Exploring the Experience of Home Education for Young People with Autism Spectrum Disorder: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

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Thesis submitted to the University of Nottingham for the degree of Doctor of Applied Educational Psychology

June 2020

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Abstract

The number of young people being home educated has risen considerably, with a reported 20% increase each year across the last five years (Association of Directors of Children's Services, 2019). In particular, there has been an increase in young people with Special Educational Needs (SEN) becoming home educated (Hopwood et al., 2007; Jeffreys, 2017). Several studies focusing on home education for young people with SEN found that a high number of participants had Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) (Kendall & Taylor, 2016; Parsons & Lewis, 2010). Despite this, research exploring the views of young people with ASD about their home education experience is scarce, particularly research that solely gathers the views of the young person.

Therefore, the current research aims to explore the views of young people with ASD, in Key Stages 3 and 4 regarding their experiences of home education. The study adopts an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis approach to gather the views of four young people using semi-structured interviews.

Five master themes were interpreted from the participants' accounts of their experience of home education. These themes were: learning experiences; support and resources; child-centred learning; impact on self; and interpersonal relationships. Themes reflected an overall positive experience, however also suggested that it may not be a positive experience for all.

The findings are discussed in light of theory and literature. Methodological considerations are addressed, particularly regarding the challenges of gathering the views of young people with ASD. The potential implications for Educational Psychologists (EP), schools, Local Authorities (LA) and the wider government are acknowledged, in particular: developing knowledge around home education; enabling insight around strategies that can be utilised across home and school settings; the need for a potential reconsideration of the EP role and potential actions that LAs can employ to support home educating families. The findings also illuminate a number of suggestions for future research.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank a number of people for their support throughout this journey, both in relation to the completion of this research study, as well as throughout the doctoral programme.

Firstly, I would like to thank the families who let me into their homes and their lives, particularly the young people for sharing their experiences with me. This research would not have been possible without you.

I would like to thank the tutor team at the University of Nottingham for their support throughout the course, especially Sarah Atkinson for her ongoing guidance, support and reassurance.

A special thank you to my fellow TEPs of cohort 12. This journey would not have been the same without you. Thank you for the memories, laughter and peer support.

Thank you to my placement Educational Psychology Service, especially my placement supervisor, for making this research possible and for supporting me throughout my placement. A special thank you to the EPs and to the Elective Home Education team for supporting with recruitment.

Finally, thank you to my friends and family for their ongoing support and encouragement. A particular thank you to my wonderful friend Sam for giving up her time to help with proof-reading. Thank you to Tom for your patience, reassurance and belief in me, especially when I did not believe in myself.

1 Introduction

1.1 Focus and Rationale of the Research

The focus of the present research is to explore the views of young people with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) about their experience of home education. The number of young people becoming home educated has risen considerably over recent years (Association of Directors of Children's Services, ADCS, 2019), which has led to a vast amount of media attention and various consultations from the government, with guidance recently being updated by the Department for Education (DfE, 2019a).

Upon an exploration of the research, it became apparent that research within this area is quite limited within the United Kingdom (UK), particularly research that gathers the views of young people to find out about their experiences. This was felt to be important, as children are the experts about their own experiences (Greig et al., 2013), therefore they can provide a true insight into what it is like to be home educated. Furthermore, whilst reviewing the media publications, alongside the published research, I noticed that many of the young people being home educated had Special Educational Needs (SEN), with SEN needs not being met in schools being noted as a common reason for home education (Jeffreys, 2017; Ofsted, 2019). More specifically, several research studies focusing on home education for young people with SEN in the UK found that a high number of participants had ASD (Kendall & Taylor, 2016; Parsons & Lewis, 2010). Despite this, research that has explored the views of young people with ASD about their home education experience is extremely limited. To my knowledge no research has been conducted that solely focuses on the views of young people with ASD in the UK. Therefore, I felt that an exploration of how home education is experienced from the eyes of the young people with ASD was warranted, to develop knowledge and insight, and as a result potentially inform practice. Thus, this led to the focus of the present research.

1.2 Research Approach

Interviews were conducted with four young people aged between 13-15 years of age, with ASD. The study adopted an Interpretative Phenomenological

Analysis (IPA) approach, which is concerned with how individuals make sense of particular experiences (Smith et al., 2009). It was felt that this would enable the idiographic nature of the participants' experiences to be captured.

1.3 Personal and Professional Interest

I am currently a Trainee Educational Psychologist (TEP), carrying out a placement within a Local Authority (LA) Educational Psychology Service (EPS). My interest in exploring the area of home education arose from hearing about the rising numbers of young people becoming home educated. My knowledge of home education at the time was very limited and I was keen to explore what the experience was like for these young people. Having never worked with a home educated young person during my role as a TEP, it made me question the role of Educational Psychologists (EPs) in supporting these young people. In addition, the EP role involves supporting young people with SEN, including ASD. Therefore, I was interested in exploring what the experience is like for this particular group of young people. I have an interest in ASD from carrying out roles supporting young people with ASD in the past and during my role as a TEP. In addition to this, I was motivated to carry out research that had relevance on a wider level, including within the EPS, the wider LA and also at a national level.

Furthermore, I have always been driven by the importance of gathering the views of young people and ensuring that their voice is heard, particularly those whose views may not often be sought, such as young people with SEN. This has developed during my role as a TEP, where I have aimed to utilise a range of different approaches for eliciting young people's voices.

1.4 Local Authority Interest

The rationale for the research also developed as a result of home education being considered a priority focus within the LA EPS where I was carrying out my placement. I discussed my ideas with the Principal EP (PEP) who further emphasised the relevance of conducting research in this area. In addition, I approached the Elective Home Education (EHE) manager within the LA who noted how the numbers have risen considerably within the LA and shared a keen interest in providing support with the research. Conversations with EPs

within the EPS resulted in feedback about the importance of carrying out research within this area at the present time, particularly due to the rising numbers. In particular, one EP who runs an ASD course for parents, shared how she is aware of parents who have attended the course who have decided to home educate their children with ASD. Therefore, it was felt that the research would be of added value within the EP profession and the wider LA.

1.5 Overview of Thesis

Chapter 2 will consider the key background information and research regarding home education, with a focus on ASD. It will then move on to address the importance of gathering the views of young people, before considering the role of the EP within home education. A systematic literature review of research that has explored young people's views about their experiences of home education will then be presented, which will lead onto the rationale for the present research.

Chapter 3 will detail the methodological approach adopted to carry out the present research, including the underlying philosophical position. The data collection and analysis procedures will be addressed, including ethical considerations and quality of the research.

Chapter 4 will present the findings of the IPA across the group.

Chapter 5 will discuss the findings in relation to the previous research and theory. Methodological considerations will be acknowledged before addressing potential implications for practice and suggestions for future research.

Chapter 6 will conclude with a summary of the findings and a reflection upon the unique contribution of the research.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of the pertinent background information and research regarding home education, with a focus on ASD. The chapter will begin with contextual information regarding home education, including definitions and government guidelines and legislation. The focus will then move on to outlining the prevalence and reasons for home education. The rationale for focusing on ASD will then be addressed, which will lead on to an exploration of ASD, including definitions, prevalence and theoretical perspectives. The challenges young people with ASD can face in schools will be discussed, before considering the reasons young people with ASD may become home educated. This will be followed by an exploration of the ways home education is delivered. The chapter will then move on to addressing the importance of gathering the young person's voice, followed by a focus on the role of the EP in home education. A systematic literature review will then be presented in order to explore what current UK research tells us about young people's views about their experiences of being home educated. The findings from the literature review will then lead to the rationale for the present study.

2.2 Definition of Home Education

Elective Home Education (EHE) is defined as parental choice to educate their child at home, rather than sending them to school (DfE, 2019a). It is important to note the difference between EHE and Education Otherwise Than at School, which is where the LA provide education to certain young people, such as those that are too ill to go to school (DfE, 2019a). However, EHE is a term of some disagreement as not all parents 'elect' to home educate but feel they have no other choice (Parsons & Lewis, 2010). Therefore, the term 'home education' will be used throughout this paper to respect the views of home educating families. In addition, Monk (2009, p.157) has expressed concern over definitions such as the one by the DfE (2019a), stating that they fail *"to capture the myriad of practices, motivations and locations for home education."* Monk (2009) notes that views are often formed on the basis of stereotypes and that a one-size fits all approach is generally inappropriate.

Within countries such as the United States (US), home education appears to be well established and accepted, whereas this does not appear to be the case within the UK (Lees & Nicholson, 2017). This may be due to confusion regarding the legality of home education (Lees & Nicholson, 2017). Education for children is a legal requirement, attendance at school is not. This is set out in the Education Act (1996, section 7, p.4):

"The parent of every child of compulsory school age shall cause him to receive efficient full-time education suitable –

a) to his age, ability and aptitude, and
b) to any special educational needs he may have,

either by regular attendance at school or otherwise."

Therefore, home education falls into the 'otherwise' category. As noted by Ofsted (2019), home education is a valid alternative to school.

2.3 Government Guidelines and Legislation

Guidelines regarding home education were developed by what was formerly the Department for Children, Schools and Families in 2007 (DCSF, 2007). The guidelines set out that parents are not required to gain approval to take their children out of school to be home educated, unless their child is enrolled at a special school under arrangements made by the LA. When a parent withdraws their child from school, it is the school's responsibility to inform the LA. There is no legal obligation on the parents to do this. Therefore, if a child has never attended a school, they may be unknown to the LA. The DCSF (2007) guidelines state that the LA has a duty to intervene if they feel a child is not receiving a suitable education. However, the LA does not have any statutory duties in relation to monitoring home education provision and there is no legal requirement for parents to let the LA into their home or to respond to any requests (DCSF, 2007).

These guidelines around home education led to concerns regarding safeguarding, particularly following the death of a young girl, Khyra Ishaq, whose mother had informed social services that she was being home educated (Myers & Bhopal, 2018). This resulted in the DCSF commissioning

the Badman Review (2009) to review current home education practice in England. Badman's (2009) findings led him to make a total of 28 recommendations. These recommendations included that a compulsory national registration system should be set up; the definitions of what constitutes a 'suitable' and 'efficient' education should be reviewed; the LA should have the right to monitor home education practice and have access to family homes; and the LA should provide more support and guidance to home educating families. However, the review was met with criticism by home educators, stating that a representative group had not been consulted and there was a misuse of quotes that had been reported out of context (Stafford, 2012). Due to a general election being called, these recommendations were never put into place (Stafford, 2012).

In April 2018, the DfE (DfE, 2018) issued a call for evidence regarding the adequacy of the current arrangements for overseeing home education in relation to the registration and monitoring of provision, as well as the current support available to home educators. They also called for views on a proposed update to the guidance regarding current arrangements for home education. An updated guidance document was developed in April 2019 (DfE, 2019a), with another consultation being opened at the same time to address these issues further (DfE, 2019b). Therefore, the current guidance around home education, in relation to a compulsory register and monitoring from the LA, has not really moved forward from that originally proposed by DCSF (2007). The DfE (2019a) guidance suggests that each individual LA should publish their own guidance and policies around home education, which should be updated in line with the wider governmental guidance. It is also suggested for LAs to hold a voluntary registration scheme to oversee home education in their area and offer support to any families who request it; however, this is not a requirement (DfE, 2019a).

2.4 Prevalence of Home Education

Home education has risen considerably in recent years, with a survey across 106 LAs in England estimating that there were 57,873 young people home educated across all 152 LAs in Autumn 2018, representing an increase of around 27% from the previous year (ADCS, 2018). Although, in Autumn 2019,

there was found to be a slight decrease, with estimated numbers of 54,656 young people (ADCS, 2019). However, the survey received a much higher response rate to the previous year, including a total of 132 LAs, with the authors noting a much smaller margin for error (ADCS, 2019). In addition, the ADCS (2019) reported that there was an average increase in the number of home educated children of around 20% each year, across the last five years. The survey found that Key Stages 3 and 4 had the highest numbers of children being home educated (62% of the total known number) (ADCS, 2019). There has also been an influx of media attention, with the BBC reporting an increase in home education figures of around 40% over the last three years (Issimdar, 2018). It is important to note that all of these figures are likely to have been underestimated due to there being no requirements for parents to register their children as home educated (DfE, 2019a).

This rise in prevalence has also been found for children with SEN, with the BBC reporting a 64% increase in children with a SEN statement or Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP), which is the updated statement of SEN, becoming home educated over the previous five years (Jeffreys, 2017). In a feasibility study exploring the prevalence of home education in England, Hopwood et al. (2007) found that 5% of children being home educated had a statement of SEN compared with 2.9% nationally. I do acknowledge that this reference is 13 years old, therefore these figures may not be relevant today. However, the DfE reported in 2019 that 3.1% of young people nationally have an EHCP (DfE, 2019c). In comparison, in the ADCS (2019) survey, 129 LAs reported on the number of home educated young people with an EHCP and it was found that 87 reported less than 5%; 38 LAs reported between 6-10% and one LA reported that more than 25% had an EHCP. It is difficult to ascertain the exact percentage for those who reported less than 5%, as well as the total number of children in each LA. Nevertheless, these findings show that there appear to be many children with an EHCP being home educated.

2.5 Reasons for Home Education

It is clear that the numbers of young people becoming home educated is on the rise, which poses the question, ‘Why are young people becoming home educated?’ Morton (2010) interviewed parents about the reasons why they

decided to home educate, finding that home educators appeared to fall into three groups, which Morton (2010) labelled ‘constructions of choice’. The first group was ‘natural’ choice, which is based on parents choosing home education as a way of life, whilst rejecting the conformity and social structures of mainstream life. The second group was home education as a ‘social’ choice, where parents wanted to take responsibility for their child’s social development and did not want them being influenced by other children. The final group was home education as a ‘last resort’, where parents found they had no other choice. Several parents in the ‘last resort’ category reported that their children were struggling at school, often due to bullying or SEN. Some of the parents mentioned that school had impacted their children so negatively, it had resulted in self-harm and suicide attempts (Morton, 2010). However, these findings were from one study which mainly recruited parents from the South-East of England, therefore may not be representative to the wider home educating population. Furthermore, Rothermel (2003) has critiqued papers that attempt to fit home educators into neat categories, noting that they are not a homogenous group and that their motives are diverse.

Nonetheless, the ‘last resort’ reason for home education appears to be a common finding across research studies. Hopwood et al. (2007) found that a group of home educating parents, LA representatives and representatives from home education organisations noted that one of the most common reasons for home education was around dissatisfaction with the school’s discipline and ability to keep children safe, including bullying, school phobia and poor standards of behaviour. The most common reasons also included being unsatisfied with the education and curriculum on offer; cultural, religious or philosophical beliefs; and needs related to SEN not being met, including ASD, dyslexia and gifted and talented children (Hopwood et al., 2007). It is important to acknowledge that these findings are only across nine LAs, therefore may not be representative.

More recently, Ofsted (2019) carried out research to explore the move to home education for young people in secondary schools. They found that parents reported that home education was felt to be the only option, in line with Morton’s (2010) ‘last resort’ category. The most common reason reported by

parents and their children were related to SEN, medical, behavioural or other wellbeing related needs. Parents reported that the approaches taken in school to meet their child's needs had been ineffective (Ofsted, 2019). However, these findings are only a snapshot from seven LAs in the East Midlands. Additionally, similar findings were found in Wales, with a study finding that nearly a third of home educating parents reported that their child had additional learning needs and that negative experiences at school led to the decision to home educate (Maxwell et al., 2018).

Furthermore, research that has specifically focused on children with SEN in the UK has reported similar findings. Parsons and Lewis (2010) carried out an online survey with 27 home educating parents of children with SEN and found that 'push' factors were the most common reason for home education, such as the school not being able to meet their child's needs. As noted by the authors, the nature of surveys can limit the views that can be shared by parents. Kendall and Taylor (2016) conducted telephone interviews with seven home educating parents of children with SEN, which typically allows for a more in-depth exploration of views. They found that parents reported that their child's needs were not being met; there was a lack of understanding from staff, particularly in relation to ASD; and a lack of partnership with parents. This school experience was reported to have had a negative impact on the child's wellbeing. However, the small sample sizes in both of these studies should be taken into consideration. In addition, it is acknowledged that all of the studies mentioned in this section are subject to self-selection bias. In particular, due to there being no legal requirement to register children as home educated, it may be that it is the families who are registered and known to the LA who decide to take part in research. Therefore, views gathered are unlikely to be representative of all home educating families.

Another reason for home education that has gained attention is when schools pressure parents to take their child out of school, known as 'off-rolling' (DfE, 2019a). A possible reason that has been suggested behind this is around schools being focused on their exam results, rather than on the needs of individual children (Children's Commissioner, 2019). The parents in Maxwell et al's (2018) study reported that the focus on attendance figures, meeting

targets and test results did not suit their children. A study by the Children's Commissioner (2013) found that 1.8% of a sample of schools admitted to persuading parents to withdraw their children from school to educate them at home. However, the number of schools this is based on is unclear. The DfE (2019a) note that they feel off-rolling has played a significant part in the increase in numbers of young people becoming home educated, particularly for those aged between 14-16 years of age.

2.6 Autism Spectrum Disorder

It appears that children with SEN are a prominent group within the home educating population, due to reported rising numbers, as well as SEN needs not being met in schools being noted as a common reason for home education (Jeffreys, 2017; Maxwell et al., 2018; Ofsted, 2019). The most common type of SEN for home educated children is unknown. However, the DfE (2019c) found that the most common type of SEN for children in schools with an EHCP is ASD. This could be the same across the home educated population, although this would just be an assumption based upon the data in schools. In addition, not all children with SEN have an EHCP. However, a number of research studies focusing on home education for young people with SEN in the UK have found that a high number of participants had a diagnosis of ASD (Kendall & Taylor, 2016; Parsons & Lewis, 2010; Taylor et al., 2011). Additionally, in a survey carried out by ADCS in 2017, one LA noted that a significant number of the children being home educated had ASD (ADCS, 2017). Therefore, this may suggest that a further exploration of ASD and home education is warranted.

2.6.1 Definitions and Prevalence

It is important to acknowledge that there has been much debate and disagreement regarding the various terms used to conceptualise autism (Kenny et al., 2016). Kenny et al. (2016) carried out an online survey in the UK with over 3000 individuals with autism and members of their support network to ascertain their views on their preferred terminology. Overall, they found that preferences varied and there was no consensus for one particular preferred term. Therefore, I have made the decision to use the term 'Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)' to align with the terminology utilised by the American

Psychiatric Association (APA, 2013) and the World Health Organisation (WHO, 2018).

ASD is defined by the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual 5th edition (APA, 2013, p.50) as:

- *"Persistent deficits with social communication and social interaction…";*
- *"Restricted, repetitive patterns of behaviour, interests or activities..."* including rigid thinking and sensory needs.

The International Classification of Diseases 11th edition (WHO, 2018, 6A02) note that these deficits can cause impairment across *"personal, family, social, educational, occupational or other important areas of functioning…"* It is important to note that the difficulties associated with these impairments vary considerably between each individual (Frederickson & Cline, 2015).

It is difficult to ascertain the exact prevalence rates of ASD. Elsabbagh et al. (2012) report that there are an estimated 1 in 160 children globally with a diagnosis of ASD and other pervasive developmental disorders. A survey carried out by the NHS estimates that 1.1% of the adult population in England have ASD (Brugha et al., 2012).

2.6.2 Theories of ASD

There are a number of theories that have been proposed to help understand ASD, which will now be discussed in turn.

Theory of Mind

Theory of Mind (ToM) is the ability to attribute mental states to others and predict their behaviour (Frederickson & Cline, 2015). Understanding the mental states of others has been found to be a common difficulty in many individuals with ASD (Baron-Cohen, 2001). Baron-Cohen et al. (1985) conducted a study using a false-belief task, where one character moves a marble whilst another character is away and the children are asked where the character will look upon return. They found that most of the children with ASD answered incorrectly, in comparison to children with Down's Syndrome and typically developing children. Therefore, suggesting they struggled to mentalise and understand that other people have different thoughts to

themselves. More recently, Kana et al. (2015) found reduced activation in regions of the brain related to the ToM network in children with ASD, compared to typically developing peers. However, it is important to be mindful of the small sample sizes in both of these studies when generalising findings.

Empathising-Systemising Theory

Baron-Cohen (2009) developed the Empathising-Systemising theory to suggest individuals with ASD have low levels of empathy but high levels of systemising, which is the drive to build or analyse a rule-based system. This theory can help to explain social and communication difficulties in individuals with ASD, as well as specific interests, repetitive behaviour and need for routine (Baron-Cohen, 2009). Greenberg et al. (2018) conducted a large-scale study, including over 36,000 participants with ASD, and found that most of these individuals obtained a higher score for systemising.

Executive Dysfunction

Executive functions encompass a wide range of abilities that are needed in order to prepare for and execute actions and behaviours, including planning; prioritising; monitoring and switching between various tasks; impulse control; and being able to think of alternative ways of responding to a situation and weighing up the possible outcomes (Frederickson & Cline, 2015). Hill (2004) notes that individuals with ASD can have deficits in executive functions. This theory of executive dysfunction can help to understand the characteristics of repetitive behaviours and restricted interests (Hill, 2004). Gioia et al. (2002) used the Behaviour Rating Inventory of Executive Function (BRIEF) (Gioia et al., 2000), which is a parental questionnaire, to explore the executive functions of children. They found that there were deficits in flexibility across a group of 47 children with ASD. More recently, Granader et al. (2014) reported the same finding when using the BRIEF with a much larger sample of 411 children with ASD.

Weak Central Coherence Theory

Frederickson and Cline (2015) note that the previously mentioned theories do not explain why some young people with ASD have special strengths or savant

skills, such as art, music and poetry (Frith, 2003). Frith (1989) suggested that this could be due to a weak central coherence. Central coherence is the ability to combine information to form a whole, as well as to generalise across different contexts (Birch & Frederickson, 2015). It has been suggested that individuals with ASD may struggle to do this, which may be connected to particular strengths in certain areas (Frederickson & Cline, 2015). Frith (2003) notes that focusing on small elements of information could be linked to skills needed for drawing and learning music. A study conducted by Meilleur et al. (2015) found that across 254 individuals with ASD, over 62% had a special skill in the areas of either memory, visuospatial skills, reading, drawing, music or computers.

2.6.3 ASD and School

In line with these theories, the difficulties young people with ASD may encounter have been found to have an impact within school. A study conducted by Emam and Farrell (2009) found that children's difficulties with social and emotional understanding, in line with ToM, had an impact on their relationship and interactions with their teachers. In addition, Frederickson and Cline (2015) note that children with weak central coherence may struggle when generalising their learning in schools and with incidental learning opportunities. Furthermore, Taylor et al. (2011) report that a number of parents of children with ASD felt that their children's specific strengths and abilities were not being fostered in school.

A survey conducted by The National Autistic Society (2015) regarding a review of the SEN system for young people with ASD in schools, found that 75% of parents reported that it had not been easy to get the educational support that their child needs in school. Parents reported that a lack of support had led to a negative impact on their child's social and communication skills, progress with education and self-esteem. Research conducted by the All Party Parliamentary Group on Autism (2017) found that less than half of the young people reported being happy in school, with 70% reporting that they felt their peers did not understand them and 50% reporting that they felt their teachers did not know how to help them.

2.6.4 ASD and Home Education

Similar to findings regarding home education in general, one of the main reasons for home education for children with ASD is regarding school's understanding of their needs. Kidd and Kaczmarek (2010) carried out a study with a sample of Australian parents who were educating their children with ASD at home and found that all parents reported that the experience of school was the main reason for them choosing to home educate. Parents reported that the challenges at school did not match their children's learning needs and that their children were experiencing stress and anxiety. In addition, they noted that they felt that school staff struggled to understand ASD, which resulted in a lack of appropriate support and strategies being put in place for their children (Kidd & Kaczmarek, 2010).

Parents of children with ASD in a study in the US noted that they felt that their child did not fit into the typical school system, whether that being mainstream school or a special school (Hurlbutt, 2011). As these studies were not conducted in the UK, the potential cultural differences must be acknowledged. Daniels (2017) carried out research for their unpublished thesis in the UK with home educating families with children with ASD. The main reasons for home education reported were professionals having a lack of understanding and knowledge regarding their child's needs; child's dislike of school; school's failures to promote children's needs; school strategies being short lived; and parental knowledge and experience of alternative education (Daniels, 2017).

2.7 Delivery of Home Education

2.7.1 Governmental Guidance

In line with the Education Act (1996), parents have to ensure that the education their child receives is 'suitable', 'efficient' and 'full-time'. However, there are no clear definitions as to what constitutes a 'suitable' education under English law (DfE, 2019a). Therefore, in the recently updated guidance, the DfE (2019a) have set their own criteria as to what LAs should refer to in order to assess whether a young person is receiving a 'suitable' education. They note that issues pertaining to suitability should be considered on a spectrum, whilst taking account of each individual child's circumstances. In summary, the criteria set out by the DfE (2019a) are that:

- The education provided *"…should enable a child to participate fully in life in the UK by including sufficient secular education."* (DfE, 2019a, p. 30).
- The education provided does not have to adhere to programmes, such as the National Curriculum.
- The education provided does not go against 'Fundamental British Values', although parents do not have to promote these values.
- Any requirements set out by the LA regarding effectiveness of subjects, such as literacy and numeracy, should be considered in light of the ability of each individual child.
- Allowances must be made when assessing the suitability of education depending on each child's ability; and the content of home education may foster an individual child's particular aptitudes.
- There should be a focus on socialisation.
- The environment should be conducive to learning, as well as safety.
- Parents should be able to choose how to educate their child, whether formally or informally, depending on what is deemed suitable for the individual child.

With reference to children with an EHCP, if the LA deem that the education being provided is suitable, they do not need to arrange any special educational provision for the child; however, they are still obliged to carry out annual reviews of the plan (DfE, 2019a).

In relation to what comprises an 'efficient' education, the DfE (2019a, p.32) regard this as *"one which achieves what it sets out to achieve".* The DfE (2019a) note that there is no lawful definition regarding what constitutes 'full-time' education. Nevertheless, they refer the reader to the number of hours children receive education in state schools, whilst acknowledging that due to the variation in home education practices, this may often operate outside of typical school hours and term times.

2.7.2 Findings from the Research

Research that has been conducted to explore how home education is being delivered has found a variation in approaches. Hopwood et al. (2007) found

that a range of teaching methods were being used across home educating families, varying from more structured and formal approaches to less structured and informal approaches. In most families, there appeared to be a mixture of both approaches. The structured approaches may include parents following the National Curriculum, using text books and implementing set hours and timetabled sessions. In regards to the more unstructured approaches, parents may be driven by their child's interests and encourage learning through everyday experiences (Hopwood et al., 2007).

In their online survey with parents of children with SEN, Parsons and Lewis (2010) found that nearly three-quarters of the parents reported that they adopted a flexible approach, with some noting that this had evolved over time. The main approach was for parents to carry out some planning, whilst taking into account their child's preferences. Similarly, Taylor et al. (2011) found that parents reported that learning was guided by their children's interests and needs. In particular, they found that several children were able to pursue some of their particular interests, such as robotics, which the authors note may be in relation to their participants with ASD (Taylor et al., 2011). In some families, tutors are employed to support with teaching (Hopwood et al., 2007). Additionally, learning has been found to take place outside of the home, such as visits to museums and art galleries (Hopwood et al., 2007; Taylor et al., 2011).

2.7.3 Self-Determination Theory

Riley (2016) notes how the opportunity for young people to pursue their interests within home education fosters intrinsic motivation. The notion of intrinsic motivation can be considered further in light of Self-Determination Theory (SDT) (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Deci and Ryan (1985) argue that there are three psychological needs that lead to intrinsic motivation: competence, autonomy and relatedness.

- Competence – the understanding and skills needed to take on optimal challenges (Ryan & Deci, 2000)
- Autonomy – having choice, the ability to carry out self-directed learning and an acknowledgement of feelings (Deci & Ryan, 1985)

- Relatedness – having secure connections with others (Deci et al., 1991)

Due to constraints within school, intrinsic motivation may be more difficult to promote than within home education (Riley, 2016).

2.8 Young People's Voice

The importance of gathering the young person's voice has been made apparent across numerous legislations. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989, Article 12) states that every child has the right to express their views regarding all matters that affect them. In addition, the Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice (SEND CoP, DfE & Department of Health, DoH, 2015) emphasises the importance of children and young people being involved in decision making. In line with the SEND CoP (DfE & DoH, 2015), gathering the views of young people is a key part of the EPs' role (Fox, 2015). In addition, harmonious to Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory, the child's views should lie at the very centre of an EP's work (Fox, 2015). Children are the experts about their own experiences, not the adults around them (Greig et al., 2013).

However, most of the current research into home education, particularly for children with SEN, focuses on parental views and outlines the importance of future research gathering the young person's views (Parsons & Lewis, 2010). van Schalkwyk and Bouwer (2011) emphasised the importance of gathering the young person's voice if we want to obtain a true understanding of the home education context. The authors carried out a case study with home educating families in South Africa and compared the views of parents and children. They found that there were some similar views, however there were also some significant differences. They noted that parents appeared to think they had acted in the best interests of their child, without having a clear awareness of their child's needs.

2.8.1 Gathering the Views of Young People with ASD

A particular challenge when gathering the views of individuals with ASD, is that researchers without ASD may struggle to truly understand what the experience is like for these individuals, leading to a potential 'double empathy problem' (Howard et al., 2019; Milton, 2012). IPA is an approach that is being

increasingly adopted to explore such individual experiences (Howard et al., 2019). IPA believes that individuals are the experts about their own experience and aims to gain an equal balance between the views of the individuals taking part and those of the researcher (Howard et al., 2019). In a recent review of research that has used IPA with individuals with ASD, Howard et al. (2019) found that within the ten included studies, the most common method of data collection was semi-structured interviews. The flexible nature of semi-structured interviews has been reported to allow participants to obtain a level of control of the interview process (Huws & Jones, 2015) and to promote rapport building between the participant and researcher (Cridland et al., 2014). In turn, empowering individuals with ASD to ensure their voices are heard (Humphrey & Lewis, 2008).

The participation of young people with ASD in research is considerably lacking (Ellis, 2017), with young people's anxiety being noted as a key reason (Preece & Jordan, 2010). In particular, the reliance on language within research which aims to gather views, including IPA studies, can pose a challenge for some young people with ASD (Beresford et al., 2004; Ellis, 2017; Howard et al., 2019). In regards to IPA research specifically, a number of adaptations have been suggested which can support individuals with ASD to take part, including ensuring there is an adult available if needed during the interview, providing young people with a visual card to indicate they would like to stop the interview and supplementing interviews with the use of diaries and drawings (Humphrey & Lewis, 2008; Huws & Jones, 2015). The use of visual methods has also been suggested to promote the inclusion of young people with ASD in other types of interview-based research, such as using colour coded cards, utilising photographs or drawings to share about experiences and the use of joint attention activities (Beresford et al., 2004; Ellis, 2017; Scott-Barrett et al., 2019). As well as helping to reduce anxiety, these different techniques can also provide young people with ASD an alternative platform to share about their experience (Howard et al., 2019).

In addition, in their paper exploring researchers' experiences of gathering the views of young people with ASD, Scott-Barrett et al. (2019) found that ensuring young people have control over their involvement in the interview, including

whether they would like to take part, as well as how they choose to share their views, helps to reduce any power differentials between the researcher and the participant. Furthermore, taking time to build rapport with the young person prior to conducting an interview was also found to be extremely important (Scott-Barrett et al., 2019). One researcher in particular noted that in their studies they found it was crucial to conduct an initial visit prior to the interview to build up a rapport with each participant, which often included engaging in a preferred activity, as well as ascertaining what may be the best way to conduct the interview (Preece, 2002; Preece & Jordon, 2010). Therefore, it is important that researchers make appropriate adjustments to ensure that more young people with ASD are included in research.

2.9 The Role of the Educational Psychologist in Home Education

The main purpose of the EP role is to provide support to young people within school settings. EPs have a key role to play in supporting young people with SEN, including those with ASD. However, the only time they really become involved with supporting a home educated young person is regarding statutory work, such as the EHCP needs assessment process (Bowers, 2017). However, due to the rising number of young people becoming home educated, perhaps a reconsideration of how EPs could become more involved in working with this population is warranted (Arora, 2003). It is interesting that Arora (2003) expressed this view 17 years ago. Due to the number of young people becoming home educated continuing to rise, this argument could be considered as even more pertinent today.

It seems imperative for EPs to develop their understanding of what home education is like for these young people. In particular, the benefits of home education may help to support the development of interventions within schools, especially where home education has been started due to negative school experiences (Jones, 2013). In addition, Lees and Nicholson (2017) note that many home educated young people end up returning to the education system for post-16 education, which is evidenced by the lack of inquiries into post-16 home education in home education support networks. This is very pertinent to EPs, due to their role expanding to work with young people aged 19-25 years (SEND CoP, DfE & DoH, 2015), meaning that EPs

could be involved in supporting these young people. Therefore, it is important for EPs to know about their experiences to enable them to provide support with their transitions and their futures.

Furthermore, developing the evidence-base around home education will hopefully help professionals such as EPs to be able to support parents who may be considering home education to make an informed decision. In addition, EPs will be able to provide guidance to home educating families regarding teaching and support, as well as links within the community (Jones, 2013).

2.10 Conclusion

The literature review has provided a background into home education, with a particular focus on ASD. It is evident that the numbers of young people becoming home educated is increasing rapidly, which has led to recent reviews to governmental guidance and an influx of media attention. The reasons for making the decision to home educate appear to predominately be related to negative experiences in school. In particular, young people with SEN, especially ASD, appear to be a prominent group within the home educating population. The young person is at the centre of their home education experience; therefore, it is imperative that their views are captured. In the following section a systematic literature review will be conducted to explore the current research that has gathered the views of young people regarding their experiences of being home educated.

2.11 Systematic Literature Review

2.11.1 Introduction

Systematic reviews aim to identify, appraise and synthesise the current research in a specific area, to enable a particular research question to be answered (Pettigrew & Roberts, 2006). It enables the researcher to ascertain what is currently known about the topic and how it is known (Gough, 2007). In addition, systematic reviews can identify where there might be uncertainty in a research area and where more research is warranted (Pettigrew & Roberts, 2006). The process ensures that a thorough search of a range of sources has been conducted in a reproducible manner (Lefebvre et al., 2011).

Gough (2007) suggests that the following key stages are carried out when conducting a systematic review:

- Develop review question and protocol
- Define how studies will be considered, through creating inclusion criteria
- Carry out a search of the studies
- Screen the studies, using inclusion criteria
- Describe the studies

In addition, a systematic synthesis should be carried out that aims to:

- Appraise the study quality and relevance
- Synthesise the findings, in order to answer the review question
- Communicate and engage

Gough (2007) suggests that an appraisal should be carried out of the study quality and relevance in relation to the review question, rather than solely focusing on appraising study quality in a generic way. I will carry out the systematic review in line with Gough's (2007) recommendations and will use Gough's (2007) Weight of Evidence framework to appraise study quality and relevance.

2.11.2 Review Question

The focus of this systematic review is to explore the research that has been conducted within the UK around gathering young people's views about their experience of being home educated. The aim being to identify any gaps in the current research.

Therefore, the systematic review was guided by the following question:

- What does current UK research tell us about young people's views about their experiences of being home educated?

2.11.3 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion:

- Participants to include young people who are currently being home educated
- There will be some focus on gathering the viewpoints of young people about their experience of being home educated
- Qualitative or quantitative study design
- Published in a peer reviewed journal or unpublished theses
- Written in English
- UK based research

Exclusion:

- Participants are young people who attend school, another educational context or are no longer being home educated or only include parents or professionals
- Published in a non-peer reviewed journal
- Books
- Book reviews
- Literature reviews
- Not written in English
- Research conducted outside the UK

A decision was made to only include research carried out within the UK due to the cultural and legislative differences regarding home education. Both quantitative and qualitative studies were included as quantitative methods, such as survey designs could still gather the views of young people. I decided to only include research published in peer reviewed journals to reduce bias, as these publications are already subject to a strict review process. Due to the paucity in UK research regarding the views of young people about their experiences of being home educated, it was decided to also include unpublished theses. Studies included had to have an element of gathering the young person's views about their experiences of being home educated.

2.11.4 Search Strategy

Web of Science, Scopus and ERIC were searched in July 2019 using the following search string:

((“home educat*” OR “educat* at home” OR homeschool*) AND (child* OR “young people” OR “young person” OR adolescen*) AND (view* OR voice* OR experienc* OR perception* OR perceiv* OR perspective* OR understand* OR thought* OR think* OR judg* OR interpret*))

Variations in terms related to home education were used, alongside the use of truncations to encompass various wording, such as “home educat*” would search for ‘home education’, ‘home educate’, ‘home educated’ or ‘home educating’. In addition, although ‘homeschool’ is generally an American term, it was included to ensure that no UK papers that had used the term were missed. I did try ‘home school’ but this resulted in an overwhelming number of results due to wording such as ‘home, school’ or ‘home-school relationships’ being included in the search. Therefore, it was decided not to include this term. Similarly, various terms related to children and young people were used, as well as terms related to gathering views or experiences, alongside truncations to allow for variations in wording, spelling and plurals. Table 2.1 below shows the number of search results that were generated within each database.

Database	**Number of search results**
Web of Science	146
Scopus	221
ERIC	312
Total	679

Table 2.1 A table showing the search results generated from each database for the systematic literature review

A total of 679 results were generated across all databases. Duplicates were removed which resulted in a total number of 508 records, which were screened based on title and abstract, in line with the inclusion criteria. A total of 497 papers were excluded at this stage, with 11 papers being screened for eligibility via full text. This resulted in a further seven papers being excluded

(see Appendix 1 for details of these excluded papers). A total of four studies met the inclusion criteria. Additionally, due to the low numbers of included published studies, British Library EThoS was searched for relevant unpublished theses within the last 10 years. This resulted in a further two papers meeting the inclusion criteria. An additional thesis appeared relevant but could not be accessed until October 2019. When I was able to access this thesis, it was found that it met the inclusion criteria. In addition, I was aware of one further thesis due to wider reading around the topic. Therefore, a total of eight studies were included. The process is outlined in Figure 2.1 below.

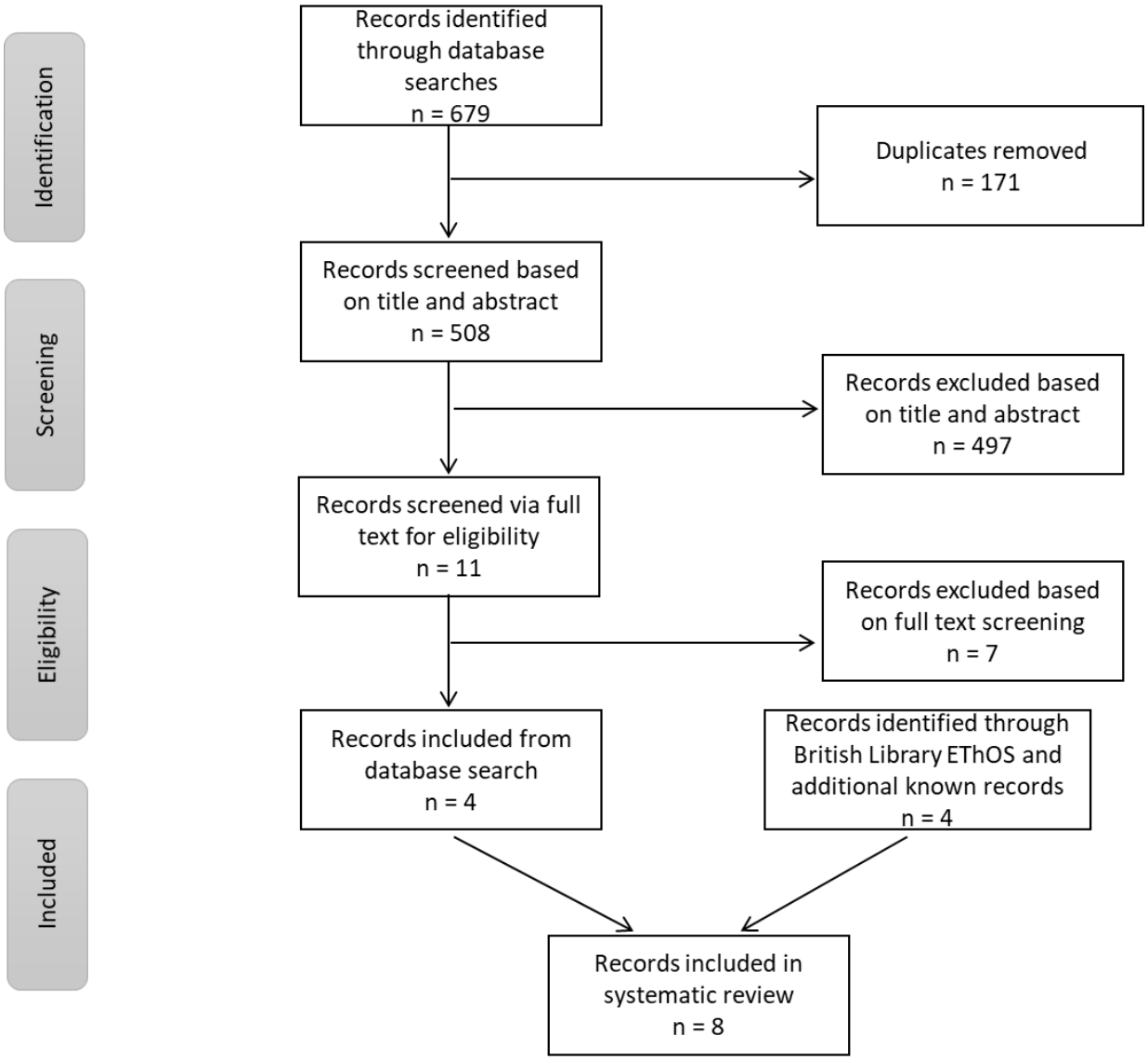

Figure 2.1 PRISMA flowchart showing the screening process of the systematic literature review (Moher et al., 2009)

2.11.5 Summary of Included Studies

Table 2.2 below details a summary of the included studies, drawing on the key findings. Where possible only the relevant research questions and findings in line with the review question have been detailed. However, for the majority of the studies, analysis appeared to be carried out across both parents and young people, therefore it was not possible to only report on the findings related to the views of young people. Also, in some studies there were several research questions, however analysis of data appeared to be general. Therefore, it was not possible to pull out findings that related solely to the research questions that were most relevant to the present review question. A further detailed table can be found in Appendix 2.

Study	Methodology	Participants	Relevant Research Questions	Key Findings
Arora (2006) *Peer-reviewed*	Interviews with families who had been home educating for >18 months. Analysed using open coding and content analysis.	12 families, including 17 young people (10 girls, 7 boys, aged 6-17 years – eight had SEN, two of which had Asperger's Syndrome). Appears that home educators and children were interviewed together.	What are the arrangements for home education? What support would home educating parents find useful and effective?	Three families utilised a tutor, in one family the Grandmother provided the teaching and in another a 15-year-old girl took responsibility for her education. In the rest of the families, the mother took the main responsibility. Five families reported that they regularly used the computer to support their learning. Most families noted that they followed an explicit structure. Several children shared that they felt they had more time to complete their work, following their own pace. The timetable was generally in line with the core subjects of the National Curriculum, with a focus on basic skills and knowledge, whilst still allowing some negotiation with the young person. Two families had produced their own materials. There was a mixed view on support received. None of the families were current members of home education support groups. One young person was being flexi-schooled and attended a special school part-time. Families generally felt they would have liked more support from the LA, particularly in relation to assessing progress and accessing resources and advice. Almost all families would have wanted their child to attend school, with some still considering how this could happen. Strong view that children were much happier and learning much more than they would have in school. Overall, most of the young people did not feel they were missing out on a social life.
Daniels (2017) *Unpublished thesis*	Semi-structured interviews with parents and children, and observations. Follow up telephone	15 parents and eight children (aged 5-11 years) with ASD were interviewed.	How do parents organise home education for their children with ASD; what pedagogical approaches and practices do	Learning appeared to be child-centred and organised flexibly in response to the children's individual needs and interests, with most families ensuring there was some focus on literacy and numeracy. Approaches appeared to have evolved over time, with the majority following a semi-structured approach. Majority did not use visual structures. There was a focus on learning through concrete and kinaesthetic activities. The majority used books, digital resources and engaged in activities outside the home, with some utilising tutors. There had been a change in roles and responsibilities in the families.

	interviews with parents. Analysed using thematic analysis.	Interviews with parents and children were conducted separately. Observations in four homes. Ten parents participated in follow up interview.	they employ; and what resources do they use? What do parents and their children with ASD perceive to be the advantages and disadvantages of home educating?	Advantages noted were parents having intimate knowledge about their children to meet their learning needs; ability to tailor the curriculum; ability to meet their children's social and emotional needs (including sensory needs); ability to manage and promote social situations; and the ability to promote well-being and enhance current skills. Disadvantages noted were related to financial difficulties; prejudice from others; responsibility on parents; and impact on friendships.
D'Arcy (2012) *Unpublished thesis*	Semi-structured interviews with families and home education professionals. Analysed using ladder of abstraction, alongside critical race analysis. Also, created three vignettes for further insight into a few families' experiences.	11 Traveller families - children shared their views within some families. Two home education professionals.	What are the experiences and perceptions of Traveller families regarding home education? Are there emerging equality issues concerning Traveller families' use of home education?	Theme - 'EHE as a "Suitable Education"?' - Families noted many perceived benefits, including children being safe and protected, being able to learn without having to go to school, parental control over what is learned, flexibility, more time spent as a family, learning can focus on the Traveller lifestyle and the children can focus on the way of life that they are used to. The majority of families utilised a tutor, mainly due to confidence in their own ability. There was a mix between routine and flexible approaches. Learning tended to focus on basic skills, such as reading, writing and spelling, as well as those in line with the family's needs, such as supporting the family business. The author concluded that there were push factors, namely problems in school, with school being a place of inequality and pull factors, namely the safety of home education. However, home education posed inequality issues too, mainly access to a 'suitable education', particularly in relation to financial and social resources.
de Carvalho and Skipper (2019)	Semi-structured interviews. Use of social interaction	Three girls (aged 11-14 years, one had	How do home educated	Three main themes were identified: 1. 'Sense of community within home education networks', which was in relation to using networks to meet people and seek support. Participants

Peer-reviewed	diaries and reflection sheets to aid recall. Analysed using thematic analysis.	ASD diagnosis) and their mothers. Interviews were conducted separately.	adolescents and their parents experience and understand socialisation?	reported that there was a common interest, shared sense of identity and a sense of acceptance and understanding. Overall, the participants had a positive sense of community and found it easy to access social opportunities. 2. 'Diversity of their social experiences and networks', which was in relation to a wide range of activities that the girls took part in as well as the diverse group of people they socialised with. It was felt that there was a better quality of socialisation during learning activities and that diversity promoted the development of individual identities. Overall, the participants felt these experiences improved social skills and were of better quality to social interaction experiences at school. 3. 'The importance of choice in socialising opportunities', which related to the girls having an element of choice and freedom regarding the social activities and contacts they engaged in. It was felt that most groups were targeted to younger children and there was little available for teenagers.
Jones (2013) *Peer-reviewed*	Photovoice - children were asked to take photographs to represent their home education experience. These were supplemented with verbal or written narratives. Analysed using grounded theory.	Nine young people from six families (aged 7-14 years, one had a diagnosis of ASD).	What are home educated children's experiences and perceptions of home education?	Three main themes were identified: 1. 'Identity and development of self', which related to how the children compared themselves to other children and the ownership they felt they had over their own learning, with older children's learning choices being influenced by their identity and sense of self. 2. 'Experiences and perceptions of learning', where the children noted a balance between adult led and child led learning, indicating that choice played an important role in learning being motivated by interest, leading to enthusiasm and passion. Learning does not appear to fall into distinct categories of 'formal' or 'informal' but is more a continuum. 3. 'Relationships with others', which was related to the support and encouragement the children got from others. The children indicated that this had an influence over their learning choices and interests.
Nelson (2013) *Unpublished thesis*	Semi-structured interviews, child-centred activities (photo collages and	15 parents, eight children (5 girls, 3 boys, aged 7-15 years) and 41	How is home education practised?	The home education approaches utilised fell into three categories: structured, semi-structured or autonomous, with the majority adopting a semi-structured approach. Despite the approach taken, practices and activities were diverse. Support from other family members and home education groups were found to be important.

	stories) and focus groups. Analysed using the constant comparative method and network analysis.	young people (26 male, 15 female, aged 16-25 years). Interviews/focus groups were conducted separately.	What are the experiences of parents, children and young people who have been or are currently engaged in this provision? What are the views of parents, children and young people regarding how home education is perceived in society? What changes would parents, children and young people like to see for home education moving forward?	Benefits reported were having one-to-one interactions; learning through conversations; travel, such as visiting places outside the home; there being no time pressure; being able to pursue interests; ability to adapt learning styles; helping children to develop as a person; and enhancing life skills, such as independent skills. Disadvantages reported were financial struggles, particularly as many parents had to leave employment; problems in relation to access to exams, college places and work experience; difficulties accessing specialist support or facilities; lack of support from the LA; lack of interactions with peers, with a consensus that most groups are targeted at younger children. In regards to others' views regarding home education, key findings were regarding initial scepticism of family members; societal reaction, in regards to many people being unaware of the legal status of home education and stereotypes, particularly in relation to socialisation and the media's representation. Four themes arose regarding the future of home education. These were support for funding and resources; LA training; research; and a greater awareness.
Solder (2017) *Unpublished thesis*	Case-study approach, 'conversations' with families, utilising a narrative approach and creative resources.	Five families – eight young people (6 girls, 2 boys, aged 4-13 years) and their parent/s – data	What are the thoughts and emotions associated with experiences of home education	Key themes from the across case analysis: • Relationships, including: o 'Parent-child relationships': generally supportive and non-directive o 'Sibling relationships': seen as being positive and supportive o 'Friendships': seen as being important and including friends of various ages, as well as school educated friends • Views on learning and beyond, including:

	Informal conversations with parents during Forest School visit. Analysed using critical discourse analysis, the listening guide, and thematic analysis for across case analysis. Development of 'I Poems' for children over 10 years old.	gathered as a family unit.	for young people? What are the thoughts and emotions associated with experiences of home education for parents?	○ 'School': generally viewed as negative and some young people had experienced bullying ○ 'Learning environment': including learning taking place in different locations, attendance at groups and "colourful and energetic" homes ○ 'Learning': found to be a variation in structure, sometimes being led by child's interests, being practical and the children expressing excitement about their learning ○ 'Ambitions': children were ambitious about their future and did not perceive that being home educated would be a barrier to success • Home education and lifestyle choices, including: ○ 'Home education': families felt confident in children's abilities for social interaction, felt that the children had a better general knowledge and that home education needs to be tailored to individual needs ○ 'Shared values and beliefs': views that children should be guided by their interests, there should be an encouragement of a love for learning and curiosity and that there should be less emphasis on meeting age related expectations ○ 'Lifestyle': including alternative choices such as no television, being vegan and religious views ○ 'Others' perceptions': all families had faced negative comments The author gave a general summary of their findings in relation to the research question regarding young people's thoughts and emotions, which is most pertinent to this review: • Young people felt they had developed friendships of better quality. • They noted feeling more confident which they linked to their home education experience and opportunities to engage with a range of adults and children across different situations. • They felt that their different educational approach did not interfere with friendships. • They expressed excitement when talking about their learning experiences. • All young people shared that they were happy being home educated.

Winstanley (2009) *Peer-reviewed*	Informal interviews with young people and parents during various workshops across a 13-month period. The author draws on quotations, unclear how data was analysed.	Author notes that quotations are from a sample of 27 children (aged 7-17 years) and their parents but exact number of participants is unclear.	No clear research question. Focus is on the home education experience of gifted children.	No clear themes were drawn, with the author using quotations more generally. The author notes different models such as 'small schools' where most of the learning takes place in the home, with regular trips planned through networks. A quote from one young person noted that 'small school' activities enable them to see friends but not as often as in school. The author acknowledges the pros and cons of home education, drawing on quotes from the young people. One young person shared that they have friends online but commented on the convenience of things, such as needing to take a bus to the library, whereas at school it was all in one place. A further child commented on missing the PE lessons at school.

Table 2.2 A table showing a summary of the included studies in the systematic literature review

2.11.6 Appraisal of Study Quality and Relevance

Gough's (2007) Weight of Evidence framework was used to assess the quality of the included studies. It was decided to utilise this framework as it provides support with assessing the quality of the studies in regards to general methodological considerations, as well as the appropriateness and relevance to the particular review question. Table 2.3 below shows the ratings given to each study. An explanation of the criteria used to critically appraise the studies can be found in Appendix 3 and a table evidencing the judgements I made for each study can be found in Appendix 4.

	Weight of Evidence A *Generic judgement*	**Weight of Evidence B** *Appropriateness of design for answering review question*	**Weight of Evidence C** *Relevance of focus of study for answering review question*	**Weight of Evidence D** *Overall rating*
Arora (2006)	High	High	Medium	High
Daniels (2017)	Medium	High	Medium	Medium
D'Arcy (2012)	Medium	High	Medium-Low	Medium
de Carvalho and Skipper (2019)	High	High	Medium	High
Jones (2013)	High	High	High	High
Nelson (2013)	Medium	High	Medium	Medium
Solder (2017)	Medium	High	Medium	Medium
Winstanley (2009)	Low	Medium	Medium	Medium-Low

Table 2.3 A table showing the Weight of Evidence ratings for each included study (Gough, 2007)

As an example, Jones (2013) achieved an overall rating of 'high' due to a strong level of clarity regarding their study details and procedure, leading to a

‘high’ rating for Weight of Evidence A. It was also rated ‘high’ for Weight of Evidence B due to utilising a qualitative methodology and a clear method of data analysis. In addition, it was the only study to be rated ‘high’ for Weight of Evidence C, due to solely focusing on the views of young people. The majority of the studies received an overall weighting of ‘medium’, with three studies achieving a ‘high’ weighting. It was felt necessary to assign Winstanley (2009) an overall rating of ‘medium-low’ due to a lack of transparency regarding their data collection and that the paper appeared to be more of a literature review, interspersed with quotations from informal interviews, rather than a direct research study.

2.11.7 Synthesis of Included Studies

In line with Gough (2007), a synthesis of the findings will now be conducted, in order to answer the review question. As noted by Thomas et al. (2012), a synthesis is not merely an account of the findings from each individual study, it involves a process of bringing the data from different studies together to form a connected whole. The general aim of a qualitative synthesis is to synthesise data that is typically of a textual form (Snilstveit et al., 2012). There are a wide range of synthesis approaches that can be adopted, including critical interpretative synthesis, ecological triangulation, framework synthesis, grounded theory, meta-ethnography, meta-narrative, meta-study, textual narrative synthesis and thematic synthesis (Barnett-Page & Thomas, 2009). Upon consideration of the range of different approaches, a textual narrative synthesis was chosen for the present synthesis. This approach was felt to be the most appropriate as it aims to organise studies into homogeneous groups and compare and contrast the similarities and differences between the studies (Hong et al., 2017). Lucas et al. (2007) note that a textual narrative synthesis typically reports upon study characteristics, context, quality and findings across the studies. The present textual narrative synthesis will draw upon this guidance to present the findings. The quality of the studies has already been discussed in line with Gough’s (2007) criteria, with further elaboration of study quality being discussed throughout the following synthesis.

In order to identify and extract the key information and data from each study, I utilised the information I had already captured in Table 2.2 above and also re-

read each paper to obtain any further details. I recorded the information in tables under the areas of study characteristics, methodology, analysis and key findings.

The textual narrative synthesis approach has been critiqued for its limited ability to identify commonality across studies, in comparison to the thematic synthesis approach (Lucas et al., 2007). Barnett-Page and Thomas (2009) note that this may be due to the thematic synthesis approach organising information through themes. Therefore, in an attempt to overcome this potential limitation of textual narrative synthesis, I looked across each study and generated overarching themes that I felt captured the main findings. This allowed for commonalities and differences across studies to be addressed. The tables that evidence the process that was carried out can be found in Appendix 5.

2.11.7.1 Study Characteristics

Out of the eight included studies, four are peer-reviewed publications and four are unpublished theses. The dates of publication range from 2006-2019. All studies were conducted within the UK. Out of the studies that identified the number of young people who participated, this ranges from three to 17, with some studies only identifying the number of families who participated (D'Arcy, 2012) or not clearly reporting on the number of participants (Winstanley, 2009). Within a quantitative study, sample size would be judged in terms of external validity. However, it is not deemed appropriate to assess qualitative research against the same criteria due to the nature of the research. Therefore, judgements can be made in relation to transferability, where studies are explicit about their participants and the data collection to enable replication within similar groups in the future (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Overall, it was felt that the majority of studies had relatively high transferability, with the exception of Winstanley (2009), which therefore was judged as 'low' quality in regards to Weight of Evidence A.

The ages of the young people that were reported range from four to 17 years old across the studies, with one study only recruiting children within the primary school age range (Daniels, 2017) and one only within the secondary

school age range (de Carvalho & Skipper, 2019). The rest of the studies report a spread across age ranges. Nelson (2013) also recruited 41 older young people, aged 16-25 years old. Of those who report gender, both girls and boys participated, except for de Carvalho and Skipper (2019), who only had female participants. The authors note how this may limit the generalisability of the findings.

Daniels (2017) is the only study to solely focus on young people with ASD. Therefore, showing a paucity in research exploring young people's views of home education in the ASD population in the UK. In addition to Daniels (2017), of those studies that report on SEN, three reported that some of the participants had SEN, with all three including ASD (Arora, 2006; de Carvalho & Skipper, 2019; Jones, 2013). D'Arcy (2012) noted that one young person had ASD and at least three others had SEN but it was unclear if these children took part in the interviews.

Only one study was solely focused on gathering the views of young people (Jones, 2013) and was therefore rated 'high' for Weight of Evidence C. All of the other studies appeared to focus more on the whole family perspective. Solder (2017) note that they initially aimed to only capture children's views but then found it more valuable and holistic to consider the family unit. They did have a research question specifically regarding children's views but it appeared they did not analyse data or generate themes to answer this question separately. As the majority of the studies analysed the views of young people with those of their parents, there is a risk that the child's voice may have been lost or overshadowed. D'Arcy (2012) had a specific focus on Traveller families and Winstanley (2009) on gifted children. In addition, D'Arcy (2012) also carried out interviews with home education professionals.

2.11.7.2 Methodology

The most common method of data collection was in the form of interviews, with the exception of Jones (2013) who used 'photovoice', accompanied with either verbal or written narratives, and Solder (2017) who utilised a narrative approach using creative resources, such as play dough and beads to gather views. Some of the other studies drew on other approaches to help elicit

dialogue within the interviews, including de Carvalho and Skipper (2019) with the use of diaries and reflection sheets, as well as Nelson (2013) who utilised collages and short stories with some of their participants. In addition, Nelson (2013) held focus groups with some of the young people and Daniels (2017) supplemented some of their interviews with observations. Triangulation of data through the use of multiple methods can enable a richer understanding of the topic being explored (Willig, 2013).

Three studies also had a questionnaire phase to their research but it was felt that this was not relevant to the current review question as it was either about views of families as soon as they started home education, therefore was not about their experience or appeared to be parental questionnaires, therefore did not include the views of young people (Arora, 2006; Daniels, 2017; Solder, 2017).

2.11.7.3 Analysis

There were a wide range of methods of analysis utilised across the studies. The most common analysis was thematic analysis (Daniels, 2017; de Carvalho & Skipper, 2019; Solder, 2017). Solder (2017) also used critical discourse analysis and 'the listening guide'. Other methods of analysis that were used were open coding and content analysis (Arora, 2006); ladder of abstraction and critical race analysis (D'Arcy, 2012); grounded theory (Jones, 2013); and constant comparative method and network analysis (Nelson, 2013). Two studies also supplemented their analysis with individual vignettes (D'Arcy, 2012) and 'I poems' (Solder, 2017). It appeared that Winstanley (2009) did not carry out any analysis on their data but was more an anecdotal account of quotes, hence this being the only study not to receive a 'high' rating for Weight of Evidence B.

2.11.7.4 Key Findings

Key themes were identified from across the included studies and will now be presented.

Delivery of Home Education

Pedagogical approaches

Across the studies there was a variation in approaches utilised, with several studies noting the use of tutors (Arora, 2006; Daniels, 2017; D'Arcy, 2012). Three studies noted that there was some teaching of core subjects, such as reading and writing (Arora, 2006; Daniels, 2017; D'Arcy, 2012). Resources that were utilised included books (Daniels, 2017) digital resources (Arora, 2006; Daniels, 2017) and engaging in activities outside of the home (Daniels, 2017; Nelson, 2013; Solder, 2017; Winstanley, 2009).

Child-centred approaches

The most common approach that appeared to be adopted by families was in line with a semi-structured approach (Daniels, 2017; D'Arcy, 2012; Nelson, 2013). Jones (2013) noted a balance between adult led and child led learning. Arora (2006) reported that most families followed an explicit structure but that there was still some negotiation with the children. Also, Solder (2017) found that there was a variation in structure adopted. Overall, there was a common view that learning does not fall into distinct categories but is more of a continuum (Jones, 2013), with approaches evolving over time (Daniels, 2017) and a diversity in practices and activities (Nelson, 2013).

A key finding across the studies was that learning appeared to be organised flexibly in line with children's individual needs and interests. D'Arcy (2012) reported that the flexibility of home education was a perceived benefit to Traveller families. The ability to tailor education to meet individual needs and learning styles were noted across several studies (Daniels, 2017; Nelson, 2013; Solder, 2017). Arora (2006) found that several children reported that they were able to work at their own pace. In addition, children's learning being guided by their interests (Daniels, 2017; Jones, 2013; Nelson, 2013; Solder, 2017) and the children having an element of choice regarding their learning

(Arora, 2006; de Carvalho & Skipper, 2019; Jones, 2013) appeared to be a prominent finding across the studies.

Socialisation

There were mixed findings across the studies in regards to socialisation, with the topic being mentioned in seven of the studies.

Arora (2006) noted that the young people did not feel they were missing out on a social life. Solder (2017) noted that participants felt that friendships were important and that they had friends of varying ages, including school educated friends. In fact, they felt that they had developed friendships of better quality, in comparison to when they were at school. Families reported that they felt confident in their children's social interaction skills (Solder, 2017).

de Carvalho and Skipper's (2019) paper was focused on the experience of socialisation. Overall, they found that young people had a positive sense of community and felt they were understood and accepted; found it easy to access social situations; felt their social experiences were more diverse, which improved their social skills and social interaction experiences; and felt that they had choice and freedom regarding their social activities and contacts. They did note that it was felt that most groups were targeted towards younger children, with little available to teenagers. This lack of opportunities for teenagers was also noted by Nelson (2013), who reported a lack of interactions with peers as a disadvantage to home education. Daniels (2017) noted that the ability to manage and promote social situations was an advantage of home education but that a disadvantage was the impact on friendships.

D'Arcy (2012) noted that there were inequality issues for young travellers who were home educated in regards to access to social resources. Furthermore, Winstanley (2009) reported that one young person had shared that they have friends online and another noted that 'small school' activities enable them to see friends but not as often as in school.

Wellbeing

Daniels (2017) specifically focused on young people with ASD and found that one of the advantages of home education was being able to meet children's social and emotional needs, including sensory needs, as well as being able to promote wellbeing. In regards to Traveller children, D'Arcy (2012) found that one of the perceived benefits of home education were that children felt safe and protected. de Carvalho and Skipper (2019) found that the diverse range of activities and social opportunities available to home educated young people fostered a sense of acceptance and understanding, as well as promoted the development of individual identities. Additionally, Solder (2017) noted that young people reported feeling more confident, which they linked to their home education experience, as well as expressing excitement about their learning. Despite Arora (2006) reporting that almost all families would have wanted their children to attend school, there was a strong view that the children were much happier and learning much more now they were home educated.

Relationships and Support

A pertinent theme that ran throughout the studies was around the changing role of relationships and support from others. Daniels (2017) noted that there had been a change in roles and responsibilities in the families that participated in their study, with the responsibility being put on parents being noted as a disadvantage of home education. D'Arcy (2012) reported that families felt that a benefit of home education was that they were able to spend more time as a family. The support and encouragement from others were reported to have a great influence over children's learning in Jones' (2013) study. Additionally, Solder (2017) identified a key theme in regards to relationships, noting that parent-child relationships were supportive and non-directive, as well as support being received from siblings. Support from other family members (Arora, 2006; Nelson, 2013) and home education groups (de Carvalho & Skipper, 2019; Nelson, 2013) were also reported to be important. In comparison, Arora (2006) reported that none of the families in their study were part of home education groups.

Daniels (2017), Nelson (2013) and Solder (2017) all reported that families had received negative views from others about their choice to home educate. Nelson (2013) noted that people were often unaware of the legal status regarding home education and were influenced by stereotypes, particularly regarding socialisation and the media's representation of home education.

Regarding external support, difficulties with finances were noted as a disadvantage in several studies (Daniels, 2017; D'Arcy, 2012; Nelson, 2013). There were challenges reported regarding accessing resources (Arora, 2006; D'Arcy, 2012; Nelson, 2013; Winstanley, 2009) and in relation to assessing progress and accessing exams, with families feeling a lack of support from the LA (Arora, 2006; Nelson, 2013).

2.11.8 Summary of Systematic Literature Review

Overall, the review identified several themes regarding the experience of home education across the eight included studies. There were a reported range of pedagogical approaches being adopted, with the flexibility to tailor the learning experience to individual needs and interests appearing to be a pertinent finding within current research. There seemed to be mixed views regarding the experience of socialisation, with some studies noting an increase in opportunities and development of social skills, and others reporting a lack of opportunities. Additionally, supporting young people's wellbeing appeared to be a common focus within the studies. Finally, the importance of relationships and support appeared to be a key topic, with some families noting a lack of support.

However, it is important to note that only one of the eight studies solely focused on gathering the views of young people (Jones, 2013), with the other studies appearing to analyse data across young people and parents together. A limitation of this is the risk of the young person's voice getting lost. Therefore, it is not clear how much these findings are actually the views of the young people themselves. Furthermore, ASD was not the focus of the present review question due to the paucity of UK research that has gathered the views of young people with ASD about being home educated. The search found that only one study has focused solely on young people with ASD (Daniels, 2017),

and again the young people's views were analysed alongside their parents. It was interesting to find that the views gathered within Daniels' (2017) study were not that dissimilar to the views gathered across the other studies. This finding may be due to the fact that several of the other studies unintentionally included young people with SEN or specifically ASD. This further emphasises the prevalence of young people with ASD being home educated.

2.11.9 Limitations of Systematic Literature Review

It is important to acknowledge that the systematic review was carried out solely by myself. Therefore, the search terms were devised by myself only, as well as the conducting of the search and screening of the studies. In addition, I generated the specific criteria for Gough's (2007) Weight of Evidence and made the judgements. I also carried out the textual narrative synthesis and made the decisions regarding what information I felt was important to include and about the overarching themes that were developed. As noted by Lucas et al. (2007), interpretation and judgement are at the centre of a textual narrative synthesis. However, I discussed some of my decisions throughout the whole systematic review process with a fellow researcher, which is hoped to have added some level of reliability to the process. In addition, it is anticipated that the transparency of the procedures that were conducted at each stage of the review will make any future replication possible.

As previously noted, the textual narrative synthesis approach has been critiqued for its limitation in addressing commonalities amongst studies in comparison to the thematic synthesis approach (Lucas et al., 2007). However, I attempted to overcome this by carrying out a deeper and more in-depth synthesis of study findings through the development of themes. In contrast, Lucas et al. (2007) note that a key strength of a textual narrative synthesis is that it enables gaps in the literature to be addressed. This was an essential part of the present study and will now be discussed in the following section.

2.12 Rationale

There are only a number of UK studies that have explored the experience of home education from the young person's point of view. However, most of these studies have then analysed findings alongside data from parents, thus

risking the young person's voice getting lost. Furthermore, research exploring home education within the SEN population is even more limited (Gaither, 2017; Parsons & Lewis, 2010). In relation to the ASD population specifically, research in the UK is extremely limited. To my knowledge, the only UK study to explore the young person's experience of home education is an unpublished thesis by Daniels (2017), which again analyses young people's data with the data of their parents. Additionally, this study only had participants from one town in the South-East and Daniels (2017) emphasises the importance of future research within other areas. Also, the children were limited to the age range of 5-11 years old. As home education is on the rise and young people with ASD seem to be a key, yet under researched, group within the home education population, it seems imperative that more research is conducted, especially research that aims to focus solely on the young person's voice (Kidd & Kaczmarek, 2010). Therefore, the aim of the proposed research is to gather the views of young people with ASD about their home education experience. Additionally, as ADCS (2019) found that Key Stages 3 and 4 had the highest numbers of children registered as home educated, the present study will aim to recruit from this older age range, whilst expanding research to another area of the country.

2.13 Research Question

How do young people with ASD interpret their experiences of being home educated?

3 Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of the methodology of the present research. It will begin with outlining the paradigmatic, ontological and epistemological stance of the research. The chapter will then address the methodology chosen to answer the research question, with a focus on the rationale behind this choice and potential limitations. I will then move on to address my reflexivity and the potential impact this may have had on the research, before moving on to describe the design of the research, including data collection, ethical considerations and data analysis. The chapter concludes with a consideration of the quality of the research.

3.2 Research Paradigms

A paradigm is a way of viewing the world and it encompasses particular philosophical beliefs that drive a researcher's decisions (Mertens, 2015), including ontology, epistemology, methodology and methods (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016). There is a wide variation in labels given to different paradigms, which can make defining particular paradigms a complex process (Mertens, 2015).

The *positivist* paradigm has dominated psychological and educational research for many years (Mertens, 2015). It is this paradigm that typically underlies quantitative research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Positivism believes that there is a straightforward and direct relationship between the world and how it can be perceived and understood (Willig, 2013). The focus of positivist research is to test hypotheses through the production of generalisable knowledge (Duberley et al., 2012). As a response to the many criticisms that the positivist paradigm has faced, a *post-positivist* paradigm arose, which adheres to many of the same principles but acknowledges possible researcher limitations, with a focus on probability rather than direct causal relationships (Robson & McCartan, 2016).

In contrast to the positivist paradigms, the *interpretivist* paradigm believes that no interpretations of knowledge are deemed as correct but that multiple knowledges exist (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016). The researcher aims to

understand individual interpretations of the world (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). It is believed that reality is socially constructed (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016). As a result, the paradigm is often also referred to as a *constructivist* or *social constructivist* paradigm (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). In comparison to the deductive nature of positivism, interpretivist/constructivist researchers inductively develop theories or themes from the information gathered (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Rehman & Alharthi, 2016). Additionally, it is believed that different researchers will bring different perspectives to the same situation due to their individual worldviews (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016). It is this paradigm that typically lends itself to qualitative research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

3.3 Ontology

Ontology is defined as the questioning of the nature of reality and asking 'what is there to know?' (Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Mertens, 2015; Willig, 2013). This is pivotal to understanding how to make meaning of the information that is gathered (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017).

Ontological positions are generally of a *realist* or *relativist* nature (Willig, 2013). A realist ontological position believes that there is one objective and measurable truth (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). In comparison, a relativist position does not believe that the world is an orderly place and instead questions its 'out-there-ness', with an emphasis on the diverse range of interpretations that can be applied to any given situation (Willig, 2013).

Positivist paradigms align with the realist ontological perspective, with positivism considered as being *naïve realism* and post-positivism as *critical realism*, as it is acknowledged that although reality is real, it can only be known imperfectly (Lincoln et al., 2018). On the other hand, interpretivist /constructivist paradigms believe that multiple realities exist and that they are socially constructed by different people (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016). It is the researcher's aim to try to understand the multiple constructions of knowledge (Mertens, 2015). Therefore, it is this paradigm that is in line with a relativist ontological stance (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

3.4 Epistemology

Epistemology is the questioning of the nature of knowledge and asking 'how do we know?' (Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Mertens, 2015; Willig, 2013).

Positivist paradigms, in line with a realist ontological stance, suggest that the aim of research is to observe and measure objective reality (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) and to find the 'truth' about a particular situation (Robson & McCartan, 2016), thus adhering to an *objectivist* epistemology (Duberley et al., 2012). It is believed that research can be conducted without any bias or personal involvement or interests from the researcher (Willig, 2013). In comparison, interpretivist/constructivist researchers, in line with a relativist ontology, aim to adhere to a *subjectivist* epistemology (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Duberley et al., 2012). The focus is on exploring the individual's views regarding their experience, whilst taking account of contextual factors and interactions amongst individuals (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In addition, it is believed that the relationship between the researcher and participants is an interactive one (Mertens, 2015), with the researcher also needing to acknowledge the possible impact of their own background and how they position themselves within the research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

In keeping with a subjectivist epistemological position, a *phenomenological* approach takes subjectivity one step further through attempting to ascertain the quality and texture of individual experience through the eyes of the participant, irrespective of what 'really' happened (Willig, 2013). Phenomenology assumes that the same situation can be experienced in many different ways, thus there is the possibility for as many 'experiential' worlds as there are individuals (Willig, 2013). Phenomenological researchers aim to ask questions regarding what an experience is like for that particular individual (Willig, 2013).

3.5 Philosophical Underpinnings of the Current Research

In line with the current research question, the present research aligns with an interpretivist/constructivist paradigm as the focus is on exploring individual interpretations of their experience of being home educated. The research is in line with a relativist ontological stance as it is believed that multiple realities

exist, with a focus on exploring and understanding these individual constructions of reality. The present study adopts a subjectivist and phenomenological epistemological stance, as it is assumed that the individual's experience is subjective and aims to explore their interpretation of their experience through their eyes. In addition, the subjectivity of my interpretation of the participant's experience is also acknowledged.

3.6 Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

IPA is a qualitative methodology which aims to understand how individuals make sense of particular experiences (Smith et al., 2009). It aims to gain an insight into the individual's experience from their perspective, whilst acknowledging the impact of the researcher's own views, as well as the relationship between the participant and researcher (Willig, 2013). Furthermore, IPA moves away from a descriptive account of participant's views to an intensive and detailed analysis of a small number of individuals (Larkin et al., 2006). The first aim within IPA is to understand the participant's world and 'what it is like', whilst acknowledging that the researcher can only make a third-person account of the participant's experience (Larkin et al., 2006). The second aim is to develop an interpretative analysis and understand 'what it means' for the participant (Larkin et al., 2006). This interpretation is often supported through engaging with existing theoretical constructs (Larkin et al., 2006). There are three key theoretical underpinnings to IPA, which are phenomenology, hermeneutics and idiography (Smith et al., 2009). These will now be addressed in turn.

3.6.1 Phenomenology

The philosophical approach of phenomenology is concerned with the study of experience and how humans make sense of their experience (Smith et al., 2009). IPA is underpinned by the work of the key phenomenological philosophers; Husserl, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and Sartre (Smith et al., 2009).

Husserl, the founder of the phenomenological approach, was particularly concerned with the idea that through carefully examining a particular experience, the essential elements of that experience may be discovered and

in turn shed light on the experience of others (Smith et al., 2009). Husserl argued that we need to go 'back to the things themselves' in order to realise that the world is a lived experience and not an object that can be studied (Langdridge, 2007). He suggested that by focusing on 'things' in their own right, we can avoid falling into the trap of trying to fit them into a pre-existing categorisation system (Smith et al., 2009). According to Husserl, we need to move away from our 'natural attitude' and embrace a 'phenomenological attitude' through adopting a reflexive approach and turning our attention towards our perception of a given experience (Smith et al., 2009). In order to focus on our perception of the world, Husserl suggested that we need to 'bracket' off the taken for granted world as we know it. We have to adhere to an 'eidetic reduction' to enable us to get to the true essence of a given phenomenon (Smith et al., 2009). This focus on reflection and 'bracketing' are at the core of IPA research.

Heidegger moved away from the beliefs of Husserl and argued that people cannot be separated from the context in which they are in (Larkin et al., 2006). Humans are part of a meaningful world and in turn the world is an essential part of our experience (Larkin et al., 2006). Heidegger used the term 'Dasein', meaning 'there being' to emphasise that humans are always part of some meaningful context (Larkin et al., 2006). We cannot be separated from the world in which we exist and therefore from the people, objects, language and culture that surround us (Smith et al., 2009). In line with Heidegger's views, IPA aims to understand the person-in-context and how they relate to the world (Larkin et al., 2006). As an extension to Heidegger's argument, Merleau-Ponty emphasised that the human relationship to the world is that of a 'body-subject' (Smith et al., 2009). He argued that an individual's experience is related to their unique embodied position in the world and can never truly be shared by others (Smith et al., 2009). Furthermore, Sartre emphasised that experience is shaped by the context of our relationships with others and that their presence or absence has an influence on our perception of the world (Smith et al., 2009).

3.6.2 Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics is the theory of interpretation (Smith et al., 2009). According to Schleiermacher, the interpretative process can lead to an insight which goes above and beyond the explicit account shared by participants (Smith et al., 2009). Smith et al. (2009) note that in IPA research, this insight may arise through connections made across a data set or through reference to psychological theory. In line with the notion of 'bracketing', Heidegger stressed that interpretation is influenced by the analyst's fore-conception, that is their prior experiences, assumptions and preconceptions (Smith et al., 2009). Therefore, Smith et al. (2009) conclude that 'bracketing' in IPA research can never be fully achieved. In fact, the prior experience of the researcher can be seen to enhance understanding (Willig, 2013).

This relationship between the analyst's prior experience and knowledge and the potential influence on their interpretation of the data is considered as an essential part of the hermeneutic circle (Tappan, 1997). The hermeneutic circle highlights the dynamic nature of the process of interpretation and the importance of looking to both the parts and the whole (Smith et al., 2009). Smith et al. (2009) emphasise that to enable an understanding of a part, we need to look to the whole and in turn to understand the whole, we need to look to the constituent parts. Therefore, understanding relies on a circular, non-linear and iterative process (Smith et al., 2009; Willig, 2013).

Furthermore, IPA research is believed to involve a double hermeneutic as the researcher is attempting to make sense of the participant's attempt to make sense of their experience (Smith, 2011). Therefore, the researcher can only make a second order interpretation, as they can only access the participant's experience through the account that they share (Smith et al., 2009). Additionally, IPA research is considered to combine hermeneutics of 'empathy' with hermeneutics of 'questioning', in order to attempt to stand in the shoes of the participant, as well as stand alongside them to view the experience from a different angle (Larkin et al., 2006; Smith et al., 2009).

3.6.3 Idiography

IPA is idiographic by nature, in that it is concerned with the particular (Smith et al., 2009). The aim of IPA is to explore how a particular experience has been understood by particular individuals, in a particular context (Smith et al., 2009). This is in contrast to nomothetic research which aims to make generalisations at the group level (Smith et al., 2009). IPA research typically involves in-depth and detailed analysis of a small and purposeful selection of participants (Larkin et al., 2006; Smith et al., 2009). Most commonly, a detailed analysis is conducted of each individual account before moving on to search for general themes across the group, with a focus on both convergence and divergence (Smith, 2011). The analysis should capture the shared themes across the group, whilst capturing how these themes may be represented in a particular way for particular individuals (Smith, 2011; Smith et al., 2009).

3.6.4 Limitations of IPA

IPA research relies on the use of language to enable participants to share their experience with the researcher (Willig, 2013). Willig (2013) argues that language is unable to describe reality but instead constructs a version of a particular experience. It tells more about the way the individual talks about an experience, rather than the experience itself. Therefore, making it impossible for the researcher to gain direct access to an individual's experience (Willig, 2013). With this limitation in mind, I acknowledge that any interpretations within the present study will be a reflection of the participant's perception, not a direct analysis of their experience.

Additionally, the reliance on language poses a potential challenge for individuals who may have difficulties with language and may find it challenging to articulate the rich texture of their experience (Willig, 2013). This is particularly pertinent to the current study, due to potential communication difficulties in the young people with ASD. However, this criticism has been argued as potentially being elitist by suggesting that only individuals who are able to articulate their experiences can partake in IPA research (Tuffour, 2017). On this note, I felt that it was important for these young people to be able to share their experiences and I have detailed the extra steps that were taken to support them in sharing their stories in section 3.8.4.2.

A further limitation is that IPA is concerned with exploring and describing what a lived experience is like for particular participants but does not ascertain why certain experiences take place or why they are experienced in the way they are (Willig, 2013). Therefore, it does not offer a causal explanation behind the phenomenon being explored.

Finally, IPA research typically includes a small sample, which could be considered as a research limitation. However, in line with the idiographic nature of IPA (Smith et al., 2009), this allows for an in-depth and detailed analysis of a particular experience, for particular participants, in a particular context. The aim of IPA research is not to generalise at a group level but to gain insight into individual perceptions of an experience, which may shed light onto similar experiences for others.

3.6.5 Rationale for Choosing IPA

The present research question aims to explore how young people with ASD interpret their experience of being home educated. Therefore, I felt that due to IPA's focus on exploring individual experiences and how individuals make sense of their experiences, IPA was best suited to answer the research question.

Additionally, the theoretical underpinnings of IPA appeared to align with my paradigmatic, ontological and epistemological position. In particular, the belief that experiences are constructed by individuals and the idiographic focus on a particular experience as perceived by a particular individual. In addition, I acknowledge the potential influence of my own prior experience and preconceptions on my interpretation of the participant's experience, in line with the hermeneutic circle of IPA. Due to these beliefs, IPA has been reported to be an appropriate choice of methodology when exploring the views of individuals with ASD (Howard et al., 2019). In particular, the double hermeneutic of IPA may help to reduce the risk of a 'double empathy problem', which can be a significant limitation of research with individuals with ASD (Howard et al., 2019; Milton, 2012). As a result, I felt that IPA was an appropriate approach for the present research study.

3.6.6 Other Approaches Considered

As part of the research process, the use of a number of alternative methodologies were considered. These will now briefly be discussed.

3.6.6.1 Grounded Theory

Grounded Theory aims to explore psychological processes, as well as what is happening, how and why (Frost, 2011). It is concerned with developing explanatory theories to understand the phenomenon being explored (Willig, 2013). Due to the focus being on developing theories, rather than exploring the lived experienced, I felt that this approach was not well suited to the research question. In addition, the approach did not align with the idiographic focus of the research question or my philosophical stance.

3.6.6.2 Narrative Analysis

Narrative Analysis is interested in the stories that individuals tell about their lives and the way they organise and bring order to their experience (Silver, 2013). The focus of Narrative Analysis is on the way individuals tell their story, including the structure, content and context (Esin, 2011), rather than focusing on their lived experience. Additionally, due to this approach relying on the participants telling their story in quite an open and unprompted way, I felt that this may be quite difficult for young people with ASD due to the unstructured nature of the approach.

3.6.6.3 Discourse Analysis

Discourse Analysis is concerned with how individuals use language to create identities, activities, relationships and shared meaning (Starks & Brown Trinidad, 2007). Research using Discourse Analysis aims to explore how language is used, including what is said and why it may have been said (Frost, 2011). Therefore, it was felt that this approach would not be appropriate for the present research question.

3.7 Reflexivity

Reflexivity refers to the process of a researcher being aware and reflecting upon the potential ways their chosen questions, methods and own subjective position may influence the research (Langdridge, 2007). Langdridge (2007) stresses the importance of researchers being transparent with their readers

about their own position in relation to the phenomenon being studied. This awareness should be apparent throughout the research. Therefore, I will now address my own position in regards to the present research study, drawing on suggested areas as outlined by Langdridge (2007). In addition, a research diary was kept throughout the research journey and reflexive comments from this will be interspersed throughout the remainder of this chapter, with a final reflection on my role as a researcher within Chapter 5. I have chosen to utilise the first person throughout to reflect how I consider myself part of the research and not an objective observer (Elliott et al., 1999), in line with my subjectivist epistemological position and the double hermeneutic of IPA.

3.7.1 Reflexivity of the Researcher

My motivation for carrying out the present study was driven by the rise in young people becoming home educated and an interest in what that might mean for the role of EPs. Furthermore, the topic of home education had been raised as a key topic of focus by the PEP in the LA in which I am carrying out my placement. In addition, I have a personal and professional interest in ensuring the voices of young people are heard, which led to the focus of the present study. Further to this, I was drawn in by the potential learning journey of carrying out a qualitative piece of research, due to past research experiences mainly being of a quantitative nature.

I consider myself to be an outsider to the topic being studied as I have no experience of home education, either personally or professionally. I have had no engagement with any home educating families up until the point of this research. As noted by Langdridge (2007), I was mindful of the potential dangers of misinterpretation that may arise due to my lack of personal experience.

I empathise with the young people and their families, who may have had a challenging experience leading up to their current situation and who perhaps may still be facing challenges.

I am a 28-year-old female with no children of my own. I attended mainstream education settings throughout my childhood. Therefore, my experience may be considered as quite different to the participants. In addition, I am currently

carrying out my placement within a LA and although I emphasised that my role was as a researcher from a University, my affiliation with the LA may have had an impact on the families' views of me. Furthermore, due to currently training to be an EP, I do bring knowledge of psychology to the research. As much as possible, I have tried not to guide the research. Nevertheless, I acknowledge that I will have been influenced by my psychological knowledge and experience and may have brought psychological constructs into its development. In addition, my knowledge of working with young people with ASD influenced my decisions when designing the research, such as an awareness of the potential need for the use of more direct questions, prompts and visual resources. Furthermore, active listening skills are of paramount importance within my role and I did find it quite challenging to keep a neutral stance and refrain from showing interest in response to what the participants were sharing with me.

3.8 Method

3.8.1 Participants

3.8.1.1 Selection of Participants

In line with the focus of IPA on gathering the views of individuals regarding a particular experience, participants were recruited using purposive sampling (Robson & McCartan, 2016). Smith et al. (2009) emphasise that the sample recruited should be as homogenous as possible. In the present study all participants were selected based upon meeting the following criteria:

- Aged 11-16 years old.
- Currently being home educated and have been for a minimum of one year.
- Have a diagnosis of ASD (diagnosed for at least 6 months).

The reason for recruiting participants aged 11-16 years old was due to the numbers of young people being home educated being higher within the Key Stage 3 and 4 age ranges (ADCS, 2019). Also, I made the decision that the young people needed to have been home educated for at least a year to allow them to have had enough of an experience to be able to share about it. A timeframe was also set regarding their ASD diagnosis so that it was not too

recent and something they may still be getting used to. I do acknowledge that the nature of ASD varies greatly from individual to individual due to it being such a wide spectrum. Therefore, I am aware that the individuals may not be considered as entirely homogenous. However, overall, it is felt that the participants can be considered as fairly homogenous due to them all being able to share about a particular experience.

3.8.1.2 Recruitment Process

I am currently a TEP working within a LA EPS and therefore I was working with a team of EPs and wider LA colleagues at the time of the research. I approached the EPs and the EHE team to ask if they could provide support with recruitment through making contact with families who met the above criteria. I provided the EPs and EHE team with initial information sheets, both a version for parents and for the young person, to be passed on to the families (see Appendix 6 for parent version and Appendix 7 for young person version). The information sheet outlined briefly about the study and asked for permission for contact details to be shared with myself if the family were interested in finding out more information. Therefore, no contact details were shared with me until permission was sought.

I made contact with the families who had expressed interest either via email or telephone and arranged a date to visit to discuss the study further, answer any questions and share the full information sheets (see Appendix 8 for parent version and Appendix 9 for young person version), consent forms (see Appendix 10 for parent version and Appendix 11 for young person version) and General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) document (see Appendix 12). In line with the findings of Scott-Barrett et al's (2019) study, I decided to carry out this initial visit as I felt that it was important to ensure that the young person had time to get to know me and to build up a rapport before the interview. In addition, it enabled an opportunity to talk to the families about anything that I needed to be aware of for the interview, such as how comfortable the young person would be to say they wanted a break or to stop the interview, as well as any adaptations that might need to be made to the way I asked my questions or any resources that might help them to share their views. All families chose for the visit to take place in their homes. Following

this initial visit, once the families had confirmed that they wanted to take part, a date was arranged for me to visit to collect the consent forms and conduct the interview.

Reflections:

I felt that it was important to not approach families directly myself so as to not blur the boundary between my role as a researcher and TEP/representative of the LA. I have no professional connection with any of the families who were recruited to the study.

I did experience a great challenge with recruitment. Some of the EPs who felt they knew a young person who met the criteria came back to me to say they did not feel it was appropriate to contact the family at that time due to the various circumstances the family were facing, for example going through a tribunal process. Additionally, due to the rising numbers of young people becoming home educated, understandably the EHE team were extremely busy. I had to make regular contact to ask them to reach out to families, which ended up happening a lot later than I had planned for. I did speak with my research supervisor about potentially exploring other routes to recruit participants, such as making contact with local home education groups. However, this was not necessary in the end.

I felt that the initial visit to the families was extremely valuable to ensure they were well informed about the study, to provide an opportunity to ask questions and to discuss anything I needed to be aware of to support the young person to participate. It also enabled the young person to get to know me and build rapport before the interview. For example, I noticed one participant had some difficulties with communication and appeared quite anxious, so we spent some time playing a game which appeared to help her. This is in line with one of the researcher's views in Scott-Barrett et al's (2019) study regarding the value of engaging in an activity during an initial visit. I spoke with my research supervisor about my hesitations around interviewing this young person and they felt that it was important to interview her if she wanted to, as it reflected the wide range of needs in relation to ASD.

3.8.1.3 Final Sample of Participants

In line with the idiographic nature of IPA, a small sample size of participants was recruited. Smith et al. (2009) suggest that doctoral level research may want to aim for data from four to ten interviews for an IPA study. However, they also note that novice first time student researchers should aim for up to six participants, with three participants being suggested as the optimum number. Therefore, the sample size of four participants in the present study is considered as a sufficient number for an IPA study. Table 3.1 presents key information regarding each participant, which was captured via a parent questionnaire (see Appendix 13). Further information is detailed within the pen portraits at the beginning of Chapter 4. Pseudonyms were assigned to each participant to protect anonymity.

Pseudonym	Age	Sex	Ethnicity	Length of time home educated	Age received ASD diagnosis	Other SEN	Provision attended prior to home education
Adam	13 years and 11 months	Male	White British	5 years	7 years old	Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder	Pre-school and primary school
Bethany	15 years and 8 months	Female	White British	4 years	5 years old	No	Pre-school and primary school
Charlotte	13 years and 6 months	Female	White British	1 year	10 years old	Hypermobility, sensory processing disorder, anxiety and depression	Primary and secondary school
Digby	15 years and 9 months	Male	Mixed ethnicity – White British with Malaysian heritage	1 year	9 years old	Attention Deficit Disorder	Pre-school, primary and secondary school

Table 3.1 A table showing key background information for each participant

3.8.2 Stakeholder Engagement

There are a number of key stakeholders who need to be acknowledged as part of the present research. In particular, the young people and their families. Additionally, the University of Nottingham requires a thesis to be completed as part of the Doctorate programme, therefore they are invested in the research that is conducted. The LA and EPS in which I am placed have shared that they have a particular interest in home education and were crucial in supporting recruitment. In addition, the research may also have the potential to reach out to professionals who work with young people, such as school staff and EPs, as well as other parents and young people who may be considering home education.

3.8.3 Ethical Considerations

I adhered to a range of ethical considerations when planning and carrying out the present research study, in line with guidance provided by the British Psychological Society (BPS) Code of Ethics and Conduct (2018); BPS Code of Human Research Ethics (2014); BPS Practice Guidelines (2017); and the Health & Care Professions Council Standards of Conduct, Performance and Ethics (2016). Ethical approval was granted by the University of Nottingham prior to starting the research study (see Appendix 14 for approval letter). I will now address some of the key ethical considerations that were of paramount importance throughout the research.

3.8.3.1 Informed Consent

As previously mentioned, all potential participants received an initial information letter (see Appendix 6 for parent version and Appendix 7 for young person version) and were asked to grant permission for their contact details to be passed on to me if they were interested in finding out more information about the study. Further information was provided in the full information sheets (see Appendix 8 for parent version and Appendix 9 for young person version), which were given to the participants along with the consent forms (see Appendix 10 for parent version and Appendix 11 for young person version). In line with the guidance (BPS, 2014), consent was sought from both the young people and their parents due to the young people being aged under 16 years old. I felt that it was important to visit the families in person to share the further

information so that they could ask any questions and also to ensure the young person had a clear understanding of the research. I left the forms with the families so that they had plenty of time to look over them and discuss together. I obtained the signed consent forms prior to the interviews being conducted.

3.8.3.2 Confidentiality

Participants were informed in the information letters that their data would be handled confidentially and that anonymity would be provided. They were also provided with a GDPR privacy notice (see Appendix 12). Participants provided consent to the use of audio recorders. The interviews were recorded using two devices. The data from these devices were stored securely and will be destroyed following completion of the research project. Consent forms were also handled the same way. All participants have been provided with a pseudonym to protect anonymity, with one of the participants (Digby) choosing their own pseudonym. Any reference to names of others or names of places have been removed from the transcripts.

3.8.3.3 Reducing Harm

I was mindful that although the potential risk of psychological harm or discomfort was minimal, some young people may not feel very comfortable talking to a stranger about their experiences. I felt that the initial visit was extremely important, as it provided a chance for both the parents and young people to ask any questions about the research but also for the young person to get to know me and build rapport before the interview. In addition, I was able to ask parents if I needed to be mindful of anything that would support the interview, such as any adaptations that may need to be made to questions or how comfortable the young person would be to tell me they wanted to stop the interview or have a break. In line with suggestions provided by Scott-Barrett et al. (2019) regarding conducting research with young people with ASD, I designed some coloured cards that the young people could use during the interview. The red card could be used to indicate they wanted to stop, yellow to indicate a break and green to carry on. Additionally, I asked families to choose where they would like the interviews to take place and all families chose their homes. In line with Huws and Jones (2015), I gave the young

person the option for a parent/s to be present during the interview if they wished, to help to alleviate any anxiety they may have been feeling.

Furthermore, it may have been possible that reflecting upon past or current experiences could have led to negative feelings for the participants. I ensured that participants were aware that they could stop the interview at any point and I was mindful to respond appropriately to any signs of possible distress. One participant, Bethany, did comment that she was feeling sad when recalling her memories of her primary school. I reminded Bethany that she could stop the interview but she confirmed that she was happy to continue. Following the interview, Bethany and I shared with her mother that some of the questions had made her feel slightly emotional. In addition, following all interviews I provided both the young people and their parents with a debrief letter (see Appendix 15 for parent version and Appendix 16 for young person version) and reminded them that they could contact me if they needed to talk about anything further. In addition, I signposted them to LA guidance regarding home education, as well as contact details to Childline should the participants feel they needed any further emotional support.

Furthermore, due to the nature of visiting families' homes and potentially meeting one-to-one with the young people, I was aware of the LA safeguarding policy if this was to be needed, as well as adhering to a lone working procedure.

3.8.3.4 Right to Withdraw

Participants were informed that their participation in the study was voluntary and were reminded of their right to withdraw before, during and after their participation. They were made aware that they did not have to provide a reason for their withdrawal from the research.

3.8.4 Data Collection

3.8.4.1 Semi-Structured Interviews

Smith et al. (2009) note that IPA research needs to adopt a data collection method which allows participants to share a rich, detailed and first-person account of a particular experience. With that in mind, semi-structured interviews are typically the most common form of data collection within IPA

research (Smith, 2011). During semi-structured interviews, the researcher has some questions to guide the interview, however these can be modified as deemed necessary throughout the interview, allowing more flexibility for the participants' responses (Robson & McCartan, 2016). This flexibility was felt to be of particular importance in the present study due to the possible need to adapt questions depending on the young people's individual needs. In addition, as previously mentioned, semi-structured interviews have been found to be a useful and empowering approach to gathering the views of individuals with ASD, as the flexible nature promotes a degree of control for the young person over the interview process (Howard et al., 2019). Therefore, this was the method chosen to gather data in the present research.

Due to the nature of individual interviews potentially being time consuming (Cohen et al., 2011), focus groups were also considered. However, in line with the idiographic nature of IPA and my aim to explore individual experiences, this method was not felt to be appropriate. Additionally, I considered conducting an unstructured interview. However, I felt the lack of structure and prompting may be quite challenging for young people with ASD. In addition, Smith et al. (2009) note that unstructured interviews are not best suited to the novice IPA researcher, which I consider myself to be.

3.8.4.2 Developing the Interview Schedule

An interview schedule was developed in line with guidance provided by Smith et al. (2009) (see Appendix 17). As noted by Smith et al. (2009), it is important that questions are open, not leading and do not make assumptions about the participant's experience. The interviewer should not directly ask the participant their research question but should identify a number of topics that would allow the research question to be answered (Smith et al., 2009). Therefore, the schedule covered the following areas: home education routine; socialisation; comparison to school; positives and negatives of home education; beginnings of home education; describing their experience; and the future. The interview schedule included a combination of descriptive, narrative, contrasting, evaluative, circular and comparative questions (Smith et al., 2009). As suggested by Smith et al. (2009), to help the participant settle into the interview and feel comfortable, the schedule began with more descriptive questions

before moving on to more analytical questions. The use of prompts and probes helped to encourage the participants to elaborate on their responses. I felt that the use of prompts and more direct and specific questions were important for young people with ASD.

Initially, I had planned to conduct a pilot study prior to the main study. Unfortunately, due to the difficulties with recruitment this was not possible. However, the interview schedule was checked over by my research supervisor and by an EP who specialises in ASD. This led to discussions around the difficulties the young people may have with some of the circular questions such as, 'Do you think your parents feel home education has helped you in any way?' and questions such as 'If you were to describe your experience of being educated at home to another child, what would you say?' The EP suggested creating some resources using speech bubbles to support the participant in answering the question (see Appendix 18 for an example of the resources created). Furthermore, following this feedback and in line with previous research that was discussed in section 2.8.1, I reflected on some other methods that could support the participants with sharing their experience, such as using drawing or taking photos prior to the interview (Beresford et al., 2004; Humphrey & Lewis, 2008). I made it clear that any photos would not be taken away or analysed but would just be used to support the young person to talk about their experience. I decided to offer the young people the option to use these resources if they wished and in relation to their needs and preferences. All young people with ASD are different and I wanted to reflect this in the various options available for them to draw upon. Furthermore, I wanted to ensure that I was empowering the young people to make their own decisions and to feel in control of their participation. I felt that this was important to reduce any potential power differentials, which were noted as a key concern in Scott-Barrett et al's (2019) review regarding conducting research with young people with ASD.

3.8.4.3 Carrying out the Interviews

Following the initial visit as previously noted, I revisited all participants on an arranged date in their homes to conduct the interviews. Interviews took place between November 2019 and January 2020. The interviews lasted between

55 minutes and 2 hours and 30 minutes. Prior to the interview, both consent forms were collected. I asked one parent from each family to complete some background questions to capture demographic information, length of time home educated, age when diagnosed with ASD, any other SEN and reasons for home education (see Appendix 13). I checked with the young people that they were still happy to be interviewed and audio-recorded and reminded them of their right to withdraw. Three of the young people opted for a parent to be present during the interview. At the start of the interview, I provided a brief introduction to emphasise that there are no right or wrong answers and that it will be more like a one-sided conversation (see Appendix 17). Following each interview, my reflections were captured in my research diary.

Reflections:

Due to being a novice researcher, I felt that having a schedule to refer to was extremely helpful during the interviews. However, as the interviews progressed, I did feel that I became more comfortable and more flexible. I felt that the use of direct questions and prompts were quite important for some of the young people. I found that most of the participants did struggle with the circular questions. Upon reflection, had I carried out a pilot to test these questions, I probably would not have included them in the final interview schedule. Despite having the range of methods to provide support, such as the speech bubbles, none of the young people wanted to use them. This may have been due to their age, perhaps seeing drawing as too young for them. In addition, I felt that some of the participants found it quite difficult to talk about their feelings, instead referring to thoughts and actions when asked such questions.

As noted above, three participants had family members present during the interview. I was sure to make it clear that my focus was on interviewing the young person. However, parents still attempted to share their views. I tried to bring the conversation back to the young person as much as I could. I felt that parents perhaps wanted to make sure that the young person did not miss anything and on occasion it appeared that the young person looked to

their parent for support. I felt that I had a moral and ethical obligation to respect both parents' and young people's feelings.

3.8.5 Data Analysis

The audio recordings were transcribed verbatim. As the focus of IPA is on the content of each participant's account, the prosodic aspects of the recordings were not transcribed in detail (Smith et al., 2009). However, notable non-verbal utterances, such as laughter and significant pauses were captured in bracketed text (Smith et al., 2009). I decided not to use any form of computer software or transcription service as I felt that listening and re-listening to the recordings enabled me to become fully immersed in the data. The process of transcribing is acknowledged as an interpretative activity in itself and thus is part of the analysis process (Smith et al., 2009). It is important to note that although I transcribed all dialogue, including parents' comments, I only analysed the views of the young people.

Reflections:
I found this stage to be particularly time consuming, especially due to multiple voices sometimes being captured when parents had also shared their views. I found that it was important to transcribe parents' comments too, as although I would not be analysing them, I felt they may be important to provide context around what the young person had said.

Smith et al. (2009) acknowledge that there is no right or wrong way of carrying out an IPA analysis. However, they do offer some guidance through a six-step framework, with the intention for it to be used flexibly (Smith et al., 2009). In line with the idiographic nature of IPA, the analysis involves engaging with each transcript in detail, before moving on to the next one (Smith et al., 2009). I followed these guidelines to support with data analysis. The stages involved will now be outlined, as suggested by Smith et al (2009):

Step 1: Reading and re-reading

The first step involves immersing oneself in the data through re-reading the transcripts, alongside repeated listening of the audio recordings. The purpose of this stage is to ensure the participant is the focus of the analysis.

Reflections:
I found this step extremely valuable as it enabled me to revisit the interviews and become fully immersed in what each participant had shared with me. Whilst re-reading, a few initial ideas regarding potential topics or themes did come to mind and I noted these down to enable me to bracket them off and ensure that I remained focused on the data. These thoughts were revisited at a later stage, where appropriate.

Step 2: Initial noting

The second step involves an exploration of the semantic content and language use. The researcher aims to keep an open mind and notes anything of interest in the form of a free textual analysis. The transcript was copied into the middle column of a table, with the initial noting being made in the right-hand column. In line with suggestions proposed by Smith et al (2009), initial noting focused on three areas:

- Descriptive comments – describing the content of what the participant has shared, with a focus on key words, phrases and explanations. This involves highlighting the things that matter most to the participant, such as objects, events and experiences. These were noted in normal text.
- Linguistic comments – focusing on the use of language and the way the content and meaning were presented. For example, pauses, laughter, repetition, hesitation, use of metaphors. These were noted in *italic text.*
- Conceptual comments – interpretative and interrogative level, moving away from the explicit claims of the participant to focus on their overarching understanding of the matters they are sharing. This is conducted through asking questions of the data. These were noted in <u>underlined text.</u>

Reflections:

I found this stage to be particularly valuable as it enabled me to immerse myself deeper in the data. Due to the length of some of the interviews, this was quite a time-consuming process due to the volume of data. I felt that it was important to keep an open mind at this stage in relation to the notes that I captured. I did start to notice where the potentially rich data was and the potential themes that may arise in the next step.

Step 3: Developing emergent themes

Working primarily with the initial notes, the researcher aims to generate concise statements that capture what is crucial and reflects an understanding. In line with the hermeneutic cycle, the researcher focuses on discrete sections of text at a time, whilst still being influenced by the whole transcript. The researcher takes a more central role at this stage through their interpretation of the data, whilst still being closely involved with the participant's experience. Themes generated reflect both the researcher's interpretation and the participant's words. The emergent themes were captured in the left-hand column of the table. Example pages from each participant's transcript illustrating initial noting and emergent themes can be found in Appendices 19-22.

Reflections:

Due to the volume of the data, I did sometimes find it challenging to know what may be considered as important data. I found that it was best to keep an open mind as the next step would allow for themes that appeared less relevant to be discarded. Also, due to the research question being about the young person's voice, it was sometimes quite a challenge to separate the young person's views from parental contributions.

Step 4: Searching for connections across emergent themes

This stage involves the researcher mapping how the emergent themes fit together. The important thing is to focus on the research question to decide whether themes are relevant or whether they are to be discarded at this stage.

Smith et al. (2009) suggest some ways to look for patterns and connections but stress that these are not prescriptive and are more to inspire researchers throughout the process:

- Abstraction – putting like with like and generating a new name, this will become a 'superordinate' theme.
- Subsumption – where an emergent theme becomes a superordinate theme as it is felt to bring together several other themes.
- Polarisation – looking for oppositional themes.
- Contextualisation – themes that relate to particular narrative moments or key life events.
- Numeration – the frequency with which emergent themes appear. This can be used as an indication of the importance to the participant.
- Function – examining emergent themes for their specific function.

Photographs to show the collating of themes for each participant can be found in Appendices 23-26.

Reflections:
I found that typing all of the emergent themes, printing them off and cutting them out was a really useful way to organise the themes and notice connections and relationships. There were lots of initial emergent themes due to the volume of data and many that were very similar to each other. Therefore, I found that the best way to manage the data was to amalgamate many themes and discard others. The final process involved the finalisation of the key emergent themes that were captured under overarching superordinate themes using post-it notes on a large sheet of paper. I found the use of abstraction, subsumption, contextualisation and numeration most helpful towards the process.

I then typed up the emergent themes under their overarching superordinate themes into a table. Once this process had been completed, I discussed the themes within research supervision and with a fellow researcher, which enabled any queries to be addressed and changes to be made. This process involved revisiting some of the earlier transcripts to ensure that a deep

enough level of interpretation had been carried out. I found that this was a skill that developed as I moved through the transcripts.

Step 5: Moving to the next case

This involves moving to the next transcript and repeating steps 1-4. In line with IPA's idiographic nature, it was important that I treated each case in its own terms. Adopting a phenomenological position, I aimed to bracket the ideas that emerged from the previous cases. This was repeated for each of the transcripts.

Reflections:
I aimed to approach each transcript in the exact same way and found that adhering to steps 1-4 supported this. I tried to bracket off themes that were developed in the previous transcripts but I acknowledge that this was quite challenging and that my knowledge of the previous transcripts may have had an influence on my subsequent interpretations.

Step 6: Looking for patterns across cases

The final step involved looking for patterns and connections across cases. I carried out this step by looking across the tables for each participant to make comparisons and identify the most prominent themes, leading to some themes being relabelled and reconfigured. This then led to the development of overarching master themes, with underlying superordinate themes for the group. Appendices 27-30 contains tables showing how each participant's individual emergent themes were clustered under the superordinate and master themes for the group.

Reflections:
When carrying out this step, I mainly utilised each individual participant's superordinate themes to search for commonalities across the group. However, upon becoming immersed in the themes across the group, I started to notice that what was one participant's superordinate theme was another's emergent theme. Therefore, this shed light on the importance of this theme across the group and I was mindful to ensure that particular

participant's experience was still heard. Additionally, I started to see some emergent themes in a different light and how they could fit with other participant's emergent themes. As a result, I found that I needed to search across both emergent and superordinate themes to enable me to develop the most prominent themes at the group level. I discussed the themes generated with my research supervisor.

3.9 Quality in Qualitative Research

Criteria to assess the quality of qualitative research is much less well defined, in comparison to the well-established standards that have been developed to judge quantitative research (Yardley, 2000). There is much dissatisfaction about qualitative research being assessed against the same criteria as quantitative research (Smith et al., 2009), as such criteria are not deemed appropriate (Yardley, 2000). In particular, if a large and representative sample size was to be recruited, then an in-depth analysis, in line with the nature of IPA would not be possible and thus the idiographic focus would be lost. In addition, due to the interpretative nature of IPA, in relation to the hermeneutic circle, the criteria of reliability, in particular inter-rater reliability is meaningless (Yardley, 2000).

Due to the wide range and diversity in qualitative approaches that are available, Yardley (2000) emphasises the need for open and flexible ways of assessing quality. Therefore, a number of guidelines have been created and were considered for the present research study, including Lincoln and Guba (1985), Tracy (2010) and Elliott et al. (1999). I felt that Yardley's (2000) quality criteria was best suited to the present study due to its flexible nature. In addition, it has been deemed most appropriate for IPA research by Smith et al. (2009). Yardley (2000) addresses four principles that they believe qualitative research should adhere to and I will now consider these in relation to the present research.

3.9.1 Sensitivity to Context

I have shown sensitivity to the context in which the present research exists through carrying out an in-depth literature review and identifying the gaps, which led to my research question and rationale behind the methodology

chosen. In addition, I have immersed myself in the philosophical underpinnings of IPA to ensure I am adhering to the phenomenological, hermeneutic and idiographic nature of the methodology throughout. Through recruiting a small sample size, I have ensured that an idiographic approach is adopted. Sensitivity was maintained throughout the analysis through the use of verbatim quotes from each participant.

Furthermore, I have been mindful of my reflexivity as a researcher throughout the research through keeping a research diary. I am aware of the potential influence of my prior experience and preconceptions, in line with the hermeneutic circle of IPA, and have aimed to bracket these where possible. In particular, I ensured that there was a gap in time between conducting my literature review and analysing my data so as to not be influenced by previous research. I ensured that my analysis was grounded in my data. I took numerous steps to ensure sensitivity to the participants and reduce any potential power imbalance. I carried out an initial meeting with the participants to ensure they had the opportunity to ask any questions and to build rapport. Additionally, participants chose the location and timing for the interview and whether they would like a parent present for support.

3.9.2 Commitment and Rigour

Yardley (2000) defines commitment as immersing oneself in the particular topic being studied, the methodology used and the data collected. Rigour is defined as a sense of completeness following data collection and analysis (Yardley, 2000).

I demonstrated commitment and rigour through following IPA guidance as suggested by Smith et al. (2009). I recruited a small and homogenous sample of particular participants and conducted in-depth interviews about a particular experience using a semi-structured interview schedule. Additionally, in line with the idiographic nature of IPA, I immersed myself in each participant's data via carrying out an in-depth and detailed analysis at the individual level before moving on to look for convergence and divergence at the group level. I utilised research supervision and support from a fellow researcher to discuss the themes generated to add to the hermeneutic circle of the research. I did initially

consider carrying out member checks with the participants, but following discussion within supervision, I concluded that this would not be appropriate for an IPA study due to its interpretative nature.

3.9.3 Transparency and Coherence

Coherence relates to how the research question matches with the researcher's philosophical perspective, the methodology adopted and the analysis conducted (Yardley, 2000). Transparency refers to detailing every stage of the research process, including the data collection and analysis procedures, as well as the potential impact of the researcher's own preconceptions and motivations (Yardley, 2000).

I feel that the present research question is well matched to my epistemological and ontological stance, which led to IPA being chosen as the appropriate methodology to guide both data collection and analysis. I have been clear regarding my rationale for my decisions throughout. In addition, I have provided clear details regarding every stage of the research, including data collection and analysis and have provided evidence of the process in the appendices. I kept a research diary to capture my reflexivity and further considerations regarding this have been detailed in section 3.7.

3.9.4 Impact and Importance

Yardley (2000) notes that an important criterion of any qualitative research is its potential impact and utility. As outlined in Chapter 2, the number of young people becoming home educated is on the rise, with a paucity in research exploring the experience from the perspective of young people. In addition, young people with SEN, particularly ASD, appear to be prominent within the home educated population, yet their views are rarely elicited. Therefore, it is felt that the present research will offer insight and develop knowledge regarding the experience of home education for young people with ASD. The potential implications are discussed in more detail in section 5.10.

4 Findings

4.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to present the findings of an IPA that was carried out to answer the research question 'How do young people with ASD interpret their experiences of being home educated?' I will begin by offering a pen portrait of each participant, before moving on to present the findings of the study.

4.2 Pen Portraits

In keeping with the idiographic nature of IPA and to ensure transparency regarding the research, I have provided a pen portrait of each participant below detailing information shared within the interview and by parents on the background questions, alongside my reflections on the interviews.

4.2.1 Adam

Adam lived with his mother, father and brother, who was also home educated. Adam's mother reported that the reasons he became home educated were due to increasing self-harm related to anxiety in school; lack of autism and disability awareness in school; very low mood/depression; and no interest in learning at school. Adam shared that it was his mother's decision for him to become home educated as he thought he had to be in school, but now he knows home education is an option, it would definitely be his decision.

Adam's mother was present during the interview. She had provided Adam with an example timetable and a snapshot of diary entries, including photographs that Adam could refer to, to support him if needed. I noticed that a big focus of Adam's dialogue was around his particular interests, which were clearly very important to him. Other pertinent themes were around the flexibility of home education, access to support and the wide variety in learning experiences he was engaging in. Adam's mother did join in to share her views on occasion, more so if Adam looked her way for support. Overall, I felt that Adam appeared to have a positive view on his home education experience and he expressed a desire to continue being home educated.

4.2.2 Bethany

Bethany lived with her mother and father. Bethany's father noted that the reason she became home educated was because he felt that there was too much time spent wasted on sports, Christmas plays, gardening, trips, art and cookery, which he noted was great for Bethany and easy for the teachers but she needed reading, writing, maths and lots of speech therapy, which she hated. He noted that Bethany gets serious work at home and lots of reading and speech therapy, although he reported that educating Bethany is not easy and that things have worsened over the last year, with Bethany noting that she hates 'school'. Bethany shared that the reason she is home educated is because "*…my Daddy think I can't go to secondary school"* (Bethany, 1038), "*because of my brain"* (Bethany, 1040).

Bethany was the only participant to be interviewed without parents present. I noticed that she had appeared quite anxious during my initial visit and I spoke to her father about my concerns. Before the interview started, Bethany and I played a game that she had enjoyed during my initial visit, which appeared to help. Bethany did become slightly emotional when recalling her memories of primary school, emphasising how much she missed it. She did appear to struggle to understand many of my questions and to take things literally. I found that I needed to repeat, reword and adapt my questions. Bethany appeared to struggle with communication and tended to give quite short answers. She struggled to answer some questions, commenting on difficulties with her memory throughout the interview. Bethany did not want to use the visual resources to support her but did take to writing things down in German, which was clearly a keen interest of hers. Overall, Bethany expressed a negative view towards home education, sharing that she felt it was hard work, boring and lonely. It appeared that perhaps Bethany's view of learning as a whole was quite negative and that she missed the fun activities of primary school.

4.2.3 Charlotte

Charlotte had been home educated for the last year, although she told me that she had been home educated before but following a move to the area, had tried school again but decided to move back to home education. Charlotte lived

with her mother, her mother's partner, two sisters, who were also home educated, and an older brother. Charlotte's mother shared that the reasons for home education were that Charlotte's needs were not being met; there was no time to complete work; homework pressures; and struggles with anxiety, noting that mental health was more important. Charlotte also noted that her older sister becoming home educated had an influence on her decision.

Charlotte's mother and partner were present for the interview, with her older sister joining towards the end. Charlotte was very chatty and able to express her views and feelings, needing very little prompting. Similar to other interviews, parents were keen to share their views and Charlotte sometimes looked to them for support. Key topics that arose in Charlotte's dialogue were around feeling free, being able to pursue her interests, being able to be herself, the impact on her wellbeing and the importance of support. Charlotte showed me lots of her art work and even brought down one of her snakes. Overall, Charlotte appeared to express a positive view towards her home education experience and a strong desire for it to continue.

4.2.4 Digby

Digby lived with his mother, father and two brothers, who were also home educated. Digby's mother noted that he had requested to become home educated, with the main reasons being peers disrupting his learning; gaps in his learning with maths, which were having an impact on science; and feeling overloaded within the mainstream school environment. Digby shared that he was drawn to the flexibility of home education and how suited it was to him.

Digby chose for his mother to be present for the interview. He referred to various versions of timetables, work and resources to support him when talking. He was very chatty and spoke in detail about his views, needing very little prompting. Digby's mother did sometimes prompt him and on occasion even asked him questions. I felt this was perhaps because she was worried that he would miss something about his experience. Key themes that arose were around freedom and flexibility; the importance of support from his mother; home education as a personalised experience; and the impact on his learning. Overall, I felt that Digby appeared to have a positive view of his experience.

4.3 Master and Superordinate Themes Across the Group

Following the analysis as described in section 3.8.5, I identified a total of five master themes which were shared across all participants, each with two to three underlying superordinate themes. Figure 4.1 details each master theme and its associated superordinate themes. It is important to note that although there are a number of discrete themes, it must be acknowledged how they interlink with each other, both at the master and superordinate level. In addition, as noted by Smith et al. (2009), the same theme may have a different meaning for different participants. In line with the idiographic nature of IPA, the higher order concepts shared by the participants are identified by the superordinate and master themes, with individual themes for particular participants being subsumed within. This allowed for a focus on the convergence and divergence across individual accounts (Smith, 2011).

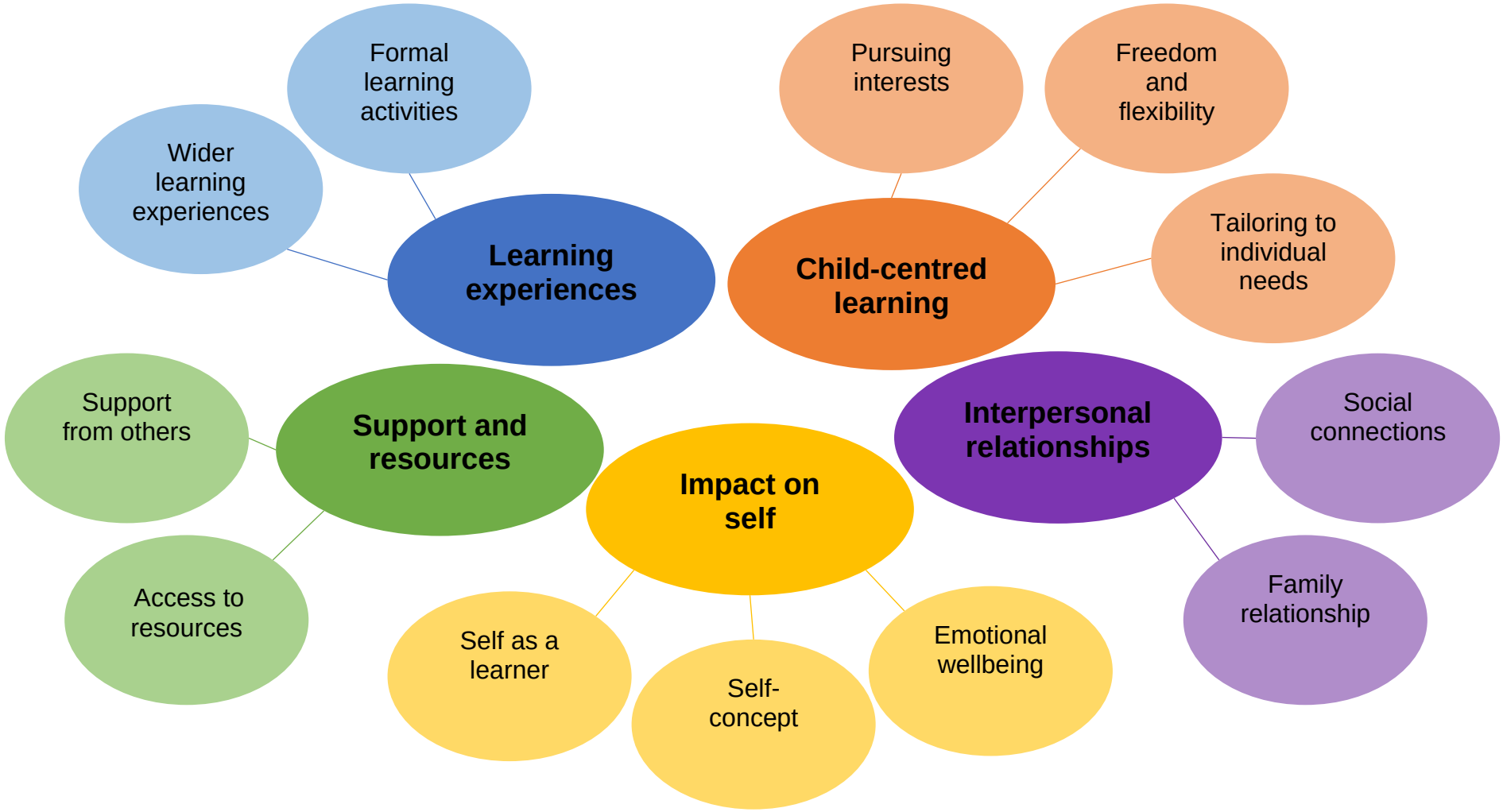

Figure 4.1 A figure showing the master themes and underlying superordinate themes for the group

In line with Smith et al. (2009), I followed the criteria that a superordinate theme needed to be present for at least half of the participants to be considered pertinent. The five master themes and their underlying superordinate themes will be discussed in the following sections. I have provided a table at the beginning of each master theme to evidence the prevalence of each superordinate theme. Whilst discussing each theme, I have presented examples of quotes from the participants. I have aimed for the quotes to be proportionate across participants, so that individual experiences can be captured, in line with the idiographic underpinning of IPA.

4.3.1 Master Theme One: Learning Experiences

This master theme encompasses the activities and experiences that the participants spoke about that I felt reflected their overall learning experience. It is made up of two superordinate themes regarding the formal learning activities they are engaging in and what I considered to be opportunities for wider learning experiences. The prevalence of the superordinate themes amongst the participants is detailed in Table 4.1.

Superordinate theme	**Adam**	**Bethany**	**Charlotte**	**Digby**
Formal learning activities	✓	✓	✓	✓
Wider learning experiences	✓	✓	✓	✓

Table 4.1 A table showing prevalence of superordinate themes for master theme one

4.3.1.1 Superordinate Theme One: Formal Learning Activities

All of the participants shared regarding the subjects they have been studying whilst they have been home educated, which I felt could be interpreted as more formal learning, in relation to what may be experienced at school. Adam shared that "*I mainly do maths, biology and coding"* (Adam, 520)*,* that *"we also do the Bible studies… not because we're religious but cus it's just like context"* (Adam, 99-100) and also that "*I do a little bit of English"* (Adam, 1251). Bethany told me that "*sometimes I do geography"* (Bethany, 11) and that she also does *"English"* (Bethany, 13) and *"maths"* (Bethany, 17). I acknowledge that these might not be the entire range of subjects the participants are engaging in. This

is evidenced by Charlotte struggling to recall all her subjects when she was sharing about what she is doing.

> *C: Uh… quite a few. Um… I'm doing Greek Mythology, I have my art. Um… I can't remember half of the ones I'm doing [both laughing]. Uh… what am I doing?*
> *M: English*
> *C: English, maths*
> *M: Maths*
> *C: I know I'm doing sewing soon*
> *M: Yep*
> *C: Um…*
> *M: Baking*
> *C: Baking yes. I don't know half the subjects…* (Charlotte and her mother, 50-59)

Digby shared that the subjects he studies currently vary depending on the GCSEs he is working towards and that "*currently I'm going toward, I think it's English and maths"* (Digby, 6-7) and that "*last year I was doing biology"* (Digby, 31-32). He also said that he does "*geography"* (Digby, 973) and that he is working towards an award in art.

> *… it's basically a qualification which you can get by doing various things including taking lessons in an Art's subject* (Digby, 1016-1017)

Three of the participants spoke about learning languages.

> *Um…Japanese, I think mainly… oh German as well yeh* (Adam, 249)

> *Well I, I used to learn French but I decided to move to German* (Bethany, 150)

> *Um… yeh again Japanese that was mainly because uh… we were planning on doing a Japanese GCSE because Mum caught me uh… learning Japanese a little bit* (Digby, 221-222)

4.3.1.2 Superordinate Theme Two: Wider Learning Experiences

The participants spoke about a range of activities or experiences they had encountered that were interpreted to have added to their learning experience on a more informal and wider level. All participants shared that they engage in a range of extra-curricular activities.

> *Well, I am with Rangers* (Bethany, 322)

> *C: I do swimming, yeh*
> *M: You used to do kickboxing*
> *C: I did kickboxing*
> *R: Okay*
> *C: I'm getting into rock climbing and archery as well [laughing]* (Charlotte, her mother and researcher, 485-489)

Digby shared that *"yeh I've got sailing"* (Digby, 1797) and commented on the benefits of this, *"which is not only educational but it's a good social as well…"* (Digby, 1962).

Adam, Bethany and Digby all spoke about experiences abroad, which I felt enabled them the opportunity to learn and experience different cultures. Bethany spoke about learning abroad and also the influence of having German relations.

> *Well sometimes I do… when I'm in France, I do school in France* (Bethany, 77)

> *B: Well I, I used to learn French but I decided to move to German*
> *R: Okay*
> *B: Yes*
> *R: Ah, why was that?*
> *B: Because, because I got um… German relations* (Bethany and researcher, 150-154)

These particular quotes from Adam emphasise the opportunities he was given when visiting China to take part in a robotics competition.

A: …it wasn't as bad as I thought it would be, no. Er, we ate jellyfish, um… I tasted sea cucumber but I didn't actually eat it because I almost threw up when I tasted it. Um… I ate shark, pigeon…
R: Wow
A: … stuff like that. Um… the only animals we saw were humans, there were no insects, there were no birds, there were no… well there weren't any disabled people or homeless people either (Adam and researcher, 774-780)

Digby spoke about how his trips abroad offered the opportunity for incidental and real-world learning opportunities.

D: …and it's interesting and it's good and you can go through and you can go 'wow, that looks really interesting, let's do that'…
R: Yeh
D: …and stuff like that, for example we went to Japan…
R: Yeh
D: …and suddenly be travelling along and I went 'oh, yeh that's the earthquake centre', so we pulled over for that and we went through it… (Digby, 1848-1854)

Although Charlotte did not talk about experiences abroad, she did share about different outdoor experiences she engages in.

Um… we usually just go around walking to places, we go to the zoo sometimes (Charlotte, 203)

Adam shared about opportunities to experience the University environment, such as attending University open days, telling me "*Um… I think the first one I did was when I was ten"* (Adam, 1934).

I felt that Charlotte's acknowledgement of how "e*verything's a learning opportunity"* (Charlotte, 2269) summed up these opportunities for wider learning experiences.

4.3.2 Master Theme Two: Support and Resources

This master theme reflects my interpretation regarding the support that the participants draw upon to help them with their learning, both in regards to support from others and their access to resources. The prevalence of the superordinate themes amongst the participants is detailed in Table 4.2.

Superordinate theme	Adam	Bethany	Charlotte	Digby
Support from others	✓	✓	✓	✓
Access to resources	✓	✓	✓	✓

Table 4.2 A table showing prevalence of superordinate themes for master theme two

4.3.2.1 Superordinate Theme One: Support from Others

All of the participants spoke about how others are involved in their home education experience. Parents in particular appeared to play a key role. Bethany referred to her parents as being involved in a way that reflected more of a direct teacher role.

> *My… my Dad teaches me English, my Mummy teaches me maths* (Bethany, 17)

Whereas, the other participants referred more to their parents as slightly fulfilling the teacher role but more so as support figures.

> *Um… you don't have like a teacher really, I mean Mum's kind of a teacher…* (Adam, 1070)

> *So, Mum usually gives me stuff to do but she doesn't directly teach me anything* (Adam, 69)

However, Adam did have the benefit of his Dad being a qualified teacher, *"but my Dad's an English teacher, he does English stuff sometimes"* (Adam, 1262).

Charlotte spoke about how her mother directs some of her learning.

> *I think we just do subjects that we need to catch up on or Mum just sets random work each day* (Charlotte, 9-10)

So if we need help, we just ask Mum and she comes to us (Charlotte, 398)

Digby shared about how most of his learning is self-directed, which is discussed further in section 4.3.3.2 and how his mother more provides support from afar.

D: Yeh, yeh Mum frequently checks in…
R: Yeh, see how you're getting on?
D: … and asks stuff like 'so how much work you done?', 'yeh, I've done this today' and stuff like that (Digby and researcher, 1513-1515)

Adam reflected on the level of attention he feels he now has in comparison to school.

So like Mum, if I've something, well like something like 50% but then at school it would be like 2% attention because there'll be like 50 people in a class but um…with Mum if I have something and I don't know what it is, I'll just ask her and she comes straight over and figure it out (Adam, 1269-1272)

Charlotte and Digby spoke about their parents in a way that felt like they were gatekeepers to resources and wider opportunities.

If anybody asked, I'm just home educated and Mum fetches all the resources and stuff like that (Digby, 2175)

When talking about engaging in activities with other home educators, Charlotte commented that *"Mum keeps track, I'd forget them all to be honest"* (Charlotte, 518). Digby shared how his mother seeks out different activities for him.

D: She loves surfing Facebook and stuff like that…
R: Yeh
D: …because… just go 'wow, look at this it's full of opportunities' and stuff like this, she'll go through 'do you want to do this?' (Digby and researcher, 2205-2208)

Two participants spoke about attending classes or workshops and having support from external tutors. In regards to his arts award, Digby shared that he visits a tutor.

> *D: Um… we go to his house*
> *R: Okay*
> *D: He's, he's a sort of comic book artist* (Digby and researcher, 2037-2039)

Adam shared regarding the external support he is receiving and appeared to value the specialist knowledge.

> *A: Well… we usually go to science tutors and I do… um… STEM*
> *R: Oh yes*
> *A: At the thing*
> *R: Ahhh*
> *A: That's where I did the robotics* (Adam and researcher, 27-31)

> *A: And those have been very useful, cus it's like, it's not exactly school but it's like between home school and school*
> *R: Ah, okay*
> *A: So, it's like… cus Mum's not an expert in Biology or like robotics or anything*
> *M: No [all laugh]*
> *A: But the person who'd be at the classes but they would also be, they'd also be able to give you a lot of like, if you had a problem, they'd come very quickly to solve it* (Adam, his mother and researcher 1728-1734)

4.3.2.2 Superordinate Theme Two: Access to Resources

All of the participants spoke about the resources they use to support them, although Bethany spoke about these in a lot less detail.

> *B: Yeh, I use the computer to write*
> *R: Do you?*
> *B: Cus I… well my, my other… I do the… what's it called?... I do paperwork as well* (Bethany and researcher, 69-71)

Charlotte, Adam and Digby mentioned using books to support their learning, with Adam and Digby talking in more detail about their use of textbooks to test themselves.

> *Yeh, we have a book where it asks you, there… it asks you all the questions* (Adam, 321)

> *D: …so you've got the two booklets, at the start I went through everything…*
> *R: Wow*
> *D: … and just went 'right, this is all the stuff that I think I need to go over', which is of course not the whole booklet but most of it um…* (Digby and researcher, 1257-1260)

All of the participants mentioned using computers to support them with their learning, with Adam and Digby noting that they utilise online programmes.

> *Um… Khan Academy… I do a lot of stuff on there, I do maths, I do coding and other things…* (Adam, 262-263)

> *So, they'd be doing Math-U-See, which is a maths programme we use, so I was doing a catch up of going through the videos* (Digby, 168-169)

I got a sense that the internet was perceived as particularly valuable for most of the participants.

> *Cus if I don't have the answer to something, I can just like Google it…* (Adam, 1236)

> *…I do Wikipedia chaining, where I'll go through things and I'll go 'oh, there's another link to here something I've never heard of before'…* (Digby, 1647-1648)

When talking about how she is so knowledgeable about art, Charlotte shared that it is through *"YouTube, I watch a certain few Artists…"* (Charlotte, 977).

Adam and Charlotte spoke about access to resources that enabled them to pursue their interests, such as subscriptions.

Yeh, it's called 'How it works' (Adam, 442)

They send you Art supplies once a month with like a prompt word so you've got to create uh… Art with whatever Art supplies they give you (Charlotte, 254-255)

Access to technology appeared to be of particular importance to Adam.

Um… basically on a computer I've got an android emulator which means it will make the computer run like an android phone (Adam, 1510-1511)

A: I think it's mainly maths and coding…
R: Maths and coding?
A: …on the computer, because you can't code off the computer [laughs] (Adam and researcher, 316-318)

I got the sense that Adam and Digby felt they had ease of access to resources to support their learning.

A: If you don't know something, then you can get the answer very, very quickly
R: Yeh
A: So you can just Google it but in school you can't Google it because Google's probably blocked in school (Adam and researcher, 1324-1327)

Digby shared how his mother provides him with so many resources that he never finds he needs anything.

D: So, if I have any concerns about obviously like do I, oh yeh I need some of this which never happens because she's just flooding so much…
R: Aww
D: …here's loads of resources, loads of resources… (Digby and researcher, 2177-2180)

4.3.3 Master Theme Three: Child-Centred Learning

This master theme was developed in response to my perception that the participants interpreted their experience as being child-centred. However, I feel from how Bethany interpreted her experience, there appeared to be elements of this theme but perhaps not as strong as for the other participants. This theme is made up of three superordinate themes regarding pursuing interests; freedom and flexibility; and tailoring to individual needs. The prevalence of the superordinate themes amongst the participants is detailed in Table 4.3.

Superordinate theme	**Adam**	**Bethany**	**Charlotte**	**Digby**
Pursuing interests	✓	✓	✓	✓
Freedom and flexibility	✓	✓	✓	✓
Tailoring to individual needs	✓	✓	✓	✓

Table 4.3 A table showing prevalence of superordinate themes for master theme three

4.3.3.1 Superordinate Theme One: Pursuing Interests

This theme arose both in relation to participants explicitly talking about engaging in their preferred activities and also through their apparent knowledge and passion for particular interests that they appeared keen to share with me.

Being able to pursue their interests appeared to be of particular importance to the participants. I felt that this reflected that their home education experience allowed them the opportunity to do this.

> *A: Well it's very good because you… I do a lot of coding*
> *R: Hmm mm*
> *A: And coding's really fun for me* (Adam and researcher, 1782-1784)

> *I'm focusing on what I want to do. There's… I've changed interests about 20 times now and I've got so many interests that I can pursue. Cus in school, they're not going to let me pursue po… plants are they? No, there's no subject about plants. I can pursue sewing, I… they.. I'm not forced to be doing one specific thing. I can do Victorian if I wanted*

to, which I really wanna do. Um… [laughing], make some corsets and some skirts (Charlotte, 1801-1806)

D: …Um… or for games you know, you'll just be like 'oh, yeh this would be a cool design for something or I've figured out a way to solve this'…
R: Ah, okay
D: …so, you know, you know maybe draw it up on paper if I can be bothered or I might just jump straight into it and do it (Digby and researcher, 313-318)

Bethany spent a lot of time in her interview talking about learning German and writing words down in German, which gave me the impression that this was particularly important to her.

B: Yeh, do you know what my favourite lesson is?
R: What is it?
B: You know… Ger… Deutsch [whispering] (Bethany and researcher, 267-269)

Adam and Charlotte gave me the sense that they are able to prioritise and get caught up in their interests.

It's sort of like, you kind of do what you want, so if you're really into maths, you'll do a lot of maths but if you really don't like English you'll… it's not that you'll not do it, you'll just do very little of it… (Adam, 1759-1761)

…if maths is on timetable but I'm already doing coding, then I'll just stay doing coding but if I can't think of anything else to do, then I'll do maths… (Adam, 1057-1059)

I spend a lot of time, especially on Art. Um… it feels like a few minutes but apparently it takes me a few hours… (Charlotte, 151-152)

Adam, Charlotte and Digby all spoke about their future aspirations in line with their particular interests.

C: Yeh, maybe fashion and stuff if I get really into it, but it depends
R: Okay

C: My interests change quite a lot [laughing]

R: Yeh, okay

C: Maybe something to do with animals that would be fun, especially snakes (Charlotte and researcher, 452-456)

…probably going to college in games design sort of thing, yeh (Digby, 3760)

Adam spoke about his plans for the following year to carry out some work experience and his aspirations regarding university and his future career.

A: … um… I'm doing, I'm hopefully going to do some work experience there…

R: Oh wow

A: … in a prosthetics department… (Adam and researcher, 1817-1819)

R: Yeh? And do you know what you want to study or what kind of area you'd be thinking about?

A: Probably prosthetics

R: Okay, can you do a course…

A: Like if there's a specific one but if there isn't, it's just gonna be like Biology and Engineering and stuff (Adam and researcher, 1956-1961)

4.3.3.2 Superordinate Theme Two: Freedom and Flexibility

This theme developed in response to the participants describing a sense of freedom and flexibility, in comparison to restrictions that they felt were imposed upon them at school. The degree of freedom and flexibility varied across participants.

Experiencing a sense of freedom was particularly pertinent for Charlotte and seemed to be at the core of her experience. The way she spoke gave me the impression that she felt trapped and confined when at school but now she felt like she had been let free.

You're not confined basically, you're free, you're not in a cage anymore (Charlotte, 639-640)

> *Right, no routine [laughing], I don't have to wear that god damn uniform, I don't have to get dressed, I'm free, I can eat what I want…* (Charlotte, 2485-2486)

Only Adam and Digby reported having a timetable, however both stressed how it was not rigid.

> *So, if I'm like 'I don't know what to do', then I'll look at this and then I'll have something to do but other than that I just kind of do what I feel like I need to do* (Adam, 462-463)

> *…it's more flexible so it's a guideline, that I'll follow this and I'll go right I'm gonna do this now rather than absolutely on the dot dropping it and going on to the next one…* (Digby, 48-49)

Although Bethany did not recall that she had a timetable, she did share that there is some routine for some subjects*, "but I think I… I normally do maths with my Mummy on the Thursday I think"* (Bethany, 238) and less so for others, telling me she learns German "*when I feel like learning German"* (Bethany, 288), showing that she does have some level of choice regarding her learning.

Similarly, Digby described how the structure of his day can vary depending on how he is feeling, in comparison to being restricted by the set times of school.

> *Yeh, so sometimes I might just go 'oh, it's 2 o'clock and I'm really not in it so I'll just finish off this page and then we'll go'…* (Digby, 1770-1771)

All participants noted flexibility around their hours. Bethany commented that *"well I normally start at about 10 or 11 [laughing]"* (Bethany, 36) and that she finishes *"about, maybe around… around 5 or 6"* (Bethany, 62). With Charlotte noting "*we do whatever we feel… we wake up whenever we want so… [laughing]"* (Charlotte, 12).

Adam, Charlotte and Digby all gave a sense of now being free to go at their own pace with their learning.

> *Uh… in school you'd have an hour to learn and here you can go on for as long as you need to learn a certain subject, you can go on for weeks if need be* (Charlotte, 634-635)

> *Um…it's not exactly like taking an alternate route, you're just doing it at your pace, you're still getting there…* (Digby, 2475-2476)

> *Well at the start I thought it was very easy cus if, in maths I'd finish it, in school I'd finish it and I'd have to wait for everyone else to finish it but at school... not at school, at home I'd do… I'd finish it and then I'd just do more and more and more…* (Adam, 1687-1689)

For Adam, the flexibility enabled him to do things that would have been much harder if he was at school.

> *It's a lot more flexible to what you do, so you can… to go to China it was a lot simpler than it would be if you went to school* (Adam, 1338-1339)

Charlotte and Digby described how they have freedom regarding what and how they learn.

> *Cus it's a lot easier, like, I… in school you have to go throughout the years but you don't learn stuff, you forget stuff and then you can't go back and learn it because they're not gonna try and teach you so I can spend a few years on like Year 5 work if I needed to, just to grasp it and then move up* (Charlotte, 2586-2589)

> *D: Yeh, it's been a lot different because I'm now not being forced to do the things that I don't want to do, not that I don't do them now…*
> *R: Mmm*
> *D: …but I can do them and I go, 'right here's how to do this'* (Digby and researcher, 671-674)

Digby and Bethany, to some level, spoke about carrying out self-directed learning.

Then when they went out, I stayed back and um… self-taught science… (Digby, 349)

Well, some I taught myself, Daddy taught, taught myself… taught me some (Bethany, 146)

Although freedom was perceived as a positive by most of the participants, Digby did talk about how he had some difficulties with it initially.

D: …school's very block based and stuff like that, which is, was quite nice in a sense because we had an assurance this was going to happen
R: Yes
D: Um… which uh… at the start of home schooling I did struggle with a little bit actually (Digby and researcher, 2541-2544)

In addition, although Charlotte does not have a set routine, she does like to know what the plans are for the next day, telling me *"I don't like surprises"* (Charlotte, 1427)

In comparison to the other participants who spoke about their plans for the future in section 4.3.3.1, I did get the perception from the way Bethany spoke, that perhaps plans around her further education were more led by parents.

Yeh, I think… my Daddy said… I think I am going to College for 3 days and then I continue home schooled (Bethany, 1161-1162)

4.3.3.3 Superordinate Theme Three: Tailoring to Individual Needs

This theme arose from my interpretation that the participants felt that they were given the opportunity to tailor their learning to suit them and to respond to their individual needs and preferences. Similar to previous themes, there was a degree of variation regarding how this theme manifested itself for different participants.

Digby spoke about how home education is a unique experience and how it is not a one-size fits all approach but is personalised to suit each particular individual.

…it's not made for anybody, you make it yourself… (Digby, 3479-3480)

> *…but there's so many different versions of it and so many different flavours of it…* (Digby, 3620)

Digby, Adam and Charlotte all indicated the importance of taking the time to find the best fit and how there is a process of trial and error involved.

> *D: Um… well, of course the first couple of weeks was, to me, it was getting it customised for myself so…*
> *R: Yeh*
> *D: …it was working through and experimenting with things…* (Digby and researcher, 3585-3588)

> *Yeh, it was like making a personalised suit* (Digby, 386)

> *…for a few months we did do very little work cus we had to set it all up, I think for about a month and then we did a lot more, then we just kind of did the amount, then we did a lot more and then we kind of balanced it out* (Adam, 1718-1720)

> *We don't really have a schedule because we had a schedule at one point but it kind of went down the drain…* (Charlotte, 3-4)

Digby described how he struggled with the analytical subjects at school, noting *"…if it's not a direct answer then I sort of struggle with it…"* (Digby, 755) but how he now has the opportunity to tailor his learning to meet his needs.

> *…I just went alright yeh I'll just get rid of um… I didn't particularly enjoy the anthologies so I went alright, I'll go with an exam board that doesn't do the anthologies then* (Digby, 717-718)

Similarly, Charlotte reflected on her enjoyment of her outdoor learning experiences, sharing how they meet her style of learning, *"I'm more a visual, hands on person than listening"* (Charlotte, 221).

I also got a sense from what Charlotte shared that she felt that her needs were more able to be met at home both due to the nature of the home environment and also the support that was being provided to meet her needs, which she felt did not happen in school.

C: … Mum understands and she finds ways, if I didn't learn it that way, she'll find a different way to teach me

R: Hmm mm

C: And they'll try and fo… in school, they'll try and force a certain way for you to learn it, even though there's like 20,000 ways you can learn it differently, they won't try (Charlotte and researcher, 1278-1282)

In particular, Charlotte noted difficulties at school around being forced to wear the uniform.

Like I tried it on, just because they wouldn't shut up and then they tried… they said okay you've tried it on once now do that every week and up it and I was like 'no, it feels disgusting, it's horrid, you try wearing something that feels disgusting' but they kept enforcing it every time I went in… (Charlotte, 672-674)

Whereas, she spoke quite frequently about how at home *"…you can wear whatever you want…"* (Charlotte, 1722-1723), which I interpreted as home being able to accommodate her sensory needs.

On a similar note, I got a sense from Bethany, that although she expressed that her parents feel she is not learning at home, it sounded like her father was taking the time to try to respond to her difficulties.

I think I'm hard to learn because I keep on forgetting and then my Dad needs to start lessons all over again (Bethany, 781-782)

Bethany also spoke about attending a group for individuals with ASD, which indicated to me that she was given the opportunity to spend time with others who understand her needs.

…It's a special club for people with… people who've got my disability [laughing] (Bethany, 415)

4.3.4 Master Theme Four: Impact on Self

This master theme was developed in response to my interpretation regarding the perceived impact that being home educated has had on the participants. It is made up of three superordinate themes regarding the impact on the

participants as learners, impact on self-concept and impact on emotional wellbeing. The prevalence of the superordinate themes amongst the participants is detailed in Table 4.4.

Superordinate theme	Adam	Bethany	Charlotte	Digby
Self as a learner	✓	✓	✓	✓
Self-concept			✓	✓
Emotional wellbeing	✓	✓	✓	✓

Table 4.4 A table showing prevalence of superordinate themes for master theme four

4.3.4.1 Superordinate Theme One: Self as a Learner

This theme arose as a result of my perception that the participants felt that their home education experience had led to an impact on their learning and their views towards learning.

Adam, Charlotte and Digby all indicated that they are learning better at home and gave the impression that they felt they had made progress since becoming home educated.

> *Definitely, I feel like I wouldn't be… I definitely wouldn't be as intelligent if I went to school because I think the robotics thing has affected it a lot…* (Adam, 1331-1332)

> *…my work is a lot better, I've improved a bit I think* (Charlotte, 1349)

Digby emphasised that he felt the way he has been able to learn at home has made his learning much more effective, making the comparison between the 'hollow' nature of work at school and the 'wholesome' nature at home.

> *D: I feel like I'm actually making progress…*
> *R: Okay*
> *D: …rather than just doing this sort of hollow sort of work…* (Digby and researcher, 3013-3015)

> *…it's, um… productive and you know like wholesome, where you actually are getting things done* (Digby, 3427-3428)

Bethany also shared that she is learning better at home. I got the sense that perhaps she feels she is learning better because she is doing more work than when she was at school.

> *B: I think I learn better here*
> *R: Okay, why's that?*
> *B: Because I used to do lots of activities at school and less work [laughing]* (Bethany and researcher, 711-713)

However, in comparison to the others, Bethany appeared to have a negative view of herself as a learner, talking about the impact of her memory and commenting *"I'm a disaster!"* (Bethany, 788). Additionally, she commented that "…*I think my parents think it's not helping me"* (Bethany, 861-862).

I felt from what Charlotte shared with me, that she had the opportunity to develop a range of life skills. For example, learning how to set up a business to sell her art work, telling me *"we're creating a website"* (Charlotte, 564) as well as opportunities for responsibility.

> *See my snakes are a good motivation because I need to take care of them* (Charlotte, 2293)

Similarly, Digby spoke about the benefits of learning with his siblings, as it helped him to learn how to cope with distractions.

> *So, the boys might be like you know being slightly noisy while they're learning or something like that, so you just get on with that and you just do it* (Digby, 1567-1568)

However, he did comment on missing out on the benefits of learning how to cope in the busy school environment.

> *D: Uh… in school there was a lot of negative stimuli, you know like other people messing around in lessons and stuff like that*
> *R: Okay, hmm*
> *D: Um… which if anything, I think that was slightly beneficial* (Digby and researcher, 2585-2588)

Adam and Digby both emphasised feeling a sense of satisfaction towards their learning.

> *Because it's not like, cus in school, you'll do a bit of it and then you'll do a bit of it the next day and a bit of it the next day but with home school you can do all of that in one day and then you've finished it and if you've done it non-stop it's really um… satisfying* (Adam, 1793-1795)

> *It's… it's more of like one of those self, you know, satisfaction and you go 'yeh, I feel that has worth', when it probably doesn't but you know, it makes you feel good…* (Digby, 1839-1840)

Charlotte gave the impression of a strong sense of enjoyment regarding her experience.

> *I love all of it* (Charlotte, 2204)

> *It's really fun* (Charlotte, 642)

In contrast to the others, Bethany held a negative view towards her learning at home, in comparison to her fond memories of school.

> *…I hate it, it's boring, I find it boring* (Bethany, 968)

> *I find it so hard* (Bethany, 1137)

> *B: I used to do lots of fun*
> *R: Ah*
> *B: Yes. I used to play with play dough and… do lots of activities with her, I used to do a lot* (Bethany and researcher, 663-665)

4.3.4.2 Superordinate Theme Two: Self-Concept

This theme was developed in relation to my reflections upon two of the participants expressing how home education had impacted on them as a person and their sense of self.

It was particularly prominent for Charlotte who spoke in great deal about how she could now be herself and how she felt school restricted this. I got the sense that being able to express herself was extremely important and that home education had led to a positive impact on her self-identity.

> *…I can wear what I want. I can get so many piercings, well if Mum says yes to them. I can get so many piercings, dye my hair, I can cut my hair even shorter if I wanted to. Like in school they wouldn't allow that…* (Charlotte, 1770-1772)

Charlotte spoke a lot about trying to fit in and how she felt she was being made to be 'normal' when she was at school.

> *…I can be myself now like I look back at pictures of myself and I'm just sat there thinking 'why did I ever look like that?', why… like I would… I tried so hard to fit in* (Charlotte, 2397-2399)

> *Because they want us to be the same as each other and refined and a copy and paste and I'm not, I'm… the printer broke… the pr [laughing], something went wrong, a virus got into the system, um… I… they really try… they really tried to make me seem normal…* (Charlotte, 812-814)

Charlotte did speak about experiencing some judgement from others in relation to her appearance, leading to questions about her school attendance.

> *…so, it's like 'do you go school? Like do school allow that?' 'No, they don't but I'm home-schooled so it doesn't really matter' It's one of the first things they ask because the appearance and everything* (Charlotte, 2242-2243)

In addition, Charlotte spoke about the positive impact on her self-esteem, in comparison to how she felt when she was at school.

> *Yeh, my self-esteem has gone up* (Charlotte, 1360)

> *Um… they made it seem like I was a bit stupid because I couldn't grasp the concept as quick as everyone else and I… I felt horrid. I think my self-esteem was really low* (Charlotte, 1284-1285)

Digby gave the impression that home education had led to an impact on his views of himself as a person.

> *…'educational' to me in homeschooling is more about you know, learning things and becoming a better person* (Digby, 3716-3717)

I got the sense from Digby that he felt the opportunities that have been provided to him through home education made him feel that he had an advantage over his school counterparts.

> *D: Yeh, so I know for example, most people in school I doubt they would have ever heard of an Arts award, let alone done one*
> *R: Mmm*
> *D: Um…so that's of course a full leg up on them* (Digby and researcher, 1110-1113)

Both Charlotte and Digby shared how they now feel they can be open and honest about struggling with their learning, without fear of judgement from others.

> *C: I'm with people I trust and can be myself with*
> *R: Hmm mm*
> *C: I don't have to pretend I know something just so I won't be embarrassed* (Charlotte and researcher, 1192-1194)

> *…I can go over again without worrying about in school going 'actually, I don't know how to simplify fractions' and stuff like that and being laughed at by everybody…* (Digby, 3485-3487)

4.3.4.3 Superordinate Theme Three: Emotional Wellbeing

I developed this theme in relation to my interpretation that participants felt that home education had impacted upon their emotional wellbeing, following difficulties they experienced when they were at school. My interpretation of Bethany's experience was in stark contrast to the other participants.

Adam spoke about the impact of school on his wellbeing at home and how he felt relieved when he found out he was going to be home educated. This sense of relief gave me the impression that he now feels happier at home.

> *A: Well probably because I was unhappy at home*
> *R: Right, okay*
> *A: Like when I went to school, I'd come back and I would be like just sad and not wanting to do stuff* (Adam and researcher, 1296-1299)

A: Very relieved

R: Very relieved?

A: Cus I remember every time I arrived at school I'd be like 'oh god no, take me back' (Adam and researcher, 1713-1715)

Charlotte spoke in great detail about the stress that she experienced at school and the impact this had on her wellbeing.

Y…school stresses you out in general, like getting up, being on time, having the right equipment, uh… getting the work done, doing it right, not making a fool of yourself. It just brings so much stress. Even if there's nothing to be stressed about, school just stresses you out anyway. Like here, I've got no stress (Charlotte, 1728-1731)

C: Stressed, my anxiety was high

R: Okay

C: My depression, everything was going downhill to be honest (Charlotte, 2389-2391)

In comparison, she emphasised how her wellbeing has improved since being home educated.

C: No anxiety…

R: Yeh

C: … that's gone down a lot, so has my depression… (Charlotte and researcher, 1353-1355)

It's easier, you're not exhausted all the time, you're safe, you're calm, you're okay (Charlotte, 2512)

Feeling safe appeared to be quite important to Charlotte. I felt that this was reflected in her comments about feeling the need to run away at school but how she does not feel that need any more.

See at school I wanted to escape, here I'm free, I don't need to escape (Charlotte, 783)

In addition, Charlotte gave the impression that she feels safe to express her emotions at home, which she felt unable to do at school.

> *I can have full down meltdowns here because I don't know what I'm doing* (Charlotte, 1196)

I also got the impression from what Charlotte shared that she felt like a gateway to funding at school and experienced a sense of feeling unwanted. Whereas at home she feels like she is actually wanted and perhaps feels a sense of belonging now.

> *And so, when I wanted to leave, they were trying their hardest to keep me in but they were just, they weren't saying anything that would help me, they were more so focused on keeping the money they were being given* (Charlotte, 1166-1168)

> *And they're not just keeping me for money…* (Charlotte, referring to her parents, 2601)

Digby described how he used to have 'meltdowns' at home when he got annoyed at being pulled away from things he had been waiting to do all day. He shared how these have lessened and I felt that this was perhaps in relation to him now being able to do what he wants throughout the day.

> *D: So, I'll get more and more annoyed and stuff like that*
> *R: Okay*
> *D: So, I feel that, yeh that happened more* (Digby and researcher, 3236-3238)

In addition, Digby spoke about experiencing anxiety around the pressures of remembering everything he needed for school but how this has now been alleviated.

> *…I was always a bit anxious going to school, especially with homework* (Digby, 3048)

> *…it was just total dread and stuff like that because I'd get in, I'd be thinking oh, I better not of like you know forgotten something…* (Digby, 3061-3062)

> *Um… yeh which I felt I dropped a lot when I came straight into homeschooling…* (Digby, 3066)

In contrast to the others, from the way Bethany spoke, I got a sense that home education had potentially led to a negative impact on her emotions, as she shared about how much she was missing school, telling me *"I miss everything"* (Bethany, 653) and became quite emotional when reminiscing about school, telling me "*I don't want to talk about it"* (Bethany, 687).

4.3.5 Master Theme Five: Interpersonal Relationships

This master theme was developed in relation to the participants talking about their relationships and opportunities to connect with others. The theme is made up of two superordinate themes regarding social connections and family relationship. The prevalence of the superordinate themes amongst the participants is detailed in Table 4.5.

Superordinate theme	Adam	Bethany	Charlotte	Digby
Social connections	✓	✓	✓	✓
Family relationship			✓	✓

Table 4.5 A table showing prevalence of superordinate themes for master theme five

4.3.5.1 Superordinate Theme One: Social Connections

The theme of social connections arose in relation to the participants talking about their opportunities for socialising with others and maintaining and forming relationships.

Adam and Charlotte both spoke about how they have lost touch with school friends, with Charlotte giving the impression that home education allowed her the opportunity to cut out negative friendships.

> *A: Um… I did for a bit but then I kinda… we didn't really see each other that often*
> *R: Okay*
> *A: We kind of just lost contact* (Adam and researcher, 991-993)

> *…I think I miss some of my old friends, I think because I got homeschooled, I kind of lost touch with some of them. But some of them became really toxic so it kind of showed their true colours, I'm glad I cut them off* (Charlotte, 861-863)

In addition, Charlotte gave me the sense that although she does miss some of her old friends, the benefits of home education outweighed her desire to rekindle those friendships.

> *C: Um… but you kind of lose touch with everyone, it's really bad but what can you do?*
> *R: Yeh, okay*
> *C: I'm not going back to school just to get my friends back [laughing]* (Charlotte and researcher, 2195-2198)

Similarly, Digby spoke about how he initially missed the social connection with school but also how it would not be enough for him to want to return.

> *Uh, yeh… at the start I did tend to miss you know, just being in school, you know it was nice to go around and be nosey at say why two people were fighting…* (Digby, 2612-2613)

> *Just because it's, just because I miss that sort of aspect, it doesn't mean that I'd want to go back particularly, no* (Digby, 2647-2648)

In comparison, Bethany shared how she is still in touch with some old friends who come to visit, telling me "*sometimes I've got some friends coming"* (Bethany, 498). Similarly, Digby shared that he still stays in touch with his school friends.

> *I'm constantly, you know in touch with my friends…* (Digby, 2259-2260)

As noted in section 4.3.1.2, all participants spoke about engaging in a range of activities which lent itself to having the opportunities to socialise with other young people.

> *So, there's a lot of ways to socialise* (Charlotte, 491)

> *Which is not only educational but it's a good social as well because I can see my friends…* (Digby, 1962-1963)

> *A: Um… yeh, so I see my friends at trampolining, a lot of the classes…*
> *R: Okay*
> *A: … my friends are there*

R: Yeh

A: And also dungeons and dragons, they come to our house to do that (Adam and researcher, 926-930)

Charlotte and Digby spoke about the value of technology for connecting with others.

Um… but I met a few people online… (Charlotte, 476)

D: …I'll chat to them on my phone and stuff like that

R: Yeh

D: Um… and I'll play with them on games (Digby and researcher, 2260-2263)

As noted in section 4.3.2.1, both Charlotte and Digby spoke about their mothers being key support figures in promoting social opportunities with other home educators, with Digby noting "*Socialisation is full Mum…"* (Digby, 2201) and how "*She loves surfing Facebook…"* (Digby, 2205) to seek opportunities for him. Therefore, further emphasising the power of technology to connect with others.

Adam and Bethany both spoke about opportunities to socialise with others from different cultures, which I felt offered them a wider social experience.

I think we made friends with all the teams that aren't Chinese that went there (Adam, 618)

The Americans, er… Filipinos, Koreans… (Adam, 621)

… I've only got my friend in France, only one of those, she can speak English anyway so I don't need to speak… learn how to speak French (Bethany, 158-159)

Adam and Charlotte spoke about opportunities to form new friends, particularly with those with similar interests. Adam spoke about spending time with "…*my friend who's from the robotics…"* (Adam, 1035). Charlotte shared how she developed a friendship on holiday.

> *So, like we find people, like I noticed her because of her dress and then like she ended up making a beeline for us and sitting in front of us and we had an entire conversation and like we got along so well* (Charlotte, 2062-2064)

Bethany commented how she struggles to make friends, telling me *"Uh… trouble with make friends"* (Bethany, 374). In contrast to the others, Bethany shared how she feels lonely due to learning on her own.

> *B: It's on my own*
> *R: On your own, yeh?*
> *B: [laughing] Lonely* (Bethany and researcher, 120-122)

> *B: Got nobody to talk*
> *R: That there's?*
> *B: Only me and Daddy and Mummy* (Bethany and researcher, 1081-1083)

This may be because Bethany was the only participant without siblings, whereas all the other participants mentioned how they have siblings who are also home educated. This point was illustrated by Digby.

> *Um, an only child I would say would be very, very isolated, I mean I've got my brothers around…* (Digby, 3292-3293)

In addition, Adam and Digby both spoke about attending classes and Charlotte also spoke about engaging in learning activities with other home educators.

> *Uh, we did some work with [name], I went over to her house and we did some Art work…* (Charlotte, 400)

In addition, Charlotte and Digby both shared how they are not one to seek social interactions and like time alone. This gave the impression that the nature of home education perhaps suited them quite well.

> *I like this, I'm more alone, it's better* (Charlotte, 867)

> *…no, I'm not a social person, no* (Digby, 2230)

So, transitioning from school where it is highly social to homeschooling didn't really particularly faze me (Digby, 3359-3360)

Despite this, Charlotte did note how being home educated may be reinforcing her dislike of going out.

C: Because in school I was… I would… I had to go out
R: Yeh
C: But with home-school, I don't have to and I usually choose not to go out (Charlotte and researcher, 2209-2211)

4.3.5.2 Superordinate Theme Two: Family Relationship

This theme was developed in response to two participants talking about the connection between their home education experience and their relationships as a family.

Charlotte reflected upon how becoming home educated has meant that the family *"…have more time to be together…"* (Charlotte, 1908). She shared that they spend time together when learning, *"…we usually just sit at the table together…"* (Charlotte, 385).

I also got a sense that her family have more time to explore shared interests and engage in shared activities together. For example, during the interview they were talking in great detail about snakes, which appeared to be a shared interest across the family.

Oo, I want a tree boa. Mum doesn't want one, she wanted one but then she figured out that they like launch themselves off branches (Charlotte, 1614-1615)

In addition, it appeared that Charlotte was planning on engaging in activities, such as rock climbing and archery, with her mother's partner.

C: Are you actually going to do it or are you going to sit there and watch?
M: No, he's gonna do it with you
C: Good [laughing] (Charlotte and her mother, 505-507)

Charlotte also talked about how the family relationship had developed since becoming home educated.

> *We're more open with each other* (Charlotte, 1951)

> *We're less tense now but I still don't like you [to sister]* (Charlotte, 1879)

She also said that there are "*less meltdowns for her"* (Charlotte, 1848), in relation to her mother. I felt that this was likely to have had a positive impact on their relationship.

Digby shared how he feels his relationship with his mother has developed since becoming home educated. He described how when he was at school, his mother could only predict what his day had been like, whereas now she can actually see.

> *…now that I'm at home most of the time and stuff like that, I feel like you've got…you can actually see this solid line now of where it's going and stuff like that and it's much easier because now, even when I'm not at home, your prediction is much more accurate of how it's going to be…* (Digby, 3112-3115)

Although, he noted that he and his mother fall out more, he described how he feels they now have a more understanding relationship. I got the impression that this was not only about his mother understanding him but also him being more understanding of his mother.

> *D: I think, I think we actually fall out more because we are exposed to each other more…*
> *R: Ah, okay*
> *M: Yeh*
> *D: …so we're… as I say, it's developed more. It also means that now, not that we're just closer, it's um… it's more of an understanding relationship now…* (Digby, his mother and researcher, 3156-3160)

> *…I'm used to you now and the things that you do and stuff like that and it's now just normal and typical of you…* (Digby, 3189-3190)

4.4 Summary of Findings

The analysis found that the participants all engage in a range of learning activities, including what I interpreted as more formal learning activities, as well as wider learning opportunities. The participants all described the range of support they draw upon, both in relation to support from others and access to resources.

From the participants' accounts, I interpreted that the participants felt that their experience was in line with a child-centred approach, although there was some variation to the degree that this manifested amongst the participants. The opportunity to pursue interests appeared to be of paramount importance. There also appeared to be a degree of freedom and flexibility across the participants, as well as opportunities to tailor their experience to suit their needs.

I felt that the participants perceived that home education had had an impact on them, in regards to their learning, self-concept and wellbeing. There was an element of divergence across these themes for one participant in particular.

Finally, the participants spoke about their opportunities to connect with others, with two participants also reflecting upon the impact on their family relationship.

5 Discussion

5.1 Introduction

The main aim of this chapter is to bring together the findings in order to answer the research question 'How do young people with ASD interpret their experiences of being home educated?' The master themes will be discussed in light of the literature and theory that were presented in Chapter 2. In addition, the themes generated led to consideration of further literature which will be referred to where appropriate. The focus will then move on to address the methodological limitations of the present study, followed by my personal reflections as a researcher. The chapter will then finish with a consideration of potential implications for practice and possible suggestions for future research.

5.2 Master Theme One: Learning Experiences

The participants in the present study shared regarding a range of activities and experiences they were engaging in, that I felt reflected their overall learning experience. I interpreted from the views shared by the participants, that they were all partaking in a range of activities that I considered formal learning activities, with all participants noting that they engage in the core subjects of maths and English, which concurs with previous research (Arora, 2006; Daniels, 2017; D'Arcy, 2012). I felt that this could be considered as a reflection of a typical learning experience, in relation to what may be occurring in school. However, some of the subjects being studied appeared to go beyond what would be considered the core curriculum, such as coding, Greek mythology, sewing and baking. In addition, three of the participants spoke about learning a language, with German and Japanese being the most common. Although German may be considered a conventional language offered in the school curriculum, Japanese is not typically a language that young people are given the opportunity to learn in school. These findings may be interpreted in line with the participants' interests, which is considered further in section 5.4.

All of the participants shared about engaging in a range of activities, which I interpreted as opportunities for wider learning experiences. They all described how they engage in extra-curricular activities, with Digby noting the educational benefits. In addition, the participants spoke about engaging in

activities such as visiting tourist attractions, days out walking and visiting the zoo. This is in line with previous research regarding home educated young people engaging in activities outside the home (Daniels, 2017; Nelson, 2013; Solder, 2017; Winstanley, 2009).

Furthermore, three of the participants spoke about opportunities to travel abroad. The opportunity to engage in cultural learning experiences has been suggested to enhance young people's views of the world, development of life skills and awareness of different cultural values (Byrnes, 2001). This was emphasised through Adam's reflections upon developing his knowledge about the Chinese culture. This concurs with previous research by Nelson (2013), where the opportunity to travel was noted as a benefit of home education.

In relation to previous research, Charlotte's comment that "e*verything's a learning opportunity"* (Charlotte, 2269), aligns with Hopwood et al's (2007) finding in their study that learning was encouraged through everyday experiences.

5.3 Master Theme Two: Support and Resources

The participants all shared regarding the support that they draw upon to help with their learning, in relation to support from others and access to resources. The role that parents played appeared to be a key part of the participants' experience. Similar to findings by Arora (2006), it appeared to be the mother who took the lead role in providing support. I interpreted that the extent to which parents were involved ranged from providing support via direct teaching to more of a facilitative and supportive role. This aligns with the supportive and non-directive role that parents played in Solder's (2017) study. Adam spoke about the benefits of not having to share an adult's attention with other students, like in school. This is similar to findings in Nelson's (2013) study regarding the opportunity for one-to-one support being noted as a benefit of home education. Research has found that smaller class sizes in school often lead to students receiving more individual attention, with larger class sizes being associated with disengagement (Blatchford et al., 2011). This may explain why the availability of support within home education is viewed as beneficial.

In addition, I interpreted from Charlotte and Digby that they felt their parents were gatekeepers to resources and wider opportunities. This support from others can be reflected upon in light of SDT and the area of relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 1985). I got a sense that the participants felt that parents were invested in supporting them and they were able to turn to them for support. Therefore, suggesting a sense of security in their relationship with the adults supporting them. The value of this support from others is in line with previous research (Jones, 2013).

Two of the participants referred to receiving support via classes or tutors. The use of tutors is in line with previous research (Arora, 2006; Daniels, 2017; D'Arcy, 2012). However, accessing classes with other young people appears to be slightly different to what was found in the previous studies. I got a sense from Adam that this access to specialist support and facilities was particularly valuable. Therefore, this may emphasise the potential benefits of seeking further support outside the home where possible. In addition, in relation to previous research (de Carvalho & Skipper, 2019; Nelson, 2013), the participants did not say that they directly seek support from home education groups but noted that this typically happened through their parents. Therefore, illustrating the potential different priorities for young people and parents.

Similar to previous research (Arora, 2006; Daniels, 2017), the use of books and computers were noted by the majority of the participants. In particular, the use of online programmes was mentioned by two of the young people, concurring with findings in Daniels' (2017) study. I interpreted that the internet was perceived as particularly valuable by the majority of the participants. This emphasises the value of having access to a computer and the internet and led to me reflecting upon what it might be like for families who do not have this. Two of the participants spoke about having access to specific resources to support their particular interests. This potentially suggests that the nature of home education more easily enables access to individualised resources, in contrast to school.

In comparison to previous research (Arora, 2006; Daniels, 2017; D'Arcy, 2012; Nelson, 2013; Winstanley, 2009), the young people themselves did not focus

on any difficulties around access to resources or finances, which may emphasise the dominance of the adult voice in previous research. This could be explained further by the finding related to parents being a key support figure and gatekeeper to resources in the present study. In fact, the way the participants spoke about resources suggested they felt they had an ease of access. This differing view may arise due to the financial cost of home education not being something that the young people themselves necessarily need to be concerned with.

5.4 Master Theme Three: Child-Centred Learning

I interpreted from the participants' accounts that there was a sense that their experience was centred around their individual preferences and needs. This was particularly prominent for Adam, Charlotte and Digby, with elements of this interpreted for Bethany.

All of the participants spoke in detail about their interests, which I felt reflected their importance to the young people. The participants described how they have the opportunity to spend time engaging in activities of their choosing, with some participants indicating how they are able to prioritise these activities over others. This finding is in line with previous research that found that children's learning was guided by their interests (Daniels, 2017; Jones, 2013; Nelson, 2013; Solder, 2017). Furthermore, when talking about future aspirations, three of the participants spoke about future plans in line with their interests. I felt that the detail in which the participants spoke about their particular interests can be considered in line with their ASD diagnosis (APA, 2013). In particular, I feel that this finding aligns with research regarding young people with ASD who have special skills in certain areas, such as drawing and computers (Meilleur et al., 2015). Taylor et al. (2011) found that the opportunity to pursue particular interests was particularly prominent for young people with ASD in their study. Therefore, it appears that the opportunity to pursue specific interests may be even more important for young people with ASD.

I also interpreted that the participants felt they had a degree of freedom and flexibility, in comparison to the restrictions they felt were placed upon them at school. There appeared to be flexibility around structure and timings for all

participants. Although two participants indicated that they had a timetable, they noted how this was not rigid but was used more as a guideline or back up, with Digby noting how he is guided by his feelings. This aligns somewhat with previous research which found that most families adopt a semi-structured approach (Daniels, 2017; D'Arcy, 2012; Nelson, 2013). There was a sense that the majority of the participants were able to learn at their own pace, similar to previous research (Arora, 2006; Nelson, 2013). The participants also shared that they had freedom of choice regarding what and how they learn, with an indication of some self-directed learning, which concurs with past research (Arora, 2006; de Carvalho & Skipper, 2019; Jones, 2013).

In relation to theory and research around ASD, particularly the need for routine (Baron-Cohen, 2009), in line with the empathising-systemising theory; and difficulties with flexibility (Granader et al., 2014), in line with the executive dysfunction theory, this finding around freedom and flexibility was quite unexpected. Digby did reflect upon the initial struggles he had with the freedom he was given, noting how he did benefit from the assurance at school. However, overall, the participants appeared to view the level of freedom and flexibility they were given in a positive light. Daniels (2017) reported similar findings regarding flexible approaches in their study with young people with ASD. I wondered whether these findings are due to the young people feeling they have an element of control and choice over their day.

The majority of the participants spoke about how they were able to tailor their experience to meet their needs, such as taking the time to find the best fit for them, in line with Daniels' (2017) finding that approaches evolved over time. As noted by Monk (2009), there is no one-size fits all approach to home education. Participants spoke about how they can make changes to their learning in line with their individual learning style. In particular, Digby spoke about how he struggles with analytical subjects and prefers things that have a direct answer, which is reflective of the recognised rigid thinking related to ASD (APA, 2013). In line with findings by Daniels (2017), Charlotte gave the impression that home education was more suited to her sensory needs, such as not having to wear a uniform, which she felt there was a lack of understanding around at school. This led me to reflect upon how the nature of

home education may suit some young people with ASD, as they are able to have more control over meeting their sensory needs, such as what they wear, as well as avoiding crowded or noisy places. This may be why school not meeting children's SEN needs has been noted as a common reason for home education in the literature (Hopwood et al., 2007; Ofsted, 2019). In particular, this finding illuminates Kendall and Taylor's (2016) research regarding parents feeling that there was a lack of understanding from staff in school, particularly regarding needs in relation to ASD. I also got the sense that some of the participants felt that support could be differentiated to meet their learning needs at home, which was much more difficult in school. This ability to tailor to individual needs and learning styles concurs with previous research (Daniels, 2017; Nelson, 2013; Solder, 2017).

As noted in Jones' (2013) study, choice and interest play an important role in fostering motivation, enthusiasm and passion for learning. This theme of child-centred learning can be looked at in relation to SDT (Deci & Ryan, 1985). I feel that the opportunity to engage in particular interests, as well as freedom to learn at their own pace and having choice regarding what and how they learn, would promote a feeling of competence in the young people. In addition, the ability to make these choices, opportunities to carry out self-directed learning and ability to respond to their feelings, is likely to promote a sense of autonomy. Both of these psychological needs are key factors for intrinsic motivation for learning (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Although I did interpret some degree of choice and flexibility in Bethany's account, there was some divergence from the rest of the group, in that it appeared that Bethany's parents did have more control over decisions regarding her learning. In particular, it was not Bethany's choice to be home educated and this was perhaps reflected in her negative views towards home education, which could be interpreted as lower levels of intrinsic motivation.

5.5 Master Theme Four: Impact on Self

The findings within this theme relate to my interpretation regarding the perceived impact that home education has had on the participants. All participants shared that they feel they are learning better at home, with three describing how they feel they have made progress since becoming home

educated. This finding concurs with findings in Arora's (2006) study, where participants emphasised a strong view that children were learning much more at home than they would have in school. In contrast, although Bethany noted that she felt she was learning better at home, she appeared to express a negative view of herself as a learner. It could be interpreted that home education had not had the same positive impact for her, as it appeared to have done for the rest of the group. This could be considered in relation to a possible low level of motivation for learning as noted in section 5.4 above. Furthermore, I perceived that two of the participants had been able to develop a range of life skills, such as learning how to manage responsibility, in line with previous research findings (Nelson, 2013).

The majority of participants indicated positive feelings towards their learning experience, such as a sense of satisfaction and enjoyment, which is in line with previous research by Solder (2017). However, Bethany seemed to hold quite a negative view towards her experience. In comparison to the rest of the group, she appeared to have fond memories of her primary school experience, particularly those of engaging in fun activities and less work. I perceived that perhaps Bethany's negative feelings were more than just towards home education and were potentially around learning in general.

I interpreted that for two participants, home education appeared to have had an impact on their self-concept. In particular, Charlotte interpreted how she now feels she is able to be herself and express herself, which she felt she could not do in school. This interpretation that home education had a positive impact on her self-identity is similar to previous research findings (de Carvalho & Skipper, 2019; Nelson, 2013). In addition, Charlotte expressed how her self-esteem had improved since becoming home educated. This can be considered in line with Charlotte feeling that she is now more accepted for who she is, which has led to her being able to accept herself and no longer feel that she has to fit in, like she did at school. I feel that this could suggest that Charlotte feels she now has a sense of belonging. In addition, Digby shared how home education had led to an impact on his views of himself as a person, particularly that the opportunities provided to him had made him feel that he had an advantage over his school counterparts. This finding is similar to the

children in Jones' study (2013), who indicated that they felt they had a privileged position to school children.

In regards to the literature (Daniels, 2017; Nelson, 2013; Solder, 2017), Charlotte did share about how she had experienced some judgement from others. This was usually due to people asking questions about her school attendance in regards to her appearance. However, none of the other participants spoke about this as part of their experience. It may be that in the previous research it was the parents who received the comments, not the young people. Therefore, this may explain why it is not interpreted as a key part of the experience for all of the young people in this study.

I interpreted that the majority of the participants felt that home education had led to a positive impact on their emotional wellbeing, following difficulties they had experienced when they were at school, such as anxiety and stress. In their study with young people with ASD, Daniels (2017) found that families reported that home education allowed them to meet children's social and emotional needs, as well as the opportunity to promote wellbeing. Research suggests that the prevalence of anxiety in young people with ASD is relatively high (Farrugia & Hudson, 2006). Therefore, the finding that home education appeared to be connected to perceived improved wellbeing for the majority of the participants in the present study appears quite pertinent. In addition, I got the sense from Charlotte that she now experienced a feeling of safety, as she no longer felt the need to run away and felt safe to express her emotions at home. This finding aligns with D'Arcy's (2012) study with Traveller children, where feeling safe was noted as a perceived benefit of home education. Furthermore, Charlotte gave the impression that she actually feels wanted at home, in comparison to school. Again, potentially suggesting she now feels a sense of belonging. In contrast, I felt that Bethany's experience did not appear to have the same positive impact on her emotional wellbeing, due to her negative views towards home education and how much she appeared to miss school.

This master theme made me reflect upon Maslow's (1954) Hierarchy of Needs, in particular in relation to feelings of safety; love and belongingness needs;

and esteem needs, such as feeling a sense of achievement regarding their learning, as well as positive views towards themselves as a person. In addition, in regards to SDT (Deci & Ryan, 1985), I feel that the participants are more likely to feel a sense of competence if they have positive views of themselves as learners and as a person in general.

5.6 Master Theme Five: Interpersonal Relationships

As noted by the DfE (2019a) guidance regarding home education, socialisation is considered as an important part of a young person's learning experience. I perceived there to be a mixed experience amongst the participants regarding friendships, with some participants sharing how they had maintained contact with school friends and others noting how they had lost touch. This is in line with the literature, with Arora (2006) finding that young people were able to maintain friendships, whereas Daniels (2017) noted the negative impact on friendships. Interestingly, however, two participants gave the impression that the benefits of home education outweighed any desire to rekindle their social connection with school life. In addition, some participants spoke about the opportunities to form new friendships, in particular with those with similar interests. It could be interpreted that in line with their diagnosis (APA, 2013), young people with ASD may be drawn to seeking out those who share the same common interest. This finding is similar to that found by Solder (2017), whose participants felt that they had developed friendships of a better quality since becoming home educated. Two participants spoke about having friendships with others from different cultures. I felt this suggested a level of diversity in social interactions, in line with previous research (de Carvalho & Skipper, 2019). Overall, it appeared that all participants had been able to maintain or form new friendships during their experience.

I interpreted that technology was felt to be particularly valuable for seeking social opportunities and staying connected. As mentioned in section 5.3, parental support in promoting social opportunities, such as via the use of social networking sites, appeared to be highly valued by two of the participants. Similarly, de Carvalho and Skipper (2019) found that parents valued the use of online groups for creating social opportunities. Furthermore, participants spoke about using technology to stay connected with friends and to meet new

friends. This is in line with Winstanley (2009), who reported regarding a young person having friends online. Overall, it was perceived that the wide range of activities the participants engaged in provided the opportunity for social connection with others, in line with findings by previous research (de Carvalho & Skipper, 2019; Nelson, 2013). In contrast to the research within the systematic literature review (D'Arcy, 2012; de Carvalho & Skipper, 2019; Nelson, 2013), the participants did not describe any difficulties around accessing groups or activities.

Despite this, Bethany did interpret her learning experience as lonely. I reflected upon the fact that Bethany was the only participant without siblings and who had not mentioned engaging in any learning with other young people. Daniels (2017) noted a similar finding and reflection for a particular young person with ASD in their study. It could be interpreted that Bethany's belongingness needs were not being fully met (Baumeister & Leary, 1995), which may have contributed towards her negative views regarding home education. In addition, Bethany did speak about how she has trouble making friends. This could be considered in relation to difficulties with social communication and interaction in regards to ASD (APA, 2013), which are reported to be linked to potential difficulties with social functioning (WHO, 2018). In addition, two participants spoke about how they are not one to seek out social situations and value time alone. However, Charlotte did note that this can reinforce her dislike of going out. This led me to reflect upon how young people with ASD's skills and desires for social interactions may vary. Some young people may need support and plenty of opportunities to develop their social skills and to seek social connection, whereas others may need that time alone and to be provided with the option to socialise on their own terms. Overall, similar to findings by Arora (2006) and de Carvalho and Skipper (2019), the majority of participants perceived that they had ample opportunities for socialisation to suit their personal needs.

Two participants shared how they perceived that their relationship as a family had developed since becoming home educated. Similar to findings in D'Arcy's (2012) study, Charlotte spoke about being able to spend more time as a family. Further to this, Charlotte emphasised how she felt the family are now more

open with each other and there is less tension. Similarly, Digby shared how he felt his relationship with his mother has developed and they are now more understanding of one another. Therefore, it appeared that the benefits of home education were wider than just for the individual participants. This led me to reflect upon whether the perceived benefits on the young person as mentioned across the other master themes led to an impact on the whole family relationship. For example, Charlotte noted how there were now less meltdowns for her mother, which I felt would likely have had a positive impact on their relationship. This finding contrasts somewhat with Daniels' (2017) study regarding home education for young people with ASD, which reported that parents noted that home education had led to some tension in their relationship with their child.

5.7 Methodological Considerations

IPA aims to understand how particular individuals make sense of a particular experience (Smith et al., 2009). The present research aimed to gather an understanding and insight into the lived experience of home education for young people with ASD. Therefore, IPA was deemed as an appropriate approach to answer the proposed research question. Due to its idiographic nature, it allows for an in-depth exploration into individual experiences. However, I recognise that this only allows for a small sample size to be recruited, with the present study including four participants. In addition, I acknowledge that the participants' accounts will have been influenced by contextual factors. The participants were all recruited from one LA and were all aged between 13-15 years old. Furthermore, I recognise that the families who came forward to take part in the research are likely to be a biased sample due to the topic area being explored. In particular, all of the families were known to the LA. Due to home educating families not having to register their children, I was unable to reach out to these 'unknown' families. In addition, during one of my initial visits, one of the participant's mothers shared how she knows lots of home educating families who choose not to take part in research as they feel sceptical about it. Therefore, the young people who participated cannot be considered representative of the wider home educated population. Nevertheless, IPA does not aim for generalisability but to gain insight into

individual perceptions of an experience, which may shed light onto similar experiences for others (Smith et al., 2009). In line with Yardley's (2000) criteria, I have aimed to be transparent through providing detailed information regarding the participants. In addition, I felt that the small sample size allowed for a detailed and rich analysis of each individual's account to be conducted.

As a result of challenges with recruitment, I was unable to conduct a pilot study to test out the semi-structured interview schedule. I feel that if a pilot had gone ahead, I would likely have not included some of the interview questions. In particular, the participants appeared to struggle with the circular questions, such as 'Do you think your parents feel home education has helped you in any way?' Upon reflection, in line with ToM, young people with ASD are likely to struggle with such questions that involve putting themselves in another's shoes (Baron-Cohen, 2001). Despite the lack of a pilot study, I did seek feedback from an EP who specialises in ASD, as well as consulting the literature on carrying out research with young people with ASD. As a result, I devised a range of ideas and resources to support the interviews, some of which were utilised, such as looking at photographs to support dialogue. However, none of the participants chose to utilise other methods to support them, such as the speech bubble templates or drawing, possibly due to the older age range of the participants. I felt that it was still important to include these questions as it would be unethical to make assumptions regarding the participants' ability and to not allow them the opportunity to share their views.

Furthermore, as acknowledged in Chapter 3, IPA does rely on the use of language and I recognise that this may be a challenge for some young people with ASD. As well as the difficulties with certain questions as noted above, I found that some of the participants appeared to take some questions quite literally and gave the impression that they felt they had to give a right answer. In addition, I felt that some of the participants struggled to talk about feelings and tended to provide more concrete and factual answers about their experience. Therefore, this did make it quite challenging to elicit their interpretations of their experiences. However, I felt that this did not stop the participants taking part and although some of the data may not have been as

rich or perhaps interpretative, I felt that it was important for their voices to be heard.

As suggested for IPA research, I utilised a semi-structured interview schedule (Smith et al., 2009). I tried to ensure my questions were as open as possible, whilst bearing in mind that young people with ASD may struggle with questions that are too open. I do acknowledge that on occasion I may have asked closed or leading questions. In particular, I felt I had to close questions down, be slightly more direct and use more prompts for some participants. In addition, I recognise that I may have missed opportunities for probing and eliciting further information, particularly in earlier interviews. I feel that this was a skill that developed as I conducted more interviews. I felt that I became more comfortable with allowing silences and time and not moving on too quickly to the next question.

I also recognise that my training as an EP may have had an impact on my interviewing skills. A key part of the training is around active listening skills and I feel that this is something that is now deeply engrained. Therefore, I did find it quite a challenge to adopt a neutral position during the interview, such as not sharing things about myself or expressing an interest in what the participants were saying. In particular, in three of the interviews, the participants spoke in great detail about their particular interests. I wanted to allow them to talk freely about what was important to them and although this did result in a lot of data to manage, I felt that it emphasised how their interests were a crucial part of their experience. In addition, I feel that these active listening skills helped to build rapport and may have actually led to the elicitation of richer and more detailed data.

One of the biggest challenges I encountered when conducting the interviews was being able to focus the interview solely on the young person. In three of the interviews, at least one parent was present. I had indicated that my focus was on the views of the young person and their interpretation of their experience of being home educated. However, the parents that were present still offered their contributions, to varying degrees, and on one occasion actually prompted or asked the young person questions themselves.

Therefore, this means that some of the views that were shared by the young people may have been influenced by parental contributions. In addition, I noticed that parental presence sometimes meant that the young people turned to their parents for support, particularly if they were struggling to remember something. Furthermore, I did wonder whether parental presence had an impact on the views the participants were willing to share, due to the fact their parents were listening. I feel that I perhaps should have set more explicit ground rules around my focus being on only hearing the voice of the young person. However, from an ethical perspective, I felt it was important for parents to be present if the young person wished. Additionally, the young people may have needed to lean upon their parents as a scaffold and taking this option away may have caused a level of anxiety. Also, parents had chosen to let me into their home to carry out my research and it would have been insensitive to shut them out from the process.

On that note, this emphasises the challenges that can be encountered when carrying out research in participants' homes. I was in their private space and becoming part of their private lives and had to ensure I was respecting this. Furthermore, upon reflection, I feel that parents wanting to contribute may be due to the fact that home education is not an isolated experience for young people but is a shared venture as a family. In addition, the parents involved appeared to be very passionate and held strong views about home education, therefore may have wanted to ensure their voices were being heard too. One parent in particular expressed concerns during my initial visit that her child would not portray a true picture of what was happening for him and she worried that if he missed things out, this might paint home education in a bad light. This experience has enabled me to reflect upon the potential reasons that the studies included in my systematic literature review may have included the views of both parents and young people, as although I did try, it does appear difficult to explore them fully in isolation.

In addition, as a key part of IPA relies on the interpretation of the researcher, I acknowledge that there may have been a level of bias in my interpretation due to any preconceptions and prior knowledge I may have had. However, I did attempt to bracket off my views through keeping a research diary and

ensuring that I analysed each transcript separately. Nevertheless, I acknowledge that it would not have been possible to entirely bracket off my views but I recognise that this is part of the hermeneutic circle of IPA. I utilised fellow researcher and research supervisor support throughout the data analysis process to enable me to discuss my interpretations and the themes generated.

I acknowledge that some of the interview questions asked and thus themes developed may appear quite factual. However, the focus of the research was to explore the lived experience of being home educated and it was felt that these questions were important to ask to truly capture this. In addition, I feel that the themes generated were also influenced by the nature of conducting research with young people with ASD, particularly that some of the participants' responses may not have been as interpretative as noted above. Additionally, this was the first time I have conducted an IPA study, which is described in further detail in section 5.8 below. I feel that all of these factors had an influence on the study design, data collection and data analysis.

5.8 Researcher Reflections

This was the first time I have conducted an IPA research study. Therefore, it is important to acknowledge that my level of interpretation may not have been as detailed as that of an advanced IPA researcher. Upon reflection, I feel that I perhaps could have carried out a deeper level of analysis for some of the participants. In particular, in relation to Bethany's experience, I found that my interpretations were somewhat limited by the responses that Bethany gave, which were often quite brief. However, I feel that I perhaps could have gone further beyond the surface through exploring the relationship between Bethany and her father in more detail, particularly their differing views regarding school and home education and the impact this may have had on Bethany and her interpretation of her experience. It was apparent that Bethany and her father had strong and opposing views about Bethany's educational experiences and this is likely to have played a key part in her experience and her apparent negative views towards home education. Bethany's experience appeared to be in stark contrast to the other participants who I felt held a similar viewpoint to their parents, which appeared to have an influence on how they interpreted

the role their parents played in their home education experience, as well as their positive views about home education. I acknowledge that my position as a novice IPA researcher is a limitation in the present study, in relation to the depth of analysis that was carried out. As noted by Smith et al. (2009), those new to IPA tend to adopt lower levels of interpretation, with interpretative skills developing as they grow more confident and gain more experience in conducting IPA studies.

In addition, as noted in Chapter 3, my background has tended to be in research of a quantitative nature. I saw this opportunity as an exciting challenge to develop my skills and learn about a new research approach. Furthermore, this was the first time that I have interviewed young people with ASD. I feel that the skills I have developed will benefit me both in relation to future research opportunities but also when gathering the views of young people within my professional practice. I feel that I have developed my skills as an interviewer, particularly around the challenges that may be faced and adaptations that can be made when interviewing young people with ASD.

I began this research journey with very limited knowledge and experience about home education. I feel that it has been an eye opening and insightful learning journey that will hopefully support me within my practice in the future and help me to support others. I feel extremely privileged to have had the opportunity to hear about the experiences of the young people who took part.

5.9 Dissemination of Research Findings

As noted in Section 3.9.2, I had planned to carry out member checks with the participants, however upon discussion within research supervision it was felt that this was not appropriate to an IPA research study. Therefore, I have arranged with the participants that I will share the findings from the study with them upon final completion of the research. I will provide them with an overall summary of the findings in an accessible format for the young people. This will also allow an opportunity for a final debrief following their participation. In addition, I will disseminate the findings within the EPS and EHE team in the LA in which the research was carried out.

5.10 Implications for Practice

5.10.1 Educational Psychologists

As noted in Chapter 2, at present EPs are usually only involved in supporting home educated young people in relation to statutory work, typically as part of the EHCP needs assessment process (Bowers, 2017). However, due to the rising number of young people becoming home educated, this perhaps calls for a reconsideration of how EPs could become more involved in supporting home educated young people (Arora, 2003). EPs are well placed to offer advice and guidance to home educating families regarding teaching and support, as well as links within the community (Jones, 2013). This would be particularly valuable for young people like Bethany and her family who may be struggling with their home education.

The findings from the present study could be used to develop EPs' understanding regarding what home education is like for young people. In particular, EPs have a key role to play in supporting young people with SEN, including those with ASD. Therefore, the present study will hopefully be even more valuable. It is acknowledged that this research is based on the views of a small sample of home educated young people. However, it is hoped that these findings, alongside previous research, will offer some insight into the lived experience of home education. Another potential way to enhance EPs knowledge and skills could be through taught input regarding home education as part of the doctoral training course.

In relation to EPs' current practice, the findings from this research, particularly regarding the reported benefits of home education, could be drawn upon to support EPs when developing strategies to support home educating families, for example as part of the EHCP needs assessment process. In particular, drawing on theories, such as ASD related theories, the belongingness hypothesis (Baumeister & Leary, 1995) and SDT (Deci & Ryan, 1985), could support EPs with developing strategies to promote wellbeing and engagement with learning. In addition, they may help EPs to support schools to develop interventions to support young people who may be experiencing a difficult time at school or where staff are struggling to meet their needs.

Furthermore, the majority of the participants in the present study spoke about plans for accessing further education in the future. This is in line with Lees and Nicholson's (2017) observation that many home educated young people return to the education system for post-16 education. Due to EPs working with young people aged up to 25 years old (SEND CoP, DfE & DoH, 2015), this may mean that they could be involved in supporting these young people. Therefore, it is hoped that research such as this study will develop EPs' knowledge regarding what their experience may have been like to enable them to support the young people with their transitions and their futures.

Another potential implication for EPs that can arise from this study is around gathering the views of young people with ASD. As previously noted, EPs work with young people with ASD on a regular basis. In addition, gathering the views of young people is a key part of their role (Fox, 2015). EPs can learn from the challenges I faced in this research, as well as potential approaches that can be utilised to support and empower young people to share their views.

5.10.2 Local Authorities and Wider Government

It is hoped that the present research can add to the evidence-base to enable LAs to further expand their insight into the lived experience of home education. More specifically, expanding their insight into the experience for young people with ASD and from the eyes of the young people themselves. An implication of this could be that LAs can use the findings from this research to inform their local guidance. In addition, they could use it to support parents who may be considering home education to make an informed decision.

I also feel that this research could have an implication at a national government level, in relation to informing the development of policy and guidance regarding home education. In particular, it may be of interest to the DfE when reviewing their guidance for LAs and parents, specifically in regards to young people with SEN.

In addition, it is hoped that the findings from this research can be of value to LAs when supporting and advising home educated families. In particular, access to the internet and technology appeared to be particularly valuable in the present study. LAs could develop guidance regarding online programmes

and resources that are available to support home educating families. In addition, LAs can develop their knowledge regarding some of the difficulties that might be faced by young people with ASD who are being home educated so that they can support them. More specifically, findings in the present study appeared to indicate that embarking upon home education without the company of a sibling may become quite isolating. Therefore, LAs may be able to offer guidance or signpost families to opportunities for shared learning experiences.

Furthermore, although the findings of this research are only based on four young people, it may be of interest to LAs that the majority of the participants were thinking about returning to further education in the future. This has an implication for LAs regarding how they can support these young people when they return. In addition, if LAs know that many home educated young people return to the education system, it might be helpful for them to provide support regarding accessing and enrolling in courses and to prepare for making the transition.

It is acknowledged in the literature review that a number of home educating families feel that there is a lack of support from the LA (Arora, 2006; Nelson, 2013). This might contribute to the reason that some families disengage with the LA. Therefore, if the LA reaches out to families to offer such support and guidance, it may encourage more families to engage and to develop a positive relationship with the LA.

The LA could link up with schools when families choose to home educate to ensure they are made aware of the support that is available at the earliest opportunity. This may be achieved through leaflets detailing the support and advice that the LA can offer. This in turn could encourage families to see the LA as a supportive service from the outset and be more likely to engage with them moving forward.

In addition, the LA could consider offering parent support groups or focus groups, with the findings from the present study acting as a guide for particular areas to explore. The information gathered from families during these groups

could further inform and develop the LA's offer, which could help them to meet the needs of home educating families.

I acknowledge that some LAs may already be offering a high level of support to home educating families. However, this research might encourage those LAs who are not currently offering such support to consider developing their services, as well as providing some ideas regarding the support that could be offered. In particular, it may help LAs when they are trying to reach out to those 'unknown' families.

5.10.3 Schools

Despite the focus of the present research being on the experience of home education, the findings could support schools regarding possible strategies that may help young people with ASD in school. Although this varies between individuals, particular ideas around offering a degree of choice, a level of freedom, and drawing on their interests could be helpful, in line with SDT (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Nevertheless, it is important to recognise that home education may still be viewed as the favoured choice for many young people due to the individuality it is able to offer, which can be quite challenging for schools. However, where home education is not the preferred option and young people would rather be in school, it is hoped that these findings would be informative and supportive.

5.10.4 Young People and Parents/Carers

The findings from this research will hopefully be helpful to those families who currently home educate. In particular, it may provide them with a number of ideas as to what might be supportive for young people with ASD, although bearing in mind these findings are in relation to a small number of participants and the importance of taking into consideration the individuality of each young person with ASD. This is emphasised in the finding regarding adopting a child-centred approach to learning. The findings may be particularly helpful for families who are just embarking upon their home education journey and may provide them with some ideas as to the types of approaches that may be supportive, such as a degree of flexibility, being guided by the young person's interests and tailoring to individual needs. In addition, it might help them to see

the potential value of seeking outside support for some young people, such as tutors or workshops. Also, the findings regarding interpersonal relationships may help families to ensure that social opportunities are being provided, whilst taking into account the young person's needs and desires in regards to socialisation.

In addition, the findings from this study may support families who feel quite sceptical about research to see the value of taking part in research around home education. This may enable more representative samples of home educating families' views to be captured in the future.

Finally, it is hoped that this research will provide families who may be considering home education the opportunity to gain a level of insight into what the experience may be like for young people with ASD. The findings from this study may support them in weighing up any possible advantages and disadvantages as experienced by these particular young people, and in turn support them in making an informed decision.

5.11 Future Research

As a reflection of the challenge I experienced with gathering the views of only young people, it appears that it is important and fruitful to obtain the views of parents too. However, from exploring the current research, alongside the present study, I would suggest for future research to ensure that these interviews are held separately and analysed separately to ensure that the young person's voice does not become lost or overpowered by parental views. Future researchers should attempt to set explicit ground rules when exploring the views of young people to try to capture the views of the young person through their eyes alone, whilst ensuring this is done with respect and sensitivity.

Furthermore, it is important for future research gathering the views of young people with ASD to carefully consider the style of questions that are included in interview schedules. I would suggest either avoiding circular questions or considering carefully how young people could be supported to answer them. Opportunities to pilot questions would be extremely advantageous. It might be a good idea to ask older young people with ASD what resources would help

them to share their views and possibly test some of these out beforehand. In addition, drawing on other approaches to supplement interviews may enable richer data to be captured. One idea that is suggested by Smith et al. (2009) is the use of observations. Other ideas could be diary entries or creative approaches, such as collages or poems. The participants in the present study appeared to be passionate about particular interests. It might be helpful to find out about these interests beforehand to see if this could help them to share their views, such as using drawing or painting if they are particularly interested in art.

One particular topic that seemed to be quite prominent in the present research was around the value of technology, both for learning and also for social opportunities. Future research exploring this in further detail could potentially develop the knowledge base around the support available for home educating families.

As this study focused on young people with ASD, it seems important that the views of young people with other SENs are captured. In addition, the present study focused on young people within Key Stages 3 and 4. It would be interesting to see if younger children interpret that they have as much autonomy as the adolescents in this study.

Finally, I feel that an area of research that would be particularly valuable is around exploring the EP role in working with home educated families. One idea could be a survey to ascertain the current picture, such as EPs' knowledge on home education and how much involvement they have had supporting home educated young people, as well as where they see their role moving forward in line with the rising numbers of young people becoming home educated.

6 Conclusion

The number of young people becoming home educated has risen considerably over recent years (ADCS, 2019). In particular, there appears to have been a rise in young people with SEN being home educated (Hopwood et al., 2007; Jeffreys, 2017). More specifically, several research studies focusing on home education for young people with SEN found that a high number of participants had a diagnosis of ASD (Kendall & Taylor, 2016; Parsons & Lewis, 2010). Despite this, research that has explored the views of young people with ASD about their home education experience is extremely limited. To my knowledge no research has been conducted that solely focuses on the views of young people with ASD in the UK. Therefore, the current research aimed to offer a unique contribution to the evidence-base through exploring the views of young people with ASD regarding their experiences of being home educated. Additionally, the study focused on young people within the Key Stage 3 and 4 age ranges, due to these stages being found to have a higher number of children being registered as home educated (ADCS, 2019).

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with four young people with ASD. The use of IPA offered a unique and detailed idiographic analysis of each participant's experience. The approach enabled commonalities to be generated across all participants to elicit prominent themes. It is hoped that these findings can shed light on the experience of home education for other young people with ASD.

A number of prominent themes were interpreted through the in-depth analysis regarding how young people with ASD interpret their experience of being home educated, although there was some variation to the degree in which some of these themes manifested amongst the participants. It was perceived that the participants engaged in a wide range of learning experiences, including what I considered as more formal learning activities, as well as wider learning opportunities. Access to support from others and resources appeared to play an important part in the participants' experiences. I interpreted that the participants felt that their experience was in line with a child-centred approach, including opportunities to pursue interests; a sense of freedom and flexibility;

and opportunities to tailor their experience to suit their needs. I felt that the participants perceived that home education had led to an impact on their learning, self-concept and emotional wellbeing. Finally, themes arose regarding interpersonal relationships, including the opportunity to connect with others and the perceived impact on family relationships.

The present research has provided an opportunity for the voices of young people with ASD to be heard, which are often overlooked. Although some challenges were experienced in eliciting the young people's views, it is anticipated that the learning from these challenges will be of benefit to future research. Findings from the present study are generally in line with previous research findings, including research that has not solely focused on young people with ASD. As noted within Chapter 2, this may be in relation to many other research studies including young people with ASD unintentionally. Furthermore, there was some divergence between the findings in this study and previous research, possibly in relation to the present research exploring the experience solely from the eyes of the young people. Considering the findings in light of a range of theoretical perspectives, particularly theories in relation to ASD, further illuminated the home education experience for these young people.

It is hoped that the findings from this study will add to the knowledge and evidence-base around home education and thus develop the understanding and insight of families, professionals, the LA and the wider government. Furthermore, this research will hopefully add to the need for a reconsideration of how EPs can support home educating families moving forward. It is important to acknowledge that I am in no way concluding that either home education or school education is more superior than the other. Although home education appeared to be perceived as a positive experience for the majority of the participants, it must be recognised that it may not be a positive experience for all. It could be suggested that some of the strategies that have been identified as beneficial for these young people may help inform practice in both home and school settings, whilst raising awareness of some of the challenges home educated young people with ASD may face.

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8 Appendices

Appendix 1 – Table showing papers excluded at full text retrieval

Author	Reason for exclusion
Bhopal and Myers (2016)	Did not gather child's views
Bower (2019)	Was not about experience of being home educated but about the reasons why the young person became home educated, one young person was included in interview, not clear how much they said
Kraftl (2013)	Says interviewed families including parents and children but then says the paper will only focus on the interviews with the parents
Morton (2010)	Focus on parents' views
Myers and Bhopal (2018)	Did not gather child's views
Rothermel (2000)	Did not gather views of children, was focused on assessing them pre and post Reception age on their learning
Smith and Nelson (2015)	Survey of parents – did not gather views of children

Appendix 2 – Table showing further details of included studies in systematic literature review

Study	Methodology	Participants	Research Questions	Key Findings
Arora (2006) *Peer-reviewed*	Phase one – questionnaires when began home education. Phase two – interviews with families who had been home-educating for >18 months. Transcribed and analysed using open coding and content analysis.	Phase one – 65 families. Phase two – 12 families, including 17 young people (10 girls, 7 boys), aged 6-17 years old – eight had SEN, two of which had Asperger's Syndrome). It appears that home educators and children were interviewed together.	1. What are the reasons for families deciding on home education? 2. Do any of the children have special educational needs? 3. What are the arrangements for home education? 4. What support would home educating parents find useful and effective?	Due to the focus of the review question, I will only summarise the key findings from Phase two, as Phase one was not about the experience of being home educated. SEN needs not being met was noted as the main reason for home education. In relation to how education was being carried out in the home, three of the families had a tutor that supported the children, in one family the Grandmother provided the teaching and in another a 15-year-old girl took responsibility for her education herself. In the rest of the families, it was the mother who took the main responsibility. Five families reported that they regularly used the computer to support their learning. Most families noted that they followed an explicit structure. Several children shared that they felt they had more time to complete their work, following their own pace. The timetable was generally in line with the core subjects of the National Curriculum, with a focus on basic skills and knowledge, whilst still allowing some negotiation with the young person. Two families had produced their own materials. There was a mixed view on support received. None of the families were current members of any home education support groups. One young person was being flexi-schooled and attended a special school part-time. Families generally felt they would have liked more support from the LA, particularly in relation to assessing progress, accessing resources and accessing advice. Almost all families would have wanted their child to attend school, with some still considering how this could happen. Strong view that the children were much happier and learning much more than they would have in school. Overall, most of the young people did not feel they were missing out on a social life.
Daniels (2017)	Phase one - Questionnaires	Eight families - 15 parents	1. What are the characteristics of	Due to the focus of the review question, I will summarise the key findings related to Research Questions 2, 3 and 4.

Unpublished thesis	with parents for background information. Semi-structured interviews with parents and children and observations. Phase two – follow up telephone interviews with parents. Analysed using thematic analysis.	completed the questionnaire and were interviewed. Eight children (aged 5-11 years old) with ASD were interviewed. Interviews with parents and children were conducted separately. Observations took place in four homes. Ten parents took part in a follow up interview.	parents and their children with ASD that are being home educated? 2. Why do parents become home educators and what are the processes involved? 3. How do parents organise home education for their children with ASD; what pedagogical approaches and practices do they employ; and what resources do they use? 4. What do parents and their children with ASD perceive to be the advantages and disadvantages of home educating?	The main reasons for home education were professionals having a lack of understanding and knowledge regarding their child's needs; child's dislike of school; school's failures to promote children's needs; school strategies being short lived; and parental knowledge and experience of alternative education. Six of the families told the LA about their decision to home educate and carried out their own research about home education. Learning appeared to be child-centred and organised flexibly in response to the children's individual needs and interests, with most families ensuring there was some focus on literacy and numeracy. Approaches appeared to have evolved over time, with the majority following a semi-structured approach. Majority did not use visual structures. There was a focus on learning through concrete and kinaesthetic activities. The majority used books, digital resources and engaged in activities outside of the home, with some utilising tutors. There had been a change in roles and responsibilities in the families. The advantages noted were parents having intimate knowledge about their children to enable them to meet their learning needs; ability to tailor the curriculum; ability to meet their children's social and emotional needs (including sensory needs); ability to manage and promote social situations; and the ability to promote well-being and enhance current skills. The disadvantages noted were related to financial difficulties; prejudice from others; responsibility on parents; and impact on friendships.
D'Arcy (2012) *Unpublished thesis*	Semi-structured interviews with families. Transcribed and analysed using	11 Traveller families - children were involved in sharing their views within	1. Why do Traveller families choose home education? 2. What are the experiences and	There were two main themes: 1. 'Problems in school: bullying and discrimination' – which led to families choosing home education. 2. 'EHE as a "Suitable Education"?' - Families noted many perceived benefits, including children being safe and protected, being able to learn without having to go to school, parental control over what is learned, flexibility, more time spent as a

	an approach called ladder of abstraction, alongside critical race analysis. Also, created three vignettes to allow further insight into a select few families' experiences.	some of the families. Interviews were also carried out with two professionals responsible for home education.	perceptions of Traveller families regarding home education? 3. Are there emerging equality issues concerning Traveller families' use of home education?	family, learning can focus on the Traveller lifestyle and the children can focus on the way of life that they are used to. The majority of families utilised a tutor, mainly due to the confidence in their own ability. There was a mix between routine and flexible approaches. Learning tended to focus on basic skills, such as reading, writing and spelling, as well as those in line with the family's needs, such as supporting the family business. The author concluded that there were push factors, namely problems in school, with school being a place of inequality and pull factors, namely the safety of home education. However, home education posed inequality issues too, mainly access to a 'suitable education', particularly in relation to financial and social resources.
de Carvalho and Skipper (2019) *Peer-reviewed*	Semi-structured interviews. Use of social interaction diaries and reflection sheets to aid with recall. Transcribed and analysed using thematic analysis.	Three girls (aged 11-14 years old, one had a diagnosis of ASD) and their mothers. Interviews were conducted separately.	How do home educated adolescents and their parents experience and understand socialisation?	Three main themes were identified: 4. 'Sense of community within home education networks', which was in relation to using networks to meet people and seek support. Participants reported that there was a common interest, shared sense of identity and a sense of acceptance and understanding. Overall, the participants had a positive sense of community and found it easy to access social opportunities. 5. 'Diversity of their social experiences and networks', which was in relation to a wide range of activities that the girls took part in as well as the diverse group of people they socialised with. It was felt that there was a better quality of socialisation during learning activities and that diversity promoted the development of individual identities. Overall, the participants felt these experiences improved social skills and were of better quality to social interaction experiences at school. 6. 'The importance of choice in socialising opportunities', which related to the girls having an element of choice and freedom regarding the social activities and contacts they engaged in. It was felt that most groups were targeted to younger children and there was little available for teenagers.
Jones (2013)	Photovoice - children were asked to take photographs to represent their	Nine young people from six families (aged 7-14 years old, one had a	What are home educated children's experiences and	Three main themes were identified: 4. 'Identity and development of self', which related to how the children compared themselves to other children and the ownership they felt they had over their own learning, with older children's learning choices being influenced by their identity and sense of self.

Peer-reviewed	home education experience. These were supplemented with either verbal or written narratives. Analysed using grounded theory.	diagnosis of ASD).	perceptions of home education?	5. 'Experiences and perceptions of learning', where the children noted a balance between adult led and child led learning, indicating that choice played an important role in learning being motivated by interest, leading to enthusiasm and passion. Learning does not appear to fall into distinct categories of 'formal' or 'informal' but is more a continuum. 6. 'Relationships with others', which was related to the support and encouragement the children got from others. The children indicated that this had an influence over their learning choices and interests.
Nelson (2013) *Unpublished thesis*	Semi-structured interviews, creative child-centred activities (photo collages and short stories) and focus groups. Transcribed and analysed using the constant comparative method and network analysis.	15 parents, eight children (5 girls, 3 boys, aged 7-15 years old) and 41 young people (26 male, 15 female, aged 16-25 years old). Interviews/focus groups were conducted separately.	1. Why is home education undertaken by families? 2. How is home education practised? 3. What are the experiences of parents, children and young people who have been or are currently engaged in this provision? 4. What are the outcomes for home educated young people concerning qualifications and employment?	The reasons for becoming home educated were dissatisfaction with school (bullying, SEN provision and the 'one size fits all' approach of the National Curriculum), siblings being home educated, lifestyle or religious choices, or other reasons, such as school phobia. The home education approaches utilised fell into three categories: structured, semi-structured or autonomous, with the majority adopting a semi-structured approach. However, despite the approach taken, practices and activities were diverse. Support from other family members and home education groups were found to be important. In relation to experiences, data was divided into benefits and disadvantages. The benefits were having one to one interactions; learning through conversations; travel, such as visiting places outside the home; there being no time pressure; being able to pursue interests; ability to adapt learning styles as needed; helping children to develop as a person; enhancing life skills, such as independent skills. The disadvantages were financial struggles, particularly as many parents had to leave employment to become home educators; problems in relation to access, in relation to exams, college places and work experience; difficulties accessing specialist support or facilities; lack of support from the local authority; lack of interactions with peers, with a consensus that most groups are targeted at younger children.

			5. What are the views of parents, children and young people regarding how home education is perceived in society? 6. What changes would parents, children and young people like to see for home education moving forward?	The author found that many of the young people went on to achieve various qualifications and pursue further education, however this was not without challenges for some young people. In regards to others' views regarding home education, key findings were regarding initial scepticism of family members; societal reaction, in regards to many people being unaware of the legal status of home education and stereotypes, particularly in relation to socialisation and the media's representation. Four themes arose regarding the future of home education. These were support for funding and resources; local authority training; research; and a greater awareness.
Solder (2017) *Unpublished thesis*	Phase one – parental questionnaires. Phase two – case-study approach, 'conversations' with families, utilising a narrative approach and creative resources. Informal conversations with parents	Phase one – 60 parents. Phase two – Five families – eight young people (6 girls, 2 boys, aged 4-13 years old) and their parent/s – data gathered as a family unit. One young person was no longer being home educated.	1. What are the main factors for parents choosing to home educate? 2. What aspirations do home educators have for their children? 3. What impact does legislation have on home education practice? 4. What are the thoughts and emotions associated with experiences of	The author analysed the findings from Phase One separately to Phase Two, therefore I will only summarise the key themes from Phase Two from the across case analysis: • Relationships, including: o 'Parent-child relationships', which were generally supportive and non-directive o 'Sibling relationships', which were seen as being positive and supportive in relation to completing work. o 'Friendships', which were seen as being important and included friends of various ages, as well as school educated friends. • Views on learning and beyond, including: o 'School', which was generally viewed as negative and some young people had experienced bullying. o 'Learning environment', which included learning taking place in different locations, attendance at groups and "colourful and energetic" homes o 'Learning', where there was found to be a variation in structure, sometimes being led by child's interests, being practical and the children expressing excitement about their learning o 'Ambitions', in that the children were ambitious about their future and did not perceive that being home educated would be a barrier to success

	during visit to a Forest School.
	
	Analysed using critical discourse analysis, the listening guide, as well as thematic analysis for across case analysis. Development of 'I Poems' for children over 10 years old.
			home education for young people?
			5. What are the thoughts and emotions associated with experiences of home education for parents?
			6. How did the young people perceive the process of talking about, and reading back, their experiences?
			7. How did the young people describe the process of being listened to?
				• Home education and lifestyle choices, including:
				  ○ 'Home education', where families felt confident in children's abilities for social interaction, felt that the children had a better general knowledge and that home education needs to be tailored to individual needs
				  ○ 'Shared values and beliefs', which included views that children should be guided by their interests, there should be an encouragement of a love for learning and curiosity and that there should be less emphasis on meeting age related expectations
				  ○ 'Lifestyle', including alternative choices such as no television, being vegan and religious views
				  ○ 'Others' perceptions', where all families had faced negative comments from others about their choices
				
				The author gave a general summary of their findings in relation to Research Question 4, which is most pertinent to this review:
				• Young people felt that they had developed friendships of better quality.
				• They noted feeling more confident which they linked to their home education experience and opportunities to engage with a range of adults and children across different situations.
				• They felt that their different educational approach did not interfere with friendships.
				• The young people expressed excitement when talking about their learning experiences.
				• All young people shared that they were happy being home educated.

Winstanley (2009) *Peer-reviewed*	Informal interviews with young people and parents during various workshops across a 13-month period. The author draws on	Author notes that quotations are from a sample of 27 children (aged 7-17 years old) and their parents but exact number of actual	No clear research question. Focus is on the home education experience of gifted children.	No clear themes were drawn with the author using quotations more generally. The author discussed a number of key reasons for parents of gifted children choosing home education, noting that these are drawn from the literature and their own research. These are lack of challenge, socialisation concerns, testing and assessment (for example, wanting their children to take early examinations), curriculum (fostering children's particular abilities), mismatch of values and beliefs (regarding the child's ability) and children's dyssynchronous development (schools struggling to manage gifted children's uneven development).

	quotations, unclear how data was analysed.	participants is unclear.		The author notes that some families feel that they are already learning more at home than school anyway. Home education is a temporary set up to bridge difficult gaps for some children. They also note different models such as ‘small schools’ where most of the learning takes place in the home, with regular trips planned through networks. A quote from one young person noted that ‘small school’ activities enable them to see friends but not as often as in school. The author acknowledges the pros and cons of home education, drawing on quotes from the young people. One young person shared that they have friends online but commented on the convenience of things, such as needing to take a bus to the library, whereas at school it was all in one place. A further child commented on missing the PE lessons at school.

Appendix 3 – Table showing Weight of Evidence framework criteria using Gough (2007)

	Weight of Evidence A Generic judgement of the study in its own terms, therefore not related to the review question.	**Weight of Evidence B** How appropriate is the design for answering the review question? Is it fit for purpose?	**Weight of Evidence C** How relevant is the focus of the study for answering the review question?
High	Peer reviewed publication AND clear description of participant characteristics, research questions, data gathering approaches, data analysis, findings, ethical considerations and limitations.	Qualitative methodology used such as interviews, along with appropriate and robust qualitative data analysis.	Focus solely on obtaining the views of young people who are being home educated.
Medium	Peer reviewed publication AND some description of participant characteristics, research questions, data gathering approaches, data analysis, findings, ethical considerations and limitations. OR unpublished research AND clear description of participant characteristics, research questions, data gathering approaches, data analysis, findings, ethical considerations and limitations.	Qualitative approach taken such as interviews but only an anecdotal account of data reported, without any form of robust analysis.	Equal focus given to young people and family members about their experience of home education.
Low	Peer-reviewed OR unpublished research AND limited description of participant characteristics, research questions, data gathering approaches, data analysis, findings, ethical considerations and limitations with lack of detail or clarity.	Quantitative data only.	Minimal focus on the views of young people.

Appendix 4 - Weight of Evidence judgements

Weight of Evidence A: Generic judgement of the study in its own terms, therefore not related to the review question

Ratings were made using the criteria listed in the framework as detailed in Appendix 3. Unpublished research was only able to achieve a maximum rating of Medium due to the criteria set. This was due to unpublished research not being subject to the strict review process that published research adheres to.

Overall ratings were made based on the category with the most points listed.

		Arora (2006)	Daniels (2017)	D'Arcy (2012)	de Carvalho and Skipper (2019)	Jones (2013)	Nelson (2013)	Solder (2017)	Winstanley (2009)
Weight of Evidence A	High	• Peer-reviewed • Research questions • Data gathering approaches • Data analysis • Findings			• Peer-reviewed • Participant characteristics • Research questions • Data gathering approaches • Data analysis • Findings • Ethical considerations • Limitations	• Peer-reviewed • Participant characteristics • Research questions • Data gathering approaches • Data analysis • Findings • Ethical considerations			• Peer- reviewed
	Medium	• Participant characteristics • Limitations	• Unpublished • Participant characteristics • Research questions • Data gathering approaches • Data analysis • Ethical considerations	• Unpublished • Research questions • Data gathering approaches • Data analysis • Findings • Ethical considerations • Limitations		• Limitations	• Unpublished • Participant characteristics • Research questions • Data gathering approaches • Data analysis • Findings • Ethical considerations • Limitations	• Unpublished • Participant characteristics • Research questions • Data gathering approaches • Data analysis • Ethical considerations • Limitations	• Participant characteristics • Findings

	Low	• Ethical considerations	• Findings - Mentions 8 family codes but not how they link to answering the research questions clearly • Limitations	• Participant characteristics – nothing on ages, gender				• Findings - Mentions themes but not how they link to answering the research questions clearly	• Research questions • Data gathering approaches • Data analysis • Ethical considerations • Limitations
Rating		High	Medium	Medium	High	High	Medium	Medium	Low

Weight of Evidence B: How appropriate is the design for answering the review question? Is it fit for purpose?

Ratings were made using the criteria listed in the framework as detailed in Appendix 3.

		Arora (2006)	Daniels (2017)	D'Arcy (2012)	de Carvalho and Skipper (2019)	Jones (2013)	Nelson (2013)	Solder (2017)	Winstanley (2009)
Weight of Evidence B	High	Qualitative interviews and analysed using open coding and content analysis	Qualitative interviews and observations and analysed using thematic analysis	Qualitative interviews and analysed using ladder of abstraction, alongside critical race analysis. Also created vignettes for a few families	Qualitative interviews and analysed using thematic analysis	Qualitative approach using Photovoice, supplemented with verbal or written narratives and analysed using grounded theory	Qualitative interviews, child-centred activities and focus groups and analysed using the constant comparative method and network analysis	Qualitative case studies using a narrative approach and analysed using critical discourse analysis, the listening guide, and thematic analysis for across case analysis. Development of 'I Poems' for older children	
	Medium								Informal interviews, unclear how data was analysed, with quotes appearing to be drawn upon more anecdotally
	Low								
Rating		High	High	High	High	High	High	High	Medium

Weight of Evidence C: How relevant is the focus of the study for answering the review question?

Ratings were made using the criteria listed in the framework as detailed in Appendix 3.

		Arora (2006)	Daniels (2017)	D'Arcy (2012)	de Carvalho and Skipper (2019)	Jones (2013)	Nelson (2013)	Solder (2017)	Winstanley (2009)
Weight of Evidence C	High					Interviewed young people only			
	Medium	Interviewed as families – included children and family members	Interviewed parents and children	Interviewed as families but little focus on children's views (M-L)	Interviewed both girls and mothers		Interviewed young people, parents and older young people (age 16-25)	Interviewed as families – did have separate research question about children's views but does not appear to have analysed data separately	Interviewed parents and young people
	Low								
Rating		Medium	Medium	Medium-Low	Medium	High	Medium	Medium	Medium

Weight of Evidence D: Overall Rating

An average overall rating was given to each study based on the Weight of Evidence A, B and C ratings.

	Weight of Evidence A	**Weight of Evidence B**	**Weight of Evidence C**	**Weight of Evidence D – Overall Rating**
Arora (2006)	High	High	Medium	High
Daniels (2017)	Medium	High	Medium	Medium
D'Arcy (2012)	Medium	High	Medium-Low	Medium
de Carvalho and Skipper (2019)	High	High	Medium	High
Jones (2013)	High	High	High	High
Nelson (2013)	Medium	High	Medium	Medium
Solder (2017)	Medium	High	Medium	Medium
Winstanley (2009)	Low	Medium	Medium	Medium-Low*

*It was decided to assign Winstanley (2009) an overall rating of 'medium-low' due to a lack of transparency regarding their data collection and that the paper appeared to be more of a literature review, interspersed with quotations from informal interviews, rather than a direct research study.

Appendix 5 – Tables showing the textual narrative synthesis process

The following tables are a record of the information that was captured from each study to inform the textual narrative synthesis.

Study	Study Characteristics	Methodology	Analysis
Arora (2006)	• Peer-reviewed • 12 families, including 17 young people • Young people aged 6-17 years old • 10 girls, 7 boys • Eight had SEN, two of which had Asperger's Syndrome	• Interviews with families – home educators and children together • Also had questionnaire phase but not relevant to current review question	• Open coding and content analysis
Daniels (2017)	• Unpublished thesis • Specific focus on ASD • 15 parents and eight children with ASD • Children aged 5-11 years old	• Semi-structured interviews with parents and children (interviews held separately), and observations within some families • Follow up telephone interviews with parents • Also had questionnaire phase but not relevant to current review question	• Thematic analysis
D'Arcy (2012)	• Unpublished thesis • Specific focus on Traveller families • 11 Traveller families – children shared their views within some families but not clear how many or their ages or gender • Author reports that one young person had ASD and at least three others had SEN but it is unclear whether they took part in the interviews • Also, interviewed two home education professionals	• Semi-structured interviews with families and home education professionals	• Ladder of abstraction, alongside critical race analysis • Also, created three vignettes for further insight into a few families' experiences
de Carvalho and	• Peer-reviewed • Three young people and their mothers • Young people aged 11-14 years old	• Semi-structured interviews – mothers and young people interviewed separately	• Thematic analysis

Skipper (2019)	• All girls • One young person had ASD	• Use of social interaction diaries and reflection sheets to aid recall	
Jones (2013)	• Peer-reviewed • Nine young people • Aged 7-14 years old • One young person had ASD	• Photovoice - children were asked to take photographs to represent their home education experience. • These were supplemented with verbal or written narratives	• Grounded theory
Nelson (2013)	• Unpublished thesis • 15 parents, eight children and 41 older young people • Children aged 7-15 years and older young people aged 16-25 years • Children – 5 girls and 3 boys • Older young people – 26 male, 15 female • No information regarding SEN	• Semi-structured interviews, child-centred activities (photo collages and short stories) and focus groups with some of the young people - interviews/focus groups were conducted separately	• Constant comparative method and network analysis
Solder (2017)	• Unpublished thesis • Five families – eight young people and their parents • Young people aged 4-13 years old • 6 girls, 2 boys • No information regarding SEN	• Case-study approach, ‘conversations’ with families, utilising a narrative approach and creative resources, such as playdough and beads – data gathered as a family unit • Informal conversations with parents during Forest School visit • Also had questionnaire phase but not relevant to current review question	• Critical discourse analysis, the listening guide, and thematic analysis for across case analysis • Development of ‘I Poems’ for children over 10 years old
Winstanley (2009)	• Peer-reviewed • Specific focus on gifted children • Author notes that quotations are from a sample of 27 children and their parents but exact number of participants is unclear • Young people aged between 7-17 years old • No information regarding gender or SEN	• Informal interviews with young people and parents during various workshops across a 13-month period	• The author draws on quotations, unclear how data was analysed

Study	Themes Generated from Key Findings				
	Delivery of Home Education		Socialisation	Wellbeing	Relationships and Support
	Pedagogical Approaches	***Child-Centred Approaches***			
Arora (2006)	• Use of tutors • Core subjects in line with National Curriculum • Use of computer	• Explicit structure • Able to work at own pace • Some negotiation with child • Element of choice	• Most of the young people did not feel they were missing out on a social life	• Children reported to be much happier and learning much more than when they were at school	• Support from other family members perceived as important • No families part of home education groups • Challenges in relation to accessing resources and advice, and assessing progress – families wanting more support from the LA
Daniels (2017)	• Use of tutors • Focus on core subjects of literacy and numeracy • Use of books and digital resources • Activities outside of home	• Semi-structured approach followed by most • Approaches evolved over time • Flexibility in response to individual needs • Learning guided by interests	• Advantage of home education – ability to manage and promote social situations • Disadvantage of home education – impact on friendships	• Advantage of home education – able to meet social and emotional needs, including sensory needs and being able to promote wellbeing	• Change in roles and responsibilities • Disadvantage – responsibility on parents • Negative views received from others • Disadvantage – difficulties with finances

D'Arcy (2012)	• Use of tutors by most • Learning focused on basic needs, such as reading, writing and spelling	• Mix between routine and flexible approaches • Flexibility viewed as perceived benefit	• Inequality issues in regards to accessing social resources	• Children feeling safe and protected noted as a benefit	• Spending more family time together reported as a benefit • Difficulties with finances noted as a challenge • Challenges in relation to accessing resources
de Carvalho and Skipper (2019)		• Element of choice	• Young people reported a positive sense of community and felt they were understood and accepted; found it easy to access social situations; felt their social experiences were more diverse, which improved their social skills and social interaction experiences; and felt that they had choice and freedom regarding their social activities and contacts • Participants felt most groups were targeted to younger children – limited options for teenagers	• Diverse range of activities and social opportunities fostered a sense of acceptance and understanding and promoted the development of individual identities	• Support from home education groups perceived as important
Jones (2013)		• Balance between adult-			• Children's learning influenced by the

		led and child-led learning • Learning more of a continuum than distinct categories • Choice and interests played an important role			support and encouragement of others
Nelson (2013)	• Activities outside of home	• Semi-structured approach adopted by majority • Diversity in practices and activities • Education tailored to meet individual learning styles • Able to pursue interests	• Lack of interactions with peers noted as a disadvantage of home education • Most groups targeted at younger children		• Support from other family members perceived as important • Support from home education groups perceived as important • Negative views received from others – often unaware of legal status regarding home education and influenced by stereotypes, particularly regarding socialisation and the media's representation of home education • Difficulties with finances noted as a disadvantage • Challenges in relation to accessing resources/facilities and exams – families

					feeling a lack of support from the LA
Solder (2017)	• Activities outside of home	• Variation in structure adopted • Education tailored to meet individual needs • Learning guided by interests	• Friendships viewed as important, with young people reporting friendships of varying ages, including school educated friends • Young people felt they had developed friendships of better quality than when they were at school • Families reported feeling confident in their child's social interaction skills	• Young people reported feeling more confident, which they linked to their experience of being home educated • Young people expressed excitement about their learning	• Parent-child relationships perceived as supportive and non-directive • Sibling relationship perceived as supportive • Negative views received from others
Winstanley (2009)	• Activities outside of home		• One young person reported that they have friends online • One young person noted that 'small school' activities enable them to see their friends but not as often as when they were in school		• Challenges in relation to the convenience of accessing resources/facilities, such as the library

Appendix 6 – Initial information sheet for parents/carers

Initial Information Sheet for Parents/Carers

*Title of Project***:** Exploring the Experiences of Young People with Autistic Spectrum Disorder who are Home Educated: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

Ethics Approval Number or Taught Project Archive Number: S1168

Researchers: Rebecca Spong

Supervisors: Sarah Atkinson

Contact Details: Researcher - Rebecca Spong (xx@x.ac.uk) University Tutor - Sarah Atkinson (xx@x.ac.uk). Supervisor at X Educational Psychology Service – XX, Senior Educational Psychologist (xx@x.gov.uk).

Dear parent/carer,

This is an invitation to take part in a research study that is exploring the experiences of young people with Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) who are currently being home educated. The research study has received ethical approval from the University of Nottingham Ethics Committee.

The research would involve your child taking part in an interview with myself, to talk about their experiences of being home educated. It is envisaged that the interview will take no more than an hour but this will be flexible based on both the amount of information your child wants to share and also to take time for your child to feel at ease and comfortable with me.

Regarding parental participation, I will ask you for a brief background regarding your child and their home education, in relation to reasons for home education and length of time they have been home educated.

All of your data will be anonymised and will not be shared with the Local Authority or have any impact on your home education practice. Your participation will solely be for research purposes.

If you would like to find out some more information about the research, please provide your signature below to indicate that you are happy for your contact details to be passed on to myself. I can also be contacted on the details above.

Yours sincerely,

Rebecca Spong

Trainee Educational Psychologist

University of Nottingham

I understand that providing my signature below confirms that I agree for my contact details to be passed on to Rebecca Spong (researcher), who will then contact me to discuss the research further.

Name……..

Signature …….

Appendix 7 - Initial information sheet for young people

Initial Information Sheet for Young People

*Title of Project***:** Exploring the Experiences of Young People with Autistic Spectrum Disorder who are Home Educated: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

Ethics Approval Number or Taught Project Archive Number: S1168

Researchers: Rebecca Spong

Supervisors: Sarah Atkinson

Contact Details: Researcher - Rebecca Spong (xx@x.ac.uk) University Tutor - Sarah Atkinson (xx@x.ac.uk). Supervisor at X Educational Psychology Service – XX, Senior Educational Psychologist (xx@x.gov.uk).

My name is Rebecca and I am doing a research project about home education. I would like to find out what children with Autism think about being home educated. I know that you are being educated at home and would be really interested in talking to you about this.

If you would like to talk to me, I will visit you at home or somewhere you like to spend time. I will ask you some questions about being educated at home. I would like to talk to you for about an hour but we might talk for a bit longer if you would like to.

The information you share with me will not change anything about your home education. It will only be used when I write about my research. Your name will not be included so no one will know that it was you.

If you would like to know a bit more about the research, sign your name at the bottom and I will then be given your phone number and will be able to call you or your parent/carer.

Thank you,

Rebecca Spong

Trainee Educational Psychologist

University of Nottingham

I understand that signing my name below means that my phone number will be passed on to Rebecca Spong (researcher). She will call me or my parent/carer to tell us more about the research.

Name……..

Signature …….

Appendix 8 - Full information sheet for parents/carers

Full Information Sheet for Parents/Carers

*Title of Project***:** Exploring the Experiences of Young People with Autistic Spectrum Disorder who are Home Educated: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

Ethics Approval Number or Taught Project Archive Number: S1168

Researchers: Rebecca Spong

Supervisors: Sarah Atkinson

Contact Details: Researcher - Rebecca Spong (xx@x.ac.uk) University Tutor - Sarah Atkinson (xx@x.ac.uk). Supervisor at X Educational Psychology Service – XX, Senior Educational Psychologist (xx@x.gov.uk).

Dear parent/carer,

This is an invitation to take part in a research study that is exploring the experiences of young people with Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) who are currently being home educated. Before you decide if you wish to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully.

Home Education within England is on the rise considerably, particularly for young people with Special Educational Needs. However, there is currently limited research around the experiences of home education for young people with ASD, particularly gathering views from the young people themselves. It is really important that young people's voices are heard about their education. Therefore, I am looking to find out from young people with ASD about their experiences of home education. I hope that this will help inform practice within schools and also add to the current research to help parents who may be considering home education to make an informed decision. In addition, it is hoped it will enhance the understanding of professionals that work with young people, such as Educational Psychologists.

If you would like your child to participate, they will be asked to take part in an interview to gather their views. This interview will be with myself and can take place anywhere that is convenient for you and your child and where your child feels

comfortable, whether that be at home or another location. The interview may last around one hour but this is entirely flexible based on both the amount of information your child wants to share and also to take time for your child to feel at ease and comfortable with me. Voice recording of the interview will take place with yours and your child's permission.

At the end of interview, I will ask if it would be okay for me to visit again to check with your child if I have interpreted what they told me correctly when I have analysed their data. It will be up to you and your child if you are happy for me to visit again.

Regarding parental participation, I will ask you for a brief background regarding your child and their home education, in relation to reasons for home education and length of time they have been home educated.

It is important to make you aware that participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that you and your child are under no obligation to take part. Your child or yourself can withdraw from the study at any point before or during the study, without having to give a reason. The research study has received ethical approval from the University of Nottingham Ethics Committee.

All information gathered will be kept confidential and anonymised, including children and parent names and will not be shared with the Local Authority or have any impact on your home education practice. Your participation will solely be for research purposes. No identifiable information will be published within the research write up. Information will be stored securely under the Data Protection Act (2018). If your child shows any signs of distress during the interview, I will check if they are happy to continue and if not, the interview will be stopped.

If you would like your child to take part please complete and sign the enclosed consent form. Your child will also need to sign a consent form. If you have any further questions or concerns, then please contact me on the details above and I would be happy to help. We can also be contacted after your participation. If you have any complaints about the study, please contact Stephen Jackson (Chair of Ethics Committee) on stephen.jackson@nottingham.ac.uk.

Yours sincerely,

Rebecca Spong

Trainee Educational Psychologist

University of Nottingham

Appendix 9 - Full information sheet for young person

Full Information Sheet for Young Person

*Title of Project***:** Exploring the Experiences of Young People with Autistic Spectrum Disorder who are Home Educated: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

Ethics Approval Number or Taught Project Archive Number: S1168

Researchers: Rebecca Spong

Supervisors: Sarah Atkinson

Contact Details: Researcher - Rebecca Spong (xx@x.ac.uk) University Tutor - Sarah Atkinson (xx@x.ac.uk). Supervisor at X Educational Psychology Service – XX, Senior Educational Psychologist (xx@x.gov.uk).

I am inviting you to take part in my research about home education. I want to talk to young people with Autism about what they think about being home educated. I know that you are being educated at home and would like to talk to you about this.

There are lots of young people being educated at home. I think it is really important that young people are able to share their views about what they think about their education. This can help the people that work with young people to understand a bit more about home education.

If you would like to talk to me, I will visit you at home or somewhere you like to spend time. I will ask you some questions about being educated at home. I will record what we talk about using a voice recorder, if you are happy for me to do this. This is because it will be very hard for me to remember everything we talk about. I would like to talk to you for about an hour but we might talk for a bit longer if you would like to. If you would like a parent/carer to be with you when we talk, that is okay.

When we have finished talking, I will go away and look at what you have shared with me. I will ask you if it is okay for me to come back and see you again on another day. I would like to check that I have understood what you told me and have not made any mistakes. You will be able to choose if you would like me to visit again.

Any information you share with me will be kept safe. The information you share with me will not change anything about your home education. It will only be used when I

write about my research. I will not include your name so no one will know that it was you.

You do not have to take part in my research, it is your choice. If you would like to take part and change your mind later, that is okay. You will not have to tell me why you have changed your mind.

If you want to take part, you will need to sign the consent form. Your parent/carer has been told about this research study. You can talk to them about it if you want to. You can also contact me or ask your parent/carer to contact me if you have any questions. If you are not happy about the study you can talk to Stephen Jackson by sending him an email on stephen.jackson@nottingham.ac.uk.

Thank you,

Rebecca Spong

Trainee Educational Psychologist

University of Nottingham

Appendix 10 - Parent/carer consent form

Parent/Carer Consent Form

Title of Project: Exploring the Experiences of Young People with Autistic Spectrum Disorder who are Home Educated: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

Ethics Approval Number or Taught Project Archive Number: S1168

Researcher: Rebecca Spong xx@x.ac.uk

Supervisor: Sarah Atkinson xx@x.ac.uk

These questions should be answered independently by the participants' parent/carer:

- Have you read and understood the Information Sheet? YES/NO
- Have you had the opportunity to ask questions about the study? YES/NO
- Have all your questions been answered satisfactorily (if applicable)? YES/NO
- Do you understand that you and your child are free to withdraw from the study?

  YES/NO

  (at any time and without giving a reason)
- I give permission for mine and my child's data from this study to be shared with other researchers provided that anonymity is completely protected.

  YES/NO
- I give permission for my child's interview to be recorded using a voice recording device?

  YES/NO
- Do you agree for yourself and your child, …….. (insert child's name) to take part in the study?

  YES/NO

"This study has been explained to me to my satisfaction, and I agree for myself and my child to take part. I understand that my child and I are free to withdraw at any time."

Signature of the parent/carer: Date:

Name (in block capitals)

I have explained the study to the above parent/carer and he/she has agreed for themselves and their child to take part.

Signature of researcher: Date:

Appendix 11 - Young person consent form

Young Person Consent Form

Title of Project: Exploring the Experiences of Young People with Autistic Spectrum Disorder who are Home Educated: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

Ethics Approval Number or Taught Project Archive Number: S1168

Researcher: Rebecca Spong xx@x.ac.uk

Supervisor: Sarah Atkinson xx@x.ac.uk

The participant should answer these questions independently:

- Have you read and understood the Information Sheet? YES/NO
- Have you had the opportunity to ask questions about the study? YES/NO
- Have all your questions been answered satisfactorily (if applicable)? YES/NO
- Do you understand that you are free to withdraw from the study? YES/NO

  (at any time and without giving a reason)
- I give permission for my data from this study to be shared with other researchers provided that anonymity is completely protected. YES/NO
- I give permission for my interview to be recorded using a voice recording device? YES/NO
- Do you agree to take part in the study? YES/NO

"This study has been explained to me to my satisfaction, and I agree to take part. I understand that I am free to withdraw at any time."

Signature of the Participant: Date:

Name (in block capitals)

I have explained the study to the above participant and he/she has agreed to take part.

Signature of researcher: Date:

Appendix 12 - GDPR privacy notice

GDPR Privacy Notice

Title of Project: Exploring the Experiences of Young People with Autistic Spectrum Disorder who are Home Educated: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

Ethics Approval Number or Taught Project Archive Number: S1168

Researchers: Rebecca Spong

Supervisors: Sarah Atkinson

Contact Details: Researcher - Rebecca Spong (xx@x.ac.uk) University Tutor - Sarah Atkinson (xx@x.ac.uk). Supervisor at X Educational Psychology Service – XX, Senior Educational Psychologist (xx@x.gov.uk).

Privacy information for Research Participants

For information about the University's obligations with respect to your data, who you can get in touch with and your rights as a data subject, please visit: www.nottingham.ac.uk/utilities/privacy/privacy.aspx.

Why we collect your personal data

We collect personal data under the terms of the University's Royal Charter in our capacity as a teaching and research body to advance education and learning. Specific purposes for data collection on this occasion are as part of a research project. The researcher is part of a doctorate programme in Applied Educational Psychology, at the University of Nottingham. The purpose of the research is to gather the voices of young people with Autistic Spectrum Disorder about their experiences of being home educated.

Legal basis for processing your personal data under GDPR

The legal basis for processing your personal data on this occasion is in line with GDPR Article 6(1e): processing is necessary for the performance of a task carried out in the public interest. We hope this research will help with enhancing understanding about home education, whilst allowing young people's voices to be heard.

Special category personal data

We will be collecting some 'special category personal data', in line with GDPR Article 9(2a): the data subject has given explicit consent to the processing. We will collect data regarding your racial or ethnic origin and data regarding a confirmation of an Autistic Spectrum Disorder diagnosis.

How long we keep your data

The University may store your data for up to 25 years and for a period of no less than 7 years after the research project finishes. The researchers who gathered or processed the data may also store the data indefinitely and reuse it in future research. Measures to safeguard your stored data include: anonymisation of data, the use of pseudonym (a fake name), any data that might identify the participant will be left out of transcriptions, data will be stored electronically using password protection.

Who we share your data with

Extracts of your data may be disclosed in published works that are posted online for use by the scientific community. Your data may also be stored indefinitely on external data repositories (e.g., the UK Data Archive) and be further processed for archiving purposes in the public interest, or for historical, scientific or statistical purposes. It may also move with the researcher who collected your data to another institution in the future.

Appendix 13 - Parent/carer questionnaire

Parent/carer questions

Age of young person (years and months)

Is your child: Male ☐ Female ☐

What is your child's ethnic group?[1]

White

- ☐ English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish/British
- ☐ Irish
- ☐ Gypsy or Irish Traveller
- ☐ Any other White background, please describe below

Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups

- ☐ White and Black Caribbean
- ☐ White and Black African
- ☐ White and Asian
- ☐ Any other Mixed/Multiple ethnic background, please describe below

Asian/Asian British

- ☐ Indian
- ☐ Pakistani
- ☐ Bangladeshi
- ☐ Chinese
- ☐ Any other Asian background, please describe below

Black/African/Caribbean/Black British

- ☐ African
- ☐ Caribbean
- ☐ Any other Black/African/Caribbean background, please describe below

Other ethnic group

- ☐ Arab
- ☐ Any other ethnic group, please describe below

[1] Ethnic groups taken from the Office for National Statistics (2009)

How old was your child when they received their ASD diagnosis?

Does your child have any other Special Educational Needs?

How long has your child been home educated?

If they attended school prior to becoming home educated, what type of provision did they attend?

- ☐ Nursery/Pre-School
- ☐ Primary
- ☐ Secondary
- ☐ Special
- ☐ Other, please describe below

What were the reasons for your child becoming home educated?

Appendix 14 – Ethical approval letter

The University of Nottingham
UNITED KINGDOM · CHINA · MALAYSIA

School of Psychology
The University of Nottingham
University Park
Nottingham
NG7 2RD

tel: +44 (0)115 846 7403 or (0)115 951 4344

SJ/tp

Ref: S1168

Friday 3rd May 2019

Dear Sarah and Rebecca,

Ethics Committee Review

Thank you for submitting an account of your proposed research **"Exploring the Experiences of Young People with Autistic Spectrum Disorder who are Home Educated: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis"**.

That proposal has now been reviewed and we are pleased to tell you it has met with the Committee's approval.

However:
Please note the following comments from our reviewers;

Reviewer One:
Minor Revisions

- There are a whole lot of information sheets… some information, e.g. "I am doing my doctorate… I am under the supervision of Sara Atkinson" may be of somewhat reduced relevance for some of the participants/their parents.

Reviewer Two:

- Approved.

Final responsibility for ethical conduct of your research rests with you or your supervisor. The Codes of Practice setting out these responsibilities have been published by the British Psychological Society and the University Research Ethics Committee. If you have any concerns whatever during the conduct of your research then you should consult those Codes of Practice. The Committee should be informed immediately should any participant complaints or adverse events arise during the study.

Independently of the Ethics Committee procedures, supervisors also have responsibilities for the risk assessment of projects as detailed in the safety pages of the University web site. Ethics Committee approval does not alter, replace, or remove those responsibilities, nor does it certify that they have been met.

Yours sincerely

The University of Nottingham
UNITED KINGDOM · CHINA · MALAYSIA

School of Psychology
The University of Nottingham
University Park
Nottingham
NG7 2RD

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Professor Stephen Jackson
Chair, Ethics Committee

Appendix 15 - Parent/carer debrief letter

Parent/Carer Debrief Letter

*Title of Project***:** Exploring the Experiences of Young People with Autistic Spectrum Disorder who are Home Educated: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

Ethics Approval Number or Taught Project Archive Number: S1168

Researchers: Rebecca Spong

Supervisors: Sarah Atkinson

Contact Details: Researcher - Rebecca Spong (xx@x.ac.uk) University Tutor - Sarah Atkinson (xx@x.ac.uk). Supervisor at X Educational Psychology Service – XX, Senior Educational Psychologist (xx@x.gov.uk).

Dear parent/carer,

Thank you for yours and your child's participation in the research study. Your child's participation will help to explore the views of young people with ASD about their experiences of being home educated. It is hoped that their participation will help to inform practice within schools and to add to the research base to help future parents to make an informed decision about home education. In addition, it is hoped it will enhance the understanding of professionals that work with young people, such as Educational Psychologists.

If for any reason, you change your mind about your child's information being included in the research analysis you are within your right to withdraw, without giving a reason. If you or your child would like to talk to someone about their involvement in the study or anything that was discussed, you can contact me on the above contact details.

I would like to thank you and your child for taking part in the research. If you feel you need any support about home educating your child, guidance from the Local Authority can be found at: XX. I hope that your child enjoyed taking part. However, should they have experienced any upset or worry as a result of anything they shared

during the interview, please contact me on the details above. In addition, as well as the guidance from the Local Authority above, various support and advice for young people can be found via organisations such as Childline at https://www.childline.org.uk/.

If you do have any further questions then please contact me on the details above. If you have any complaints about the study, please contact Stephen Jackson (Chair of Ethics Committee) on stephen.jackson@nottingham.ac.uk.

Yours sincerely,

Rebecca Spong
Trainee Educational Psychologist
University of Nottingham

Appendix 16 - Young person debrief letter

Young Person Debrief Letter

*Title of Project***:** Exploring the Experiences of Young People with Autistic Spectrum Disorder who are Home Educated: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

Ethics Approval Number or Taught Project Archive Number: S1168

Researchers: Rebecca Spong

Supervisors: Sarah Atkinson

Contact Details: Researcher - Rebecca Spong (xx@x.ac.uk) University Tutor - Sarah Atkinson (xx@x.ac.uk). Supervisor at X Educational Psychology Service – XX, Senior Educational Psychologist (xx@x.gov.uk).

Thank you for taking part in the research study. The information you shared with me will help us to know more about what young people with Autism think about being home educated.

If you change your mind about the information you shared being used in the research, then that is okay. You do not have to tell me why you have changed your mind. If you would like to talk to me about anything we talked about, you can contact me on the above contact details.

Thank you for taking part in the research. I hope that you enjoyed talking to me. If you felt upset or worried after talking to me, you can contact me on the details above or ask a parent/carer to contact me. You could speak to your parents/carers if you are feeling upset. Also, you could find support on the Childline website at https://www.childline.org.uk/. If you are not happy about the study, please contact Stephen Jackson (Chair of Ethics Committee) on stephen.jackson@nottingham.ac.uk.

Thank you,

Rebecca Spong

Trainee Educational Psychologist

University of Nottingham

Appendix 17 - Semi-structured interview schedule

Semi-Structured Interview Schedule

Introduction to interview

- I am interested in you and your experiences of being home educated.
- There are no right or wrong answers.
- This interview will be more like a one-sided conversation. I might say very little as I want to hear what you have to say.
- You can take as much time as you like when thinking and talking about your experience. *(Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009)*

Home education routine

1. Can you tell me about how you are currently being educated at home?
    - What would a typical day look like?
    - Parents/tutor
    - Subjects studied/activities
    - Timetable/structure/set hours
    - Resources
    - Use of technology
    - Location – at home (where in the home), out and about (what do you do)?
    - On own or with others
    - Tests/assessments

Socialisation

2. How do you keep in contact with other children/your friends?
    - Are you part of any home educating groups? If so, what do you do when you attend these groups?
    - Are you part of any other groups/clubs?

Comparison to school *(if been to school previously or what you have heard/think about school if you haven't)*

3. Can you tell me how you think learning at home is the same to learning at school?
4. Can you tell me how you think learning at home is different to learning at school?
5. Can you tell me about anything you miss about going to school?
    - Anything you do not miss?
6. Do you feel you learn better at home or when you were at school?
    - Why?
    - What do you think your parents feel?

Positives/negatives

7. What would you say are the positives of being educated at home?
    - Anything you like/enjoy about being home educated?
    - Do you feel being home educated has helped you in any way?
    - Do you think your parents feel home education has helped you in any way?
8. What would you say are the negatives of being educated at home?
    - Anything you don't like/enjoy about being home educated?
    - Do you feel being home educated has not helped you in any way?
    - Do you think your parents feel home education has not helped you in any way?

Beginnings of home education

9. Can you tell me why you started being educated at home?
    - How did becoming home educated make you feel? What were you thinking?

Describing their experience of home education

10. If you were to describe your experience of being educated at home to another child, what would you say?
    - How does it make you feel?
11. Can you tell me if there is anything that could make it better?

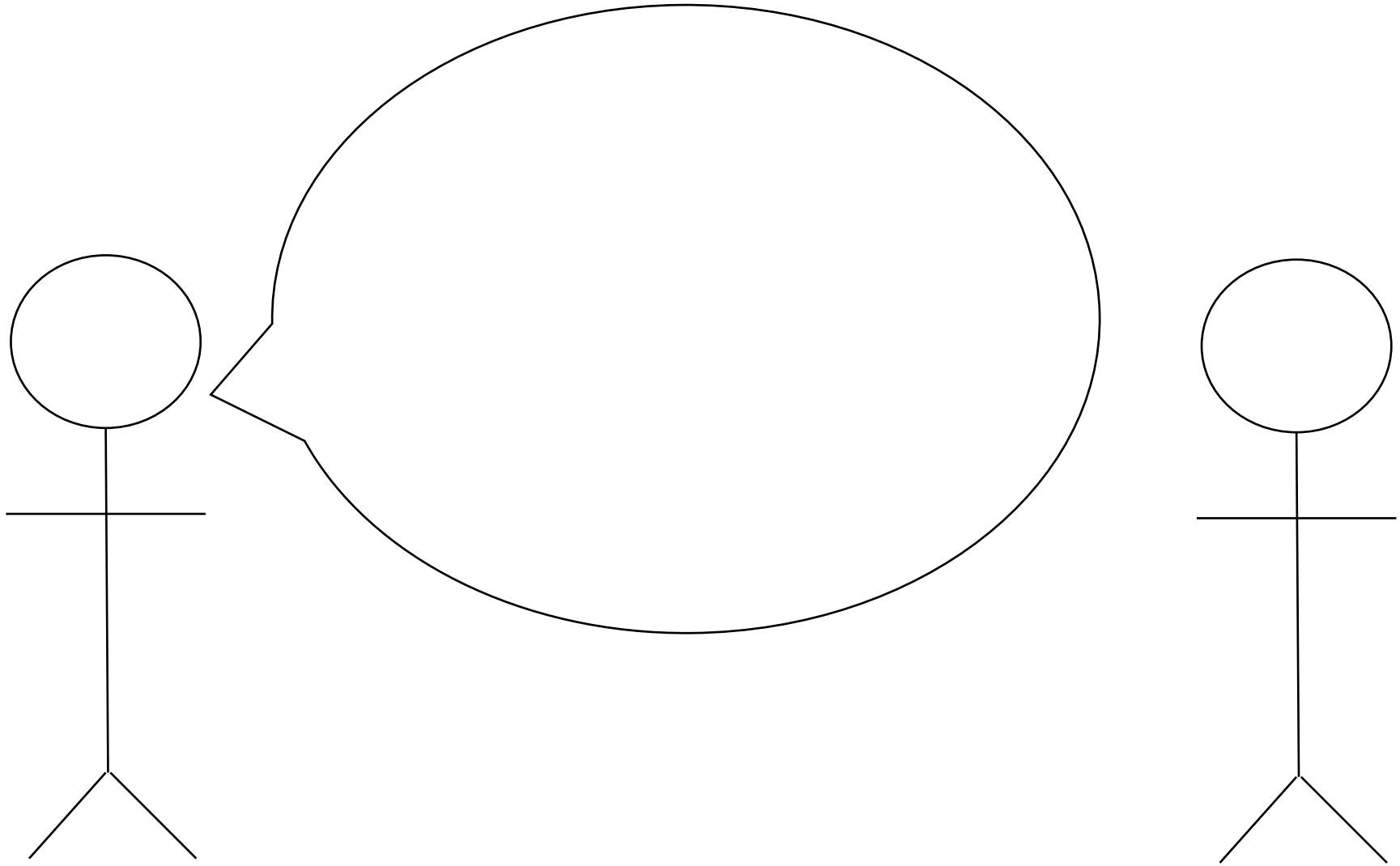
The Future

12. What are your hopes for your future?
    - Do you want to continue being home educated? If so/not, why?
    - What about when you are older (post 16), what would you like to do?

Anything else

13. Is there anything else you would like to share with me about your experience of being educated at home?

Appendix 18 – Speech bubble resource to support with interviews



Appendix 19 – Example page from Adam's annotated transcript

Emergent themes	Original transcript	Initial noting
		on the things he feels he's not so good at
Prioritising subjects of strength	R: Right, okay A: So, I learn… cus I um… I like doing maths so I learn faster	Linking learning faster with what he likes, so does more of it
Prioritising subjects of interest	R: Right A: So, I do a lot more maths but if I don't like doing something, like I don't like doing English, I'll only do very little	Does not like English so does very little – linking not liking something and not being good at something?
Defending his learning	R: Yep A: But still enough to keep up with school but R: Yeh, okay A: Hmm R: Okie doke	Still does enough English to keep up with school – feeling need to emphasise that he is doing enough? *Tailed off*
Skilled parent	A: But my Dad's an English teacher, he does English stuff sometimes R: Oh right, okay, so he can help you with that? A: Yeh	Dad is English teacher – does English with him sometimes
Immediate attention Support from Mum	R: Ah, okay, okie dokie. Are there any other reasons that you feel you learn better at home than at school? A: It's probably that I have like full attention of my like, teacher	Have full attention of teacher at home

Appendix 20 – Example page from Bethany's annotated transcript

Emergent themes	Original transcript	Initial noting
	R: 10 or 11?	
Struggles to get out of bed	B: Because I… [laughing] because I keep on being in bed [laughing]	Finds it hard to get out of bed? *Laughing – feeling it's funny that she isn't getting out of bed earlier?*
	R: Do you? [both laughing]	
	B: Yes [laughing] when school's starting… 'Sorry Daddy' [laughing]	Feels bad on her Dad – is he trying to get her out to start learning?
	R: Ah, so you start about 10 or 11?	
	B: Yes [laughing]	
	R: Yeh	
	B: Cus I really don't like school [laughing]	Does not like school, especially home school – so does not want to get out of bed?
	R: Ah	
Negative view of school, particularly home school	B: I hate school [laughing]	
	R: You don't like school?	
	B: Yes	
	R: Okay	
	B: Ah… especially home school [laughing]	
	R: Why's that?	
Home school is hard	B: Because I find it so hard [laughing]	Finds home school hard

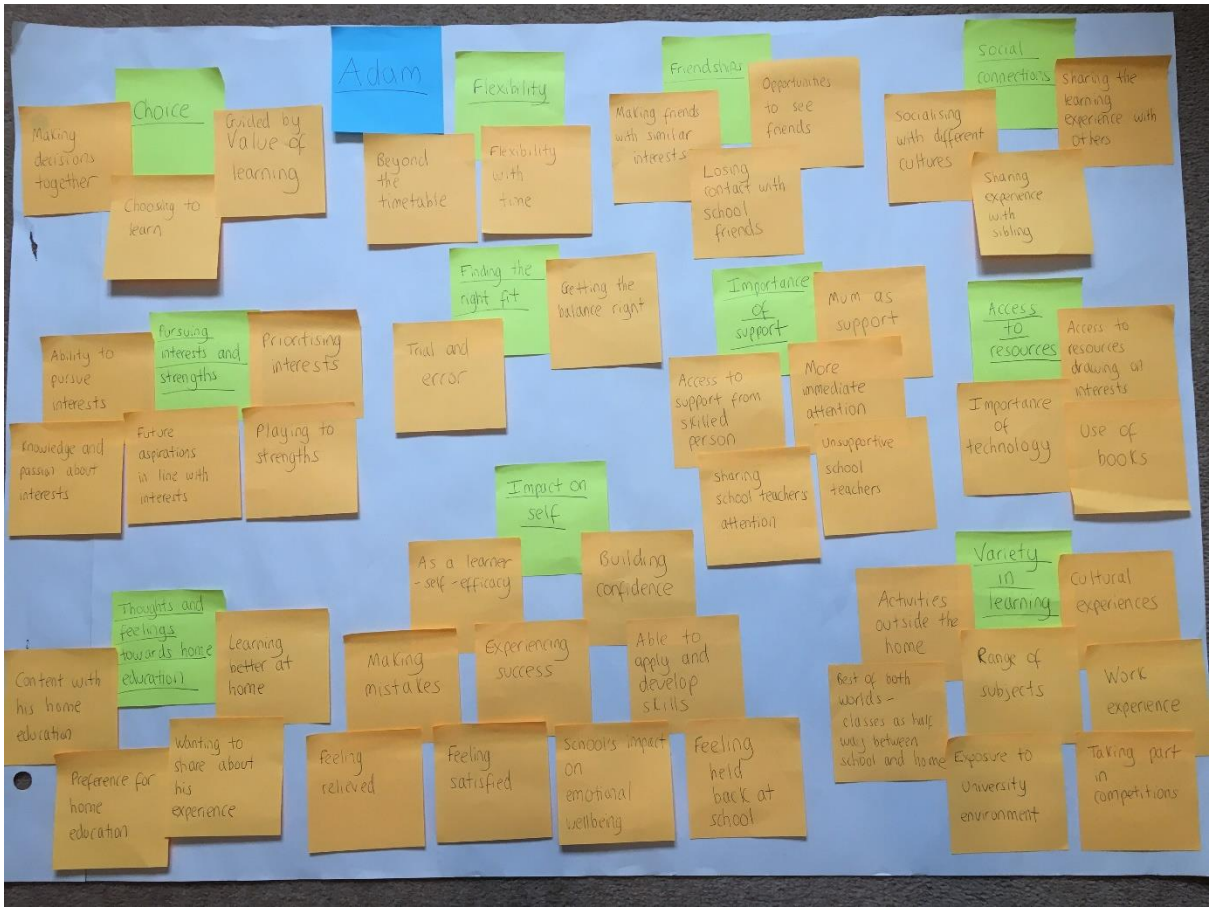
Appendix 21 – Example page from Charlotte's annotated transcript

Emergent themes	Original transcript	Initial noting
Freedom to do what she wants Freedom to express herself Positive impact on health Positive impact on self-identity School as a negative impact on self-identity	C: I get to just sit in my pyjamas and make hot chocolate [both laughing]. I could come down in like full make up and like a rainbow dress if I wanted to, no one's going to stop me R: Yeh C: I can get more piercings if I wanted to [laughing] R: Yeh C: If Mum lets me [laughing] R: So, how does that make you feel then, being able to do those things? C: Great, it's really fun. I feel a lot more like myself. I looked at old pictures of myself from 2018 and one from like the start of this year and I look so different. I look a lot healthier as well R: What from when you were at s… from before? C: Yeh, I look… I've put on a bit of weight in like… I used to have a jawline apparently but I look more like myself and I feel more like myself than I did at school because they would stop me, like I dyed my hair purple and apparently they didn't notice it the first time and then I re-dyed it again and they noticed it and told me off. I think that's when they put me in isolation but it isn't really a distraction is it? Because why are people staring at my hair whilst they're working, focus. And with piercings, they probably wouldn't allow me to have these either, I'd have to take them all out	*"No one's going to stop me" – not feeling forced or constrained like at school?* Freedom? Feels she looks healthier Feeling like she is now able to be herself – able to express herself: piercings, hair colour, what she wears Cannot see why people cannot just express themselves – why does this have an impact on anyone or their ability to learn?

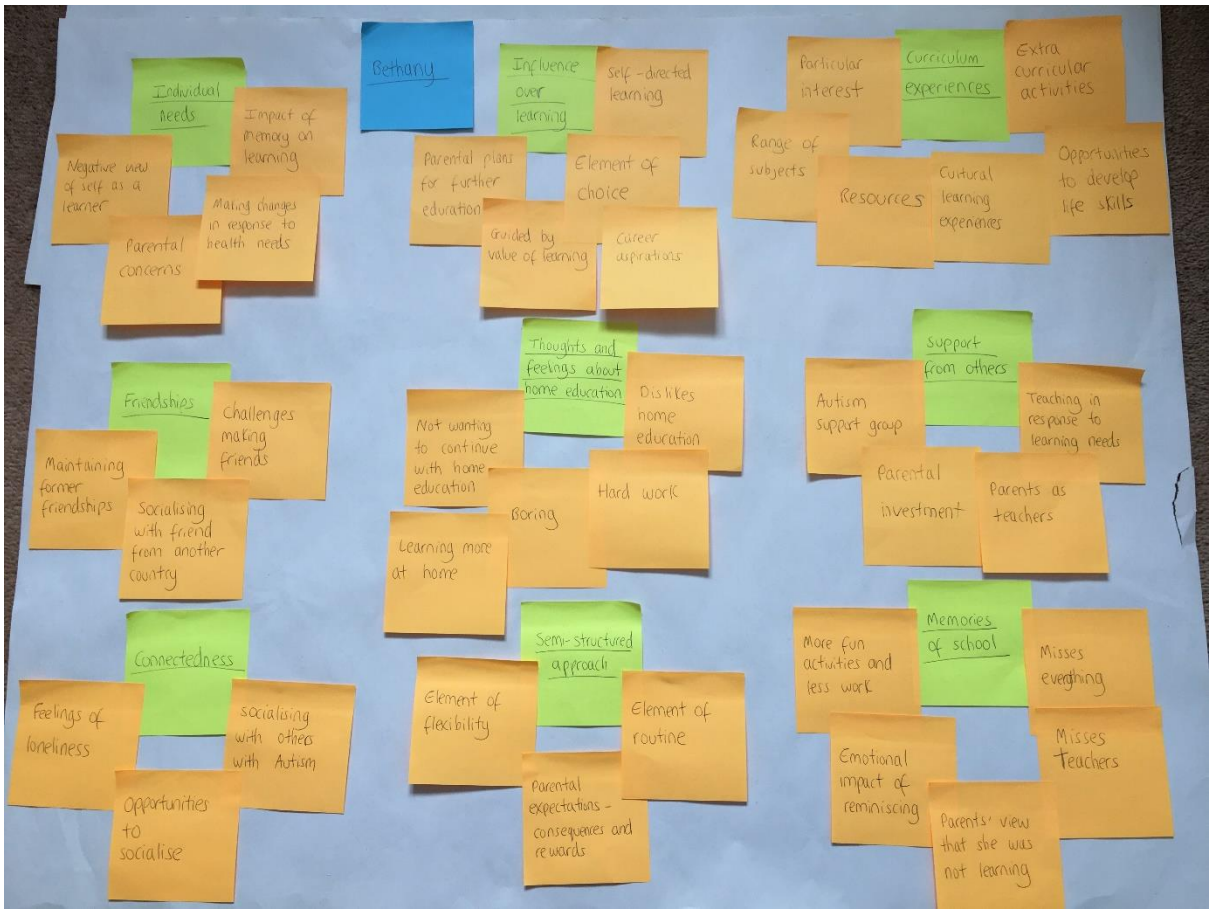
Appendix 22 – Example page from Digby's annotated transcript

Emergent themes	Original transcript	Initial noting
Flexibility in response to mood	R: Oh, okay D: … flexible to how much… how well I'm working that day so it could be mood based or…	Flexibility in response to mood/feelings
	R: Hmm mm D: … you know just, you know generally you can have a bad or good day R: Yep D: Or something like that and um… so yeh and so, I'll like do a lesson or two and then have a break for lunch, whatever and then do another lesson…	*"Whatever" – not a set pattern/routine?*
Ability to prioritise specific subjects	R: Yep D: … in the afternoon or two, depending again on how I'm feeling R: Okay D: Um… and that will work… work up procedurally towards the GCSE, for example last year I was doing biology R: Hmm mm D: But closer to about I think just mainly December it was primarily just biology R: Right	Can focus primarily on the GCSE he is working towards

Appendix 23 – Photograph showing grouping of themes for Adam



Appendix 24 – Photograph showing grouping of themes for Bethany



Appendix 25 – Photograph showing grouping of themes for Charlotte



Appendix 26 – Photograph showing grouping of themes for Digby



Appendix 27 - Adam's emergent themes clustered under group superordinate and master themes

Learning experiences	
Formal learning activities	Range of subjects
Wider learning experiences	Activities outside the home Cultural experiences Exposure to University environment Work experience Taking part in competitions

Support and resources	
Support from others	Mum as support Classes outside home Best of both worlds – classes as half way between school and home Access to tutors Access to support from skilled person More immediate attention Sharing school teacher's attention Unsupportive school teachers
Access to resources	Access to resources Importance of technology Access to resources drawing on interests Use of books

Child-centred learning	
Pursuing interests	Ability to pursue interests Playing to strengths Prioritising interests Knowledge and passion about interests Future aspirations in line with interests
Freedom and flexibility	Flexibility Beyond the timetable Flexibility with time Making decisions together Choosing to learn Guided by value of learning Feeling held back at school
Tailoring to individual needs	Getting the balance right Trial and error

Impact on self	
Self as a learner	Making mistakes As a learner – self-efficacy Experiencing success Able to apply and develop skills Feeling satisfied Learning better at home
Emotional wellbeing	Feeling relieved School's impact on emotional wellbeing

Interpersonal relationships	
Social connections	Opportunities to see friends Losing contact with school friends Making friends with similar interests Sharing the learning experience with others Sharing experience with sibling Socialising with different cultures

Appendix 28 - Bethany's emergent themes clustered under group superordinate and master themes

Learning experiences	
Formal learning activities	Range of subjects
Wider learning experiences	Cultural learning experiences Extra-curricular activities

Support and resources	
Support from others	Parents as teachers Parental investment
Access to resources	Resources

Child-centred learning	
Pursuing interests	Particular interest
Freedom and flexibility	Element of flexibility Element of routine Parental expectations – consequences and rewards Guided by value of learning Element of choice Self-directed learning Parental plans for further education Career aspirations
Tailoring to individual needs	Making changes in response to health needs Teaching in response to learning needs Autism support group

Impact on self	
Self as a learner	Negative view of self as a learner Parental concerns Parents' view that she was not learning Impact of memory on learning Boring Hard work Learning more at home More fun activities and less work at school Opportunities to develop life skills
Emotional wellbeing	Emotional impact of reminiscing Misses everything Misses teachers

Interpersonal relationships	
Social connections	Maintaining former friendships Challenges making friends Socialising with friend from another country Feelings of loneliness Opportunities to socialise Socialising with others with Autism

Appendix 29 - Charlotte's emergent themes clustered under group superordinate and master themes

Learning experiences	
Formal learning activities	Breadth of subjects
Wider learning experiences	Learning outside the home Always learning

Support and resources	
Support from others	Mum as key support figure Mum as gatekeeper
Access to resources	Access to range of resources

Child-centred learning	
Pursuing interests	Able to pursue range of interests Spending more time on interests Knowledgeable and passionate about interests Future aspirations in line with interests
Freedom and flexibility	Freedom Freedom with time Freedom regarding learning Free from restrictions Home as a relaxed environment School as restrictive Feeling rushed and pressured in school Inequality between teachers and pupils in school
Tailoring to individual needs	Supporting wider needs Supporting learning needs Tailoring learning Lack of understanding and appropriate support in school

Impact on self	
Self as a learner	Developing life skills Developing knowledge Learning new things Feelings of enjoyment Positive impact on her work
Self-concept	Positive impact on self-identity Ability to express herself Positive impact on self-esteem Experiencing judgement School as negative impact on self-identity

	Feeling different from peers at school School as negative impact on self-esteem
Emotional wellbeing	Positive impact on health Positive impact on wellbeing Prioritising wellbeing Feeling wanted at home Feeling unwanted at school Emotional impact of school Home as a safe environment Feeling unsafe at school

Interpersonal relationships	
Social connections	Forming friendships Challenges maintaining friendships Cutting out negative friendships Opportunities to socialise Learning with other home educating families Impact on social skills Use of technology to connect Home education providing solitude Reinforcing avoidance of going out Difficult peer interactions at school
Family relationship	Positive impact on family relationship Learning together as a family Engaging in activities and interests as a family

Appendix 30 - Digby's emergent themes clustered under group superordinate and master themes

Learning experiences	
Formal learning activities	Broad range of subjects Outdoor learning experiences
Wider learning experiences	Cultural learning experiences Wider learning experiences Engaging in extra-curricular activities

Support and resources	
Support from others	Mum as key support figure Parents as gatekeepers to resources Class outside home Access to specialist support
Access to resources	Access to wide range of resources

Child-centred learning	
Pursuing interests	Learning influenced by interests Knowledge and curiosity about interests Future aspirations in line with interests
Freedom and flexibility	Freedom Initial struggles with freedom Freedom with learning Freedom with time Flexibility Free from pressure School as restrictive Pressure at school Self-directed learning Self-assessment of progress
Tailoring to individual needs	Personalised experience Finding the best fit Acknowledging individual differences No one way to home education Tailoring learning

Impact on self	
Self as a learner	Making progress Developing knowledge Expanding skill set Developing life skills Rekindled interest in learning

	Effective and purposeful learning Loss of interest in learning at school Learning not effective or purposeful in school Self-efficacy
Self-concept	Feeling at an advantage to others Positive impact on self Negative impact of school on self Free from judgement Fear of judgement at school
Emotional wellbeing	Impact on emotions

Interpersonal relationships	
Social connections	Maintaining friendships Curiosity from friends Feelings of guilt over leaving friend Value of technology to stay connected Importance of friends having similar interests Opportunities to socialise Mum as encouraging social opportunities Limited need for socialisation Staying connected with school life Value of the internet for accessing social opportunities Engaging in range of activities with other home educators Shared experience with siblings Negative peer interactions in school
Family relationship	Impact on relationship with Mum