

***An exploration of the use of  
PATH  
(a person-centred planning tool)  
by Educational Psychologists  
with vulnerable and challenging pupils***

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**May 2013**

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of  
the Institute of Education, University of London, for the  
Doctorate in Professional Educational, Child and Adolescent Psychology.

*When we dream alone it is only a dream,  
but when we dream together it is the beginning of a new reality.*

Friedensreich Hundertwasser

## ***Acknowledgements***

I would like to thank the following people:

The pupils, for whom this research was carried out, for sharing their experiences and providing me with valuable insights into their worlds. Also, to the parents, school staff and other professionals who participated in the PATHs, for their contribution.

The PRU and AP staff for their cooperation and willingness to enable and contribute to this study.

Derek Wilson and Colin Newton who opened my eyes to person-centredness, mentored me along the way as I have developed my facilitation skills and inspired me to learn more. Thanks also to Claire Darwin and Colin for facilitating, and the EP team who contributed to, my PATH at the start of this process.

Lynne Rogers and Greta Sykes, my Institute of Education supervisors, who have provided valuable advice and been endlessly supportive.

My son Alex and my mum, for being so patient and supportive whilst I have devoted so much of my attention to producing this thesis.

*Thank you.*

## ***Abstract***

This thesis presents the findings of an exploration into the use of PATH (a person-centred planning tool) by Educational Psychologists (EPs) with pupils excluded from school and/or in Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) or Alternative Provision (AP) settings. This group attracts considerable government attention as they are reported to face poor outcomes and reintegration rates from PRU to mainstream school are low.

Effective planning, where pupils are actively involved in decision making, parents participate and services work together, is reported to be key in supporting successful outcomes. PATH places the young person and their family at the centre of the planning process, and utilises visual strategies for information sharing. The use of PATH by EPs in this context is a new and growing area of practice.

This study aimed to establish the potential role of PATH in the process of futures planning for vulnerable and challenging pupils. Nine PATH gatherings were examined and the perspectives of those for whom PATH was intended to support, as well as PATH facilitators and decision makers within PRU/AP settings were gathered. Semi-structured interview was the dominant qualitative method and thematic analysis was conducted to identify themes reflecting the participants experience of PATH, its role, strengths and limitations.

The findings indicate that PATH impacted positively and pupils attributed increased confidence and motivation to achieve their goals to their PATH. Parents and young people felt they had contributed to the process as equal partners, feeling their voices were heard. Improved pupil-parent relationships and parent-school relationships were reported and the importance of having skilled facilitators was highlighted. Although participants were generally positive about the process, many felt daunted beforehand, possibly due to a lack of preparation. Pre-PATH planning and post-PATH review were highlighted as areas requiring further consideration by PATH organisers. Recommendations to shape and improve the delivery of PATH are outlined together with future research directions.

***Declaration of word count***

The word count (exclusive of appendices and list of references) is 34,943 words

***Declaration of own work***

I hereby declare that, except where explicit attribution is made, the work presented in this thesis is entirely my own.

**Signed**

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Margo Bristow', written in a cursive style.

**Margo Bristow**

**May 2013**

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## **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

This study explored the experience of PATH (a person-centred planning tool) from the perspective of the participants, to shed light on its role in supporting vulnerable and challenging pupils. PATH participants, Educational Psychologists (EPs) and decision makers within the Local Authority (LA), Pupils Referral Units (PRU) and Alternative Provision (AP) settings were interviewed and examples of PATH in practice examined. The findings will be used to contribute to the overall development of PATH in the focus Educational Psychology Service (EPS) and in turn develop and share good practice.

For many children school is a positive experience, one in which they are able to thrive and achieve. For others, however, the picture is very different. Pupils referred to PRUs and AP are amongst the most vulnerable and disadvantaged that EPs work with. This group is important to study, particularly as pupil exclusion continues to be a problem in the UK (DCSF, 2007a) and these pupils are reported to face some of the 'worst prospects' (DCSF, 2007b, DCSF, 2008a).

The negative impact of exclusion and/or PRU placement is well documented (Knipe, Reynolds and Milner, 2007). Pupils in PRUs and AP are more likely to leave school with fewer qualifications. The DfE (2011a) reported that only 1.4 per cent of pupils in PRUs achieved five or more GCSEs at grade A\*-C, or equivalent, including English and mathematics and this compares with 53.4 per cent in all schools in England. Excluded pupils tend to experience higher levels of difficulties forming and sustaining relationships with peers and teachers than mainstream peers (Dodge, et al., 2003) and experience feelings of stigmatisation, rejection and labelling (De Pear and Garner, 1996; Kinder, Pomeroy, 2000 Cullingford & Morrison, 1996).

Exclusion places pupils at greater risk of later disadvantage and the practice of permanent exclusion has been strongly criticised (Parsons 2005, Arnold Yeomans and Simpson, 2009). PRU placement may lead to long term isolation and social exclusion (Family Action, 2012). Links have been identified between exclusion and drug use (McCrystal, Percy, and Higgins 2007), mental health issues (Rendall and Stuart, 2005, DoH, 2011), involvement in crime (Berridge, Brodie, Pitts, Porteous and Tarling, 2001; Vulliamy and Webb, 2000), educational underachievement, reduced employment prospects and crime (Farrell, Critchley, and Mills, 1999, Parsons 2005). In addition, the financial costs of social

exclusion are widely reported (Brand and Price, 2000, Mroz and Savage, 2006, McNally and Telhaj, 2007, Scott et al., 2001).

Schools currently exist in a climate which places emphasis on the competing demands of raising attainment and league-table rankings, and the need to include children with a wide range of SEN. The practice of excluding children from school is at odds with the drive for inclusion (DCSF, 2009 b). One of the criticisms of PRU and AP, as with all special provision, is that they isolate young people from their community and contribute to the negative labelling and stereotyping of pupils with additional needs (Norwich, 2008). It is argued that speedy reintegration is in the best interest of the pupil (Arnold, et al., 2009), however, securing successful re-entry to mainstream school is challenging with high rates of 'failure' (either further exclusion or disengagement), (Kinder 2000, Parsons, and Howlett, 2000 CCI, 2012).

There are strong financial incentives for effective reintegration. LAs in England spend large amounts of money on PRU and AP placements, which cost between £12,000 and £18,000 per pupil compared to mainstream costing £5-6,000 (Taylor 2012). The picture of funding for PRUs is to change in response to the Children and Families Bill (DfE, 2013). With increased pressure on PRUs to raise standards in a climate of austerity, new and creative ways to improve reintegration planning are called for.

For legal, moral and evidence based reasons pupil voice needs to be considered in educational decision-making (Shevlin and Rose, 2008). The literature suggests that for reintegration to be successful pupil engagement is crucial and plans should be based on the pupils individual strengths and specific needs (DfES, 2005). Children in PRUs often have greater difficulty in identifying positive and possible goals and in developing strategies to achieve them (Mainwaring and Hallam, 2010). Making a child's presence in a meeting meaningful where there is genuine regard for their views is not straightforward especially if the child has complex needs or finds communication difficult (Hayes, 2004).

There is considerable government interest in addressing the problems associated with exclusion from school (DfES, 2005; Family Action, 2012, OCC, 2012, DfE, 2012 b, g, Taylor, 2012) and finding ways to support vulnerable and challenging pupils is a priority for LAs and EPs (McNally and Telhaj, 2007). However, as Taylor, (2012) points out helping them is not easy or formulaic, time, effort, commitment and the expertise of dedicated professionals working in well-organised, well-resourced and responsive systems is needed.

Improving outcomes for pupils excluded from school has been an objective of the LA in which this research was set for many years (Coleman, 2009). Historically, high levels of school exclusion have been part of this LA's profile. In 2002/3 the LA was in the bottom quartile nationally for exclusions, and the most common reasons for both permanent and fixed-term exclusions have consistently been behaviour-related. The LA's documents indicate great concern around exclusion, and the introduction of additional PRU provision was one of the methods of direct support included in the LA's response (Carrington and Orr, 2003; Orr, 2004, 2007).

A formal service review of the Children and Young Peoples Service (CYPS) within the focus LA was undertaken in 2010 and in addition to seeking ways to develop more efficient practice, the objectives to promote inclusion and embed person-centred values across all services was identified. Person-centred planning (PCP) tools such as PATH then began to emerge in EP practice.

PATH, developed by Pearpoint, O'Brian and Forest (1993), is one in a range of PCP tools based upon principles of humanistic or person-centred psychology (Rogers, 1980, 2003). (See appendix 1: More about PATH, which includes an example of a PATH graphic). PATH is described as a capacity building tool for inclusion and has been widely used within health and social care services in transition planning, for example, around independent living for young people with learning disabilities.

PATH is designed to help identify ways of moving towards a desired future (O'Brian and O'Brian, 2000). The emphasis is on what is needed to support a child as opposed to focusing on difficulties or deficits (Wilson, 2013). The people present are typically those who attend traditional meetings or consultations around complex cases, such as, parents or carers, and paid professionals including representatives from the school, health, education and social care services. However, the intention of PATH is to also include as diverse a range of natural support figures, from wider family, friends and community circles, as possible, in order to redress power issues often associated with service led meetings and to promote opportunities for community connection.

In recent years PATH has begun to be adopted by EPs in the UK for use in schools. PATH provides a visual framework that can be employed in multi-agency meetings and group consultation. What is different about is that the child is purposefully included and the child's views are central to the process and secondly a large hand drawn graphic is

used to structure and record the proceedings. The PATH process requires the involvement of two EPs to co-facilitate the gathering, one in the role of graphic recorder and one as process facilitator. The PATH process generally takes a minimum of an hour and half to complete. The intention with PATH is that the EP's role as facilitator is brief and report writing is not essential as the graphic generated is, in effect, the report (Wilson, 2013).

The use of PATH was in its infancy when I joined the focus LA as a Trainee Educational Psychologist (TEP) in September 2011. Anecdotal feedback from schools was very positive and a growing number of requests to perform PATHs around complex cases were being received. PRU and AP settings were particularly receptive to adopting PATH for use with their pupils. The emphasis PATH places on visualising dreams and developing positive and possible goals was viewed as particularly relevant to reintegration and futures planning. Young peoples' engagement in traditional meetings was considered particularly challenging and PATH was seen as a potential alternative means to engage young people in decision making around issues that affect their future.

The growing enthusiasm around PATH sparked my curiosity and inspired a desire to investigate further. I considered that the potential for PATH to support pupils in the context of PRU and AP was worthy of exploration. My interest in investigating the evolving use of PATH within the LA fitted with the aspiration expressed by the EPS to establish how PATH was being used and to capture the experiences of the young people, their families and the schools around its use. Decisions regarding the focus and design of this study were made over time and discussed with the EP team, LA professionals and other stakeholders such as representatives from PRU and AP settings.

In this study, the meetings at which the PATH process was employed have been termed PATH 'gatherings', this is to avoid any negative connotations associated with the term 'meeting' and to identify the PATH process as distinct from a typical meeting. The terms vulnerable and challenging are used throughout this thesis to describe pupils with complex needs who have been excluded from school and/or placed in PRU or AP settings.

The present study forms a unique contribution to the literature on EP practice. Firstly the use of PCP tools such as PATH by EPs is new and currently there is a dearth of literature reporting on this growing area of practice. The potential of PATH to contribute positively to EP practice is worthy of exploration. Secondly, the need to identify effective ways of

planning with vulnerable and challenging pupils is a current concern highlighted in the literature and reflected in government policymaking. The potential role of PATH in supporting reintegration and futures planning for pupils excluded from school or in PRU and AP settings is unknown. This exploratory study provides a starting point on which to develop further research work, which may in turn begin to build an evidence base.

The findings are intended to help shape and improve the practice of PATH in the LA in which the study was carried out. The recommendations it presents, however, may be of benefit, in terms of practice and development, to any EPS's who may currently be using or considering adopting person-centred tools such as PATH.

Chapter 2 comprises a review of the literature as the backdrop for the development of the present research. It focuses on three key areas, school exclusion and the use of PRUs and AP, the factors that support re-entry to school and more generally outcomes for pupils excluded from school and the person-centred planning tool PATH. Chapter 3 describes and justifies the methodology employed to address the research aims. The findings are presented in Chapters 4 and 5. Chapter 4 presents the perspectives of the PATH participants including the pupils, parents, school staff and other professionals. Chapter 5 presents the decision makers perceptions of the role of PATH, its strengths and limitations and potential in terms of practice with vulnerable and challenging young people. Chapter 6 offers a discussion of the findings accompanied by recommendations for practice and future research.

## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

This chapter provides an overview of key areas of literature related to this piece of research. Exclusion from school and the PRU and AP context are discussed in terms of the risk factors and challenges of reintegration. Factors that may contribute to successful outcomes for vulnerable and challenging pupils are considered. The psychological underpinnings of PCP and PATH are discussed within the context of the history and development of PCP. The evidence base for PCP is summarised together with the findings of an EPNET survey seeking insight into the current usage of PCP in EP practice. In summary the research questions this thesis sets out to address are presented.

### **2.1 Exclusion and the PRU and AP context**

All children, regardless of what they may have done, and regardless of their personal circumstances, have the right to a fully rounded education in accordance with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN,1989), which is underpinned by English law (JCHR, 2010). Furthermore, according to DfE (2011 d, 2012 b,e,f) LAs have a duty to provide suitable education for all children and young people and in providing this the best interests of the child must be a primary consideration.

#### **2.1.1 Exclusion from school**

Exclusion is a disciplinary sanction that head teachers can apply when a pupil breaches school policy or criminal law. Exclusions can be either permanent, where the pupil's name is removed from the school's roll and the pupil educated at another school or via some other form of provision, or fixed-term, where the pupil remains on the school's roll but is forbidden from entering the premises for a defined period (DfE 2012, b,e).

Guidance states that permanent exclusion should only occur in response to serious breaches of the school's behaviour policy and if allowing the pupil to remain in school would seriously harm the education or welfare of the pupil or others in the school (DfE, 2012, b, e). Head teachers design and implement behaviour policies and must make strategic judgments when policy is breached, and ultimately, they decide whether or not to exclude.

In the UK, exclusion remains a stubborn feature of contemporary schooling, whilst in Europe exclusion is rare (Parkes, 2012). The most recent available figures for the academic year 2010/11 from the DfE report an estimated 324,110 fixed period and 5,080 permanent exclusions from primary, secondary and all special schools in England and Wales. According to DfE statistics, since 1996/97, when 12,670 permanent exclusions were recorded, there has been a gradual, year on year decline in the number of exclusions. This may be a result of schools and LAs being better able to find alternatives to permanent exclusion, or as Gordon, (2001), and Webb and Vulliamy, (2004) suggest, records of exclusions may be inaccurate underestimates. The recent Children's Commissioner Inquiry (CCI) into school exclusions 'They never give up on you' (2012) reports on illegal practices whereby children are 'unofficially' or 'informally' excluded. The Priority Review Report (DfES, 2006) suggested that unofficial exclusions, which go unrecorded, may provide a partial explanation for the decrease in the overall numbers of exclusions.

### **2.1.2 Risk factors for exclusion**

Exclusion in the UK is linked to a wide range of factors and these risk factors have changed little over the last few decades (CCI, 2012). Factors include: school ethos (Munn, Lloyd and Cullen, 2000), family status (Ashford, 1994), educational difficulties (Hayden, 2003; Parsons, 2005) and systemic school issues (Munn and Lloyd, 2005). Individual risk factors include, SEN, behaviour problems, parental rejection, being looked after, single parent, mental health problems, domestic violence, and being on the child protection register (Arnold, et al., 2009). It appears that there is a strong link between a child's vulnerability, the instability of home life and permanent exclusion.

According to the DfE census data for 2010/11, 79 per cent of pupils in PRUs have Special Educational Needs (SEN), boys are three times more likely than girls to be permanently excluded, and children who are eligible for free school meals are four times more likely than their non-eligible peers. The Runnymede Trust (2010), reports on ethnicity and exclusion, revealing that Black African Caribbean boys are three times more likely than their white counterparts to receive permanent exclusion. However when controlling for all other characteristics, being a pupil with any level of SEN provision has a stronger effect on the odds of being excluded than gender, free school meals eligibility or ethnicity (DfE 2012 a). Furthermore, there is a clear relationship between social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD) and school exclusion, as unacceptable behaviour is the most common reason for official school exclusions (DCSF, 2008 a; Parsons, 2005; DfE

2012 a). Children who are judged to have SEBD because of their challenging behaviour are therefore more likely to be excluded (Cooper, 2006).

Daniels et al., (2003, p27) report on studies, which suggest that 'poor relationships permeate children's problems at school prior to exclusion.' For example, Hayden and Dunne (2001) found that parents believed that personality clashes with particular teachers was an underlying reason in 60% of their sample of 80 families. McDonald and Thomas (2004, p111) found that parents reported the school's 'mindset about behaviour detracted attention from what the school could do to make itself a more inclusive and humane place'.

### ***2.1.3 Pupil Referral Units and Alternative Provision***

Where pupils of compulsory school age are not able to attend school, LAs have a duty to commission AP (DfES, 2008). Essentially, AP is education outside of mainstream school and may include PRU placement, home tuition, voluntary sector placements and work related learning (Taylor, 2012). Almost 50 per cent of the PRU population are pupils who either have been excluded or have been deemed at risk of exclusion (Daniels, et al., 2003). However PRUs also cater for pupils who do not attend mainstream schools for reasons including, illness, pregnancy, school refusing, phobias, being a young carer, or awaiting placement in a maintained school (DfE, 2011a).

Compared to mainstream, the PRU population is made up of higher numbers of children looked after, young offenders, and those experiencing health and housing problems (Daniels, et al., 2003). There is no reliable data on the number of pupils in AP but the latest figures from the DfE (2011 b) AP Census, recorded 14,050 pupils in PRUs and 23,020 in other AP settings on full or part-time placements (Taylor, 2012).

PRUs are defined by OFSTED (2007, p4) as 'short stay centres' and are intended to provide intervention lasting up to 3 terms, before pupils are reintegrated back into mainstream. Pupils in PRUs often arrive in an unplanned way mid-term and subsequent attendance can be highly erratic with far higher rates of absence than for pupils in the general school population (DfE 2011c). This results in an unpredictable student body, making the planning and delivery of educational programmes extremely difficult (OFSTED 2007). Staff in PRUs commented on the challenges they faced educating 'difficult' and vulnerable pupils in an unstable environment characterised by serial admissions and exits DfES (2004, 2005). Despite these challenges, PRUs are expected to offer a balanced and

broadly based curriculum, including English, mathematics, science, PSHE, ICT and careers education and guidance (DfE 2011 d).

The picture of funding for PRUs is to change in response to the Children and Families Bill (DfE, 2013) and this is likely to affect the way they operate in the future (DfE, 2012b). The government's Behaviour Advisor, Charlie Taylor, (2012 p21), recommended that the best PRUs should be able to 'take advantage of academy freedoms', to 'drive up quality of education and develop closer relationships with schools in their area' and the opening of free school status to providers of AP was recommended. At the present time it is difficult to foresee how these changes in policy will impact on PRU and AP, however, there is likely to be an increased focus on reintegration planning and an emphasis on services working collaboratively.

#### **2.1.4 Reintegration**

It is argued that speedy reintegration is in the best interest of the pupil (Arnold, et al., 2009), however, securing successful re-entry to mainstream school is challenging with high rates of 'failure' (either further exclusion or disengagement), (Kinder 2000, Parsons, and Howlett, 2000 CCI, 2012) especially for older pupils. Less than 20 per cent of Year 9 pupils returned from PRU to mainstream schools and a lower proportion of KS4 young people (Daniels at al. 2003). Staff in PRUs recognised that the small group, intimate environment of a PRU, offering of a high degree of interaction with adults, suited some pupils who experienced difficulties in an ordinary mainstream school (DfES, 2005) and pupils may not necessarily want to return to mainstream.

Reintegration rates are not always easily accessible, which makes it difficult to assess the success of reintegration (Lown 2005). Although there is some research around reintegration to mainstream school (ACE, 2003; DfES, 2004b; Fisher, 2001; HMSO, 2004; INCLUDE, 2000; Parsons and Howlett, 2000) there is very little research around what supports the 'sustained' reintegration of young people following permanent exclusion.

Brown (2011) reported that PRU staff are often caught between the conflicting demands of reintegrating pupils back into school and the lack of opportunity for that to happen effectively. Furthermore, pupils are often in PRU provision for a long period of time, either because their needs are too great to consider reintegration at that stage, as they are awaiting suitable SEN provision, or there is a lack of schools willing to support reintegration (Panayiotopoulos, and Kerfoot, 2007, Brown, 2011).

## **2.2 Factors that support vulnerable and challenging pupils**

The literature shows that over the last 15 years, although rates of exclusion have decreased, the challenges around successful reintegration following exclusion and improving of outcomes for PRU/AP placed pupils have not changed (Taylor, 2012). The following section reviews a range of factors that are reported to be influential in supporting vulnerable and challenging pupils.

### **2.2.1 The LA Context**

For the most favourable outcomes to be achieved legislation needs to be embedded into practice, and the LA culture and agenda must reinforce a commitment to responding to and meeting pupil needs and ensuring the availability of appropriate support services (Brown,2011). Multi-agency, integrated teams and EP services have a role to play. A clear programme for re-entry is required, with effective and informed planning and consultation, a clear programme for re-entry, and on-going support and monitoring is highly influential in supporting successful reintegration. Effective collaboration through multi-agency working, ensuring responsibilities are shared and understood by reintegration partners and involving parents/carers and pupils in planning and monitoring reintegration was identified.

#### ***Supporting emotional health and wellbeing***

Brown (2011) argues that there is a need to address the broader social and emotional needs of vulnerable young people, which, if unmet, will continue to have a negative impact on their educational outcomes and future life chances. Brown (2011, p7) goes on to state that:

The PRU represents a last chance to engage with and support vulnerable young people before they reach adulthood and this opportunity should not be squandered. The implications in terms of both the human cost and cost to society are extensive.

According to Cooper (2001), very often by the time a child reaches a PRU their difficulties are entrenched, extending back through the child's primary school histories. The child may have experienced disruption in their education and may present highly challenging behaviour and a high level of need. Meltzer, Gartward, Goodman and Ford (2000) postulated that 20 per cent of children and young people may be described as having a mental health problem and pupils in PRU and AP are more likely to have their mental health and emotional wellbeing compromised (Rendall, and Stuart, 2005). There is a growing interest in supporting pupil mental health (DoH 2011) and MacKay (2007) argues

that EPs could be instrumental in the proposed plans to deliver interventions within schools.

There is increasing evidence that schools are well placed to promote young people's emotional wellbeing by recognising potential difficulties early and intervening effectively (Atkinson and Bragg, 2012). Rait, Mosen and Squires (2010) suggest that by working with schools, EPs can develop a more sophisticated understanding of behavioural and emotional problems within the school context and Mackay (2007) argues that EPs are well placed to offer therapy-based interventions.

### ***The role of the EP***

EPs are aware of the importance of highlighting and building-on strengths within children in their day-to-day work. They frequently encounter pupils who have experienced exclusion, within schools or PRUs. Often a number of vulnerability or risk factors are uncovered in their work with these children, prompting recommendations and work around creating change and positive outcomes. EPs who link with PRUs, according to Cullen and Monroe (2010 p66), are equipped with:

applied psychology research skills, professional practice experience in complex educational and community contexts with many different agencies, and familiarity with complex casework.

Educational Psychologists, therefore, play a key role in supporting alternative provision such as PRUs to meet the needs of the vulnerable children they accommodate (DCSF, 2008a).

Most young people and some parents are vulnerable in their dealings with professionals because of relative lack of professional knowledge and, in some cases, lack of skills and resources. The BPS (2002) stipulates that EPs in this context have a responsibility to make particular efforts to ensure that clients understand fully the services available and their rights in respect of these. They also have a responsibility to redress the potential power imbalance by involving clients fully in decision-making. In particular EPs should endeavour to make sure that they establish a climate of open communication.

## **2.2.2 The PRU / School Context**

### ***Inclusive school ethos***

A school's culture, ethos, commitment to inclusion, and positive attitude towards excluded pupils are influential factors in improving outcomes for vulnerable and challenging pupils (Arnold, et al., 2009). Daniels et al., (2003) reported that where receiving schools demonstrated an inclusive ethos and flexibility in meeting the pupil needs the reintegration process was more effective.

Ainscow et al., (2006, p296) argue that, in order to promote inclusion, schools need to 'engage in a critical examination of what can be done to increase the learning and participation of the diversity of students within the school and its locality.' Inclusion represents a school development process that involves all members of the school community in removing barriers to learning and participation (Dyson et al., 2004). For genuine inclusion to occur it requires change, not only at the levels of school policy and practice, but within the culture of the school (Skidmore, 2004). Schools often feel under pressure with competing agendas, and work is needed to alleviate the pressure on schools to raise attainment and public image at the cost of inclusion (CCI 2012).

### ***Personalised Curriculum***

In terms of sustaining reintegration, consideration to the planning and development of an individually tailored, flexible, curriculum for the pupil is needed and for this to be effectual in the longer term, on-going support and monitoring is crucial (Daniels et, al. 2003) Hallam and Rogers (2008) identified that one of the main factors associated with pupil disengagement is the mismatch between the academic curriculum offered and the interests and skills of the student, and as such the promotion of quality alternative curriculum provision is vital.

### ***School connectedness***

School connectedness is the belief by students that adults in the school care about their learning and about them as individuals (Tew, 2010). School connectedness is said to be a protective factor for pupils health (McNeely, Nonnemaker and Blum, 2002) academic success (Connell and Welborn, 1991) and emotional wellbeing (Haddon et al., 2005). Critical requirements for feeling connected include high academic rigour and expectations, coupled with support for learning, positive adult-student relationships, and physical and emotional safety (McNeely et al.,, 2002). When adolescents feel cared for by people at their school they are less likely to use substances, engage in violence, or initiate sexual activity at an early age (Geddes. 2003). Finding ways to develop school connectedness

for pupils who have been excluded is likely to be challenging, however, the benefits of are clear.

### **2.2.3 The Family Context**

#### ***Parental support and involvement***

Children whose parents are involved in their school life attain greater academic achievements and are more motivated to excel than children whose parents distance themselves from their child's educational experience, (DCSF, 2008 b). The benefits of parental involvement extend beyond academic success, and when parents demonstrate a vested interest in their child's success, student attendance improves and incidences of disruptive classroom behaviour decline (Panayiotopoulos and Kerfoot 2007).

In England, the Government's strategy for securing parental involvement was first set out in the 1997 White Paper, 'Excellence in Schools'. The strategy included three elements: providing parents with information, giving parents a voice and encouraging parental partnerships with schools (Desforges, and Aboucher, 2003). This strategy has since been played out through a wide range of activities, including home school agreements (Sykes, 2001), parenting programmes, (Rogers et al., 2008), parenting interventions (DfE, 2012 g) and supporting parents with their children's 'at home' learning and development and home school liaison, (DCSF, 2009 a).

McDonald and Thomas (2003) found that the parents of excluded pupils described their relationships with schools as characterised by tension, conflict, and poor communication. Parents described a sense of powerlessness, lack of voice and exclusion. Parental involvement was considered critical to supporting behaviour management and reintegration (Daniels et al., 2003). McDonald and Thomas (2003) suggest that considerable work around communication and relationship building between schools and parents is required, especially around the process of exclusion. Finding ways for schools and the parents of children at risk of exclusion to build effective relationships and maintain communication is likely to impact positively on the outcome for the pupil.

Where young people receive active support from family members with contacts and a stake in society, their chances of altered life-styles and achievement improve considerably Daniels et al., (2003). Furthermore, the degree of pupil and parental involvement in post-exclusion processes impacts on the likelihood of positive outcomes.

Whether new legislation will impact positively is difficult to determine, however, the Children and Families Bill (2013) claims to provide pupils and their parents with greater control and choice in decisions. It aims to take forward the reform programme set out in Support and Aspiration, (DfE 2012 f) requiring LAs to involve pupils and parents in reviewing and developing provision for those with special educational needs.

#### **2.2.4 The Individual Pupil Context**

##### ***Pupil Voice***

The importance of establishing and representing the views of pupils is reflected within legislation, literature and research (Harding & Atkinson, 2009). The UN Conventions of the Rights of the Child (1989, article 12) states that children have the right to say what they think should happen, when adults are making decisions that affect them, and to have their opinions taken into account. Lown (2005 p37) proposes that 'there are good moral, pragmatic and legally supported reasons for listening to pupils, if plans are to be successful for them'. Children, as Hayes (2004, p175) reports, have, 'valuable perspectives and ideas that can be used to improve things that impact on their lives.'

However, children are often excluded from decision-making and there are few studies investigating the views of pupils excluded from school about their educational experiences (Shevlin and Rose, 2008). Munn et al., (2000) argue that in discussions of exclusions, the voices of excluded children are infrequently heard. Lown (2005 p46) argues that this represents an 'unfortunate under-utilisation of insight and suggestion.' Gordon, (2001) suggests that children's personal experiences of exclusion can provide powerful insights into the types of practical difficulties and expectations placed on them in schools. Creating opportunities to champion the voice of vulnerable and challenging pupils in decisions that affect their future should therefore be a high priority in EP work.

##### ***Pupil engagement***

Pupil cooperation, motivation and engagement in the re-entry process are imperative. Parsons and Howlett (2000) found that when young people actively wanted re-integration, were prepared for it, and willing and able to accept normal school rules and routines, greater levels of successful reintegration were achieved. Daniels et al., (2003) identified that PRUs recognise the importance of enlisting the support of both family and the young people in planning. However, they stressed that the desire to engage has to come from within the young person, and only with the active endorsement of their post-exclusion programme from the pupil is there likely to be successful re-entry. Policy and practice need to promote a variety of ways of working by staff, matching provision to an on-going

review of the young person's needs, whilst building upon the young person's strengths (Panayiotopoulos and Kerfoot, 2007). This may help young people to break out of their sometimes engrained negative patterns of behaviour or undue expectancy of failure (Hayden and Dunne 2001). If young people feel listened to, they value the experience, and their behaviour is likely to improve (Hart and Thompson, 2009). Daniels et al., (2003) warns that too optimistic a picture should not be offered, as on-going and active involvement of the young people may not guarantee continuous and increasing engagement.

### ***Goals and aspirations***

The importance of young people having goals and aspirations has long been documented as a factor in future achievement and success (Markus and Nurius, 1986, Oyserman, Bybee and Terry, 2006, Mainwaring and Hallam, 2010). Research suggests that when pupils have a clear idea or vision of what they hope to achieve or be like in the future, and how they can achieve this, they are more likely to attain their goals (Carey and Martin, 2007). Daniels et al., (2003) suggest that policy and practice should take into account what motivates the young person and what they believe they may be capable of achieving now and in the future. Berridge et al., (2001) noted that pupils excluded from school often had engrained low self-esteem and limited horizons, believing the direction of their lives was outside their control. Some were also locked into cycles of anti-social behaviour patterns, both at school and in their home community, and had difficulty envisioning a life beyond their present very localised circumstances. (DCSF, 2009 b)

Research into the possible selves of young people has shed light on the importance of pupils setting themselves realistic goals and developing their own strategies for achievement (Oyserman and Markus, 1990). Possible selves are defined as, 'the ideal selves that we would very much like to become. They are also the selves we could become and the selves we are afraid of becoming' (Markus and Nurius, 1986, p954). Oyserman, et al., (2002) stated that these ideas are motivating and can inspire young people to attain goals. Possible selves have been used to investigate various types of adolescent behaviour such as delinquency (Oyserman and Saltz, 1993; Oyserman and Markus, 1990), exclusion from school (Mainwaring and Hallam, 2010) academic achievement and engagement (Oyserman, Bybee and Terry, 2006, Oyserman, Terry and Bybee, 2002).

Mainwaring and Hallam (2010) compared the possible selves of those attending PRUs with those attending a mainstream secondary school. They found that compared to

mainstream pupils, those in the PRU had more negative possible selves. They also had fewer strategies for achieving positive possible selves than their mainstream peers. Thus the importance of helping to enable pupils to visualise their futures and identify positive and possible goals is seemingly more crucial in the PRU setting.

## **2.3 PATH, a visual person-centred planning tool**

### **2.3.1 Person-Centred Psychology**

The person-centred approach was founded on the theory of the American Psychologist, Carl Rogers, during the 1940s and was developed through therapeutic practice. Person-Centred Psychology is one of a group of approaches under the umbrella of 'Humanistic Psychology' which focuses on quality of life, how people grow, develop and become who they are (Merry, 2006). Rogers' (1980) theory proposes that we all share an 'actualising tendency,' an inherent tendency to become fully functioning.

Rogers (1980, p115-117) stated that:

'individuals have within themselves vast resources for self-understanding and for altering their self-concepts, basic attitudes, and self-directed behaviour; these resources can be tapped if a definable climate of facilitative psychological attitudes can be provided.'

This environment may be created through the development of a relationship with a person who is deeply understanding (empathetic), accepting (having unconditional positive regard) and genuine (congruent) and where a person feels free from physical and psychological threat. In their discussion of the concept of congruence, Mearns and Thorne (2007, p119) quote Rogers (1973, p. 186), who states:

I believe it is the *realness* of the therapist in the relationship which is the most important element. It is when the therapist is natural and spontaneous that he seems to be the most effective.

Merry (2006) suggests that the person-centred approach can be described as 'a way of being' in the world and it is possible to live the values upon which the theory is based. Merry (2006) further argues that to practice person-centred ways of working the practitioner must embrace the values on which the approach is based. The principles Rogers described have gone on to influence practice in education, childcare, patient care and conflict resolution and business management. (Merry, 1995) and person-centred planning tools such as PATH are rooted in Rogers' original theory.

### **2.3.2 The origins and values of PCP**

Smull and Sanderson, (2005 p 7) define PCP as 'a process of learning how a person wants to live and then describing what needs to be done to help the person move towards that life.' Mount (cited in O'Brien and Blessing, 2011, p26) claims that:

'to be person-centred is to put the person in the middle of our thinking and get to know the person in fresh and vital ways that set the pattern for everything else we do in partnership with that person...Being person centred isn't writing plans on paper. It's complex interaction of investments and commitments that leads to real change in people's lives.'

The title 'person-centred' is used because those who initially developed it shared a belief that services tended to work in a 'service-centred' way and that services, which were set up to respond to problems of social exclusion, disempowerment, and devaluation, can unintentionally contribute to it (Wilson, 2013). For example a person who is isolated may be offered different groups to attend (each run by a service specifically for people sharing a label), rather than being helped to make friends in ordinary society (Wethrow, 2002). In supporting pupils in PRUs, Brown (2011) observed a tendency toward 'service led' as opposed to 'needs led' support and when services were unavailable identified needs remained unmet.

PCP covers a range of processes sharing a general philosophical background, and aiming at similar outcomes. PCP approaches have developed over time through engagement in practice predominantly in the context of health and social care, for purposes such as transition planning for young people with learning difficulties or disabilities (Sanderson, 2002). Whilst PCP was developed because of the social and service response to disability, it was quickly recognised to be useful for many other individuals and groups of people.

There are four main approaches to person-centred planning:

- Essential Lifestyle Planning (ELP) (Smull and Sanderson, 2005).
- PATH (O'Brien, Pearpoint and Kahn, 2010)
- MAPS (Making Action Plans) (Falvey, Forest, Pearpoint and Rosenberg, 2000)
- Personal Futures Planning. (Mount, 2000)

Person-centred planning offers an alternative to traditional models which have tended to focus on a person's deficits by striving to place the individual at the centre of decision-making, and treating family members as partners. Wethrow, (2002) suggests that PATH provides a context for commitment building – creating a team of committed individuals who are knowledgeable about the person's interests and goals and are committed to helping the person to pursue them.

PCP can have many effects that go beyond the making of plans. It can create a space during which someone who is not usually listened to has central stage. It can insist that discussion is centred on what the person is telling us is important to them, with their words and behaviours, as well as what others feel is important for the person. It can engage participants personally by allowing them to speak of deeply felt hopes and fears. It can assist people in a circle of support to reframe their views of the person it is focused on. It can help a group to solve difficult problems.

### ***2.3.3 PCP's place in policy and legislation***

PCP received its first English policy endorsement in Valuing People (DOH, 2001). The White Paper expectations were translated into good practice guidance, published in 2002 as Planning with People – Towards Person Centred Approaches (DOH, 2002) and more recently as part of 'Valuing People Now', (2007). It is promoted as a key method for delivering the personalisation objectives of the UK government's 'Putting People First' (DOH, 2007) programme for social care. The coalition government has continued the commitment to personalisation through 'Capable Communities and Active Citizens' (DoH, 2010) and LAs are now being challenged by government to change their model to one that is founded on person-centred approaches.

### ***2.3.4 The Evidence base for PCP***

Possibly due to its development through engagement in practice, and the emphasis within PCP upon mobilising action rather than operationalising the process and objectively measuring outcomes, there has been a general absence of an evidence base (O'Brien and O'Brien, 2000). With the increase in interest in PCP, a number of studies have outlined its potential benefits in the UK (Robertson, et al., 2005, 2006, Rimmer et al., 2011, Hayes 2004, Michaels and Ferrara, 2006) and in the USA (Claes et al., 2010, Childre and Chambers, 2005, Miner and Bates, 1997, Hagner et, al. 2012 Holburn and Vietze 2002, Holburn, 2002 a,b, Holburn et al., 2004).

Holburn et al., (2004) established that quality of life indicators in the areas of autonomy, choice making, relationships and satisfaction improved. Robertson et al., (2005) noted positive changes in social networks, contact with family and friends, and community-based activities. PCP made a difference where there was a person-centred culture and the underlying values of those facilitating were an important factor. Robertson et al., (2006) suggested that to create personalised services, managers need to embed person-centred thinking and approaches into all of their management practices.

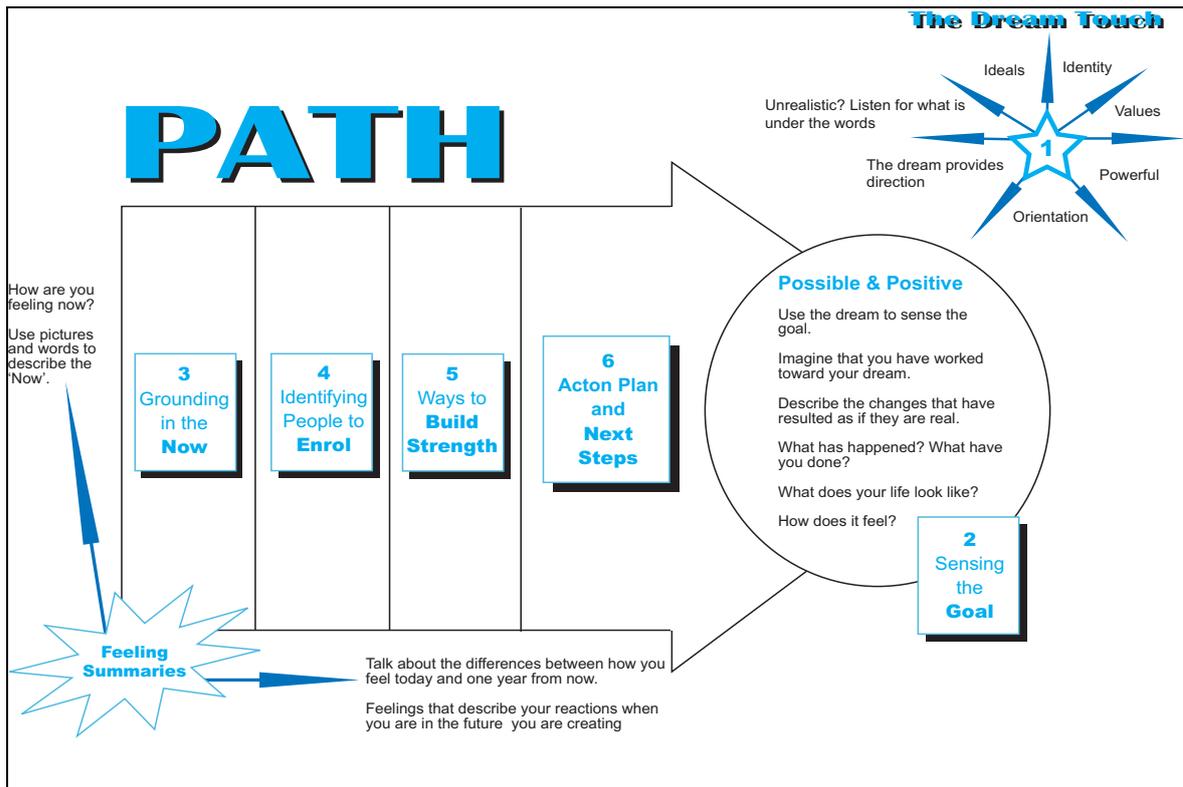
Michaels and Ferrara (2006) argue that PCP is an ideal vehicle for promoting collaboration and problem solving to ensure that transition plans are created that are meaningful and student centred. Rimmer, et al., (2011) reported that young people felt respected, listened to, and included in the planning process. They also made new friends, liked the pictures, [found the PATH process] more friendly and easier to understand and that they felt it helped adults to understand their views. This study highlights the value of including the experiences of the participants in the evaluation process.

A number of positive outcomes of PCP have been identified, including increased parental involvement and increased parent satisfaction ratings after the meeting (Miner and Bates, 1997). PCP was described by families as more purposeful, structured, clear, focused, open, in-depth and collaborative, and more successful in providing a holistic view of the child (Childre & Chambers, 2005). The findings of Hagner et al., (1996) drew some more sceptical conclusions about the efficacy of PCP processes and although family participation increased, student participation remained limited and did not appear to be valued by professionals. Hagner et al., (2012) argue that PCP can impact on student's self-determination as they become more aware of their preferences and more able to communicate them. Hayes (2004) advocates the use of visual strategies and highlights the importance of including the young person in preparation before the review to familiarise them with the process and involve them in decision-making.

### ***2.3.5 PATH: a visual person-centred planning tool***

According to Wethrow (2004) 'PATH is certainly a powerful planning tool, but in addition, and, perhaps even more importantly, it is a very powerful tool for invitation, community-building and commitment-building.' The PATH framework as illustrated in Figure 1, provides a visual structure and a series of stages (see appendix 1: More about PATH) focusing initially on the dream and then working back from this vision and goal by mapping out the actions required along the way (Wilson, 2013).

**Figure 1: the PATH Framework**



### **2.3.6 PATH in EP practice**

Literature regarding the extent of the use of PCP in Educational Psychology practice is minimal. In order to gain an overview of the current use of PCP by EPs an online survey using EPNET was used to access a UK wide EP audience. EPNET (2012) describes itself as 'a forum for the exchange of ideas and information' and had 1747 subscribers at the time of the survey. The survey was posted on 25.11.11 (see EPNET post: appendix 2). EPs were asked to list the types of visual PCP tools they use, the contexts in which they are used, what it was about these tools the EPs felt contributed to their success, and the potential barriers to their use. A total of 33 EPs from 25 different LAs plus two independent EPs reported using PCP in their practice.

The tools reported to be used included, PATH, MAPS, Solution Circle, Circles of Adults, Big Picture and visual annual reviews. Generally the stated purpose of the tool was to shed light on complex cases/situations and for group planning and problem solving. The tools were reported to be used at both an individual and organisation level. The tools were reportedly used to facilitate transition planning, annual review meetings, Team Around the Child (TAC) and other multi-agency meetings as well as continued professional development (CPD) and group development work.

All those who responded to the survey reported having positive feedback from users. EPs reported that the key factors that contribute to PATH making a difference are: the mind set behind it, the solution oriented principles, the large graphic, the focus on what is needed rather than what is wrong, and the contrast to traditional approaches to planning. The key barriers to the use of these tools were reported to be the commitment of time and skills of facilitators.

These findings suggest that although the use of PATH is relatively new to the field of Educational Psychology, it is becoming increasingly widely used across the UK. The fact that visual PCP approaches including PATH are taught as part of the Doctoral training of new EPs by a number of Universities further adds to the view that these tools are seen as credible and of value in EP practice.

### ***2.3.7 The psychological and therapeutic dimensions of PATH***

As with many models of practice, such as consultation and tools, such as PATH, in the repertoire of the EP, it is the psychology that the EP brings to the process that impacts on the outcome (Wagner, 2000). EPs draw on a range of psychological perspectives in their work and it is this multidimensional approach that marks the uniqueness of the EP contribution (Farrell, 2006). EPs develop their own individual ways of working, drawing on differing therapeutic approaches such as personal construct psychology, systems thinking from family therapy, solution focused brief therapy, and narrative therapy (Wagner, 2000). It may be argued that psychology underpins and informs every aspect and every interaction of an EP's work, therefore psychological and therapeutic dimensions are intrinsic to PATH facilitation.

## **2.4 Chapter Summary and Research Questions**

It seems that it is the most vulnerable and challenging pupils who find themselves at the receiving end of exclusion. There are often a number of risk factors in these children's lives that increase individual vulnerability, and although PRUs can offer a means of accommodating these children, their remit confines this to short term intervention, which is often followed by failed attempts at reintegration. These children, who are likely to most benefit from continuity of support, secure relationships, and a consistent learning environment, are the group who are placed at most risk of receiving fragmented support and disrupted education, jeopardising their future social inclusion and outcomes.

The literature suggests that early intervention and support for families and pupils in 'at risk' groups is needed and that policy and practice need to encourage parental involvement and value pupil voice. Developing positive relationships between pupils, parents, schools and services is key in supporting positive outcomes. Pupils in PRUs are seemingly less able to identify realistic goals, and as such interventions need to look at ways of helping pupils to identify their aspirations and develop strategies for achieving them. Finding ways of promoting school connectedness, considering individual characteristics, putting effective individual support in place and developing a personalised alternative curriculum are likely to promote sustained reintegration.

Agencies tasked with supporting and raising outcomes for vulnerable and challenging pupils face a range of challenges. Despite intervention over the years, the long-term life chances for this group remain stubbornly poor. There are legal, moral and evidence based reasons for supporting these pupils, and further research into how best this can be achieved is sorely needed. EPs have a role in collaborative working, linking services, and building relationships between schools, PRU, parents and pupils. EPs also have a role in promoting the emotional wellbeing of the child through therapy-based practice. In a context of change and efficiency drives, EPs need to identify effective ways of enabling young people to engage in planning for their future.

The gaps, which could usefully be addressed, in the current literature regarding PCP and PATH in EP practice have been identified. The evidence available suggests that PCP has a useful part to play in the transition planning of young people with learning difficulties and disabilities. The potential, however, for these approaches within the context EP practice has received little attention. Helping people come together with the young person and jointly plan positive and possible futures has potentially powerful consequences. The use of PATH by EPs with vulnerable and challenging pupils is new, however, it is argued that the potential for PATH to play an important role is worthy of further exploration and with this in mind the present research sought to respond to the following research questions:

**Research Question One:** How do pupils, their parents/carers, school staff and other professionals describe their experience of PATH?

**Research Question Two:** How do decision-makers and PATH facilitators perceive the role of PATH and its strengths and limitations in supporting vulnerable and challenging pupils?

## **CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY**

This chapter provides an overview of the methodology including the psychological and philosophical underpinnings, the rationale for the research design and methods, and ethical considerations. The sampling framework is outlined together with the development of the interview protocol and data collection procedures. Finally, attention is given to the approach to analysis and the thematic analysis process.

### **3.1 Psychological Underpinnings**

This research was developed in the context of the researcher's training and practice as a TEP. The central philosophy of researcher's placement LA is based on person-centred psychology (Rogers 1980) and PATH, the focus of this research, is a person-centred planning tool. In applying the principals of person-centredness to the methodology a non-threatening environment, providing unconditional positive regard and avoiding the adoption of an expert role, was created when communicating with research participants.

### **3.2 Philosophical Stance**

As individuals we hold a set of beliefs about the world, our 'personal philosophy' or 'personal paradigm' (Cresswell 2012). When planning research, clarification of these basic beliefs can assist in an understanding of the interrelationships between ontological (what is the nature of reality?), epistemology (what can be known?) and methodology (how can the researcher discover what she believes can be known?) (Maxwell, 2011). Historically, researchers have aligned themselves with one of two main worldviews or paradigms, positivism or constructivism, associated with the quantitative and qualitative methodologies. The current research has been developed in line with a third paradigm, 'realism' which according to Maxwell, (2011) offers a 'middle ground.'

The realist view sees the real world as stratified into different layers and believes that there are 'no facts that are beyond dispute' (Robson, 2011, p.32). Research adopting a realist position aims to gather multiple perspectives about how things 'really' for individuals in order to gain a better understanding of what is 'really' occurring in a particular context (Maxwell, 2011). Within realist approaches, the researcher essentially asks, 'What works best, for whom, and under what circumstances?' (Robson, 2011, p.39).

The realist world-view has compatibility with a wide range of research methods (Smith, 2007) and with a pragmatic stance, which places methodological appropriateness as the primary criterion for judging a study's worth. The pragmatic approach enables methods to be selected on the bases that they fit the purpose of the enquiry, the question being investigated and the resources available (Pawson and Tilly, 2007).

### **3.3 Rationale for the research design and methods**

As the practice of PATH by EPs was in its relative infancy within the focus LA an exploratory study was called for. The dearth of previous research, investigating person-centred working in the field Educational Psychology, meant that an exploration of the processes around the delivery of PATH was important in providing an insight into what PATH may offer. A key aim of this research was to gather the perspectives of young people, parents/carers, school staff and other professionals who have experienced PATH in order to inform and shape future EP practice. A flexible research design, including an inductive, qualitative and idiographic approach was adopted.

Qualitative data is often used when research aims to investigate how people understand their experiences, meanings, actions, interpretations and descriptions (Cresswell, 2012). It facilitates a 'detailed exploration of the interwoven aspects of the topics or processes studied' (Yardley, 2000, p. 215). The idiographic approach, places emphasis on valuing differences, thick or in-depth description, subjective interpretation and inductive reasoning (Smith 2007). An idiographic research design was in keeping with the person-centred philosophy by valuing and respecting individuals' views to achieve a unique understanding.

Semi-structured interviews formed the principal data collection method as an in-depth focus on differing perspectives was seen as most likely to get at the meaning and potential value of PATH. A questionnaire was initially used to collect data from the EP team and follow up questioning took place with individual EPs. The collection of data from more than one source allows for triangulation, a 'family of answers' as Pawson and Tilley (2007) term it, and lessens vulnerability to bias or errors associated with a singular source.

Interviews enable a researcher to find out from others what cannot be directly observed, such as, feelings, thoughts, intentions, past events or things that preclude the presence of an observer (Patton, 2002). Interviewing assumes that the perspective of others is meaningful, knowable and able to be made explicit (Smith, 2007). With interviewing, it is

the role of the researcher to provide a framework within which people can respond comfortably, accurately and honestly and this fits with the values of the person-centred approach. Patton (2002 p340) suggests that, 'the quality of the information obtained during interview is largely dependent on the interviewer'. To enable each participant's voice to be valued the 1:1 interview approach was selected in preference to other methods such as focus groups. The researchers training and practice in rapport building and information gathering was highly applicable to the interview approach.

### **3.4 Ethical considerations**

The Institute of Education (IOE) Ethics Committee approved the proposal for the present study, which adheres to the British Psychological Society Code of Human Research Ethics (BPS, 2009). At each stage in the design and conduct of this study the ethical implications were considered. The BPS guidance outlines the principles which guide research from its inception through to completion and which must be considered and addressed if research is, be judged ethically sound.

#### ***Respect***

This principle pertains to valuing the worth of all persons and being sensitive to the dynamics of perceived authority or influence over clients and their right to privacy. All interview participants gave informed consent and were made aware of their right to withdraw and details of how this was achieved are provided in the section on the procedure. In order for participants to feel comfortable, interviews were conducted in environments familiar to them (Smith, 2007) and pupils were given the option to have a chosen adult present. The potential influence on the openness and comfort of the interviewee in terms of the possible perceived power imbalance between interviewer and interviewee was acknowledged (Yardley, 2000).

#### ***Competence***

The principle of competence holds that psychologists should know the limits of their knowledge, skill, training, education and experience. Additional reading was undertaken to ensure that the process of decision-making used in the present research could be ethically justified (Bennett, 2007; Bond, 2000; Franey, 2002; Lindsay, 2008) and ethical issues were identified and discussed with research supervisors.

#### ***Responsibility***

Participants were informed at the start of each interview that all the data collected would be kept secure. Files were password protected if on a computer, hand written notes

anonymised and digitally recorded interviews were deleted once transcribed. Assurances were made regarding confidentiality and anonymity and the participants' right to withdraw or refrain from responding to any question at any stage during the interview. In the case of interviews with young people information was provided in an age appropriate way and the young person was presented with a red card to raise if they did not want to answer a particular question or to end the interview. Body language was monitored for signs of discomfort in order to adapt the approach or end the interview.

Confidentiality was discussed and agreed with the pupil, i.e. their comments would not be fed back to their parents or school with a proviso regarding their safety and that of others. In the case of issues around disclosure, safeguarding procedure would be followed and the nominated safeguarding officer in the young persons current placement would be informed. I informed all participants that if their words were used in the final thesis I would attribute them to their professional role and in the case of pupils, a pseudonym would be given and any overtly identifying features would be omitted. Assurances were given that all data would be treated sensitively, for example, in the case of professionals offering negative feedback regarding the way an EP had facilitated a PATH, the information would be used to inform and improve the service and not be directly reported back in a way that could cause upset to any individual concerned.

### ***Transparency***

The comprehensive descriptions of the research methodology and approach to analysis included in this thesis were intended to provide an accurate account and allow the reader to identify potential limitations and make alternative interpretations. Copies of transcripts and a step-by-step breakdown of the data analysis process have been included for this purpose. Robson (2011) warns of the intrinsically sensitive nature of practitioner research where there may be a risk or duty of revealing inadequacy or worse. The potential risks were discussed with the stakeholders and it was felt that as the use of PATH was in its relative infancy any observations, positive or negative, could be useful in terms of constructive learning points.

### ***Integrity***

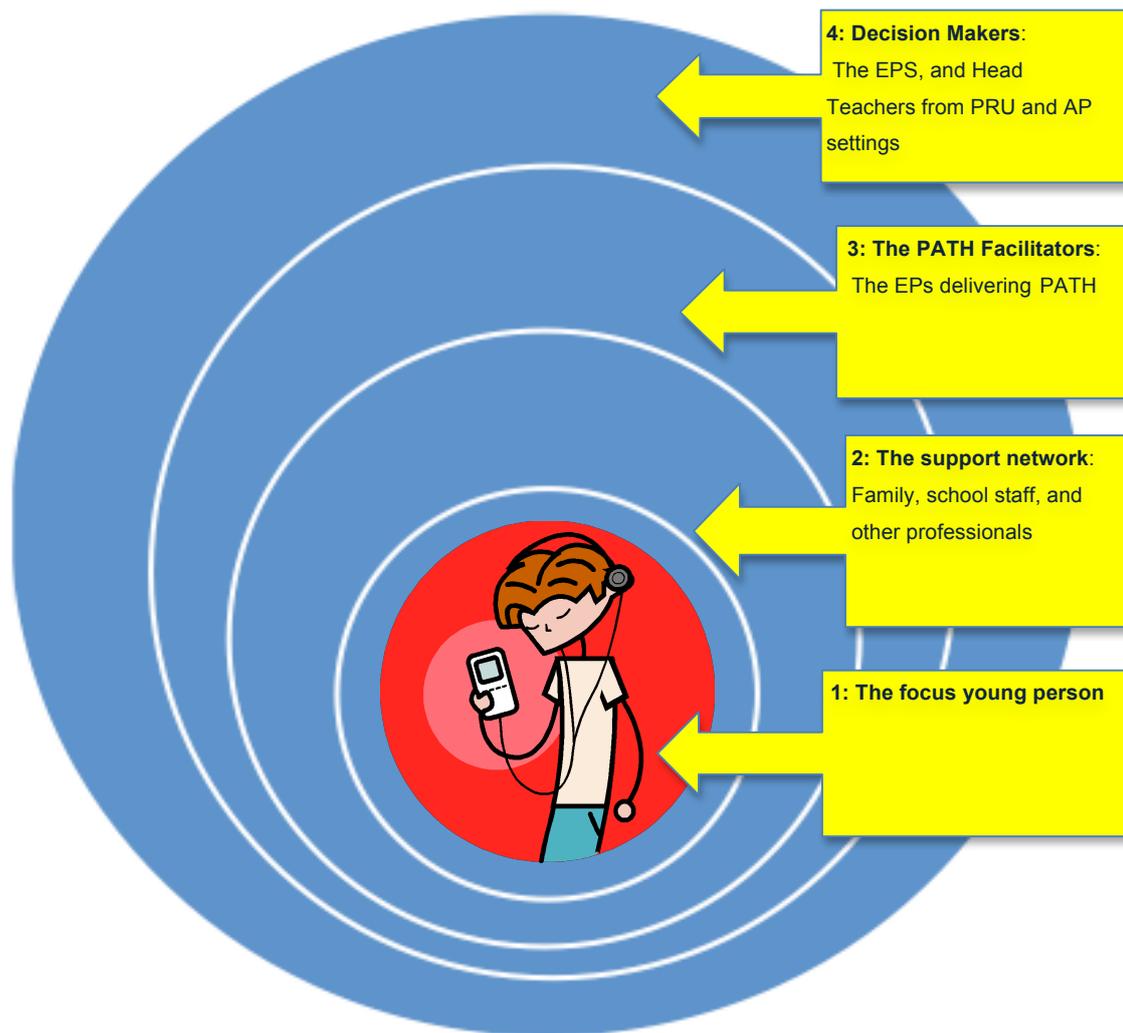
Integrity relates to the honesty, accuracy, clarity and fairness of a psychologist's work. As researcher I was not placed under any perceived or actual pressure to produce anything other than my honest findings. I was given assurance that my position as trainee educational psychologist would not be affected by whatever findings emerged. The

possible risks to integrity of merging the boundaries of researcher and practitioner are acknowledged.

### **3.5 The sampling framework**

In line with person-centred thinking, a balance of perspectives between those in a position of comparative power, who were knowledgeable about PATH, and those who had little or no experience of PATH and for whom the PATH was intended to support (i.e. those at the receiving end) was sought. Special emphasis was placed on attempting to gain the perspective of the focus young person and on attempting to gain a balance of perspectives between 'natural support' and professional or 'paid support' To ensure that all voices were represented, a sample from each of four differing levels of involvement with PATH was selected. Figure two, shows a visual representation of the differing levels of the sampling framework and each level is explained below.

- **Level 1: The focus young person**, for whom the PATH was intended to support.
- **Level 2: The Support Network:** parents/carers and those closest to the focus young person, (natural support), school staff from the PRU or AP setting and staff from the focus young person's old school and/or new receiving school, other professionals such as, youth workers, health professionals and LA representatives also form the support network (professional support)
- **Level 3: PATH Facilitators**, EPs who are knowledgeable about PATH and have first hand experience of the process and its implementation. The views of EPs who did not use PATH in their practice were also included in attempts to generate a balance of perspectives.
- **Level 4: Decision Makers:** included senior staff members (head teachers or acting head teachers) within the focus PRU and AP settings who currently employ PATH in their process of supporting their pupils. In order to gain the wider LA and EPS perspective Senior Educational Psychologist representatives were included.



**Figure 2: A visual representation of the sampling framework**

### **3.5.1 Issues of access and sample size**

The number of PATHs taking place within the LA, for pupils excluded from school and/or in PRU/AP settings, placed an important constraining factor on the scope of the study. Approximately 16 such PATHs had been scheduled during the data collection period of Spring, Summer and Autumn terms 2012. It was feasible to attend nine of the proposed PATHs. This number constituted more than half of the possible data collection opportunities and was considered a sufficiently large sample to gain useful data and to provide access to a sufficiently large participant sample for interview purposes given that some participants may not consent.

The aim of the research was to gain interview data from a range of participants. Generally between six and 10 participants attended each PATH gathering. It was therefore decided that wherever possible all the focus young people, the parent/carer or person closest to the young person and two other adults selected from the school staff and other professionals in attendance would be interviewed. However due to circumstances beyond my control this was not possible in every case. Table 2 shows the actual number of interviews that were achieved from each level of the sampling framework.

**Table 1: The sampling framework, number of participants interviewed and the method by which data was collected**

<b>Sampling Framework</b>	<b>Participant Groups</b>	<b>Data collected</b>
<b>Level 1: The focus young person</b>	6 young people experiencing exclusion from school/ attending PRU or AP setting.	6 Interviews
<b>Level 2: the support network</b>	6 parents (5 mums 1 dad) 5 mainstream school staff 5 PRU/AP school staff 6 other professionals	22 Interviews
<b>Level 3: PATH Facilitators</b>	The EP team including and 2 consultant EP PATH facilitators	16 Questionnaire responses with follow-up questioning 2 Interviews 9 Post PATH reflection sessions
<b>Level 4: Decision makers</b>	3 senior staff members from PRU and AP settings and 1 senior EP	4 Interviews
Total number of participants interviewed = 34 (not including EP questionnaire follow-up and post PATH reflection sessions)		

## **3.6 Developing the interview protocol**

### **3.6.1 Pilot interviews**

Interviews were conducted with participants from three PATH gatherings and included two focus young people, a parent, a Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO) from a

mainstream school, a member of staff from a PRU, a social worker and a LA Inclusion Officer.

The pilot study demonstrated that it was unrealistic to attempt to interview PATH participants immediately afterwards. Path gatherings usually last a minimum of an hour and a half and often participants needed to depart or felt exhausted by the end. Furthermore, a period of reflection prior to interview was seen as potentially beneficial.

Attempts to interview participants within a week of the PATH, were hampered by issues of access and competing demands. A timeframe of three weeks after the PATH was set for adult participants and four to six weeks for the focus young people. The rationale for this was that if the PATH was beneficial and meaningful to the young person it was likely that they would be able to recall the experience after this time had elapsed. This timescale provided an opportunity to review what actions had been carried out since the PATH and to identify potential positive outcomes for the young person.

The reflections of the EP facilitators were captured immediately after each PATH gathering firstly as the experience was fresh and learning points could be acted upon in the next PATH, and secondly for practical reasons as to attempt to access them at a later time was likely to be difficult due to the nature of the EP role and the demands placed upon time.

### ***3.6.2 Interviewing the focus young people***

During the pilot phase a child (aged 9) was interviewed using the draft pupil interview schedule (appendix 4). Although co-operative, the young person provided brief responses to open questions, however, he responded well to scaling questions. A second young person (aged 15), approached for interview, declined to be interviewed by the researcher but agreed to feed back via their key worker who used the interview schedule and wrote down their responses. This proved successful, however, opportunities to probe further were not possible.

In order to attempt to make the interview process as open and accessible as possible the design of interview sheet was considered. The aim was to make it look appealing and make it suitable for use by an adult if the child elected not to be interviewed by the researcher. Furthermore using scaling questions in the pilot highlighted a need to provide a prepared scale to mark responses. The revised interview schedule (see appendix 5)

included scales for certain questions, the use of child-friendly language and interview prompts. A number of additional questions were included to establish if and to what extent the pupil had been involved in the pre-PATH planning and preparation.

### ***3.6.3 Interviewing parents***

An interview schedule (appendix 6) was piloted with a parent who provided brief responses and brought up issues that were not deemed within the remit of the interview. In order to maintain focus on the interview it was decided that an interview schedule (see appendix 7) that the parent could look at whilst the interview was in progress would be beneficial. Scaling questions were added and questions placing a greater emphasis on exploring the factors that may have impacted on the PATHs success were included.

### ***3.6.4 Interviews with school staff and other professionals***

During the pilot (using the semi-structured format) participants of this group tended to provide lengthier and more detailed responses, and on occasions responded to questions included later in the schedule. To avoid jeopardising the flow and enthusiasm of the respondent an interview guide approach was adopted (see Appendix 8). The guide set out the issues to be explored, (for example, the role of PATH, first impressions, usefulness, etc) and discussed in any order and the actual wording of questions was not pre-determined. This ensured that the interviewee led the conversation and that common information was obtained from each person without imposing a rigid format.

### ***3.6.5 The development of interview questions***

Some interviewees had attended more than one PATH (Inclusion officer and PRU staff) whilst for others this was their first experience (focus young person, parent, social worker and SENCO). This was viewed as important information as those who had attended more than one PATH may be able to provide reflections and comparisons, whilst for those experiencing the process for the first time, capturing first impressions was deemed useful.

It emerged, during the pilot, that the professionals and parent had been involved in numerous meetings to discuss the schooling of the(ir) child and these meetings were often tense and difficult especially for the parents. In contrast interviewees reported positive feelings about their experience of PATH. This insight led to the inclusion of a question focusing on previous experiences of meetings and how these compared with the PATH in order to attempt to pinpoint the distinct characteristics of PATH.

It was important to identify the perceived role and usefulness of the PATH for each participant, as through piloting, it became clear that the perceived usefulness of the PATH was strongly connected to the individual's perception of its intended role. For example, a parent who had received little information regarding what to expect, constructed her view of the role of PATH on her expectation that the PRU would tell her what was happening regarding her son's reintegration. The PATH did not meet her expectations and as such, although she conceded that her son thought the PATH was fun, and it was useful in other ways, she still did not know when he would be going back to mainstream school. Therefore questions around the perceived role and usefulness of the PATH were included.

The final semi-structured interview schedules consisted of a range of open-ended questions and scaling questions. The scaling questions were included as the pilot revealed that interviewees responded well to the scaling approach and secondly this enabled comparison within and across the data sets.

### **3.6.6 Questionnaire design**

A self-completion questionnaire was designed to collect data from the EP team about their views on PATH in EP practice. The drawbacks of using a questionnaire include the issue that data is influenced by the characteristics of the respondents, e.g. their level of motivation to complete the survey, and the potential for a low response rate. The EP team was viewed as a relatively homogenous group, who were considered likely to cooperate provided the demand on their time was short. The EP team was aware of my role as researcher and had a shared understanding of PATH.

The questionnaire was piloted by two EPs who completed a draft version (see appendix 9) and provided feedback on its ease of use, the perceived value of the questions posed and the order and wording of the questions. Amendments were made in response to feedback prior to the revised questionnaire being distributed across the team.

EPs were asked to provide their name in order for me to follow up their responses and gain more detail if needed. A range of closed and open questions were included. (see appendix 10: EP Questionnaire). Not all EPs within the service use PATH and so the use of a service wide questionnaire enabled the potentially useful insights of EPs not using PATH to also be captured. A question was included to identify if the EP respondent felt that PATH can make a useful contribution to EP practice. This was included to identify EPs who may not value PATH. To increase the trustworthiness of data negative or contradictory views were sought. To attempt to gauge the demand for PATH coming from

schools a question was included asking 'Have you received any requests from your schools to use PATH this academic year? If so how many?' Other questions sought to identify the EP's perception of the strengths and limitations of PATH. Questions were designed to elicit the EPs perceived level of competence and establish what preferences EPs held with regard to the verbal and graphic facilitation roles.

### **3.7 The practitioner researcher role**

The recognition that context and individual interpretation impact upon action and outcomes means that it is important to acknowledge the influence that the researcher's own background has had on the development of this research, as this has implications for every level of the research process, from the interpretation of the literature reviewed through to the selection of methods and the conclusions drawn (Creswell, 2012; Robson, 2011)

Since commencing my placement in the focus LA in September 2011, the boundaries between my involvement in PATH as a practising TEP and my role as researcher often merged. My position as TEP allowed access to, seminars, training sessions and regular practice development group meetings. I endeavoured to gain a broad holistic view of the EPS's journey in promoting person-centred working and the adoption of PATH by PRU and AP settings whilst reflecting on my own journey as a developing PATH practitioner.

Long-term immersion in the research context, enabled me to develop considerable knowledge. Continuing active involvement granted opportunities for asking questions, listening to a wide range of peoples' views, observing colleagues over time and develop first hand experience in the facilitation of PATH. The use of a flexible design strategy enabled me to take advantage of opportunities to collect data as they arose, make use of unplanned events, and informal conversations.

It was initially the aim to carry out direct observation during PATH gatherings. However, I was called upon to co-facilitate a number of PATHs, which made writing effective field notes difficult. Participation in the PATHs made it possible to gain a sense of what it feels like to be in a PATH, and observe interaction between participants. Through participation I was able to develop an appreciation of how different each persons experience may be.

Due to the inevitable power imbalance between researcher and pupil/parent it was crucial to build a relationship prior to the interviews. In order to achieve this I used the PATH gathering as a means of mutual relationship building. This meant that when I met with the

pupil and family after the PATH for interview we already had knowledge of each other. My presence in the PATH meant that I could converse with them about aspects of the PATH that only a participant would have knowledge of. This approach was intended to promote the values of person-centredness by attempting to develop an open and trusting relationship.

### 3.8 Research Participants and Data Collection Procedure

Data were collected from nine PATH gathering in line with the sampling framework and ethical guidelines. Table 2, below provides details of the PATHs, and lists the pseudonym of the focus young person, their age and year group, at the time of the PATH. The table also lists the participants from each PATH who were interviewed.

**Table 2: Details of the focus young people and PATH participants interviewed.**

<b>PATH</b>	<b>Focus young person (Pseudonym)</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Year group</b>	<b>PATH Participants interviewed</b>
<b>1</b>	<b>Sarah</b>	15	11	1. Pupil (P1) (interviewed by key worker) 2. Support worker YOS (Ss 1) 3. Head Teacher of AP setting (Ss 2) 4. Senior Youth Worker (Pf 1)
<b>2</b>	<b>Jake</b>	15	11	5. Pupil (P2) 6. Mum (Pt 1) 7. Head Teacher of AP setting (Ss 3)
<b>3</b>	<b>Leon</b>	9	5	8. Pupil (P3) 9. Dad (Pt 2) 10. Head Teacher from mainstream school (Ss 4) 11. Inclusion Officer (Pf 2) 12. Paediatrician (Pf 3)
<b>4</b>	<b>Ben</b>	9	5	13. Mum (Pt 3) 14. SENCO from PRU (Ss 5) 15. Head Teacher from old school (Ss 6) 16. SENCO from receiving school (Ss 7)
<b>5</b>	<b>Ronan</b>	12	8	17. Mum (Pt 4) 18. Student Support Manager from old school (Ss 8)
<b>6</b>	<b>Finlay</b>	13	8	19. Pupil (P 4) 20. Senior Child Care Officer in PRU (Ss 9) 21. Inclusion Officer (Pf 4)
<b>7</b>	<b>Callum</b>	12	8	22. Pupil (P5) 23. Advisor Learning Support (Pf 5)
<b>8</b>	<b>Ashley</b>	15	11	24. Parent (Pt 5) 25. Deputy Head Teacher from Mainstream school (Ss 10)
<b>9</b>	<b>Kirsty</b>	15	11	26. Pupil (P 6) 27. Parent (Pt 6) 28. Project Worker (Pf 6)

### **3.8.1 Level 1: The Focus Young Person**

The focus pupils had all been identified by their setting as in need of support around planning for their future and the use of PATH had been proposed either by their setting or the support services around them. The key selection criteria for inclusion in the study were that of being excluded from school (either fixed term or permanently) and/or currently attending a PRU or AP setting. It was an opportunity sample and the researcher had no involvement in the pupil selection given that the criteria above were met. Each of the pupils were known to the EPS. The researcher had no prior knowledge of or involvement with the pupils in the capacity of researcher or EP practitioner. The pupil sample was not a homogenous group and ages ranged from nine years to 15 years however they all shared the following features.

- All were on the SEN register (either at the level of school action plus or with a statement of SEN)
- All were either excluded from school (fixed term or permanently) or were attending a PRU or AP setting at the time of their PATH
- All had agency involvement (Health, Education or Social Care)

The literature review highlighted the factors that make young people more vulnerable to exclusion or placement in PRU or AP. These factors were reflected in the pupil sample (see appendix 15) by the high proportion of, pupils with a statement of SEN, (four out of nine); boys (seven out of nine); and eligibility for free school meals, (seven out of nine). The demographic of the county in which this study took place is relatively low in ethnic diversity and so the high representation of black African Caribbean boys who experience exclusion, reported by the Runnymede Trust (2010), was not reflected in this sample which was composed entirely of white British pupils. None of the pupil sample currently met the criteria for 'looked after' however, three of the participants were described as on the 'edge of care' and were currently in residential placement with social care involvement.

The entire sample presented with factors that were reported in the literature to increase vulnerability to exclusion and PRU/AP placement. The needs of the sample group may be classed as 'complex' and varied, presenting with multiple risk factors. To ensure anonymity a brief overview of the types of risk factors reported by the school staff/professionals working with the young people is provided.

The sample comprised a pupil reported to self-harm and had attempted suicide, a school refuser, a pupil with a diagnosis of ASD, two pupils with a diagnosis of ADHD and a pupil who was currently in the process of being assessed for ADHD. One pupil was described as having moderate learning difficulties, whilst six pupils were described as having difficulties with reading and writing and/or dyslexia. One pupil had speech and language difficulties. Three of the young people were described as having a history of criminality, two of whom had Youth Offending Service involvement at the time of their PATH. Instability at home was reported as a common feature in many cases and three of the sample had reportedly experienced domestic violence (see appendix 15). All nine focus young people consented to be interviewed and six interviews were conducted.

### **3.8.2 Level 2: The Support Network**

Between five and nine adults attended each PATH. Participants were selected on the basis of their consent and availability for interview. Some consenting participants proved difficult to reach for interview and so the number of actual interviews carried out varied from the initial number aimed for. In total six parents, five mainstream school staff, five PRU/AP schools staff and six other professionals were interviewed (see appendix 16).

### **3.8.3 Procedure for data collection around each PATH**

Table 3, below, details the procedure for collecting data around the PATH gatherings. Issues of access and ethical considerations are noted.

**Table 3: The approach to data collection around the PATH gatherings**

<b>Timing</b>	<b>Data collection procedure</b>
<b>1: Prior to the PATH</b>	The EP leading the PATH and the PRU/AP setting were consulted to confirm that my attendance was acceptable. The family was contacted directly by phone and an information/ consent letter on LA headed paper sent (see appendix 3).
<b>2: On the day of the PATH</b>	My role as researcher was made clear at the beginning of the PATH gathering. The consent of the participants was again sought. A contingency plan was drawn up in the event a person in the group declined consent. No participants declined consent.
<b>3: At the end of the PATH</b>	Photos of the PATH graphic were taken to enable distribution to all participants and the focus young person was presented with the original graphic. Suitable times, dates and locations were agreed with the participants who consented to interview. Comments made by the participant at the closure of the PATH were noted. Post PATH reflection

	sessions with the EPs facilitating the PATH were held as soon as the PATH gathering had dispersed and field notes were made.
<b>4: Post PATH interviews with parents, school staff and other professionals</b>	Interviews were carried out within 3 weeks of the PATH. Participants were informed of their right to decline answering any questions and withdraw at any time. Their confidentiality and anonymity was assured. At the start of each interview, after a general introduction outlining the nature of the research and the purpose of the interview, rapport-building questions were employed. Interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed.
<b>5: Post PATH interviews with the focus young person</b>	Interviews were carried out 4-6 weeks after the PATH gathering within the familiar environment of the pupils setting. The safeguarding of the child was considered in terms of carrying out 1:1 interviews with children under the age of 18 without another adult present. Firstly I was able to demonstrate that I am in possession of an enhanced CRB check, and secondly the child was invited to elect to have another adult present if they wished. As far as my personal safety was concerned, a suitable private space, which was not isolated but allowed for private conversation, ideally within the view of others (i.e. a room with CCTV or a glazed door), was requested for interview purposes. All young participants were assured that there were no right or wrong answers and that the purpose of the interview was simply to gain their views. An A3 colour photocopy of the PATH visual was referred to during the interview. Interviews were digitally recorded with the child's consent.
<b>6. Post PATH follow-up</b>	Follow-up enquiries were made within a 3 to 6 month period after of the PATH to find out how the young person was getting on and to check on the progress of the actions agreed during the PATH. These enquiries consisted of phone calls to the setting/parent and or key professionals working with the pupil.

### **3.8.4 Level 3: The PATH Facilitators**

The PATH facilitators' sample comprised the entire EP team, 16 of whom completed a questionnaire and agreed to follow-up questioning. Prior to this a collaborative group session with the EP team was held, to discuss the aims of the research and enable colleagues to comment on the research design and their experience of using PATH. This session was attended by 20 EPs including the principal, two senior EPs and 17 full and part-time EPs.

At a County EPS day held in December 2012 hard copies of the EP questionnaire were

handed out to the EPs attending and an electronic version was emailed to the entire team enabling EPs to select the method of response most amenable to them. Sixteen members of the team responded within a two-week period out of a possible 24. This included part time and full time main grade EPs and two Senior EPs. Six consenting EPs provided further information during follow-up questioning.

Two Consultant EP Facilitators (employed by the service to train and mentor EPs in the use of PATH) were interviewed according to the following procedure. A joint, formal (digitally recorded) interview (see appendix 11: interview guide one) was held in November 2011 to gain their insights as experienced PATH facilitators. Follow-up individual interviews (see appendix 12: interview guide two) to reflect on the use of PATH with pupils excluded from school were held in January 2013. These interviews were held in separate rooms within the council building and each interview lasted between one and a half and two hours, were digitally recorded and transcribed. Other conversations, and email correspondence were recorded in the fieldwork diary.

### **3.8.5 Level 4: Decision Makers**

Senior staff members from two PRU and one AP setting were approached, as they were known to have recently begun using PATH. This sample was recruited as they had attended a PATH training day run by the EPS and had expressed their interest in developing the use of PATH. The senior staff members included two head teachers and an acting deputy head teacher. They agreed to be interviewed and consented to my participation in future PATHs held for pupils in their settings for research purposes. They further agreed for the focus young person and other participants to be approached for consent to be interviewed after each PATH.

Interviews with the senior staff members took place in their PRU or AP settings. The aim of the interview was to identify how they perceived the role of PATH, what they hoped PATH might add and what they perceived the strengths and limitations of PATH to be (see appendix 13: PRU/AP interview schedule). Each interview lasted between 1 and 1½ hours, were digitally recorded and transcribed. A copy of the transcript was sent to each for their information.

A Senior Educational Psychologist (SEP), in a key decision making role (lead for the Practice and Development Group for Person-centred and Collaborative Problem Solving) was recruited for interview in order to gain the EPS and wider CYPS perspective on the introduction of PATH in EP practice. (see appendix 14: senior EP interview schedule)

### **3.9 Rationale for the approach to data analysis**

Yardley (2000) suggests that in an effort to enhance rigour, qualitative researchers have become overly pre-occupied with specific analysis, and as such apply rules and procedures so firmly that they risk losing a critical stance. Thematic analysis enables the researcher's viewpoint and research context to be unencumbered and has the advantage that it is not tied to any particular theoretical background (Braun and Clarke 2006). Narrative and interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) approaches are used when the focus is on the narratives of a small and homogenous group. In this study, the 34 people interviewed were not a homogenous sample and as such IPA and narrative approach would not have been appropriate. Furthermore according to Riessman (2003) in thematic analysis the emphasis is on the content of a text, 'what' is said more than 'how' it is said, the 'told' rather than the 'telling' whereas with the narrative approach attention is given equally to the 'what' and the 'how'. The aim of this study was to identify 'what' people said about PATH and as such greater emphasis was placed on the content of peoples narratives as opposed to how their narratives were told. As such thematic analysis was considered more appropriate than other forms of narrative analysis.

#### **3.9.1 Inductive Thematic Analysis**

There are three key approaches to the development of codes, which include theory driven code development, prior research-driven code development and thirdly inductive data-driven code development (Boyatzis, 1998, Braun and Clarke, 2006). As is recommended for research where the relevant theory is undeveloped, inductive coding, allowing for the inclusion of data-driven themes (Blank, 2004) was used and as such decisions about themes were influenced by new information from the data itself. The aim of inductive data analysis is not to impose too many assumptions on the data but to let the data speak. Ideas are generated from what is seen after reading and re-reading interview transcripts.

#### **3.9.2 Process of Analysis**

The process of analysis was influenced by Saldana's (2009) first cycle and second cycle coding methods whereby initial exploratory coding was carried out followed by a method of evaluation coding which enabled data which may usefully inform practice to be collected and themed. The phases of thematic analysis proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006) were used as a basis on which to engage with the data. The section below summarises the steps followed in analysing the data.

**Phase 1: Familiarisation with the data.**

The interviews were transcribed verbatim including pauses, ‘erms, interruptions and indications of inaudible material (Gillham, 2005) this enabled interpretation of individual quotes in context and allows for others who may wish to review the transcripts at a later date to do so. (see appendix 17 for a full transcript)

The data were initially grouped into data sets (see table 4) so that initial codes emerging from the same group of respondents could be viewed together.

**Table 4: Datasets in relation to each research question**

<b>Research Question 1</b>	
1.	Focus Pupils
2.	Parents
3.	School staff
4.	Other Professionals
<b>Research Question 2</b>	
5.	Senior Staff from PRU and AP settings
6.	Senior EP
7.	Consultant EP Facilitators
8.	Educational Psychologists

The transcripts from each dataset were read and initial notes made next to passages, which appeared of relevance to the research questions, or appeared common across the data sets. Presented below is an extract from a transcript with initial notes in the margin.

**Table 5 Transcript extract with codes**

<b>Interview transcript (Pt 6)</b>	<b>Initial notes</b>
<p><i>I: Can you say what it was about the PATH that you think contributed to its usefulness?</i></p> <p><i>P: I think the fact that Kirsty having it drawn up on the wall and you can see how you can say to people I thought this and that and the other, but she said at the time-it doesn't always stay in your head, you don't always remember everything you think and when you see it written like that...</i></p> <p><i>MB: Yes.</i></p> <p><i>That gave her a clearer idea of what she was aiming for, I think.</i></p> <p><i>MB: Right, so having the graphic, you say, really helped?</i></p> <p><i>TF: Yes, it was having it up on the wall in front of us all.</i></p>	<p><i>Graphic: helps to see and remember what was said.</i></p> <p><i>Graphic helps to clarify aims</i></p> <p><i>Seeing graphic up on the wall helps.</i></p>

**Phase 2: Generating Initial Codes within the data.**

This phase required systematic coding throughout each entire data set. Further guidance regarding the approach to coding was sought from Saldana (2009) and initial first cycle exploratory and evaluation coding methods were employed. (See appendix 18 for an illustration of the initial coding process). Working systematically through the data a code was applied to help organise the data into meaningful units. This involved using a highlighter to identify particular passages or sentences within the transcripts.

**Phase 3: Searching for Themes.**

Here codes were sorted into possible themes and thought was given to the relationships between codes. I endeavoured to represent all of the themes, which emerged from the data, no matter the prevalence (Fielding, 2007). Following Braun and Clarke's (2006) proposed stages, I considered what might constitute a theme. Rather than a quantifiable proportion of the responses, I described themes, which were of relevance to the research questions. To this end, any themes, which appeared to describe how the participants viewed the PATH, were included.

Themes appearing across the data sets from the groups of respondents were grouped together and compiled into tables. This made the individual extracts from the data easier to compare and provided a holistic picture of differing perspectives generated around one theme. Table 6, below shows how comments made by different professions were grouped together under a linking theme.

**Table 6: Merged data sets: key themes**

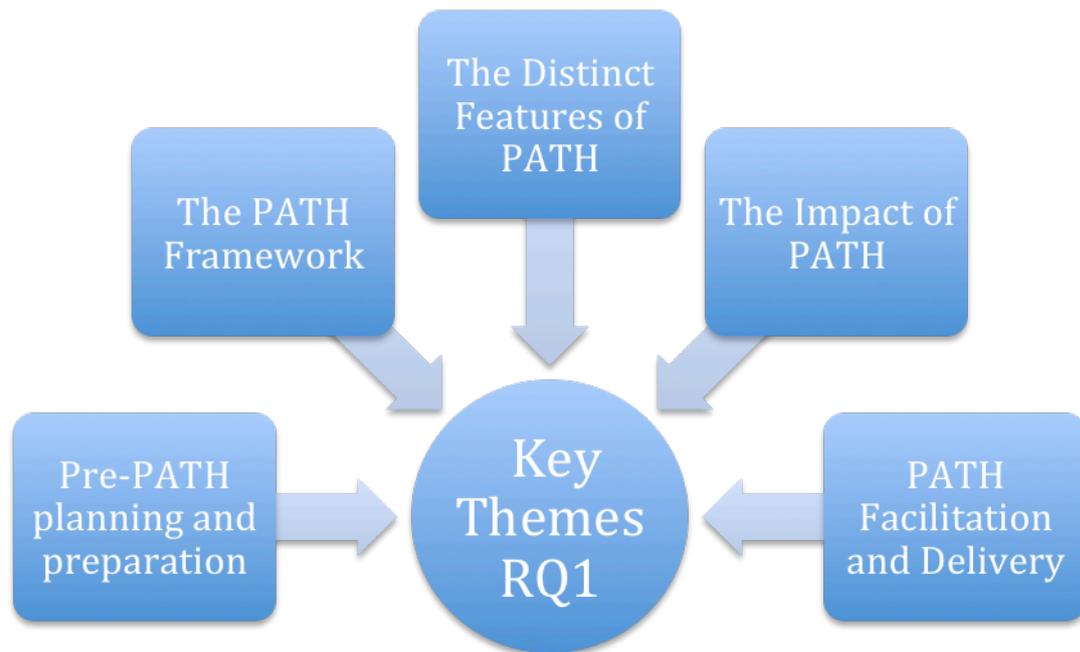
<b>Theme</b>	<b>Code</b>	<b>Extracts from data</b>
PATH Graphic	Supports visual learning style	PI 1: fabulous, I'm dyslexic, I like visual learning, incredibly useful. [the graphic] gave the meeting a focus. We looked at [the facilitator] and the visual not at Sarah or each other I think that was important. Sarah would not have coped if we had been looking at her.
	Focus on graphic not on the child	
	Structure	PI 2: I think the graphic is central to the process, it gives a structure to follow.
	Maintains focus and Pace	PI 3: I think the visual framework really helped to maintain focus and pace to the meeting. It helps to provide structure and a clear purpose
	The order makes sense	PI 6: Each section follows on from the first and although it may seem counter-intuitive to start in the 'future' and go back to the 'now' it makes perfect sense and it all goes in the direction of the dream. In other words it all points in the direction of where the child wants to be. Yeah it makes sense to start with the 'dream', the positive future, and then go back to what's happening now and how we can get from now to the desired outcome.
The order is vital. Talk about positive things before what's going on now.	PI 1: I thought the structure was perfect. I loved the dream first of all, it starts in a positive place. The order was vital, having the dream first followed by one year from now and then moving on to what is happening now was very important so that the child could talk about positive things before talking about their current situation. The crap place they are in now, although difficulties are acknowledge it is important to know where the child is now and the focus was on the dream.	

**Phase 4: Reviewing Themes.**

This phase involved checking themes linked to the coded extracts and to the whole data set. The checking and re-checking of themes is part of a cyclical process. Following the guidance of Braun and Clarke (2006), I revisited the original transcripts and the main, sub- and miscellaneous themes many times, in a process of actively engaging with the data and deliberating over which themes and sub-themes most effectively illuminated and explained the meanings of the data. The process of analysis was discussed and reviewed in supervision and a collaborative coding session was held with a fellow TEP whereby a sample from each of the data sets was coded jointly and the themes discussed. Inter-rater reliability was not used as the realist approach underpinning this research accepts that different interpretations are inevitable. Yardley (2002) suggests that while it may be possible to train two individuals to code data in the same way, this does not remove the subjectivity in the interpretation; rather, it replaces it with a subjective interpretation agreed by two people. However, the advantage of having a fellow researcher engage with the analysis and act as, what Barbour (2001 p.1116) refers to as, 'devils advocate' helped to generate new interpretations, question my rationale for ascribing certain codes and to ensure that I could justify my findings or at least discuss how to improve them with the help of another critical eye.

**Phase 5: Defining and Naming Themes.**

Themes in this phase were further refined and defined and considered in terms of relevance to the research questions. At this stage some groups of codes were collapsed or grouped with similar themes and codes, which were not relevant, were removed. Figure two shows the key themes, which emerged across the data sets in relation to research question one.



**Figure 3: Key themes in relation to research question one**

### **3.10 Chapter Summary**

This chapter outlined the realist, pragmatic, and qualitative methodology adopted within this research reflecting the person-centred philosophy of PATH. Semi-structured interviewing was adopted as the dominant data collection method. Ethical issues were highlighted along with details of participants and information relating to the initial pilot and final data collection procedure. Thematic analysis was used to identify themes relating to each of the research questions.

## CHAPTER 4: THE PARTICIPANTS' PERCEPTIONS OF PATH

This chapter presents the views of the PATH participants, that is the people for whom the PATH was intended to support. The themes derived from the interviews and scaled questions from the participants of nine PATH gatherings are presented in relation to:

**Research question one:** How do pupils, their parents/carers, school staff and other professionals describe their experience of PATH?

The participant groups included the focus young people (6), parents (6), school staff from PRU and AP settings (5), school staff from mainstream schools (5) and other professionals (6). The illustrative quotes included in this section are identified by a pseudonym or code according to the naming conventions outlined in Appendix 20. The exact words of the participants have been included and in some cases the language is not standard English and some words used by the young people may be considered offensive. The themes relating to research question one are discussed and a detailed account illustrated by extracts from the data follows.

**Table 7: Themes in relation to research question one.**

Facets of PATH Process	Themes
<b>1. Pre-PATH planning and preparation</b>	Initial apprehension Preparation and planning Expectations
<b>2. The Impact of PATH</b>	Emotional response Commitment Embarrassment Feeling comfortable and listened to Usefulness Making a difference
<b>3. The PATH graphic</b>	Usefulness Visual Structure
<b>4. The use of Props</b>	Age appropriate Conveying a message

	Humour Equality
<b>5. PATH in contrast to traditional meetings</b>	Inclusion Equality Child focussed Solution oriented Distinct atmosphere
<b>6. PATH Facilitation and Delivery</b>	The Skills of PATH facilitators Review process

## 4.1 Pre- PATH planning and preparation

### 4.1.1 Initial apprehension

Almost all the adult and pupil participants, who had not attended a PATH before, reported feelings of initial apprehension. Words used to describe how the participants initially felt included; unsure, worried, nervous, scared, stressful and sceptical.

When asked about their first impressions of the PATH the young people said:

I didn't know what to think. I didn't really want to go in. I didn't see what it was all for. (Sarah)

...nervous, didn't know what to expect (Jake)

I thought, what on earth are they doing? (Finlay)

Yeah, I was fine once I knew... like got to know everyone. I was a bit scared at first. But you know... I was OK afterwards. Yeah well I'm just not good with new people really... (Kirsty)

In contrast, Leon did not report any initial apprehension replying

I just got on with it.

A common experience reported by participants was that of an initial lack of confidence prior to, or at the beginning of the PATH, followed by more positive feelings once the

PATH was underway. For five of the six parents this was their first experience of PATH, and feelings of initial doubt and concern were reported by all of them. However, as the PATH progressed, parents reported that their initial worries subsided:

My first impression was, oh my God! What's going on? What is this all about? ...But actually it was OK, just not your regular sort of meeting. I didn't realise what it was gonna be like. (Leon's dad)

I thought it was all a bit airy-fairy to begin with. I thought 'oh God what the hell are we doing here?' It was all right when it got going and it was good at the beginning when Ronan was getting involved. I was worried it was gonna be really embarrassing. (Ronan's mum)

I was really worried... We didn't know how Ashley would react. My husband was very sceptical. I was stressing about it. But actually it all worked out okay. It's a strange way of doing things, but once we got into it you could see it all coming together. (Ashley's mum)

School staff and professionals, new to PATH, also reported initial apprehension when asked for their first impressions.

I didn't really know what to expect and have never seen anything like it. I felt I was in a parallel universe –[laughs] no, it was really helpful. (Ss3)

I thought, oh no! Death by flip chart. It made my heart drop, I felt I would have to get up and do something clever, I was relieved when I realised I didn't have to...do anything. (Ss7)

Bit new age, bit alternative. I really wasn't sure if this was going to be my thing. I was a bit uneasy and a bit worried. I didn't want it to be uncomfortable for [the child] and just thought it could all go horribly wrong. However, that was before I had experienced PATH, now I am much more of a fan and much more comfortable with the process. (LA)

#### **4.1.2 Preparation**

The pupils and adults all reported that they had received little or no information about what to expect at the PATH gathering. There was no evidence of pupils being included in

preparation and planning prior to their PATH. Four of the six pupils interviewed said that they knew indirectly that a meeting was due to take place, however, they were not included in preparation and did not have a say in who would be invited:

My mum got a letter and she told me she was coming in. (Callum)

Finlay knew nothing about the PATH or any meeting until directly before he was brought to the room where the PATH was being held:

...I was just told... by one of the teachers just to go and then later on I went to the office with all you lot.

Four participants (2 pupils, 1 parent and 1 professional) reported that they would have liked more information and that information targeted at the pupil may help the pupil to be better prepared.

It would be good to have more information before it so you know what to expect and think about it first. Uuurh, If I thought about it more first I might have been able to say more about what I want to do and stuff. (Jake)

It would have been good to be a bit more prepared. To maybe have the questions first so I could have had a chance to think about it a bit. Also I think it would have been better for Leon to have had someone explain what was happening. (Leon's Dad)

Maybe it would be helpful to do a bit of preparatory work with the child so they know what to expect and what they might be asked about in the meeting so they can think about it before. (LA)

Ss 5 suggested that school staff and professionals new to PATH may benefit from some sort of 'briefing or video' before attending a PATH so that they may 'drop their guard and be prepared to be open,' 'step willingly into this space' and be able to 'engage in a more productive way.'

In contrast, Ss 3 and Ss 4 reported mixed feelings on how useful information may be prior to the PATH as, they suggested, it is hard to explain what to expect.

In some ways it might be better to just go straight in without any preconceived ideas and just go with it. (Ss 4)

Highlighting concerns with regard to child-centredness and having a balance of both natural and professional support, Ss2 suggested that as part of the preparation and planning of a PATH, pupils should have more of a say in who should be invited to their PATH:

I think it would have been better, as it's intended to be student-centred, for Jake to have been involved in inviting people. He was outnumbered by the adults. It would have been better to have had more of a mix of people, including maybe someone from his peer group.

#### **4.1.3 Expectations**

Adults were asked what they perceived the role of the PATH to be and whether the PATH had met their expectations. Most participants said that they expected PATH to be a multi-agency meeting, in which they would discuss and plan for the focus child's next steps regarding schooling/further education. Parents, in particular, reported that they had not been 'told' what the role of the PATH was and so they made their own assumptions based on the specifics of their current situation or kept an open mind. For example, Jake's mum said she didn't have any expectations and 'just went along with it.'

Ashley's mum felt that in their particular case, although not explicitly stated by school, the PATH was being held as things were becoming increasingly difficult for their son and he was at risk of permanent exclusion. She said:

It was all going downhill before that [the PATH]. I wasn't sure what was going to happen. It was really difficult. Things were mounting up.

She felt that the role of PATH was:

...for us all to get together and work out how to move things forward.

When asked if the PATH met her expectations she replied:

I think if we hadn't had that meeting Ashley wouldn't be there [in school] now.

Ronan's mum felt that the PATH did not meet her expectations. She was expecting a meeting to discuss the timing of her son's reintegration back into mainstream. She said:

The PATH wasn't really about that, We really needed a meeting just to talk to the PRU before having something like that, as some basic issues weren't covered.

The lack of information and preparatory work, reported by the participants, led to a seeming lack of clarity or a shared understanding of the role of PATH. The expectations of parents, as a result, were not fully known or understood, and in the example above this led to a mismatch of expectations, and a concern important to the parent was not addressed.

## **4.2 The Impact of PATH**

### **4.2.1 Emotional response**

Positive emotion words used by interviewees to describe their experience of the PATH included: fun, hopeful, more confident, pleased, relieved, moved, blown away, overwhelmed, feel-good, connected, inspired, proud, optimistic, awesome and amazed.

Adults recounted:

....a kind of feel-good factor to the meeting, everyone had a chance to talk and it was emotional at times but not just in a bad way. (Ss 5)

It was really quite emotional. I was blown away! (LA)

I personally feel very optimistic. (HP)

It was like a group hug. (LA)

I am sure it was good for the parents to hear so many positives. You do leave with a lighter and more hopeful attitude. (LA)

... it's really powerful and I was truly impressed... Moved! (LA)

Some adults described the PATH as emotionally exhausting.

I don't think I could go through that every time. Although it's good, it's hard too.  
(Ben's mum)

Kirsty was totally and utterly exhausted at the end of it. (Kirsty's mum)

You feel kind of elated and emotionally drained after. (LA)

A number of participants commented on their emotional response or the emotional response of others during or after the PATH. In three of the PATHs parents were reported to cry or be at the brink of tears as a result of hearing positive comments about their child.

It was overwhelming. To hear what people was saying about Ronan. Good things! I mean, you just don't ever hear it. I was trying hard to hold it together, I nearly ran out. I just didn't want him to see me cry. (Ronan's mum)

I think it was really important for mum to hear some positives. That's what made her cry. She was upset but in a kind of good way. It was important for her to see that there were a lot of people in the room who really know her son and like him and could see the positives in him, and to see he really could have a bright future.  
(Ss 5)

I could see her welling up, I was welling up too. (LA)

Leon's dad reported that he noticed Leon smiling and laughing during the PATH, and he had not 'seen him smile like that for ages'. Participants reported the positive effects of identifying the strengths a young person may have:

One lady said I had a nice smile. I have always thought I was ugly. I didn't think a smile could be one of my strengths. (Sarah)

I noticed how much she smiled in the meeting... I had never really seen her smile before. Wow! How amazing is that? (LA)

She was so impressed yesterday and really proud. We put it [PATH graphic] up on the wall. She got a lot out of the interest she got from the other pupils. I don't know how long it will last but it has definitely made a difference for now. (Ss2)

Generally participants reported enjoying their experience of PATH and indicated liking the structure. All the young people interviewed reported enjoying the 'Dream' section, with three young people reporting that they found it the most memorable aspect of the PATH.

Yeah. I really enjoyed it; I liked every part of it [the PATH] really. It was good. I mean the dream bit was great because you could go wild and imagine stuff.  
(Kirsty)

I thought the structure was perfect and I loved the dream bit right at the start. (Ss1)

#### **4.2.2 Commitment**

Eight adults (2 parents, 4 school staff, and 2 LA representatives) commented on the impact of the 'enrolment' stage in the process in terms of demonstrating commitment. 'The act of signing up' was said to provide a visual display of 'commitment' and a demonstration that a 'support network exists around the child:'

I agree that 'signing up' is important; it's a symbolic gesture and provides the sense that we are all in this together for the long run (LA)

I didn't realise so many people wanted to help. (Ben's mum)

According to Ss 5, when planning reintegration from PRU back to mainstream, a receiving school may not feel confident about coping with a particularly challenging child. The enrolment process was said to demonstrate to the parent 'the family are not alone' and that the receiving school 'won't be left out on a limb' and support would be ongoing once the child was back in mainstream:

It's showed mum and the school that there is support for [pupil], an awful lot of professionals are involved and know and care about his future. [The receiving school] has gone away with something good in mind, knowing that the services supporting him have signed up to continue to support him (Ss 5)

During one PATH, when the time came for the participants to sign up, the head teacher (from the mainstream school the mother wanted her child to go to at the end of his PRU placement) declined to sign-up. Ss 5 felt that the head teacher's action 'sent a clear message to the parent without the head being given the opportunity to formally reject [the

pupil] in front of everyone'. Ss 5 felt that this action enabled mum to 'go away and reflect and make a decision' for herself about which school may best meet her child's needs.

Declining to enrol was only reported in one case, however, the implications of such an action in terms of conveying a message of commitment are potentially serious. In this particular case (as explained by Ss 5) a representative from the child's catchment area school was also present at the PATH and as a result of her receptiveness towards meeting the needs of the child, the mum selected this school instead.

### **4.2.3 Embarrassment**

Mixed responses were reported with regard to the time travel analogy used in the goal setting stage of the PATH process. Callum, felt that the act of spinning around and pretending to travel in time was 'stupid' and suggested that considering what his life might be like in the future could be achieved just by asking participants to think about.

...and that spinning around to go back in time shit. No! It's just stupid. They could just say, think about it. Not, we are going round and fucking round.

In contrast, Finlay, reported that 'going in the time machine to see what it is like for me in the future' was the most memorable part of the PATH.

Two parents described feeling 'silly' having to stand up and spin round during the imaginary time travel:

I felt stupid going around like Doctor Who and that made everybody who was joining in spinning around like loonies... that probably makes them at ease.  
(Kirsty's mum)

An LA participant suggested that adults might have found some aspects of the PATH embarrassing or uncomfortable as a result of being 'out of their comfort zone:'

I can see there might be tension around how differing professionals respond around things like the props, the visioning, the standing up and turning round and imagining you are travelling through time. They have to get over it. This is for the young person. What we do is for the young people. Its not about keeping it in the adults' comfort zone. We are employed to help them. (LA)

#### **4.2.4 Feeling comfortable and feeling listened to**

Scaling questions (using a scale with 0 meaning not listened to/uncomfortable and 10 meaning completely comfortable/listened to) were used during interview to identify how comfortable the pupils felt during the PATH. Scores ranged from seven to nine indicating that generally the pupils felt comfortable:

... its ok, not scary and its good, good fun, the people were kind.(Leon)

I felt comfortable. It was alright (Finlay)

Pupils, parents and school staff were asked to provide a score for how well listened to they felt. Again the scores were high. All the pupils who responded provided a score of 10 for feeling listened to:

Everyone listened to everyone and they all listened to me. (Jake)

Yeah, everyone listened to me (Callum)

Parents and school staff provided scores ranging between 7 -10.

Kirsty's mum said:

Oh, ten. Definitely. I didn't feel that I wasn't listened to or anything, so I would say ten out of ten.

A paediatrician stated:

I felt everyone in the room was listened to and given an opportunity to speak. Not in a way that is stressful or puts you on the spot. (HP)

#### **4.2.5 Usefulness**

Participants were asked how useful they felt the PATH had been and were asked to provide a score of between zero-10 (zero being not very useful and 10 being very useful). The pupil scores ranged between eight and 10, the school staff between six and 10, professionals between seven and 10. The parent group provided the lowest scores for the PATH's usefulness of between five and 10. These scores suggest that some PATHs were perceived as more useful than others, and pupils generally perceived their PATH to be more useful than their parents did.

Generally participants, especially the pupils, responded positively when asked how useful they felt the PATH had been:

I'd probably say it is very useful and there's friendly people... It is good to get all of your ideas written out and it was quite fun. (Kirsty)

It really has been helpful. (Ashley's mum)

In contrast Jake's mum responded:

I can't see what difference it will make. (Jake's mum)

The paediatrician indicated that the PATH was 'very productive' in terms of 'identifying needs' and 'steering appropriate provision' and argued that:

This tells you more than any diagnosis.

Ss 10 said the most useful aspect for the PATH was that it 'had enabled them to see Ashley in a different and more positive light' and that Ashley had been given an opportunity to see his school differently and to hopefully pick up the message that 'we want to work with him to make things better for him' and 'its not all about excluding him.'

Adults suggested that the graphic was useful in supporting the engagement of pupils, several of whom were reported to have difficulty in sustaining attention and concentration. This was particularly evident in the case of Leon, a Year 5 boy, who according to Ss 4 'joined in with the drawing and writing' and 'remained engaged throughout the process to my amazement.' Leon 'wrote up his strengths on the graphic' and reported enjoying being allowed to do this:

I liked doing a bit of drawing and helping with the writing... and no one minded. (Leon)

Adults commented on the usefulness of the order in which the differing stages of the PATH were tackled:

I think the order is vital, having the dream first, followed by one year from now and then moving on to what is happening now was very important so that the young person could talk about positive things before talking about their current situation, the crap place they are in now. (Ss5)

In contrast, a SENCO from a PRU expressed concern that she and her colleague may not have been as honest about how challenging the young person's current behaviour remains, as they should have been. She was worried that failing to paint a full and accurate picture may have had implications in terms of the effectiveness of this PATH in supporting the pupil's reintegration:

We didn't know how honest we could be. We felt we had to stick to the positives and so we both came away wondering whether we missed an opportunity to paint an accurate picture of the way things really are. He is really difficult to handle, his behaviour is still extreme, he has great difficulty managing his frustration when he can't get his words out. It felt like we were selling the child and we both came away feeling uncomfortable with that.

#### **4.2.6 Making a difference**

A number of pupils attributed positive changes in themselves to the PATH, when asked if the PATH made them think differently about things, pupils reported:

Yeah I will think about going to bed and not doing Facebook all the time. I know it's bad and it makes me unhappy and I get angry with what people say. (Sarah)

Well now I know where I want to go. I know there are things I can do. It has helped me talk to my mum more now. I think she understands me better. (Jake)

It was just actually finally getting a word in my life... I haven't actually had a chance to talk about how things could help me. But that was actually the one meeting ever that's actually given me a chance... I've been in school and everything. (Finlay)

It's kind of helped me, yunno, to like notice where I've been wrong and shit. Well like it helped me to notice where I've been wrong where before I just thought it was some petty nonsense. [my behaviour] But then when like now, and I have looked

back on it, I've realised what I thought was petty nonsense can hurt someone, or like messed up, or like destroyed property or some stuff. (Callum)

Pupils were asked if they had noticed any change in themselves since the PATH:

Well I think it is going to push me more I think, and I am not going to give up. So I think it's confidence it's given me sort of thing. (Kirsty)

Callum reported that since the PATH he had been making a big effort to change and to try and achieve his targets. He appeared proud of his progress and indicated that his teacher would attest to his success.

I just thought, you know what? I might as well just stop and be good so I can get out of here and back to [school] and also help my Mum... I've done all my work, I have been trying my hardest not to swear, trying my hardest not to walk out of class... But literally, after this if we just go in my class you can ask my teacher, 'cos I have been trying my hardest. (Callum)

Ashley's mum stated:

The PATH allowed Ashley to see that people are not all against him. They want to help him. He really listened to what people said about him. You know what they said about his strengths and what they hope will happen in the future. Ashley said he felt like he was looking for his glasses. He couldn't see what he was doing wrong. Since the PATH he says he feels as if he has found his glasses now and can see things more clearly. He couldn't see why they picked him up... and from that moment he has just been so much calmer. Something seems to have clicked.

In one example the PATH impacted on the peer group. Sarah said that once her peers had seen her PATH they also wanted a PATH for themselves.

Some of the other kids saw it [PATH graphic] and said it looked good. I told them about it. They want to do a PATH too now. (Sarah)

Changes were noted in the parent-school relationship as well as the pupil-school relationship:

I think that as a result of the PATH and everyone being there, we now have better communication from the school. Ashley has calmed down a lot now as well. He knows people are trying to help him and they are not all against him. I think being all together in the room helped that. It is reassuring to know that they are willing to make the effort to accommodate Ashley. The things that came up in the PATH has made a difference to the way they speak to him and the way they work with him, and it has really helped him. I feel so much more confident about the school and the help they give him. It's not all negative now. (Ashley's mum)

The progress of the focus young people of the nine PATHs included in this study was followed up several months after their PATH, in order to see how each of them was getting on, and a brief update is provided in table 8 below.

**Table 8: Focus Pupil Follow-up**

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Age/Yr At time of PATH</b>	<b>Setting</b>	<b>Latest news</b>
Sarah	Age 15 Yr 11	AP	Has moved away from home and is living with another family member and is reported to be regularly attending college.
Jake	Age 15 Yr 11	AP	Attending college studying mechanics. Returned to the AP setting to say hello and let them know how he is getting on. Really regrets not having worked harder for his GCSEs
Leon	Age 9 Yr 5	PRU	Back in mainstream school full time and planning for transition to secondary school. School reports that the situation has improved.
Ben	Age 9 Yr 5	PRU	Returned to a different school. Difficulties have been encountered and there is still considerable agency involvement. Attendance has been good and the school feel they have a clearer view of his needs and how best to support him and he did enjoy his visit the fire station!
Ronan	Age 12 Yr 8	PRU	Returned to a different school and the transition went well and the PRU believe he has settled in Okay.
Finlay	Age 13	PRU	Still in the PRU and seeking a school which will suit him.

	Yr 8		
Callum	Age 12 Yr 8	PRU	Returned to his old school and has settled back in reasonably well and is said to be doing well at the moment.
Ashley	Age 15 Yr 11	School	Reported to be much calmer and less challenging and the school were delighted to report that he has been able to stay in the room to sit his year 11 exams
Kirsty	Year 11	PRU	Has put in an application for a course at college and is currently planning a number of visits to familiarise herself with the college with her project worker. Mother reported that she has been out a few times and has been a little less dependent on her. Attendance at PRU has increased. Kirsty reported that she feels more confident.

### 4.3 The PATH graphic

PATH is a visual planning tool, whereby the contributions of the participants are written or drawn onto a large piece of paper or 'graphic', which is positioned, on the wall in full view of the participants (see example PATH graphic in appendix 1). All the participants had positive things to say about the graphic and the themes, which emerged included usefulness, structure, and engagement as illustrated by this quote:

The graphic was useful. It gives you something to look at and you can see what you're saying going up on the wall. It made it more engaging and the structure was helpful. (Ashley's mum)

#### 4.3.1 Usefulness

Four of the six pupils interviewed gave the graphic a score of 10 (on a scale of zero to 10) for its usefulness. The other two pupils gave a score of seven and eight respectively. Parents, school staff and professionals provided a score of between seven and 10. Examples of what pupils said about the usefulness of the PATH graphic included:

Very useful cos you know I don't really write things out much and it's big and it's there... so you know, it was good. Just so I understand a bit more what I want to do because they have all just been in my mind and I haven't really written it out anywhere. And it is on paper now so I can have a look back and stuff...( Kirsty)

It was all right, helped a little bit better, the diagram made it more fun. (Jake)

Jakes' mum said:

The visual stuff was good. It made it more interesting and the pictures were more better than just writing it and...made it better.

It's up there on the paper in front of you. It helped having it all in front so everyone can see it. (Kirsty's mum)

#### **4.3.2 Visual Structure**

Finlay seemed to find being able to look at the structure and approaching each section in order helpful.

I like doing things in an order so I know where I am going.

There was something about looking at the structure drawn onto the large graphic that seemed to support thinking:

Looking at it helped to make me think. (Sarah)

Parents reported:

You've got some way of knowing where the meeting was going from start to finish didn't you? So I think so because other times you could think "oh, I am a bit lost here" but you weren't lost at all with that. . (Kirsty's mum)

We can look at it again and remind ourselves of where we need to be going when things get tough. It will be a good reminder and I can use it to help to try to motivate Ronan. We can see where we want to be. (Ronan's mum)

It was nice to see what was being written. (Ben's mum)

School staff made comments like,

... its live, organic, unfolds in front of you. Much better than everyone separately taking notes. (Ss7)

#### **4.4 The use of Props**

The use of props during the PATH gathering was met with mixed responses. The themes which emerged in the discussions about the props included age appropriate, humour, equality and conveying the message.

##### **4.4.1 Age appropriate**

Finlay and Callum's (both Year 8 boys) comments about the props reflected a sense that, for them, the props were not age appropriate:

I thought it was a bit silly with all the bit baby props. (laughs) Not babyish, just a bit weird with all the props that kids usually use. (Finley)

I am thirteen. Obviously it's not a massive age... Ra ra ra. But If you think about it I don't really want to stand up holding a freaky squeaky chicken, with a friggin' crown on my head, and holding a fairy wand in the other. I look like a right dick. Not all kids. I mean, even some ten years olds might find it stupid. I am not saying all kids my age will find it stupid. But I think quite a few of them will. (Callum)

In contrast Sarah and Kirsty (both Year 11 girls) were happy to engage in the use of props.

I got a wand to hold and everything (Sarah)

I thought it was ok yeah. I mean it's just... I thought it was quite cool really as a way of explaining things out. (Kirsty)

Three parents described feeling 'silly', however they engaged with the props for reasons including: feeling they should conform with the process and for the benefit of their child. The props were considered to 'lighten the atmosphere' and have a 'levelling effect'

I felt really silly but I did it for Ronan. He seemed to like them. It's a bit daft but had the effect of lightening the atmosphere. (Ronan's dad)

To start off with you feel a bit silly, but when everybody does... As an adult you tend to not play, do you, or do anything like that? ...No, I am glad I didn't have to honk that duck very often! (Laughs). I think it was a good idea where it puts everybody in the same position. Everybody had to say something and hold something, and do something and I think it probably makes the kids feel more calm and not quite so pressured because you can laugh. Because if the adults can honk these silly ducks and can put a silly wig on then... (laughs). (Kirsty's mum)

#### **4.4.2 Conveying the message**

In terms of conveying the message about the ground rules of PATH Finlay said:

They brought a bit more of an imagination.

Adults felt that the props were useful in getting the intended message across :

I felt that it was good that we were reminded not to use jargon and that this was to be a non-judgemental and safe space... to cast aside our negative thoughts. It can be very easy to bring your bad day with you. That was a good way to start. (Ss 6)

Um. I see the point of them. And I think people might think that they are silly perhaps. But I think that it is good for people to have visual reminders and silly things... What they might think of as silly. But in the end they see the point of them. ...(Ss 8)

In contrast, Ss 2, expressed doubts over the extent to which the intended message was understood:

The props were probably more helpful for the adults. I am not sure if Jake understood what the chicken was for, what jargon is or what the wig was about. He probably got most out of the key as he clearly made the connection when he said,- 'its the key to my future'.

#### **4.4.3 Humour**

The humour evoked by the use of the props seemed to help to support the message in a light hearted or humorous way:

The props can get the message across more quickly and it is a bit light-hearted (LA)

[laughs] It was just a bit of fun with an important message. (Ss 4)

If we want people to let their guard down then laughter and all that Interruption...getting them to laugh, getting them... It puts them... and also it puts people into their creative brain. (Ss 5)

An unexpected outcome around the use of props came to light when Ss 5 described how reflecting on the props in a humorous way in future contact with the parents seemed to have had a positive effect on relationships.

...actually we have referred to the props at subsequent meetings [with parents] and we will make jokes like 'no squeaky chicken this time' or 'don't you think the wig suited [staff member]' or whatever. If we can have a laugh with the parents then half the battle is won and more serious things can be discussed. I think, a bit of common ground, it helps to build a bit of trust. (Ss5)

#### **4.4.4 Equality**

A number of the adults alluded to the props having an equalising or levelling effect and that they helped to ensure each person had a turn to speak:

I thought the props were really helpful. Holding things like the key and the wand was good for taking turns to speak and preventing people from talking over each other. And standing up and turning around in the time travel. It's a great leveller. Making everyone equal....having something to hold onto takes the emphasis of things. Frees people to say things. (LA)

#### **4.5 PATH in contrast to traditional meetings**

When compared to previous experiences of meetings, participants reported that PATH was characterised by certain distinct features. The sense that the PATH format offered something very different to traditional meetings came across very strongly. Themes around inclusion, equality, child-focus, a solution orientation and a distinct atmosphere

described as welcoming, informal and fun emerged. Participants described their experience of PATH as considerably more positive than typical meetings:

The pupils alluded to a sense that, for them the PATH was more inclusive, more focussed towards them, more fun and more helpful than other meetings they had attended:

...less boring than normal meetings because we joined in instead of just being told. (Jake)

It was more fun ...more about me. ...it was good. (Leon)

I'm not saying they [previous meetings] are better than that meeting [PATH] because that meeting [PATH] has helped me quite a bit. (Callum)

Parents also reported that PATH was more fun, less judgemental and provided a more equal balance of power whilst effectively dealing with the issues:

It's a much better way to hold a meeting. It was fun and more light hearted but still addressed the issues. (Ashley's mum)

So much better than the normal meetings. I didn't feel like I was being ganged up against by the 'do-gooders' or looked down on like a 'bad parent.' That's what it can be like, you know. It can be awful. (Ben's mum)

Participants talked about a positive atmosphere created by the PATH that encouraged 'honesty', 'openness' and a 'non-judgmental atmosphere':

I felt I could be really honest (Kirsty's mum)

I feel the PATH process encourages open and honest dialogue even when things go a bit wrong or are difficult or something unexpected comes out. (LA)

School and LA participants reported:

The whole thing felt very different from the moment you walked in.  
(Ss 6)

It doesn't really compare. Everything about it is different. That feeling you get as you walk in, the welcome, the music, the seating arrangement, the visual on the wall, refreshments everything is different. Strikingly different. (Ss7)

There was a welcoming atmosphere; people can be a little anxious attending a meeting. It makes a change not to sit around a table. We all had labels using our first names which felt a bit different. (Ss 5)

I attend numerous meeting regarding the exclusion or reintegration of pupils. The PATHs I have attended are very much more positive and are in stark contrast to our usual meetings. (LA)

Meetings tend to focus on negative aspects and how these can be worked on by the professionals, rarely is there a positive focus. (LA)

It was interesting to note that two participants suggested that, for all the positive aspects of PATH, the differences between PATH and traditional meetings may in itself have been difficult or anxiety raising for adults:

I guess this can be a little uncomfortable for some people as its not what you expect when you walk through the door and if you haven't experienced it before it may be a little anxiety raising. (Ss 7)

Mostly adults are not expected to close their eyes or get up and turn around in a meeting or asked to use their imagination to visualise how things might be in a years time. In some respects its probably much harder for the adults to do all that than it is for the child. (LA)

School staff suggested that the more positive and less problem focussed approach of PATH was helpful:

The PATH didn't focus on any of the difficulties Sarah is presently going through. It was helpful to lift Sarah out of what is presently surrounding her and allow her the freedom to focus on possible future directions. Not get bogged down in the problems like so many meetings do. (Ss 1)

Themes of inclusion and equality were reflected in comments made about the set-up of the room and the way that the PATH was facilitated, which had the effect of controlling potential dominating voices:

The seating arrangement, the graphic, the presentation, the fact the child was central and his opinion was viewed as the most important. The dream being a starting point makes the whole atmosphere more positive and the sense that everyone is equal and those perhaps in a higher status position are not allowed to dominate is really important. (LA)

The emphasis placed on including the pupil was seen as quite different to what might be expected in a traditional meeting:

Just to see little Leon being listened to. When would you get that in a normal meeting? (LA)

A senior youth worker reflected on traditional meetings which, in contrast to the PATH, had failed to consider the needs of the child and did not enable pupil voice.

For too long now if a young person has felt uncomfortable in a meeting they have been told to just walk out, if they find it too precious, just walk out. No one has considered why they feel they have to leave. Or how to change the meeting in some way so that the young person doesn't feel that it's too precious or uncomfortable for them to stay. This [PATH] meeting, on the other hand, was all about including the young person and enabling them to stay. (LA)

Comments regarding traditional meetings reflected professional's perception of themselves as experts:

It is common practice to hold planning and reintegration meetings without the child. There is a tendency to think that we know what's best. (LA)

In contrast to the last points about including the child in the meeting, the following comments reflect the sense that adults may find it more comfortable to plan without the child being present:

There is also a tendency not to want to discuss things in front of the child. I do feel that not including the child is more about the comfort of the adults. It is far easier and less stressful to not include the child. Very often we talk without carefully considering the language we use to describe a child and their behavior. (LA)

## **4.6 PATH facilitation and delivery**

### **4.6.1 The Skills of the PATH facilitators**

The pupils referred to the facilitators as 'nice,' 'kind' and helped to put them at ease:

The people there seemed to care. (Sarah)

The adult participants placed importance on the skills of the PATH facilitators and it seemed that the skill sets for each role were viewed as very different and each highly valuable:

It was good to have two people facilitating and guiding the process. I don't think one person could draw and lead the meeting as well. It is a very skilful job. Well each role is very skilful but in different ways.

(Ss 5)

A lot hinges on who is doing the facilitation - both the verbal facilitation and who is drawing the graphics. (Ss 2)

I think it was really carefully managed, open and non-judgmental without it being artificial or contrived. (HP)

The importance of good graphic skills were referred to by Ss2 and LA staff who indicated that in order for the PATH graphic to make sense after the PATH or to anyone not present at the PATH the clarity of the graphic was crucial:

The actual drawing, how it's done and what is included makes a big difference. Especially when you take it away with you and look at it after the meeting. (Ss 2)

The skills of the verbal facilitator in terms of creating a 'safe' 'non-judgmental atmosphere' and retaining focus on the pupil were referred to by most of the adult participants:

There is a lot to be said about creating a great non-judgmental atmosphere, where no one feels like they are being judged. It's got a lot to do with the facilitator creating the right atmosphere. (LA)

[The facilitator] kept all the discussion on Leon's interests, and throughout the meeting she checked back with him to see if he agreed with what was said or wanted to add anything. It was really funny to see the head teacher say something and then Leon was asked if he agreed with that, and Leon was asked if it could be put up [on the PATH graphic] Talk about role reversal! (Leon's dad)

Four adult participants raised concerns with regard to a possibility for the pupil and parent to have felt uncomfortable discussing their present circumstances in the 'now' stage of the PATH. Participants indicated that discomfort was avoided as a result of the careful and sensitive management of the facilitator:

I thought this bit [now section] was gonna be bad. I didn't want to go over it all. It is uncomfortable to go over the past. But as it was they just stuck to the main things and didn't go into detail or ask questions. Ronan was really truthful and he could see what it was that was going wrong. (Ronan's mum)

The 'Now' section was managed really sensitively. That could have been very difficult for Leon and his parents. I can see it is important to have a grounding in the now. I suspect that most of the people there know the history. It was well handled, dealt with in a way that did not allow for a raking through of the past. No sense of blame or judgment, just the key facts. (HP)

The now section is probably the hardest, hard for the parents, they were incredibly honest and brave, hard for Leon to listen to. However, I think it was managed really well and he was able to have his say around everything that was said. (LA)

#### **4.6.2 Review process**

The adult participants highlighted the need for a review process to be carried out at some point after the PATH:

I think we will need to review this in say 6 weeks time, after half term some time to see what difference it has made. (Leon's dad)

I believe a review would be useful, perhaps on a smaller scale than the original PATH with maybe the school, child and parent with other professionals kept in the loop as and when needed. (LA)

Pupils were asked if the PATH had been discussed with them or referred to after their PATH gathering.

We took the big paper back to [AP setting] and Mr X put it up on the wall. It's good cos it will remind me. Mrs X and me went through it again with Mr X [he wasn't present at the PATH] so he could understand it all. (Sarah)

I did have pictures of that thing [PATH Graphic] on my phone as my Mum said keep reminding yourself of it. (Callum)

PRU and LA participants felt very strongly that for the PATH to have any 'lasting impact' it is likely that 'revisiting it is crucial'. At least two of the young people (Finlay and Ronan) said they had not discussed their PATH with any adult since.

No, not since the PATH. I haven't seen it. Yeah I know. I wasn't given anything. I haven't heard a word from anything else. (Finlay)

No, we haven't looked at it since. (Ronan)

The importance of 'good quality copies of the PATH graphic' to be 'distributed' after the PATH to relevant services to serve as 'a visual reminder' and as a means to refer to the 'list of action points' was stressed by school and LA staff:

We need a good camera to take a really good picture, otherwise the actions will be missed unless you write them all down. (Ss 5)

## **4.7 Chapter Summary**

This chapter presented the perceptions of the participants from nine PATH gatherings following data analysis. Both positive and negative accounts have been included in an

attempt to provide a balanced and trustworthy overview of the participants' experience of PATH in order to address research question one. An interpretation of these findings is presented in Chapter 6.

## **CHAPTER 5: DECISION MAKERS' AND PATH FACILITATORS' PERCEPTIONS OF PATH**

The last chapter presented the views of PATH participants, that is the people for whom the PATH was intended to support. In contrast, this chapter presents the views of service providers and decision makers, that is, those in a position of relative power, knowledgeable about PATH and have taken the decision to use PATH in the support of vulnerable young people. The themes derived from the interviews and questionnaire responses are presented in relation to research question two:

**How do decision-makers and PATH facilitators perceive the role of PATH and its strengths and limitations in supporting vulnerable and challenging pupils?**

Data relating to the perceived role of PATH and the factors that act as barriers or enablers to the process are presented. Aspects of the PATH process and its implementation thought to require further consideration in terms of developing practice are highlighted. For convenience and consistency the respondent groups are referred to according to the naming conventions set out in table 9 below.

**Table 9: Decision-makers and PATH facilitator respondent groups**

<b>Respondent Group</b>	<b>Context</b>	<b>Naming convention</b>
<b>Decision makers</b> head teachers (2) and acting deputy head teacher (1)	Pupil Referral Unit and Alternative Provision setting	PRU/AP
Senior Educational Psychologist (1)	Representing the view of the CYPS and EPS	SEP
Consultant EP PATH facilitators (2)	Experienced PATH facilitators commissioned by the LA to support the service in the development of person-centred working	CEP
Educational Psychologist (16)	Representing the views of the EP team, not all of whom use PATH in their practice	EP

The themes relating to research question two are outlined below in table 10, and a detailed account illustrated by extracts from the data follows.

**Table 10: Themes in relation to research question two.**

<b>Context</b>	<b>Themes</b>
1. The Local Authority	CYPS vision/agenda Person-centred working
2. EP practice	Delivering PATH A New and different way of working The application of psychology Building teams
3. The PRU and AP	PATH as a starting point Re-integration and futures planning Parental participation and relationship building
4. The individual pupil	Making a difference to the pupil Barriers to engagement Commitment building and belonging Dreams and aspirations Measuring change

## **5.1 The Local Authority Context**

### **5.1.1 Children and Young Peoples Service (CYPS) vision**

The SEP reported that, PATH fits with the CYPS values and priorities of:

- Promoting person-centred working
- Developing inclusive practice
- Prioritising the needs of the county's most vulnerable pupils.
- Improving outcomes for excluded pupils
- Reviewing the ways PRUs deliver services

According to the SEP, the above aims were embedded in the EPS core-operating model and resources had been allocated in order to facilitate their promotion. PATH was seen to play an important role and evidence of this comes from the commitment by the CYPS to fund training in PATH and invest in the support of Consultant EPs to train and supervise the EP team. Ways of improving practices across the county and promoting EP involvement had been considered at a systemic level, for example, a project had recently

been set up involving EPs working with the county's PRUs and a PATH had been carried out to help identify the vision for improving the effectiveness of PRUs.

PATH's perceived role in promoting inclusion was referred to by respondents, for example:

PATH is a tool for inclusion...Inclusion is at the heart of person-centred working.  
(CEP)

PATH's role in promoting inclusion was alluded to at the level of the systems around the child, such as the processes of supporting reintegration and inclusion back into mainstream school, or planning with the young person around post school provision. At the level of the child PATH was seen to have a role in encouraging or enabling the young person to participate in the process of planning for their future

The receptiveness demonstrated by the EP team in embracing person-centred working by undertaking training and including PATH in their practice was viewed as key to ensuring that the EPS agenda was delivered effectively on the ground. The perceived receptiveness of schools, PRUs and AP settings in embracing PATH was also seen as essential in 'moving the agenda forward'.

### **5.1.2 Person-centred working**

The respondents referred to a desire to work in a 'person-centred' way and they viewed the practice of PATH as instrumental in this. 'Pupil involvement' seemed to define a shared understanding of the term 'person-centred'. The EP group talked about PATH being 'strength based' 'promoting equality and diversity,' 'balancing power differentials' and 'giving voice' and these factors were viewed as fundamental in relation to the notion of person-centredness:

PATH is about ordinary needs and what it will take to have a good life. (CEP)

The person-centred approach was described by respondents as a means to 'counter' the perceived negative influences of 'medical' or 'deficit' model practices.

PATH is value based, it's about helping people to meet their ordinary needs rather than the identification of special needs. It's not about diagnosis and treatment,

trying to fix people or normalizing them, it's about working with, it's about what it will take to have a good life. (CEP)

The facilitators job is to keep it person-centred... keep the focus on the young person's dreams and interests, not to let professionals take over or slip into 'what's wrong, how can we fix it mode.' (EP)

The SEP talked about the person-centred ethos of the CYPS and how tools like PATH fit within the operating model and the vision to 'embed person-centred approaches across the CYPS.' Mention was made of the drive to shift the way services are delivered, making them more personalised and to:

tailor services to the needs and aspirations of the child rather than the child needs being expected to fit with available services. (SEP)

A PRU head teacher recounted how he was originally inspired to adopt PCPin response to concerns about:

...a general lack of student voice and input regarding their future and learning preferences, there was also concern about a lack of attendance at meetings by pupils, parents and professionals. We were introduced to PATH by [EP] and immediately could see how we could use it and how it could work for our pupils.

The SEP stated that 'training', for PRU/AP staff and other professionals, to enable a greater understanding of the person-centred approach, its origins and philosophy was 'the first step' in attempts to embed the values and principles in practice. The Senior EP reported that training was currently being rolled out across the county and a conference around person-centred working had recently been held.

Although respondents were generally positive about embracing the principles and could see the value of person-centred working, an EP respondent queried:

how is person-centredness measured? PATH may be a person-centred planning tool but how do we ensure it is used in a person-centred way?

Developing a shared definition regarding the terms used around person-centred working and ensuring that the practice of PATH is truly person-centred were highlighted as areas, for further attention by the EPS.

## **5.2 The context of EP practice**

EPs perceptions of PATH were collected from the entire EP team through a questionnaire, which was followed up in 6 cases with additional questioning. The questionnaire data revealed that 14 of the 16 EP respondents felt that PATH made a useful contribution to EP practice and nine EPs reported that they currently use PATH in their practice. EPs commented on the PATH being 'practical', 'time bound' and 'well received by schools'.

### **5.2.1 Delivering PATH**

The key issues around the use of PATH in EP practice reported by the EP team included, facilitation skills, the absence of a need for an EP report, EP co-working, effective use of EP time and issues of ownership.

The facilitators' 'expertise', 'manner', 'ability to manage the group' and 'graphic skills' were perceived as key factors contributing to PATH's success by the EP group. The skills of the facilitator were also highlighted as important in the PATH participants' responses presented in chapter four of the findings.

The questionnaire data highlighted the levels of perceived competence in PATH facilitation held by the EP team. Of the 16 EP respondents, five stated a preference for the verbal facilitation role, six preferred the graphic facilitation role, four EPs stated that they would be happy to perform either role. The reasons for the selection of one role over another included a 'lack of confidence in leading the PATH' and a lack of 'drawing ability'. One EP who stated a preference for the graphic facilitation role stated:

I worry about how I would help to turn around any blatant negativity that arose from the audience.

As many of the EPs at the time of data collection were still undergoing training the apparent lack of confidence reported by a number of EPs is perhaps not surprising. When asked what might help to increase levels of competence, the EPs reported that they would benefit from 'more practice', 'working alongside more experienced colleagues', 'opportunities to observe' and 'further training.'

EPs reported that the dissemination of a colour copy of the PATH graphic to all parties negated the need for an additional written report, as the jointly agreed actions were listed on the graphic. This was seen as a distinct advantage as report writing was viewed as time consuming and not always effectual. One EP did, however, question:

Is the PATH diagram enough? Can it lose its meaning over time? Does it mean anything to a person who wasn't present at the time?

The need for two facilitators (usually both EPs) was talked about in both positive and negative terms. Three EPs commented on the positives of EPs working jointly, for example, in practical terms 'when it's a large PATH' and secondly in terms of the benefits of 'differing psychological perspectives' and 'complementary skills'. Five EPs reported liking opportunities for co-working and found working collaboratively 'motivating' and a means to 'develop skills.'

In terms of the effective use of EP time, the need for two EPs had the disadvantage of making a PATH 'difficult to organise' and possibly risking 'a long wait for a PATH to take place'. It was argued that although PATH requires two EP facilitators, what can be achieved in the one and a half hour time frame may be greater than what may be achieved through conventional EP work, plus, the absence of a need to produce a written report suggested that it offered a potentially effective use of EP time. One EP reported:

When I first did a PATH with [colleague] – only a month or so ago, I remember commenting that it felt like doing the information gathering, report writing and first intervention steps all in one.

Two EPs raised concerns regarding the issue of 'ownership' saying:

As the EP is just there to facilitate, who will be responsible for following up actions?

In terms of organising the process, around excluded pupils returning to school, issues of ownership arose from senior staff in PRU/AP settings, suggesting that this is an area requiring further consideration:

Who is responsible? Receiving school or us? We are encouraging receiving schools to host the PATH, so who organises it? Who pays for it? We need some clarity and guidance. (PRU/AP)

Further confusion was expressed with regard to the extent of the EP facilitator role and responsibilities. In other words EP facilitators may carry out a PATH for a school or PRU/AP anywhere in the county, however they would not expect to necessarily be responsible for the follow up or on-going work. One EP expressed the need for clarification regarding post PATH work suggesting that liaison with the nominated school EP was needed to communicate with schools and manage expectations.

### **5.2.2 A new and different way of working**

Respondents commented on the role of PATH in providing a new and different way of working.

PATH offers a new way of working for EPs who may currently use more traditional approaches to assessment and testing in their practice. (SEP)

Phrases like 'creative', 'fun', 'colourful' 'different' 'innovative' 'novelty' were used. These features were considered 'appealing to the young person' and positive factors in contributing to a PATH's success. One EP also mentioned 'cheesiness'.

A point was made regarding the visual, kinaesthetic, aural and written aspects of PATH, which was understood to be particularly helpful to those who benefit from a range of learning styles. A head teacher from a PRU stated:

It ticks the boxes in terms of how people learn themselves, for instance it is visual, people are active – kinaesthetic, as well as the spoken and written elements. (PRU AP)

One EP warned that

It might become jaded if used with the same people repeatedly

PATH's 'novelty' or newness in terms of EP practice was described as a factor relating to its perceived usefulness. Issues around avoiding over-use and PATH's longer-term sustainability as an effective tool were concerns for a number of EPs

### **5.2.3 The application of psychology**

The respondents mentioned the importance of a psychological dimension to PATH. This was reported in two ways. Firstly, the EP bringing psychology into play through their role as facilitator, for example through their questioning style and language. Secondly through a perceived psychological dimension reported by respondents in the PATH process itself, for example:

There is something about the dream space, something about visualising a better future, its uplifting, energizing, it draws you in.

(PRU/AP)

Its like group family therapy. (PRU/AP)

EP and PRU/AP respondents referred to the 'solution focused' and 'positive' aspect of PATH and its role in 'shifting thinking'. The EPs and CEPs drew comparisons between PATH and Narrative Therapy in terms of 're-authoring the young person's story.' The principles of Personal Construct Psychology were alluded to through comments like:

PATH aims to get at the child's perceptions, their view of the world and their identity. (EP)

PATH was described as 'self esteem building' and 'empowering' and one EP discussed the role of PATH in terms of promoting 'joint action' and 'synchronising intentions.' EPs suggested that PATH was a vehicle for EPs to 'share ideas from psychology' and that the EP has a role to play in 'developing an evidence base for these type of tools'. Another EP felt that PATH fits with her approach to practicing psychology:

It fits with the interactionist approach in that it doesn't view the child in isolation, the interacting influences around the child are brought into play.

In contrast, one EP warned that PATH may be viewed as 'psychology in fancy dress.'

#### **5.2.4 Building teams.**

The respondents made links between PATH and multi-agency working, describing PATH as 'useful in collaborative working,' 'bringing people together' and 'building a team around the pupil.' PATH was viewed as 'different to,' 'more positive than' and 'offering more' than typical multi-agency meetings. Respondents made mention of ways in which PATH may be used to enhance multi-agency working. A PRU head teacher felt that PATH made a unique contribution by:

building bridges between home, schools and services in a way that no other type of meeting does.

An AP head teacher used the term 'galvanising' to express the effect her perceived PATH to have on the participants. One CEP stressed the importance of involving a diverse range of people beyond those who typically might be present at a multi-agency meeting:

PATH is not about individuals, it's about building teams. It's about capacity building around the child. The team should include more than service providers and school staff. Very often it's the influence of friends, extended family and community members that makes the difference.

Factors perceived by EPs that acted as a barrier to PATH's role in team building included 'the right people not being in the group' and 'lack of co-operation and collaboration'. It was pointed out that for busy professionals a 'PATH may not been seen as a priority', and as pupils excluded from school tend to have numerous meetings organised around them, prioritising which meetings to attend may be difficult.

EP and PRU/AP respondents identified 'adults not willing to sign up' as a barrier to effective team building. As highlighted in chapter four, of the nine PATHs, only one instance of a head teacher declining to 'enrol' was noted. This may not be a regular occurrence, but the negative impact may have serious consequences. EP facilitators proposed that 'advice from more experienced facilitators' in ways to handle this type of situation if and when it arose, would be beneficial in order to limit the potential negative impact.

## **5.3 The PRU and AP context**

### **5.3.1 A belief in PATH**

Ten out of the 16 EP reported having received requests from schools to carry out person-centred planning activities such as PATH. This level of interest suggested that schools were receptive to trying out or continuing to use PATH. Furthermore it alluded to a hope or belief on the part of schools that PATH is a worthwhile and effective tool.

The PRU/AP settings reported being impressed by what they had heard or seen of PATH and 'immediately identifying its potential' for use in 'supporting transitions' in their settings. One head teacher had organised a training event in conjunction with the EPS, and PRU and AP staff from around the county had been invited.

### **5.3.2 PATH as a starting point**

A need for 'clarity with regard to what PATH's intended contribution is' and what PATH might offer was highlighted strongly by EPs. There was a concern raised by the EPs that PATH may be seen by schools as an 'outcome in itself' rather than a means to gather information and plan.

Sometimes, offering a PATH is perceived as the answer to the presenting problem rather than a vehicle for exploring or gaining a greater understanding of the concern. (EP)

The idea that PATH's role may be as 'a catalyst' for action was proposed, and examples of how PATH had been used as a starting point for on-going work were provided. Several respondents connected PATH with the TAC process, for example, an EP reported that the PATH she had facilitated was going to be used to inform the next TAC meeting. EP and PRU/AP respondents also linked PATH with the Annual Review process for pupils with a statement of SEN. The use of the PATH graphic to inform IEP targets was also highlighted. An EP reported that

The PATH helped the school to understand the direction that Ashley and his family want to take in terms of his education, and they were clear about our role in supporting that. Now they can develop an IEP to reflect what they can do for Ashley. (Ss 10)

Holding PATHs for young people in PRU placement was described as part of the wider information gathering process:

Once we have done the PATH we use the information about the dream, the goals and so on in the pupil profile and we keep a copy of it in their file. The PATH tends to be a one off but it feeds into the baseline data like academic attainment, PASS, and the functional analysis. It contributes to the bigger picture adding a different slant and forms the background to make decisions on the appropriate course of action around where we go next. (PRU/AP)

Examples of how the PATH graphic was used for information sharing and to remind the young person of their goals were reported:

We produce an A3 colour copy of the PATH graphic and we refer to it in meetings and with the pupil. It can provide new information to professionals who don't know the pupil. ...and for the pupils we use it to help to remind them and keep them on track. (PRU/AP)

### **5.3.3 *Re-integration and futures planning***

PRU/AP staff reported that PATH added something 'powerful' to their existing re-integration and futures planning procedures by 'going beyond traditional planning processes.' They felt PATH was particularly useful in moving 'complex' or 'stuck' situations forward and helped to present the pupil in a more positive light.

PATH is used to get the receiving school working together with us [PRU] and whatever services, such as social care, that are involved. It helps the receiving school see the child in a more positive way and to meet the parent. (PRU/AP)

One PRU respondent talked about PATH in relation to the challenges of reintegration planning:

Its really hard for our kids to return to school after exclusion. They have a bad reputation to deal with.... the school and their peers have expectations of how they're gonna behave. They may not fit back in with their old mates, who may have moved on and ...were probably not the best of influences. For a young person who isn't the best of communicators and hasn't got the best social skills, starting back

can be really difficult, they have to kind of reinvent themselves... PATH doesn't make those issues go away but it's like planning for a new start, and putting the past behind

In the AP settings the emphasis on using PATH was on helping to plan for the young person's next steps in post school provision. In the two cases of PATHs in AP settings, the young people were in year 11 and the focus was on considering what they might do after their GCSEs such as college options:

It was quite a surprise when Sarah said she wanted to go to [x] college none of us knew she had an interest in [x]. (EP)

A number of challenges were reported around the organisation and delivery of PATHs, for example getting the right mix of people, finding a suitable venue and making sure there is a 'good big wall' and seating:

Sometimes its hard to get the parents in. Sometimes we haven't been able to get any of the right professionals to attend, which is a shame,.  
but to be honest I feel that for the young person something positive comes out of it regardless. (PRU/AP)

I don't think you could say we have had any resounding failures, but some of our PATHs have been more productive than others. (PRU/AP)

PRU/AP respondents reported taking steps to integrate the use of PATH into their practices and procedures for supporting reintegration or futures planning. Their shared vision was to hold a PATH for each young person in their care:

We aim to carry out a PATH for each one of our kids before they go back into mainstream.

The EP team felt that PATH was an 'appropriate tool for supporting transitions', as people began to:

Shift thinking and start to create a new more positive narrative for the young person. (EP)

A PRU respondent suggested that the engagement of the young person in a PATH:

demonstrated to the receiving school that [the pupil] could stay in a room for an hour and a half and contribute in a positive way. That alone is a pretty strong message.

#### **5.3.4 Parental participation and relationship building**

The PRU and AP respondent reported that building relationships with the parents/carers of pupils who have been excluded from school is 'vitaly important' and 'often very challenging' with 'parents not turning up' or 'unable to get to meetings,' 'hard to reach' and encountering 'travel issues.' It was reported that some parents have a negative view of the school system and that PATH has played a part in attempts to re-engage them:

It has an instant impact on them [parents]. Most of the meetings they have been to have been, your child is doing this wrong, that wrong and you need to do something about it. PATH puts the child and parents into a much more positive frame of mind about meetings, and actually helps us to get a potentially hard to reach parent back into school and come to another meeting here. (PRU/AP)

It was revealed that relationships with parents often improved after a PATH:

The positive impact of PATH is mainly for our parents... because I think some of our parents quite often have their own difficulties, learning or emotional needs, often socially isolated, the parents and the child are often isolated from their community. Path helps us get those parents on side and gain their trust in our intention to help and not to judge them.... enter into a more positive relationship. (PRU/AP)

### **5.4 The individual pupil context**

#### **5.4.1 Making a difference to the pupil**

It was generally felt that PATH had a role in providing opportunities to increase chances for change and to make a positive difference to the young person:

It [PATH] helps the child to identify their dreams and goals and desired direction in order to steer action, as opposed to applying what experts view is best for the child. (EP)

The role PATH played in promoting the voice of the pupil was deemed important. One EP talked about PATH having a role in promoting the voice of marginalised pupils, and mentioned childrens' 'legal right to have a say in decision making'. A PRU head teacher stated that:

All too often pupils won't stay in a meeting.... it's just not conducive. Meetings cause all sort of anxieties as they don't know what's gonna happen next. The way PATH is delivered makes it more comfortable for them to speak

Respondents described the differences they had noticed in pupils during and after a PATH. One EP commented on an observable change in body language and the demeanour of a young person during a PATH:

She was very shy at the start of the PATH and was wedged in next to her mum on the sofa with a wall of pillows round her. After a while she started to engage more with the other members of the group and before the end of the PATH she was up on her feet drawing. She really came out of her shell. (EP)

#### **5.4.2 *Enhancing a sense of belonging.***

Respondents reported that PATH provided opportunities for the young person to 'begin to feel involved in their community in a more positive way' (EP), to be enabled to 'contribute something positive' (EP) and to 'gain that sense of belonging' (PRU/AP). It was suggested that PATH provides a 'starting point' in helping a young person to begin to make 'meaningful relationships' (PRU/AP) and develop 'positive community links' (CEP) and 'better friendships' (PRU/AP):

Social isolation and friendship difficulties repeatedly come up as an issue for our kids. Developing appropriate friendships may not come easily and sometimes a helping hand is needed. (PRU/AP)

It was further suggested that through PATH the PRU, school and family could try to find ways to support the young person in making connections with people with shared interests.

PATH helps us to identify what they are interested in. This can be used to help make connections with other kids or adults who share similar interests. (PRU/AP)

Examples of unexpected connections and a willingness on the part of participants to go beyond their professional role in order to contribute to helping the young person to pursue their goal were reported. As the following two examples illustrate:

Ben loves anything to do with fire engines and what do you know? [school staff member] knows a fireman and so she suggests why don't they arrange a visit to the fire station? (PRU/AP)

...he said he would like his own den or tree house in the garden. This was news to Leon's dad who said he would see what he could do and then [school staff member] offered to help [with building a den] too. (EP)

One CEP talked about PATH's potential role in 'helping to make connections'

My experience has been that if enough of the right people are present at the PATH they all begin to contribute ideas, solutions, connections, actions. More importantly, they all begin to see their part in the picture. (CEP)

In order to ensure the best possible chances of enabling connections to be made, it was suggested that 'inviting the right people' to the PATH was essential. Evidence from this study (taken from the lists of participants in attendance at each PATH) revealed that in all nine PATHs the young person had no more than two natural support figures (family/carers and friends) and in one PATH no natural support figures were present (the young person chose not to invite any family members). Paid support figures (school staff and professionals) outnumbered natural support figures in each case. This was identified by the CEP and EPs as an area in need of further work and planning.

### **5.4.3 Engagement**

In the nine PATHs studied no instances of the pupil refusing to attend were observed, however, as examined in chapter four, an initial reluctance or apprehension around attending was described. In one of the PATHs the EP described how the young person rarely spoke directly to the group, he nodded occasionally and whispered to his mother, who fed his comments back to the group on his behalf. The young person was observed sitting with his school bag on his lap, which had the effect of obscuring his face.

In another PATH, the EP recounted how the young person was instructed to leave the PATH gathering by a member of the PRU staff. The PATH facilitators reported that they felt that the young person was willing to engage, however, the adult, who had not experienced a PATH before, felt very strongly that the child should not be present. The child had happily engaged with the dream and goal stages however when it came to the 'now' stage the staff member told the child to leave the room. The EP facilitator described the act of preventing the young person from being present for their PATH by 'sending him out' of the room as 'sabotage.' The CEP suggested that pre-PATH planning with PRU staff is needed to ensure such acts of 'sabotage' do not recur.

#### **5.4.4 Measuring change**

Decision makers in PRU and AP settings viewed PATH very favourably in terms of its potential. However, EPs argued that for PATH to be considered an effective tool, ways of 'systematically gathering evidence' generated through its use in practice was required. It was noted by respondents that it is often difficult to identify positive change, as PATH may impact on a young person in any number of ways, which may not be immediately measurable or easily identifiable:

' throw the pebble in and watch the ripples' (EP)

A PATH may help to support slight 'shifts in perception', 'encourage reflection', increase 'self-esteem' and 'self-awareness', help 'increase motivation to change,' 'identify first steps in working towards dreams or goals', 'allow voice', 'empower' and 'increase capacity to cope', and help develop a 'sense of community and belonging'.

These potential positive contributions may constitute an outcome, which may or may not be measurable or reliably attributed directly to the PATH. The SEP, CEPs and EP respondents talked about different approaches to evaluating the potential positive effects of PATH for the young person and it was agreed that finding ways of evaluating the impact of PATH was not straightforward but nonetheless needed.

### **5.5 Chapter Summary**

This chapter provided an account of the PATH facilitators and decision makers' perceptions of the role of PATH. A number of perceived strengths and limitations of the process and its implementation emerged from the interview data. Aspects of the PATH process that were identified for consideration by PATH organisers and facilitators are summarised and discussed in chapter 6.

## CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION

This research aimed to explore the use of PATH by EPs with vulnerable and challenging pupils in order to shape and improve practice. The perspectives of those for whom PATH was intended to support, and the facilitators and decision makers who promoted the use of PATH were gathered. The findings captured contrasting perspectives of the role of PATH and its strengths and limitations. This chapter considers how the themes identified in chapters four and five address the research questions. The strengths and limitations of the study are examined, future research directions are proposed and the chapter concludes with a summary of recommendations for developing practice.

### **6.1 Research Question One: How do pupils, their parents/carers, school staff and other professionals describe their experience of PATH?**

#### ***6.1.1 Pre-PATH planning and preparation.***

Initial apprehension and scepticism was reported by those who had not experienced PATH before. Parents were concerned that the process may be daunting for their child and the number of adults present in the meeting was considered likely to be intimidating. Adult participants in a previous study also voiced concerns that PCP processes may place additional pressure on children (Hagner et al., 1996). This view was born out by the young people who talked about feeling nervous and not knowing what to expect, with some pupils not aware that a meeting had been planned.

Wilson's (2013 p1) assertion that in PCP the young person 'is given as much choice and control as possible and this includes who comes to the PATH, where and when it is held' was not born out in this research. There was no evidence of pupils being included in preparation and parents reported receiving little or no information. The pupils' apprehension may have been based on previous experiences of meetings compounded by a lack of pre-PATH preparation. It therefore seems important that, preparatory work is undertaken to ensure pupils are informed about the process. Not only do PATH organisers need to consider how to support pupils who may feel nervous or reluctant to attend, they need to consider ways, inline with Wilson (20013), of ensuring that person-centred values

are extended to the pre-PATH planning stage if claims that PATH is a truly person-centred process are to be upheld.

PATH organisers may also need to consider the parent's level of education and possible feelings of disempowerment when expecting them to engage in a new process involving speaking in front of others, given that previous literature asserts that parents with a lower socioeconomic status (Desforges and Abouchaar, 2003), and less educated parents (Fantuzzo et al., 2000) are less likely to be involved in their child's education.

In a number of cases the PATH did not address what parents had expected. According to the BPS (2002) EPs should be aware that those experiencing problems are in a vulnerable position. In this respect, expectations of what EPs can offer may be inaccurate and EPs should attempt to ensure that parents do not have exaggerated expectations. This mismatch of expectations may have been exacerbated by the lack of pre PATH information to parents.

Although participants described feeling nervous and apprehensive before, and at the start of the PATH, they seemed to be reassured by the process and described feeling more relaxed and comfortable as the PATH proceeded. Pupils provided high scores for their level of comfort during the process and this appeared to be fostered by a number of factors, including the informal style of the meeting and the skills of the facilitators. Participants described an 'open' and 'non-judgmental atmosphere', which encouraged 'honesty' and generated a 'feel good factor'. Factors such as the seating arrangement, and the provision of refreshments and music may have contributed to the creation of the welcoming and relaxed atmosphere described by the participants.

### **6.1.2 The impact of PATH**

#### ***Emotional response***

PATH participants made reference to positive emotions in connection with their experience of PATH. Generally participants enjoyed the PATH, pupils especially enjoyed 'the dream' stage and valued feeling listened to. Participants reported experiencing a range of emotions including laughter, tears and emotional exhaustion. There was a sense that by the end of the PATH, an emotional journey had been shared.

Rifkind (1995) talks about the containment of emotions in group consultation and highlights the skills required to effectively manage emotional issues during consultation. Although it was reported that facilitators acted with sensitivity, especially in the 'now'

stage, it may be useful to be aware of emotional responses and to be mindful of these when delivering PATH. This point serves to reinforce the need for effective training and supervision for EPs undertaking the role of PATH facilitator and perhaps adds to an argument in justifying the value of having two EPs present.

### ***Making a difference***

A number of pupils attributed positive changes in themselves to their PATH. Daniels et al., (2003) suggest that reintegration planning should take into account what motivates young people and what they believe they may be capable of achieving. The PATH seemed to enable pupils to identify their desired direction and empower them with the belief that they could achieve their goals, and pupils reported increased levels of confidence and motivation. Changes in behaviour were reported by a number of pupils, such as, improved effort, behaviour and relationship both in school and at home. One pupil reported that the PATH had helped him to reflect on the impact of his behaviour and as a result he had chosen to be 'good.' Literature around exclusion very often paints a different picture, suggesting that interventions designed to elicit changes in behavior, increase motivation and confidence and support reengagement are often met with mixed or poor results (Hallam and Rogers, 2008, Arnold, et al., 2009).

The changes in behaviour seemed to have been initiated by the pupils themselves and did not necessarily relate to the actions listed on their plan. Interestingly, in interviews the pupils said very little about the action planning stages. However, up to six weeks after the PATH, young people recounted details of the 'dream' and 'goals' stages. This suggests that there is something about these aspects of the PATH that inspires and influences pupils more so than the agreeing of actions. The fact that pupils reported a perceived difference in themselves was in line with what would be expected from a person-centred approach, which stems from principles that assert that clients have the capacity to choose what is best for them in order to self-actualise (Rogers, 1980, 2003, Merry, 2006).

### ***Usefulness***

Pupils, perceived the PATH to be useful, in line with the findings of Miner and Bates (1997). In contrast parents' perceptions were mixed. One parent reported that the PATH has been 'really helpful' and another said 'they couldn't see what difference it would make.' Perhaps if parental expectations were addressed earlier and a clear strategy for on-going review was implemented, parents with doubts may be reassured that PATH is not a one-off isolated event.

PATH was perceived as useful in eliciting pupil voice, encouraging active engagement and empowering the child to make positive changes. However, Daniels et al., (2003) warn that too optimistic a picture should not be offered, as ongoing and active involvement of the young people may not guarantee continuous and increasing engagement. As such any positive effects generated through the PATH need to be acknowledged and supported by professionals if lasting benefits are to be realised.

### ***Relationships***

In line with Cullen and Monroe's (2010) finding, that relationship building in PRUs helped reengage pupils, participants in the present study reported improved relationships. One pupil claimed that communication between him and his mother had improved and he felt his mother understood him better as a result of the PATH. This finding is encouraging as supportive family relationships, are known to have a positive impact in the context of exclusion (Daniels et al., 2003). Parents reported that relationships with the PRU/school had improved and PRU staff reported improved engagement with parents after the PATH. Again this is important as the impact of parental participation in schooling in relation to improved outcomes is widely reported (Beverage, 2004, Fan and Chen, 2001)

School staff commented that PATH provided an opportunity for the school to see the pupil in a different and more positive light and vice versa. Participants reported that PATH provided opportunities for the young person to 'begin to feel involved in their community in a more positive way,' to be enabled to 'contribute something positive' and to 'gain that sense of belonging.' These findings suggest that PATH may have a role in re-authoring pupil-school narratives (White and Epston, 1990) and rebuilding relationships. Relationship building may in turn increase a pupil's sense of connectedness with their school. A number of pupils reported feeling more positive about re-entry to school and transition to FE. Students are more likely to succeed when they feel connected to school and school connectedness is linked with higher levels of emotional well-being (McNeely, et al., 2002). The potential benefits of school connectedness are clear and if PATH has a role, however tentative, in its development this should be nurtured.

The indicators of positive change were reported by the pupils up to six weeks after their PATH suggesting that the PATH may well have impacted on these pupils thinking and behaviour in a reasonably lasting way. In line with Daniels et al., (2003) findings, it is hoped that by basing planning on the strengths of the young person and by actively engaging the young person greater levels of successful reintegration may be achieved.

## ***Engagement***

When given the opportunity to contribute their views, pupil engagement was high. Eight of the nine young people remained engaged throughout the process (at least one and a half hours). This was remarked on as 'surprising' and 'extremely positive' by school staff and parents. Kinder, (2000) suggest that PRUs recognise the importance of engaging young people in planning. However, Daniels et al., (2003) stress that the desire to engage has to come from within the young person, and only with the active endorsement of their post-exclusion programme from the child is there likely to be successful re-entry.

Professionals noted observable differences in pupil demeanour during PATHs. In accordance with Wilson (2013), the PATHs were pupil led and the pupils' own dreams and goals formed the basis of the plan. Factors such as the relaxed nature of the meeting and child-friendly approach were considered to support pupil participation. However, in one instance the engagement of a pupil was 'sabotaged' by a teacher. School staff new to PATH, may benefit from an awareness of the importance of involving children in planning and decision making processes (Badham and Wade, 2008) to avoid any future 'sabotage.' PATH organisers may wish to consider this in pre-PATH preparation with adult participants.

The high level of engagement demonstrated by the young people in this study would suggest that there is something about the PATH process which supports their inclusion and enables them to contribute in a way which many traditional meetings do not. It may be that post-exclusion programmes based on the PATH have a greater chance of attracting the active endorsement of the pupil.

### ***6.1.3 The PATH graphic***

The PATH graphic was popular with all participants and was rated highly for usefulness. Pupils liked to see what was being said in the visual format on the wall and it helped them to 'think'. In a similar way, Rimmer, et al., (2011), found that the young people in their study liked the graphic and it increased their understanding. Parents and pupils felt that the visual written record provided reassurance that nothing would get 'lost' and they had something they could refer back to later. Hayes (2004) argues that visual approaches provide an interesting cue for young people, facilitating their engagement and understanding in the meeting. The young people's understanding of the information shared in the PATH may therefore have been facilitated by the visual approach used.

These findings support Wilson's (2013 p 6) view regarding the function of the graphic, which he suggest provides 'a visible acknowledgement that individual contributions were heard and individuals know this because they can see their words and images recorded on the poster.' This is in line with the suggestion made by Hayes (2004) that recording children's views in a visual format illustrates to them that they have been heard.

#### **6.1.4 *The use of Props***

Feelings were mixed with regard to the use of props. One pupil felt that the props were 'stupid' and not age appropriate whilst another said they were 'cool'. School staff and professionals commented on the levelling influence of the props, the benefit of bringing humour in to the meeting. The literature on PCP (Wilson and Newton, 2011, Pearpoint) advocates the use of props and suggests that when serious subjects are talked about playfully with props as visual metaphors a safer climate may be created. In Wilson and Newton's (2011) experience using props in PATH, children and adults become more communicative and creative and more willing to take risks and try out ideas. PATH facilitators need to be aware of the potential benefits of using props as well as the mixed responses reported here when making decisions around the use of props in their own practice.

#### **6.1.5 *PATH in contrast to traditional meetings***

In traditional meetings pupil engagement is often poor (Rose & Shevlin, 2005). The personal power and self-confidence of the staff can significantly outweigh the power and self-confidence of the young person and family they aim to support (Weetman, 2010). This can mean that meetings actually fail to change very much despite best intentions. Compared to previous experiences of meetings, participants reported that their experience of PATH was considerably more positive and that PATH was characterised by features, which set it apart from conventional meetings. Parents reported that the facilitator listened to and valued their contribution and ensured that their point of view was given equal status to that of the professionals. The role of the facilitator in enabling the parent to feel at ease and contribute may have helped to address the power structures highlighted by Sykes (2001), ensuring parents felt like true partners in the planning process, feeling that their contributions were heard and that agreed outcomes would happen.

Pupils described PATH as 'less boring' and 'more fun' whilst other participants described it as, welcoming, strikingly different, child-focussed and more inclusive. The sense that the PATH format offered something very different to traditional meetings came across very

strongly. Wilson (2013) suggests that by focussing on 'ordinary needs' as opposed to 'special needs' and asking what sort of life the pupil wants and who can help, distinguishes PCP from traditional approaches. PATH was said to address the range of learning styles: (visual, aural, read/write, and kinaesthetic) proposed by Fleming and Mills (1992) and this further set it apart from traditional meetings.

Arnold et al., (2009) suggested that young people excluded from school are not accustomed to attending meetings in which they are asked for their thoughts and ideas or being listened to by adults in positions of authority. This highlights a wider need for the adoption of child-centred ways of working and more specifically preparation for pupils prior to their PATH to ensure they are enabled to make the most of their opportunity to express their thoughts and ideas.

#### **6.1.6 PATH facilitation and delivery**

The stages in the PATH framework provided a structure that proved beneficial, ensuring that everyone had an opportunity to contribute and information could be shared. This reflects the findings of Reid and Green (2002) who also concluded that parents found the PCP process provided clarity and in-depth, open communication.

Starting the process with the 'dream' and 'future goals' stages before talking about the present situation was seen as beneficial. One young person found the 'time travel' the most memorable aspect of the PATH whilst other pupils and parents felt 'silly' standing up and spinning around. Parents suggested that it lightened the atmosphere and helped people feel at ease.

Parents and professionals were initially concerned that the 'now' stage might be uncomfortable however sensitive management by the facilitator avoided discomfort. School staff perceived the 'enrolment stage' or the act of 'signing up' as a crucial 'symbolic gesture' demonstrating a commitment to building a support network around the child. This was perceived as an especially important message for the parents and the receiving schools. One instance of a representative from a school declining to sign up was reported and as a result the parent decided to send her child to a different school.

The graphic recording and process roles were valued and having skilled facilitators to run the PATH was viewed as important. Participants praised the careful and sensitive management of the process by the facilitators which seemed to ensure discussions remained focused on solutions. Rimmer, et al., (2011) reported that the skills of the

facilitator where considered to be a contributory factor in helping the young people in their study to feel respected, listened to, and included in the planning process.

A need for a clear strategy for post PATH review was identified. PRU and LA participants felt very strongly that for the PATH to have any 'lasting impact' it was likely that 'revisiting it is crucial'. Reviewing the PATH tended to happen in a seemingly adhoc fashion, without a clear format and the EP facilitators were not necessarily invited. The focus of the review was predominantly on the achievement of the agreed actions. Reviews took place 'in house' by PRU staff or as part of a TAC, IEP, AR etc meeting. It was unclear to what extent pupils were included and in at least two cases young people had not seen their PATH or discussed it with an adult since the PATH gathering.

A range of factors impacted on the reviews, for example, at the time of the PATH in six of the nine cases it had not been agreed which school or FE setting the pupil would be moving on to from their PRU or AP setting and in four of the cases the time-frame was unknown. This made it difficult in terms of inviting relevant school staff and agreeing an appropriate date for review. Deciding the location for the review was complicated by a number of factors, for example, one young person moved to a different part of the country and three pupils lived a considerable distance from the PRU.

The lack of clear and consistent reviewing procedures was considered critical for on-going effective planning. Although importance was placed on ensuring the pupil was included in the PATH this was not reflected in the process of review and as a result valuable opportunities to build on any positives generated through the initial PATH may have been missed.

Although decision makers acknowledged that PATH was intended as a starting point it seems that the next steps were unclear and the review was not considered as an integral part of the process. There is a need for PATH planners and organisers to clarify the role of the review and consider the development of an approach to review that may be applied consistently after each PATH.

## **6.2 Research Question Two: How do decision-makers and PATH facilitators perceive the role of PATH and its strengths and limitations in supporting vulnerable and challenging pupils?**

### **6.2.1 *The Local Authority Context***

The LA demonstrated a commitment to the embedding of person-centred values and practice across the county. This was evidenced by the investment of resources for training events and conferences for school and PRU staff, the initiation of a practice development group (PDG) by the EPS and a commitment to on-going training and support for EPs.

It appears that the LA were addressing the claims made by Brown (2011) and DfES (2005) that legislation needs to be embedded into practice, and the LA culture and agenda must reinforce a commitment to responding to and meeting pupil needs by ensuring the availability of appropriate support services. The aims of the LA are well-matched to the current Government's policy emphasis on promoting multi-agency working, including the voice of the child in decision making and improving outcomes for pupils excluded from school. However, in line with Brown (2011) review systems around PATH are in need of further consideration.

The SEP explained that a person-centred approach to planning was adopted by the CYPS in response to the criticism posed by Brown (2011) and Smull (2002) that planning is often centred on matching needs with services. Smull (2002) warns that when services are offered on the basis of professionals perceptions of what a young person needs rather than on the desires and wishes of the young person they run the risk of being mismatched or applied inappropriately. The SEP viewed PATH as a means to access a young person's vision in order to plan efficiently and apply services to support the young person appropriately.

Merry (2006) argues that to practice person-centred ways of working the practitioner must embrace the values on which the approach is based which raises questions around the belief systems of the practitioners. Although EPs and decision makers in PRU/AP were receptive to person-centred working the extent to which they embraced person-centred values was unclear. Hence a means to evaluate the extent to which the actual delivery of PATH fits person-centred values may be needed.

## **6.2.2 The context of EP Practice**

### ***The application of psychology***

EPs and schools felt that PATH had a psychological and therapeutic dimension, which added to its value and made it particularly appropriate for use in complex or stuck situations. Participants described PATH in terms of group therapy and like a 'group hug.' This view adds further weight to Atkinson et al., (2013) argument that EPs are well placed to deliver therapeutic interventions and reflects the increased interest on the role of EP as therapeutic provider (MacKay, 2007).

The EP facilitator was said to bring psychology into play through their questioning style, language and manner. PATH was described as 'self esteem building' and 'empowering.' This reflects Rogers (1980) assertion that showing a client unconditional positive regard, acceptance, and understanding will support them to grow towards maximising their capacities. Young people reported feeling more positive about themselves and their future after their PATH and it seems likely that the psychological contribution made by the EP facilitators may have impacted on this.

The findings indicate a number of implications for the EP profession. Therapy based EP practice is a growing area and MacKay (2007) argues that with the current emphasis on emotional wellbeing and an increased focus on integrated children's services, EPs have a key opportunity 'to make a significant contribution to this area and to include therapy in the range of services they routinely offer' (MacKay 2007, p14). EPs are skilled in the delivery of a range of therapeutic techniques to individual, groups and at a systemic level. EPs' ability to deliver extended therapeutic programmes is constrained by time and service capacity. As PATH is time bound and brief it may offer an efficient vehicle for EPs to apply their therapeutic skills in approaches such as solution focused and narrative therapy as well as those prescribed by the person-centred approach.

### ***PATH and the EP role***

EPs felt that PATH made a useful contribution to EP practice, as it was practical, time bound, well received by schools and fitted with their approach to practicing psychology. Facilitation skills were viewed as important however not all EPs felt competent to facilitate. Further support and training with regard to managing tensions and unexpected challenges such as 'sabotage' and 'refusal to sign-up' was called for. Those responsible for the support and training of PATH facilitators need to be aware that 'developing appropriate scripts' and the confidence of the facilitators to 'effectively manage tensions' were perceived as a training need.

The literature on PATH (Wilson, 2013) proposes that the graphic is the sole document produced in reference to the gathering. The EP team generally viewed the understanding that an EP report was not an essential outcome of a PATH positively. An EP, however, raised questions regarding whether the PATH graphic was sufficient in terms providing an alternative for a report and whether the graphic effectively conveys meaning over time and how people not present at the initial gathering may interpret it. The importance of 'good quality copies of the PATH graphic' to be 'distributed' after the PATH to relevant services to serve as 'a visual reminder' and as a means to refer to the 'list of action points' was stressed by school and LA staff.

The PATH framework was considered appropriate for use in a range of contexts such as group consultation and multi-agency working. Wilson (2013 p 5) states that 'PCP holds the promise of creating the type of forum where genuine inter-professional working is more likely to develop.' Cameron (2006) states that EPs can make a distinctive contribution as practitioners who can apply psychology to problems that occur in complex environments and the findings demonstrate that PATH has a growing role in this context.

The need for two facilitators was viewed positively in terms of providing opportunities for EPs to work jointly and challenging in terms of capacity and the logistics of organisation. It was argued that although PATH requires two EP facilitators, what can be achieved in the one and a half hour time frame may be greater than what may be achieved through conventional EP work, plus, the absence of a need to produce a written report suggested that it offered a potentially effective use of EP time. Issues of ownership of the process and information sharing were raised. EPs may be enlisted to carry out PATHs across the county, not necessarily in their own patch of schools, and EPs expressed concern that there may be a lack of clarity over the roles and responsibilities of the facilitator EP and the patch EP. Clarification regarding roles and responsibilities in post PATH work, the need for further EP input in terms of written work and the sharing of the PATH graphic were identified as areas for further consideration by the EPS and PATH organisers.

### ***Issues of the balance of power***

The PATH process requires careful and sensitive facilitation, with inadequate facilitation being identified as a key barrier to the effective use of PCP (Reid & Green, 2002). This point may be particularly relevant when engaging in the process with vulnerable young

people, as the balance of power may constrain the young person in terms of contributing freely.

The BPS (2002) states that EPs need to attend to the potential power imbalances that arise in their work. Most young people and some parents are vulnerable in their dealings with professionals because of relative lack of professional knowledge and, in some cases, lack of skills and resources. EPs in this context have a responsibility to redress the potential power imbalance by involving clients fully in decision-making. In particular, professional EPs should endeavour to establish a climate of open communication.

The literature on PCP and PATH (Smull, 2002, Weetman, 2010, Wethrow, 2002, Sanderson and Lewis, 2012, Pearpoint, O'Brien and Forest, 1993) stresses the importance of attempting to create a balance of paid/professional support figures and unpaid natural supports from within the young persons life. This is said to alleviate the power differential and encourage a diverse range of contributions and viewpoints (Wilson, 2013). In each of the nine PATHs, professionals outnumbered natural support and this is an aspect of the PATH process that needs to be addressed by PATH organisers in order to maximise opportunities for successful outcomes.

### **6.2.3 The PRU and AP context.**

The numbers of requests for EPs to deliver PATH suggested that schools were receptive to PATH and believed that PATH was worthwhile and effective. Decision makers in PRUs and AP were keen to use PATH and provided anecdotal evidence of its ability to initiate positive change.

Tensions around the role and purpose of PATH were highlighted. PATH was viewed by some as a starting point or part of a wider process of information gathering and planning feeding into other systems such as TACs, ARs, IEPs and reintegration or futures planning for the young people. However PATH was seen as an 'outcome in itself' by some schools. In discussing PATH, Smull (2002 p 61) points out that 'the plan is not an outcome, the life that a person wants is the outcome'.

PRU staff expressed a concern that, in one particular PATH, they had not painted a full and accurate picture of the child in terms of his 'readiness to return' to mainstream school. The staff member reported feeling a pressure to 'sell the child' to the receiving school and to focus exclusively on the positive aspects of the pupil. The PRU staff expressed their

concerns asking ‘how honest should we be?’ A tension between the best interests of the child, his current needs and being honest with the receiving school was expressed. In a further example a member of teaching staff in a PRU sent a child out of the PATH as they felt the child should not be present if negative things about the child’s present situation were going to be raised. This was described as ‘sabotage’ as this prohibited the child from contributing and the person-centred nature of the process was disrupted.

In attempting to understand these two examples, a question regarding the ability of the teaching staff to maintain congruence within the PATH may be raised. The three fundamental tenets of person-centred psychology include congruence, unconditional positive regard, and empathy. According to person-centred theory (Mearns and Thorne, 2007) these qualities must be demonstrated in order for effective relationships to be made and positive change to take place.

Congruence, sometimes called genuineness, is a characteristic of being transparent, real and honest in a helping relationship. The concept of therapeutic congruence is not straightforward and is distinctly more complicated in the context of a PATH where relationships are not confined to the helper and client but include a wide range of people with differing levels of understanding and knowledge in terms of the person-centred approach. It seems that the teaching staff in the examples felt unable to voice reservations and difficult feelings and this resulted in their discomfort. Apprehension around discussing difficult issues in the presence of the young person was also expressed by other participants and so it seems that maintaining congruence is particularly challenging especially for the teaching staff.

It may not be realistic to expect that PATH participants should be knowledgeable about the tenets of person-centred psychology and training in this prior to a PATH is unlikely to be feasible, however, the potential for discomfort to participants and harm to the effectiveness of the process resulting from incongruence must not be overlooked.

In response to the PRU based concerns regarding ‘sabotage’ and the perceived pressure to present an artificially positive perspective, decision makers felt that clarity with regard to PATHs intended contribution was called for to alleviate confusion over its role and purpose. In addition, staff may benefit from information prior to the PATH to help identify and alleviate potential concerns and give ‘permission to be honest’. Providing supervision or de-brief sessions for staff after a PATH may help staff to reflect on any incongruity experienced and be better equipped in future PATHs. Furthermore as PATH becomes

more widely used and staff become more familiar with the process the importance of congruence may be better understood.

### ***Parental involvement***

According to McDonald and Thomas (2003) parents of excluded pupils describe relationships with schools characterised by tension, conflict, and poor communication. Finding ways for schools and parents to build effective relationships and maintain communication is likely to impact positively on the outcome for the pupil. PATH was seen as playing an important role in this by encouraging parental participation and improvements in parent-school relationships after PATH were noted.

Parental views gathered by Sanderson (2010) supported the idea that PCP can encourage collaborative planning between professionals and the parents of students with SEN. One parent described their feeling of being a contributing team member, rather than a visitor in the school. Findings from Miner and Bates (1997) also reflected this, showing parents who had experienced PCP processes were significantly more involved in a subsequent IEP meeting than a control group. Similarly, Hagner et al., (1996) found that families played an active role in planning meetings.

### ***6.2.4 The individual pupil context***

Decision makers reported that PATH had a role in providing opportunities to increase chances for change and to make a positive difference to the young person. The role PATH played in promoting the voice of the pupil was deemed important. PATH was seen to create a context in which pupils could comfortably engage with adults, speak and be listened and this was viewed in stark contrast to traditional meetings. PATH was described as an important means of eliciting pupil voice by providing a context conducive to the pupil engagement.

### ***Friendships***

Social isolation and friendship difficulties are said to characterise pupils in PRUs (Ross, 2009) and this was reflected in the themes expressed in the pupils' 'dreams'. Themes around the need or desire for friendship were evident in each of the nine PATHs. It is likely given what we know from prior research regarding pupils who have been excluded (Parsons, 2005, Lown, 2005) that many of them will have experienced rejection from family and/or peers.

Examples of how the PATH helped in the building of connections within the child's community were quoted. None of the nine PATHs included friends or peers of the young person or community members connected to the young person in a role other than paid support. It was argued that potential opportunities for increasing the pupils sense belonging and community connection may have been missed as a result. It was further argued that a more equitable balance of power may be created by ensuring that a balance of paid and natural support figures are present to avoid the pupil being 'outnumbered' by professionals. Planning to ensure the 'right mix of people' are present in future PATHs was called for.

### ***Achieving goals***

Facilitators noted that the pupils tended not to spontaneously offer strategies for achieving their goals and benefitted from the support of the adults to develop strategies. Much of the research around possible selves has identified this finding (Mainwaring and Hallam, 2010, Oyserman and Markus, 1990). As Mainwaring and Hallam (2010) point out, the importance of helping to enable pupils to visualise their futures and identify positive and possible goals is seemingly more crucial in the PRU setting as these pupils appeared less able to achieve this without support.

What is important to note is that the young people in this study demonstrated some very positive attitudes and goals, which without the PATH they may not have had an opportunity to express. It is suggested that those who experience failure have their working self-concept shaped by the negative possibilities, whereas, those who achieve regularly have a working self-concept with positive conceptions (Oyserman, and Saltz. 1993). Therefore, creating opportunities for young people to express their desired futures goals and dreams, and helping them to develop plans and strategies to achieve is likely to be of benefit to them. (Oyserman, et al., 2006,)

### ***Outcomes***

The reported outcomes of PATH correspond with the literature base in relation to the development of inclusion, (Falvey et al., 2000, Sanderson and Lewis, 2012), such as encouraging participants to share ideas, resources and information and become more involved with the wider community.

Measuring outcomes on the other hand was considered challenging as a PATH may impact in any number of ways, which may not be immediately measurable or easily

identifiable. It was generally agreed that finding effective ways of evaluating the direct impact PATH were needed. With the wider issue of increasing emphasis on establishing the EP contribution, ways of evaluating PATH in terms of outcomes for pupils was viewed as a challenge in need of further consideration.

### **6.3 Strengths and limitations of the study.**

When judging the value of qualitative research there is some debate over whether issues of reliability and validity should be applied (Cresswell 2012). Qualitative research is by its nature more flexible than quantitative, and benefits from a different approach when establishing worth (Yardley 2000). One way of assessing qualitative studies is to apply the concept of credibility. Credibility refers to examining the appropriate basis for assessing a piece of research, and considering issues which may negatively affect or invalidate the research (Cresswell 2012, Yardley, 2007). Prolonged engagement, thick description, reflexivity and the triangulation of data sources help establish credibility in this case.

When working with social systems such as schools, it is difficult to tease out from the complexity of influences the impact of one initiative (e.g. PATH). The reported influence of the PATH tool on the participants is likely to be influenced by a number of contextual factors such as the skills of the facilitator, the people present, the receptiveness and the contribution of the participants and so on. This corresponds with a realist perspective which acknowledges the complexity of the social world by suggesting that more than one mechanism may be involved in creating a particular event and, furthermore, whether or not the mechanism under investigation produces the event will depend on the context within which it operates (House, 1991).

#### **6.3.1 Commitment and Rigour**

Commitment and prolonged engagement may be demonstrated by the practitioner-researcher role undertaken over the course of 18 months. Rigour refers to the completeness of the data collection and analysis. In other words, using an adequate sample and interpreting the data thoroughly. In terms of sample size theorists have tried to provide heuristics for the number of participants needed for qualitative research but these vary widely (Creswell, 2012). The present study included 34 interviews thereby adhering to guidance provided by Guest, Bunce and Johnson (2006).

It was useful to triangulate the pupil and parent data with the views of school staff in order to gain a range of perspectives. The use of triangulation to establish a consensus of

opinion is criticised in qualitative research (Denzin, 1994). Triangulation in this case was used for the consideration of divergent or alternative perspectives.

Thematic analysis is a sound approach within the tradition of qualitative methods (Braun and Clarke's 2006) when it is clearly demarcated, allows for replication and for others to understand how themes were devised. A detailed account is provided and whilst I accept that another researcher may have produced different themes even with the same approach, I believe this is an inevitable part of this method of psychological inquiry.

### **6.3.2 Reactivity**

This refers to how the researcher's presence in the setting may affect the setting and the behaviour of the people involved. In the current study, this was addressed in three ways. Firstly, I avoided carrying out research in settings in which I was attached to in my role of TEP as it was felt that this could lead to role confusion. Secondly, by triangulating the data from differing sources my influence may be minimised. Thirdly, I have attempted to be transparent in my approach in order that the readers may judge for themselves the impact of my presence.

I reflected on my role and position throughout the study to ensure the potential impact of this on the data collected and the findings was minimised. As a TEP, employed by the LA I worked closely with those most involved in the promotion of PATH and attended regular PDG meetings. This placed some pressure to focus on the positive aspects of the process, thereby validating the resources directed to the initiative. However, I was motivated to ensure that PATHs were as constructive as possible and therefore acknowledged the value of highlighting criticisms mentioned by participants as a way of refining the process.

I attended all of the PATHs, and co-facilitated some of them. This helped me to build rapport with the participants and gain an insiders perspective, however it may have made reporting criticism about an aspect of the PATH process I led, difficult for participants and may have biased responses.

### **6.3.3 Respondent Bias**

The dynamics of power in the interviews, as suggested by Kvale (2007), was considered. Some participants were less educated and from a different socio-economic group, creating a power imbalance between the interviewer and interviewee. In addition to this,

the younger participants may have attributed additional authority to the interviewer due to their age. I have experience of working with parents and young people and endeavored to make them feel comfortable. However, it must be considered that participants might have found it difficult being completely open and honest with the interviewer, given the relative positions (BPS, 2002) and may therefore have portrayed a more favourable view of the PATH process.

I was alert throughout the research that my role as a LA representative may affect the responses in the interviews. For example, the PRU and AP staff may have presented a more positive view of PATH, because they may have assumed that they should align their answers with the views of the LA. This is a difficult bias to address, as participants may not be aware that their answers have been affected. I aimed to reduce it by reassuring participants that all their answers would be anonymised and that neither the setting nor LA would be identified in the subsequent reporting of the research. The use of triangulation of the data sources was intended to minimise the effect of respondent bias and I employed transparency in order to demonstrate my awareness of its potential impact.

#### **6.3.4 Researcher Bias**

This refers to the prior knowledge and preconceptions that the researcher brings to the research process, and which may affect how they approach the work and/or the participants. In order to reduce this, I used reflexivity to identify areas of possible bias. The use of supervision and fieldwork diary enabled issues which may have affected my approach to the study, such as, past experience of working with pupils at risk of exclusion and my feelings about the PATH tool to be discussed. I was also alert during the interviews to the importance of not leading the interviewees in a particular direction through my questioning, responses, or my non-verbal cues.

#### **6.3.5 Sample**

The generalisability or transferability of these findings is restricted by the representativeness and size of the sample. Nine PATHs were included in this study and it may be argued that this is adequate for an exploratory study.

Of the nine PATHs reviewed, two were carried out for girls. This broadly reflects the DfE census data (2010/11) that shows exclusion rates for boys are approximately three times higher than for girls. Consequently, however the views of girls were less well represented.

Similarly the over-representation of mothers in the PATHs (eight mothers, one father and one step father) means that the views of fathers have not been as thoroughly explored.

The county in which this research took place has a predominantly white population and so although the entirely white-British sample is not surprising given the convenience sampling method, it must be taken into consideration in terms of transferability. Future studies focusing on a greater diversity of ethnic mix may be useful given that some ethnic groups (black African Caribbean) are more frequently represented in the PRU population (Runnymede Trust, 2010).

#### **6.4 Future research directions**

There is much scope for future research in relation to the PATH process and its implementation. Research is a community endeavour, one in which each individual study captures a small area of a phenomenon and this may be built upon by subsequent research taking different perspectives. Yardley (2000) embraces this as a benefit of qualitative research in particular where different approaches and questions used in each study complement each other to provide a multi-faceted construction of the 'truth' of any phenomena.

Most of the existing research into PATH is around young and older adults with learning disabilities transitioning into independent living and findings suggest that PATH has a useful role to play. Further research specifically around PATHs role in the process of reintegration planning for excluded pupils may help to shed light on how PRUs can develop their systems and in turn improve chances of successful reintegration.

This initial exploratory study has identified that in some cases young people have felt clearer about their goals and future direction and more confident in their ability to achieve their goals. Changes in pupil behaviour and improved relationships between school and parent, and parent and pupil have been attributed to PATH. What is not clear is what it is about the PATH that has promoted these perceptions in some cases but not in every case. A case study approach may help to shed light on the interacting factors around a pupil who has been excluded or placed in a PRU or AP setting to gain a holistic picture prior to, during and after a PATH in order to tease out what it is that may contribute to the promotion of positive outcomes.

The present study reports data gathered from participants up to six weeks after the PATH. Pupils' ability to recollect their experience was particularly impressive however this study cannot reveal anything about the longer-term outcomes for the pupil. This would be interesting to investigate particularly as PATH focuses on long-term planning and life direction. To review pupils' progress, especially around reintegration back into mainstream may help to establish PATHs contribution in the wider planning process.

A question arising from this study, which indeed is likely to arise out of any value based practice, was how is it possible to establish that the practice of PATH was person-centred? This study found that although the PATH itself was generally considered to be person-centred, the pre-PATH preparation and post PATH review clearly were not, as pupils were not included. Holburn (2002a p85) developed the 'assessment of PCP facilitation integrity' to evaluate the integrity of PCP. A limitation of this approach is that it focused exclusively on the PCP meeting itself not on the work leading up to it or after it. A procedure for monitoring the whole PATH process may help to ensure it is practiced in a consistently person-centred way.

## **6.5 Summary of findings**

PATH was well received by the pupils, parents, school staff and other professionals. Whilst not an objective measures of success, should PATH not have been well received, concerns would be raised as to its appropriateness for use in this context.

The PATH seemed to empower some of the pupils to believe they could achieve their goals, for example, the PATH was said to increase confidence and self-belief. Changes in behaviour were reported by pupils up to six weeks after the PATH, such as improved effort in school and at home.

The atmosphere created in the PATH was said to be, informal, fun, and child-centred and this was believed to contribute to effective collaboration. Pupils and parents felt listened to and PATH was generally viewed as useful. The PATH seemed to have a positive effect upon pupil-parent and parent-school relationships.

Although initial apprehension was experienced pupils reported feeling comfortable and enjoyed aspects of the PATH such as 'the dream.' The visual framework or large graphic used to record the process was viewed as useful and the order in which aspects of the process were tackled were considered important.

Compared to previous experiences of meetings pupils and parents felt their experience of PATH was much more positive and potentially sensitive or difficult aspects were treated sensitively by the facilitators.

This study identified the need for clarification over the role and purpose of PATH, further pre PATH planning and the inclusion of the pupil in preparation. Creating a balance of natural, community and professional support in the gathering was considered important in attempting to address issues of power and generate further opportunities for building relationships.

EPs felt they would benefit from further training, opportunities to practice alongside more experienced colleagues and supervision in order to increase their confidence in managing tensions and challenges. The creation of a working group made up of EPs and PRU/AP decision makers is proposed to address the recommendations.

## 6.6 Summary of Recommendations

### 6.6.1 Recommendations for the LA

The recommendations presented in the table below are intended for consideration by the Senior EP team and the Practice Development Group (PDG) for PCP. In taking these recommendations forward liaison with schools/PRU/AP decision makers is proposed.

**Table 11: Recommendations for LA**

<b>Areas for consideration</b>	<b>Response to findings</b>
<p><b>Role and purpose of PATH</b> A clear definition of the role and purpose of PATH is needed.</p>	<p>To ensure PATH facilitators have a shared understanding of the circumstances in which the decision to use PATH is appropriate.</p> <p>To ensure that before PATH is requested by a school, PRU or AP its role and purpose is fully understood.</p>
<p><b>Pre-PATH information</b> Parents, and professional would benefit from pre- PATH information. For example a concise summary and example graphic.</p>	<p>To avoid mis-matched expectations and to alleviate initial apprehension.</p>
<p><b>Review Process</b> Guidance on how post PATH review</p>	<p>To ensure greater consistency, to maximize any positive outcomes from the PATH, to</p>

process should be conducted.	address any outstanding issues/actions and to identify future goals.
<p><b>Ownership of process</b></p> <p>A procedure to clarify roles and responsibilities. 'Ownership' of the process needs to be clear from the outset. In the case of re-entry to school the receiving school should be involved as much as possible.</p>	<p>To clarify confusion and to identify:</p> <p>Who should organise the PATH?</p> <p>Who selects the venue?</p> <p>Who hosts the PATH?</p> <p>Who is responsible for sharing information after the PATH i.e. taking photos and sharing the graphic, checking actions are carried out and organising the review process.</p>
<p><b>PATH Working Group</b></p> <p>Consideration may be given to the setting up of a working group made up of EP, PRU/AP and school staff to address the procedural issues highlighted in the findings. E.g. defining role and purpose of PATH, considering issues of 'ownership,' setting up a procedure for review, etc.</p>	<p>To ensure that research findings are disseminated and that recommendations are considered and taken forward.</p>

### 6.6.2 Recommendations for EPs

The recommendations set out in the table below are intended for consideration by the EPS, PDG and individual EP facilitators.

**Table 12: Recommendations for EPs**

<b>Areas for consideration</b>	<b>Response to findings</b>
<p><b>Facilitation skills</b></p> <p>Ways to effectively manage unexpected challenges or tension during PATH eg refusal to sign-up and sabotage etc.</p> <p>Ways to address any perceived skill gaps in facilitators</p>	<p>To ensure facilitators feel competent and confident in their practice.</p> <p>This may take the form of further training, supervision, observation and co-facilitation with more experienced EP, the development of scripts, etc.</p>
<p><b>The extent of the EP role in PATH organisation and follow-up work.</b></p>	<p>To clarify Post PATH responsibilities as EPs may facilitate a PATH anywhere in the county (not</p>

In cases where the EPs role is confined to facilitation only, a clear procedure outlining the responsibilities for follow up is needed in liaison with the patch EP.	purely within their own patch of schools)
<b>The use of Props</b> Consideration needs to be given to the use of props on a case by case basis. EPs may develop their own preferred approach	To ensure that the use of props is age appropriate and to address feelings of discomfort or embarrassment.

### 6.6.3 Recommendations for PRUs, AP and Schools

The Recommendations set out in the table below are for consideration by the PATH organisers within the PRU/AP/School context.

**Table 13: Recommendations for PRU, AP and schools.**

Areas for consideration	Response to findings
<b>Pre-PATH Pupil involvement</b> Pupil involvement in preparation and planning should be encouraged. Preparatory work may include work around identifying self (hobbies interests strengths etc.), and the pupil should have involvement in who should be invited.	To ensure planning for the PATH is child-centred and that the child has a sense of ownership and understanding of the role of their PATH. To alleviate initial apprehension.
<b>Pre-PATH preparation with staff</b> School staff new to PATH may benefit from a briefing prior to engaging in a PATH. Schools, PRUs and AP setting may benefit from an awareness of the potential benefits of inviting a broad range of participants.	To avoid potential negative impact of 'sabotage.' To give permission to be honest To clarify the implications of the enrolment stage.
<b>Balance and diversity of participants</b> PATH participants should be made up of a balance of natural, (family/ friends) community and professional support	To ensure power differentials are considered and opportunities for community and commitment building are maximized. Creative thinking may be required in cases where the young person does not want to

	invite their parents/carer or where family figures are not available
<b>Information sharing protocol</b> Consideration is needed around how the PATH graphic is shared and who should have access to it.	To ensure that sensitive and confidential information shared on the PATH graphic is given the same level of confidentiality as an EP report.
<b>Room and resources</b> A suitable space for the PATH to be performed should be considered.	To ensure suitable space and resources (wall, seating, refreshment etc.) are available.
<b>Venue</b> An 'ideal' should be agreed in terms of venue i.e. wherever possible the PATH should be hosted in a neutral venue e.g. a place with no negative connotations for the young person. The receiving school may be a suitable venue.	To send a clear message about inclusion. To create a positive atmosphere reinforcing the importance and value placed on the gathering.

## 6.7 Conclusion

This research provided a unique contribution to the field of Educational Psychology and the literature on PCP. The perceptions of the recipients of PATH, those who deliver it and the decision makers who have promoted its use across the county have provided fresh insights into the practice of PATH. A picture emerged revealing an overall positive response to PATH and a greater understanding of its potential role in supporting vulnerable and challenging pupils was gained. In identifying the strengths and limitations of the process important insights around its practice emerged informing recommendations intended to help shape and improve practice.

This study is relevant to EP practice in terms of promoting visual person-centred collaborative planning, and listening to pupils and promoting their views. The findings are in line with the recommendations of the Lamb Inquiry, which advocates partnership with parents and honest and transparent communication (DCFS, 2009), guidance in the SEN Code of Practice, (DfES, 2001), and UN rights of the child (1989) which states that pupils should participate in decisions made about their education.

The current study was undertaken to fill a gap in the research which directly explores the views of PATH participants. The study therefore plays an important role in taking steps towards developing an evidence base to support the use of PATH. If central government and LAs, are to continue to promote the use of PCP, it is important that a comprehensive evidence base is developed which aids professionals' understanding of the strengths and limitations of the process and its role in supporting young people.



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## APPENDICES

## **Appendix 1: More about PATH**

### **The PATH process**

PATH is a stepped process that requires a graphic recorder to note information expressed by participants and a process facilitator to support participants through the framework. The process facilitator actively listens to the views of all the participants, creating a solution-focused approach to visioning and collaborative planning.

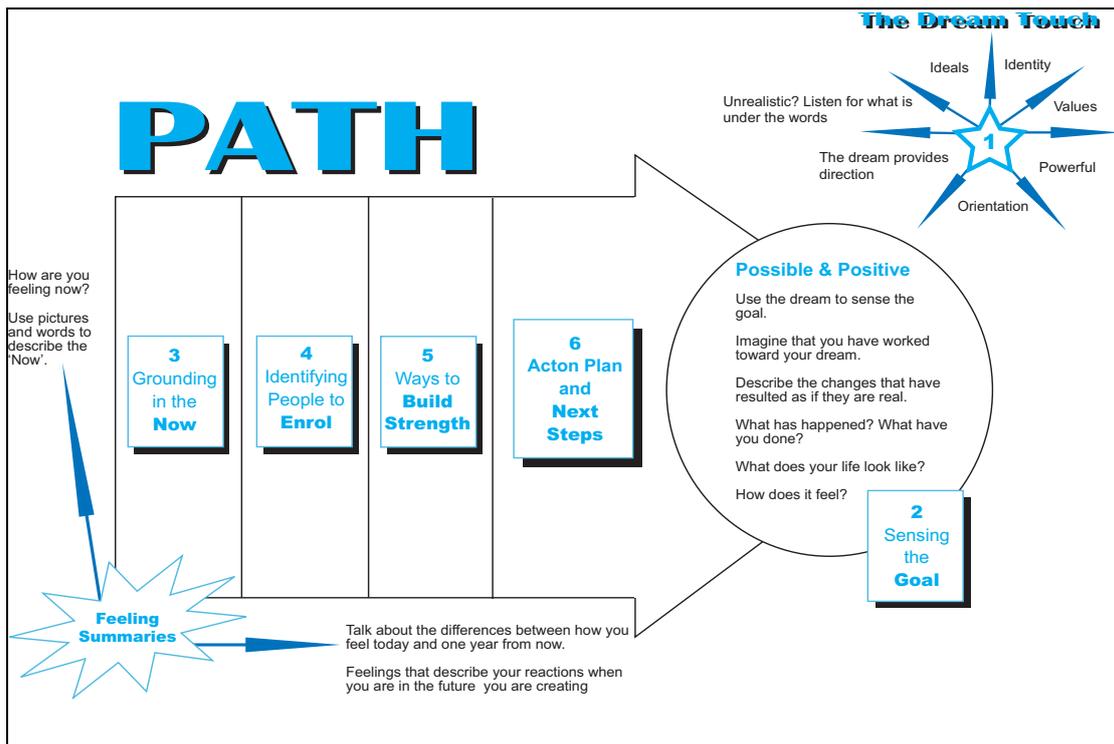
The process requires a team that knows and cares about the focus person, and who are willing to commit to the future vision over the next year. It works best when the dream can be clearly described by the focus individual and the team. It is very strongly focused on the future and putting the vision into action. The facilitator has a strong role to play in the process to make sure that the goal or dream is really that of the focus person, and not that of the team, especially if the focus person does not use words to speak.

One particularly useful application for PATH is for an existing team that is stuck and requires a change in direction. A PATH can only take place in a meeting, because it depends upon the momentum that is generated by the team. It can often be very emotional and can lead to very significant changes in the life of the focus person.

Perhaps the most notable feature of PATH is the colourful illustrated path visual that is created. This graphic is used to keep focus and promote creativity.

### **Ground rules and turn taking**

Props are used by facilitators at different points during the PATH meeting. At the beginning of the PATH ground rules are discussed and volunteers are asked to wear a wig, hold a ball and chain, a person is nominated to hold a squeaky chicken and squeeze it if any one uses any jargon and terminology that might not be understood by all participants. A wand, or key or some other artefact may be passed from one person to the next to signify who is the speaker.



**The stages of PATH include:**

**Stage 1: The Dream or “North Star”**

With PATH, this dream or “North Star” comprises the person’s direction and identity. It is not the actual goal, but may be compared to self-actualization (Rogers 1980). The focus young person is asked (with the support of others) to think about and describe who they would like to be, where they would like to go, what would they like to do, who they would like with them etc. In their dream, what does the focus young person see themselves doing more of or less of than they do currently? They are asked to visualise their future and describe what it might look and feel like. The images the young person describes are drawn on the graphic in the dream section. (the pupil may be encouraged to contribute to the drawing themselves if they wish) Adults are also asked to contribute by sharing their dream for the young person.

**Stage 2: Positive and possible (Sensing the Goal).**

This section encompasses what can be realistically achieved in approximately one year. A time travel analogy is used to transport all the participants to one year on. An imaginary time machine is used, and participants are asked to stand up and turn around (the theme tune from Doctor Who is often played during the time travel) and when they stop they are asked to imagine that they are now standing in the same room with the same people, only a year has passed. Participants are then encouraged to look around them and see what is

different and then reflect back over the last year and identify what positive and possible things have happened.

***Stage 3: Grounding in the Now.***

In this section facts about what is currently happening in the focus young person's life right are discussed. The focus person is asked to look at where they are at present, compared to where they will be when their goal is achieved.

***Stage 4: Identifying People to Enrol.***

This is a stage in which the focus person considers who will share the PATH with them, who might be able to help them, and who they might encounter along the way that may try to block them. In this section it is acknowledged by the facilitator that, as individuals, we can't necessarily achieve our goals in life without the help of others. The focus young person (with the support of the other participants) is asked to consider who they may want or need to help them on their journey to achieving their goal. A process of signing up then follows. The pupil is encouraged to lead this by asking those people present who they feel they would like to help them to approach the PATH graphic and sign it. People who may not be present at the time but have been identified as helpers are also written up (in order to make them aware and gain their support later).

***Stage 5: Ways to Build Strength.***

This stage looks at the relationships, knowledge and skills that will be needed, and focuses on a discussion of the strengths a young person may have, and the strengths they are likely to need, in order to work towards their goal. This includes the strengths and resources of the support network around them (family professionals etc)

***Stages 6-8; Action plan and next steps.***

- Charting Action for the Next Few Months.
- Planning Next Month's Work.
- Committing to the First Step.

This is a time to consider possible blocks that might be in the way, along with the supports that will be needed. Based on where things are now and where things should ideally be in a year's time as identified by the goals section, the actions required to help support the necessary changes are considered. An action plan detailing the 'who, what, when and where' of each proposed action is jointly agreed and the next steps are pinpointed.

## **Appendix 2: EPNET Survey Questions**

### **Collaborative problem solving and person centred planning using graphic facilitation.**

**Dear EpNetters,**

Your support in helping my with my doctoral research would be most appreciated.

I am a 2nd year trainee EP and I am carrying out an exploration of the use of PATH ( a visual person centred planning tool) which my service has begun to use with children and young people for my doctoral research.

I am interested to know if you are using any visual or graphically facilitated collaborative problem solving and person centred tools (such as PATH, MAPS, Circle of Adults Solution Circles etc) in your own service/practice and in what context you use them. I am also keen to know how these tools/processes are received by the school and young people or other people you are using them with.

I would be very grateful if you could respond to the following questions. (your responses will be treated respectfully and I will not name individual EPs - if used in my research I will only name the borough or LA location)

- 1. What type of graphically facilitated tools do you use in your EP practice?**
- 2. What contexts do you use them in?**
- 3. What do you feel it is about these tools that can help make a difference?**
- 4. What are the potential or real/experienced barriers to using these tools?**
- 5. How have the tools you use been received by the recipients?**

Many thanks for your help

Margo Bristow (TEP)