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CHILDREN'S VOICE

Evaluating a method for eliciting children's voice about educational support with children with speech, language and communication needs

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This article reports the development and evaluation of a toolkit-based approach to eliciting children's experiences of educational support, where the children in question experience speech and communication needs. The 'Your Voice Your Choice' approach was evaluated using a cross-case analysis methodology, which represents a novel approach to critical examination of the effectiveness of such resources. We explored seven case studies within a critical realist framework. We found that the toolkit was effective at supporting most (although not all) of the children with speech and communication needs to explore their school learning and support experiences through a scaffolded emotion-based 'dialogue', which was corroborated by observations and other data sources. The toolkit facilitated access to children's voice as they revealed how they felt across a number of relational, learning and support areas, which could be used by services to focus provision and consider how to better support children's social and emotional needs.

Key words: **children's voice, SEND, education, communication, inclusion**

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Despite increased research into the importance of recognising children's voice in decisions that affect them, there is still a significant gap between discourse and reality (Robinson, 2014). This is particularly the case for children with disabilities (Aubrey & Dahl, 2006; Franklin, 2013), especially those with communication difficulties or cognitive needs (Morris, 2003). Many local authorities in England have struggled to ensure that the views and feelings of children with complex needs are recognised (Franklin, 2013). Yet this group is often subject to intervention through assessment, planning and review processes. In practice, the capacity for services to follow the principles of children's voice is restricted by a number of underlying barriers, including negative perceptions of capabilities (Willow et al., 2004); a lack of methods, information and time (Marchant & Jones, 2003); and limited opportunities to develop the necessary skills, for both children and practitioners (Burke, 2010).

One of the central obstacles that challenge children's voice is that professionals lack an understanding of children's rights (Lundy, 2007). In a large-scale research project, Kilkelly et al. (2005) found that there was limited awareness of the rights of children across services, including implementation of Article 12 (the right to have a voice). With the introduction of the Special Educational Needs Code of Practice in England (DfE & DoH, 2015), the legal necessity of listening to children was made paramount by obligating local authorities to include children. Crucially, the Code notes that they 'must *not* use the views of parents as a proxy for young people's views'. However, practitioners are often unsure how to carry out the requirements, due to a lack of guidance and training (Norwich & Kelly, 2006). Moreover, there is a lack of research into the most effective methods for enabling those with communication or cognitive needs to participate (Clark, 2005; Marchant & Jones, 2003; Morris, 2003). That is, although methods have been proposed as suitable for this purpose (for example, diamond ranking, mosaic), few have been robustly evaluated (see Bloom et al., submitted).

This article therefore reports a novel approach to eliciting views from children with speech and communication needs, which centres on emotion-based reactions as a route into exploring learning experiences, designed specifically for children with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN). This study is distinctive in adopting a cross-case analysis methodology to evaluate the approach.

Using emotional reactions as a route into understanding

Research has shown that the emotional consideration of particular experiences is essential to children's motivation, interpersonal resources and cognition (Immordino-Yang et al., 2016). Positive social-emotional variables, such as positive interactions with teachers, positive representations of self and non-rejected peer status, can predict academic success (for example, Bernard, 2006; Denham et al., 2003; Howes & Smith, 1995). Negative emotional experiences in childhood are consistently associated with poor academic attainment (Currie et al., 2012), unemployment, suicide risk, substance misuse, early pregnancy and criminality (Valiente et al., 2011).

More specifically, anxiety is associated with poorer school outcomes on test performance, grades and school completion (for example, Duchesne et al., 2008). Anger is thought to reduce achievement because it negatively affects higher-order cognitive processes, such as problem solving, memory and strategic thinking (Pekrun et al., 2009). Both anxiety and anger are believed to decrease motivation for learning and engagement in classroom activities as well as disrupting children's ability to recall material (Linnenbrink, 2007). Sadness and anxiety are components of the withdrawal system, which interfere with children's motivation, leading them to avoid challenging school experiences that are perceived to lead to negative outcomes (Davidson et al., 2000). Emotions also affect relationships, as the quality of peer and child–teacher relationships are associated with educational outcomes (Jerome et al., 2009). Children who are often angry find developing and maintaining relationships in the classroom more difficult (Pianta et al., 2007). Meanwhile, anxious children are more likely to have difficulty relating to peers, be rejected and show aggression (Bruch, 2001). Cognitive psychologists argue that children's experiences of negative emotions can lead to a fixation of the cause of the emotion, causing cognitive resources to be diverted from educational capacities to alternative areas, distracting the child from learning (Valiente et al., 2011). From an interpersonal perspective, children with negative emotions are more likely to miss out on the benefits of working with others (Davidson et al., 2000).

There is a general lack of research on associations with specific positive emotions. However, positive emotions have been shown to encourage children to engage with their environments, which is likely to broaden cognitive awareness, increase their potential for solving problems and provide academic benefits (for example, Fredrickson, 2001). Positive emotions, such as joy and interest, encourage attention, which is a key factor in promoting learning and

achievement (Ladd et al., 2003). Joy also encourages the desire for play and creativity, which are fundamental mechanisms that promote children's learning (Vygotsky, 1978). Other research shows that joy, hope and pride positively correlate with children's academic self-efficacy, academic interest, effort and overall achievement (Pekrun et al., 2004). From an interpersonal perspective, joyful children are more likely to engage in free-time social play at school and form friendships that can provide social and academic support (Spinrad et al., 2004).

Overall, it appears that negative emotions detrimentally affect school experiences, while positive emotions seem to be related to more positive school experiences. Finding effective ways to elicit children's feelings about their school and support experiences, in order to provide insight into how they are affected by those experiences, is therefore an important first step in alleviating negative emotions and promoting positive emotions. However, this can prove particularly challenging to do if children have special educational needs.

The aim of this study was to evaluate a new approach using emotion-based reactions as a route to explore learning experiences with children who have identified communication and language needs. Research has suggested that children who experience these needs display significantly elevated levels of emotional difficulties compared to peers without them (Charman et al., 2015). These difficulties can be seen through externalising behaviours including hyperactivity, conduct problems and oppositional behaviour, and internalising behaviours such as anxiety and depression (Conti-Ramsden & Botting, 2008; Snowling et al., 2006). The design of this tool enables these differences to be acknowledged and enables children displaying either type of behaviour to have their views heard.

It should be noted that children with communication and language needs are a diverse group, and many of the conditions associated with these needs (for example, autism) include cognitive difficulties that could impact the extent to which children are able to evaluate a learning episode, or to process the nature of their emotional response to it. We recognise this as a potential constraint. However, in conceptualising and designing our approach, we argue that for many children part of their difficulties in communicating their needs is rooted in a lack of experience with such interactions. In turn, this is likely to contribute to their inability to engage with such activity, as this lack of experience can be disabling in itself. Therefore, our approach is designed to afford children the opportunity to experience participatory opportunities

that could stimulate cognitive mechanisms required for reflection and communication (Le Borgne & Tisdall, 2017). We recognise that it may not work for children who have the most severe cognitive impairments as part of their areas of need, but we did not want to pre-judge children's capacity in this respect in the context of this evaluation.

The YVYC tool

'Your Voice, Your Choice' (YVYC) was developed to reflect the central premise of the project: to enable children to voice their experiences and become involved in effective decision-making processes. Kellett (2011) argued for the importance of having a non-verbal, visually-based, flexible method that uses a combination of multi-sensory stimuli that can be adapted to suit the individual. YVYC comprised a purple felt mat (45 x 45 cm) with a yellow-laddered horizontal layer at the bottom and Velcro bases on areas that the children could manipulate. Emotions were provided at the bottom of the mat, represented pictorially by symbols familiar to the child (for example, smileys, thumbs-up, and so on), and the range of emotions could be simplified as needed.

Children were asked a number of pre-conceptualised questions relating to topics within their learning, social and emotional and support experiences. These were represented by photographs or symbols, which the children could place on the scale according to how a particular experience made them feel. Photo elicitation offers an alternative to purely verbal methods and is believed to stimulate new thoughts and memories prompted by the images (Collier & Collier, 1985). Photographs are preferable to symbols or statements because they do not exclude those who are unable to read, are less abstract, and help to focus the child on the present (for example, Beresford et al., 2004). These photographs were obtained across a range of social, behavioural and learning domains for each child participant. Illustrations were used where photographs could not be taken.

Case studies were developed for seven of the children with whom the tool was used in order to evaluate its effectiveness.

Methodology

Research paradigm and purpose

The research paradigm that best describes the underlying assumptions of the study is that of *critical realism*. Critical realism delivers a path between the extremes of positivism (the search for objective truth) and interpretivism

(the belief that there are no objective and extrinsic facts within society) (Sayer, 2000; Tekin & Kotaman, 2013).

Unlike the interpretivist view, critical realism argues that there is an actual 'reality' independent of what is observed but, due to the uncontrollable nature of social structures and systems, it is not always possible to observe this reality. Instead, an interpretation of the event is gained, but that interpretation might be viewed differently by different people and data acquired through research might not necessarily grant access to this reality (McLeod, 2011; Pawson & Tilley, 2008). Within critical realism, dominant narratives are accepted as if they were real but, through exploration and analysis, are examined for the operation of power and challenged according to the practices and outcomes that they permit and prohibit. As it cannot be assumed that a particular truth can be revealed in its entirety, critical realism depends on gathering data that help to identify alternative explanations, which is crucial to understanding a particular phenomenon (Easton, 2010).

Data collection and cross-case analysis

Using the YVYC tool (that is, the felt mat described earlier) in isolation fails to take into account contextual information. Instead, the YVYC tool in combination with other methods (collectively known as the YVYC toolkit) includes contextual information by representing how adults around the child feel about the child and their experiences. This should provide a better exploration of voice within a contextual framework because it is more representative of social phenomena (Robson, 2011; Tekin & Kotaman, 2013). Therefore, prior to using the tool with the children, the interviewer engaged in an 'information gathering' phase over several hours in the children's school with educational practitioners that worked with the children and, where possible, the children's parents. Semi-structured interviews, informal discussions, questionnaires, observations, official documentation and the interviewer's own reflections were used to explore the contextual experiences about the child from different perspectives. In this way, critical realism can be seen as woven into the YVYC toolkit design, providing both a wider theoretical framework and a rationale for practice in complex social and educational environments. This enabled the interviewer to develop interview questions for each child, to be used in conjunction with the tool, that were contextually appropriate for them, supported by relevant resources such as pictures of people, environments and items familiar to the child (Table 2 provides examples of this process). Children were then able to respond non-verbally by selecting the appropriate pictorial emotion on the tool, and verbally as well if they wished.

It should therefore be noted that the purpose of the background/contextual information was to uphold the principles of critical realism through, for example, triangulation, while also promoting adaptability for the child. The tool was then altered depending on the background data. Where it was felt that the child might struggle to understand all 16 emotions (this feeling was guided by professionals around the child and the first author's own observations), only several might be offered. It was not used to help interpret the child's emotional responses – these were accepted as true within the humanistic paradigm.

Prior to the formal interview the interviewer conducted a screening procedure to see if the child had the cognitive capacity to engage in the process and also modelled how to use the tool. These resources, taken together for each child, formed individual case studies, which were then subjected to a rigorous cross-case analysis.

In order to ensure a reliable methodological process, we followed Yin's (2014) recommendations to address specific elements of the design, which he identifies as the propositions, its unit of analysis, the logic linking the data to the propositions and the criteria for interpreting the findings.

Propositions

Propositions can be viewed as being similar to hypotheses in quantitative research and help to provide a focus to the case study by placing limits upon the research. Stake (2005) likens them conceptually to relevant issues that the reader needs to understand, but essentially, their purpose is to guide the data collection, analysis and discussion.

This study focuses on the following central proposition: *the Your Voice, Your Choice tool will help children who have SLCN by providing them with an alternative way of exploring how they feel about their school learning and support experiences.*

It is believed that the YVYC tool will help children to communicate more successfully because it is built upon a theoretical consideration of ideas designed to remove several communication barriers and foster sensory reflection. That said, given the vast range of individual differences and the complexity of communicative and cognitive needs, it is acknowledged that the tool is unlikely to work with all children. Multiple case studies will not only evaluate whether the YVYC provides an alternative way of voicing the children's

experiences, but will also seek to identify the circumstances in which it does and does not work.

Criteria for interpreting the findings

Unlike quantitative studies, where probability is used to interpret and validate findings, the primary strategy used within the case study approach is to identify and address rival explanations (Yin, 2014). Rival explanations help to identify potential threats or influences that might account for particular observations or inferences made within the data that might challenge the proposition. The more rivals that have been considered and rejected, the more robust the findings are considered to be. A broad range of rival explanations were identified and considered within this study (see Table 1).

Participants

Six outreach service centres based in a single region of the UK were contacted by email and asked if they would like to put children forward to become involved with the project (the name of the region where data were collected and the exact year of data collection have not been provided, to preserve the anonymity of participants). Out of the six, three responded that they would. Together, they provided support to a number of local schools in the area for children with additional needs.

Any child who was displaying difficulties accessing the curriculum and had an SLCN was considered eligible to become the focus of a case study. They also had to be receiving an intervention or support programme put in place by the participating outreach services. Parents were provided with detailed information as to the nature and purpose of the research, and were asked to provide written consent for their children to participate. Once written consent had been provided by the parents of the children, the interviewer met with the child and their primary adult contact in their educational setting. A total of 20 children (aged four to 18 years) from six mainstream and special schools took part in the study across three action research cycles. A summary of the 20 children's needs and difficulties are presented in Table 2. From these 20, seven case studies were the focus of this analysis. These were chosen because they provided a wide-ranging sample in terms of age, needs and gender, and demonstrated the tool succeeding and failing in a variety of contextual and individual circumstances. The seven case studies were also the most detailed of the 20 cases; data were triangulated from multiple sources. It should be noted that all case studies were written up using pseudonyms, and consent was given by parents for the reproduction of anonymised extracts from the interviews in resulting reports and publications.

Table 1: Rival definitions, application to this study and method of countering

Type and definition of rival	Application to current study	Method to counter rival
The null hypothesis: the observation was a result of chance circumstance only.	The children do not understand the emotions or experiences offered. The elicited responses from the children using the YVYC tool do not accurately reflect their experiences.	Children will be provided with a screener prior to administration to test their emotional understanding. Information about the child's experiences will be triangulated from multiple perspectives to check for concordance. Interviews will be audio-recorded and reflected upon for consistency. Action research cycle 3 only: YVYC tool interview will be re-administered after a period of time.
Investigator bias: experimenter effect in the field.	The children's elicited responses are likely to report positive emotional responses to questions because that is what they believe the interviewer wants to hear.	Triangulation of responses improves validity (YVYC interview, practitioner responses, documentary evidence, interviewer observations, and parental responses). Action research cycle 3 only: Interviews will be *video*-recorded and reflected upon for consistency.
Direct rival: an intervention other than the target intervention accounts for the result.	Information elicited from the child using YVYC could have been elicited using standard forms of communication. YVYC offers no unique method.	Analysis and evaluation will seek out discrepancies between child and practitioner perspectives as a result of the YVYC elicitation.
Implementation rival: the implementation process, not the substantive intervention, accounts for the results.	The YVYC tool was not set up or carried out appropriately for the child.	The YVYC tool will be individualised to meet each child's needs.
Rival theory: a theory different from the original theory explains the results better.	The theories that the YVYC tool are built upon are not responsible for eliciting or not eliciting information from the children but are due to other reasons.	Reflections and evaluations will compare individual and cross-case results with the literature.

Note: Adapted from Yin (2014).

Table 2: Summary of children's needs and individual tool adaptations made as a result of contextual triangulation within each action cycle

Case	*Age*	*Sex*	*Year*	*Summary of children participants' needs and tool adaptations made through contextual triangulation*
Action Research Cycle 1				
'Billy'	12–14	M	Year 9	Diagnosed with verbal dyspraxia. Reported speaking, listening and attention difficulties. Concerns raised over social interaction, increased aggression, literacy and numeracy skills. Tool adaptations: Happy and Sad with full scale ('not at all' to 'extremely'). Inclusion of questions about speech and language therapy intervention, football, computer games, siblings; areas identified of interest or concern. Provided additional time for responses since practitioners mentioned stuttering as an issue.
'Aaron'	3–5	M	Reception	Diagnosed with Down syndrome and a related hearing impairment. Severe learning difficulties within social, language, motor and developmental areas. Tool adaptations: Only Happy or Sad emotional cards presented (no scale) because of practitioner concerns. An image of a car was offered (identified as an interest by practitioner). Teaching assistant attended interview to support with sign language.
Action Research Cycle 2				
'Nathan'	7–11	M	Year 3	Recently classified as a Child in Need. Undergoing assessment of autism. Refusal to engage with learning. Tool adaptations: Six emotions presented (Happy, Sad, Calm, Worried, Angry and Confident) using full scale. According to practitioners he is artistic, loses interest quickly, reacts negatively to praise, probably will not talk. Interview duration shortened, praise was subtle, no pressure to verbalise, questions about art presented.

(Continues)

Table 2: (Continued)

Case	*Age*	*Sex*	*Year*	*Summary of children participants' needs and tool adaptations made through contextual triangulation*
'Lionel'	7–11	M	Year 4	Statemented and diagnosed with autistic spectrum disorder and ADHD. Emotional self-regulation difficulties. Refusal to engage with learning. Tool adaptations: Six emotions presented using full scale. Parent identified him as likely to be highly anxious during interview. Preventative steps taken, e.g. personalised e-mail, follow-up visits. Practitioner identified him as quick to anger but high-achieving. His interest in the military was discovered; much praise provided on his academic abilities in interview.
'Tina'	3–5	F	Reception	Diagnosed with foetal alcohol syndrome resulting in auditory, visual and learning difficulties. Reported to have language, attention and listening needs. Tool adaptations: Only Happy or Sad emotional cards presented (no scale) due to joint concerns over complexity. Severe communication needs identified by practitioners/observations. Learns best through sign. Teaching assistant attended interview to support with sign language. Object included (a policewoman's hat) was identified as being of interest.
Action Research Cycle 3				
'Nina'	12–14	F	Year 9	Diagnosed with ASD in Hungary. English is an additional language (EAL). Reported language and learning difficulties. Numeracy and verbal difficulties. Tool adaptations: Parents highlighted poor understanding and vocabulary, attention and memory. School noted poor self-esteem. School concerns over twin relationship interfering with learning. Sixteen emotions presented (Happy, Sad, Afraid, Angry, Disgusting, Exciting, Calm, Worried, Proud, Surprised, Joking, Ashamed, Tired, Frustrated, Confused and Confident) and full scale. Cooking, language they are exposed to, relationship with sister were areas of interest identified prior to interview.
'Helen'	12–14	F	Year 9	As above. Helen and Nina are identical twin sisters and were described with largely the same needs and difficulties.

(Continues)

Table 2: (Continued)

Case	*Age*	*Sex*	*Year*	*Summary of children participants' needs and tool adaptations made through contextual triangulation*
Not written up into case studies				
	3–5	F	Reception	Communication and language skills prime concern. Comprehension, attention and listening skills limited. Understands two-word commands only.
	15–18	F	Nurture group	Significant learning, social and emotional needs. Receptive and expressive language difficulties. Concentration and attention difficulties.
	15–18	F	Nurture group	Moderate learning difficulties. Delayed language development, dyspraxia, difficulty coping with change. Psychotic episodes.
	15–18	F	Year 10	Complex learning difficulties. Cerebral palsy. Poor cognitive skills. Underdeveloped language, academic and social skills and understanding behavioural requirements in environment.
	15–18	F	6th Form	Complex learning difficulties. Difficulties with balance and co-ordination associated with immature motor development and motor function also affecting speech.
	12–14	F	Year 8	Disordered receptive and expressive language skills. Poor fine and gross motor skills. Reduced vision affecting depth perception. Highly anxious.
	12–14	M	Year 8	Global developmental delay. Extremely anxious with occasional aggressive outbursts.
	12–14	F	Year 8	General and complex learning difficulties. Listening and comprehension skill difficulties.
	12–14	M	Year 8	Moderate learning difficulties. Suspected autism but diagnosis ongoing. Word-finding difficulty requiring time to respond.
	12–14	M	Year 9	Global language and communication difficulties. Immature social interaction skills.
	7–11	M	Year 4	Diagnosis of autism. Concerns over lack of interaction with peers and adults.
	7–11	M	Year 4	Suspected autism. Aggressive responses have increased during the past year. Concern over attainment especially within literacy and numeracy.

Note: Pseudonyms are used throughout.

Data analysis stages

The data collected for each case were stored within NVivo 11, listened to on multiple occasions and transcribed. Incomplete words, utterances such as 'ers', pauses and irrelevant talk were typically discounted. An exception to this was the interviews carried out with the children, where it was considered important to include all vocalisations to capture the voice of the child and demonstrate the challenges the children had communicating. Initial thoughts were highlighted within Nvivo, with the interviewer's reflections written as memos.

Participant data for each case were grouped into sub-categories within their respective cases: practitioner perspectives, which comprised teachers, support assistants and professionals working alongside the children; parent perspectives (where applicable); interviewer perspective; and child perspectives, which comprised of the YVYC tool elicitation. These sub-categories made initial analysis more effective because it highlighted the various interpretations of the children's experiences. It also helped to code one perspective first, then compare and contrast this against a second, reflecting the intent of the interviewer to construct the child's world according to different perspectives.

A coding framework underpinned by a consideration of the theoretical proposition and rival explanations was created. Codes were assigned to words or phrases that represented a summative, salient or essence-capturing portion of the data for each participant (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Coding occurred line by line in a systematic way across each case by highlighting and capturing segments of relevant text. Coding in this way allowed the interviewer to retrieve and classify similar data chunks.

Initial codes were collated into a more refined number of themes. Themes were identified as groups of re-occurring patterns or similar codes that revealed propositional evidence about socio-cultural constructs and contexts, conceptual processes or the discourse around the child.

A cross-case analysis was carried out on the whole dataset after all of the individual case studies had been completed. Its purpose was to aggregate data by comparing and contrasting findings in order to determine whether the project's proposition was supported. The cross-case analysis was derived from the analysis produced in the individual case studies and then re-examining the data to produce a word table. This was analysed alongside the original data to appropriate themes, which covered similar issues. The cross-case

analysis gave rise to a range of questions about the nature of the similarities and differences between the cases. These included:

- What are the key patterns that occur in each of the cases?
- What might be responsible for these patterns?
- What is surprising about these patterns?
- How did the children interact with the tool, and how did the interviewer interact with the child?

A word table was created showing perceptual comparisons that the YVYC toolkit discovered between practitioners, parents, the interviewer and children across all cases (see Table 3). The cross-case analysis provided a synthesis of the results, from which global themes were identified (see Figure 1).

Central theme of the results: overcoming barriers to communication

The cross-case analysis revealed that the YVYC tool was observed to be effective at overcoming or reducing some of the barriers to communication for some children, but it was not successful for all children. Specifically, themes relating to overcoming barriers to communication were identified as *non-vocal communication*, *scaffolding competence* and *anxiety reduction* (see Figure 1), and these will now be discussed in turn.

Non-vocal communication

Vocal communication was not found to be a pre-requisite for use of the YVYC toolkit. Instead, the cross-case analysis revealed that children could convey meaning about their school and support experiences by utilising the provided emotions and scale to express how affected they were by their experiences. All of the children sometimes chose to only express themselves using the emotion cards:

Interviewer:	*'How do you feel about talking to friends?'*
Billy:	*[Selects 'very happy'.]*
Interviewer:	*'How do you feel about school trips?'*
Lionel:	*[Selects 'very happy', 'very calm'.]*
Interviewer:	*'How do these sports make you feel?'*
Helen:	*[Selects 'calm'.]*

The capacity of the YVYC tool to elicit non-vocal voice meant participation was still possible for those who appeared reluctant or anxious to converse, or simply when children did not know why they felt an emotion, yet still recognised it.

Table 3: Cross-case analysis: evaluation of the YVYC tool against the QAF Outreach requirements

Name (age, gender) (AR cycle)	Perceived strengths and needs *(school, interviewer, and parent interpretation of child's difficulties and strengths)*	Adaptable to age and communicative needs *(removes barriers of age and needs)*	Easy and well-timed to administer *(speed/difficulty of administration and organisation)*	Capable of eliciting views across social, emotional, behavioural and learning domains *(provides information on child's school experiences)*	Engagement with the tool *(child maintains interest and enjoys the process)*	Evaluates interventions *(provides information on child's school intervention experiences)*	Change in attitudes towards school over time *(follow-up administration reveals affective differences)*	Proposition accepted? *(YVYC helps children who have SLCN by providing alternative ways of exploring how they feel about their school and support experiences)*
Billy (14, M) (AR 1)	Diagnosed with verbal dyspraxia. Presented with associated stutter. Concerns over speaking, listening, attention, social interaction, literacy and numeracy skills. Increasing aggression hypothesised due to inability to communicate his needs. Resilient. Appeared more comfortable conversing with peers. Gets very aggressive and angry at home and will hit out at family.	Capable of listening to questions about his experiences and answering appropriately. Stuttering decreased during administration. Billy's needs did not prevent him from accessing the tool.	2 hours preparation time needed to organise experiences into photographs and illustrations. 45 minutes to administer on 1-to-1 basis.	Provided emotional responses which led on to multiple conversations. Results showed he generally enjoyed school and highlighted individual areas of strength and weakness. Abstract questions were difficult to answer (e.g. 'Do you feel you are able to listen well when you are there?').	Appeared fully committed to the process. Fully engaged throughout the administration. Reported that he enjoyed the tool activity and offered ways of improving it for future children. Rapport building through discussing areas of interest helped Billy relax (e.g. football, computer games).	Reported feeling sad and nervous about being moved to a separate school for SLT but was happy once he was there. Shows preference for learning with groups of peers rather than with teaching assistant. Showed he was generally happy with his interventions.	N/A. Tool only applied once.	Yes. Encouraged reflection on his experiences. Showed he was happy generally but anxious in certain circumstances, e.g. speaking in public. Physical manipulation of the photographs with interviewer acted as a bridge to access higher communication level.

(Continues)

Table 3: (Continued)

Name (age, gender) (AR cycle)	Perceived strengths and needs *(school, interviewer, and parent interpretation of child's difficulties and strengths)*	Adaptable to age and communicative needs *(removes barriers of age and needs)*	Easy and well-timed to administer *(speed/difficulty of administration and organisation)*	Capable of eliciting views across social, emotional, behavioural and learning domains *(provides information on child's school experiences)*	Engagement with the tool *(child maintains interest and enjoys the process)*	Evaluates interventions *(provides information on child's school intervention experiences)*	Change in attitudes towards school over time *(follow-up administration reveals affective differences)*	Proposition accepted? *(YVYC helps children who have SLCN by providing alternative ways of exploring how they feel about their school and support experiences)*
Aaron (4, M) (AR 1)	Diagnosed with Down syndrome. Severe learning difficulties within social, language, motor and developmental facets. Able to understand range of two- but not three-word instruction. Supported by practitioners successfully through sign language.	YVYC tool was adapted and individualised to its most simple form; however, it was not able to overcome Aaron's barriers despite a support assistant also being present.	2 hours preparation time needed to organise experiences into photographs and illustrations. 5 minutes to administer before the interview was stopped.	Aaron was unable to make his views known either to the interviewer or to his support assistant using the YVYC tool.	Appeared fully committed – he enjoyed manipulating the cards and the Velcro on the mat despite not being able to appropriately voice his feelings.	N/A. YVYC failed attempt.	N/A. Tool only applied once.	No.
Tina (5, F) (AR 2)	Diagnosed with foetal alcohol syndrome resulting in auditory/visual difficulties. Moderate learning difficulties focused on comprehension, language, attention and listening. Supported by practitioners successfully through sign language	YVYC tool was adapted and individualised to its most simple form; however, it was not able to overcome Tina's barriers despite a support assistant also being present.	1.5 hours preparation time needed to organise experiences into photographs and illustrations. 3 minutes to administer before the interview was stopped.	Tina was unable to make her views known either to the interviewer or to her support assistant using the YVYC tool.	Appeared fully committed – she enjoyed manipulating the cards, the physical object (policewoman's hat) and the Velcro on the mat.	N/A. YVYC failed attempt.	N/A. Tool only applied once.	No.

(Continues)

Table 3: (Continued)

Name (age, gender) (AR cycle)	Perceived strengths and needs *(school, interviewer, and parent interpretation of child's difficulties and strengths)*	Adaptable to age and communicative needs *(removes barriers of age and needs)*	Easy and well-timed to administer *(speed/difficulty of administration and organisation)*	Capable of eliciting views across social, emotional, behavioural and learning domains *(provides information on child's school experiences)*	Engagement with the tool *(child maintains interest and enjoys the process)*	Evaluates interventions *(provides information on child's school intervention experiences)*	Change in attitudes towards school over time *(follow-up administration reveals affective differences)*	Proposition accepted? *(YVYC helps children who have SLCN by providing alternative ways of exploring how they feel about their school and support experiences)*
	Suspected verbal dyspraxia. Learns through sign language, visual symbols and TEACCH. Persistently engaged and on task.	Trialling a physical object (a policewoman's hat) still did not help to elicit Tina's views.						
Lionel (8, M) (AR 2)	Statemented and diagnosed with ASD and ADHD. Emotional self-regulation difficulties. Social stress. Refusal to engage with learning material in some circumstances. Reported by class teacher to not struggle to access the curriculum and to have a good emotional understanding. Appears independent and confident. Horrified at the thought of change because of his ASC/ADHD.	Capable of listening to questions about his experiences and answering appropriately using the toolkit. Stayed calm throughout the interview – no evidence of refusal. ASD/ADHD traits did not hinder the interview. Lionel's needs did not prevent him from accessing the tool.	1.5 hours preparation time needed to organise experiences into photographs and illustrations. Administration: 26 minutes to answer 23 questions on 1-to-1 basis.	Provided emotional responses which led on to some conversation. Reluctance to discuss some of his difficulties in detail, e.g. his writing problems. Results showed he was generally confident about his school subjects and showed areas of strength and weakness.	Appeared content and engaged throughout the interview but reported to not like the YVYC tool activity, stating it was too long.	Reported a number of supportive strategies that he was using, including breathing strategies, chewy tube and his class teacher staying calm.	N/A. Tool only applied once.	Yes. Encouraged reflection on his experiences. Showed he was happy generally but social situations sometimes caused him stress. Physical manipulation of the photographs with interviewer acted as a bridge to access higher communication level.

(Continues)

Table 3: (Continued)

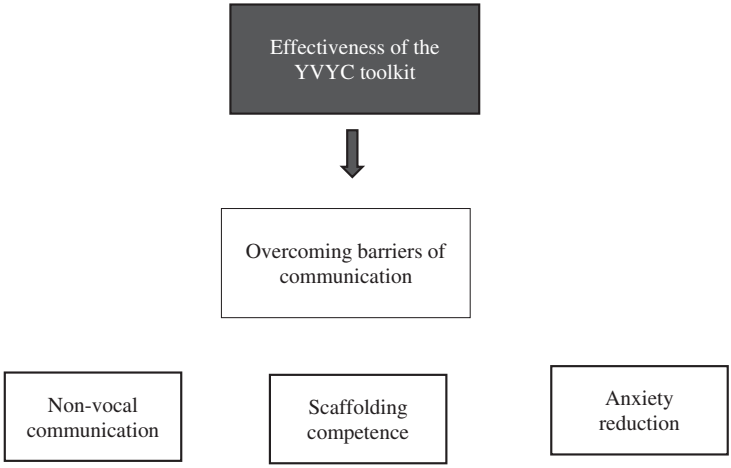
Name (age, gender) (AR cycle)	Perceived strengths and needs *(school, interviewer, and parent interpretation of child's difficulties and strengths)*	Adaptable to age and communicative needs *(removes barriers of age and needs)*	Easy and well-timed to administer *(speedldifficulty of administration and organisation)*	Capable of eliciting views across social, emotional, behavioural and learning domains *(provides information on child's school experiences)*	Engagement with the tool *(child maintains interest and enjoys the process)*	Evaluates interventions *(provides information on child's school intervention experiences)*	Change in attitudes towards school over time *(follow-up administration reveals affective differences)*	Proposition accepted? *(YVYC helps children who have SLCN by providing alternative ways of exploring how they feel about their school and support experiences)*
Nathan (9, M) (AR 2)	Recently classified as a Child in Need due to neglect which is having a negative effect on learning and well-being. Undergoing assessment of autism. Refusal to engage with learning. No reported friendships. Difficulty trusting others. Motivation crucial to engagement. Financial difficulties.	Capable of listening to questions about his experiences and answering appropriately using the toolkit. He did not refuse to engage with the toolkit although he did show impatience.	1.5 hours preparation time needed to organise experiences into photographs and illustrations. Administration: 25 minutes to answer 30 questions.	Provided emotional responses which led on to minimum conversation. Results showed he was generally happy at school with specific preferences for music and art. Area of greatest negativity concerned social and emotional communication, e.g. working by himself or with others, all evoked anger and worry.	Completed the tool but often appeared impatient with the activity.	YVYC tool showed som confusion over what support Nathan felt he was receiving, e.g. that he does not read to his teaching assistant, only himself.	N/A. Tool only applied once.	Yes. Some elements of reflection but lack of conversation made it unclear how effective this reflection was. YVYC tool not able to explore reasons behind negative issues without conversational element. Incomplete picture.
Nina (13, F) (AR 3)	Diagnosed with autism in Hungary (but refuted in UK). Numeracy and verbal difficulties. Impulsive, no awareness of danger. Self-confidence and independence concerns. Cognitive/developmental delay. Low expectations.	Capable of listening to questions about her experiences and answering appropriately using the toolkit. Verbal difficulties did not impact her ability to interact with the YVYC tool.	1.5 hours joint (Nina and Helen) preparation time needed to organise experiences into photographs and illustrations. 1st administration: 28 minutes to answer 23 questions.	Provided emotional responses which led on to multiple conversations Able to select and express multiple emotions showing that she understood she could feel negative and positive emotions at the same time.	Appeared fully committed to the tool. Fully engaged throughout the administration. Reported that she enjoyed the tool activity.	Reported positive feelings towards teachers who she feels understand her.. Shows positive emotions towards some school-based interventions, e.g. shorter instructions, extra English lessons, paired reading, having a teaching assistant.	Feelings mostly consistent over 1st and 2nd administration. Reported feeling considerably more tired between 1st and 2nd administration.	Yes. Nina's ability to converse after considering her emotional reflections helped the interviewer to understand why she felt the way that she did.

(Continues)

Table 3: (Continued)

Name (age, gender) (AR cycle)	Perceived strengths and needs *(school, interviewer, and parent interpretation of child's difficulties and strengths)*	Adaptable to age and communicative needs *(removes barriers of age and needs)*	Easy and well-timed to administer *(speed/difficulty of administration and organisation)*	Capable of eliciting views across social, emotional, behavioural and learning domains *(provides information on child's school experiences)*	Engagement with the tool *(child maintains interest and enjoys the process)*	Evaluates interventions *(provides information on child's school intervention experiences)*	Change in attitudes towards school over time *(follow-up administration reveals affective differences)*	Proposition accepted? *(YVYC helps children who have SLCN by providing alternative ways of exploring how they feel about their school and support experiences)*
	Appeared confident to communicate. Incapable/vulnerable.	Appeared confident in her answers.	2nd administration: 23 minutes to answer 17 questions.	Highlighted her concerns, e.g. anxiety about working alone. Safeguarding information discovered (bullying).		Showed she was generally happy with her interventions	Bullying reportedly decreased on 2nd administration. Began to identify as the 'joker' among her peers at the 2nd administration.	
Helen (13, F) (AR 3)	Diagnosed with autism in Hungary (but refuted in UK). Numeracy and verbal difficulties. Impulsive, no awareness of danger. Self-confidence and independence concerns. Cognitive/developmental delay. Low expectations. Appeared confident to communicate. Incapable/vulnerable.	Capable of listening to questions about her experiences and answering appropriately using the toolkit. Verbal difficulties did not impact her ability to interact with the YVYC tool. Appeared confident in her answers.	1.5 hours joint (Nina and Helen) preparation time needed to organise experiences into photographs and illustrations. 1st administration: 20 minutes to answer 21 questions. 2nd administration: 28 minutes to answer 20 questions.	Provided emotional responses which led on to multiple conversations. Able to select and express multiple emotions showing that she understood she could feel negative and positive emotions at the same time. Highlighted her need to stay with her sister based on protection. Safeguarding information discovered (bullying). Particularly expressive about areas meaningful to her (e.g. art).	Appeared fully committed to the tool. Fully engaged throughout the administration. Reported that she enjoyed the tool activity.	Provided an account of what type of support helped her to learn more effectively. Positive feelings towards teachers who she feels understand her. Shows positive emotions towards some school-based interventions, e.g. shorter instructions, extra English lessons, paired reading, having a teaching assistant. Showed she was generally happy with her interventions.	Reported feeling considerably more tired between 1st and 2nd administration. Bullying reportedly decreased on 2nd administration. Feelings about her school experiences have improved over the 1st and 2nd administration.	Yes. Helen's ability to converse after considering her emotional reflections helped the interviewer to understand why she felt the way that she did.

Figure 1: Thematic map showing how the effectiveness of the YVYC toolkit and concordance of recipients interact to promote children's voice



Nathan was an example of a child who was reluctant or unable to provide verbal information. The interviewer was advised by the class teacher that Nathan would refuse to talk because he had *'refused to work or talk … for months'* and was said to often refuse to talk to people he did not know particularly well. However, Nathan was able to engage with the activity while offering limited vocal communication throughout his interview. For instance, he showed that social situations made him feel angry, he disliked working in groups an he became worried when working with his teaching assistant. In contrast, listening to music calmed him down, he felt very happy around animals, and art and music were his preferred subjects. Triangulation through the supporting features of the YVYC toolkit, such as the interviewer observations and proxy perceptions, agreed with his feelings across many of the areas discussed, supporting the validity of his sentiments without requiring of further detail. As a result, the case study was able to explore how the school might use the information to differentiate his work more successfully (for example, by focusing on his relational needs and motivational interests). However, without more information, the limits of the YVYC tool became apparent. For instance, it was unclear why he felt so angry, disliked social situations, and felt unable to talk to others. The answers to these questions were hypothesised and discussed within the case study using information from the additional perspectives drawn out by YVYC toolkit. In this regard, the

YVYC toolkit, as a complete method, was able to fill in some of the gaps related to these questions. However, without more detail from Nathan, this was largely intuitive deduction and not a true representation of his experience, which represents a threat to the principles of children's voice.

Scaffolding competence

The YVYC tool provided a structural format that enabled some children to operate at an emotional and cognitive level that was higher than they would otherwise have been able to access if unsupported, consistent with the concept of the zone of proximal development (ZPD) (Vygotsky, 1978). As a result, it was possible to raise the capability level of the children in order to elicit their voice.

For example, Billy's SENCo and parents were concerned about his anger and frustration, yet were unsure as to the reasons for it. The SENCo's comments included: *'He shows no anger issues at school but at home has many'* and *'Mum is unhappy with Billy's behaviour as he is hitting out and angry especially towards his siblings'*. The school had tried talking to Billy but this had not revealed anything (interviewer's reflective log). Yet within the structural framework of the YVYC toolkit, Billy expressed himself. Lionel provided an account of his experiences, and guidance supported his capacity to reflect upon them. Some of Nina's and Helen's practitioners, and their parents, saw them as being cognitively and emotionally immature, but they gave a very comprehensive account of their school and support experiences and demonstrated a range of experiences, which they reflected upon.

How was this made possible? From a procedural viewpoint, the interviewer (more-capable adult) first *modelled* how to use the tool, by providing examples of how the interviewer might feel in similar situations. This was not scripted but conversed, for example: *'If I was to think about how I feel right now, I would say that I feel happy because it's a sunny day. I feel very happy so I pick up happy and place it on the "very" position. What might you select if I ask how you are feeling now?'*

Participants were required to *attend* to the interviewer and the YVYC tool; to *retain* the information they were being told; to *reproduce* what they had observed and apply it to their own circumstances; and finally to have the *motivation* to engage with the interviewer. These observations fit with the assumptions and necessary conditions of Bandura's (1977) social cognitive theory of modelling. However, the YVYC tool also placed additional demands

on children: they were required to think about how they felt across specific and general experiences. This is a reflective skill that utilises a combination of cognitive and emotional skills and processes, including memory (Beresford, 2012). The following extract illustrates the elicitation process.

Interviewer: *'So how do you feel about sports?' [Shows photograph of the sports hall.]*

The interviewer supported Nina's recall of memory by providing a photograph of the sport's hall, the place where she goes for sports. This provided a visual cue (Grady et al., 1998).

Nina: *[look of disgust on face] 'Ugg! I hate sports'.*
Interviewer: *'Okay, you hate sports. Which emotion would you pick out when you think about sports? So you've got angry, sad, afraid, worried, frustrated, tired'. [Shows rest of emotions.]*

Once the memory was accessed, the interviewer supported her to think more deeply about which emotions related to her feelings. The provision of emotional cues directed her attention towards her affective experience rather than having to retrieve emotional labels, thereby reducing cognitive load.

Nina: *[Selects 'sad']...'Sad'.*
Interviewer: *'There is no right or wrong answer'. [pause].*
Nina: *'Sad because I don't want to change all the time.'*
Interviewer: *'Okay, how sad do you feel?'*

The interviewer validated Nina's initial reaction and gave her time to reflect on the intensity of that feeling.

Nina: *[Places card on 'little bit sad'.]*

The recollection of her memory about how and why she felt sad about sports stimulated another associated memory about sports, that of Karate.

Nina: *'After school Karate is baaad'.*
Interviewer: *'Oh you have to do that, do you?*
Nina: *'Yea. I don't wanna but mum said "I should".' [Gestures pointed finger angrily towards camera.] 'Grr Mother'. [She looks unhappy.]*

In practice, the YVYC tool broke down the skills and processes required to think about her experiences into manageable chunks, which led to multiple associated reflections. The interviewer's role was to guide the child while encouraging him or her to master the skills required to utilise the tool (reflection, attention and articulating emotions). Information and suggestions were also used to help the children express themselves, which furthered practice and understanding. This learning occurred in follow-up sessions when the interviewer re-administered the YVYC tool to Nina and Helen. In the first interview, they were reliant on looking at the emotional choice cards, asking questions about the emotions, and placing the cards on the corresponding spot on the mat. However, in the second interview, they were more adept at talking about their emotions without needing to see or feel the emotion cards. The purpose of the YVYC tool can be seen as simplifying the child's role in the elicitation process, working to help the child learn and develop the skills (in reflection, attention and articulating emotions) to a point where they can perform the tasks (attending to the questions, selecting appropriate emotions) independently.

Despite this simplification process, both Aaron and Tina were unable to access the tool. This is well illustrated by Aaron.

> Interviewer: *[Shows photograph of toys] 'Do you feel happy or sad when you are playing with the car?'*
> Aaron: *'Car'.*

Aaron appeared to assume that the interviewer wanted him to repeat the name of the object in the photograph. This is likely to be because he was used to carrying out similar tasks within his speech and language intervention. He was able to retrieve the memory of the car but he did not appear to understand what was meant by the terms 'happy' and 'sad', or he failed to understand the purpose of the task. Research shows that recognition of basic emotions (happiness, sadness, fear and anger) typically occurs between the ages of three and four years (Bullock & Russell, 1985). As such, he may not have reached the developmental and cognitive milestone required to recognise these emotions, given his additional needs.

In a comprehensive review of over 3,000 articles relating to child participation and competence development, Ljungdalh (2012) found that there is a correlation between children's participation in learning environments and the acquisition or development of skills, capability or competence. This begs the

question: is the failure to elicit voice from Tina and Aaron due to a lack of competence or a lack of experience afforded to them? Further research is needed to determine the answer, as it is not yet known whether certain abilities are required in order to participate, or if participation develops certain skills. However, there is a connection between competence and participation, and it is not a one-way causal relationship, but a reciprocal one. It was clear that the practitioners working with Aaron and Tina held the view that they had limited competence:

> '*Because of the age … and the level of learning disability'*.
>
> (teaching assistant talking about Aaron)

> '*Only a very basic tool would work with [Tina] due to her limited comprehension*'.
>
> (Outreach practitioner)

The extracts above demonstrate the discourse of 'competency bias' (Hinton, 2008), which pathologises children for a lack of competence rather than adults' inability to enable children to participate (Le Borgne & Tisdall, 2017). The problem with this discourse is twofold. First, there is a concern that Aaron and Tina will continue to be excluded from elicitation and participation-type activities because the failed YVYC tool activity confirmed existing beliefs. This in turn restricts them from practising the required skills. Second, Aaron's and Tina's rights are denied to them because practitioners do not know how to access their experiences.

Anxiety reduction

This theme explores the ways in which the YVYC tool acted to reduce the anxiety that many of the children felt leading up to the elicitation and expressed during it. Out of the seven participants, five (Lionel, Billy, Nathan, Helen and Nina) were observed to have symptoms of anxiety. Given the high prevalence of anxiety and associated behaviours within the data, we were concerned about the effectiveness of our approach in facilitating the reduction of anxiety prior to and during the administration process.

Anxiety is an anticipation of, or a reaction to, a perceived threat. It is a normal physiological reaction to stress. When a person perceives a threat, the body is alerted and is sent into a state of fight, flight or freeze mode – a survival instinct. When this happens, the part of the brain responsible for rational thought is 'switched off'. Of particular concern is the fact that

responses can be learned, meaning if the fight, flight or freeze response is activated in a particular situation once, it can be triggered in similar situations in future, leading to the person feeling anxious when there is no real danger (Immordino-Yang et al., 2016). The assessment, planning and review processes can be an anxiety-producing experience, which can decrease motivation and disrupt memory – central processes that were observed to be critical for children to access and reflect upon their experiences. Therefore addressing anxiety is vital to achieving reliable results.

The cross-case analysis revealed that the YVYC approach reduced anxiety through a number of specific design considerations, which will now be considered in turn.

Time

Research supports the concept of giving children time, both in terms of getting used to the idea of taking part in research and during actual participation (Greig et al., 2013). The children were approached by a school contact to see if they felt comfortable taking part in the project. If they agreed, the interviewer then met with the child, and spent two to three days across several weeks getting to know them, and working alongside them. This process was considered important to build trust and rapport (Greig et al., 2013).

Adaptability

Prior to carrying out the YVYC tool interviews with the children, background information about perceived needs, home environment, interests, culture, communication preferences and strengths were explored in a manner similar to that advised by other researchers (Beresford et al., 2004) (see Table 2). Interviewer observations within the child's school environment added to this information and provided an additional perspective for understanding the child's context. As a result, the YVYC tool could be adapted across a number of areas. The number of emotions used ranged from two in the first action research cycle to 16 in action research cycle 3. The scale of the tool was altered depending on the perceived competency of the child (ranging from a simple choice of 'happy'/'sad', to 'not at all', 'a little', 'quite a bit', 'very' and 'extremely' to achieve a more nuanced expression of emotional intensity). Adapting the scale and emotions to the child's perceived competency helped to minimise task anxiety because it was aimed to be optimally challenging, which promotes motivation (Anderman & Anderman, 2014). The YVYC toolkit could also be adapted during the interview. For instance, Billy's YVYC tool was configured to include 'happy' and 'sad', emotional

constructs that could be scaled across the measures of 'not at all', 'a little', 'quite a bit', 'very' and 'extremely'. This was chosen because it was unknown whether or not he could cope with more difficult emotions; practitioners had stated that he struggled to communicate how he felt. However, during the interview Billy noted that he felt unable to express himself within the confines of those constructs:

> Interviewer: *'So when you are at your speech and language lesson, so try and picture yourself there. How do you feel about arriving there? About leaving your current school and going to [school name]?'*
> Billy: *'OK but nervous. Do you know what you should do – you should get another like there, like nervous or something'. [Billy points to the mat and explains that I need a nervous emotion card.]*
> Interviewer: *'Because you don't feel sad about it? You feel nervous?'*
> Billy: *'Yeah.'*
> Interviewer: *'Okay, that's really good to know.'*
> Interviewer: *[Interviewer writes 'nervous' down on a blank piece of paper and adds it to the emotional cards.] 'This says nervous, where would you put it on the mat?'*
> Billy: *'Quite nervous'.*

Bringing additional blank cue cards enabled Billy to voice how he wanted to interpret his experience, which personalised it to his liking. This served to bolster his confidence and empower him. He felt able to voice additional comments about ways to improve the toolkit, such as making the mat bigger, demonstrating his growing competence.

The use of Velcro on the cue cards provided an additional layer of adaptability because it meant that children were free to change their minds:

> Interviewer: *'The next one is geography.'*
> Lionel: *[Selects 'quite confident', 'very happy'.] [Lionel changes his mind and rearranges his cards on the mat.]*

Lionel was supported to change how he wanted to express himself and, as a result, he was given the autonomy to do so without seeking the interviewer's approval during the rest of the interview. Those who got the opportunity to use the YVYC tool twice (Nina and Helen) were able to change their minds in light of more recent experiences:

Interviewer: *'Okay, last time when we talked about sports, you said you felt quite a lot calm about sports. Is that still the same now?'*
Helen: *[Shakes head – no.]*
Interviewer: *'No? You have changed your mind now? What do you feel now about sports?'*
Helen: *[Nods – yes.] 'Umm'.*
Interviewer: *'Did you say you played badminton and softball?'*
Helen: *'Yeah. Now we just running and badminton.'*
Interviewer: *'So how do you feel about those now?'*
Helen: *'Tiring, umm. Angry.*
Interviewer: *'OK, how angry would you say you feel about it?'*
Helen: *'Quite a bit angry. Tired.'*
Interviewer: *'How come you feel quite a bit angry about it now?'*
Helen: *'Because I'm so tired.'*
Interviewer: *'Do you find you're tired a lot at the moment?'*
Helen: *'Yeah.'*
Interviewer: *'Is that because you are on the computer a lot in the evenings?'*
Helen: *'Yeah'.*
Interviewer: *'Does your mum know you are on the computer a lot in the evenings?'*
Helen: *'Sometimes.'*

Providing the opportunity for children to change their minds produces a double effect. It serves to empower children by enabling them to take responsibility for their own tool results, but it also gives an opportunity for further talk. In this example, enabling Helen to change her mind has led to new insight into her late-night computer habits, which is causing her increased tiredness levels, information that the school did not know.

Familiarity

Background information was also used to individualise the toolkit to include familiar points of reference. For instance, it was discovered that Lionel liked military history, which was used to develop rapport and foster verbal communication.

Interviewer: *…'How do you feel about school trips?'*
Lionel: *[Selects 'very happy', 'very calm'.]*
Interviewer: *'What is your favourite type of school trip?'*

Lionel: *'I don't know, probably my favourite school trip ever in my life is the one we just had last week.'*
Interviewer: *'Oh a military museum, wasn't it?'*
Lionel: *'Yeah. I think you know why I like it?'*
Interviewer: *'Is it because you like military?'*
Lionel: *'Yeah'. [Talks in detail about what he saw at the museum.]*

Similarly, finding out that Nathan was particularly anxious around people he did not know prompted the interviewer to spend additional time with him prior to the interviews to help him feel at ease. Evidence supports getting to know children prior to carrying out research with them to reduce anxiety (Grieg et al., 2013). This background gathering phase was instrumental in individualising the toolkit specifically for each child, providing them with a sense of familiarity.

Photographs

When anxiety is high, it is easier to think and communicate with pictures or photographs rather than words (Tami, 2018). Photographs that matched the experiences of the children were mostly taken by the interviewer, and where this was not possible illustrations were used instead. For example, Billy's and Aaron's speech and language interventions were photographed, as were the children's schools, their playground, classrooms, teachers, the sports hall and the lunch hall. Public experiences, such as working in a group, were provided through illustration due to data protection issues. Children's toys were photographed in the case of Aaron, and a familiar object was provided for Tina (a policewoman's hat). In response, children could use pictures of emotional cue cards (faces with various emotional expressions) to express how they felt, which reduced the pressure to find the right words.

The photographs also meant that children did not have to maintain eye contact with the interviewer. This is an important feature especially for those with autistic spectrum conditions (ASC) who typically present with an anxiety-based inhibition towards looking at and following the eyes of adults. Lionel had social anxiety and, as a child with ASC, was also observed avoiding looking adults in the eye. This was also witnessed with Billy. The interviewer observed in one of his lessons that *'he appeared hunched over, refrained from eye contact and mostly only spoke when he was spoken to'*. The YVYC tool enabled the children to interact in a way with which they were comfortable. It did not force them to talk or expect them to look at the interviewer,

which helped them to concentrate on their reflective thoughts, rather than worrying about complying with social norms.

Relationship building

A further concept identified within the cross-case analysis was the propensity of the YVYC toolkit to reduce anxiety through relationship and rapport building. Gathering background information about the children represented one component of this as it helped to identify interests that could be discussed within the interview.

The interviewer's role as facilitator was also important. The interactional process of the YVYC tool between child and interviewer can be seen as being akin to therapy in nature. Rogers (1979) conceptualised therapy not as a treatment – that is, something which is done to the child – but instead as an opportunity for growth. The YVYC tool can be shown to mirror this approach by providing children with an opportunity for growth, because it looks at the whole child and helps them to observe and reflect upon their own behaviour. This is illustrated in the following extracts:

Interviewer: *'So you feel quite a bit frustrated about Art. And why is that?'*
Nina: *'Because I'm not good at it.'*
Interviewer: *'But you want to be good at it?'*
Nina: *'Yes. I try my best. I know how to do little people from plasticine…'*
Interviewer: *'The next one is Art. How do you feel about Art?'*
Helen: *'Confident. [selects "extremely confident"] And happy [selects "extremely happy"].'*
Interviewer: *'Extremely confident and extremely happy. And why is that? What is it about Art that makes you feel those things?'*
Helen: *'Because …[incomprehensible] I feel like I'm flying or something'.*
Interviewer: *'That's a nice description, a lovely image'.*

Another key element of the humanistic approach is to have unconditional positive regard, characterised by warmth, acceptance and being non-judgmental. This helped to ensure that the interviewer was not seen as the authority figure in the relationship, which allowed for a more open flow of information. This is considered a key characteristic in supporting recipients towards personal growth (Shirk et al., 2011).

However, approaching the interviews in this manner may have also increased the likelihood of children displaying social desirability bias (Miller et al., 2015).

Interviewer: *'So we were looking at confident – do you know what I mean by confidence?'*
Billy: *'A bit yeah'.*
Interviewer: *'So when you were at [SLT intervention], do you feel that going and practicing your speech and language, does it make you feel more confident? [pause] Are you happy doing it? [pause] Do you think by doing it it makes you more confident to talk?'*
Billy: *'OK – I like going. Actually very happy.'*
Interviewer: *'You feel it's happy by you going?'*
Billy: *'Yeah'.*
Interviewer: *'Good'.*

The passage above was taken from the first YVYC tool interview attempt. The interviewer was adapting the tool, testing to see if Billy understood the term 'confident' and exploring feelings Billy had about his experiences. However, listening to and reading the passage back, it becomes clear that Billy did not understand what the term meant and felt pressured to provide an answer that he felt the interviewer was looking for. This represented a threat to the validity of the YVYC tool in its capacity to elicit an accurate representation of the child's voice and this threat is present throughout all of the interviews.

Engaging

During the first two action research cycles, children who successfully used the YVYC tool were asked how they felt about the tool. Billy said that it was *'good'*, Nathan reported that it was *'Easy. Extremely easy'* and Lionel said that *'it is helpful'*. The interviewer recognised that these responses might be biased by social desirability, and so during the final action research cycle (with Nina and Helen), instead of asking what children felt about the tool, they were asked how they felt at both the start and at the end of the interviews. Nina replied that while at the start of the interview she felt *'happy, excited'*, at the end she felt '*Calm. Quite a bit calm because I explained it. Proud, a little bit proud because I like mentioned help things and stuff.'* Helen picked out the emotions 'Extremely happy' at the start, and at the end picked 'Confident', 'Calm' and 'Surprised'.

The exception to this account was Nathan, who showed excitement during the first 15 minutes but then rapidly lost interest. When asked whether he thought the tool was useful and good for other children, he replied *'No'*. Responding to further questions relating to how he felt it could be improved and whether or not it took too long, he said that it *'takes too much time'*. Nathan's elicitation took 23 minutes, 10 minutes of which was taken up with the pre-screener test, which sought to explore his emotional understanding. This was subsequently removed in action research cycle 3 in order to give more time to exploring the children's views on issues that matter and ensure that attentional demands were not too high.

Overall it appeared that the children enjoyed and were engaged by the YVYC tool which helped foster happiness rather than anxiety. The interviewer's reflections support this conclusion, as the majority of the children especially appeared to enjoy physically manipulating the cards and placing them down onto the mat, which helped to make the elicitation process fun and non-test-like. This was also evident for Aaron and Tina who, despite not being able to access the tool, visibly enjoyed playing with the photographed cards, the emotional cue cards and the Velcro.

Summary of findings

The cross-case analysis and discussion reveal a number of ways in which the YVYC toolkit can be considered an effective way to elicit the school and support experiences of children with SLCN, but it is also important to consider the possible pragmatic implications of the toolkit.

Kellett (2011) warns that consultation with children has been marred by tokenism in cases where consultation was required to secure funding or views were manipulated and exploited to secure a particular adult agenda. This research project demonstrates the advantage of, and recommends the use of, a third-party children's advocate (in this project it was the interviewer) to oversee the administration of the YVYC toolkit, who is removed from the school system and therefore free of assumed truths. However, it should be cautioned that even the interviewer sometimes became inadvertently influenced by preconceptions, and any advocate should be aware of these effects.

This project shows that the YVYC toolkit offers services the opportunity to meet their responsibilities to respect children's rights, while at the same time providing information that can be used to implement and defend planning decisions. In this way, it adheres to a number of principles and obligations

that are set out in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN, 1989, specifically Articles 2, 12, 13) and the Special Educational Needs Code of Practice (DfE & DoH, 2015).

This project also shows that the YVYC toolkit can be used to offer services a way of demonstrating accountability and impact from the child's perspective. It provides a framework within which to ask children directly how they feel about a particular strategy or intervention. These data can help schools and services determine whether or not interventions and strategies are understood and enjoyed, as well as the degree to which they are impacting the child in positive or negative ways – information that can be used either to justify their continuation or to re-formulate a new plan in light of the findings.

Establishing how children felt about more abstract interventions and strategies was more complex. The outreach practitioners had said that often the service that they offer involves training other teachers in differentiation, demonstrating awareness of needs, modelling good practice, and supporting implementation advice given by other agencies. These could not be directly assessed by asking the child. However, the YVYC tool suggests that it can monitor affective experiences over a given timeframe that helps to build up a picture of how children feel in light of changing contexts. When background knowledge is also understood about a child, abstract implemented strategies, such as teacher training, improved differentiation, and classroom management, can be associated with affective experience changes. It should be noted, however, that any practitioner using the tool requires sufficient time to build up this contextual information and the necessary resources prior to interviewing a child in order to make the interaction relevant and meaningful.

Furthermore, while the YVYC toolkit can facilitate the elicitation of children's emotions, it does not necessarily follow that educational practitioners and parents will gain understanding of what is underlying the said emotions. For example, although using the YVYC toolkit with Billy enabled unique insight into the causes of his anger and frustration, this was not the case for Nathan. He could label his emotions but could not fully contextualise them. Therefore, for some children, the outcome of the YVYC toolkit could both elicit emotions and provide understanding about the underlying causes, allowing action planning to alleviate situations that provoke negative emotions. However, for other children, the YVYC toolkit may simply be a first step in eliciting emotions but further research would be needed to suggest how then to understand their source.

A final point to make about the impact and implications of the YVYC toolkit is the fact that it may not be effective for all children (at least in its present state). Both Aaron and Tina failed to use the tool effectively to express their views and the research is unclear as to whether this was due to a lack of competency or a lack of experience (Ljungdalh, 2012).

Concluding comments

The YVYC toolkit was designed to recognise the role that emotions play in learning, by affecting motivation, self-efficacy and achievement. It was also designed to follow humanistic psychological principles that assert that children are experts on their own lives. These two points are paramount for services to utilise the YVYC tool effectively, as opposed to a tokenistic approach that has often mired the children's voice movement (for example, Kellett, 2011).

The YVYC tool will be suitable for most, but not all, children with SLCN. Those with the most significant cognitive barriers are at greatest risk of not being able (or enabled) to access the tool. There is a danger that practitioners will assume that children with complex needs lack the required skills to express their views. It should be reiterated that there is no research consensus that supports this thinking. It is equally likely that exposing children to participatory opportunities will enable them to practice skills that stimulate the necessary cognitive components of reflective thinking (Le Borgne & Tisdall, 2017).

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