is there a single object to this activity or several? Maybe some are subordinate. What level of agreement is there about the nature of the object?

II.   How is participation related to the object of activity?

III.   What forms of mutual accountability exist or are sought?

IV.   How do reifications mediate participation and towards what goal?

V.   How do artefacts mediate participation and towards what goal?

The result was a narrative which described the practice in each phase of the lesson.

3.5.10.2 Analysis for RQ2: How can strengths be understood as part of a social practice?

There were three steps to the analysis:

i. How is the strength re-described when seen as a form of situated participation?

The interview of the YP and the KP were examined to see how they talked about the strength in the context of the observed session (this also allowed verification that the strength was thought to have been present on the occasion of the observation). Talk about specific strengths is re-organised and represented as specific forms of participation using the coding and connective strategies described above for research question 1.

ii) What aspect of practice affords this situated participation the opportunity to happen?

A question about this was asked as part of the interview – but this phase of analysis also used retroductive questions from critical realist theory (Danermark et al., 2002) – that is, asking what is logically necessary for the (strength) participation described above to be possible? What supports the existence of this form of participation? How does this relate to

the practice context defined in the answers to RQ1.

iii) Are there conditions which are likely to support the triggering of this mechanism/ affordance?

Again, retroductive questioning was used to support the analysis to this subquestion, but one level up: what is necessary for this mechanism to exist (or helps it to be more effective). On occasions this section was omitted if I judged there was insufficient data to make an interpretation.

5.3.10.3 Analysis for RQ3: How is a child's identity in a context related to their strength-based participation within that context?

This section of the analysis used ideas from situated learning to consider the child or young person's identity within the practice. It consisted of fours substages:

i. Check on the duration of participation

It was important to see how much exposure the child or young person had had to the practice.

ii. Evidence of change in participation

There was an examination of changes in the nature of participation through time which could reflect a distinct form of trajectory of participation (Wenger, 1998).

iii. How is the YP's identity (in practice) described (as recounted by the YP and by the KP)

The way that the CYP and KP described the CYP's identity was analysed to see how it related to specific forms of participation. Re-occurring and significant terms were highlighted.

iv. How is this identity related to the highlighted strengths?

There is a reflection on how such an identity relates to the identified strengths described in

research question 2.

<u>5.3.11 Validity and generalisation</u>

In order to consider questions of validity and reliability I have drawn specifically on sources which have taken a critical realist approach to qualitative research. In particular, I have based my discussion around Maxwell's (2012) account of descriptive, interpretative and theoretical validity, before making some comments about generalisation.

5.3.11.1 Descriptive validity

Maxwell defines descriptive validity as concerned with the accuracy of what is recorded. Threats to descriptive validity arise when events are recorded in a way that distorts what was seen or heard. Maxwell makes a distinction between acts and actions, acts being the observable behaviours (e.g., saying 'hello') and actions the same events given meaning (= a greeting). He implies that observational data should only attempt to record acts, to which meaning can be added when participants explain the sense they made of events. This advice was followed to the extent that interview transcripts were coded before the observational data, so that any potentially interpreted remarks on the observation schedule (e.g., Teacher made a joke) could be checked against what participants had said about it later.

5.3.11.2 Interpretive validity

Interpretive validity is concerned with capturing what people mean. The intention behind the observation schedule was to begin to think about the observed session as a form of situated practice - hence categories to be observed within the observation schedule were already steered towards a situated view. It was acknowledged that there was a risk here that other important ways of understanding the context, which participants might hold,

could be excluded. However, the interview schedule was left open enough to allow space for interviewees to present their own understanding of the session. Participants could elaborate their answers - and where it seemed that a situated perspective could not account for statements these remained uncoded and were examined for the presence of other ways of understanding what was happening - if it had turned out that a lot of statements had remained uncoded it would have cast doubt on the legitimacy of interpreting the context from a situated viewpoint.

In a further move to guard against the 'forcing' of data to fit categories (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005) some inter-rater agreement checks were made with a colleague coding samples of transcript which did lead to a small alteration in the coding procedure.

5.3.11.3 Theoretical validity

For Maxwell (2012) theoretical validity refers to an account's function as an explanation of a phenomena. I have linked this view of theoretical validity with Danermark et al.'s (2002, p.148) rendering of it as a series of questions about the extent to which theoretical understandings can shed light on the research object:

"To what extent can we, starting in the theory, understand and explain connections and processes of which we earlier had a more imprecise conception? Does the theory promote a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of interest? What can it explain or not explain, respectively? What experiences contradict the theory? Are there aspects/ dimensions of the research object which cannot be conceptualised from the theory in question?"

In the context of this study I am interested in the extent to which a situated analysis of practice can offer insights into the way strengths are related to context and so questions of theoretical validity will be pursued more thoroughly within the discussion of the findings.

5.3.11.4 Generalisation

A critical realist approach to generalisation is concerned with developing a deeper

understanding of local instances of social objects and the conditions in which they create effects, rather than claiming that findings can be automatically applied to a wider population (Sayer, 2000). This deeper theoretical understanding of a phenomenon will give more information about how the same object may function similarly or differently in different conditions (Maxwell, 2012). This is not only of theoretical interest, for from a practice point of view as an educational psychologist, I will be interested in thinking about how possible it might be to apply elements of one practice to another, to make strengths more likely to occur. However, such transfer effects will not be guaranteed because human sense-making and agency may intervene in unexpected ways (Sayer, 1992). Nevertheless, it is hoped that the detailed study of a small number of contexts may be useful in considering how others could be altered.

3.6 Findings and Analysis

3.6.1 Case 1: Jayden and the PE lesson

I had tried to observe Jayden in a PE lesson on a prior occasion, but he had not got the right kit and was not able to take part. I re-arranged to visit a few weeks later, and prior to doing so, I telephoned Jayden's mother to ask her to check that he had the right kit with him this time. In my reflective diary I noted that I was part of the activity system and to some extent my presence influenced Jayden's participation in the session (i.e. facilitated him attending). During the session I sat to one side and did not interact with any of the pupils or the key person, Mr Gold (the instructor). Afterwards I was told that Jayden had behaved in a typical fashion and he also reported that Mr Gold had run the session as usual.

The PE lesson was structured into three distinct phases: an initial question-answer session; a handball activity; and work in the gym.

3.6.1.1 RQ1: The representation of context

3.6.1.1.1 Phase 1 of the lesson: The ABCs (14.06-14.26)

Phase 1: Coding: Adequacy and patterns

Table 9. Case 1, Phase 1: Overview of code frequency

	C	K	KC	CK	XC	CC	R	A	O	ACC	U/C
KP	1		5	1			8		5	2	
YP	1	3	3	1			2				2
Obs	1	1	8		1	1	4				

Un-coded statements (2/50): the young person made remarks about session typicality and session entrance.

There was agreement in the data sources that a large proportion of participation involved Mr Gold taking the lead in episodes of interaction. There was reference to a number of reifications – which will be discussed below.

There was very little child-child participation at this stage, the only episode occurring when one young person demonstrated a skill while the others watched.

Situated account: The ABCs

From the instructor's perspective one of the primary objectives of the first phase was to calm the pupils by getting them to sit and listen. This was established through an adult-directed form of practice in which the pupils sat in a line on the floor while the instructor stood in front of them. Mr Gold asked the pupils questions about an ABC mnemonic representing different athletic qualities. The ABC mnemonic was a reification which was used to structure adult-child interaction and allowed the instructor to assert control over when children spoke and moved.   The pupils' role was to answer questions and physically demonstrate certain skills.

> Jayden: Er we are expected to (.) if we know the answer (.) put our hand up he
>   will then choose us we (.) answer the question and he will then ask us
>   to demonstrate what the answer or the thing that we've answered
>   means (YP1: 47-50)

Mr Gold insisted on compliance with basic rules – what he referred to as 'the drill' . Reifications such as 'the drill' and 'learning environment' contained expectations about behavioural norms. Any pupil who continued to misbehave was led out of the session by another member of staff.

3.6.1.1.2 Phase 2 of the lesson: Handball (14.27-14.40)

Phase 2: Coding: Adequacy and patterns

Table 10. Case 1, Phase 2: Overview of code frequency

	C	K	KC	CK	XC	CC	R	A	O	ACC	U/C
KP							5		3	1	2
YP	1		1	2		3	3	1	2		
Obs	2		8			4	2	1			

There were two uncoded statements (2/41) within the key person's account of phase 2. These related to general patterns of activities used within the session over time and the impact of different young people entering the group. Neither of these were specifically about the nature of the practice that was observed that day.

There was a difference in the profiles of codes between the key person interview and the other two sources. This was because Mr Gold tended to focus on the rationale for this phase of the lesson, rather than the nature of the participation which took place.

Mr Gold and Jayden explained the purpose of the handball game in different terms. Jayden's account making reference to the idea that the class were learning the rudiments of kick boxing – a thought influenced by the instructor coming from a kick boxing club. The instructor had highlighted this misapprehension earlier in the interview:

> Mr Gold: It's because we run a kick boxing club. We have a gym where we do boxing, kick boxing, that sort of thing and as soon as we said kick boxing the kids all said 'we're going to do kick boxing' but it's much more than that because they asked us to teach PE and (.) part of the (.) core work within kick boxing the discipline aspect of the kick boxing, we're going to bring that into the PE lesson (KP1: 5-10)

The difference in the perceived object of the session did not disrupt its running. However, the association of the instructor with kick boxing and the idea of working towards becoming skilled in kick boxing may have increased the motivation of the young person.

It is noticeable that there was a greater amount of child-child interaction in this phase due to the pupils playing a game of handball together.

Situated account: Handball

In phase 2 of the session the pupils were organised into two teams and played a game of handball together. The key person said that the main objective was to accustom the pupils to following simple rules in a social environment – something which he believed they needed to improve at and which was important when they were in other social environments. This differed from Jayden's view. He saw the reason for the game being to do with developing the capacity to make quick physical actions – something which he linked to the idea of kick-boxing.

This phase began with some teacher questions highlighting the rules of handball and certain ways of playing the game. A competitive game followed in which the pupils participated collaboratively with each other to score a goal for their team. The reification of the handball rules (pass-move-call) was meant to mediate the way the game was played. YP2 was assigned to be captain of his side. The 'game environment' created its own sense of mutual accountability. The key person acted as referee stopping the game if the rules were not observed.

3.6.1.1.3 Phase 3 of the lesson: Gym work (14.46-15.15)

Phase 3: Coding: Adequacy and patterns

Table 11. Case 1, Phase 3: Overview of code frequency

	C	K	KC	CK	XC	CC	R	A	O	ACC	U/C
KP				1							5
YP			2						1		
Obs	5		13				1	7			

Uncoded elements (5/35) all occurred when Mr Gold was asked about phase 3 of the lesson. He spoke about the progress of the group and of a specific child rather than the general nature of the activity in the gym – an example of an uncoded passage is:

> Mr Gold: The yeh that's the one, he's always like, he actually listened towards the end, [Int: (he was quiet)] yeh he was asking me questions and he's never once done that until today, never once done that, because me and him always come to loggerheads because he always winds the kids up and he's swearing he's going to beat someone, that sort of thing, and I can't be having that, I can't be having that, but today it's the best he's actually performed, best ever. (KP1: 119-125)

This extract was hard to fit it within the coding scheme as it represented a narrative of change and contrast over time in the instructor's relations with a single class member, rather than something about the nature of the session I was watching. Nevertheless, it does highlight the instructor's role in enforcing moral order and the way success is construed as movement towards operating within certain norms within the class. From this point of view it can be seen as consistent with a situated analysis although not with the narrower coding scheme used in this study.

The situated account of this phase is weaker because most of the information about the character of participation comes from the observation. No child-child interaction was observed.

Situated account: Gym work

In this part of the session the pupils were in a small gym containing benches, a punch bag, dumb bells, etc. The key person modelled how to use each piece of equipment. Then each pupil was assigned to a particular piece of equipment, which they used. The key person stopped the group after two minutes and the pupils moved round to use the next piece of equipment and so on. The gym equipment included well known artefacts which structured the kind of actions the pupils engaged in.

The gym work was followed by a warm-down session where the pupils were encouraged to stand in a circle with Mr Gold and he talked to them about muscle groups and asked them questions. Although this kind of interactional structure was similar to what had happened in phase 1 it felt more relaxed.

3.6.1.2 RQ2: Strengths as part of a social practice

3.6.1.2.1 Problem solving and good sportsmanship

i. How is the strength re-described when seen as a form of situated participation?

Jayden did not make a clear distinction between problem solving and good sportsmanship. He described the activity in which this strength appeared as being when during the handball game he interacted with other players in his team, correcting their actions in order to make it more likely that his team scored a point (and accepting that they had the right to correct his actions too). It was tricky for me to analyse this passage at first, because I was affected by own default assumptions about the nature of problem solving being to do with a step by step approach to finding a solution, when this is not immediately apparent. However, Jayden's view of problem solving was more direct: supplying the advice that will help someone overcome a problem.

When specifically asked to talk about good sportsmanship, Jayden's account of it was very similar to his view of problem solving, essentially describing how, in this context, good sportsmanship involved offering advice to players:

> Jayden: sportsmanship saying like ur (.) instead of (.) instead of doing that you do this and things like that and °>it just carries on and carries on<° (YP1: 166-168)

Jayden confirms that, in his eyes, good sportsmanship could entail offering advice to players on the opposite team as well. In extending his talk about good sportsmanship he explains that as a form of participation it has an emotional quality:

> Jayden: Yeh cause even though you're even though you're not on the same side doesn't mean you have to be (.) doesn't mean you don't have to be friends or doesn't mean you have to be mean to each other (YP1: 178-180)

When asked to describe parts of the session where Jayden displayed problem solving, the instructor Mr Gold, initially focused on Jayden's ability to quickly answer (solve) the questions that he asked the group at the start of the session. However, when prompted to think about the handball phase of the lesson, Mr Gold was able to see how Jayden used problem solving here too, in terms of helping his team find the easiest way to score. Mr Gold termed this 'teamwork' and went on to endorse the view that Jayden's ability to be a good sportsman involved an emotional component of not reacting negatively to adversity:

> Mr Gold: =Team work team work, he is good like that, team work and he is a good sportsman because win lose or draw he doesn't take it personal
> Int: No
> Mr Gold: Whereas some of them want to start fighting. (KP1: 163-167)

ii. What aspect of practice affords this situated participation the opportunity to happen?

Considering the way in which Jayden described the strength of problem solving as correcting other children's actions, within a school context, this could only occur within an activity in which it permissible for children to offer each other advice. This is a characteristic of activities in which one is part of a team working towards a goal. The assignment of the captain reification to Jayden also supported and emphasised a role for this type of advice giving.

Jayden framed good sportsmanship as involving being friendly towards opponents and offering them help and advice too. In order for this kind of participation to be possible an activity would need to be competitive – as the handball game was.

Jayden also spoke about how the physical activity of the session helped him to relax and release any anger:

> Int: So is there something special about (.) THAT lesson then that allows you to (.) to [allow you to
> Jayden: [It rel it relaxes me a bit it relaxes me and lets if I've got a bit of anger I put my anger out into that lesson   (YP1: 190-193)

iii. Are there conditions which are likely to support the triggering of this mechanism?

The high level of discipline and control exercised by the instructor was necessary to allow the game to occur successfully without becoming chaotic.

3.6.1.3 The child's identity within the class

i. The duration of participation

The observed session took place soon after Christmas and had been running once a week through the autumn term. However, there had been a substantial break in Jayden's attendance. He had not had his PE kit with him for several weeks and had not been able to take part.

> Mr Gold: =no the the consistency that's a lack of consistency (.) we haven't saw him for a good few weeks. Every time I come and I say "You doing the class today?" and he make an excuse "Ahh I forgot this I forgot that" (KP11: 194-197)

ii. Evidence of change in participation, what was the position at the start and what is it now? (type of trajectory)

Within the interviews there was a difference in the way the Jayden and Mr Gold spoke about the trajectory of Jayden's participation in this session. Jayden described himself as initially quite nervous and withdrawn – concerned that he didn't know the other pupils in the group. However, the instructor reported Jayden being competent in this session right from the beginning.

In any case at a certain point Jayden stopped attending the session and then found it difficult to re-engage:

> Jayden: most of the times I just couldn't (.) °couldn't be bothered to do it° (.) forgot my kit (YP1: 209-210)

This highlights that a seemingly inbound trajectory (Wenger, 1998) may not always be maintained, perhaps especially in the case of pupils who have a history of finding school challenging. My own involvement in encouraging Jayden to attend this session again had succeeded in, at least temporarily, re-engaging him – perhaps showing that assessment and intervention are not always clearly separable.

iii. How is the YP's identity (in practice) described (as recounted by the YP and the KP)?

The identity-in-practice which the instructor emphasised was one of being 'smart', 'listening well', 'being attentive', 'answering questions'. This identity of the good student fits with the model of practice which Mr Gold promoted, which was quite directive and largely required pupils to follow instructions and answer questions. He did acknowledge another role, that of 'strategist' which came from the way Jayden worked with other members of his team in the game phase.

Jayden talking about that lesson and his identity within it, focused on being fully involved, being as good as anyone else there, being 'relatable' to the lesson:

> Jayden: How would I describe myself when I'm in that lesson? I would describe myself as (..) relatable to the lesson and I would describe myself as (.) I am just as good as everyone else (.) I'm not the only one out (.) like I ain't left out when I'm doing the lesson and things like that   (YP1: 255-259)

These two ways of thinking about Jayden's identity in the lesson are not quite the same: the instructor seeing the pupil as smart and responsive, the pupil seeing himself as fully involved. However, perhaps they do provide an outside and inside view of the same sort of participation. Answering questions is no doubt also part of being fully involved. Indeed, one of the qualities of the lesson which Jayden particularly liked was that the teacher asked everyone questions and did not exclude anyone.

> Jayden: cause you get some people that just talk to the one person (.) feel like yeh I'm just goin to talk to that one person because I just feel like doin it (.) whereas Mr Gold he's fair with everyone he gives everyone a good chance to speak out for themselves (YP1: 276-281)

iv. How is the identity related to the highlighted strengths?

The way participants spoke about Jayden's identity in the class was not specifically focused on the individual strengths which initially drew me to observe that session. Problem solving and good sportsmanship reflect an aspect of Jayden's full participation, but only took place in one relatively short part of the lesson.

3.6.2 Case 2: Davy and the Art lesson

My initial impression of the lesson was that included four distinct phases: entry, teaching around a table, independent work and tidy up. Only the first three phases were analysed as there was not enough data to consider the tidy up phase.

3.6.2.1 RQ1: The representation of context

3.6.2.1.1 Phase 1 of the lesson: Entry (12.34-12.40)

Phase 1 Coding: Adequacy and patterns

Table 12. Case 2, Phase 1: Overview of code frequency

	C	K	KC	CK	XC	CC	R	A	O	ACC	U/C
KP	2	1	2				1	1	8	3	
YP	1										2
Obs	1		3				3	2			

Coding of statements was fairly unproblematic (2/30 uncoded). There was some ambiguity in the coding of a key person comment which might have been coded as either a description of Mr Hill's participation or an account of his objectives in that phase.

> Mr Hill: I try to keep it quite err (.) direct really, what they have to do, you know simple things like sit down, take your bag and coats off, wait for further instruction. (KP2: 40-42)

As it seemed to convey his general intention at this point in the lesson this was coded as an object.

The young person did not offer any comments about the practice in this phase of the lesson, beyond talking about his emotional state of anticipation at the start of the lesson. There could have been an assumption on his part that, as his educational psychologist, I might be interested in his emotional state, which we had talked about in previous meetings. He did

move on to talk about the overall shape of the lesson, a comment which was left uncoded because it did not relate to the initial entry phase.

Situated account: Entry

This phase happened at the start of the lesson as pupils entered the room and went to their desks to sit down. Mr Hill sat at his desk at this point. Information about the object or purpose of this phase of the lesson is drawn entirely from the interview with the teacher. A recovering theme is the importance of keeping 'it' structured.

> Mr Hill: get ready for register and just try to keep it err quite structured really. (KP2: 45-46)

I interpret 'it' as referring to pupil participation and teacher-pupil interaction. Mr Hill gave the pupils brief instructions which focused them on simple actions: sitting down, answering their name when the register was taken, etc. The superordinate object seemed to be to settle the children and establish a sense of control prior to beginning the lesson proper. The teacher explained a number of reasons for taking this line, which included the generally staggered entry time of the class and the presence of certain individuals in the group who had the potential to challenge his authority. This was a time when he re-asserted the boundaries and social rules. Reifications (e.g., the use of a seating plan) and artefacts (e.g., the register) sometimes originated from the broader school-wide practices.

3.6.2.1.2 Phase 2 of the lesson: Round the table (12.40 – 12.47; 13.04 – 13.07; 13.27 - 13.30)

Phase2: Coding: Adequacy and patterns

Table 13. Case 2, Phase 2: Overview of code frequency

	C	K	KC	CK	XC	CC	R	A	O	ACC	U/C
KP		1	6	1			5	2	7	3	3
YP	2		6	1				2	1	1	1
Obs	2		12	3			2	4		2	

Uncoded statements 4/67. In the section of the interview about this lesson phase there were three key person comments that were not coded. One of these related to thoughts about how a part of the teacher-pupil interaction might have been handled differently, another talked about how practices within the lesson, such as drawing, were linked to the idea of becoming an artist, the third was a general comment about art being a visual subject. These comments reflect some weakness in the coding scheme's tendency to focus on the social nature of existing practices rather than wider issues – which nevertheless, might still have been accommodated within a practice based view.

All three data sources contained a large proportion of KC interactions. However, many of the forms of interactive participation which were labelled KC, reflected acts where the teacher showed the children how to do something. Showing has a different quality to other forms of interactive participation which might also be assigned this code such as the teacher asking the class a question or giving a pupil an instruction. While all such interactions show the key person initiating some kind of interactive participation, it was important to go beyond the code to appreciate its meaning.

Situated account: Round the table

In this phase of the lesson, which alternated with phase 3 (independent work – see below), the class gathered around one of the front tables in the room and Mr Hill talked to them about the art activity they were doing. The teacher identified two reasons for this phase: one to give the class a break from sitting and concentrating on their own tasks, the second to allow them to see more closely when he demonstrated specific techniques or showed them examples of work. The physical closeness of teacher and pupils did seem to confer a degree of intimacy in the relations between them which was also a feature of some aspects of phase 3.

During this phase Mr Hill sometimes used work of other classes or other pupils within the class as examples of how things could be done. Such work then became an artefact which mediated the interaction between teacher and class. There was a sense that the child's work was recognised as something worthy of attention.

The class were sometimes asked to grade the work that was held up for attention and suggest ways it could be improved. The grading system might be seen to represent an external artefact which mediated the appraisal of the art produced in the lesson. It perhaps aligned the nature of what was being accomplished together more with the accurate use of technical methods than, for instance, self-expression.

Generally, pupils remained in a respondent role during this phase of the lesson. Davy characterised this as being 'focused' on what the teacher was doing and saying, he talked about the cognitive operations of thinking and memorising. He concluded that an important object for him was to avoid being embarrassed by not knowing what to do at the end of a demonstration. It was interesting that independently the key person highlighted how important this phase of the lesson was to him in achieving his goals as a teacher.

> Mr Hill: It's where (.) the best part the main part of that lesson cause if they walk away from that table and they don't understand what they're doing, your lesson's pretty flawed and their learning, their learning won't advance or how it should within that lesson, so it's quite a pivotal part of the lesson really (KP2: 138-142)

Both parties felt a degree of accountability to accomplish this part of the lesson successfully – this is quite suggestive of the subtle and interactive way in accountability can be mutually developed in a community of practice (Wenger, 1998, pp.81-82).

3.6.2.1.3 Phase 3 of the lesson: Independent work (12.47 – 13.04; 13.07 - 13.23)

Phase 3: Coding: Adequacy and patterns

Table 14. Case 2, Phase 3: Overview of code frequency

	C	K	KC	CK	XC	CC	R	A	O	ACC	U/C
KP			4	2					2	3	2
YP						1			1	2	
Obs	5		17	7			1			6	

Both uncoded elements (2/53) were in the interview with the key person. The first referred to the reasons why a certain child frequently got up from his seat to show Mr Hill his work. This was made sense of in terms of the child's perceived need for reassurance and the relative immaturity of the class.

> Mr Hill: and >we've got< you know a low ability year 7 class you will get that still (KP2: 171-172)

It referred to a characteristic of the learners rather than a feature of the practice. Similarly, at another point the teacher referred to the motives for a child's behaviour – wanting to receive help from the teacher - in individual terms:

> Mr Hill: I think it's partly that jealousy from the pupil, while he's helping that child he's not helping me and then they'll just want you to do it for them as well, basically (KP2: 197-200)

Both of these accounts of why children behaved as they did could be accounted for in terms of practice (see below), but the teacher, focused more on individual qualities of the child.

By removing them from the analysis I am to some extent imposing my favoured perspective on the scene.

A common feature across sources were statements that could be coded as to do with mutual accountability – these related to the need for children to be working, generally in silence on their own work and the teacher's role as partly about policing this.

In common with the other phases of this lesson there is almost a complete absence of child-child interaction or participation.

Situated account: Independent work

During this phase of the lesson the children worked at their tables on the Art task which had been previously demonstrated. Mr Hill walked around the room. The object was that the children effectively accomplished the task by working on their own. The room remained in an atmosphere of near silence and it became clear from the interviews that this was an explicit requirement of behaviour in this phase imposed by the teacher.

Also during this phase Mr Hill sometimes helped children with aspects of their work. He would occasionally ask a child to stand while he sat on the child's seat to add some detail to the work. It was during this time when Mr Hill had to contend with other children's requests for assistance or attention. There was quite a subtle positioning of the teacher's availability for interaction going on. In between episodes of helping, Mr Hill reminded the class of the time left to complete set tasks and the guided them to complete particular details:

> Tr -> class, "You have seven minutes left, aim to get one of the sections done before the end of the lesson." Observation note 1.20pm (ii)

3.6.2.2 RQ2: Strengths as part of a social practice

3.6.2.2.1 I feel safe

i. How is the strength re-described when seen as a form of situated participation?

When asked to expand on what he meant by 'feeling safe' in the Art lesson, Davy described it as being comforted. In situated terms it may be an emotion which arose from a particular arrangement of practice. In this case being seated near to one of his friends.

Equating the idea of feeling safe with the feeling of being comforted was particularly salient for a young person who has experience of struggling with anxiety and fears. During the interview Davy talked about some of his fears:

> Davy: I hate loud noises, but not quiet quiet because I like to feel safe [Int: Yes] I like to feel safe (.) I don't wanna get that really quiet feeling when I feel like somebody's around me or something and I get really scared sometimes. YP2: 76-69

ii. What aspect of practice affords this situated participation the opportunity to happen?

The main aspect of practice which created the opportunity for Davy to feel safe was that students were assigned to sit at specific desks. By chance, Davy had been assigned to sit near his friend and knew that this arrangement would pertain every time he came to the Art class.

Davy was also seated on the table at the front of the classroom, which the teacher asked the class to gather around for *Round the table* time. This meant he could remain in his seat at these times.

iii. Are there conditions which are likely to support the triggering of this mechanism/ affordance?

The practice of carrying out a large part of the activity of the lesson in a fixed seating plan (Entry, *Independent work*) had created this possibility. The use of a seating plan was an

aspect of the whole school policy – although Mr Hill has modified it slightly to suit the class context (not having enough girls in the class to make it a boy-girl alternating pattern). However, Mr Hill was not aware that Davy has ended up sitting near his best friend.

3.6.2.2.2 I Enjoy making things

i. How is the strength re-described when seen as a form of situated participation?

Davy expanded on the strength of being good at making things. He explained by making things he included a range of activities from model making to making pieces of Art through drawing and painting. He contrasted this with writing which he did not like doing (YP2: 193-202). He described making things without reference to other people.

ii. What aspect of practice affords this situated participation the opportunity to happen?

The opportunity to make things is being provided for Davy in Art lessons – although it should be noted that the practices through which it is offered are structured and well-specified by the teacher (through modelling and demonstration in *Round the table* practice and clear time-limited objectives and supervision in Independent work practice).

Davy said that when he was excited about making things, he could become 'hyper' or over-excited. However, unlike in other lessons (he uses the example of maths) he had remained relatively focused in Art and he described how the Art teacher reacts to calm him down.

Int:	[laughs] so (.) but you know when you said you could get a little bit hyper in those lessons
Davy:	Yeh, talk a lot as well
Int:	Do you think Mr Hill, how does he react if you get a little bit hyper
Davy:	Yeah, like shhh or calm down
Int:	But he can handle it okay
Davy:	Yes I feel like he can
YP2: 203-209	

There was some evidence then that a further element of this lesson which helped Davy to stay focused on making things was the Art teacher's low-key way of keeping Davy calm - this was something that was noticed in the observation as well (o2:1.20(iii))

Davy also drew attention to the generally quiet conditions in the Art class, where everything was very calm, again contrasting this with maths where there is a 'crazier' atmosphere.

iii. Are there conditions which are likely to support the triggering of this mechanism/ affordance?

From the interview with Mr Hill it appeared he saw this class group as one of the ('lower academic ability') sets which benefitted from a more structured teaching approach, where he modelled work more frequently. Therefore, it might be added that the wider context of the school's setting system had created the conditions which made it more likely for Mr Hill to opt to establish the forms of practice I had observed.

3.6.2.2.3 The teacher believes I can do well

i. How is the strength re-described when seen as a form of situated participation?

The strength 'the teacher believes I can do well' was equated with the experience of receiving praise. Davy said that he knew Mr Hill believed he could do well because he praised his work at the end of the lesson. Mr Hill also mentioned praise as a means by which he could communicate that he valued the pupil's work – however, he situated this within a more complex set of practices (see below).

ii. What aspect of practice affords this situated participation the opportunity to happen?

Certainly, there were opportunities for the teacher to offer direct praise throughout the *Independent work* phase. However, Mr Hill drew attention specifically to how praise could be delivered indirectly by using Davy's work as an example, when he gathered the class round one of the front tables. He was aware that Davy sometimes found this embarrassing, but Mr Hill also thought that it raised Davy's confidence.

From a critical realist position a mechanism might be delineated: the practice of using Davy's work as an artefact in the *Round the table* phase combined with him being able to cope with his work being shown in this way, allowed Davy the opportunity to believe the teacher thought he could do well.

iii. Are there conditions which are likely to support the triggering of this mechanism/ affordance?

The interview with Mr Hill extended into the wider terrain of developing a personal knowledge of pupils and an interest in them. This relation did not stop at the classroom door but continued when he met them around school:

> Mr Hill: the lesson doesn't always start in the classroom you know, I see Davy walking around sometimes, not just Davy, other pupils, it's nice to acknowledge the pupils in the corridor ask them about the work or ask them about the day. (KP2: 219-222)

This kind of personal interest/ intimacy with the pupils was reflected in elements of the practices within his classroom, for example, gathering the class to be physically near him when he showed them things, or sitting on a child's seat to aid in the execution of a particular technique (and interestingly co-occurred within a generally very disciplined and controlled set of relations with the pupils). It seems likely that a praise statement or indirect acknowledgment of a pupil's work meant more within a context in which there was a sense that the teacher knew you well and took an interest in you. From a critical realist point of view this might be seen as a condition which allowed the mechanism of valuing praise to be especially effective.

3.6.2.3 RQ3: The child's identity within the class

i. Check on the duration of participation

Since September (YP2: 123) – One lesson per week for over one term (four months) (KP2: 260).

ii. Look for evidence of change in participation, what was the position at the start and what is it now (Type of trajectory).

Davy talked about being shy initially (151) and confused (153). There was quite a potent evocation of how it felt at the start of transfer into secondary school.

> Davy: (inaudible) I was very shy and confused, didn't know where to go [Int: yeh] didn't know nearly anyone, all my primary school friends were hanging out with their er er new friends, I'm just lost (CYP2: 158-160)

He agreed that he was now more confident (line 170) but highlighted some limits to confidence (lines 173-183)

Mr Hill concurred with this view – saying that Davy was more nervous at the start and become more confident (inbound trajectory) (KP2: 275-278)

iii. How is the YP's identity (in practice) described (as recounted by the YP and by the KP)?

Davy described himself as 'focused' and 'confident' (line 188) 'excited' (191) 'hyper' (193)

Mr Hill sees the Davy as 'vocal' (287, 307) – someone who is involved (307) and likes to ask questions. He sees Davy as having high standards for himself (307-8) and responding well when asked to do things (291-2).

There is some common ground here as both parties are drawing attention to Davy's engagement in this lesson – seeing him as focused, excited or vocal.

iv. How is this identity related to the highlighted strengths?

From the analysis above, the actualisation of strengths (I feel safe, I enjoy making things, the teacher believes I can do well) is recast as possible through the presence of supportive aspects of practice and the conditions within which they take place. Then, more broadly, the identity of 'the engaged pupil' might be seen as the positive overall outcome achieved in this lesson, which is contributed to by these actualised strengths.

<u>3.6.3 Case 3: Nazia and the English lesson</u>

The observation of the English lesson suggested that it would be logical to see it as divided into two phases. The first phase being characterised by whole class teaching and the second a time when children worked individually on a written task.

3.6.3.1 RQ1: The representation of context

3.6.3.1.1 Phase 1 of the lesson: Recap (10.06 - 10.30)

Phase 1 Coding: Adequacy and patterns

Table 15. Case 3, Phase 1: Overview of code frequency

	C	K	KC	CK	CC	XC	R	A	O	ACC	UC
KP	2	1	5				5	2	10	2	6
YP	5		1								
Obs	5		14			1	9	2			

There was some ambiguity in the coding of the initial statement by Ms Taylor:

> Ms Taylor: Because this needs to be an independent write as much as possible um (KP3: 20)

Following this a number of objectives for the session were described, so these words might have legitimately been interpreted as the reasoning behind the object of the lesson. However, because of the strength of the phrase 'needs to be', I felt it was signaling, something important about the nature of the lesson and therefore a form of mutual accountability that the was being sought.

A number of teacher utterances remained uncoded (total uncoded 6/70). These referred to places where Ms Taylor talked about the meaning of the lesson by relating it to what had been covered in previous lessons, for example:

> Ms Taylor: I think so, I think um to prepare for a write there's so many steps, and they've already looked at plenty of examples, they've already done their planning for it (KP3: 61-62)

There were also comments about how she tended to think about the general organisation of these lessons:

> Ms Taylor: So um there will often be a SPAG focus, because it's about them using their skill, it's not just about, you know, the outcome, it's about what skill will they be applying (KP3: 82-83)

While, in quotes such as this, she was talking about the children's participation in the lesson, these were general remarks, rather than something about the session I had observed that day.

Frequencies of coding show that the teacher interview was the only source of information about the object of activity in phase 1 of the lesson. The observation gained more information about the nature of the teacher-child interactions, all of these being initiated by the teacher, usually in the form of questions. No child-child interaction was recorded in this phase.

Situated account: Recap

The teacher, Ms Taylor, was very clear about the object of activity in the first part of the lesson. The main objective was to prepare the class to do some independent writing which they did in the second half of the lesson. Ms Taylor wished to do this by stimulating the children to remember relevant ideas and information about non-chronological reports and to do this through creating a lively dialogue with them about the topic. Pupil participation involved accepting and taking part in activities directed towards these teacher-determined objectives. The lesson was structured around the teacher asking the whole class a series of questions about the meaning of reifications to do with written reports (e.g., the 5Ws) and grammar, and getting the children to do a range of things: express ideas, read texts, identify

forms of writing. From a mutual accountability perspective, she stressed the importance of it being okay for the children to make mistakes because these were opportunities for further learning.   Artefacts were used which allowed a shared focus – e.g. texts which every child had in their book, or which were projected on to the class white board. This phase of the lesson culminated in the children writing down their success criteria for the forthcoming written task.

3.6.3.1.2 Phase 2 of the lesson: Independent writing (10.30-11.08)

Phase 2 Coding: Adequacy and patterns

Table 16. Case 3, Phase 2: Overview of code frequency

	C	K	KC	CK	XC	CC	R	A	O	ACC	UC
KP		1	2			2			1	3	1
YP	6						1	1			
OS	5		2		9						

An ambiguity that I noted during coding this section was interpreting comments by Nazia such as:

Nazia: (..) we wrote tiger in the middle (YP3: 30)

I was not absolutely sure that Nazia was talking about an action she had done herself or whether she was indicating that the work had been co-written with the teaching assistant. As she used the pronoun 'we' quite frequently I assumed it was the former.

The one uncoded statement (1/34) was:

Ms Taylor: (..) which is why for my group, my group's a bit a little bit more able (..)

This draws attention to a limitation in the coding system which paid attention to the doing and interacting aspects of participation without looking more widely at how the class was

grouped in the room. Although I did not code this statement, I did end up using it to make sense of differences in the pattern of coding in the interview with the teacher and the observation schedule – where there was a large number of XC codes (another adult – not the key person interacting with the child). This statement also alludes to individual characteristics of children – their 'ability' which is not easily accommodated within the situated model.

Situated account: Independent writing

In this part of the lesson the general structure of participation changed. Now the children were all working on a writing task and the staff in the room (teacher and teaching assistants) were supporting them to accomplish this activity. In talking to me about this part of the lesson Ms Taylor emphasised the importance of the children being as independent as possible in their work. She encouraged children to check each other's work. Artefacts used to aid the drafting process included handheld white boards where children could practice writing sentences. The teacher used the term scaffolding to express how she wanted to work with children at this point (the idea of only giving sufficient help to allow a child to maintain autonomy). However, my observation of Nazia highlighted that the teaching assistant who was supporting her group was quite heavily focused on working with Nazia, asking a number of questions which seemed to be steering her towards writing particular things. At times it felt rather more directive than scaffolding.

> No don't tell us the meaning of carnivore, tell us this animal is a carnivore – how would you put that in a sentence? (OS3: 11.08)

On the whole the children seemed to be engaged in writing. However, in the interview Ms Taylor drew my attention to the way one pupil engaged in 'over-writing', that is pretending to write, but in fact, just tracing words that had already been written. She saw it as part of her role to gently counteract any tendency to slip out of engagement in this way.

3.6.3.2 RQ2: Strengths as part of a social practice?

3.6.3.2.1 I can write well

i. How is the strength re-described when seen as a form of situated participation?

The strength of good writing is seen by the child as the alteration of sentences so that they make sense. The key person, Ms Taylor, described 'good writing' as complying with expectations, that is: the pupil focusing on a process which mediated writing (saying sentences aloud first), being 'on-task' (a reification which is often used to represent pupil concentration) and remaining within the boundary of the task (as Ms Taylor had defined it). They were talking about the same phenomenon but had slightly different, but not necessarily incompatible, perspectives on it. One commonality is that both descriptions focused on solo participation by Nazia in *producing* the writing (as opposed to the quality of the finished piece of work).

ii. What aspect of practice affords this situated participation the opportunity to happen?

If we consider the retroductive questions (Danermark et al, 2002) (e.g., what is necessary in order for X (the strength) to exist?) then there is evidence that Nazia's writing was also supported by intense adult involvement - a striking feature of the observation was the extent to which the teaching assistant intervened in order to help Nazia carry out the writing task. The actions of the teaching assistant were an important aspect of the mechanism that allowed the good writing to happen. But I query whether to some extent they were motivated by my presence in the classroom and her desire to make sure Nazia produced some reasonable work.

Other mechanisms which supported the accomplishment of writing as a process included the use of artefacts such as the handheld white boards on which sentences could be written in trial form, as well as the encouragement for children to read each other's work and offer advice to one another.

iii. Are there conditions which are likely to support the triggering of this mechanism/ affordance?

The notion of good writing as to do with the process rather than the product of writing, was reflected in norms within the lesson where the reification 'drafting' was heavily deployed. These conditions sanctioned some of the mechanisms described above.

3.6.3.2.2 I can do things by myself

i. How is the strength re-described when seen as a form of situated participation?

Nazia equates the strength of doing things by herself to participation on the writing task. The extent of the strength, doing things by herself is qualified a little in both child and key person accounts. The child acknowledges that she did a little work on her own and then a bit with the teaching assistant.

> Int: You were drafting (.) yes, did you do it by yourself? No? or a little bit?
>   A little bit yourself, a little bit with her. What would you say?
> Nazia: I did a little bit with Miss (Hussain) and a little bit by myself (YP3: 89-
>   91)

ii. What aspect of practice affords this situated participation the opportunity to happen?

The strength of doing something on her own seems to be dependent on being within a practice where the requirement is for children to produce independent work (phase 2 of the lesson).

Independence is also related to the type of adult support which is provided. The teacher's comments about scaffolding earlier in the interview refers to the relationship between independence and support:

> Ms Taylor: To be as independent as possible, obviously you know Mrs Hussain and
>   I, we um (.) try to scaffold that so they're not completely left to it,
>   though we're trying to create as much independence as possible (KP3:
>   93-95)

It's possible that the amount of independence that Nazia exhibited may have been a little constrained by the extent and nature of the teaching assistant's interventions. Although her input was important in guiding Nazia through the written work, perhaps she could have tried to use slightly lighter forms of assistance. On the other hand, alternative non-situated explanations are possible here which would highlight the possibility of cognitive limits affecting the extent to which Nazia can operate independently in this context.

iii. Are there conditions which are likely to support the triggering of this mechanism/ affordance?

This class is a specially resourced group with a relatively small number of pupils and high staff:pupil ratio. These conditions no doubt influence the amount of support that is available to enable Nazia to achieve some level of independent work.

3.6.3.2.3 I speak well

i) How is the strength re-described when seen as a form of situated participation?

Two examples of 'speaking well' are mentioned. Nazia agrees she did this when answering questions in class. This was supported later in the teacher interview where there was talk about Nazia's keenness to answer teacher questions (KP3: 154-163). Nazia also equated speaking well with reading out aloud to the class (YP3: line 96).

ii) What aspect of practice affords this situated participation the opportunity to happen?

These responses represent good speaking as occurring within sanctioned slots within the instructional practices present during phase 1 of the lesson. The artefacts of the shared white board and the display of a suitably accessible text also facilitated Nazia's ability to read aloud to the rest of the class. The key person was especially aware of Nazia's desire to answer questions in class and chose her frequently to answer, so as to boost her engagement (KP3: 158-161).

Nevertheless, the way that 'good speaking' is associated with the instructional practices of the lesson does not link it to less formal ways of interacting with peers, for example (see below).

3.6.3.2.4 Other children like me, I enjoy doing things with other children

i) How is the strength re-described when seen as a form of situated participation?

Nazia enlarges on the meaning of these strengths by saying that an example of them happening was when she was helping her friend (YP3: 105).

ii) What aspect of practice affords this situated participation the opportunity to happen?

It seems likely from observation notes that positive peer interaction happened after Ms Taylor stopped the class and asked them to swap and read each other's work. From observation notes it seemed to me that this was unlikely to have happened through the facilitation of the teaching assistant, who seemed more concerned with directly advising Nazia. Although the teacher implicated the presence of direct support in reducing social problems, the facilitation of pupil interaction by the teacher herself promoted positive pupil-pupil dialogue:

> Ms Taylor: But they are allowed to support each other and point things out to each other _and_ I think as a teacher to guide that dialogue (KP3: 116-117)

iii) Are there conditions which are likely to support the triggering of this mechanism/ affordance

Ms Taylor agreed that generally strengths (positive peer relations) are present but then talked about instances where problems have emerged - when Nazia has been frustrated by what is described as the distractions caused by other children (KP: 143-145). She located this at other times of the school day when Nazia did not have adult support with her. This

suggests that there are elements of the wider social environment which are likely to influence the extent to which pro-social interaction happens.

3.6.3.2.5 The teacher cares for me/ believes I can do well

i) How is the strength re-described when seen as a form of situated participation?

Nazia talked about Ms Taylor picking her to answer questions "all of the time" (YP3: 123) and said that this was an example of her caring for her and believing she could do well. In describing how she values Nazia, Ms Taylor also talks about her capacity to put her hand up and answer questions (KP3: 154-158).

ii) What aspect of practice affords this situated participation the opportunity to happen?

A situated point of view highlights how the meaning of this strength emerges through the medium of the asking of questions – perhaps not how one might immediately think about being 'cared for or valued' – but a key aspect of the practice, especially in phase 1 of the lesson. The teacher is conscious of deliberately making sure she chooses Nazia to answer.

3.6.3.3 RQ3: The child's identity within the class

i. The duration of participation

The KP had been teaching Nazia since the beginning of that school year and seen her in the same class every week for several months.

ii) Evidence of change in participation, what was the position at the start and what is it now? (type of trajectory)

I was unable to get Nazia to answer this question, perhaps it was too hard for her to understand.

The teacher could see a change in Nazia's participation towards answering questions with more relevant information as time went on.

> Ms Taylor: she has something to contribute and I think you can always see in her face when she's got something she really wants to say, not just answering the question for the sake of it, but something she knows is right, and I think that has gone better. (KP3: 181-183)

iii) How is the YP's identity (in practice) described (as recounted by the YP and the KP)?

Ms Taylor characterised Nazia's identity within the class as 'a contributor' (line 188) although she also said that her identity was variable and there were days when she needed a lot more support from staff to make a contribution.

In describing herself in English lessons, Nazia expressed three qualities: 'good', 'I'm always putting my hand up', 'I have respect'. On questioning Nazia about the meaning of this last quality, she described it as being polite towards others:

> Nazia: Like I say if I ask if I need something then I say 'Please can I have a ruler or pencil?' (YP3: 160)

There is commonality in the way that Ms Taylor and Nazia saw Nazia's identity in the session, both emphasising her ability to contribute by putting her hand up and answering questions.

iv) How is the identity related to the highlighted strengths?

The identity as a contributor certainly seems to be supported well by Nazia's oral engagement in the class which is captured by her strength of speaking well (within the practice slots available for this). The extent to which the presence of adult support allows her to be a contributor in terms of 'good writing', and positive peer interaction remains a little unclear.

3.7 Discussion

The discussion section will explore the way in which each of the three research questions was answered by the research findings. It begins by examining the representation of strength-based contexts which emerged in the study, before considering how this framed an understanding of strength and identity. The section closes with a review of the implications of the research for EP practice and future research.

3.7.1 Representing social context

The initial research question was to explore the nature of the strength-based context which emerged when concepts from situated learning were used to analyse it.

The analysis of each strength-based context culminated in a narrative description of the social practice in that context which was based on concepts from situated learning.   Below I consider these 'situated accounts' and discuss their status vis-à-vis related literature. What kind of representations of practice emerge? How far could they explain all aspects of what was said about the contexts, and finally, from a critical realist perspective does each represent a coherent underlying social object?

3.7.1.1 The representation of context which emerged

In each case the analytic process resulted in the creation of situated accounts of a small number of phases within each of the observed lessons. Viewing each observed class as an activity system made up of staff, students and resources (Greeno & Engeström, 2014), these phases might be understood as the distinct patterns of practice which emerged in each of these three activity systems.

Patterns of practice, such as *The ABCs* in case 1, or *Round the table* in case 2, are small scale forms of practice – social arrangements that may last for a matter of minutes before they are succeeded by another pattern of practice. Nevertheless, they are enduring in that they appear to be the building blocks with which each lesson is typically constructed.

These patterns of practice drew on a limited number of concepts (embodied in codes) from situated learning theory which could broadly speaking be described as to do with:

A. Forms of participation that occurred (solo or interactional) and in terms of interactional participation who this occurred between and who initiated the interaction. So, for example, the code KC represented a unit of interaction between the key person and a child or young person, which was initiated by the key person. This code was used when the key person asked the class a question, for instance.

B. Reification or artefacts which mediated the way that activity unfolded. Reifications, language structures which structured the way things were done were found in all the classes visited, highlighting the salience of particular ideas or the way that discipline was enforced. They may be seen as an important way in which meaning is created within classroom (Evitniskaya & Morton, 2014; Greeno & Gresalfi, 2008).

C. Ideas about the overall goals of activity and what constituted the rights and wrongs within the practice, including the boundaries of acceptable behaviour.

Figure 4. Grouping codes into Community of Practice dimensions
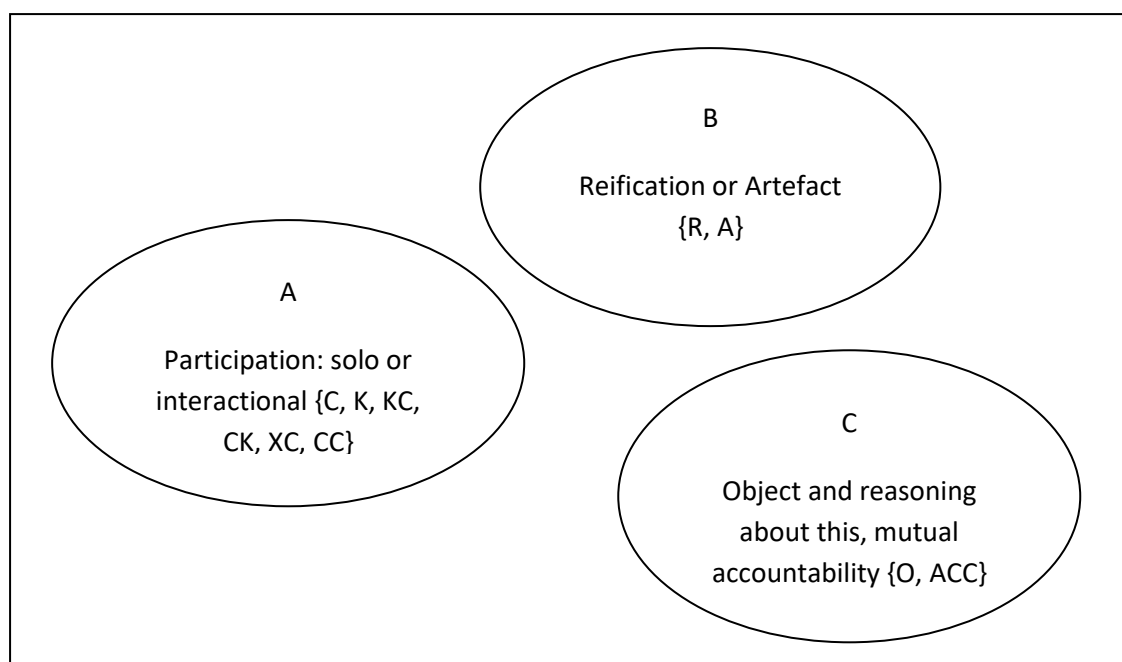
Grouping the codes in this way echoes the dimensions of a community of practice defined by Wenger (1998 – see Figure 4). Group A might be seen as representing forms of mutual engagement, group B types of shared repertoire and group C the nature of the joint enterprise undertaken. The patterns of practice in this study are describing something much smaller scale than a community of practice. My research was not trying to establish whether the classes visited might constitute communities of practice and the extent to which school-based classes do qualify for this description remains a matter of debate within the literature (Haneda, 2006; Ayar et al., 2014). However, the fact that the codes in this study can be categorised in this way suggests this possibility should not be ruled out.

3.7.1.2 Explaining all of what was said

How far were these practice-based representations of context able to explain the totality of what was seen during the observation and spoken about in the interviews? As these practice-based representations were based on coded extracts from the transcripts, one way of checking the extent of their explanatory power was to examine the extent and nature of passages of transcript which had remained uncoded. Could these represent an alternative way of thinking about the context which could not be reconciled with this situated view?

Most uncoded statements originated in the interviews with the key person (19/24). Many were sections where the key person, talked in more general terms about the nature of the observed lesson. For example, Mr Gold the instructor in case 1 talked about the impact when new students joined the class, Mr Hill described how aspects of drawing could be linked to the idea of becoming an artist, and Ms Taylor described what had already been covered in previous English lessons:

> Ms Taylor: Pangea, yeh yeh, and what they had to do then, and I think they did that last Thursday or Friday, when you lead up to a write, they often are exposed to examples (KP3: 44-45)

Such statements were left uncoded because they did not describe the specific lesson that had been observed. However, they were not necessarily inconsistent with taking a situated learning perspective, and might have been understood within such a framework as the way

norms are re-negotiated, the forms of identity linked to practice or typical patterns of participation, for instance.

One uncoded statement referred to the way that pupils were physically grouped in the English lesson in case 3.

> Ms Taylor: (..) which is why for my group, my group's a bit a little bit more able (KP3: 95)

This did draw attention to a weakness in the coding scheme which focused more on the organisation of participation in terms of what people did and said to each other, than how they were grouped into arrangements based on skill-level or other qualities. Although it only overtly affected a single part of the transcript it highlighted an important point, that the situatedness of learning in a classroom is likely to be affected by the way groupings are arranged and staff deployed in relation to these groupings. Situated analyses of learning contexts have paid some attention to the way social grouping are organised (e.g., Martin & Evaldsson, 2012; Evnitskaya & Morton, 2011). However, it can be in a fairly brief way:

> "In this practical lesson, students, working in small groups, had to classify a one-celled organism (Euglena) by carrying out two activities" Evnitskaya & Morton (2011)

There could be value in knowing more, for instance to learn little about the size of class the number of groups, the basis for their formation, how much space there was, the ambient noise levels and so on. Such things could help shed light on the nature of participation.

In Ms Taylor's statement:

> Ms Taylor: (..) which is why for my group, my group's a bit a little bit more able (KP3: 95)

There is reference to a further quality which was difficult to assimilate within the situated coding scheme, the notion of 'ability'. The same reference to individual differences in ability was present at a point in the interview with Mr Hill, when he explained why a student got out of his seat to ask him a question:

> Mr Hill: and >we've got< you know a low ability year 7 class you will get that still (..) (KP2: 171-172)

And also in attributing motives to individual factors rather than practice:

> Mr Hill: Yeh I know with some people (.) I think it's partly that jealousy from the pupil, while he's helping that child he's not helping me and then they'll just want you to do it for them as well, basically (KP2: 197-199)

These were rare examples, but they showed that staff were sometimes using an individual differences perspective to explain what happened in the session. Interestingly each of these occasions seemed to serve a discursive purpose of explaining why certain things, which were perhaps deemed as undesirable, were happening in the room. Here perhaps we see the traces of how a deficit account which frames things in terms of child ability can still surface from time-to-time.

3.7.1.3 Practice: A coherent social object?

In studying the profiles of codes which, for each phase of a session, represented the three data sources of interviews with key person, young person and observation schedule, it was possible to look for similarities in how each practice was described. Seeing consistencies would give confidence that all accounts were making reference to the same underlying social object (Sayer, 1992, 2000). There was evidence of similarities across sources. For example, in the first phase of case 1 all sources made reference to the predominance of the KC code, indicating the emphasis within that practice of instructor initiated interaction with the students, similarly within the second phase there were multi-source references to reifications, which were the rules of handball that structured participation at that point.

Nevertheless, there were also plenty of differences in the way that phases of practice were represented by the three data sources. For example, it was quite common for the key person interviews to be the main source of information about the object or purpose of activity. It was also the observation which provided most information about the nature of participation. These differences seem understandable in terms of role and perspective. Teacher are taking the lead in organising sessions, they are more familiar with the rationale behind what is happening. Also, through repeated experience teacher and students may be more inclined to take routine participation for granted and not see it with the fresh eyes of the observer.

Some differences in profile are worth further comment. In case 1 there was a difference in how the key person and the young person viewed the objectives of the PE lesson, with the young person, Jayden, seeing the objective as more overtly linked to learning about kick boxing. Despite this difference Jayden engaged well in the class. Although his and the PE instructor's objectives appeared to be different, they were able to co-exist. There did not need to be complete agreement over goals for participation in the practice to function (Wenger, 1998, p.78).

In case 3 there was some tension between how Ms Taylor talked about the importance of promoting independence and using minimal scaffolding and the observation which highlighted the use of more directive teaching strategies from the teaching assistant. This difference highlights that accounts of practice may not always be consistent – as Sayer (2000, p.20) puts it:

> "It also needs to be remembered that social reality is only partly text-like. Much of what happens does not depend on or correspond with actor's conceptions"

The teaching assistant may have lacked the skills to scaffold Nazia's learning in the more sensitive way the teacher espoused. In this case the difference between sources does not undermine the idea of an underlying social practice, it just draws attention to some of its complexity.

3.7.1.4 Summary

The application of situated learning theory and the notion of practice was largely able to make sense of the way that participants talked about the sessions and the events that were observed. It was noted that the approach to coding did not pay as much attention as it could have done to the way classes had developed through time or the spatial arrangement of learners and staff. There was also a small amount of data which drew on notions of individual differences which would be more compatible with an acquisition-metaphor of learning (Sfard, 1998). The presence of this alternative conceptualisation will be borne in mind in the next section which considers how strengths were understood using the situated lens.

Critical realists such as Danermark et al. (2002) argue that the validity of theory rests on the extent to which it can generate a deeper explanation of the phenomena which is being examined, in this study: the context within which strengths are present and the relationship of strengths to identity. This will be reflected on as attention moves on to an exploration of these areas in sections 3.7.2 and 3.7.3 below.

3.7.2 Looking at strengths in terms of situated mechanisms and conditions

The study took a critical realist view of situated learning. It conceptualised the underlying structure of activity within classrooms as situated practice with its own patterns of participation and meaning. The critical realist position prompted the question, within such structures what mechanisms/ affordances[3] are present, and what are their powers and liabilities? The powers include the features of the practice which afforded certain events the opportunity to happen. In this research we were especially interested in those features of practice which afforded forms of participation which the young person equated with a particular strength.

In case 1, for example, in the second phase of the PE lesson the students were divided into two teams to play a game of handball. Elements of this form of practice, the collaborative nature of playing in a team and the goal directed nature of the task, were identified as affording Jayden the opportunity to exercise what he saw as the strength of problem solving. Furthermore, the fact that the game was competitive afforded him the opportunity to display 'good sportsmanship' by offering advice to players on the opposing team.

In this study I also asked what are the conditions which might support or impede the triggering of mechanisms which afford strength-related participation? This was explored by asking retroductive questions, for instance, what was necessary for this mechanism to be triggered, rather than remain latent? This drew attention to wider aspects of the practice in each room as well as the potential of other structural factors to be playing a part.

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[3] In this discussion I continue to follow the work of Volkoff & Strong (2013) in treating the critical realist concept of mechanism and the ecological concept of affordance as synonymous.

For instance, this happened in case 2 where after considering the elements of practice which helped to enable Davy to enjoy making things in Art – the structured and well specified tasks, the low key ways in which Mr Hill kept Davy calm – attention was given to structural factors which were likely to be supporting the way pedagogy was organised in this lesson. These factors (e.g., the setting system in the school) were more distal compared to the elements of practice which directly impinged on how Davy approached making things in the Art room (Dalkin et al., 2015).

3.7.2.1 Assessing the value of taking a situated view on strengths

In discussing the role of theory in critical realist research, Danermark et al. (2002) argue that its value should be analysed by the light that it sheds on its subject matter. They suggest a dispassionate assessment of how far particular theories are able to offer explanations. Below I ask such questions to consider how far the situated learning theory applied in this study was able to shed light on the context of strengths. This is not an assessment of the value of situated theory in general in this regard, but of how it was deployed and used within the current study, and in particular how it was deployed within a critical realist frame of reference.

3.7.2.2 Does the theory provide a deeper understanding of the social context of strengths?

Applying a situated learning perspective to understand a strength involved a fuller specification of the strength as an element of situated activity – when we see what Jayden actually means by problem solving, what Nazia means by good writing, and so on.

In doing this, we are looking more closely at what participants' mean by a strength, returning its meaning to them. Moving more towards an understanding of the strength from the child or young person's point of view and, sometimes, away from our own assumptions about what the strength may mean (Wong, 2006; Wilding & Griffey, 2015) – this issue was reflected in my initial difficulty in understanding problem solving in the terms that Jayden used, as I was more familiar with my own understanding of it.

Looking closely at the connection between aspects of practice and participation which the child equates with strengths, allowed an understanding of the immediate social context which permits the strength-based participation to exist and have meaning. This is something which is lacking in context-free versions of strength-based assessment, reviewed in the first phase of this research project.

From a critical realist perspective, it is the pattern of resources within the practice which contribute to the mechanism/ affordance which is actualised when the child takes advantage of their presence to engage in strength-based participation (Strong & Volkoff, 2013). An interesting insight gained from the analysis was that significant affordances were not activated only by the CYP, but also by members of staff. This happened, for example, when Ms Taylor took advantage of the *Recap* phase to ask Nazia questions or when Mr Hill used Davy's work as an exemplar during the *Round the table* phase. What we see in practices is the activation of a number of related affordances, sometimes these may be seen as sequences (Strong et al., 2014), where the activation of one affordance allows the opportunity for another to be activated.

While extending our understanding of how strengths occur the critical realist concept of mechanism can also alert us to ways in which such phenomena may be relatively narrow or limited in scope (the liabilities or the downsides of mechanisms – see Volkoff & Strong, 2013.). Consider the way that Nazia's strength of good speaking is formatted and shaped by the structures of teacher-student exchange during the *Recap* phase of the lesson. She is becoming skilled in answering questions, but this mechanism offers a fairly narrow way of interacting and does not provide opportunities for other forms of 'good speaking'.

3.7.2.3 What can this theorisation explain and not explain?

A critical realist situated view of strengths distinguishes between resources within practice that act as components of mechanisms and wider contextual factors or conditions which influence these mechanisms. The fuller representation of a surrounding practice within the situated account, helped to furnish ideas about the supportive nature of the conditions within which particular mechanisms took place. For example, the situated account of the

Round the table practice in case 2 highlighted the intimacy between the teacher and students during this phase of the lesson, an intimacy which is likely to have made the praising of individual pieces of work more personal and more meaningful.

This may also help to explain why the same aspect of practice may be ineffective in different conditions - for example Davy might not be encouraged by the same valuing or praise within lessons which do not provide the same level of teacher-pupil intimacy – although we cannot know this without further work. In this sense it problematizes the idea of transfer of strength-based participation to another context or whether it might arise within a slightly altered social resource – i.e. would Jayden be able to apply his ideas of good sportsmanship within a maths lesson in which teams of pupils competed to solve a problem?

There are some further limitations. This way of studying a strength in context looks at a particular instantiation of that strength in detail but it cannot explain how far what was observed is characteristic of the strength in question for that particular child. There might actually be many examples of Nazia speaking well in different ways in different contexts around school but we do not know this from a detailed analysis of just one situation.

In addition, although using this situated framework helps to examine the meaning and contextualisation of what someone (the child) calls a strength it does not have anything to say about relative merit of this 'strength' (an issue arose in phase 1 also) from another's perspective. As an educational psychologist I may question the nature of what Nazia calls 'good writing' and ask how far what she is doing is sufficiently independent.

A third point drawing from the debate about participatory versus acquisition-based metaphors of learning (Sfard, 1998) is that a participatory approach, such as the situated one used in this study, neglects to tell us about individual level factors. For example, we don't know about the capacity of the actors to act in different ways – e.g., could Nazia have taken a more independent stance to her written work?

Expanding on this line of critique it could be argued that the situated model does not explain why a particular child sees the possibility of an affordance in a particular practice – Davy found sitting near his friend helped him to feel safe but another child might not see the same affordance in that element of practice. However, it may be possible to move

towards some synthesis of situated and individualised thinking which allow an explanation
to be developed. The connection between individual factors which predispose some to see
a mechanism but not others is touched on in the literature on affordance. Thus, Volkoff &
Strong (2013), in talking about the affordance for sitting provided by a log, explain:

> "For example, a fallen log affords a person the opportunity of sitting. This original
> definition is somewhat ambiguous about whether an affordance is a property of an
> object or of the relationship between an object and an actor. After some debate, the
> consensus emerged among ecological psychologists that an affordance is a property
> of the relationship, and was defined as an opportunity for action (Hutchby 2001;
> Stoffregen 2003). Thus an affordance for sitting related to a log and the actors who
> encounter it exists for most people, but not a horse or an infant." (Volkoff & Strong,
> 2013, p.822)

Volkoff & Strong (2013) are referring to the physical characteristics of horses and infants
which exclude them from accessing the affordances for sitting provided by a log. In the case
of Davy, it seemed to be more to do with his personal psychological characteristics (a
predisposition towards anxiety) which raised the salience of being seated close to his friend
– provided by the seating plan mechanism.

Greeno & Gresalfi (2008) accommodate such individual factors such as the dispositions and
abilities, or personal histories within their use of the affordance concept:

> "An affordance for an individual in an activity system includes the resources and
> practices of the system, that individual's access to those resources and practices, and
> the dispositions and abilities of the individual to participate in a way that supports
> her or his activity and learning in some way (Norman 1988)." (p.172)

> "affordances for action are relational; students' histories of participation shape their
> attunement to affordances in a setting and in a task" (p.178)

Thus, it seems legitimate to consider the way in which such individual dispositions or
personal histories in children and young people prompt them to be more aware of particular
affordances/ mechanisms within practices.

While the situated approach used in this study may be strengthened by allowing some
consideration of individual factors, perhaps it could also be criticised for not paying
sufficient heed to the relevance of broader discourse or ideational factors which might draw
participants towards certain forms of participation. For example, in case 1, the notion that
the PE lesson could be leading towards the desired end of becoming a kick boxer seems to

have carried appeal for Jayden and may have activated wider ideas about the martial arts, which he found attractive. Such broader constellations of meaning that circulate within a culture have been conceptualised by theoretical structures such as Figured Worlds (Holland et al., 1998). Nevertheless, such issues might be addressed within a broader view of situated learning. For example, Wenger (1998), talks about the way in which participation can go beyond the experience of engagement in practice and include the imagination and in particular alignment, 'coordinating our energy and activity in order to fit within broader structures and contribute to broader enterprises' (ibid., p.174). However, within the current study this was not explored.

3.7.2.4 Summary

In this section there has been a discussion of the value of conceptualising the context of strengths in terms of a situated model of practice understood within a critical realist framework. This way of representing what is happening allows children and young people's strengths to be understood as the actualisation of mechanisms or affordances that are contained with the structure of practice. It draws attention to the importance of the nature of practices and their mechanisms, but also to the actors whether they be staff or CYP, who actualise specific mechanisms. While this perspective helps to illuminate the nature of a context it does have some limitations in what it can and cannot explain. For example, importing some elements of individual differences helps to explain why some affordances are salient to some children and not others.

3.7.3 Strength-based participation and identity

This research study was interested in going beyond a situated analysis of strengths and considering the relationship between strength-based participation and a child's identity within that practice. A situated view of identity was taken which sees it as a phenomenon which emerges out of the way participants are positioned and position themselves within practice (Hand & Gresalfi, 2015; Nasir & Hand, 2008; Lave & Wenger, 1991). In discussing the first phase of the research project it was suggested that one of the virtues of strength-based assessment might lie in the discovery of contexts in which children, who are at risk of being seen negatively, inhabit more positive forms of identity. More specifically, how would phenomena the child viewed as strengths impinge on the nature of their identity within a context where those strengths were present?

A situated view of identity sees it as something which emerges *in time* as learners are exposed to involvement in practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Nasir & Cooks, 2009). This is reflected in the title of the book by Lave & Wenger (1991) 'legitimate peripheral participation' which defines a social process whereby learners begin their experience on the fringes of a community of practice and through involvement in its activity gradually assume more central roles in its functioning. This shift in participation having concomitant influences on the participant's identity within the practice. Such longitudinal changes were referred to by Wenger (1998) as trajectories of participation.

The notion of a trajectory of participation was reflected in the data in this study by Jayden and Davy as they spoke about their initial state on entry being different to later on:

Jayden: (..) when I first started the lesson I was I was actually nervous I didn't didn't I didn't know the people that were doing it (..) (YP1: 219-221)

Davy: I wouldn't have been as much confident (YP2:163)

There was some evidence of in-bound trajectories for Davy and Nazia, but in the case of Jayden and of Nazia there was also evidence that a consistent in bound trajectory was not continuously attained. Here is Nazia's teacher talking about this issue:

Ms Taylor: (..) she can vacillate back and forth between, you know, someone who might be a little more reticent and hold back and want that support to

someone who's raising her hand and telling others what to do." (KP3: 174-176)

3.7.3.1 How identities were described

When talking about themselves within the particular lesson context under study, each of the three young people described themselves in positive terms.

Jayden: (..) I would describe myself as (..) relatable to the lesson and I would describe myself as (.) I am just as good as everyone else (.) I'm not the only one out (.) like I ain't left out when I'm doing the lesson (YP1: 256-28)

Davy describes himself in the Art lesson using he words, 'focused' and 'confident'. His teacher, Mr Hill, emphasised Davy as someone who was 'involved' in the lesson:

Mr Hill: He gets involved, he's like, he's vocal, he asks questions (.) he wants to do well (..) (KP2: 307-308)

Nazia and her teacher, Ms Taylor, both emphasised Nazia's ability to contribute within the English lesson as a key aspect of her identity in that class. When talking about matters of the young person's identity it seemed that all participants tended to talk in general terms that were to do with engagement and inclusion in the lesson. It was success in this general task which was being celebrated in the positive labels of 'contributor', 'relatable to the lesson' and 'involved'. At this point in the interviews there was less or no reference to the initial strengths which had been the reason for looking more closely at each context in the first place.

The individual strengths seemed to serve as smaller or foundational units which allowed each child to engage successfully in tasks at specific points in the class practices: Jayden's problem solving gave him an advantage at the time his class engaged in handball, Davy's sense of security at being seated near a friend helped him to feel safe in the Art lesson, Nazia's good writing was a reflection of her accurately following required processes of drafting in the *Independent writing* part of the English lesson.

Sometimes, it was the child's participation within the more general patterns of each lesson which was represented in the way their identity was talked about, particularly by the staff.

For example, in his initial remarks about Jayden, the PE instructor Mr Gold talked about Jayden as being 'smart' and 'responsive', later he said:

> Mr Gold: (..) he listens well (.) and if you ask anything of the class and they struggle I look to him because nine times out of ten he's got the answer. (KP1: 231-232)

Jayden's positive attributes are related to his contribution within question-answer structure which was a common feature of the broader practice described in the situated accounts. Davy's teacher picks up on a similar attribute when he says:

> Int: (..) what sort of involvement does he have?
>
> Mr Hill: err, he's vocal, wants to answer questions (..) (KP2: 286-287)

Similarly, Nazia refers to herself in the following way:

> Nazia: (..) I'm always putting my hand up (YP3: 153)

She describes herself as playing a competent role within the question-answer format which formed the *Recap* phase of the lesson (situated account phase 1)

The initiate-response-evaluate pattern of teacher-pupil dialogue is a common form of communication structure found in classroom (Cazden, 1988). More broadly such patterns in classroom interactional structure have been referred to as forms of participant structure (Philips, 1972; Tabak & Baumgartner, 2004). Philips (1972) coined the term participant structure in research about the practice of teachers in north American classrooms. She described four common participant structures. The first was described like this:

> "In the first type of participant structure the teacher interacts with all the students. She may address all of them, or a single student in the presence of the rest of the students. The students may respond as a group or chorus in unison, or individually in the presence of their peers. And finally, student verbal performance may be either voluntary, as when the teacher asks who knows the answer to her question, or compulsory, as when the teacher asks a particular student to answer, whether his hand his raised or not. And always it is the teacher who determines whether she talks to one or to all, receives responses individually or in chorus, and voluntarily or without choice." (Philips, 1972, p.377)

Researchers operating with the situated learning paradigm have studied the educational implications of different forms of participant structure (DiGiacomo & Gutierrez, 2016; Greeno & Gresalfi, 2008 Tabak & Baumgartner, 2004). Of interest for this study is the view

that the slot that one occupies within a participant structure can, over time, have implications for how you see yourself and others see you within a practice. As Greeno & Gresalfi (2008) put it:

> "(..) we operationalise participatory identity by considering the emerging patterns in opportunities that an individual takes up in the context of particular activity systems and the opportunities that are created in that system." (Greeno and Gresalfi, 2008, p.184)

Viewed from a critical realist perspective, participant structure may be seen as a model of the real or transitive version of the social context. The qualities of participant structure include mechanisms which afford certain participant identities. Such mechanisms are largely a result of the options for roles that can be taken up (or rejected) within particular structures.

It could be argued that participant structure offers a more parsimonious theoretical model of social context and its relationship to identity than the situated accounts of practice developed in this study – which contain narrative accounts of practice based on an assortment of concepts from the situated learning literature. Nevertheless, as we have seen, these situated accounts include more elaborated representations of the practice context, which can highlight features significant in the realisation of strengths.

Having said this, in terms of the current study, it is participatory identity viewed in the general terms of the participant structures present in the focal classrooms which is being primarily referenced, rather than more specific identities linked to the actualisation of particular strengths. This might be seen as a slightly missed opportunity, it could be quite a powerful form of self-validation to be recognised in terms of one's own strengths.

3.7.4 Some limitations

So what of the potential for using this kind of research as an assessment tool to learn about the contexts in which children and young people have access to strengths? The potential of this form of assessment (and its potential link to forms of intervention needs to be tempered by an awareness of its limitations.

Firstly, this research has been carried out with three young people working in particular school contexts. A situated analysis of the social contexts within which these young people experience strengths may have illuminated our understanding in these cases but there is a need for it to be tried in a greater number before confidence in it can be assured. In addition, the contexts that have been studied have all been school-based ones and it remains unclear whether a similar procedure would work well in other settings, such as the family or local community.

The more detailed enquiry into a particular context could be critiqued for offering only a snapshot of that context on one occasion, although interviews tried to remedy this by asking participants about the history of participation. A further limitation in focusing on one context was alluded to earlier, where it was pointed out that this does not inform us about the nature of a strength and its actualisation in other social contexts. For instance, it could be that there are other examples of written work that Nazia would describe as examples of good writing and these may be facilitated by other forms of resources – for example, through the use of computer-based approaches.

From an EP practice point of view, how far could this kind of detailed examination of strength-based context be justified when there are urgent problems to solve, or when it does not offer sustenance to the deficit-orientated means by which children and young people are deemed to qualify for levels of statutory support. This tension was side-stepped in the study because it was conducted outside of the commissioned EP work. However, I feel that on balance, things were learnt within this work which would help in developing a fuller understanding of the individual young people and in creating ideas for supporting them at school.

3.7.5 Implications for EP practice

Turning now to the implications of this research for EP practice, where does this study take us? In this section I would like to draw attention to three answers to this question.

Firstly, and most simply, it seems that this form of assessment was successful in telling staff things about the young people in their class that they did not already know, in particular

what those young people viewed as strengths within those classrooms. This was evident within the key person interviews when staff reported being pleasantly surprised by what young people had said.

> Int: the other one was that he felt it was an example of a lesson where the teacher believed he could do well
>
> Mr Hill: Ah that's nice (KP2: 212-213)

By having a clearer feedback on what is working for a child, staff can have greater confidence in pursuing certain ways of working. This is spelt out in quite a lot of detail by specifying it in critical realist terms of mechanisms and conditions.

Secondly, looking more closely at the contexts within which children and young people were reporting the presence of strengths altered my own professional understanding of them as individuals. For example, prior to the research taking place I had developed a view of Davy as a child who exhibited a fair degree of anxiety. My assumption would have been that he would respond best in a nurturing and gentle social environment where there were fewer demands. However, what he showed me was a lesson which was highly structured and teacher-directed. I began to re-construe how this might be working for him, providing him with the security of a space where there was less fear of bullying from other children or worries about not understanding the task, a place where it would be possible for him to take up the opportunities afforded by strength-based mechanisms.

Thirdly, this kind of assessment suggests avenues that could be followed to develop follow-up interventions, either in relation to the observed context or in contexts elsewhere in the child's life.

In terms of the focal contexts, the representations of practices, conditions and mechanisms for the activation of strengths, trajectories of participation and identity did not represent end points.

Adjustments could be made to the nature of the practice, conditions or strategies which supported the actualisation of strengths. For example in the case of Nazia, it seemed that there probably were opportunities to develop less directive ways of supporting her to accomplish more independent written work; and in the case of all three children, but

especially Jayden and Nazia, there was scope for developing a greater amount of practice which led to strength-related student-student interaction. In Jayden's case the key interpersonal strength of problem solving and good sportsmanship, only had the opportunity to be exercised in a brief window within the lesson when the pupils played handball together – perhaps 10 minutes within a 70 minute session. This seemed a shame given that social and emotional development was one of his key goals.

In both the case of Jayden and of Nazia, there were questions about the stability of the young person's inbound trajectory of participation. This raises questions about how far this trajectory might be supported and made more stable. After all, in the case of Jayden, it was my intervention with his mother which had led to him actually having the right PE on the day I observed. Solution-focused theorists have emphasised the importance of small changes for the better (De Shazer, 1985, 1988). Creating a sustained and successful inbound trajectory could be the small improvement in a child's experience of school that would be felt elsewhere.

Then there is the question of how far ideas about the way that strengths are actualised in one context could be applied elsewhere. This is, of course, is a question about generalisation or transfer and a critical realist view of this might be helpful. From this perspective we may be more confident that mechanisms will be activated if the conditions around them are similar to the ones in which we have already seen success (Pawson & Tilley, 1997). This is in line with the views on transfer proposed from a situative positon by by Greeno, Smith & Moore (1993) who emphasised the importance of constraints and affordances in the new context being similar in nature to the ones in the original context. In planning for this type of transfer it could be very helpful to have the presence of a professional who is able to enter both contexts and mediate the dialogue between them – such a brokering role (Wenger, 1998) may be one to which the educational psychologist is especially well suited.

The transfer of ideas about what is working in one context for one child may also be a transfer which affects a wider number of children. If, for example, certain practices seem to work well for one child they may work well for others with similar needs. Viewed in this light, the practice of transfer becomes a systematic form of a school improvement.

3.7.6 Future research directions

There is much for future research to explore! Some of these future topics are suggested by the limitations section above, for example; how would the approach work with other children in other settings, such as the family context? The logical next step though, is to investigate how feasible it would be to build an intervention around the information gained from a contextualised strength-based assessment. What kind of process would be necessary in order to plan such an intervention and could the educational psychologist act as broker within it?

Chapter 4

Phase 3: Sharing the situated analysis with school staff

4.1 Introduction

Phase 3 was the final phase of my research project and in this introduction I describe some of the thinking behind how I shaped it and what I hoped to achieve. My original plan had been to move towards the development of a strength-based intervention based on the assessment I had carried out in phase 2. What I had not envisaged was the time and effort it would take to complete, analyse and write about the assessment stage. By the time I was ready to pursue an intervention, too much time had passed in the case study sites (approximately one year) for it to naturally flow from my analysis. Nevertheless, I was still interested to see how the participants would view the results of my work. For example, would they react positively or might they resist the strength-based formulation and offer more negative views of the young person concerned? This latter reaction was one I had experienced (or fearer) in some of the cases in phase 1 of the study.

Unfortunately, it seemed problematic to interview the students again, who by now had moved on to new year groups, or in one case a new school. I therefore decided that in this phase of the research I would only work with adult participants from the case study sites. This, in any case, would mirror the pattern of much school-based consultative work by educational psychologists in which the final analysis of a situation and planning for future interventions is carried out with the psychologist and the staff who will be responsible for implementing interventions (Wagner, 2000). In addition to checking how staff viewed my analysis the return visit could help to link and integrate some threads from earlier phases of the work, in particular to look again at how I might use a 'zooming out' approach (first discussed in phase 1) to help understand the significance of the observed or focal contexts within the broader landscape of the young person's life. I would also talk with participants about the potential intervention implications that might have stemmed from the contextualised strength-based work I had done. Below, I present an introduction to phase 3 in which I expand on my thinking relating to these three aspirations. I conclude by presenting the three research aims which I developed for this phase of the study.

4.2 Sharing theory with practitioners

During phase 2 of this project the validity of the research was scrutinised from the perspective of a critical realist ontology and epistemology. Efforts were made to ensure that the way I represented practices in the three classrooms took account of the participants' views. This was done by interviewing participants and checking my emerging thoughts about the practices I had seen soon after I had carried out the observations. I also explicitly drew on participant accounts to build models of the affordances for strengths in each of the contexts. I then subjected the final representation of practices and affordances to questioning intended to check its theoretical validity.

Despite these checks, I still thought it was important to take my final representations of practices and affordances back to participants to see what they made of them. Although the project had been a piece of academic research, where I had made a sustained attempt to research and theorise the nature of the contexts in which young people demonstrate strengths, it had also been a piece of action research (McNiff, 2013) where I had been thinking through and checking the feasibility of doing this kind of work within my professional role as an educational psychologist. From that latter point of view particularly, it was important for me to see how far practitioners would be able to relate to the situated models I had developed - as within a professional practice scenario I would be aspiring to use this way of framing what was happening in order to influence educational practice.

Within research methods literature, taking analysed findings of research back to participants is seen as a form of validation. Qualitative research is often built on data draw from participant interviews. It is common within this tradition to take research data, be it transcripts or analysed/ interpreted representations of what has been said, back to participants to get their judgement on its accuracy or fidelity. This process is known as member checking, respondent validation or participant validation (Birt et al., 2016).

Birt et al. (2016) argue that member checking can be used both for research which takes a constructivist stance and for research which takes a more objectivist ontological position.

Generally speaking, member checking is seen as a way to ensure that participants' perspectives and meanings have been accurately represented.

Nevertheless, member checking has its critics. Morse (2015) argues that where analysed or interpreted representations of data are taken back to participants the researcher is placed in a difficult position. If participants disagree with the interpretation that has been made then what can be done? Morse suggests that it would be incorrect at that point to delete parts of the analysis which a participant did not like because the researcher should have a more comprehensive view, which could be based on data from a number of participants or through engagement with theory and research.

This position is contested by Birt et al. (2016) who argue that even where data has been analysed and interpretations have been developed from several sources, if the final representations are to have significance for the participants from which the data was drawn, then they should be able to recognise their own experiences in these results.

Within their paper, Birt et al (2016) declare themselves as 'subtle realists' (Blaikie, 2007). In common with critical realism this position sees social phenomena as having an existence independent of the individual. It is via people's representation of social phenomena that the researcher begins to get some idea of their nature. From this standpoint member checking is aiming to achieve some level of triangulation between sources of information to arrive at a better model of the research object.

Andrew Sayer (1992), the critical realist philosopher, offers a view about knowledge which is also relevant here. He argues that traditionally social science has taken a contemplative view of knowledge, seeing it as language-based and propositional, rather than of a practical nature. He sees much knowledge tied up with practical activity in specific contexts (know-how). Furthermore, he describes how social objects that become the focus of research, be they communities of people working in classrooms, factories or elsewhere, have their own understanding and knowledge of their practices. This is distinct from the investigators' conception of how such social objects may be working. He argues there is a dialogical relationship between subject (researcher) and object (researched) in which each community's knowledge and understanding can be influenced by contact with the research process (ibid, p.29). When Sayer talks about 'the double hermeneutic' he sees it as "the

need for the interpenetration of the frames of reference of observer and observed, for mediation of their respective understandings" (p.49)

This perspective could be seen as broadening the idea behind member checking and legitimising a dialogue between the researcher and the researched to develop new representations of social objects, which continues to integrate the practical know how of the practitioners into the more contemplative propositional nature of academic knowledge.

Realistic Evaluation (Pawson & Tilley, 1997) provides a good example of how a critical realist approach to research can involve this kind of process. Pawson & Tilley (1997) describe the conduct of a realist interview (p.164) which they divide into two stages: the teacher-learner function and the conceptual refinement process. During the teacher-learner stage the researcher explains their realist theorisation of the social object in terms of contexts, mechanisms and outcomes, while the participant listens. Then during the conceptual refinement stage the participant is invited to share their own thinking in relation to the model that has been just presented. With their intimate knowledge of the social object under study participants are expected to be able to offer potential adjustments to the way the researcher has theorised it. The result should be a more robust model of the social object.

4.3 Zooming out

Phase 2 research involved focusing in and studying one particular context which a young person associated with strengths on one particular occasion. Although participants were asked questions about the typicality of what was observed and how the child or young person's participation had developed over time, there was no attempt to gain a view of how this context related to others in the CYP's life. Perhaps the observed context was very similar to other contexts that the young person visited during the day, or perhaps it would be deemed to have been quite different.

This issue, of the relationship between contexts, was raised at the end of the phase 1 research where questions were asked about the significance of a single strength-based context in the life of a young person who may move between many contexts within a single

day. During the phase 1 discussion it was suggested that 'zooming out' or moving the analytical focus outwards (see section 2.7.2) could help interpret the significance of a particular context. With the benefit of this interpretative move it may become possible to gain more insight into the meaning of a particular context for the young person. Zooming out could also provide clues about the extent to which the practices that were observed in the focal context may or may not be present elsewhere – which could be a way of sensitising participants to the potential for intervention in other parts of the child's life.

The relationship between a young person's participation in classroom activity and the practices on offer there has been the subject of two pieces of qualitative research involving Victoria Hand (Associate Professor, University of Colorado) - who employs a situative lens in her work. These studies draw attention to some of the ways in which practices may vary across learning contexts and the implications this can have for learners and are worth looking at in more detail.

Nasir & Hand (2008) looked at the opportunities for engagement provided by two contexts which two male students, Kevin and Vaughn encountered in their time at high school. The purpose of the study was to attempt to conceptualise how the contexts, a basketball club and a maths class differed in this regard. Both boys were able to participate very successfully in the basketball club training sessions. The analysis by Nasir & Hand highlighted how the practices in the basketball sessions offered the boys three important features: (i) a clear sense of the meaning of what they were learning; (ii) the chance to develop integral roles within the team; and (iii) opportunities for self-expression. In summary, both students in their own ways, were able to participate fully in these sessions.

However, the maths class was rather different. Lessons involved listening to the teacher's explanations or responding to her questions within the traditional initiation-response-evaluation (IRE) formats. Access to the learning domain of maths was less clear and there was less opportunity to take on important roles in the functioning of the lesson beyond passively answering questions. The authors argue that these practices created a space in which it was easy for students to remain quite marginal (p.168). Vaughn in particular found

it hard to offer the right answer during episodes of IRE[4], but the structure of participation did not offer him other ways of contributing to the lesson. His attention would drift and the teacher perceived him as "having a lot of trouble focusing" (p.170).

Here zooming out to see how the boys function within two contexts allowed Nasir & Hand to show links between their participation and the nature of the practices they found themselves within.

Within the second paper (Hand & Gresalfi, 2015) Victoria Hand describes research she carried out following two students between lessons in an American high school. She studied how far different lessons afforded the opportunity for five different types of participation: (i) reasoning with procedures, concepts and definitions; (ii) following directions; (iii) asking questions about lesson content; (iv) working accurately; and (v) participating actively. Hand also checked the extent to which students in the class were held accountable for demonstrating each of these forms of participation. She found dramatic differences in how students (Lucia (female) and Santiago (male)) participated in different lessons. They both (particularly Lucia) participated relatively well in the inquiry-based maths lesson which promoted active learning and held students accountable for engaging in this way. However, elsewhere the opportunities for active participation were less prevalent and the students' engagement in classes declined, to the extent that they might be seen as quite off-task and disruptive in some lessons. For example, in science classes which offered weak opportunities for some of Hand's affordances, Lucia's attention drifted off and she could be seen writing notes to her friends or even skipping class. Similarly, Santiago in his Science lesson was often told off by the teacher for not paying attention and would engage in disruptive behaviour making jokes. This observational research supported Hand's view that "individuals can appear dramatically different in different places" (p.194) and a lot of this seemed to be related to the affordances on offer in different spaces. Of particular note from this research was the finding that providing affordances for active learning alone was not enough, teaching staff also needed to 'hold students accountable' for engaging in this manner. So, although Santiago's English teacher did provide opportunities for open ended

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[4] IRE stands for initiate-response-evaluate, a common pattern of interaction found in classrooms (Mehan, 1979).

project work, the structures for accountability in the class were generally weak, and Hand argues this contributed to his lack of motivation in the lesson.

These studies might be critiqued for offering a rather unsympathetic image of the teaching staff and the practices within classes in which focus students failed to engage. Could the lack of affordances for active learning in these spaces have been influenced by broader conditions affecting those departments: a rigid curriculum, poorly staffed teams or lack of training, for example. Ironically these contextual factors, which might affect the engagement of staff, were not examined by Hand. Nevertheless, as an educational psychologist who is often tasked with producing a definitive account of a child's functioning, this research is a salutary reminder of the role that context plays. It also provides illustration of the value of zooming out to get a fuller appreciation of the landscape of practices which a child encounters in a day. Zooming out may help to identify ways in which change could be introduced. Could some elements of the practices available in Kevin and Vaughn's basketball practices be transferred to their maths class? How might some of Santiago's positive participation in his English class be developed?

In terms of my project, zooming out may help prepare the ground for thinking about how to move from strength-based assessment to intervention. It could provide a more comprehensive appreciation of the young person's life at school (and possibly outside of school) which would be helpful in thinking about where best to site intervention and what form this might take.

4.4   Moving from assessment to intervention

As an educational psychologist there is an imperative on me to go beyond an assessment of a child or young person's situation and to think about changes or interventions that might flow from it. Professional educational psychology practice is structured around the assessment – intervention sequence, whether this is manifest through forms of collaborative work with others in schools, which through assessment work towards the development of a plan of action to address a problem or concern (Annan et al., 2013), or simply through the structure evident within the classical statutory psychological advice in

which assessment results are followed by sections detailing the kind of provisions which are likely to help a child make educational progress (BPS, 2015).

Within the scope of this research project it has not been possible to investigate how a contextualised strength-based assessment might flow into a plan for change or intervention. However, towards the end of phase 2 (Section 3.7.5 Implications for EP Practice) I was able to reflect on some of the interventions that might have followed the strength-based assessment in each of the three cases. I highlighted three possibilities:

a. Adjustments to practice in the focus context to increase the potential for activation of key strengths.
b. Intervention to support a child or young person to become more consistently and more deeply involved in the activities within the context – i.e. to support an inbound trajectory (Wenger, 1998).
c. Applying strength related practice from one context to another.

In this concluding phase, in addition to gaining some feedback on the findings of the contextualised strength-based assessment from participants, I aimed to begin to explore with them how they might see the implications of this work and its potential links to change or intervention.

In this section I begin to sketch out how such change or intervention might be conceptualised from a situated or situative perspective and in a way which is consistent with the critical realist philosophy taken within this project. I begin by considering the notion of brokering as introduced in Wenger (1998) as a potential candidate for showing how change can occur in practices.

4.4.1 Brokering

Wenger (1998) describes brokering as the movement of ideas from one community of practice to another. For Wenger the process of brokering requires the presence of a certain kind of participant – a broker. This is somebody who is associated with two different communities of practice and has the legitimacy to bring ideas from one to the other.

It might be argued that educational psychologists occupy a broker role as they engage in collaborative consultation work with teaching staff (BPS, 2015; Wagner, 2000), helping to apply elements of psychology to the practice of teaching staff within a school or classroom community of practice. For example, in the first two change scenarios above the psychologist would be using ideas from situated strength-based assessment to: (a) help increase the presence of a particular affordance; or (b) support the inbound trajectory of a student. The third change scenario (c) would involve introducing affordances found useful in a separate community of practice. This could represent a more complex form of brokering between the educational psychologist and different communities of practice within the same school.

The concept of brokering has received attention in the field of education, where there has been interest in how to facilitate the communication of ideas between academic and practitioner communities (Hartmann & Decristan, 2018; Goos & Bennison, 2018; Kubiak et al., 2015) as well as between different communities within the education and school system (e.g., Corbin et al., 2003; others) and between school and home communities (Perry, 2014).

Kubiak et al. (2015) make the point that introducing ideas from elsewhere can have negative effects on participants – it can make them feel inadequate or push them towards disengaging (p.81). They ask the question, what can brokers do to avoid this and promote the development of knowledgeability (a term used by Wenger to denote the capacity to connect with a large number of practices). In subsequent case studies they highlight how the importance of the broker building a trusting relationship with participants and having credibility and experience in the areas of work that are to be discussed.

Corbin et al. (2003) applied the notion of brokering to the work of numeracy coordinators in schools during implementation of the National Numeracy Strategy. They found that the concept had some advantages, for instance emphasising the importance of negotiation of meaning over the more one-way notion of 'cascading' knowledge. They also had reservations about the extent to which Wenger's concept could cope with some of the specific issues affecting the work of numeracy coordinators. For example, questioning how far it could account for larger scale issues of power that were operating in schools (e.g., the audit culture) which compromised the idea of negotiation.

4.4.2 Transfer of affordances

It is possible to use other ideas from the literature on situated learning to consider how to generalise strength-based participation from one context to another. This could be helpful in the case of change scenario (c) above.

Greeno et al. (1993) wrote an important text about the meaning of transfer in situated learning which has been widely cited since its publication and continues to be referred to in more recent sources (e.g., Veillard, 2012; Larsen-Freeman, 2013). Greeno et al. (1993) explain that from a situated point of view, generalisation is about knowing how far forms of participation in one social context might be possible in a second. A key issue is the nature of the two contexts.

As in my own study, Greeno et al. (ibid.) use the concept of affordance to characterise what it is about particular contexts which allow certain activities to happen. In terms of transfer they make two related points. The first is that for an activity to be performed in two contexts, both must contain the affordances necessary for it to happen. And secondly, for a learner to transfer (or generalise) their participation from the first to the second context, they must be able to recognise the relevant affordances in the second situation.

Greeno at al. (ibid) make the point that the number of situations which provide affordances for a specific activity is socially constructed and a result of the distribution of social practices. This is particularly relevant within a school where the same features (e.g., a teacher modelling a skill) may or may not occur in different classrooms. A further point is that where instruction is present it is possible for it to prepare learners for transfer by attuning them to key affordances, which they can expect to find in different contexts, and which they can activate through specific forms of participation. In terms of contextualised strength-based intervention, there is a message here about the care needed in adapting successive contexts in ways which preserve essential features and make them recognisable to the learner.

Critical realism has some further caveats to add about the possibility of transfer. In its view on causation, critical realism sees the powers of objects (including social objects such as the

practices within classrooms) to be related to their possession of mechanisms (affordances) which can produce effects. It is the nature or constitution of the object which determines whether it has certain causal powers (Sayer, 1992).

> "The particular ways-of-acting or mechanisms exist necessarily in virtue of their object's nature. The nature or constitution of an object and its causal powers are internally or necessarily related: a plane can fly by virtue of its aerodynamic form, engines, etc.; gunpowder can explode by virtue of its unstable chemical structure (..)" (Sayer, 1992, p.105)

It may be difficult to adapt one social object say a Maths lesson, to allow affordances found in a basketball practice because the internal constitution of the two social objects may be very different. In addition, within the critical realist account, whether mechanisms/ affordances are activated also depends on external conditions (ibid., p.107) that pertain around the social object, this puts another potential limit on transfer as the conditions around one context may differ in a way which affects the activation of an affordance (e.g., the time of day might affect the likelihood of a child engaging with practice elements). That is not to say that transfer is always unlikely but that one should take into account some of these issues to make it more likely to succeed.

The research reported in this thesis did not have the scope to design and explore the nature of interventions. However, in this final phase of the project there was an opportunity to raise this issue with participants from the three phase 2 case studies. Could they see ways in which this kind of situated assessment might lead to change, generalisation or transfer?

4.5 Research aims

In this coda to the research project. I have discussed three areas that I decided to explore in phase 3 of the study and made links to ideas from literature in situated learning and critical realism which informed my thinking. The plan was to return to the case study research sites, share my phase 2 analysis with participants by carrying out a realist interview (Pawson & Tilley, 1997) and possibly revise the hypotheses I had built about the nature of the context which supported the identified strengths. To use this opportunity to get a better view of how the focal context fitted into each young person's life and to begin to discuss how this

kind of work might lead to change or intervention. Below I have summarised this intent in three main aims:

Aim 1: To see how participants reacted to the representation I had built up of the context in which they worked;

Aim 2: To explore the meaning that participants attribute to the strength-based context in relation to wider contexts in the child's life;

Aim 3: To consider the kind of ideas for action that might stem from a contextualised strength-based assessment analysis.

These aims are further specified and developed into a research plan in the methodology section which follows.

4.6 Methodology

4.6.1 Research aims and research questions

The three research aims were developed into more specific research questions. The first aim:

 Aim 1: To see how participants reacted to the representation I had built of the context in which they worked;

was refined to focus on agreement:

(RQ1) Does the key person recognise/ accept the representation of practice and affordances which has been created by my analysis?

Aim 2: To explore the meaning that participants attribute to the strength-based context in relation to wider contexts in the child's life;

As a research question this became:

(RQ2) How do participants relate the strength-based context to other contexts in the child's life (in space and time)?

Aim 3: To consider the kind of ideas for action that might stem from a contextualised strength-based assessment analysis.

This became the research question:

(RQ3) What actions/ interventions do participants think might stem from this analysis?

(RQ3) What actions/ interventions might stem from this analysis?

4.6.2 Philosophical stance

The philosophical stance of the research in phase 3 continues to be that of critical realism, which was formulated within the methodology sections of phase 1 and 2. The act of taking research findings back to participants to gain their views on them, is viewed from a critical realist position, in which the intention is to work towards a more accurate form of

representation – utilising the approach that Pawson & Tilley (1997) have called a 'realist interview'.

A critical realist stance on causation (Sayer, 1992) is also used to further interrogate the possibilities for transfer or generalisation from context to context.

4.6.3 Action research methodology

From the point of view of the action research orientation of this project, phase 3 may be understood as a further cycle of plan-do –review. In this phase I planned how to share the results of my research with participants, carried this out and then analysed and reviewed what had been gained from the process.

As in phase 2 the action I carried out is not part of my everyday practice as an educational psychologist. It was research activity which I arranged to take place in addition to the regular educational psychology work that I carried out in the case study schools. From this point of view the process continued to deviate from the 'pure' form of action research which focuses on the development of real daily work practice (Ebbutt, 1985; Hopkins, 2014). Having said that, the research interviews (described below) were organised in a way which was consistent with the form of much educational psychology consultative work in schools (Wagner, 2000). The interviews begin with a discussion about the meaning of assessment information and then proceeded to consider the potential sites of and form that intervention might take.

The interview might then be thought of as a first approximation to how a contextualised strength-based consultation could happen. And part of the review of the research process will entail some reflection on its success in this light. Therefore, the process is nearer to educational psychology practice than might first be envisaged, it is almost a rehearsal of how certain elements of practice might work.

4.6.4 Reflexivity

In this phase of the research I saw the issue of reflexivity in similar terms to how I had seen it in phase 2 (see section 3.5.5). To supplement this, following Sayer (1992) this phase of the research was particularly interested in openly working with the double hermeneutic of researcher's and participants' understanding of the research object, so it might be argued there was less danger of 'hidden' subjectivities influencing the research process. Within the interviews I requested comments from others and there were times when I, as the researcher, made overt suggestions about the nature of the research object and invited counter arguments or agreement. At the same time I needed to avoid dominating the discussion.

There remained my status as educational psychologist within the case study schools and the potential for this to result in participants wishing to answer in ways which supported my work. This is hard to control or detect, but during the analytic process I tried to be attentive to any passages which seemed to reflect possible inter-professional dynamics.

4.6.5 Ethical issues

The ethics application for this phase of the project was presented as an amendment to the ethics application for phase 2 (Appendix A11). Initially I did hope to re-interview the CYP, as well as staff, participants so the amendment included reference to both groups. The main ethical issue was to avoid participants, particularly the CYP, from developing false hope that talk about potential interventions would lead to actual change. To safeguard against this additional emphasis was placed on this point in revised information sheets and consent forms (Appendix A12). I received clearance from Manchester Metropolitan University ethics committee for this extension of the research (Appendix A13).

Informed written consent was secured from all the participants.

4.6.6 Resources: Boundary object illustrations

In this section I give extended coverage to the notion of the 'boundary object' as it turned out to be an important part of the way the interview process was designed.

In considering how to talk to practitioners about the analysis of practice and affordances from phase 2 of this research project, a concern was that the analysis itself was lengthy and detailed and if communicated purely via language could be difficult to follow. Providing some kind of summary of the findings in visual form might aid the communication process. For this reason it was thought that it would be useful to look at the possibility of creating artefacts which might be viewed as boundary objects (Star and Griesemer, 1989). Wenger (1998, p.105) explains how boundary objects are:

> "artefacts, documents, terms, concepts and other forms of reification around which communities of practice can organise their interconnections"

This seemed to fit well with what I needed, as I would be trying to facilitate interaction between two different worlds about the project's findings: with my researcher identity I would find it easy to take the perspective of an academic community of practice but I needed to make the findings accessible to teaching and non-teaching staff who would be more familiar with a school-based community of practice.

4.6.6.1 The origin of the concept

Star & Griesemer (1989) used their historical study of how a natural history museum set up in California during the early part of the 20th century to illustrate the meaning of a new concept they had developed called the 'boundary object'. A boundary object was defined as:

> "an analytic concept of those scientific objects which both inhabit several intersecting social worlds *and* satisfy the informational requirements of each of them." (p.393)

The boundary object was a way of thinking about objects which can be used by different social groups, mediate their interaction and improve the coordination of collaborative work

between them. The notion of object was defined very broadly to include material artefacts, diagrams, maps, categories and so forth, as well as buildings, institutions or spaces.

Star & Griesemer (1989) argued that a key reason for the existence of boundary objects was to manage varying viewpoints from different actors involved in collaborative work. Boundary objects did not impose a single way of thinking about an issue but provided a structure which helped to coordinate the focus of activity.

Towards the end of their paper, Star & Griesemer (ibid.) listed four types of boundary object which they had distinguished in their work at that point. These were: Repositories, where objects could be classified and sorted in a standardised way (e.g., libraries); Ideal type, an abstracted representation (e.g., map, diagram); Coincident boundaries: a class of objects which share the same bounded space (e.g., the area of a city, to which a variety of services use to define their reach); Standardised forms (e.g., standard formats for collecting information).

The idea of boundary objects proved to be very attractive to researchers and this original article has been heavily cited since its publication. However, the concept has proved a little elusive and provoked various debates. Twenty years later in her paper 'This is Not a boundary object: Reflections on the origin of a concept' Star (2010) made some further observations about the nature of boundary objects and attempted to answer questions she had often been asked about them. In particular she stressed that while boundary objects were defined in part by their interpretative flexibility allowing different audiences to read different things into them, they were also action orientated, facilitating the flow of particular forms of activity and this affected the way they were structured too.

Star (2010, p.603) explained that the use of the word 'boundary' in boundary object did not refer to the edge or periphery of a specific object but to the shared space between groups, or to the boundary between groups. The meaning of the word 'object' in boundary object is similar to its use in computer science, and referred to something towards which action is carried out. When you put those ideas together, you have something which is between groups and which they can both act on – a boundary object.

4.6.6.2 Boundary objects – some applications in educational research

Within educational research the notion of the boundary object has been used to denote a large variety of objects, used in many different kinds of situation. One way in which the term has been used has been to describe the object which stakeholders from different communities jointly develop (Clark et al., 2015; Jahreie & Ludvigsen, 2007). Such an object can then be the focus that coordinates collaborative work. For example, in research by Jahreie & Ludvigsen (2007) teachers from different disciplines developed a new teacher education programme. A portfolio assessment tool was seen as the boundary object, the development of which helped to coordinate and build bridges between perspectives.

A second use of the term has occurred when objects (abstract or physical) have been deployed to structure the discussion between groups. Blasjo & Christensson (2018) demonstrate how the use of 'academic questions' (research questions or questions that might be used to think about an academic source) were used in seminars where academics and students discussed research and scholarship. Similarly, a case study from nurse education in Kubiak et al. (2015) illustrates how partners from university and placement site refer to a list of proficiencies (boundary object) to help make sense of practice, assess progress and set goals for practice. The boundary object is flexible enough to be used for different purposes.

Finally, both Nordholm (2016) and Kubiak et al. (2015) argue that for boundary objects to successfully bridge the gap between communities they need to be used in combination with skilful brokering in which their potential significance is signalled and negotiated.

4.6.6.3 Boundary objects in this project

For each case within the current project, illustrations were created in which practices and affordances were depicted visually. Affordances were viewed as elements of the practice, which were perceived and activated by the actions of the individuals concerned to produce a form of situated participation which corresponded to the CYP's view of a strength.

These diagrams were used in conjunction with a spoken resume of practice and affordances to communicate the main findings of the analysis, but also to act as a starting point for further discussion of the adequacy of the representation.

An example illustration can be seen in Figure 5 (below) which depicts the strength of 'problem solving' in case 1. The small illustration at the top refers to the practice context in which this takes place: Handball. The illustrations on the second row show key elements of the practice which supported Jayden's strength related participation – the first is that Jayden was part of a team working towards a goal and the second that he had been given the responsibility of being captain[5]. The box at the bottom describes how Jayden took up (or activated) the affordance presented by these practice elements when he participated in the way which he described as problem solving.

Figure 5. Boundary object illustration depicting the practice context and the affordance of 'problem solving' participation

Problem solving: Interacting with other players in his team, correcting their actions in order to make it more likely that his team score a point (and accepting that they had a right to correct his actions too).

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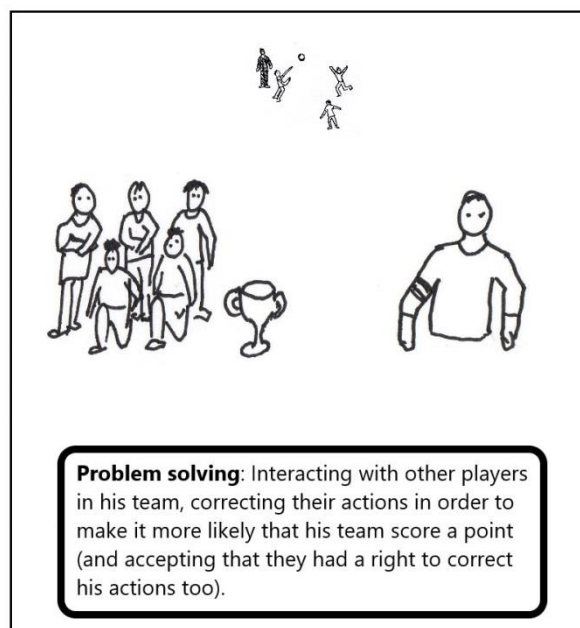
[5] It was only later that I realised that Jayden's comment that the physical nature of the handball session helped him to release anger and relax, could have been highlighted as a third element of this practice that afforded his problem-solving participation.

A second example of a boundary object illustration is presented in Figure 6. This was produced for case 3 and it illustrates Nazia speaking well, within the *Recap* practice. A slightly different format was used here, At the top is a small picture indicating the practice context to which the boundary object refers, in this case the *Recap* phase. Underneath the relevant element of practice is presented to the left of the lower box and the way the affordance was actualised as a form of strength-based participation on the right.

Note, the supporting action of Ms Taylor choosing to ask Nazia a question is itself an actualised affordance because Ms Taylor has taken the opportunity, presented by the practice of the *Recap* phase, to direct a question towards Nazia. Thus, in total this display shows a sequence of two affordances, one teacher actualised and one learner actualised (cf. Strong et al., 2014).

Figure 6: Boundary object illustration depicting the practice context and the affordance of 'I speak well'

Key element: Ms Taylor chooses Nazia to answer questions		**I can speak well** Nazia answers a question that the teacher asks

4.6.7 Sample

In each case study site two members of school staff were chosen to be interviewed. Each pair consisted of the teacher who had been the key person (KP) in phase 2 and an additional person (AP) – a member of staff who it was thought would have an overview of the young person's functioning across the whole school. This presence of this latter person was thought to be necessary in order to contribute to research questions 2 and 3, where it would be an advantage to have a broader view of the young person's functioning across different school contexts. A summary of the participants is provided in Table 17 below.

Table 17. Summary of Phase 3 participants

	Key person (KP)	Additional person (AP)
Case 1, Jayden in the PE lesson	Mr Gold (PE Instructor)	Mr Oliver (Learning mentor)
Case 2, Davy in the Art lesson	Mr Tom Hill (Art teacher)	Ms Lyn West (SENCO)
Case 3, Nazia in the English lesson	Ms Taylor (English teacher)	Ms Brooks (SENCO)

4.6.8 Procedure

At each site arrangements were made to carry out a semi-structured joint interview with the key person and the additional person. Each interview was audio-recorded and transcribed.

An interview schedule was created which covered the three research questions (a full version of this can be found in Appendix A14). I will describe the main sections of the schedule here.

I began with a preamble in which I reminded participants of the orientation and purpose of my research. Then in conjunction with the boundary object illustrations I read out a summary of each practice form I had observed in the key person's session. After this I asked the key person: "From your perspective how accurate is this representation of the phases of practice I observed in your classroom?"

Then I said, "Now the second part of this analysis looked at how these practices afforded opportunities for certain strengths to be present." I then proceeded to read out a summary of practice elements which afforded the opportunity for each strength while displaying the corresponding boundary object illustration. After each illustration, I asked the key person, "How accurate do you think this is? Any comments that you'd like to make?"

After this section of the interview was over I brought the additional person into the conversation, and asked both interviewees further questions about how the focal context

compared to other contexts which the young person had been part of at the time and subsequently.

In the final part of the interview I asked both participants to reflect on any, "potential actions/ interventions which might have potentially stemmed from this kind of analysis."

4.6.9 Analysis

The transcript from each interview was analysed separately using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2012, 2006). This was done to retain the unique meanings drawn from each case study context. The six phase approach to thematic analysis was followed (Braun & Clarke, 2012).

Phase 1 – familiarisation with the data. This was undertaken during transcription when any interesting issues seen in the interviews were noted in a research diary.

Phase 2 – the generation of initial codes. Each transcript was scrutinised in relation to each of the three over-arching research questions in turn. Utterances relating to a research question were coded with a label which reflected the literal content of the utterance - thus corresponding to what Braun & Clarke describes as a 'semantic label'. For example, the code 'Issues outside of school' was used for the following utterance:

> Mr Oliver: Exactly, and with these young people, at the best of times they've got issues out of school, they come in with it as well. (Int1: 195-196)

Phase 3 – Searching for themes. In this phase of the analysis I looked at ways of grouping codes which seemed to be describing a common theme, which related to a specific research question. For example, in the transcript for case 2 I saw quite a few different codes which seemed to be describing how Davy felt recognised and part of things in the Art lesson. These codes related to different things, 'feeling safe', 'having his own space', 'relating to a member of staff', etc., but they were used by the interviewees to conjure up this sense of being recognised and part of things.

Phase 4 – Reviewing the themes – this was done within NVivo software where on review some themes were collapsed into a broader overarching theme.

Phase 5 – Defining and naming themes – I found this stage became relevant when I began to draft out the findings section for each case. This forced me to articulate the meaning of the theme more clearly in prose.

Phase 6 – Producing the report – This report in this case being the thesis!

A tabulated index of codes and themes can be found in Appendix A15.

4.7 Findings and Analysis

The findings and analysis for each case are presented below, structured by the three research questions. The names of themes and codes are underlined and where a theme or code name is not used the identifier for this code or theme is underlined instead (e.g., C1.1.P).

4.7.1 Case 1, Jayden in the PE class

RQ1: Does the KP recognise/ accept the representation of practice and affordances which has been created by my analysis?

The KP, Mr Gold, was shown representations of the three practices which had been identified as present within the observed context of the PE session and he recognised each of these, saying they were reasonable summaries of what happened (C1.1.P). He also felt that my account of how these practices afforded opportunities for Jayden's strengths was accurate (C1.1 Aff).

Relating to specific practices, Mr Gold added a few comments to make the account of his objectives in each phase more exact (T1.1.P+a). For example, he said in phase 1 The ABCs mnemonic related specifically to athletic skills the class were working on in the lesson (C1.1.P1+).

However, in talking about the practices within the lesson he drew attention to an aspect which I had perhaps not represented sufficiently in my initial analysis. This was the degree to which it was necessary to work through negative emotions that arose in the group (T1.1P+b Negative emotions).

> Mr Gold: it's just that, I mean, every time you have a lesson there's always spats (Int 1: 109-110)

These 'spats' were described as moments when things did not work out in the desired way for a student and they reacted with negative emotion. Then Mr Gold explained, it was often necessary to intervene and help them work through conflict in a calm manner:

> Mr Gold: so we'll step in and say "this is not the way to handle it boys", stop the whole game, sit em down, "so the reason why you said this, he said that" (Int 1: 302-304)

Underlying some of these spats was an uneasy relationship between students in the group where the possibility of being laughed at was ever present:

> Mr Gold: "Everyone's going to laugh at me", that's their first instinct to laugh at each other as well, but as soon as you laugh at them they're ready to flip and fly in your face straightaway. (Int 1: 315-317)

In expanding on the nature of the practices, Mr Gold spoke about the importance of equity (T1.1.P+c) stressing that he was careful that every student in the group had the chance to experience certain things (e.g., be listened to, lead the others, use gym equipment). This was an aspect of the class which I had not picked up on in my initial observation and interview and seemed to reflect a value that was important to Mr Gold. I was reminded that Jayden had picked up on something similar when he spoke about Mr Gold giving everyone a chance to speak.

> Jayden: cause you get some people that just talk to the one person (.) feel like yeh I'm just goin to talk to that one person because I just feel like doin it (.) whereas, Mr Gold, he's fair with everyone he gives everyone a good chance to speak out for themselves (YP1: 276-281)

RQ2: How do the KP & AP relate the strength-based context to other contexts in the child's life (in space and time)?

Mr Oliver, the learning mentor, who had a broader view of Jayden, seeing him in different lessons across the school day, commented that he was aware that lessons like PE could bring the best out of him (T1.2a) and he attributed this to individual factors to do with Jayden's preference for practical rather than academic activity and the driving force of his interest in a subject. Nevertheless, there was a contradiction here because the learning mentor also cited academic lessons (Science and History) as ones that Jayden found interesting.

In talking about the nature of the PE lesson context Mr Gold described a disciplined and rule based culture (T1.2b) to which he insisted all the students in the class commit. Students needed reminders to follow the rules and concentrate on the session.

Returning to Jayden there was agreement that with occasional support he was able to take responsibility (T1.2c) and engage in PE sessions. Mr Gold explained that Jayden did need a degree of prompting and low-key management of his emotional reactions to things that did not go his way.

A further reflection on the question of how the PE context related to other contexts in Jayden's life was that outside factors affected how Jayden presented in class (T1.2d). This was used to account for why he had good and bad days.

Looking at Jayden's participation in the class through time, it was noted that his attendance had been sporadic (T1.2x) and at a certain point, a few weeks after I had observed him, he quit PE (T1.2y) meaning he stopped coming to the class altogether. It was unclear to both interviewees why Jayden had decided he did not want to come anymore. In exploring this decision, the dominant hypothesis was that emotional factors had intervened, perhaps to do with what others in his peer group had said to him in a session or conflict outside of it.

RQ3: What actions/ interventions might stem from this analysis?

In the final part of the interview I asked Mr Gold and Mr Oliver to comment on what could be taken from the analysis of Jayden's strengths in the PE lesson. Initially the tone was pessimistic as the learning mentor commented that everything depended on what else was going on in Jayden's life (T1.3a).

I led the topic of conversation back to the possibility of applying things that had worked well in PE to other lessons (T1.3b). Both participants were able to react positively to this idea. They understood and agreed when I raised the idea of team-based activity being used as a format in other lessons so that Jayden could have further opportunities to problem solve in ways which helped a team achieve a goal.

> Mr Gold: That sort of background yeah what you're saying there is absolutely paramount and it would definitely work in an educational academic setting (Int1: 244-245)

They were also able to see how the way that Jayden had seen himself being a good sportsman might be applied more broadly to help him develop better ways of reacting to others around him. Here the KP was a little more sceptical that this would work,

> Mr Gold: it's getting him to recognise (..) and applying that in a classroom setting, but you know what it's like, (..) as soon as one misses a goal they'll laugh, they'll tease, and as soon as you do that (it's going to spoil it) the effect on that child is going to go down straightaway (Int1: 256-264)

Finally, I also suggested a possible intervention would have been to strengthen Jayden's engagement in the lesson. Here the focus would be on <u>staff encouraging participation</u> (T1.3c). It would mean going beyond the normal management of the lesson - contacting parents to make sure kit was brought, helping Jayden to get into the lesson, reminding him of his positive engagement.

There was some difference of opinion here from Mr Gold, who framed this as <u>coercing the student</u> (T1.3d) saying that there had to be some drive from the student himself before such tactics could work. Nevertheless, he could recall how encouragement to participate had worked with another student.

<u>4.7.2 Case 2, Davy in the Art lesson</u>

RQ1: Does the KP recognise/ accept the representation of practice and affordances which has been created by my analysis?

The KP, Mr Hill, verified that both the *Round the table* and *Independent work* practices were accurate representations of the main phases of the lesson I had observed (<u>C2.1.P</u>).

In reflecting on the *Round the table* practice he emphasised the role he played in modelling the task that the students were expected to do themselves. Following this was further discussion about how the KP managed the alternation between the two practices in order to avoid students from having to concentrate for too long or become bored. These comments highlighted the relationship between these two phases, where they were seen as working <u>in tandem</u> (T2.1.P+).

Mr Hill spoke about the second episode of *Round the table* practice when students were able to take stock of the initial work they had done.

> Mr Hill: It's like time for, like when you bring them back for like second modelling (.) the second part of the modelling you do in the lesson, it's time for them to start thinking about what they're doing and (.) see other people's work, see their own work, question how they can get to the next level (Int2: 42-45)

This showed a subtle change in the way that *Round the table* worked following *Independent work*, the meaning of the phase influenced by what had gone before it.

Turning to the way that specific strengths had been represented as activated affordances, the KP also accepted these as accurate (<u>C2.1.Aff</u>). He then elaborated on how sitting near his best friend helped Davy to feel safe. The KP extended the benefits of Davy's seating position to encompass other positives about sitting on a table near the front.

> Mr Hill: and he's at the front, he's in a secure comfort zone isn't he? And he's sat at the forefront of everything that's going on in the lesson because I'm doing demonstrations at that table. (Int2: 29-31)

This idea of being <u>at the forefront of everything</u> (C2.1 Aff+) seemed to convey something about supporting Davy's engagement and confidence. This was not something which the KP directly related to any of the three strengths that Davy mentioned (I feel safe; I enjoy

making things; The teacher believes I can do well) but might be seen as condition that made these more likely to occur.

In the second part of the interview I asked the SENCO, Ms Lyn West, and the KP how the strength-based context of the Art lesson compared to other contexts that Davy was part of at that time. Much of the response to this question focused on what was distinctive about the Art Class (T2.2a). This included five subthemes. The first of these was that within this class: Davy felt recognised and part of things (T2.2a1) – for example, he felt noticed and it was implied that this might not always be the case in other contexts:

> SENCO: so Davy feels like he is (.) noticed, rather than not being noticed and I know, that in some instances (.) he could just be forgotten about within the room because he can be quite quiet (Int2: 72-74)

He was often the first to arrive, he had his own space and related well with his teacher,

A second theme was that: everyone was supported to do bigger projects (CT2.2a2) than in other lessons, where the focus was characterised as being more about short tasks, structured with powerpoint slides.

Furthermore, the teacher took charge of things (T2.2a3), learning activity was all visual (T2.2a4) and there was a quality of intimacy within the class (T2.2a5) - this latter theme was related to the favourable small size of the class and the relatively large size of the classroom.

> SENCO: whereas in your room lots of space to get pupils rou::nd and have a conversation with everybody together (.) whereas in a classroom I can imagine that being quite difficult. (Int 2: 107-109)

The five class subthemes characterised how it was anticipated Davy might perceive the culture of the Art class and what he would value about this lesson. These themes seem to be aligned with the level of analysis of a community of practice (Wenger, 1998), as they

could be seen as describing the kind of mutual engagement and joint enterprise that went on in the room.

In addition, the SENCO talked a little bit about how Davy had a <u>preference for the subject</u> (T2.2b). The lesson suited him more than other lessons because it required hands on physical activity rather than writing, which he was thought to dislike.

Since my observation of Davy mid-way through his time in Year 7, the SENCO said school assessment indicted he was doing well across subjects and achieving at a particularly high level in Art.

<u>RQ3: What actions/ interventions might stem from this analysis?</u>

When I invited the participants to think how aspects of the Art lesson might be applied elsewhere, the SENCO focused on how one of the practices had involved bringing the pupils round the table at the front and suggested this might only be applicable within Art lessons:

> SENCO: I think it is unique to Art because the space you've got in your room and you're able to pull them round to do the modelling and that's quite difficult within (.) let's just go within an English subject (.) to pull them round one table for what purpose, that would be very difficult, if they were looking through an exam paper etc. (Int 2: 137-140)

Objections like this highlighted intrinsic differences between the Art class and other lessons, which would make transfer of strategies problematic.

One difference that was cited was that the Art class was a relatively small group in which certain strategies were easier to implement (<u>T2.3a</u>). Nevertheless, the Art teacher moderated this view by explaining how with larger groups of 25-30, while not bringing all of the students round one table, he had still adopted some aspects of the *Round the table* practice by using a 'visualiser' (a projector) which allowed him to show a single student's work to the whole class.

> Mr Hill: but I do use the visualiser and it stops the movement around the room, so you get, you take a child's work, put that under the visualiser and you can speak about it on the board. (Int2: 153-155)

This response returned to the idea of <u>specific strategies</u> (T2.3b) and highlighted that the same affordance might occur through the use of different tools.

Following this, the SENCO focused on another difference between the Art lesson and other lessons: when the students were physically brought to together around the table it was easier to spot misbehaviour than if they were still arranged around the classroom.

I re-orientated the SENCO by highlighting other specific things that might be portable from Mr Hill's Art lesson:

> Me: Yeah it's got some advantage, but don't you think Lyn that some of the things that Tom was doing would be portable into other [situations?
>
> SENCO: [yeah
>
> Me: I mean this kind of thing, structuring tasks, the low key way of keeping someone calm, and certainly the praise side of things (Int2: 170-175)

This prompt resulted in the SENCO adjusting to the theme of specific strategies, which she felt staff were now using more often with Davy:

> SENCO: .. I do know a lot of staff have got on board with the praise to help his self-esteem a lot more, so he's got quite a lot more positive referrals now, and I think people (also) notice him out on the corridors a little more, so he actually feels like he's noticed (Int2: 177-180)

This answer included reference to strategies (or one might say staff activated affordances), which had been used more recently. It had been necessary, though, for me to influence the SENCo by asking a question that led her away from the way she had been characterising the situation. Rather than seeing this as the researcher using a leading question, it might be seen as an example of brokering (Wenger, 1998), highlighting the complex way in which my own identity in the research process shifted during the interview.

In the final part of the discussion the Art teacher spoke about another impact of the analysis. It had allowed him to slow down and think more carefully (T2.3c) about the way he was teaching Davy and other children. It had prompted ideas about things he might try with other children:

> Mr Hill: it comes at you with such pace, it's nice to slow it down and you know, this is what it has done for me now, (you know) for em I don't (.) like I've looked and thought right I could use this with that child or that one (Int 2: 217-220)

Here the idea has been to apply ideas to other parts of the same teacher's practice, a different kind of transfer to the one I had initially contemplated. However, this would be transfer to a more similar social object (the practice of teaching art to another group by the same teacher) and so might be more likely to have happen from a critical realist point of view (Sayer, 2006).

The SENCO and the Art teacher made specific reference to the boundary object illustrations at this point in the interview, saying that they made things very clear and easy to understand. The Art teacher suggested they could be used in a training session to discuss practice with other staff.

4.7.3 Case 3, Nazia in the English lesson

<u>RQ1: Does the KP recognise/ accept the representation of practice and affordances which has been created by my analysis?</u>

When I showed the English teacher, Ms Taylor, the way I had represented practice in her class, that is *Recap* followed by *Independent work*, she initially qualified the extent to which what I had seen was an everyday occurrence (C3.1P). She explained that, although there was a general expectation in Year 6 that classes did more independent work, with this class the writing work was generally supported and purely independent work was undertaken more occasionally, for assessment purposes. However, this seemed to be a case of differences in how we were using the word 'independent' as I had only used it to denote an activity in which each child produced work of their own – not excluding adult and peer support, which I had registered.

Nevertheless, Mrs Taylor stressed that on a more typical day I would have seen possibly more scaffolding of writing work – for example:

> Ms Taylor: I think other times, other lessons, probably been more commonly, so they'll be more scaffolding, more teacher intervention, "have a go at writing a sentence, put it on the board, tell me what you think. (Int3: 50-52)

One of the problems we faced was that the observed lesson had happened some months before in the previous school year, so it was difficult for Ms Taylor to remember what had happened in the specific lesson I had observed.

Having said this there was agreement about many of the practice elements that were seen to be operating in this lesson to support the various strengths that Nazia had identified. Here, for example, Ms Taylor is talking about how she takes advantage of whole class sessions to pick Nazia to answer questions (C3.1 Aff):

> Ms Taylor: Yeah and that's actually quite common, when she's in a positive mood I will say she will put her hand up all the time, so to keep her going I will call upon her (Int3: 125-127)

<u>RQ2: How do the KP & AP relate the strength-based context to other contexts in the child's life (in space and time)?</u>

In considering how the context of the English lesson compared to other contexts, participants focused on two broad areas, the nature of the child's participation in the English lesson and the kind of practices that were operating there.

Nazia was described as being more relaxed and confident in the English class, more able to participate and more able to form relationships with other children and with staff (T3.2a). Statements sometimes connected these characteristics with the small class size (<u>T3.2b</u>) of the English group:

> SENCO: in the smaller group she felt more comfortable with the adults and the other children um (.) she was able to participate a lot more (Int3:182-184)

However, the discussion went beyond the size of the class to consider a range of practice features which facilitated Nazia's involvement in the lesson (<u>T3.3c</u>). This included the way in which she was chosen to answer more often, that allowing her to answer verbally played to her strengths and that being amongst children of similar skill level meant all the lesson content was accessible to her.

Beyond this I noted a further aspect of the English class, which seemed distinctive to me. This was what I called the <u>culture of drafting</u> (T3.2d). It seemed to be reflected in Nazia's comment about her writing when she had described good writing as, 'changing the sentence so it made sense'. Children were encouraged to always see what they were doing as 'a work in progress', which it was natural to return to and improve further. The SENCO, Ms Brooks, explained this was quite a common orientation in English lessons in the school but less common in other subjects. The English teacher underlined its importance in removing the fear of judgement:

> Ms Taylor: I think part of what she enjoys about it is she has control over it because when you just write a sentence it's not going to be judged as right or wrong, she'll have the chance to change it and that gives her a feeling of actually, "I've got the power to make this better (Int 3: 309-312)

In considering Nazia's educational trajectory since the observation, it was noted that she had made the transition into Year 7 at the same school and was part of the nurture class in that year, which was similar in size to the English group.

<u>RQ3: What actions/ interventions might stem from this analysis?</u>

When the interview turned to ways that the analysis might lead to intervention, the first theme that the SENCO mentioned was how being chosen to answer questions in class (<u>T3.3a</u>) could be 'taken on board', presumably by other staff – this was related to the strength of 'the teacher believes I can do well'.

> SENCO: (Oh is it) definitely about one about how she says the teacher believes I can do well because she picked me all the time and think that's something you can take on board is that the importance for her self-esteem of being chosen. (Int3: 239-242)

The SENCO was taking one of the affordances, represented in the boundary object illustrations and suggesting it could happen in a different context.   She then expanded on how providing a verbal response may be an easier way for Nazia to participate in the lesson than writing something down.

> SENCO: Because I think sometimes she may struggle to write it down because there's a lot of things to remember but when it's like a question
>
> Mrs Taylor: Umhm
>
> SENCO: and she can just keep that answer in mind and she can put her hand up, that kind of short kind of (.) feedback then from the teacher from that one answer, it's positive for her. (Int3: 262-266)

In this elaboration the SENCO went beyond how I had been seeing the meaning of this affordance and elaborated the meaning of the illustration (<u>T3.3b</u>).

In a similar fashion the SENCO made a connection with one page profiles of children which was an artefact used within the school to get children's views about what worked well and what they liked. She queried whether children always found it easy to say verbally what they were good at. Echoing the way I had carried out the research, she thought the process of drawing up a profile could be aided by someone observing and then feeding back to the child 'this is what you did really well, do you agree?'   Finished profiles might be visual (like the boundary object illustrations) and feed into teacher planning.

The English teacher focused on a different theme, which was about limiting the culture of judgement (T3.3c) in the classroom. This idea seemed to flow from our slightly earlier discussion of 'the culture of drafting' and so rather than being rooted in my observation of a particular affordance in the classroom, came from our follow up discussion of the ethos that Ms Taylor was promoting in the room.

> Mrs Taylor: I just think for her, the more we can limit sort of a culture of, right versus wrong, or black versus white and be able to have a grey area where she can explore (int3: 347-349)

The 'grey area' referred to a place where there were many ways of doing something, the work was not quickly judged as right or wrong but developed in a way which was more open-ended and passed more control back to the child. Ms Taylor thought this could allow students to feel less pressured and was something which was of benefit to other children not just Nazia.

> Mrs Taylor: I think that worked for her and I think it works for a lot of children, just to be able to give her the confidence, that it doesn't have to be this or this, there is an area of grey and we can work within that (Int3: 350-352)

But it was also a way of teaching which was not always easy to follow when structural forces inclined staff to work in a different way:

> Mrs Taylor: the blank paper, yeah give the words, write the right thing to have, we don't mean it I think, it's just the nature of schooling unfortunately. (Int3: 355-357)

4.8 Discussion

In this section I examine the findings from all three cases together and discuss these in relation to wider literature. I begin by looking at how staff responded when I shared with them the contextualised analysis I had made in phase 2. I then consider what was said about the significance of the focal contexts in relation to other parts of the young people's lives and finally review the ideas for change and intervention that it might lead towards. This section then closes with a discussion of the limitations of this phase of the study as well as the implications for future practice and research which emerge from it.

4.8.1 Sharing theory with practitioners

One of the aims of sharing the phase 2 analysis with participants was to see if they could recognise it as a representation of what happened in their classrooms and to gain an idea of how accurate they felt it was.

The key person in each of the case study sites was able to recognise the representation of the educational context that I took back to them – although they sometimes qualified my findings by adding some further comment about practices and affordances.

Sometimes these comments added a relatively small detail to the way a practice had been described. For example, in case 1 when Gold explained that the ABC mnemonic was linked to skills the boys would be working on later in the PE session. At other times a more significant addition to my practice account was made. This happened in case 1 where I began to realise I had underplayed the extent to which the practices were punctuated by the eruption of negative emotions and conflict which Mr Gold needed to manage. If the management of internal conflict was a large problem for him it might explain why the exercise of student-student interaction was so circumscribed within the session as a whole – and hence why it might prove difficult to argue for an increase in opportunities for team work experiences of the kind that contributed towards the affordance of problem solving.

Some further insight was also gained about how practitioners understood the meaning behind certain forms of participation or moments within practices. Again, in case 1, Mr

Gold mentioned how the value of equity was important to him when assigning students to activities. In case 2, Mr Hill explained differences in the meaning of the second episode of *Round the table* from the first. Here I was picking up more information about how the practitioners' conceptualised their social world. These ideas would not have been possible to gain through observation alone as they represented the practitioner's close knowledge of what they were doing (Sayer, 1992).
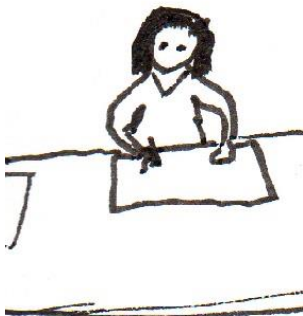
On a couple of occasions, I noticed my own understanding of the relations between practices and affordances changing during the interviews. In case 2 as Mr Hill talked about the way that the second episode of *Round the table* was influenced by the students having just engaged in *Independent work* and reached a point where they could take stock of that experience, I began to see how these two practices worked in tandem. Similarly, in the third interview, the conversation prompted me to see how at the point that *Independent writing* began, involvement in the *Recap* phase made it more likely that Nazia would be able to create a sentence.

Star & Griesemer (1989) argued that the nature of boundary objects is that while they provide a structure they are flexible enough to be interpreted or used in different ways. The altered view I gained of what afforded Nazia the opportunity to write well could have been added to the boundary object illustration at the time of the interview to create a new formulation.

In Figure 7 below I offer an illustration to show how this might have looked. This revised boundary object depicts the affordance of Nazia doing good writing by changing the sentences so they made sense. She has activated an affordance which is supported by the TA intervention – a feature of *Independent writing* – and the prior experience of the *Recap* phase - which is shaded grey to highlight that it is a condition which makes this affordance more likely.

Figure 7. Revised boundary object illustration showing practice context, condition and affordance of 'I can write well'

| Relevant Condition: Prior experience of *Recap* phase | Key-element of practice: TA intervenes to help Nazia carry out writing task. | | Actualised affordance: "I changed the sentence and they made sense" = **I can write well** |

Including a representation of conditions which made the activation of an affordance more likely is in keeping with a critical realist view of the social world (Sayer, 1992; Pawson & Tilley, 1997). Following this line, it would also have made sense to include conditions in the case 1 illustration of the problem-solving affordance. Here the conditions of equity and discipline, seemed to be particularly empowering for Jayden.

Revision such as this highlight that returning to practitioners can result in development in researcher thinking, not just because it adds details, but because it prompts a more fundamental re-conceptualisation.

Having said this, I sometimes felt that participants began to move away from the meaning embodied within the boundary object illustrations. For example, Ms Taylor in case 3 talked about asking Nazia questions to 'keep her going', rather than in order to make her see that she believed she could do well or to promote her efforts to speak well – which would have been more in line with the strengths focused on here. However, Ms Taylor in focusing on 'keeping Nazia going' seemed to be referring to a more general idea of encouraging her engagement. Similarly, Mr Hill expanded on the nature of Davy's seating position – initially referred to as a way of helping him to feel safe, seated near his friend – by drawing attention to the way this put him at the front of the class and in the 'forefront' of things. Again Davy's engagement in the lesson seemed to be very present in Mr Hill's mind. While it was encouraging to hear staff engaging with the ideas in this way I was concerned that it took us a little away from the young person's original reason for talking about particular features of the lesson. Perhaps I could have used the boundary object a little more assertively at these points as a structure to reign in the conversation – this would have fitted with the boundary object purpose of coordinating perspectives (Blasjo & Christensson, 2018) sometimes via firmer brokering (Nordholm, 2016; Kubiak et al, 2015).

Overall, I was pleased by the response of the practitioners to the study analysis. Thinking about the process as a practicing educational psychologist it seemed that this way of depicting events made sense to them and was a good stimulus for further discussion, so that boded well for using it in future professional encounters.

4.8.2 The significance of the strength-based context

The second part of the interview allowed me to examine the significance of the focal context in the broader lives of the young people concerned.   This was done through using a 'zooming out' question similar to the one I had asked myself in phase 1: How does this context compare to other contexts which X may have been part of at this time? Below I discuss the answers that were given to this question, relating these to wider literature that influenced this situated study.

The first thing that can be said is that there was evidence that each focal class compared favourably to others the child inhabited at school. Mr Oliver, the learning mentor, described PE as a lesson which, at times, could bring the best out of Jayden, he equated it with lessons (History, Science) which aroused Jayden's interest, where he became more animated, but saw a contrast with maths and English where he withdrew; Art was seen as a positive lesson for Davy, he was often the first to arrive, had a good relationship with his teacher and engaged well with tasks. But the SENCO suggested there were other lessons where he could be quiet and overlooked; Nazia was seen as confident and able to be involved in tasks in the English lesson, but the SENCO at her school had seen her 'timid and self-conscious' in other larger classes.

This kind of feedback suggested that the focal contexts had been important places for each of the young people concerned. However, the reasons given for this did not always refer to differences in the way that practice was organised in these places. Sometimes staff referred to intrinsic preferences that a pupil had for a subject as being important. For Mr Oliver it could come down to simply whether Jayden was interested in a subject. If he was he became engaged, if he was not he would disengage. Similarly, the SENCO at Davy's school talked about Davy liking Art and this making a difference to his engagement.

While this project takes a situated learning perspective it does not ignore the individual factors that young people bring to a context. Towards the end of phase 2, Greeno & Gresalfi (2008, p.272) were quoted as saying:

> "An affordance for an individual in an activity system includes the resources and practices of the system, that individual's access to those resources and practices, and the dispositions and abilities of the individual to participate in a way that supports her or his activity and learning in some way."

The 'dispositions and abilities of the individual' will play a part, but this is in conjunction with the way that practices and resources within the activity system are organised. And, it was possible to recognise connections between what staff said about each class and some of the messages found in situative learning research about engaging educational environments. For instance, staff spoke about how students' participation in their respective focal classes was recognised: Davy was an active participant in Art lessons where he was noticed and interacted with the teacher freely. Nazia was seen as an important

participant in question-answer sequences with her teacher. At their best it might be said that these contexts offered the students an opportunity to play what Nasir & Hand (2008) describe as an integral role in the functioning of the group.

Also, echoing the work of Hand (Hand & Gresalfi, 2015) the focal classes might be seen as places where staff held students accountable for the level of their involvement. In the PE class this was achieved through the establishment and maintenance of clear social rules, but it could also be seen in the Art and English lessons where there were frequent discussions about how work could be developed and improved.

There was a sense that following strengths back to a context where they were evidenced had led me to classes which exhibited a strong culture and a teacher who actively sought to create a distinctive ethos in the room. While still relying at times on traditional forms of classroom participant structure, in their own way each teacher prioritised engaging pupils in the learning process. They differed from those classes in Hand's study where there had been a more lassiez-faire attitude to student learning and more opportunities to remain disengaged (Hand & Gresalfi, 2015).

At this point in the interview, asking an open question about how the focal class compared to other contexts did change the focus of discussion. We moved beyond the specific strength-related affordances of practice, embodied in the boundary object illustrations, and looked at broader ways in which the focal class compared to other classes in the school. Sometimes this identified aspects of practice which were seen as supportive of certain strengths, such as the culture of drafting found in the English lesson, which it was proposed may lead to a more open-ended and less pressurised way of learning and contribute to her view of herself as a good writer.

The strong and distinctive culture that was exhibited within the focal classes added further weight to the idea that these classes had actually made the transition to becoming distinctive communities of practice in their own right. What was happening in each of them was not just a replaying of 'doing school' together (Haneda, 2006). Instead one found a distinctive way of organising mutual engagement (Wenger, 1998) which were shaped by ideas such as equity (case 1), intimacy and discipline (case 2) and privileging the 'grey zone' of exploration (case 3).

These interviews happened almost a year after the initial phase 2 data collection and it was possible to get some comments on how the young people's participation in learning contexts had developed since that time. Trajectories varied and this in itself may explain some of the tone within interviews. Jayden had stopped attending PE class and staff had been unable to re-engage him. The consensus was that influences from other places had led to him opting out of the session. Perhaps 'spats' in the peer group had become too much for him – from a critical realist perspective, an example of how a negative condition may have ultimately closed down his strength-related participation in PE. On reflection I felt this may have led Mr Gold and Mr Oliver to feel less influential in their work with Jayden.

For Davy and Nazia the subsequent months had been more positive. Davy was now excelling in Art and doing well in other subjects too. Nazia had transferred to a class in her new year group which seemed likely to replicate some of the supportive practices found in her Y6 English lesson. With this context in mind it was possible to turn to the idea of the implications that might have been drawn from the initial contextualised assessment of strengths.

4.8.3 Action and intervention possibilities

Participants did not always find it easy to use the analysis to move towards ideas for intervention or change. In case 1, Mr Oliver initially expressed the pessimistic view that it all depended on what was going on in other parts of Jayden's life. In case 2, the SENCO, Ms West, became stuck in the uniqueness of Art lessons and how difficult it was to see the practices and strategies we had discussed being applied to other types of lesson. In both of these examples I felt compelled to intervene with a more directive remark:

> Me: but don't you think Lyn that some of the things that Tom was doing would be portable into other situations? .. (Int2: 172-173)

Or, in case 1, an example of what I had thought might be possible:

> Me: what I wondered was could you take a mechanism like that out of PE and put it in another lesson, you know, maybe even into a maths lesson or a history lesson, so you're working as a team rather than individuals working on their own activities (Int1: 229-232)

Here I felt my own role changing and becoming more like a broker (Wenger, 1998). Although from a critical realist position I might also be seen as making my own theory more explicit to the practitioners to see whether they could recognise it or develop it in some way (Pawson & Tilley, 1997). I remained a little concerned that my positional power (as researcher and educational psychologist) might close down the participants' ability to disagree with me. I was therefore pleased to see that participants were able to take issue with some of the propositions I made. For example, Mr Gold displayed reservations about whether Jayden would be able to apply the idea of good sportsmanship in other contexts when teased by peers, and Mr Gold again, contested how far it was his role to entice Jayden into the PE class; and Ms West moderated the idea of giving focused praise by saying this probably was a little easier in a small group.

Generally my prompts seemed to get staff to think more broadly of the way specific affordances might be engineered to occur in different types of lesson. I found it interesting that the Art teacher Mr Hill introduced the notion of the visualiser to show how even in a larger class he could develop a practice which resembled *Round the table*, in the sense that students could collectively look at work and by implication it would still be possible for a teacher to highlight a particular student's work as praise worthy. Here although a form of practice was being described that might lack some elements of *Round the table* – for example, the physical sense of intimacy that is developed by being close together, it looked like it might be similar enough in its internal structure (Sayer, 1992) to permit a certain affordance to operate. And, one should not be too pessimistic about the possibility of a strategy being implemented in different subject classes as this is something that happens routinely through the implementation of common school policies on issues such as behavioural approaches, taking registers, seating plans and so forth.

In case 3 Ms Taylor took the conversation about potential interventions to a deeper level when she expanded on the culture of drafting which I had observed in her lesson. Here she articulated a pedagogic philosophy that moved away from a reliance on right or wrong (black and white) responses to teacher instruction, towards 'a grey space' where learning through guided experimentation was encouraged. This she saw as an approach that would benefit many children, not just Nazia. In my terms she was talking about something more ambitious than adding the odd strategy here or there, she was implying a change that if

undertaken would influence the deeper nature of practice in many lessons in that school. But she acknowledged the forces which militated against such innovation and in this sense touched the same power structures that Corbin et al. (2003) referred to as non-negotiables in their research.

The discussion about potential intervention covered two of the possibilities anticipated – by supporting a child to follow an inbound trajectory within the focal context (Jayden) and Applying strengths to a new context (all three cases). The interviews did not consider adjustments to practice in the focal context to promote more of an identified strength, and it was a regret of mine that I did not manage this in case 1 where I saw potential for this with Jayden's interest in team problem solving. Perhaps, in terms of using this kind of approach in professional practice, it highlights a need to be a little more structured in terms of checking through potential levels of intervention with participants. This kind of reflection is directed towards ways of increasing the effectiveness of my brokering skills (Currie & White, 2012).

On the positive side, participants did mention further possibilities for action that I had not anticipated. These included: using the boundary object illustration as a means to promote teacher reflection and development both through individual conversation and training (Case2 , Mr Hill); and using the approach to supplement existing school systems such as one page profiles (Case 3, Ms Brooks). These were both alluding to higher level organisational change that the work could stimulate.

4.8.4 Limitations

In this section I will cover some of the limitations to this phase of the research project. The first issue that needs to be acknowledged is that the models of practice contexts and strength-related affordances that were built up and represented in the form of boundary objects were still just that, representations of what was going on. They were based on data gathered through observation and interview but all the same may have weaknesses in the way that they theorise the contextualisation of strengths. This point is consistent with the critical realist philosophy that has been adopted throughout the project and which insists

that our best understanding of reality can only be through the development of transitive theoretical models that in themselves are always fallible and subject to revision (Sayer, 1992; Blaikie, 2007). This is no different to the hypothesis-testing approach to EP practice in which formulations are tested through intervention (Monsen et al, 2008). Although receiving confirmatory judgements from involved practitioners is encouraging, ultimately the model's adequacy is determined by the extent to which proposals for actions stemming from it result in positive change. This intervention stage remains to be tested in future research.

There are also limitations due to the way the research was carried out. One was due to the time that passed between the initial observation and interviews that took place in phase 2 and returning to interview practitioners in phase 3. This period of almost a year occurred because of the time I needed to work through the analytic process and plan and design the return interviews. It did mean that the staff involved sometimes found it difficult to remember the session that I had observed. It also meant a lot of further time and experience had passed and participants' perspectives on the focal context and student were now affected by this in a way that they were not when I first interviewed them. I felt this was evident in case 1, where the staff seemed less positive about Jayden on the return visit – by which time he had become seen as a youngster who had dropped out of their class rather than the 'good' student they had talked about before

This phase of the research did not return to interview the young people involved. There was a risk that the resulting interviews may have reinforced a particular view about the nature of priorities as seen from the view of professionals. The young people may have placed a different emphasis on the meaning of the identified contexts and affordances. Nevertheless, it would have been difficult to arrange interviews to include all participants at the same time as the students may have been a little overwhelmed by the presence of the adults in the meeting. Some further individual interviews might have been possible using the boundary object illustrations to take the meaning of the results more accessible.

There may have been some demand characteristics operating in that participants knew me and could have wished at some level to support my research by saying positive things about

it. As mentioned above this did not stop them sometimes expressing reservations about some aspects of what I said, so I believe the level of self-censorship was fairly low.

Finally, there is a limitation in terms of the scope of this work which focused exclusively on school-based contexts and affordances. It would be interesting to see how far it would be possible to use the same approach to compare and transfer between contexts out of school into school and vis-a-versa.

4.8.5 Implications for future practice and research

Here I will look at the implications of this phase of the research process for both future practice and future research. I deal with these two implications in that order because it is the development of contextualised strength-based practice which is the main source of my research interest.

The method of bringing back situated representations of practice and affordances in the form of boundary object illustrations does seem to have potential for collaborative work which seeks to extend the reach of strength-based practice in schools. It would be interesting as a next step to research some cases that used this approach to design and put in place interventions, to see how effectively the process could be applied from start to finish.

Despite this research occurring in a real life setting and involving professionals and young people who would have been, under normal circumstances, working with an educational psychologist, this interaction was in fact flagged as a piece of research and was therefore exempt from the expectations and pressures that would be a normal part of practice. A second implication for practice-based research then is to examine how to embed this kind of consultation and intervention meeting within real life practice. It seems likely that it would need to be framed in a way which took account of the dominant modes of problem-focused practice – perhaps being used as a form of graduated response to concerns. So, for example, if there is concern about a child's capacity to develop communication skills, using a contextualised strength-based approach to examine social practice in those areas of the

child's life where they communicate most, and then applying these practices elsewhere to promote equivalent affordances.

Then a third implication for future research touches on different aspects of the professional work embodied in this third phase of the project. Could the design of boundary objects be organised in a way which accelerated the process of creating an analysis following initial assessment observation and interviews? In the current research the illustrations were carried out by someone with a good level of artistic skill, would the illustrations still be effective if carried out in a more rudimentary form by practitioners themselves?

If this third phase of the project was developed into a form of practice which helped staff to develop strength-based interventions, there are still open questions about how best to use the boundary object representations to guide the conversations that unfold. Would effective brokering, particularly around thinking about transfer give more prominence to the illustration and its development in the meeting?

There are also questions here about the nature of power dynamics within any follow up meeting– not just between researcher and participants but between the participants themselves. The current research invited teachers into the room whose practice was being celebrated as strength-based. One would need to be careful how ideas about potential transfer of strategies was introduced to staff who were perceived to be in less favoured contexts.

4.9 Conclusion

In this third phase of the research project, the analyses of contextualised strength-based assessment were taken back to staff working in each of the case study schools. Each analysis was presented to staff using boundary object illustrations which depicted combinations of practices and affordances. It was found that staff largely agreed with the analysis and were able to add further comments which could be used to elaborate the representations. Interviews indicated that the focal contexts had been perceived as places in which the students in the study participated most successfully at school. With brokering guidance from the researcher, staff were able to generate a number of ideas for potential

strength-based interventions which could have flowed from this work. A number of

implications were drawn for future practice and research in this area which seek to develop

and refine the approach used in this project.

Chapter 5

Concluding chapter

5.1 Introduction

In this concluding chapter, I begin by updating literature searches initially carried out in phases 1 and 2 of my action research cycle. I then conclude the project by discussing its overall contribution, its limitations and ideas for future research. Finally, I reflect on the effect the research has had on my own professional work as an educational psychologist.

5.2 Considering more recent published work

This research project was a piece of action research in which the literature base that was used within each phase was locked after it was done, as it represented the basis of research design and interpretive decisions which were made at the time. To go back and augment it with more recently published work post-hoc would have potentially altered the basis on which such decisions were made.

However, in concluding the project it was possible to re-run literature searches and check to see what had been published since searches in phase 1 and phase 2 were conducted. This was not thought to be necessary for phase 3 as literature searches for this phase were carried out relatively near to the end of the project in 2018.

5.2.1 Rerunning phase 1 literature searches

Searches from phase 1 were rerun for the period from August 2015 to February 2020 with the same inclusion criteria initially used (see p.29). The number of results for these searches is shown in Table 18.

Table 18. Repeated strength-based assessment literature search.

Search = TI ("strength-based" or "strengths-based") and TI(assessment).	Results
ERIC	4
BEI	2
PsychInfo	9

One of the papers that had been published since 2015 was a literature review of strength-based assessments (Climie & Henley, 2016). In order to check for additional relevant recent papers a citation search was carried out on this paper using Google Scholar. A citation search was also carried out on the paper by Brazeau et al. (2012) which had, in the initial phase 1 literature review, been the source which had spoken most clearly about the importance of contextualising strength-based assessment. The same exclusion criteria were applied to the results of these citation searches, the results are displayed in Table 19.

Table 19. Results of citation searches on Climie & Henley (2016) and Brazeau et al. (2012)

	Relevant results/ Total results
Climie & Henley (2016)	3
Brazeau et al. (2012)	7

5.2.2 Main findings from rerunning phase 1 literature searches

In reviewing the literature that has appeared recently on strength-based assessment I tried to ascertain how far it was consistent with the main findings of the phase 1 literature review and whether there was any new research, which like my own, sought to contextualise this kind of assessment.

Overall, the identified papers gave continued prominence to forms of strength-based assessment which were mentioned during the phase 1 literature review. These might be characterised as offering measures of children's intra-individual strengths or strengths which are to do with their relationships or the ecologies they move within (e.g., family,

school, community), but which are not able to give information about the nature of the social interaction or activities within which the strengths are present.

For example, the review paper by Climie & Henley looks at seven assessments: The Behavioral & Emotional Rating Scale, 2nd edition, (BERS-2) (Buckley & Epstein, 2004); The Devereux Early Childhood Assessment Preschool Programme, 2nd edition, DECA-2; LeBuffe & Naglieri, 2012); The Devereux Student Strengths Assessment (DESSA) (LeBuffe et al., 2009); Resiliency Scales for Children & Adolescents (RSCA) (Prince-Embury, 2007); Social Emotional Assets and Resilience Scales (SEARS) (Merrell, 2011); Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) (Goodman & Goodman, 2009); and the Strengths Assessment Inventory (SAI) (Brazeau et al., 2012). All of these except the RSCA and the SDQ were covered in the phase 1 review. Neither the RSCA or SDQ is very different from the other five: the RSCA looks at internal aspects of resiliency in children and the SDQ has a list of pro-social behaviours that a child may display.

Other identified papers included reports of the development of these assessments: Lambert et al. (2018) considered the reliability and validity of the BERS when it has been adapted for use in different countries around the world; Doromal et al. (2019) was a validation of the DESSA with a low income preschool sample; Royer-Gagnier et al. (2016) an investigation into the psychometric properties of the SAI with a sample of young people involved in the justice system.

Three papers (Harris et al., 2017; Barba et al., 2019; Bozic et al., 2018[6]) reported methods which contextualised a young person's strengths, going beyond positive aspects of the ecology (good relations with family members etc.) to learn more about specific strength-related activities.

Harris et al. (2017) Reporting a strength-based intervention with young people who were involved in substance misuse. Here the Strength Assessment Inventory was used initially, then counsellors helped young people to explore how they could use their strengths in different contexts. The young people also worked with each other to give examples of how strengths were deployed.

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[6] A published version of phase 1 of this research project (see Appendix A16).

Barba et al. (2019) describes a strength-based approach for school psychologists to use when they are helping teachers to work with newly arrived immigrant students in Californian schools. They used the Culture Assets Identifier (CAI), an assessment tool which gathered information about cultural skills and experiences which can be used in school interventions. Initially developed by Aganza et al. (2015) the CAI is a semi-structured interview which is carried out with the young person and which, amongst other things, identifies activities which they engage in at home or which relate to their culture. This information is then used within an asset based consultation (ABC) process in which the school psychologist collaborates with the teacher to develop culturally informed strategies that can support the student.

There are similarities between Harris et al. (2017) and Barba et al. (2019) and my own research in the use of interviewing to learn more about the activities and contexts where strengths are present. The Harris et al. (2017) study is more therapeutic, working directly with young people, whereas Barba et al. (2019) like my own work, brings assessment information back to inform a consultation meeting between psychologist and teacher. However, neither study explores how some school contexts might already be supportive of strengths, nor does either study apply a situated learning framework to analyse the identified contexts or activities.

5.2.3 Rerunning phase 2 literature searches

Literature searches from phase 2 aimed to find sources which applied situated learning, communities of practice or situative learning to understand contexts involving children and young people. These searches, initially carried out in March 2016, were repeated in February 2020 to identify recent work in this area published between 1st April 2016 and 2020. The results of the updated searches are presented in Table 20.

Table 20. Repeated phase 2 literature searches.

Database; search term	Results
Proquest Education; Ti ("situated learning") and (classroom or child or young person or pupil or adolescent)	2
Proquest Education; Ti ("communit* of practice") and (classroom or child or young person or pupil or adolescent)	8 (3 of which were about communities of practice involving teachers only)
PsychInfo; Ti ("communit* of practice") and (classroom or child or young person or pupil or adolescent)	1
Proquest (All) Ab ("situative learning")	10 of which only 2 dealt with children or young people

5.2.4 Main findings from rerunning phase 2 literature searches

Broadly speaking in rerunning this search I was interested in any recent developments in the application of situated approaches to the learning and education of young people.

Amongst the literature I found, there were further examples of situated learning, communities of practice and situative learning being applied to analyse both formal and informal learning situations involving children and young people. For example, Kyratzis & Johnson (2017) examined how children participated together in classroom problem-solving activities. They viewed learning from a situated point of view and cited Lave & Wenger

(1991). Dullea (2017) researched how children participated in an opera chorus scheme designed to give them real-life experience of working with an opera company in the UK. Dullea (2017) drew on Lave & Wenger (1991) and the notion of situated learning. In their study of adolescent second language learners in a high school, Martin-Beltran et al. (2019) applied the community of practice framework, while remaining mindful of some of the critiques of it. They focused specifically on how the language practices of students from different language backgrounds informed the shared repertoire within the learning setting. Jung et al. (2019) used a situative framework to study a biology tablet-mediated learning programme involving children aged 9-11 at a nature centre summer camp. They reference the work of Greeno and use situative theory to study the evolution of children interest in the programme.

Examples like these show that situated approaches continue to be applied to better understand the school based and non-school based settings in which children and young people learn to function.

Much of the research was, like my own work, case study based and involved observation and interview with participants to learn more about specific contexts. As in previous studies the observation side of the research sometimes used audio or video-recording and analysis of large data sets. However, there were also examples of approaches such as the use of field notes (Dullea, 2017) which might be more feasible within EP practice.

One study, Botha & Kourkoutas (2016), seemed particularly pertinent to my own research. This focused on the needs of children with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties at school. Botha & Kourkoutas drew on literature to list challenges which could get in the way of effective support for these children. This included: referral to outside professionals which did not take account of how the children were functioning in school; the way that labelling and pathologizing children did not necessarily translate into finding ways of helping them at school; problems caused by a lack of collaboration between teachers and others involved (researchers, policy developers and so on). Botha & Kourkoutas (2016) argued that inclusive interventions for such children should be managed by communities of practice involving related professionals, parents and the children themselves. This was not an empirical study

of how communities of practice work, but a suggested remedy to some of the problems that usually beset supporting this group of children.

The arguments in Botha & Kourkoutas (2016) could indicate where processes in my own project might be deployed to support greater understanding of what is working for specific students with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (and perhaps other forms of SEN). Such work would include the temporary addition of the educational psychologist to specific communities of practice within the school setting.

However, within this updated search and despite the continuing use of situated approaches to understand educational contexts, no examples were found of how such theoretical frameworks might be applied to understand the situations where children and young people's strengths are present.

5.3 The contribution of this research project

As I approach the close of this thesis, I would like to consider the main contributions that my research project might be thought to have made. In the discussion and conclusion of each phase, I have already drawn attention to contributions to educational psychology practice knowledge. Phase 1 showed that a sample of CYP referred to the attention of an educational psychologist, because they were perceived as having difficulties, could nonetheless identify contexts in their lives, often within school, where strengths were present. Phase 2 showed how a theoretical framework based on situated learning and utilising the concept of affordance could be deployed to analyse the strength-based contexts that were identified by three CYP. This proposed a way of understanding strengths as forms of participation and highlighted how aspects of practice provided CYP with important opportunities to participate in certain ways. Phase 3 indicated that the teachers and school staff involved in these cases were able to appreciate this situated way of thinking about strengths and could begin to consider how this kind of analysis might lead to further changes or intervention.

However, I would now like to go a little further and discuss how the project might contribute to the broader fields of educational research and practice.

I will begin with the field of research. Literature searches indicate that this research project represents the first attempt to create a situated form of strength-based assessment. The origins of strength-based assessment are based in forms of individual psychology in which strengths are understood as internal qualities of an individual, or supportive types of social ecologies within which they move (parent who take an interest, recognition at school). Therefore, much of the purpose of traditional types of strength-based assessment are to chart these as general qualities, without understanding how they are achieved in typical scenarios. Applying a situated learning lens allows a closer examination of how such participation actually happens in particular contexts of practice. It is this conceptual shift and the empirical demonstration of its possibility which is the main academic contribution of this thesis.

The significance of taking such a view is that it can lead to an assessment process which is as much about the context of strength-based participation as it is about the participation itself. It creates a form of applied psychology which is more sensitive to the role of social practice and therefore provides a more comprehensive understanding of how strengths happen.

There are examples of existing research which has been interested in learning more about the social contexts within which strengths are present (Harris et al., 2016; Barba et al., 2019; Rawana & Brownlee, 2009). However, these have used follow up atheoretical interviews to learn more contexts and activities and have not attempted to theorise how these relate to strengths. Bringing situated learning theory to bear on the subject allows a different kind of analysis to occur and surfaces some unexpected links. For example, that the basic practice in an educational space might afford strength-based participation in ways which are not always known to the staff involved. Or, that a practice only creates an opening for the CYP when a member of staff uses it as a basis for creating an additional opportunity for the CYP – as Ms Taylor did by specifically directing questions to Nazia in case 3.

A second contribution to educational research I would like to mention here, is the synergy that has been gained by using situated learning in combination with the philosophical base of critical realism. The benefit has been two-way. Critical realist ideas have strengthened the conceptualisation of social practice as a unit of analysis. Seeing practice as the critical realist 'social object' of study has allowed it to be subject to typical questions and methods that are

used within this paradigm. For example, using critical realist analytical methods such as retroduction to generate ideas about what is necessary for a form of participation to occur as well as asking questions about the conditions under which mechanisms of the object are likely to be triggered. Conversely a situated view has provided a further example, building on the work of Volkoff & Strong (2013), of how the critical realist notion of the generative mechanism may be productively interpreted as equivalent to the notion of affordance – thus preserving its relational nature, at once a combination of object structure and deployment by the actor.

Taking this integrative view also has a contribution to make towards the professional work of educational or school psychologists. A situated form of strength-based assessment brings the nature of practice into the spotlight. It creates by implication, questions and possibilities about the way practice could be developed or altered. This has the advantage of keeping the educational psychologist firmly engaged in collaboration about practice and its connection with the CYP, rather than seeing the CYP as somehow separate from practice.

5.3.1 Future possibilities for an emancipatory form of professional practice

This project, like other research and scholarship (Gillham, 1978; Leyden, 1999; Prilleltensky, 1991; Billington, 2014; Williams et al, 2016), begins from critique, and moves towards an alternative vision of how EP practice might be organised. It argues that educational psychology practice does not have to involve a focus on difficulties and the inevitable language of problem solving. In the introduction to the thesis I explained how closely wedded to problem-solving approaches the profession has been. Strength-based approaches offer a different starting point. Before and during this research project I was attracted by the emancipatory potential of a contextualised strength-based approach to educational psychology practice. Reflecting on the research process, I am now in a better position to take stock of how far this was possible and how it might be developed further.

The research reported here shows how a strength-based approach can be applied to a consideration of educational practices, so that learners who may have struggled to function within many of the contexts they have found themselves, are now involved in examining how some of the practices around them work well and potentially how ideas discovered in

these places might be applied elsewhere. It offers one possibility for a more emancipatory form of professional practice. It might be seen as a method for understanding an institution's most inclusive practices and therefore an initial step on the development to increased inclusivity.

However, writings on emancipatory practice highlight the way that power can operate through professional actions, often unconsciously, leading to further forms of oppression (Williams, 2013; Tew, 2006; Trede et al., 2003). It is important to be as aware as possible of the sources and nature of power in institutions.

Although institutional and structural forms of power were not the main focus of this thesis, a critical realist ontology did represent these forces in the notion of conditions (Sayer, 1992). This meant I had the scope to think about the way that power affected me at times during the project. On occasion in phase 1, I became aware of it through my own discomfort justifying a strength-based line. In phases 2 and 3, I was aware I had avoided the complexity of power relations by carrying out my research slightly to one side of my traded EPS work.

With respect to future possibilities for developing and applying emancipatory strength-based practices, it would be important to look more closely at how power may act to inhibit such initiatives and what it might be possible to achieve, nonetheless, through further strategic moves (cf. Tew, 2006).

Within school systems in which other priorities exist, the individual's fate is likely to be affected by structural forces. However, elements of an emancipatory approach may illuminate existing practices, in order of the extent to which the approaches used in this thesis would be overtly applied, this could include:

1. Using a situated perspective as the conceptual means to build a formulation (Johnstone & Dallos, 2014) - a situated view would be able to represent difficulties as well as strengths. Here formulation becomes an interpretative task and might incorporate processes of zooming in and zooming out.
2. Using a situated strength-based orientation to guide interview questions in routine case-level work, so that both child and adult contribute to the identification of practices and affordances.
3. Working with the grain of existing statutory power structures. This could mean basing a pre-

statutory intervention on a contextualised strength-based viewpoint (extending what is working well) or using the same orientation to help provide ideas for the provision section in a statutory advice report.

4. Using a contextualised strength-based approach as a way of framing consultation (Wagner, 2000), which would not only build on the strengths of a teacher's work, but possibly bring CYP into conversations about practice.

5. Using the approach in combination with boundary object representations to facilitate reflective staff development, as was suggested by Mr Hill in phase 3 interviews.

6. Offering whole school training on the methodology to promote a contextualised strength-based discourse in schools.

5.4 Research Limitations

Within the discussions of different phases of the project I have already described some of the methodological weaknesses of this study (see sections 2.7.5, 3.7.4 and 4.8.4). Here I would like to consider some of the limitations which might apply to the project's form as a whole.

The first limitation has been alluded to in part in these earlier sections. The project has been a small scale piece of research and has been carried out slightly to one side of the forces that impinge on the practice of EPs, especially in phase 2 and 3. It may therefore underestimate the difficulties of sustaining a contextualised strength-based approach within today's education systems, In EP practice as a whole remains problem-focused and closely tied to the statutory assessment of special educational need. Some writers have mentioned that the take up of even traditional/ individualised forms of strength-based assessment has been relatively modest (Nichols & Graves, 2018; Climie & Henley, 2016).

Secondly, the three case studies in which there was a situated assessment of contexts in phase 2, all happened within schools. It seems likely that school lessons will be a more structured and repetitive form of social situation than might be found elsewhere. This would suit a conceptualisation which was founded on identifying patterns in the way people interacted and functioned together. It remains to be seen whether similar forms of practice could be easily distinguished within other non-school settings.

Finally, how realistic is it to spend this amount of attention studying what works well for one CYP? It would surely be impracticable to do this for every child. Perhaps this point should be conceded. Contextualised strength-based assessment may be a method which is best suited for working with CYP for whom school presents the most difficulties, those who are the most significantly marginalised or at risk of exclusion. Then again, these are the sort of children and young people with whom EPs are regularly working. For such pupils it could be a very empowering process to experience and if successful in generating insight may increase the range of needs with which a school is able to cope.

5.5 Future research directions

Future research could attempt to address the limitations mentioned above, considering the application of these assessment ideas within the actual practice of educational psychology practice or looking to extend them to situations outside of school settings.

However, perhaps the clearest next step is to investigate ways in which a contextualised strength-based assessment might lead to change or intervention. Some of the possibilities were discussed towards the end of the project, particularly in phase 3, where three forms of change were outlined in section 4.4 (adjustment to increase strength participation in the focal context; support for more consistent participation; transfer to another context). These were supplemented following the phase 3 interviews to include a fourth possibility, which was to influence organisational systems (e.g., to promote teacher reflection and learning or enhance existing tools such as one page profiles).

The actual structure of the phase 3 interviews in which I (the school's EP) sat down with a member of staff from the strength-base context and an additional member of staff (e.g., the SENCO) did adumbrate one particular way in which a post-assessment meeting might be organised to facilitate the identification of intervention possibilities. Indeed, situated learning proved useful here in offering the notion of brokering to analyse how the EP role might be understood at this point. In addition, the use the deployment of a visual boundary object representation seemed to facilitate discussion.

Nonetheless, this remained only one option in how an intervention planning phase might be organised – and of course, in this case, it was a process which lacked the input of the CYP at this stage. Earlier in phase 1 of the project, in discussing how Dayyan's work on the CSF might have informed planning (see section 2.6.2.4) I speculated that it could have led to a joint planning meeting with me, the SENCo and Dayyan himself. Such formats remain open to be explored in future research.

5.6 Personal journey

To complete my reflections on the conclusion of this research project, I would like to make a few comments about the effect it has had on my own practice as an educational psychologist over the last six years. During that time, I have been fortunate enough to be able to carry out this research in the schools where I work as an educational psychologist. The phases of the project each engaged with cases which had already been raised for me to contribute to professionally. I found it was not difficult to use the methods that I devised in my ordinary day-to-day work. But how far has the experience of developing and using a contextualised form of strength-based assessment affected the way I carry out my work at other times?

I have looked for opportunities to use the Context of Strength Finder and I have used it from time to time in my work with other children and young people. On one occasion, I carried out a strength-based observation using the observation schedule I developed in phase 2 of the project, spoke to the teacher and the child about the observation and brought them together to discuss how to develop an action plan. This was an exception, though, to my more usual practice, where I must admit, I continue to be drawn towards solving problems and making assessments of difficulties. Time constraints and a need to recognise and pay heed to the problem have continued to affect me. That is not to say my practice has not been influenced in more subtle ways. Now whenever I observe a lesson, I tend to find it helpful to view it in situated terms, to think about the basic practice forms that are present and the kinds of opportunities for participation that this creates for a CYP. Sometimes I see episodes of practice which seem to work very well in providing the opportunity for a pupil to

activate affordances and engage in a lesson, at other times I see a lack of affordances and some marginalisation.

I continue to believe that increasing my own deployment of strength-based methods would create a more liberating and holistic form of applied psychology practice. I continue to prompt myself and make myself take steps in this direction whenever I see the opportunity. Sometimes I feel guilty that I have not used the CSF for a while. Once I pondered on this and wondered how it would work if I applied the theory I had developed to my own situation. If I saw my own work with strength-based methods as a form of participation in practice which I wanted to happen more often. Perhaps I needed to remember those places where it had been possible to take a contextualised strength-based approach and then research how this came about. It would seem to be more likely to happen if I was in a place where others recognised and understood the value of what I wanted to do and wanted to make it happen. Or, alternatively, if I took sustenance from developing this approach with people in a separate community of practice, so that I was sustained in brokering the idea more frequently into my school-based work. This latter position is how I have felt during my time as a post graduate researcher at Manchester Metropolitan University. The challenge now is to find other communities where I can continue to develop my practice.

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Appendices

Appendix A1. Context of Strength Finder Checklist

Personal strengths	No	Sometimes	Yes
1. I can cope in difficult times			
2. I have a sense of humour			
3. I solve problems			
4. I can do things by myself			

Doing strengths	No	Sometimes	Yes
5. I write well			
6. I read well			
7. I speak well			
8. I can make things			

Family strengths	No	Sometimes	Yes
9. I get on with my Mum/ Dad			
10. My family listens to me			
11. My family does things together			
12. I get on with my brother/ sister			

Friendship strengths	No	Sometimes	Yes
13. Other children/ young people like me			
14. I enjoy doing things with other children / young people			
15. I have a close friend			
16. Other kids think I'm cool			

School strengths	No	Sometimes	Yes
17. There is a teacher who cares about me			
18. I have done special things at school			
19. Teachers believe I can do well			
20. Pupils are treated fairly in my school			

Community strengths	No	Sometimes	Yes
21. I take part in sports			
22. I belong to a youth club			
23. I go to a church/ mosque/ temple			
24. I help people in my community			

Appendix A2. Phase 1 data gathering forms

PARTICIPANT DETAILS

Participant Identifier	
Gender	
Age	
Date of assessment	

Reason for EP involvement

Rationale for use of strength-based assessment

What happened

Further thoughts

CSF Record Sheet 1

		O	G	Notes
1. Difficult times				
2. Humour				
3. Solve problems				
4. By myself				
5. Write well				
6. Read well				
7. Speak well				
8. Make things				
9. M&D				
10. Listens				
11. Together				
12. Bro/ sister				

		O	G	Notes
				- 280 -
13. Like me				
14. Enjoy				
15. Close friend				
16. Cool				
17. Teacher cares				
18. Special				
19. Do well				
20. Fairly				
21. Sports				
22. Youth club				
23. CMT				
24. Help others				

CSF Record Sheet 2

Situation								
Strengths								

1. Who belongs in this situation? Who does not belong in it?

2. How long/ often have you done this together?   _____

3. Describe a typical occasion when you have done this together.

4. What can x do in this situation? What can you do in this situation? (I7)

5. Would there be a way of behaving that wasn't right in this situation? (I5)

6. Are there special pieces of equipment that you use together? (I10)

7. In this situation do you use any special words or have any special ways of doing things? (I11)

Appendix A3. Phase 1 Ethics documents

APPLICATION FOR ETHICAL APPROVAL

Introduction

All university activity must be reviewed for ethical approval. In particular, all undergraduate, postgraduate and staff research work, projects and taught programmes must obtain approval from the Academic Ethics committee.

Application Procedure

The form should be completed legibly (preferably typed) and, so far as possible, in a way which would enable a layperson to understand the aims and methods of the research. Every relevant section should be completed. Applicants should also include a copy of any proposed advert, information sheet, consent form and, if relevant, any questionnaire being used. The Principal Investigator should sign the application form. Supporting documents, together with one copy of the full protocol should be sent to the Faculty/Campus Research Group Officer.

Your application will require external ethical approval by an NHS Research Ethics Committee if your research involves staff, patients or premises of the NHS (see guidance notes)

Work with children and vulnerable adults
You will be required to have an Enhanced CRB Disclosure, if your work involves children or vulnerable adults.

The Academic Ethics Committee will respond as soon as possible, and where appropriate, will operate a process of expedited review.

Applications that require approval by an NHS Research Ethics Committee or a Criminal Disclosure will take longer.

1. Details of Applicants

1.1. Name of applicant (Principal Investigator): Nicholas (Nick) Bozic
Telephone Number: XXXXXXXXX

Email address: nicholas.m.bozic@stu.mmu.ac.uk	
Status: Educational Psychologist	Postgraduate Student (Research)
Department/School/Other Unit: Psychology	
Programme of study (if applicable): N/A	
Name of supervisor/Line manager: Professor Rebecca Lawthom	

1.2. Co-Workers and their role in the project: (e.g. students, external collaborators, etc)
Possibly members of my Local Authority Educational Psychology Service, but they have not been identified yet.

Name:	Name:
Telephone Number:	Telephone Number:
Role:	Role:
Email Address:	Email Address:

2. Details of the Project

2.1. Title: **Learning about the social contexts which promote strengths in children and young people**

2.2. Description of the Project: (please outline the background and the purpose of the research project, 250 words max)

In working as an educational psychologist for almost twenty years I have gradually become interested in strength-based approaches to understanding and working with children and young people. During much of my work in schools it is assumed that my attention will focus on the things that pupils cannot do or find difficult. However, I have found that it can be equally profitable to seek out the contexts where a child or young person is experiencing some forms of success and then learn what has led to these 'exceptions'. This type of orientation is recognised within a growing literature on strength-based approaches to practice in relation to many of the human services. While this is a welcome development it is necessary to also pay attention to the social environments that promote strength development, so that we can make schools and other settings more effective. The theoretical framework provided by

Communities of Practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998) offers a way of conceptualising the relationship between structures of social practice (e.g. the way children and adults relate to each other in a common endeavour) and the development of forms of identity. The purpose of my study is to see if the Communities of Practice framework can be used to support a form of strength-based educational psychology practice which remains sensitive to context.

2.3. Describe what type of study this is (e.g. qualitative or quantitative; also indicate how the data will be collected and analysed). Additional sheets may be attached.

This study is a sustained piece of action research planned to occur over three distinct phases. Results from the first phase will inform the development of the second phase and so on.

Phase 1 is envisaged to take about 12 months and it is for this work that I am seeking ethical approval. The planned research will involve interviewing children and young people (CYP) I work with in my capacity as an educational psychologist. The aim will be to see whether it is possible for CYP to identify communities of practice (inside or outside school) within which they are able to experience and/or develop strengths. The data will be gathered on a specially created proforma, which can then be subject to the following quantitative and qualitative analysis:

Identified strengths will be examined:

- **The mean numbers of strengths highlighted per social context;**
- **The proportion of occasions in which new strengths/ competences were identified;**
- **Differences in patterns of strength by age.**

Accounts of social contexts will be subject to inductive thematic analysis to gain a clearer understanding of the types of social contexts which CYP identify.

Identified social contexts will also be analysed to assess whether they are indicative of communities of practice. Key indicators of communities of practice will be established as defined codes. Each account will be analysed through deductive thematic analysis to see how many codes can be identified within it.

It is envisaged that subsequent phases of research activity will use ethnographic and case study methods to make further studies of identified communities of practice. Separate applications for ethical approval will be made for these phases of the project.

2.4. Are you going to use a questionnaire?   **NO**
2.5. Start Date / Duration of project: Pilot data gathering from 01 Sep 2015 – duration 2 months;   main data gathering from 01 Nov 2015 – duration 5 months
2.6. Location of where the project and data collection will take place: Birmingham. Data collection will take place in schools in East Birmingham district.
2.7. Nature/Source of funding: Self-funded
2.8. Are there any regulatory requirements?   **YES** (Provide details, e.g. from professional bodies) • There are legal requirements for Practitioner Psychologists to be registered with the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) whilst working in the UK. My registration is up-to-date.. • I am also a member of the British Psychological Society which provides additional guidelines for research and practice. • I have an up-to-date DBS Certificate (**please see copy attached**)

3. Details of Participants

3.1. How many? Twenty
3.2. Age: Between the ages of 7 and 25
3.3. Sex: Male and female
3.4. How will they be recruited?   They will be referred to me as part of usual pattern of work in the local authority/ local schools.
3.5. Status of participants: (e.g. students, public, colleagues, children, hospital patients, prisoners, including young offenders, participants with mental illness or learning difficulties.)   Children and young people who on-roll at school or college and who have been referred to the Educational Psychology Service.

3.6. Inclusion and exclusion from the project: (indicate the criteria to be applied).
    Inclusion criteria:
        • Child or young person has been referred to me for EP involvement;
        • Child or young person is aged 5-16;

• Concerns about the child's learning or behaviour;   • CYP is able to communicate clearly.

3.7. Payment to volunteers: (indicate any sums to be paid to volunteers).   No payment.

3.8. Study information:
 Have you provided a study information sheet for the participants?
         YES
         I have designed an information sheet for parents and another for participants (Please see attached)

3.9. Consent:
 (A written consent form for the study participants MUST be provided in all cases, unless the research is a questionnaire.)
 Have you produced a written consent form for the participants to sign for your records?
         YES
         I have designed a consent form for parents and another for participants (Please see attached)
 .

4. Risks and Hazards

4.1. Are there any risks to the researcher and/or participants?   (Give details of the procedures and processes to be undertaken, e.g., if the researcher is a lone-worker.)   The research will involve interviewing children/ young people about their strengths and the places where they exhibit such strengths.   The usual risks of EP practice apply to the researcher: - Risk of false accusation from young person;   - Risk of entering household where one could be in danger.   - There is a very small risk of children/ young people becoming upset if the interview perhaps reminds them of difficult events.

4.2. State precautions to minimise the risks and possible adverse events: Precautions: - The researcher will need to interview young people in a confidential area, but as usual, will need to be mindful to stay within easy sight of others;   - On occasions there may be a need for the researcher to make home visits in order to gain parental consent or to meet young people. Again, the usual procedures regarding safe working will be adopted – not to enter a home without parent present, to record the address of the visit within my outlook calendar, etc.

	-	The researcher will monitor the emotional reaction of participants carefully during interviews. If at any time a child/ young person looks like they are becoming upset they will be given the opportunity to recover and then asked if they would like to continue or else stop the interview.

4.3.	What discomfort (physical or psychological) danger or interference with normal activities might be suffered by the researcher and/or participant(s)? State precautions which will be taken to minimise them: N/A

5. Ethical Issues

5.1. Please describe any ethical issues raised and how you intend to address these:

Consent to take part in the research project will be sought from the parents/ carers of participating children/ young people (BPS, 2010). However, in line with British Psychological Society (BPS, 2010) recommendations, child participants will also be "given ample opportunity to understand the nature, purpose and anticipated outcomes of any research participation, so that they may give consent to the extent that their capabilities allow."

Informing participants of the nature and purpose of the research project will be addressed by creating separate participant information sheets for parents/ carers and for children/ young people. Care will be taken to ensure the use of language is appropriate for the intended audience. Where parents have limited understanding of written English attempts will be made to provide a translation.

Confidentiality will be maintained. Information provided by participants will be anonymised and stored in a secure location (see Section 6 below). It will not be possible to identify participants from any data which is subsequently published.

The right to withdraw from the research will be respected, as recommended by the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2011). Participants and their parents/ carers will be informed that withdrawal from the project will be possible at any stage.

BPS (2010) Code of Human Research Ethics. Leicester: BPS.
BERA (2011) Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research. London: BERA.

6. Safeguards/Procedural Compliance

6.1. Confidentiality:
   6.1.1. Indicate what steps will be taken to safeguard the confidentiality of participant records. If the data is to be computerised, it will be necessary to ensure compliance with the requirements of the Data Protection Act 1998.

   The following steps will be taken to ensure confidentiality of information collected from participants:

<ol type="i" start="1">
Each participant will be assigned a code and the data gathered from them will have this code written on it, rather than any other identifying details;
A table of codes and their correspondence with participant identity will be created. This will be held at a different location from the participant data;
Both the participant data and the code table will be held in locked filing cabinets;
When taking notes from participants, if further names are mentioned by the participant, these will also be recorded on the data collection proforma as codes with the code-identity correspondence added to that participant's entry on the table of codes;
All signed consent forms will also be held separately from the data gathered from participants;
When data from participants is prepared for publication/ PhD write-up, no identifying information will be included.

6.1.2. If you are intending to make any kind of audio or visual recordings of the participants, please answer the following questions:

    6.1.2.1. How long will the recordings be retained and how will they be stored?

    6.1.2.2. How will they be destroyed at the end of the project?

    6.1.2.3. What further use, if any, do you intend to make of the recordings?

I do not intend to make any audio or visual recordings.

6.2. The Human Tissue Act

The Human Tissue Act came into force in November 2004, and requires appropriate consent for, and regulates the removal, storage and use of all human tissue.

6.2.1. Does your project involve taking tissue samples, e.g., blood, urine, hair etc., from human subjects?

    NO

6.2.2. Will this be discarded when the project is terminated?

    YES

    NO

If NO – Explain how the samples will be placed into a tissue bank under the Human Tissue Act regulations:

6.3. Insurance

The University holds insurance policies in place to cover claims for negligence arising from the conduct of the University's normal business, which includes research carried out by staff and by undergraduate and postgraduate students as part of their course. This does not extend to clinical negligence.

In addition, the University has provision to award indemnity and/or compensation in the event of claims for non-negligent harm. This is on the condition that the project is accepted by the insurers prior to the commencement of the research project and approval has been granted for the project

from a suitable ethics committee.

Research which is applicable to non-negligent harm cover involves humans and physical intervention which could give rise to a physical injury or illness which is outside the participants day to day activities. This includes strenuous exercise, ingestion of substances, injection of substances, topical application of any substances, insertion of instruments, blood/tissue sampling of participants and scanning of participants.

The following types of research are not covered automatically for non-negligent harm if they are classed as the activities above and they involve:

1)   Anything that assists with and /or alters the process of contraception, or investigating or participating in methods of contraception
2)   Anything involving genetic engineering other than research in which the medical purpose is treating or diagnosing disease
3)   Where the substance under investigation has been designed and /or manufactured by MMU
4)   Pregnant women
5)   Drug trials
6)   Research involving children under sixteen years of age
7)   Professional sports persons and or elite athletes.
8)   Overseas research

Will the proposed project result in you undertaking any research that includes any of the 8 points above or would not be considered as normal University business? If so, please detail below: No

6.4. Notification of Adverse Events (e.g., negative reaction, counsellor, etc):
(Indicate precautions taken to avoid adverse reactions.)

Please state the processes/procedures in place to respond to possible adverse reactions.
As with all interviewing work carried out by educational psychologists there is the possibility of an adverse reaction – even though in this case the conversations will be focusing on positive events. If a child or young person becomes upset during the interview they will be given time to recover and asked if they would like to continue or whether they would prefer to not to say any more. In this event I would contact the child/ young person's parents to let them know what has happened.

In the case of clinical research, you will need to abide by specific guidance. This may include notification to GP and ethics committee. Please seek guidance for up to date advice, e.g., see the NRES website at http://www.nres.npsa.nhs.uk/

SIGNATURE OF PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:	Date
SIGNATURE OF FACULTY'S HEAD OF ETHICS:	Date:

Checklist of attachments needed:

1. Participant consent form
2. Participant information sheet
3. Full protocol
4. Advertising details
5. Insurance notification forms
6. NHS Approval Letter (where appropriate)
7. Other evidence of ethical approval (e.g., another University Ethics Committee approval)

MEMORANDUM

Manchester Metropolitan University
FACULTY OF HEALTH, PSYCHOLOGY AND SOCIAL CARE
FACULTY RESEARCH DEGREES GROUP

TO: Nicholas Bozic
CC: Prof Rebecca Lawthom
FROM: Prof Hugh McLaughlin
DATE: 05/10/2015

Manchester Metropolitan University

RESEARCH DEGREE REGISTRATION: Nicholas Bozic ID: 14501337
I am pleased to inform you that you have been registered by the Faculty's Research Degrees Group as a Part Time candidate for the degree of PhD (Psychology). Set out below are details of the approved registration and information concerning the proposal of the examiners.
Approval for your ethical application 1306 has also been given 29 September 2015.

REGISTRATION DETAILS

Title of Programme of Research: *Applying theoretical formulations of social context to promote strength development in children and young people*

Supervisors: Prof Rebecca Lawthom (DoS), Dr Janice Murray

Date of Registration and Duration

The period of registration will be at least 72 months from your registration date 26 September 2015 subject to the conditions specified in University Regulation 27.6. It is anticipated that the award will be conferred within 12 months from the date of submission.

PROPOSAL OF EXAMINERS

Your Director of Studies will need to propose the examiners to the Faculty Research Degrees Committee for approval at least three months before the expected date of the examination – please see University Regulation 37. Forms can be downloaded from the University's Graduate School web pages or they are available from the Faculty Research Degrees Administrator.

A list of key dates will follow shortly. Your Director of Studies has been copied in to this correspondence.

Yours sincerely,

Cate Lawton
Research Degrees Administrator

Learning about the social contexts which promote strengths in children and young people

> *I would like to invite you to allow your son/ daughter to take part in a research study. Before you decide, you need to understand why the research is being done and what it would involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully. Ask questions if anything you read is not clear or would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not to take part.*

The study is exploring ways of identifying the social contexts in which children and young people display strengths.

What is the purpose of the study?

Educational psychologists are interested in learning about the strengths of children and young people, as well as the things they find more difficult. For all of us the social environment plays a big part in whether we are able to display our best qualities. If we can learn more about the social contexts which work best for particular children and young people, we will be in a better position to improve the education they receive.

Why have I been invited?

You are receiving this invitation because your son/ daughter has been referred to the educational psychology service.

Does my son/ daughter have to take part?

You can decide whether your son or daughter takes part in this study. This information sheet describes the study and there is a consent form to show you agreed for your son/ daughter to take part. You can withdraw them from the study at any time up to 30.4.16, without giving a reason.

What will happen if I agree that they can take part?

If your son/ daughter takes part in this study:

- They will continue to receive the usual level of support from the educational psychology service
- Anonymised information about their strengths will be included in the research project.

What will happen if I do <u>not</u> agree that my son/ daughter can take part?

If your son/ daughter does not take part in this study:

- They will continue to receive the usual level of support from the educational psychology service.
- No information about their strengths will be used in the research project.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

It is hoped that the information gained from this interview will help to provide a more effective service for your son/ daughter.

In addition, the study as a whole should help educational psychologists to improve their work with children and young people at school.

What if there is a problem?

If you have a complaint to make about this research please contact the researcher in the first instance (see contact details below). The researcher's line manager can also be contacted on this number.

Will participation in the study be kept confidential?

All information which is collected about your son or daughter during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential, and any information about them which leaves the local authority will have their name and address removed so that they cannot be recognised.

- Data will be collected through handwritten notes made during interview.
- it will be stored safely, by the researcher:
    - individual participant interview data will be anonymous and given a research code, known only to the researcher;
    - A master list identifying participants to the research codes data will be held on a password protected computer accessed only by the researcher;
    - hard paper data will be stored in a locked cabinet accessed only by researcher;
    - electronic data will be stored on a password protected computer known only by researcher.

- Authorised people (other members of the educational psychology service and research supervisors) will be able to see identifiable data.
- The data will be retained for a minimum of 6 years.

What will happen if I don't carry on with the study?

If you withdraw your son/ daughter from the study before 30.4.16 information about their strengths will be removed from the project.

If you withdraw after 30.4.16 anonymous information about your son/ daughter will have been added to the data gained from other participants and it will not be possible to remove it from the study.

Withdrawal from the study will not affect your son or daughter's involvement with Birmingham Educational Psychology Service.

What will happen to the results of the research study?

Anonymised information collected from this study may be published as part of a PhD thesis or in academic/ professional journals or books.

Who is organising the research?

This research is being carried out by the researcher as part of his PhD and with the backing of Birmingham Educational Psychology Service. It is being supervised by staff at Manchester Metropolitan University.

Contact details:

The researcher's contact details are as follows:

Nick Bozic (Educational Psychologist)

Address: Access to Education, Vauxhall Gardens, Barrack Street, Birmingham. B7 4HA.

Telephone: 0121 303 1793

PARENT/ CARER CONSENT FORM

Learning about the social contexts which promote strengths in children and young people

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.	YES	NO
2. I understand that my consent is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw it at any time until 30th April 2016, without giving any reason.	YES	NO
3. I agree to my son/ daughter taking part in the above study.	YES	NO

_____	_____	_____
Name of Parent	Date	Signature

_____	_____	_____
Name of Person	Date	Signature
taking consent.		

<u>Pupil Information Sheet and Consent Form</u>

<u>The Strengths Project</u>

I am your educational psychologist.

Today I have asked you some questions about your strengths, the things that you do well.
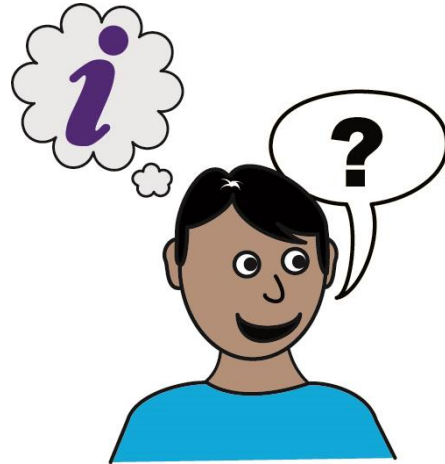
I would like to include your answers in a project I am doing about children and young people's strengths, which is called The Strengths Project.

Why am I doing this project?

To find out about children and young people's strengths.

To learn where children and young people use their strengths.
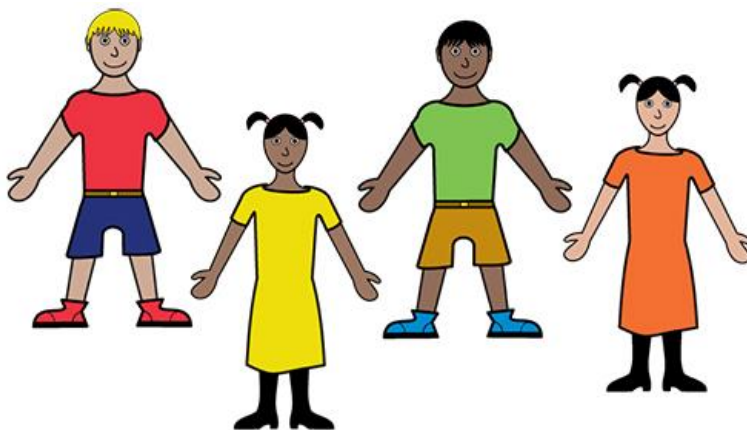
What happens if I take part in the strengths project?

- Information about your strengths will be included in the project.

- It will be added to information I have got from interviewing other children/ young people.

- At the end of the project I will send you a report about why strengths matter.

- Your name will not be not be included in anything that I write about this project.

Do I have to take part?
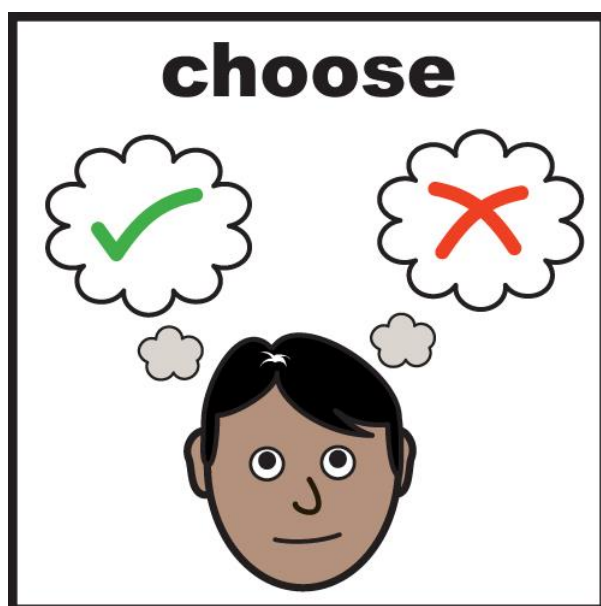
- You can say 'yes' I do want to take part, or 'no' I do not want to take part.

- If you say 'no' I will still be your educational psychologist.

- You can say 'yes' now and change your mind later, as long as you do it before 30th April, 2016.

If you have any questions you can ask me now or next time I'm in school.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information.

Images by

I _____ (Full name)
have read the information sheet and I would like to take part in the Strengths Project.

Please circle Yes or No to the following questions:

I understand that I can decide not to be in the project now or at any time up to 30th April 2016.	YES	NO
I am happy to take part in the Strengths Project.	YES	NO

Date: _____

Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form (Pupil version)

The Strengths Project

I am your educational psychologist. As part of my work with you today I have asked you some questions about your strengths, the things that you do well.

I would like to include your answers in a project I am doing about children and young people's strengths, which is called The Strengths Project.

I am finding out about the situations where children and young people use their strengths.

Why am I doing this research?

- To find out about children and young people's strengths.

- To learn where children and young people use their strengths.

Do I have to take part?

No, you don't have to take part. You can say 'no' now or any time before 30th April, 2016.

Don't worry, if you say you don't want to be in the project I will still be your educational psychologist.

What happens if I take part in the strengths project?

- Information about your strengths will be included in the project.

- It will be added to information I have got from interviewing other children/ young people.

- At the end of the project I will send you a report about why strengths matter.

- Your name will not be included in anything that I write about this project.

If you have any questions please ask me now or next time I'm in school.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information

I _____ (Full name) have read the information sheet and I would like to take part in the Strengths Project.

Please circle Yes or No to the following questions:

I understand that I can decide not to be in the project now or at any time up to 30th April 2016.	YES	NO
I am happy to take part in the Strengths Project.	YES	NO

Date: _____

Appendix A4. Extracts from Phase 2 Research Diary

29.1.18

Following obs and interview with K's art teacher beginning to think the value of this context is more about the high degree of structure and discipline than the artistic activity per se.

23.1.18

Just preparing for observing the Art class at X. Made me wonder whether in thinking about the significance of a CYP's strengths I need to reflect a little on the problems that they are also dealing with. For example, R. seems to be managing intense anxiety so this heightens the significance of being near his friends in Art? (although this wasn't one of the strengths that he nominated for Art).

12.1.18

Carried out the observation of the PE session at Y. It struck me that besides writing what happens in the different columns, it would be helpful to annotate the notes afterwards with notes about general points that seemed relevant – for example, in this case, the way in which the instructor, Patrick, was continually involved with the young people, talking to them, monitoring them – it really was quite an intense process. As he said he couldn't turn his back for a moment because with these kids something will happen.

11.1.18

Rang J's mother to see if she could remind J to take his trainers to Y tomorrow. Felt that she was a little defensive on the phone – made me wonder whether she thought there was some implied criticism of her in my call.

15.12.17

Went to Y today to do the obs but couldn't do it because J hadn't got his trainers and didn't want to do the session in bare feet. When I got there it was lunchtime and J had already been in trouble. He was being disobedient and doing things he shouldn't have been doing – playing with cricket bats belonging to the youth centre in the hall. He was generally in a negative and excitable mood, deliberately swearing in front of staff etc. When I talked to him about participating in the kick boxing session he told me the session was 'boring', which made me wonder how far it still represented a context of strength for him, or whether such designations vary depending on how he is feeling. Arranged with staff to come back after Xmas to observe the session on 12th Jan.

Appendix A5. Phase 2 Ethics documents

Introduction

All university activity must be reviewed for ethical approval. In particular, all undergraduate, postgraduate and staff research work, projects and taught programmes must obtain approval from the Academic Ethics committee.

Application Procedure

The form should be completed legibly (preferably typed) and, so far as possible, in a way which would enable a layperson to understand the aims and methods of the research. Every relevant section should be completed. Applicants should also include a copy of any proposed advert, information sheet, consent form and, if relevant, any questionnaire being used. The Principal Investigator should sign the application form. Supporting documents, together with one copy of the full protocol should be sent to the Faculty/Campus Research Group Officer.

Your application will require external ethical approval by an NHS Research Ethics Committee if your research involves staff, patients or premises of the NHS (see guidance notes)

Work with children and vulnerable adults
You will be required to have an Enhanced CRB Disclosure, if your work involves children or vulnerable adults.

The Academic Ethics Committee will respond as soon as possible, and where appropriate, will operate a process of expedited review.

Applications that require approval by an NHS Research Ethics Committee or a Criminal Disclosure will take longer.

7. Details of Applicants
7.1. Name of applicant (Principal Investigator): Nicholas (Nick) Bozic
Telephone Number: 0121 243 3466

Email address: nicholas.m.bozic@stu.mmu.ac.uk	
Status:	**Postgraduate Student** (~~Taught or~~ **Research**)
	Staff
Department/School/Other Unit: Psychology	
Programme of study (if applicable): N/A	
Name of supervisor/Line manager: Professor Rebecca Lawthom	

7.2. Co-Workers and their role in the project: (e.g. students, external collaborators, etc)

Name: Ms Jill Copley	Name:
Telephone Number: 0121-303-1793	Telephone Number:
Role: Senior Educational Psychologist (my local authority line manager)	Role:
Email Address: jill.copley@birmingham.gov.uk	Email Address:

8. Details of the Project

8.1. Title: **Learning about the social contexts which promote strengths in children and young people.**

8.2. Description of the Project: (please outline the background and the purpose of the research project, 250 words max)

The research carried out in this PhD project is conducted as part of my everyday practice as a local authority educational psychologist.

There has already been a phase 1 to this project in which a strength-based assessment approach (The Context of Strength Finder or CSF) was designed and used with a sample of children and young people referred to my educational psychology team. The assessment approach resulted in the identification of contexts which children and young people associated with combinations of their strengths.

This ethics application concerns the second phase of the project, which is seeking to learn

more about identified social contexts by visiting them and gathering data about them. The intention is to do this in ways which are consistent with the time frame that an educational psychologist would normally be working to, within routine practice.

8.3. Describe what type of study this is (e.g. qualitative or quantitative; also indicate how the data will be collected and analysed). Additional sheets may be attached.

Phase 2 is focusing on carrying out a more detailed investigation of a situation that a child or young person has identified as a 'context of strength'.

This phase of the project will involve visiting the site of an identified context of strength, interviewing a key person who is familiar with it (e.g. a teacher or a parent) and carrying out observations of the context. There will also be post-observation interviews with the key person and the child or young person concerned.

The interviews and the observations will be using a situated learning perspective and will concentrate on the following areas: the nature of the activity/ practice, type of participation, forms of interaction and supporting artefacts, etc.

Interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed for analysis.

Observations will be recorded in the form of handwritten notes.

Analysis will be holistic and aim to create a representation of the context through the creation of a synthesising storyboard.

Alongside this data collection I will also keep a reflective research diary in which I will record my thoughts and observations about how this approach has fitted into my professional practice. The data from this diary will be analysed separately using a qualitative approach.

8.4. Are you going to use a questionnaire?
>   YES (Please attach a copy)

>   **NO**

8.5. Start Date / Duration of project:
1.10.17/ 6 months of data collection

8.6. Location of where the project and data collection will take place:
Birmingham

8.7. Nature/Source of funding

Self-funded

8.8. Are there any regulatory requirements?
YES (Provide details, e.g. from professional bodies)

NO

- There are legal requirements for Practitioner Psychologists to be registered with the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) whilst working in the UK. My registration is up-to-date..
- I am also a member of the British Psychological Society which provides additional guidelines for research and practice.
- I have an up-to-date DBS Certificate

9. Details of Participants

9.1. How many? There will be four child/ young person participants of differing ages see below. In each of these cases a further adult participant will be interviewed – e.g. a teacher or parent. Therefore in total it is envisaged that there will be eight participants from whom data will be drawn.

9.2. Age: The children and young people involved will be aged between 2 and 25. I aim to select one from each of the following age groups: preschool, primary school age (5-11), secondary school age (11-16), young adult age (17-25).

In each case I will also interview at least one adult.

9.3. Sex: Male and female.

9.4. How will they be recruited? (Attach a copy of any proposed advertisement)
The children and young people will be referred to me as part of the usual pattern of work in the local authority/ local schools.

9.5. Status of participants: (e.g. students, public, colleagues, children, hospital patients, prisoners, including young offenders, participants with mental illness or learning difficulties.)
Children and young people who have been referred to my local authority educational psychology team.

9.6. Inclusion and exclusion from the project: (indicate the criteria to be applied).
- Child or young person has been referred for EP involvement;
- Child or young person is aged 2-25;
- Concerns about the child's learning or behaviour.

9.7. Payment to volunteers: (indicate any sums to be paid to volunteers).
No payment.

9.8. Study information:
Have you provided a study information sheet for the participants?

> **YES** (Please attach a copy)
> NO

There are five separate forms of participant information sheet. They have been designed for the following:

- the child or young person participants, and a simplified version of this has been produced for younger children;
- Parents/ carers;
- Key Person who interacts with the CYP in the context;
- Setting Manager who acts as gatekeeper to either school or community settings. the person who has authority to sanction my research within the setting. In a school this may be the headteacher, in a community organisation it would the manager of that organisation.

Three types of letter have been created to inform others about the observation that is planned and to provide an opt-out option. Please see section 5.1 below for details about the use of these letters.

9.9. Consent:
(A written consent form for the study participants MUST be provided in all cases, unless the research is a questionnaire.)
Have you produced a written consent form for the participants to sign for your records?

> **YES** (Please attach a copy)
> NO

.

10. Risks and Hazards

10.1. Are there any risks to the researcher and/or participants?
(Give details of the procedures and processes to be undertaken, e.g., if the researcher is a lone-worker.)
The research will involve interviewing adults and children/ young people about a social context and carrying out an observation of that context.

The following risks apply to the researcher:
a. Risk of false accusation from young person;
b. Risk of entering household where one could be in danger.
-
The following risks apply to participants:

c. By observing the child or young person in a situation they may become self-conscious.
d. A child or young person may perceive the act of being observed as stigmatising.

e. There is a very small risk of children/ young people becoming upset if the interview perhaps reminds them of difficult events.

10.2.   State precautions to minimise the risks and possible adverse events:
Precautions:
a. The researcher will need to interview young people in a confidential area, but as usual, will need to be mindful to stay within easy sight of others;
b. On occasions there may be a need for the researcher to make home visits in order to gain parental consent or to meet young people. The researcher will not enter a home without parent present, and will record information of the address he is visiting in a way which is accessible to colleagues in the team.

c. When carrying out observations the researcher will aim to be discrete and not make it obvious that he is particularly interested in one participant's participation in the activity.
d. The researcher will prepare a form of participant information which makes it clear that the observation is strength-based and therefore looking at the activity/ practice from a positive point of view.
e. The researcher will monitor the emotional reaction of participants carefully during interviews. If at any time a child/ young person looks like they are becoming upset they will be given the opportunity to recover and then asked if they would like to continue or else stop the interview.

10.3.   What discomfort (physical or psychological) danger or interference with normal activities might be suffered by the researcher and/or participant(s)? State precautions which will be taken to minimise them:
Possible danger to the researcher:
a. Exposure to dangerous environment in the community – for example if a young person identifies an apprenticeship context as one where strengths are present, and this contains potentially dangerous machinery, etc.
Precaution:
a. The researcher will check on safety issues prior to visiting a site to carry out an observation.

11. Ethical Issues

11.1.   Please describe any ethical issues raised and how you intend to address these:

Informing participants of the nature and purpose of the research project will be addressed by creating separate participant information sheets for parents/ carers and for children/ young people and for the adults who are interviewed. Care will be taken to ensure the use of language is appropriate for the intended audience. Where parents have limited understanding of written English attempts will be made to provide a translation.

An important ethical issue in this phase of the research is that CYP and parents understand that giving consent for me to carry out this research will mean that some of the adults (Setting Manager, Key Person) in the context to be visited will learn that the CYP has an educational psychologist assigned to them.

Consent to take part in the research project will be sought from the parents/ carers of participating children/ young people (BPS, 2010). However, in line with British Psychological Society (BPS, 2010) recommendations, child participants will also be "given ample opportunity to understand the nature, purpose and anticipated outcomes of any research participation, so that they may give consent to the extent that their capabilities allow."

Consent to carry out research in the setting will be obtained from the Setting Manager.

I will leave the Setting Manager copies of letters which can be distributed to others in the context to be observed, and sent to parents of any CYP in the context who are under the age of 16. The letter will explain that I will be carrying out some strength-based observation into what is working well in the setting, and that my focus will be at the group level, considering how people interact and participate in activities together. The letters will make it clear that all information collected will be anonymous. It will be possible for parents to signal if they do not want information about their child to be included in the data collection; it will similarly allow CYP over the age of 16 to indicate if they do not want to be observed.

Finally, the Key Person who will be interviewed about the context of strength will also be given the opportunity to give consent. The Key Person will be given letters for other staff who may be present while the observation is taking place, so they can opt out of this if they wish.

Confidentiality will be maintained. Information provided by participants will be anonymised and stored in a secure location (see Section 6 below). It will not be possible to identify participants from any data which is subsequently published.

The right to withdraw from the research will be respected, as recommended by the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2011). All participants, and in the case of children their parents/ carers, will be informed that withdrawal from the project will be possible up to the point at which data is processed.

BPS (2010) Code of Human Research Ethics. Leicester: BPS.
BERA (2011) Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research. London: BERA.

12. Safeguards/Procedural Compliance

12.1.   Confidentiality:

12.1.1. Indicate what steps will be taken to safeguard the confidentiality of participant records. If the data is to be computerised, it will be necessary to ensure compliance with the requirements of the Data Protection Act 1998.

The following steps will be taken to ensure confidentiality of information collected from participants:

vii. Each participant will be assigned a code and the data gathered from them will have this code written on it, rather than any other identifying details;

viii. A table of codes and their correspondence with participant identity will be created. This will be held at a different location from the participant data;

ix. Both the participant data and the code table will be held in locked filing cabinets;

x. When taking notes from participants or transcribing what they say, if further names are mentioned by a participant, these will also be recorded as codes with the code-identity correspondence added to that participant's entry on the table of codes;

xi. All signed consent forms will also be held separately from the data gathered from participants;

xii. When data from participants is prepared for publication/ PhD write-up, no identifying information will be included.

12.1.2. If you are intending to make any kind of audio or visual recordings of the participants, please answer the following questions:

12.1.2.1. How long will the recordings be retained and how will they be stored?

Audio recordings will be made of interviews with participants and key adults. These will be retained for ten years after the end of the project. This is to comply with the document MMU Guidelines of Good Research Practice (June, 2014)

12.1.2.2. How will they be destroyed?

Audio recordings will be held on digital media and these will be erased at the specified time.

12.1.2.3. What further use, if any, do you intend to make of the recordings?

Recording of interviews will be transcribed so that they can be analysed more thoroughly. The transcriptions will be kept in anonymised form for ten years after the end of the project.

12.2.   The Human Tissue Act

The Human Tissue Act came into force in November 2004, and requires appropriate consent for, and regulates the removal, storage and use of all human tissue.

12.2.1. Does your project involve taking tissue samples, e.g., blood, urine, hair etc., from human subjects?

YES

<u>NO</u>

12.2.2. Will this be discarded when the project is terminated?
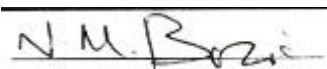
YES

NO

If NO – Explain how the samples will be placed into a tissue bank under the Human Tissue Act regulations:

12.3.   Notification of Adverse Events (e.g., negative reaction, counsellor, etc):
(Indicate precautions taken to avoid adverse reactions.)

Please state the processes/procedures in place to respond to possible adverse reactions.
As with all interviewing work carried out by educational psychologists there is the possibility of an adverse reaction – even though in this case the interviews will be focusing on positive events. If a child or young person becomes upset during the interview they will be given time to recover and asked if they would like to continue or whether they would prefer to not to say any more. In this event I would contact the child/ young person's parents to let them know what has happened.

In the case of clinical research, you will need to abide by specific guidance. This may include notification to GP and ethics committee. Please seek guidance for up to date advice, e.g., see the NRES website at http://www.nres.npsa.nhs.uk/

SIGNATURE OF PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: _N. M. Brazi_	Date 25.8.17
SIGNATURE OF FACULTY'S HEAD OF ETHICS:	Date:

Checklist of attachments needed:

8.   Participant consent forms (5)
9.   Participant information sheets (5)
10. Opt out letters (3)
11. Full protocol – I attach observation schedule and interview schedules that I plan to use.
12. Advertising details
13. NHS Approval Letter (where appropriate)
14. Other evidence of ethical approval (e.g., another University Ethics Committee approval)

Manchester Metropolitan University

M E M O R A N D U M

FACULTY ACADEMIC ETHICS COMMITTEE

Faculty of Health,
Psychology & Social Care

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Birley Fields Campus
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To: Nicholas Bozic

From: Prof Carol Haigh

Date: 13/10/2017

Subject: Ethics Application 1518

Title: Learning about the social contexts which promote strengths in children and young people - phase 2.

Thank you for your application for ethical approval.

The Faculty Academic Ethics Committee review process has recommended approval of your ethics application. This approval is granted for 42 months for full-time students or staff and 60 months for part-time students. Extensions to the approval period can be requested.

If your research changes you might need to seek ethical approval for the amendments. Please request an amendment form.

We wish you every success with your project.

Prof Carol Haigh
Chair
Faculty Academic Ethics Committee

www.mmu.co.uk

Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form (CYP version)

The Strengths Project

I am your educational psychologist. As part of my work with you today I have asked you some questions about your strengths, the things that you do well.

I would like to include your answers in a project I am doing about children and young people's strengths, which is called The Strengths Project.

I would also like to visit one of the situations you have mentioned today and learn more about what happens there by observing the situation and interviewing you and one other person about that situation.

Why am I doing this research?

- To find out about children and young people's strengths.

- To learn where children and young people use their strengths.

Do I have to take part?

No, you don't have to take part. You can say 'no' now or any time before the information is processed.

Don't worry, if you say you don't want to be in the project I will still be your educational psychologist.

What happens if I take part in the strengths project?

- I will visit one of the situations you have described today.

- I will write notes about what happens there.

- I will interview you and ………………… about what I see there. I will record the interviews on a dictaphone, so I can listen to them again later.

- One or two adults in the place I visit will learn that you have an educational psychologist.

- Information about your strengths and the situations in which you use your strengths will be included in the project.

- It will be added to information I have got from interviewing other children/ young people.

- Your name will not be not be included in anything that I write about this project.

- You will not be paid for taking part.

Who I am

I (Nick Bozic) am a qualified educational psychologist, registered with the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) (Registration number: PYL23412). I have received Disclosure & Barring Service (DBS) clearance to work with children and young people.

If you have any questions please ask me now or next time I'm in school.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information

Key Person Information Sheet

Learning about the social contexts which promote strengths in children and young people

> *I would like to invite you to take part in a research study. Before you decide, you need to understand why the research is being done and what it would involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully. Ask questions if anything you read is not clear or you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not to take part.*

The study is exploring ways of studying the social contexts in which children and young people display strengths.

What is the purpose of the study?

Educational psychologists are interested in learning about the strengths of children and young people, as well as the things they find more difficult. For all of us the social environment plays a big part in whether we are able to display our best qualities. If we can learn more about the social contexts which work best for particular children and young people, we will be in a better position to improve the education they receive. This project is exploring a new way of analysing social situations.

Why have I been invited?

You are receiving this invitation because you have been identified as a key person in a social context which a child/ young person associates with strengths.

Do I have to take part?

You can decide whether or not to take part in this study. This information sheet describes the study and there is a consent form to show that you agree to take part.

What will happen if I agree to take part?

If you choose to take part in this study:

- I will ask you some questions to gain some basic information about the situation I plan to observe.

- I will visit the situation and observe what happens there. While I am there I will write down some notes about what I see.

- Following the observation I will interview you and the child/ young person about what I have observed. These interviews will be audio-recorded.

- All the information I gather through interviews and observations will be anonymised and securely stored.

- Anonymised information about from the interviews and observations will be included in a write-up of the research project and possibly in published academic papers/ books.

What will happen if I do not agree to take part?

If you do not take part in this study:

- No information from you will be used in the research project.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

It is hoped that the information gained from this research will provide new insights into the way strength-based contexts can be analysed and used to support children and young people.

The study as a whole aims to help educational psychologists improve their work with children and young people at school.

There is no direct personal benefit in taking part (e.g. no financial inducement).

What if there is a problem?

If you have a query or complaint to make about this research please contact the researcher in the first instance (see contact details below). The researcher's line manager can also be contacted on this number. You can also contact the researcher's supervisor (contact details below) or the independent complaints person regarding the conduct of the study (contact details below).

Will participation in the study be kept confidential?

All information which is collected during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential, and any information which is published will have names and identifying features removed so that they cannot be recognised.

- Data will be stored safely, by the researcher:

  o Electronic data will be stored on a password protected computer. The password will only be known to the researcher.

  o All collected data will be anonymised and given a research code, known only to the researcher; An index of research codes will be held in a locked filing cabinet accessed only by researcher.

      o Data recorded on paper will be stored in a locked cabinet accessed only by researcher.

- Data will be retained for ten years after completion of the project. The project is due to be completed at the end of 2020.

What will happen if I don't carry on with the study?

If you withdraw from the study before the data gathering phase is over, information collected from you can be removed from the project. If you withdraw after this point, anonymous information collected from you will have been added to the data gained from other participants and it will not be possible to remove it from the study.

What will happen to the results of the research study?

Anonymised information collected from this study may be published as part of a PhD thesis or in academic/ professional journals or books.

Who is organising the research?

The researcher (Nick Bozic) is a qualified educational psychologist, registered with the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) (Registration number: PYL23412). He has received Disclosure & Barring Service (DBS) clearance to work with children and young people.

This research is being carried out by the researcher as part of his PhD and with the backing of Birmingham Educational Psychology Service. It is being supervised by staff at Manchester Metropolitan University.

Contact details:

The researcher's contact details are as follows:

Nick Bozic (Educational Psychologist)

Address: Access to Education, Vauxhall Gardens, Barrack Street, Birmingham. B7 4HA.

Telephone: 0121 303 1793

The supervisor's contact details are as follows:

Prof Rebecca Lawthom (Professor of Community Psychology)

Address: Manchester Metropolitan University, Faculty of Health, Psychology and Social Care, Birley Building, 53 Bonsall Street, Manchester M15 6GX.

Telephone: 0161 247 2559

Independent Complaints Person regarding the conduct of the study:

Prof Carol Haigh

Address: Manchester Metropolitan University, Faculty of Health, Psychology and Social Care, Birley Building, 53 Bonsall Street, Manchester M15 6GX.

Telephone: 0161 247 5914

The Strengths Project: letter to parents/ carers

Dear Parent/ Carer,

I am a qualified educational psychologist carrying out research into the development of strengths in children and young people. I am registered with the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) (Registration number: PYL23412). I have received Disclosure & Barring Service (DBS) clearance to work with children and young people.

The research is exploring social situations in which children and young people can express their strengths. An observation will be carried out and notes will be made about the way people interact and participate in activities together.

I am writing to you because as part of the project I am planning to carry out an observation in a context in which your son/ daughter is likely to be present.

Any information collected will be anonymous and it will not be possible to identify individuals.

If, however, you do not wish your child to be included in the observation, please complete and return the tear-off slip below.

Thank you,

Nick Bozic

✂- -

I would prefer that my child is not part of the observation.

Name of child _____

Signed _____   Relation to child _____

Date _____

<div align="right">Please return to ……………………………………….</div>

The Strengths Project: letter to other staff

Dear staff member,

I am a qualified educational psychologist carrying out research into the development of strengths in young people. I am registered with the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) (Registration number: PYL23412). I have received Disclosure & Barring Service (DBS) clearance to work with children and young people.

The research is exploring aspects of the social environment in which young people can express their strengths. An observation will be carried out and notes will be made about the way people interact and participate in activities together.

I am writing to you because as part of the project I am planning to carry out an observation in a context in which you are likely to be present.

Any information collected will be anonymous and it will not be possible to identify individuals.

If, however, you do not wish to be included in the observation, please complete and return the tear-off slip below.

Thank you,

Nick Bozic

✂- -

I would prefer not to be included in the observation.

Name _____

Signed _____

Date _____

Please return to …………Nick Bozic……………………………….

Appendix A6. Phase 2 Observation Schedule

Practice/ Activity observed

How does the child/ young person participate in this activity?		How are relationships organised?	What reifications/ artefacts mediate X's participation?
Time	X's actions and the related actions of others	Interaction between X and others, interactions elsewhere in the context	Reifications/ artefacts

Appendix A7. Interview Schedule

Here I am interested in gaining the participants' views about how they understand the meaning of what I have observed.

Preamble: Let's talk about some of the different events that took place while I was watching and recorded on my sheet. I'm interested in how you understand what I saw.
1. So, near the start I saw this (read the actions I wrote down in terms of participation/ interaction/ artefact use).   **What is happening at this point in the lesson/ session/ activity?**

CYP Prompts	KW Prompts
What sort of things does the teacher say/ do at this point in the l/s/a?	What sort of role do you take at this point in the l/s/a?
What sort of things do you/ others say/ do at this point in the l/s/a?	What kind of participation do you want from the pupils at this point in the l/s/a
Is what I saw typical of how you are at this point in the l/s/a?	What kinds of interactions happen at this stage?
	Are there any routine-based ways of talking or special equipment that is used at this point?
	Is what I saw typical of how this stage of the l/s/a runs?
	What is the purpose/ significance of this part of the l/s/a?

2 (a). Then later I saw this (read the actions I wrote down in terms of participation/ interaction/ artefact use). **What is happening at this point in the lesson/ session/ activity?**   Use prompts above   [repeat for further episode if desired]

CYP	Key person
3. You told me this activity was a time where the strengths of x, y, z were sometimes present. Was that the case today? How did the activity allow you to show these strengths? Or, What is it about this activity that allows these strengths to be present? (for non-personal strengths)	3. CYP told me that for him/ her this activity was a time where the strengths of x, y, z were sometimes present. Have you seen evidence of that? How does the activity allow CYP to show these strengths? Or, What is it about this activity that allows these strengths to be present? (for non-personal strengths)
4. How long have you been doing this activity? Has the way that you take part changed over that time? Prompt: How were you the first time you did it compared to now?	4. How long has CYP been doing this activity with you? Has the way that s/he takes part changed in any way?
5. How much do you feel part of the session?	5. Do you think that CYP has a sense of involvement/ belonging when s/he takes part here?
6. How would you describe the way you are when you take part in this activity? Prompt: can you think of three words to describe the way you are during the activity?	6. How would you characterise CYP's identity during this activity/ session/ lesson?

Appendix A8. Key to transcription symbols

Symbol	Meaning	Example
(.)	Very brief untimed period of silence	we are expected to (.) if we know the answer
(text)	Original talk is difficult to hear	(he was quiet)
><	Section of talk that is spoken more quickly than surrounding talk	>it just carries on and carries on<
=	Latched or almost overlapping turns of speech	=team work team work
°	Speech that is quieter than surrounding speech	°couldn't be bothered to do it°
[	Overlapping speech	Me: (..) would be portable into other [situations SENCO: [yeah
(..)	Some transcribed talk is omitted	It's getting him to recognise (..) and applying that in a classroom setting

This notation is taken from Atkinson & Heritage (Eds.) (1984) Structures of social action: Studies in conversation analysis. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Appendix A9. Marked up extract of transcript illustrating coding process

Coding key

Code	Description	In transcript
C	Independent participation (can include "doing, talking, thinking, feeling and belonging" (Wenger, 1998, p.56)) within the activity by child	Single bold underline
K	Independent participation within the activity by key person	Zig zag underline
KC	Interactional participation within the activity in which key person initiates and child/ children are in respondent role	Double underline
CK	Interactional participation within the activity in which child initiates and key person is in respondent role	Double underline
XC	Interactional participation within the activity in which adult (not key person) initiates and child/ children are in respondent role	Double underline
CC	Interactional participation within the activity in which child initiates and another child is in respondent role.	Double underline
R	The use of a reification – this is a language-based term/ phrase which represents a solidification of a mode of participation	red text
A	The use if an artefact – this is a physical object which acts as a tool mediating the actions of participants.	red text
O	Object (or purpose) of activity is mentioned	Text highlighted yellow
OR	Object Reasoning – text about the reason for the object	Brown text
ACC	Mutual accountability – a statement about right and wrong in this practice / how actions can be sanctioned. What is important and	Green

	what isn't, what should and shouldn't be – can reflect on both KP and child behaviour.	highlight
U/C	Uncoded – meaningful segment of text which doesn't fit within codes above	Dotted underline
Amb	Passages which were ambiguous and could be understood by different codes.	Note made separately

Where codes were represented in the transcript by a similar textual marker (e.g. KC, CK, XC, CC) they were differentiated when tabulated.

Transcript extract marked up with codes

27 Int: with the you know, what different letters stand for so um can you

28 tell me, how I mean how do you desc= how do you see the purpose of that

29 part of the session, what's that about?

30 KP: It's for the boys to associate PE with different letters (just to)

31 see how much the boys can listen and concentrate because it is a

32 learning environment and I want to see if the boys=if I give them A B C

33 D sort of thing, that's quite a basic routine as (it is) they should

34 know it at that age but if they can associate it with what we're trying

35 to deliver, what we're trying to get the boys to understand within the

36 context of a PE lesson, those things will make a big difference to them.

37 Int: Yes

38 KP: Cause now as I do it now I come in and I say "What is A?" and they

39 know it, they know it, they know it. And from there they can move on

40 (.) because what I tend to do is then (.) um if they struggle with

41 anything, say like the word 'responsibility', I will try (inaudible)

42 responsible, if you're like the team captain, [3:00] like J was the

43 captain today, yo team captain. If you're responsible what does that

44 mean? And they'll say it in four words, to take the lead.

45 Int: um

46 KP: Do you understand?

47 Int: I wondered whether it happened at the start of the session, a

48 little bit as well, to disc=to get them into you know listening to you,

49 to get them disciplined before you did anything else

50 KP: Yeh

51 Int: Do=is there a bit of that in it as well? That you have it as a

52 kind of orienting=

53 KP: (of course)absolutely so I come in and I say "Right boys sit in the

54 one line" and usually they run from now til for about five minutes sort

55 of thing. They know the drill when I come in there "Now we've only got a

56 cer=an hour and a half to do a PE lesson, sit down in line and

57 (inaudible)" it's the hardest thing that=I could have all the brains in

58 the world it wouldn't make any difference if you can't get them to sit

59 down and listen to you.

Tabulation of coded extract above

	Line	Actor 1	Actor 2	Reification/ Artefact	Object	Notes
kO kR	30			Letters	The boys associate PE with different letters	Mnemonics
kO	30-31				An objective: to assess how much [the boys] can listen and concentrate	
kR kACC	31-32			Learning environment		"because it is a learning environment" The term learning environment carries expectations of listening and concentrating
kO kR	32-34			Letters/ basic routine	The teacher assesses how much the boys associate PE with different letters	
kOR	35-36				Learning will make a big difference for them	
kKC kR	38-39	Teacher asks a question (about the reification)	They know the answer	The concept represented by letter A		

kCK kR	40-43	Boys struggle with a concept	Teacher elaborates meaning	Concept of 'responsibility'		
kKC kR	43	Teacher asks a question	They know the answer	Concept of 'responsibility'		
kKC	53-54	Teacher gives instruction to sit in line				
kC	54-55		Boys run around for 5 minutes			
kACC kR	55			The drill		Reference to mutual agreement on behaviour
kKC	55-56	Teacher gives instruction to sit in line				
kKC kR	55-56	Teacher gives instruction to sit in line		The drill (sitting down in line)		
kOR	57-59				Emphasises importance of getting boys to sit and listen	

Note: Codes in this table are prefixed with lower case k to indicate they come from interview with key person.

Appendix A10. Interrater agreement: Materials and results

Inter-rater was shown these code descriptions.

Descriptor	Code	Description
Participation (Child)	C	A description of how the child/ children participated in the observed lesson, without explicit reference to others. Participation can include "doing, talking, thinking, feeling and belonging" (Wenger, 1998, p.56)) **"They were writing in their books."**
Participation (Key person)	K	A description of how the key person participated in the observed lesson, without explicit reference toothers. **"I point at the clock."**
Interactional Participation K->C	KC	An account of Interactional participation within the observed activity in which key person initiates and child/ children are in respondent role. It can be verbal interaction or physical. **"I said shhh and they listened."**
Interactional Participation C->K	CK	An account of Interactional participation within the observed activity in which child initiates and key person is in respondent role **"He put his hand up and I came to his desk."**
Interactional Participation X->C	XC	An account of Interactional participation within the observed activity in which an adult (not the KP) initiates and child/ children are in respondent role **"The TA gave him the worksheet."**
Interactional	CC	An account of Interactional participation within the observed

Participation C->C		activity in which child initiates and another child is in respondent role. **"The boy helped his partner with the question."**
Reification	R	The use of a reification – this is a language-based term/ phrase which represents an abbreviation for of a mode of participation **"pass-move-call" (abbreviated reminder of rules in handball)**
Artefact	A	The use if an artefact – this is a physical object which acts as a tool mediating the actions of participants. **"The children write on whiteboards."** (This could also be codes as C participation)
Object	O	Object (or purpose) of activity is mentioned. This is talk about what the goal of the activity is, it is distinguished from participation codes because it does not report actually occurring instances. **"In this lesson I want them to produce independent work."**
Object Reasoning	OR	Object Reasoning – text about the reason for the object. It often includes words/ phrases like 'because', 'the reason..' **"because they will have to do this kind of thing in the exam"**
Mutual accountability	ACC	A statement about right and wrong in this practice / how actions can be sanctioned It is distinguished by reference to words like 'should', or 'expectation' in relation to the actions of participants. **"I expect the pupils to …", "They should sit quietly"**

Uncoded	U/C	A meaningful segment of text which doesn't fit within codes above **"It was warm in the room."**

Practice coding

Interrater was given practice in using the codes. First with some fictitious statements and then with a block from the transcript. After that we discussed the application of codes before moving on to the test material.

1	The reason for doing it this way is that they are generally a poorly behaved class.	OR
2	Stephen set up the easel.	C
3	One boy shouted and I told him off.	CK
4	I want them to understand when to use commas and full stops.	O
5	I pointed to the board and they stopped what they were doing.	KC
6	Remember the 5Ws I said.	R & KC
7	They worked together in small groups	CC
8	He looked focused.	C
9	I showed them how to do the problem.	KC
10	The computer is available.	A

Is that a typical start to the lesson?		
38	Yeah because I know some of that group they come over from maths, which is the other side of the building (.) and um it's a bit of a staggered entrance to the lesson.	OR
40	I try to keep it quite err (.) direct really, what they have to do, you know simple things like sit down, take your bag and coats off, wait for further instruction.	O
44	get ready for register and just try to keep it err quite structured really	O
45	Because as soon as you, in an Art lesson, as soon as you give them a little bit of freedom, that's where things can be	OR

47	it just needs to be a bit structured	O
47	they have to understand boundaries and where	O
47	they have to understand boundaries and where	ACC

The utterance in bold is the immediate turn in the interview prior to the to be coded sections.
Shaded box shows interrater chose different code to me.

Int: So what sort of participation are you looking for from them at that point in the lesson?		Me	IR
51	Just sit down	C	C
51	be engaged	C	C
51	I remember saying that you know "have a think about what the lesson involved last lesson, what we spoke about last lesson and remember what was there	KC	KC
54	I always have that slide on the board	A	A

Int: ..and what kind of interactions are happening at that stage? Between you and the children?		Me	IR
59	well it's just, keeping, making sure they understand the clear boundaries	ACC	ACC
59	making sure they understand the clear boundaries with the instructions I've given	KC	KC
60	just being assertive really	K	K
61	just so they're settled and ready to learn	O	KC

Int: And there's any routine ways of talking at that point=I suppose the ABC=the 321 thing is		Me	IR
64	Well yeah the 321 is something that I think you have to embed it a little, you have to, you know work at it to embed, but I think groups like that respond to clear you know prolonged three (.), er 'ssh two' (.) one and it gives them a chance to just settle down. You know if you go if you fire out >321< it'll just go straight over the pupils' heads and they won't retain that	R	R
71	they understand that as a routine now, what I'm	ACC	ACC

	expecting		

Int: Yeah. So it's fair to say that the significance of that part of the lesson is around (.) settling them down, getting them ready for learning and also being very structured and asserting oneself at the start.		Me	IR
75	the reason, you know, one or two pupils there, in that group, if you're not like that at the start the (.) you will lose concentration (.) it can lead to behaviour problems, behaviour issues.	OR	OR

Int: Yep, well what I want to ask you about now, another feature of the lesson, which is interesting to me [7.07] was the way that you periodically asked them to gather round one of the front tables. And then you know, you seemed to be using that in a particular way to highlight certain things, maybe to punctuate the lesson. How do you see that? Is that a stylistic thing of your own? Or (.) is that an important part of the way the lesson=		Me	IR
86	Because they're doing sustained pieces of work	OR	O
87	it's getting em out of their seats giving them a little bit of freedom, but still controlling that freedom as well so	O	OR

Int: Yep, well what I want to ask you about now, another feature of the lesson, which is interesting to me [7.07] was the way that you periodically asked them to gather round one of the front tables. And then you know, you seemed to be using that in a particular way to highlight certain things, maybe to punctuate the lesson. How do you see that? Is that a stylistic thing of your own? Or (.) is that an important part of the way the lesson=		Me	IR
92	Yeh it breaks that up	O	O
92	obviously we're working on a small A5 scale, if I'm picking someone's work up and there's people at the back of the class they're not going to be able to see [8.10] (inaudible) if I'm speaking about detail, if I'm speaking about, you know, tone or whatever I may be speaking about at the time, they won't see it (.) unless I project	O	OR

	something on the board (.) you know that's not my way of doing things [Int: Noh] I like to just gather them around		
97	project something on the board	A	A

	Int: I thought that that business of gathering round the table was (.) it does give one the impression of a certain degree of intimacy isn't it [KP: yeh yeh] it's looking quietly people are=	Me	IR
102	It gives you a better chance, so you know you've got people around you, closer and you can identify if there is any behaviour problems	OR	OR
102	It gives you a better chance, so you know you've got people around you, closer and you can identify if there is any behaviour problems	ACC	O
104	one of the lads, he wasn't focusing very well, I remember pulling him up on that	CK	KC
104	one of the lads, he wasn't focusing very well, I remember pulling him up on that	ACC	ACC
105	you can highlight the question a bit more with certain pupils	O	O

	Int: Yes yeah, so again I could ask you about the [9.00] kind of participation I mean let's ask you a little bit about the role that you're playing at that part of the lesson as well. How would you describe it?	Me	IR
111	I'm there at that part of the lesson, there to model (.) what the pupils have to do to achieve that lesson	OR	O
111	I'm there at that part of the lesson, there to model (.) what the pupils have to do to achieve that lesson	ACC	KC
112	You know, in a way it's where they err probably because it's a visual subject where I can impact most (.) when I have that impact	U/C	OR

Int: And when you say model, what do you mean by that?	Me	IR
116	model the work	K	K

Int: So showing them how to do things	Me	IR
118	Showing them how to do things yeah scaffolding the learning	KC	KC

Interrater agreement = 17 /26 = 65%

After collapsing O & OR codes (affects lines 86, 87, 92,111)

Final interrater agreement = 21/26 = 81%

Appendix A11 Phase 3 Ethics Amendment Information entered into online ethics system

Note: Periodically press save to ensure that the amendment form is saved. When this is done successfully a green bar appears across the top of the screen saying Save complete. Pressing Navigate takes me back to the main screen showing the project.

Y1   Is this amendment to information previously given in the approved application form? Y/<u>N</u>

Y2   Do you want to extend the end date of the project? <u>Y</u>/N

Y3   Please enter the new end date of the project:

31/07/2019

Y4   Is this an amendment to the protocol? <u>Y</u>/N

Yes, I intend to write an extension to the protocol.

Y5   Is this amendment to the Participant Information Sheet, consent form, or any other supporting documentation? <u>Y</u>/N

I am thinking there will be an additional page to the PIS which covers the proposed meeting and an additional consent form for said meeting.

Y6   Is this a modified version of an amendment previously notified, but not approved? Y/<u>N</u>

Y7   Summary of changes

Briefly summarise the main changes proposed in this amendment. Explain the purpose of the changes and their significance for the research project.

If this is a modified amendment, please explain how the modifications address the concerns raised previously by the Faculty Research Ethics and Governance Committee.

If the amendment significantly alters the research design or methodology, or could otherwise affect the discipline specific value of the study, supporting information should be given (or enclosed separately). Please indicate whether or not additional discipline specific critique has been obtained.

My PhD research is exploring how to contextualise strength-based assessment with children/ young people. The project is divided into two phases. This proposed amendment concerns an extension to the second phase study.

The second phase study was carried out in three separate schools. It involved observation of practices in a particular social context (e.g. a classroom) – which a focal child associated with strengths - and then interviews with the child and an adult key person (e.g. the teacher) about what I had observed. That part of the research has now been carried out and generated some interesting findings.

I now wish to carry out a concluding piece of work, in which I hold three meetings, one for each case from the second phase, with participants (focal child, key person) and the school SENCO, in order to present my findings (enabling validation of my analysis) and also asking questions about how such findings might be used to inform further hypothetical actions in the school. These meetings would be audio-taped.

Y8   Please detail why this amendment is needed:

I would like to share the findings of my research with participants and learn what they think about them because ultimately my study is about enhancing practice and it is important to check the work makes sense to professionals and children/ young people. I also wish to get a little feedback on how participants view the potential implications of the findings.

Y9   Please describe any ethical issues that will arise as a consequence of amendment, and how you intend to address these:

The main additional ethical issue which arises is to ensure that the child or young person is not led to believe that the discussion about potential implications of the research findings will actually be implemented. I have included text within the amended information sheet and consent form to guard against this risk.

Y10:   Do you have any amended document(s) and any other supporting information to upload? Y/N

Yes – Protocol extension and Overview of alterations to PIS and consent forms

Y11   Do you have any additional comments which have not been covered in the form? Y/N

No

Appendix A12 Overview of Alterations to Participant Information sheets and Consent Forms

Participant Information Sheets

Alteration to Key Person Information Sheet from phase 2

Under the heading: What will happen if I agree to take part? Insert as a fourth bullet point:

- Following analysis of the data I will interview you again, this time with the school SENCO to consider the findings of the study and explore how they might be applied elsewhere. This interview will be audio-taped.

Alteration to CYP Information Sheet from phase 2

Under the heading: Why am I doing this research? Insert as a third bullet point:

- To explore the implications of this research.

Under the heading: What happens if I take part in the strengths project? Insert as a fifth bullet point:

- I will interview you again after I have analysed the information about the lesson I observed. I will ask for your views on the research findings. I will ask you to tell me how you think the findings could be applied in other lessons. I must tell you that this is not meant to result in changes to your other lessons. The ideas we talk about will just be used within my research project.

Alteration to Parent/ Carer Information Sheet from phase 2

Under the heading: If your son/ daughter takes part in the study. Insert as a sixth bullet point:

- Following analysis of the data I will interview your son/ daughter again to get their view on the findings and to discuss how these might be applied in other parts of the school day. I must emphasise that the ideas that are discussed at this point are not intended to lead to any changes in the school, but are only intended to inform the research project.

SENCO Information Sheet

A separate information sheet for the SENCO will be created which be very similar to the KP information sheet.

<u>Consent Forms</u>

Alteration to Key Person Consent Form from phase 2

Additional statement added after statement 3:

I give consent for an interview with me and the school SENCO about the findings of the research to be audio-recorded.

Alteration to CYP Consent Form from phase 2. Removal of second and third consent statements and addition of the following three statements:

1. I agree to be interviewed about the findings of the Strength Project.

2. I understand that what I say may be written about but my name will be changed.

3. I realise that the ideas we talk about are not meant to result in changes in my school.

SENCO Consent Form

A new consent form for the school SENCO to sign, this will be based on the wording within the key person consent form.

Parent/ Carer Consent Form

This remains unchanged.

Appendix A13. Ethical approval for phase 3

25/10/2018

Manchester
Metropolitan
University

Project Title: Learning about the social contexts which promote strengths in children and young people

EthOS Reference Number: 1299

Ethical Opinion

Dear Nicholas Mile Bozic,

The above application was reviewed by the Health, Psychology and Social Care Research Ethics and Governance Committee and, on the 25/10/2018, was given a favourable ethical opinion. The approval is in place until .

Conditions of favourable ethical opinion

Application Documents

Document Type	File Name	Date	Version
Additional Documentation	Protocol extension	06/10/2018	1
Additional Documentation	Overview of alterations to PIS and Consent forms	06/10/2018	1

The Health, Psychology and Social Care Research Ethics and Governance Committee favourable ethical opinion is granted with the following conditions

Adherence to Manchester Metropolitan University's Policies and procedures

This ethical approval is conditional on adherence to Manchester Metropolitan University's Policies, Procedures, guidance and Standard Operating procedures. These can be found on the Manchester Metropolitan University Research Ethics and Governance webpages.

Amendments

If you wish to make a change to this approved application, you will be required to submit an amendment. Please visit the Manchester Metropolitan University Research Ethics and Governance webpages or contact your Faculty research officer for advice around how to do this.

We wish you every success with your project.

HPSC Research Ethics and Governance Committee

Page 1 of 1

Appendix A14. Phase 3 Interview Schedule (Case 1)

	Preamble reminding participants about the orientation and purpose of my research and why I am interviewing them today.
	As you know I am carrying out research into the contexts in which children and young people's strengths are present.
	I visited Apple School to observe a PE lesson involving Jayden last year and then interviewed both you and Jayden to learn more about the nature of this context and how it related to the strengths which Jayden associated with it.
	Today I want to share my analysis of the observation and interviews and see how far you agree with it. Then I will bring Mr Oliver into the discussion and we will discuss this context in relation to others in Jayden's life and possible implications.
	My analysis is divided in two. Firstly, it defines the main practices which I saw in the room and then it looks at how these might be related to specific strengths that Jayden identified. I have illustrations to help here.
RQ1: Does the KP recognise/ accept the representation of practice and affordances which has been created by my analysis? Zooming-in/ Validation question Boundary objects Kubiak et al. (2015, p.82)	To KP: This illustration displays what I saw as the three main practice forms in your lesson. I called them The ABCs, Handball and Gym Work. The ABCs This took place in the hall. The pupils sat in a line on the floor while Patrick stood in front of them asking them questions about an ABC mnemonic representing different athletic qualities. The pupils' role was to answer questions and physically demonstrate skills. One of the objects of this first phase was too calm the students by getting them to sit and listen. Handball The pupils were organised into two teams and played a competitive game of handball together. The structure of the handball rules (pass-move-call) affected the way the game was played. R was assigned the role of captain for one team. Patrick acted as a referee during this phase. Gym work This took place in the gym. Patrick modelled how to use each piece of equipment. Each pupil was assigned a piece of equipment and

	needed to use it in the prescribed manner for 2 minutes, before Patrick got everyone to move round to the next piece of equipment. From your perspective how accurate is this representation of the main phases of practice I observed in your classroom? prompt: anything important which is missing? R associated two of his strengths – problem solving and good sportsmanship with the Handball phase of the lesson In the second part of my analysis I looked at how the handball session afforded opportunities for these two strengths to be present. 1. This illustration deals with the strength of problem solving. Jayden felt that handball afforded him the opportunity to interact with other players in his team, correcting their actions in order to make it more likely that his team score a point (and accepting that they had a right to correct his actions too). Here we see aspects of the Handball practice which afforded this strength the opportunity to happen, they were (1) being part of a team-based goal directed activity and (2) being conferred the specific role of captain. These happened in a general context where the teacher maintained a high level of discipline 2. This illustration deals with what Jayden called the strength of good sportsmanship. It is similar to problem solving but includes giving advice to players on the other team as well. It has the emotional quality of being friendly towards opponents. It relied on the same aspects of practice as problem solving.. but also required that Jayden was engaged in a competitive activity. How accurate do you think this is? Any comments that you'd like to make? (prompt: anything important which is missing?)
RQ2: How do the KP & AP relate the strength-based context to other contexts in the child's life (in space and time)? Zooming-out,	To KP and AP: Now I wish to open up the discussion a little and involve Y as well. How do you think this strength-based context compares to other contexts which Jayden may have been part of at this time? (prompt: both at school and elsewhere) (spatial) How do you think this strength-based context relates/ compares to other contexts which Jayden may have been part of before and after this?

landscapes of practice	(temporal) Considering this what sense do we make of this strength-based context in Jayden's life?
RQ3: What actions/ interventions might stem from this analysis? Question about how brokering might work or even if brokering is the correct way forward.	Okay and finally where does all this take us… Are there potential actions/ interventions which might have potentially stemmed from this kind of analysis? Could Jayden apply ps and gs in other parts of the school day? Are these mechanisms (affordances) possible to bring into other lessons (e.g. collaborative goal directed team work and competitive goal directed team work?) Are there other things that we can take from this analysis?

Appendix A15: Tabulation of themes and codes in phase 3 thematic analysis

Case 1, RQ1

Theme	Code	References
	C1.1.P Accuracy	2
	C1.1 Aff accuracy	2
T1.1.P+a More exact		6
	C1.1.P1+ relate ABCs	1
	C1.1.P1+ focus	1
	C1.1.P2+ giving leadership role	1
	C1.1.P3+ children understand social rules	1
	C1.1.P3+ children understand muscle groups	1
	C1.1.P3+ children understand equipment	1
T1.1.P+b Negative emotion		5
	C1.1.P+ Spats	3
	C1.1.P+ Peer dynamics	2
T1.1.P+c Equity		3
	C1.1.P3+ every child gets a pc of equipment	1
	C1.1.P2+ everyone has a chance to be listened to	1
	C1.1.P2+ each boy will be given the captain role	1

Case 1, RQ2

Theme	Code	References
	C1.2y He quit PE	8

	C1.2x Sporadic attendance	2
T1.2a PE could bring the best out of him		3
	C1.2a PE brought best out of him because practical	1
	C1.2a likely to prefer practical to academic	1
	C1.2a get best out of him when interest aroused	1
T1.2b A disciplined and rule based culture		8
	C1.2a Teamwork	1
	C1.2a Students indicate ready to learn	1
	C1.2a Students challenge each other	1
	C1.2a Students commits to concentrate	1
	C1.2a Learning environment	1
	C1.2a KP reminds them of commitment to social rules	2
	C1.2a KP challenges student if rules not followed	1
T1.2c With occasional support he was able to take responsibility		4
	C1.2x prompting needed	1
	C1.2x Emotional reaction	1
	C1.2x sense of responsibility	1
	C1.2x engaged	1
T1.2d Outside factors affected how J presented in class		3

Theme	Code	References
	C1.2x On a good day	1
	C1.2x Issues outside of school	2

Case 1, RQ3

Theme	Code	References
	C1.3 Sharp with peers	2
	C1.3 Hard to have a consistent message	1
	C1.3 Taking it personally	1
T1.3a Depends what's going on in his life		2
T1.3b Apply mechanism elsewhere		9
T1.3c Staff encouraging participation		5
	C1.3 Strengthen participation	1
	C1.3 Reinforce positive	1
	C1.3 Rang his mother	1
	C1.3 Increase prompting	1
	C1.3 Got into it	1
T1.3d Coercing the student		2
	C1.3 Got to be something in him	1
	C1.3 Coerce him	1

Case 2, RQ1

Theme	Code	References
	C2.1 Accuracy	1

		C2.1 Aff Accuracy	1
		C2.1 P+ Modelling	1
		C2.1.Aff+ At the forefront of everything	1
T2.1.P+ Practices in tandem			2

Case 2, RQ2

Superordinate theme	Theme	Code/ child theme	References
		C2.2b Good performance in other contexts	1
		C2.2b Extremely good in Art	1
	T2.2b Preference for this subject		2
		C2.2a Likes the subject	1
		C2.2a Likes a practical subject	1
T2.2a The Art Class			24
		C2.2a4 All visual	1
	T2.2a1 Davy felt recognised and part of things		12
		C2.2a Relates to member of staff	5
		C2.2a Has his space	2
		C2.2a First to arrive	1
		C2.2a Feels safe	3
		C2.2a Feels noticed	1
	T2.2a2 In here everyone is supported to do bigger projects		5
		C2.2a Shorter tasks in other lessons	1

		C2.2a Not just left for 45 mins	1
		C2.2a No segregation	1
		C2.2a No need to look elsewhere	1
		C2.2a Less powerpoint slides	1
	T2.2a3 Teacher takes charge of things		4
		C2.2a Tr has strategies to keep children calm	1
		C2.2a Tr manages behaviour problems	2
		C2.2a Sitting at front	1
	T2.2a5 There is a quality of intimacy in this class		2
		C2.2a Space to gather pupils round	1
		C2.2a Small groups make it personal	1

Case 2, RQ3

Theme	Code	References
	C2.3a Unique to Art	1
T2.3a Strategies applied to small group		3
T2.3b Specific strategies		7
	C2.3a Not just left for 45 mins	1
	C2.3a Noticed in corridors	1
	C2.3a Portable strategies	1
	C2.3a Positive referrals	1
	C2.3a Praise	1
	C2.3a Quiet praise	1

	C2.3a The visualiser	1
T2.3c Prompting teacher reflection on practice		2

Case 3, RQ1

Theme	Code	References
	C3.1 Aff Speaking	1
	C3.1 Aff+ Indep writing – Recap phase supports	1
	C3.1 Aff+ Other children – onus off Tr	1
	C3.1 Aff+ Speaking - engagement	1
	C3.1 P Accuracy	3
	C3.1 P+ More scaffolding normally	3
	C3.1 X Memory	1

Case 3, RQ2

Theme	Code	References
	C3.2a Could struggle in other contexts	3
	C3.2b In similar class now	2
	C3.2b Nurture class is a small group	1
T3.2a Qualities of child in that context		10
	C3.2a builds relationships with adults	1
	C3.2a builds relationships with	2

	children	
	C3.2a confidence	3
	C3.2a happy	1
	C3.2a participate more	2
	C3.2a relaxed sharing her work	1
T3.2b Being in a small group helped N		4
	C3.2a better relations with other children in small grp	1
	C3.2a Confidence grew in small grp	1
	C3.2a More comfortable with others in small group	1
T3.2c Practices facilitate her involvement		6
	C3.2a Chosen less often in other contexts	1
	C3.2a Extent of differentiation makes difference	3
	C3.2a Support to answer successfully	1
	C3.2a Verbal feedback plays to strengths	1
T3.2d		6
	C3.2a Control and agency	2

Case 3, RQ3

Theme	Code	References
T3.3a Being chosen		3
T3.3b Building on analysis		2

	C3.3a One page profile	1
	C3.3a Speaking favours her	1
T3.3c Limit culture of judgement		3
	C3.3a Avoid pressure	1
	C3.3a Work and feedback	1
	C3.3a Works for others too	1

Appendix A16. Paper published in Educational Psychology in Practice, Vol 34.1 (2018)

Exploring the context of strengths – a new approach to strength-based assessment

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Abstract

Since the 1990s many strength-based assessments (i.e. inventories, checklists, interview schedules) have been developed for use with children and young people, but these have offered a limited appraisal of the contexts in which strengths are present. In this study a new form of contextualised strength-based assessment was used within the routine practice of an educational psychologist. A multiple case study explored how this approach worked with eight children and young people referred to a local authority educational psychology team, ranging in age from 6.9 to 19.2 years. Qualitative data was analysed holistically using a story-board method. In all cases, participants identified situations or contexts which they associated with the presence of specific strengths. In some cases they highlighted aspects of a situation which might be hypothesised to have pedagogical value. There is discussion of the tensions that can arise in using this approach in schools when a more negative view of a pupil has already emerged. Nevertheless, the introduction of fresh information, about the type of contexts which suited specific children and young people, was helpful in providing ideas and recommendations which may have been missed otherwise.

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Introduction

This paper considers published strength-based assessments that can be used with children and young people (CYP). An important limitation of these assessment tools is identified – namely their weaknesses in eliciting the contexts in which strengths are found. This leads on to a description of an assessment called the Context of Strength Finder (CSF) which was designed to remedy this problem. A multiple case study is presented which explored the kind of information that was generated when the CSF was used with a sample of CYP referred to an educational psychology team in the UK.

Professional context

The last three decades has seen growing recognition within the profession of educational psychology (and school psychology outside the UK) of the importance of learning about the strengths (i.e. positives qualities and resources) within the lives of CYP, as well as their difficulties and needs. It can be seen in the history of publications within professional journals which have explored the potential of solution-focused approaches (e.g. Rhodes, 1993; Redpath & Harker, 1999; Stobie et al., 2005), positive psychology (e.g. Gertsch, 2009; Miller & Nickerson, 2007) and strengths-based approaches (e.g. Jimerson et al, 2004; Bozic & Miller, 2013). Strength-based approaches have been advocated in order to gain a more holistic assessment of a child or young person (Tedeschi & Kilmer, 2005), to promote better levels of engagement from CYP (Jimerson et al., 2004); and to create interventions which can take advantage of strengths and preferred ways of being (Bozic, 2013).

Recently, in the United Kingdom, the Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Code of Practice: 0 to 25 years (DfE, 2015) has emphasised the importance of gathering information about the strengths of CYP. The importance of learning about their strengths and competences is mentioned at several points within the document. For example, in the description of the progress check at age 2 (para 5.23); the nature of SEN support in schools (para 6.52) and the assessment and planning process for an Educational, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) (para 9.22).

The assessment of strengths

One of the first and most influential proposals to focus on the assessment of client strengths came from Saleebey (1992) in his recommendation for a strength-based approach to social work. In this vision, the assessment of strengths forms a guiding notion in work with clients: a way of learning about their unique qualities and how to most effectively collaborate with them. Early approaches in this genre used inventories of potential strengths to aid the assessment process (Cowger, 1992). These were criticised for not necessarily containing the strengths which the client valued (De Jong & Miller, 1995). This led some to advocate more content-free forms of strength assessment, in which the interviewer sought to learn about the unique strengths a client possessed and even the special language that they might use to express such strengths (Wilding & Griffey, 2015; Wong, 2006). On the other hand, adopting a content-free form of assessment might mean that certain potential areas of strength are not specifically checked for during the assessment.

Historically, the literature on assessment in education and child psychology has drawn attention to strengths, but usually as a way of showing how they combine with difficulties in a domain of professional interest, for example, strengths and difficulties in reading (Sheldon & Hatch, 1950) or early developmental skills (Ysseldyke & Samuel, 1973; Ullman, 1979). A change occurred in the late 1990s when a number of North American assessment tools were developed for use with CYP, which focused exclusively on strengths (Climie & Henley, 2016). Some of these were in the form of checklists of potential strengths (e.g. Lyons et al, 2000); others were standardised assessments which would allow a young person's strengths to be compared with those of other CYP (e.g. Epstein & Sharma, 1998). These assessments drew from diverse theoretical roots including positive psychology and resiliency theory.

The role of context

Psychology as a whole has sometimes been criticised for taking a too individualised approach to its subject matter, neglecting the importance of different environments on human functioning (Kagan et al., 2011; Orford, 1992; Vygotsky, 1980; Bronfenbrenner,

1977). However, some strands within the literature on strength-based assessment/ practice have discussed the importance of context in fully understanding the meaning of human strengths. For example, suggesting that strengths can be seen as phenomena which grow out of the opportunities provided by supportive contexts (Jimerson et al., 2004; Rhee et al., 2001, p.10). As Saleebey (1992, p.9) put it "Western stereotypes notwithstanding, an individual rarely discovers and employs strengths and gains a perceived sense of power in isolation." The goal of the strength-based practitioner should be not only to learn about client strengths but also to understand something about the contexts which allow them to be present – which, in turn, provides ideas for how intervention might create better contexts for someone (Saleebey, 1992; De Jong & Miller, 1995). Nevertheless, despite this call for strength-based assessment to be contextualised, published approaches have tended to foreground the assessment of individual strengths without much attention being paid to the contexts where they are expressed.

This is true of several assessments which have come from the positive psychology movement. One of the most famous of these being the Values in Action Inventory for Youth (VIA-Y) (Park & Peterson, 2006) which requires young people to check for the presence of 24 character strengths (e.g. kindness, authenticity, creativity, etc.). Further positive psychology measures have been developed to check for personal qualities such as optimism, hope or gratitude (Lopez & Snyder, 2003).

From a resiliency theory view-point, strengths have been equated with protective factors – those qualities which help children to cope with adversity. Resiliency theory has identified both internal and external forms of protective factors (Benard, 2004), but strength-based assessment tools have sometimes restricted themselves to an examination of the internal variety only, ignoring the influence of context. This is the case with the Devereux Early Childhood Assessment (DECA) (LeBuffe & Naglieri, 1999), the Devereux Student Strengths Assessment (DESSA) (LeBuffe, Shapiro & Naglieri, 2009) and the Social-Emotional Assets and Resilience Scales (SEARS) (Merrell et al., 2011). For example, the teacher version of the SEARS groups strengths under the headings: responsibility, social competence, empathy and self-regulation.

One should not be too critical of these measures because an assessment of internal strengths can be useful when supplemented by data from other aspects of the ecology around a child or young person, but there is a risk when the focus of assessment remains overly focused at the individual level. Checking for the presence or absence of personal strengths can lead practitioners towards a similar position to that taken by a deficit approach – where the main goal becomes helping the individual to change through developing their strengths or acquiring new ones (Wilding & Griffey, 2015). The danger is that important contextual influences on strength development (or lack of it) are over-looked. The outcome of careful assessment may then simply lead to recommendations for how an individual may be coached to make better use of their strengths, rather than considering how the context might be changed. In the extreme case, clients can even be positioned as blameworthy if they haven't taken opportunities to develop their strengths more fully (Held, 2004; Friedli & Stearn, 2015).

Some strength-based assessments have been designed to check for the presence of strengths beyond the individual. Often inspired by resiliency theory's notion of external protective factors, these assessments have also looked for evidence of strengths at the level of peer, family, school or community levels. Within the Child and Adolescent Strength Assessment (CASA) (Lyons et al., 2000) items are grouped under ecological headings, and sometimes worded in ways which go beyond personal skills and indicate strengths within the context, such as the availability of supportive peers or positive relationships within the wider family. The Assets Interview (Morrison et al., 2006) includes questions like, 'What are the rules and procedures in class? How do the rules help him/her to learn?', and, 'What activities does the school offer for students? How does X participate in these activities?'. These questions can be useful in highlighting aspects of the context which may be working well or could work better to support a pupil.

Other assessments continue to focus on strengths expressed as personal statements, but allow these to be associated with categories that suggest ecological contexts where they may be more likely to be used. This is the case with the Behavioral and Emotional Rating Scale (Version 2) (BERS 2) (Buckley & Epstein, 2004) which consists of 52 items which a young person, parent, or teacher completes and can be grouped into the categories: intrapersonal strengths; interpersonal strengths; affective functioning; family involvement;

and school functioning. The Developmental Assets Profile (DAP) (Scales, 2011; Search Institute, 2005) uses this kind of terminology. It is made up of 58 strength items, each of which is also assigned to a particular form of context: personal, social, family, school, and community.

Rawana & Brownlee (2009) have done something similar by aligning strengths into domains or 'areas of functioning that a child engages in on a regular basis' (p.257). These are categorised as contextual domains (peer, family/home, school, employment, community) or developmental domains (personality, personal and physical care, spirituality and cultural, leisure and recreation). In their work with children and families, part of the assessment process involved grouping identified strengths – elicited through interview and the use of checklists – within these domains.   The authors comment that this process created the opportunity to have further conversations about why strengths appeared in some areas of functioning but not others.

These are interesting developments in which the role of context is perhaps becoming a little more prominent in strength-based assessment, although there are ways in which such work could be extended. The representation of contexts as general categories, such as 'school' or 'family/ home' lacks information about the *specific* school or family situations, for example, in which strengths are displayed. There could also be more systematic analysis of these particular situations to understand how they are structured and *how* they provide opportunities for strengths to be expressed or present. This more specific information could suggest ways in which other social environments could be better organised for a child or young person.

The study reported in this paper attempted to extend the contextualised approach to strength-based assessment, by providing children and young people with a method for explicitly linking strengths to particular situations, the characteristics of which could then be explored with follow-up questions.

Method

Development of the Context of Strength Finder (CSF)

A new form of strength-based assessment was created called the Context of Strength Finder (CSF) (Bozic, in preparation).   The purpose of this assessment tool was to gain information about the social situations or contexts which supported the strengths of a young person. It was decided that the CSF would be used directly with CYP so as to maintain the increased engagement and positivity that is often noted as a feature of strength-based assessment (McCammon, 2012). This meant it would be a form of self-report giving the young person's subjective view of the assessment domain.

In all, 24 items were created to represent strengths at different levels of ecology from individual to relational, school and community (see Table 1). These strengths were taken from the findings of resiliency theory and corresponded to well-known protective factors (Benard, 2004). For each category, space was left for CYP to identify unique strengths of their own which were not included in the 24 pre-selected ones.

Table 1. CSF Strength items

Psychological strengths	Peer strengths
9. I can cope in difficult times	25. Other children/ young people like me
10. I have a sense of humour	26. I enjoy doing things with other children / young people
11. I solve problems	27. I have a close friend
12. I can do things by myself	28. Other kids think I'm cool
Academic/ vocational strengths	**School strengths**
13. I write well	29. There is a teacher who cares about me
14. I read well	30. I have done special things at school
15. I speak well	31. Teachers believe I can do well
16. I can make things	32. Pupils are treated fairly in my school
Family strengths	**Community strengths**

13. I get on well with my mum/ dad	33. I take part in sports
14. My family listen to me	34. I belong to a youth club
15. My family does things together	35. I go to a church/ mosque/ temple
16. I get on with my brother/ sister	36. I help people in my community

The CSF was designed to allow identified strengths to be selected and grouped together to represent a particular context. This was done by taking the items out of the traditional checklist format and making them into a set of cards – each representing a different strength. Cards were produced in two colours: green for a definite strength and orange for a partial strength. They were illustrated to allow their meaning to be clearer (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Cards from the CSF
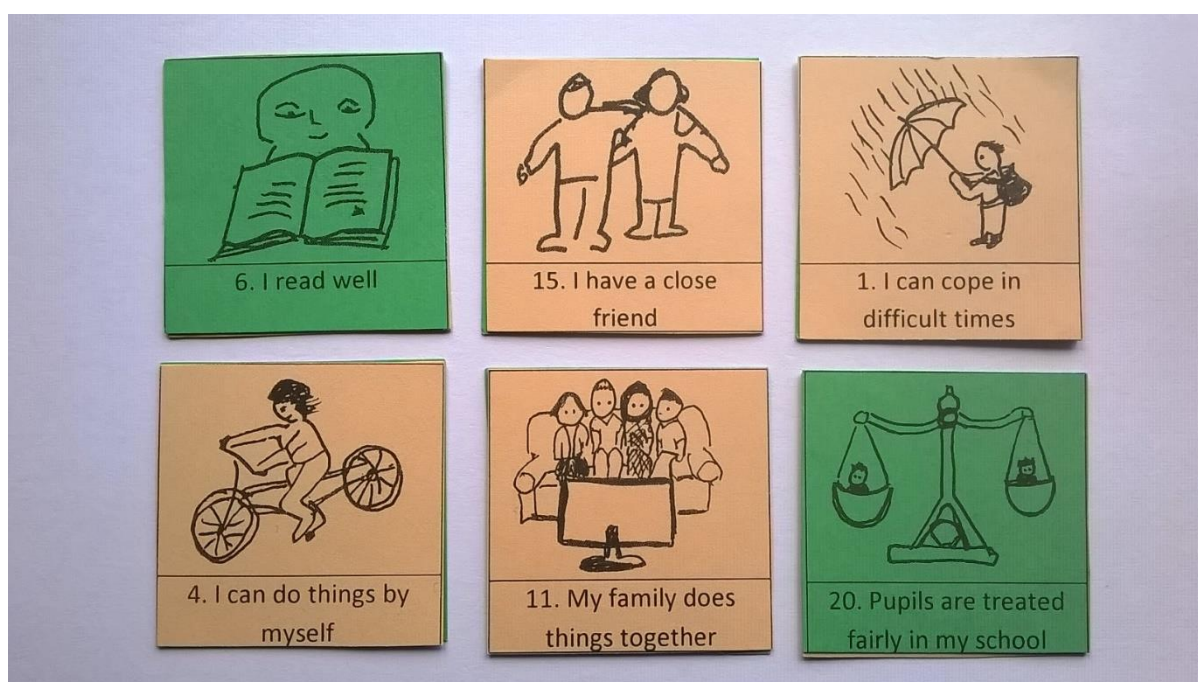
Once a young person had identified a set of strengths which they felt they possessed, these could be represented on the table top by a selection of cards of the appropriate colour. Then cards could be grouped together by the CYP to show how strengths combined in particular situations. A schedule of questions was developed to analyse identified situations or contexts. The questions were drawn from situated learning theory (Hand & Gresalfi,

2015; Wenger, 1998) an approach which assumes that all social contexts are sites of learning (Lave, 1996). The questions were designed to elicit: who participated in the situation, whether it was something that was well established, what the activity entailed, what level of accountability existed in the situation, and whether there were special artefacts or ways of doing things. The language used was kept as clear and accessible as possible (See Table 2).

Table 2. Follow-up questions to analyse an identified situation

8. Who belongs in this situation? Who does not belong?

9. How long have you been doing this together?

10. Describe a typical occasion when you have done this together.

11. What can you do in this situation? What can x do in this situation?

12. Would there be a way of behaving that wasn't right in this situation?

13. Are there special pieces of equipment that you use together?

14. In this situation do you use any special words or have any special ways of doing things

The CSF was piloted with two young people during October 2015.

Research study

Research aim and question

The research aim of the study was to trial the use of the CSF and examine how it worked within the practice of an educational psychologist (EP). Two more specific research questions were:

What is gained in using the CSF to learn about the context in which strengths are present in a child or young person's life?

What is problematic in using the CSF to learn about the context in which strengths are present in a child or young person's life?

Case Study Design

A multiple case study design was used for this research. Yin (2009) describes case study as a form of empirical inquiry that seeks to understand a phenomenon "within its real life context". This way of conducting research differs markedly from more reductionist approaches, which aim to derive understanding by removing things from their context and breaking them down into their constituent elements. Instead case study can be seen as offering the opportunity for a holistic representation and analysis of phenomena.

Thomas (2010, 2011) argues that a case study's "validation comes through the connections and insights it offers between another's experience and one's own." (Thomas, 2010, p.579) Rather than making claims of generalizability, the best that can be obtained is to identify patterns within contextualised practical knowledge – something which Thomas refers to as phronesis.

Fully describing the context of each case helps the reader to appreciate the phenomenon that is being reported. To this should be added the notion of reflexivity which refers to the manner in which the researcher's own position and experience influences the study. In the case of this research, the EP involved was also the principal researcher. Rather than attempting to conceal this, it was important to make the self-interpretations of the researcher explicit within the data gathering and analysis phases which follow.

Participants

The participants in this study were a selection of CYP referred to the attention of an urban local authority educational psychology team (EPT) between November 2015 and April 2016. Referrals came from two sources: as requests for EP involvement from schools who purchased traded time from the EPT; and from the Local Authority, when a statutory

assessment was requested and the local authority needed to have written psychological advice from an EP.

The CSF was only chosen for use with a child or young person if its use had some kind of rationale and it seemed likely that the individual concerned would be able to comprehend the assessment process. It was attempted with twelve CYP, two did not want to take part and for two others there were problems gaining consent for their data to be used within this paper. Therefore the final sample comprised eight CYP, all were male and ranging in age from 6.9 to 19.2 years. The ethnicity of participants was as follows: British - White (2); British - Asian (5); British – Black (1).

Ethics

Several ethical issues were addressed using published guidance from the British Psychological Society (BPS, 2010) and the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2011). Issues included how to adequately explain to participants that declining to take part in the research project would not affect the service they received from the educational psychologist. Carefully worded information sheets were developed with pictorial support. For participants under the age of 16 parental consent was also obtained. As part of the measures taken to protect confidentiality, pseudonyms were assigned to each participant. Ethical approval was gained from Manchester Metropolitan University's ethics committee.

Procedure

When using the CSF with a child or young person the following procedure was adopted:

a. The EP made notes on a diary sheet about the reason for involvement and the rationale for using strength-based assessment.

b. The participant was interviewed in a quiet room away from other people.

c. The participant rated the extent to which strengths from the CSF were true for them and added unique strengths that were not on the list. During this process the EP asked the participant to expand a little about strengths they mentioned.

d. Cards representing the participant's strengths were laid out on the table top – green cards for definite strengths and orange cards for partial strengths.

e. The participant was asked to recall a situation where two or more strengths were simultaneously present and move the corresponding cards into a group. When a situation was identified seven follow-up questions were asked (see Table 2 above). If time allowed this was done for a second situation/ context.

f. Following the session the EP made contemporaneous notes about what had happened on the diary sheet. Information gained from the assessment was used in on-going EP work with the child or young person. At a later date, for the purposes of the research project the following analytical process was undertaken.

Analytical approach

At the end of the data collection period, in April 2016, for each case, all the original data gathered using the diary sheets and records sheets were displayed in the form of a storyboard (Thomas, 2011). This enabled a holistic understanding of the case to emerge; post-it notes were written and stuck on the storyboard to represent additional 'noticings' (Thomas, 2011, p.185) about what was gained or problematic about the contextualised assessment. Finally, following Flyvberg (2006) a narrative was constructed to give an account of each case.

Narratives were constructed in two main sections: the first describing the reasons for the work and what happened during the session – based on contemporaneous notes; the second considering the outcomes from the later analytical stage when the researcher purposely focused on what was gained/ problematic about the elicitation of contextual information.

This division of the narrative for each case was made to enhance the study's internal validity – that is the ability to demonstrate how the findings were related to empirical data collected earlier (Cohen et al., 2011). Case study theorists argue that it is the continual need to account for empirical data which acts as a 'corrective force' to preconceptions about phenomena (Flyvberg, 2006).

Findings and Analysis

All eight CYP were able to link identified strengths with particular situations where these were present in their lives. Below narrative accounts of two of these are selected to exemplify different issues. The narratives are written in the first person by the EP who carried out the assessments (first author). Within these accounts the subjective experience of the EP concerned is made clear so that it can be understood as part of the narrative.

Example 1: Cemal

(1) Cemal was a sixteen year old boy (ethnicity: British Asian) in Year 11 at a mainstream secondary school. Recently there had been some conflict between the school SENCO and Cemal's family over whether or not he had been diagnosed with dyslexia earlier in his school career. I suggested that by applying the LA's Dyslexia Guidance we could gather information to help us determine the nature and severity of Cemal's difficulties. I met Cemal twice and carried out a range of literacy assessments which showed he did have major problems at the word level in reading and spelling. I then used the CSF to gain his view of his strengths.

Cemal rated the presence of the 24 pre-selected strengths and added two unique strengths to the list, which were 'I can mentor children' and 'I can advise friends about problems'. In elaborating about the strength 'My family does things together', Cemal said:

"A lot. My mum's brothers and sisters are very close. We all have lived in grandma's house at one point. We eat together on Saturday."

It was this family situation that Cemal identified when I asked him to think of a context where his strengths were apparent. He described playing monopoly or cards with brothers, male cousins and uncles on Saturdays. It was on these occasions he said, that four strengths were apparent – including strength 10, 'My family listens to me'. He described this situation as one where we can "talk brother to brother stuff".

(2) In reflecting on this assessment I felt the CSF had allowed me to get a closer understanding about what was important to Cemal. I could see the situation he described

seemed to fit with the unique strengths he has identified earlier. He saw himself as an empathetic person who could help others and be supported by them. However I felt a degree of tension moving away from the specific brief I had to investigate Cemal's literacy skills. In the immediate aftermath of the assessment I even wondered if it would have been better to have got Cemal to think about situations where he used his strengths in literacy-related tasks, but I realised that if I had done this I would have failed to gain a broader view of him.

I struggled with how to relay this expanded view of Cemal back to the SENCO. I was worried she might perceive that I had strayed from my brief, especially bearing in mind the tension between home and school. The compromise I came to was to integrate some of what I had learnt about Cemal from the CSF into the Dyslexia Guidance report I had to write. In that report I wrote:

"A strength-based assessment, which I carried out at the same time as assessing Cemal's literacy skills, revealed a number of strengths. In particular, Cemal reported that he finds fulfilment in mentoring other children and advising his friends about problems. Solving problems through talk seemed to be an important part of Cemal's identity and may be something which he could pursue in future work. It could also be the case that this interest in interaction could be harnessed to help Cemal improve his literacy skills, for example by being part of a mutual support group."

Example 2: Ethan

(1) In this second case example I was asked to carry out a statutory assessment of a fourteen year old boy (ethnicity: British White) who went to a mainstream secondary school in a neighbouring local authority (but lived within the authority where I worked). Ethan had had a diagnosis of autism when he was younger and when his file arrived I could see there were a large number of reports from professionals detailing his difficulties in learning, language understanding and social interaction. I decided that rather than add to this extensive cataloguing of his difficulties I would carry out a strength-based assessment using the CSF.

When I visited the school to see Ethan I was presented with a number of teachers and teaching assistants who had worked with him and wanted to tell me all about his problems and how much he needed an Education, Health and Care Plan. I made careful notes about what they said but persevered with my plan to use the CSF. The SENCO said that she thought it would be best if she stayed in the room because Ethan might be anxious about talking with a stranger.

Despite the SENCO's worries, Ethan responded well to the CSF assessment. He described two contexts where strengths were present, both of them situations that occurred within school: Friday football practice sessions and writing in English lessons. In both cases, Ethan cited strength 4, 'I can do things by myself'. He provided some interesting details when I asked him to describe what the teacher did in each context. For example, in football practice, "the teacher shows you how to do it. How to do the low dive and the high dive [goal keeping skills]." In English, to get you started on a piece of writing, the teacher "puts starter sentences on the board."

(2) Asking Ethan follow-up questions to explore these situations seemed to highlight some interesting pedagogic features. The quoted examples (above) are strategies that might help him get started on tasks and feel a sense of 'doing things by himself'. I began to think of various strength-based hypotheses: the modelling of skills could be important, because Ethan's language understanding is a little limited; the predictable format of these activities may help him to feel less anxious (football sessions always begin by putting the cones out and doing some dribbling practice).

After the assessment the SENCO said she had been surprised and pleased by how much Ethan had said. She had noted that Ethan had not said anything about a teaching assistant who was meant to help him in English lessons. I thought it would have been interesting to do some further observation of the situations that Ethan had mentioned to check some of the hypotheses that had occurred to me and see if there were other elements to each context – although the immediate priority was to complete the written psychological advice.

Discussion

The CSF was successful in allowing the CYP in this sample to identify situations in which strengths were present. It was able to draw attention to specific contexts which CYP associated with the expression of strengths. Existing strength-based assessments such as the DAP (Scales, 2011; Search Institute, 2005) or BERS 2 (Buckley & Epstein, 2004) might relate strengths to broader categories such as 'school functioning' or 'interpersonal skills' but not to particular activities. Overly general statements of context can leave much unknown, as Brazeau et al. (2012, p.385) point out:

"An additional challenge arises in explaining assessment results to clients and their families. Relaying to a client that they have strengths in the area of 'interpersonal strengths' may not be particularly useful without elaboration on the context within which this strength becomes apparent."

Follow-up questions within the CSF were designed to gain more detailed information about the strength-based situations that CYP identified. Sometimes, as in the case of Ethan above, the information that was gathered related to specific lessons or activities that happened at particular times. Sometimes it related to the way that such contexts might be structured in terms of the roles that pupils took, the kind of tasks carried out, or the way that staff would interact with students. This kind of information could stimulate interesting hypotheses about the kinds of social arrangements and pedagogic strategies that might suit an individual with often quite complex needs. It begins to answer the call to consider the interactions between strengths and the environments which CYP inhabit (Wilding & Griffey, 2015). Such hypotheses tended to be strength-based, focusing on how success was attained, rather than charting how dimensions of a problem might combine to explain difficulties.

While using the CSF with CYP could invite one to zoom-in and explore more thoroughly what was happening in a situation, at times it seemed profitable to 'zoom-out' and consider what a context might be saying in relation to other aspects of a CYP's life. This happened in the interpretation of the situation offered by Cemal (above), where the meaning of playing games with his family was deepened by thinking about how it related to other strengths that he had mentioned earlier in the assessment. In other cases, zooming out allowed a

context of strength to be compared to other contexts that a young person encountered – suggesting its significance in the overall life trajectory of the young person. For example, a 19 year old young man who was having a statutory assessment, recalled a situation where he had received positive attention at school years before and this seemed to contrast poignantly with difficulties he had experienced in life since that time. Zooming-out became one of the interpretive techniques that helped to make sense of contexts in CYP's lives – although such interpretations would need further checking and verification before they could be relied upon.

For all eight cases in this study, the initial information at referral was dominated by the difficulties a child or young person was experiencing at school or elsewhere. This can be seen in both the illustrative cases above. With Cemal, EP involvement was directed towards his literacy problems and whether these were sufficient grounds to warrant the identification of dyslexia and the case as a whole was influenced by the tension that existed between home and school. With Ethan, again the initial focus was on his difficulties at school, staff were understandably concerned to emphasise why he needed the support of an EHCP. Deliberately altering the focus of assessment to look for strengths felt risky: staff may not appreciate the reason for this approach; they might feel that it ignored the reason they requested EP involvement in the first place. There were certainly times when the EP concerned could feel this tension, especially in cases where staff were feeling very stressed about the way a pupil was behaving at school. Nevertheless, the CSF was able to identify contexts at school (and elsewhere) which seemed to be working and in that sense highlighted positives in existing practice which could be built upon. A contextualised understanding of the child's strengths, tempered by an awareness of the concerns of teaching staff, did lead to a new kind of awareness and action on the part of the EP.

Research reminds us of the powerful way discourse in school can construct the meaning of a pupil's actions and mark them out as different or deviant (Orsati & Causton-Theoharis, 2013; Goodley & Lawthom, 2013; Maclure et al., 2012). There have been concerns about the potential connotation of negative labels if these are internalised by an individual and influence the way they see themselves (Harwood & Allan, 2014; Hargreaves et al., 1975). It has been suggested that professionals become more conscious of the consequences of different constructions and consider how to avoid pathologizing CYP (Billington, 2012), for

example, by taking a multi-level perspective (Wicks, 2013), looking at alternative ways of talking about behaviour (Pearson, 2016) or otherwise re-framing its meaning (Harwood & Allan, 2014). Strength-based assessment, and in particular a form which is context-sensitive, might offer a further way of changing the way that a pupil is viewed. If there is concern that negative labels may be internalised, locating contexts in which CYP can occupy more positive identities would seem to be a priority.

Limitations

Some issues and cautions remain over the contexts identified by the CYP in this study. The level of status which should be accorded to these contexts was unclear. How significant were they?

The reports of CYP may be influenced by a degree of social desirability bias. Being interviewed by a sympathetic professional might encourage a young person to present themselves in a more positive light. Although the assessment tool was designed to capture the subjective views of CYP, the meaning of these views could be placed within a larger context with additional evidence from separate sources, whether this is through follow-up observation or discussion with others.

A second issue concerns how far an elicited context represents something significant about a child or young person's life. It might simply be the first thing that occurred to them when they were interviewed. Once again there is no real way of knowing, except through doing a little more work observing the individual in these situations or talking to others who knew them well.

In addition, it may be possible to understand elicited contexts as temporary points in the child or young person's developmental or educational trajectory. Some of the contexts that were mentioned were not necessarily ones that would always be seen as ideal ways of catering for an individual. One seven year old child, in this study, described a situation of shared intimacy, reading at home with his mother. Although something which he valued highly at that time, it may represent a form of social interaction from which educators will seek to build, rather than see as an end-point. Similarly the situation which Cemal

described, playing games with his brothers and cousins, rather than being replicated in the classroom would most likely provide ideas for the structure of future activities.

Open questions such as these, invite a next phase of action in which ideas from the CSF become shared and discussed with parents and teachers, as ways of arranging contexts to best support a child or young person's strengths are jointly explored.

Conclusion

This study trialled the use of a novel method for carrying out strength-based assessment with CYP. Participants were able to link their strengths to particular contexts using representations and interaction rather than a checklist approach. Further analysis provided some interesting ideas about the kinds of social activity and interpersonal interaction that took place in these contexts. This kind of assessment invites further investigation to explore how such structures may contribute to the expression of strengths.

Acknowledgement

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