UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON

FACULTY OF SOCIAL AND HUMAN SCIENCES

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**Not in Education, Employment or Training: The educational life history of
a young person in West Sussex**

By

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Thesis for the degree of Doctor of Education

April 2015

Abstract

This study aims to explore the experience of being not in education, employment or training (NEET) using a narrative approach. A single participant called Jake took part in a year- long study that employed face-to-face interviews in order to elicit his lived experience of being NEET. Data were thematically analysed and the work of Carl Rogers was used as a theoretical lens through which to consider Jakes' narrative, in particular his educational, family and employment experiences.

Approximately 8% of young people aged between 16 and 18 in the UK are categorised as NEET despite various Government initiatives to reduce this figure. These young people are frequently treated as a homogenous group and yet a wide range of personal circumstances and individual needs are encompassed within the NEET label. A single category is therefore insufficient to describe this disparate group. Furthermore the categorisation tends to focus on a deficit model of young people that provides a negatively skewed official (and public) perception of those labelled NEET.

Jake's narrative indicated that he had made and experienced positive changes in his life, that enabled him to move towards self actualisation, a concept developed by Rogers. These include the development of a better relationship with his father, addressing and managing a drug dependency and being successfully employed as result of undertaking voluntary work. His experiences demonstrated his agency but also the structures which limit or bound this. These changes took place whilst he remained within the NEET category. Without the opportunity to articulate his self-affirming story this narrative, like those of many others who are disenfranchised, would have been unheard leaving perceptions of those labelled NEET unchanged. Important insights about Jake's individual experience are articulated but they also have resonance for others who are NEET and therefore his narrative has wider value.

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Academic Thesis: Declaration Of Authorship

I Cate Mullen

declare that this thesis and the work presented in it are my own and has been generated by me as the result of my own original research.

Not in Education, Employment or Training: The educational life history of a young person in West Sussex

 I confirm that:

1.   This work was done wholly or mainly while in candidature for a research degree at this University;

2. Where any part of this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree or any other qualification at this University or any other institution, this has been clearly stated;

3.Where I have consulted the published work of others, this is always clearly attributed;

4. Where I have quoted from the work of others, the source is always given. With the exception of such quotations, this thesis is entirely my own work;

5. I have acknowledged all main sources of help;

6. Where the thesis is based on work done by myself jointly with others, I have made clear exactly what was done by others and what I have contributed myself;

7. Either none of this work has been published before submission, or parts of this work have been published as: [please list references below]:

Signed:

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Date:

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Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my supervisors for all of their support throughout the EdD process. Firstly, Alison Fuller and latterly Michaela Brockmann and Jenny Byrne. You have been both patient and kind.

My thanks also go to my friends and family who have always believed that I would complete my studies - even when I didn't. You have had to remain interested for a long period of time in what I am doing and I am very grateful for that.

Finally, I would like to thank Jake for allowing me to spend a year talking with you. You gave generously of your time and throughout the process of writing your words I have been reminded of your wit, maturity and agency.

March 2015

Chapter 1: Introduction

Why is research done at all? It is done in the spirit of inquiry - to find things out. (Thomas, 2011 p.196)

1.1 The Purpose of this Research

This research presents an account of a young person's educational and life experiences, gathered over a year of meeting with him. It is driven by a wish to know more about the lived experience of being a young person who is not in education, employment or training (NEET). The purpose of doing this is to gain a greater understanding of the experiences and issues related to being a young person who is NEET and an attempt to 'illuminate the experience' (Simmons, Thompson and Russell, 2014a p.1) by asking him to tell his story. This is in contrast to research which focuses upon the quantifiable elements of young people in this group and the categories into which they are slotted. I utilise the theories of Carl Rogers (1959, 1969, 1980) as a framework for considering what his narrative tells us about the individual's lived experience, his sense of self and the importance of his educational experience in shaping this. Whilst literature exists which utilises the narrative of young people who are NEET there is minimal literature which presents in-depth information gathered over time in this way.

Nudzor (2010) notes that very few studies of young people who are NEET have actually engaged with the young people themselves 'with a view to finding out about their lived experiences and perceptions of their NEETness' (p.19). This is precisely what this research intends to undertake in part to redress the 'gap' in research acknowledged above . The breadth and diversity of this group of young people means that this research may be limited in its scope to draw conclusions that can be extrapolated to the whole NEET population or even to part of it. The same is true however of research which attempts to understand the experiences of a large sample of young people who are NEET given the issues of heterogeneity within this group.

 Issues regarding the methodology used here will be discussed in more detail throughout but from the outset of undertaking this research I have been mindful of the statement 'the purpose of a case report is not to represent the world but to represent the case' (Stake, 2008 p.142). Some transferability and extrapolations

to others in similar circumstances may be possible on the basis of the work presented here but its primary purpose is to represent an understanding of a single life in order to begin to explore that lived experience of being a young person who is NEET. Throughout the work presented here is an acknowledgement of the significant role played by external events in shaping and impacting upon an individual's experiences and the interplay between an individual and the wider social world of which they are a part, an acknowledgement therefore of both structure and agency (Giddens, 1979).

I will now outline why I have an interest in researching young people who are NEET and then what is meant by the term itself. I will follow this with a brief outline of the methodology to be used followed by the research questions to be answered. A summary of the chapter will then be provided.

1.2 My Interest in the Subject Area

Much of my interest in considering the educational and life history of a young person who is NEET stems from my professional experiences as an Educational Psychologist (EP). EPs are applied psychologists who work with young people aged from birth to 25 years of age. My experience of working within secondary schools in a city locality over a number of years increased my awareness of the numbers of young people who become 'excluded' from access to full time schooling and to a traditional educational pathway of gaining recognised qualifications such as GCSEs before moving onto college or work. This could either occur through formal exclusion from school or less formal exclusion routes, for example non attendance or attendance on a part time timetable . The range of reasons for this is broad. I have worked with young people whose 'exclusion' is due to difficulties such as school refusal or school phobia. This can result in intervention from medical professionals such as those linked to Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS). I have also supported young people who are permanently excluded from school and attend alternative educational provision, as well as young people with poor attendance and young people whose learning difficulties prevent them from following a mainstream school curriculum. Difficulties with engagement in formal education can be seen prior to entry to secondary school and can lead to exclusion from the social aspects of schooling, such as making and maintaining friendships and age appropriate interests, as well

as impacting upon academic attainment. A desire to move away from my professional experiences with this group of young people towards a more structured, research led understanding of young people who are 'at risk' of becoming NEET or who are already NEET utilising the evidence base available has driven this research.

The way in which this piece of work has been undertaken reflects the 'single case' design which I utilise in my day-to-day work as an applied psychologist by actively seeking and valuing the thoughts, views and opinions of children and young people. The framework through which this type of information is collected, analysed and presented will differ between applied psychologists.

1.3 What does 'NEET' mean?

The term 'NEET' came into usage following publication of the 1999 Government report 'Bridging the Gap' (Social Exclusion Unit [SEU], 1999) and replaced earlier terms used to describe this group .It often describes young people who are not currently in education, employment or training. It is sometimes used within literature to describe young people aged 16-24 who fall into this category but was originally intended to describe those aged between 16-18 years and this is how it will be considered here. Despite developments and initiatives driven by Government policy over the last decade, to reduce the number of young people who are NEET, the number of young people who are NEET has remained relatively unchanged and stands at around 7% of young people aged 16-18 in 2014 (SFR8/2015). The most recent quarterly briefing from the Department of Education (DfE),released in February 2015, reports that the proportion of young people who are NEET has fallen across all age groups and further that it is the lowest on record for 16-18 year olds. The impact of increasing participation is mediated however by the falling employment rate of the 16-18 year old age group. Employment rates have fallen for this group from 61.4% at the end of 2001 to 41.3% at the end of 2011, rising to 47.4% by June 2014 (SFR8/2015). In West Sussex, the area in which this study was undertaken, data provided by the DfE indicates that in March 2014 4.4% of 16-18 year olds were estimated to be NEET. At the same time 20.2% were recorded as 'activity not known'.

Clearly, a term such as NEET encompasses a broad range of young people with a wide range of circumstances and needs. Subgroups within the NEET category include the following (Nudzor, 2010 p14): care leavers, carers, young parents, offenders, young people with low educational attainment, persistent truants, young people with physical/mental health problems and young people with drug or alcohol abuse problems.

A report commissioned by the Department for Children, Families and Schools (DCFS) Spielhofer, Walker, Gagg, Schagen, and O'Donnell (2007) reported that according to the literature available, young people who are NEET are consistently described as being most likely to:

- Have achieved no or very low qualifications when leaving school at 16
- Have not enjoyed school, have a history of truancy and/or exclusion and feel they were not treated as adults in school
- Be male
- Be white
- Come from lower socio-economic backgrounds
- Have low levels of career exploration skills and self awareness
- Have parents with low qualification levels, aspirations and awareness of post 16 options

The range of subgroups outlined above indicates that the reasons for NEET status are varying and therefore the interventions and support that young people require are likely to be equally diverse.

Subgroups such as those above highlight the difficulties inherent in attempting to categorise any group of people under an 'umbrella' term or definition– no group is homogenous in nature and the only commonality between the young people in the subgroups above is their NEET status. A criticism levelled at the term 'NEET' is that it describes what a young person is *not* and therefore fails to allow for the significant differences that exist in the young people's situations or the reasons for their NEET status (Yates and Payne, 2006). This does not enable a consideration of the individual experiences of young people who are NEET. The breadth of sub groups subsumed within the category means that in order to effectively target policy and intervention the NEET group has to be disaggregated

(Furlong, 2006). Other criticisms of the term include the fact that a focus on unemployment draws attention away from considering young people who are in inferior forms of employment, for example jobs without training (JWT)(Furlong, 2006).

The existence and use of the term NEET can also be viewed in positive terms however. Furlong (2006) notes that the term helps maintain the focus of policy makers and researchers upon a vulnerable group and that the term brings groups such as young mothers and young people with disabilities into one group or category rather than further marginalising them by use of traditional terms such as 'inactive'. The term has also been suggested to be a useful 'proxy category' for exploring the impact of school-to-work transitions (Yates, Harris, Sabates, and Staff , 2011 p.530). It is interesting to note that since 2007 the Scottish Government ceased to classify young people as NEET and instead has categorised them as requiring 'More Choices, More Chances' (Scottish Executive, 2006 cited in Lawy, 2010 p.429). Similar criticisms can be levelled at this 'label' as it implies that this group of young people are in need of help and support rather than recognising that the systems or interventions available have contributed to their status. This viewpoint is shared by Simmons and Thompson (2013) who observe that whereas unemployment status implies a sense of shared responsibility for a collective and social problem, NEET status positions non-participation in employment within the individual.

The summary provided above indicates that research exists which considers how to conceptualise the population of young people who are NEET and as a consequence of this there has been consideration given to the various 'routes' young people may have taken to arrive at that point. The current research is less concerned with the categorisation of young people who are NEET, instead it presents the lived experiences of a young person who is NEET with the purpose of presenting an account which focuses upon the lived experience of an individual. This enables a view beyond the categorisation of this group.

1.4 The Research Problem and Aims

The research problem and questions to be answered are driven by the conception of my EdD thesis to study the educational life history of an individual who is NEET

in West Sussex. The research 'problem' or aim is essentially to provide a comprehensive narrative account from a young person who is NEET in order to understand the lived experience and the factors that shape it . As noted above, few studies of this type exist (Nudzor, 2010). By considering one young person I will be moving away from research which attempts to aggregate or categorise young people who are NEET, often with a resulting focus upon skills and experiences which the young people do not have rather than a focus upon their areas of strength and their view of themselves and their NEET status. This study will consider the educational experiences of a young person who is NEET with the purpose of exploring their development of self, utilising Rogers' theories of self and his theory of education. The analysis of the information gathered will enable themes to be identified and discussed which relate to this.

 The research aims are as follows:

1. To provide an understanding of the lived experience of a person who is NEET, from the perspective of the young person himself, and of the social, economic and political factors that shape this

2. To conceptualize the issues associated with being NEET, for the young person in question, utilising Rogerian theory and consider how this may enhance our understanding of young people who are NEET

3. To consider if and how this narrative account can be useful when considering other young people who are NEET

The research questions are:

What is the lived experience of an individual who is NEET?

Can understanding the experience of an individual who is NEET usefully add to the knowledge base regarding this group of young people?

Can understanding the experience of an individual who is NEET enable consideration of the policy and practice around this group of young people?

This study entailed the collection of biographical information through interviews, undertaken in 2011-2012 with one young person who is NEET.

1.5 Outline of Thesis

My thesis aims to present a narrative of the educational life history of a young person who is NEET. This chapter has outlined the rationale and aims of the thesis.

Chapter two provides a summary of the policy and practice around young people who are NEET including Government initiatives which have been implemented in an attempt to tackle youth unemployment.

Chapter three is a literature review of research relating to young people who are NEET and considers both quantitative and qualitative research. Issues relating to the categorisation of young people who are NEET are discussed. This is then followed by an overview of Carl Rogers theories of the development of the self and education along with consideration of how these will be utilised within this study.

Chapter four considers the methodological issues associated with this research including the narrative approach to data collection and the utilisation of one participant. This chapter also provides a description of thematic analysis as a framework to consider the narrative of the participant.

Chapter five outlines the methodological process undertaken in this study. This includes a description of the piloting stage of the research and the techniques used here. The main phase of the research is described.

Chapter six provides the information gathered from the participant in the main phase of the research. The themes identified from his narrative are presented and his own words are used to illustrate these. The theories of Carl Rogers and existing research are used alongside the narrative.

The findings are further discussed in chapter seven with reference to the existing literature and the research questions which the study sought to address. Limitations of the study and future research directions are also considered. Conclusions are provided at the end of this chapter.

Chapter 2: Context: Policy and Politics

If these young people were kittens there would be a national campaign to save them. (The Guardian, 13th July 2010)

2.1 School to Work Transitions and the Emergence of the NEET Category

The previous chapter presented an overview of the purpose and rationale behind the research to be presented. Information gathered over a year of meetings with a young person who is NEET is to be considered with reference to the research questions. These relate to whether this adds to the knowledge base which exists about this group and in particular whether the findings from this research could usefully inform policy and practice concerning this group of young people. To consider the latter, it is clear that an understanding of the policy and practice that is pertinent to this group needs to be presented and understood. This chapter provides an overview of policy developments and associated practices which have impacted upon young people who are NEET. These will be considered with reference to the present study.

The term NEET came into usage in the late 1990s and represented a re-categorisation of young people who had previously been described as inactive or unemployed. The 'changing times consensus' (Gayle, Lambert and Murray, 2009 p.18) relates to the acknowledgement that the societal background against which young people grew up underwent transformation in the latter decades of the twentieth century and as a consequence the usual or normal pattern of school to work transition changed. This has been conceptualised by some as being representative of the emergence of an extended youth phase (Arnett, 2007). The social and economic changes which characterise this shift are well documented (Fergusson et al., 2000; Shildrick and MacDonald, 2007; Simmons and Thompson, 2011a; Brockmann, 2012; Simmons et al., 2014a). These include reference to the reduced employment opportunities that were a consequence of the decline of the youth labour market in the 1980s influenced by increased competition in manufacturing from the Far East and the change in the methods of production brought about by technological advances (Bynner, 2012). What followed was the development of a number of training initiatives made available to school leavers including the Youth Training Schemes (YTS) in 1983, superseded by the introduction of National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ) in 1986. These changes

and the social backdrop against which they took place meant that the experiences of transition that school leavers had became increasingly individualised. Where there had previously been 'collective' transitions from school to work there existed now a diversity of jobs or training courses (Simmons et al., 2014a) and 'an apparently wide range of options' (Fergusson, Pye, Esland, McLaughlin and Muncie, 2000 p.283). These developments were in part a reflection of a longer held view that remaining in education was a desirable situation (Maizels, 1970 p.5):

> reports issued over the years, have tended to regard the industrial environment as a harmful one as far as young workers are concerned, and to believe that the most effective antidote is continued exposure to an educational influence.

2.2 The Governmental Response to NEET Data

It is useful to consider Government responses to data regarding the number of young people who are NEET in the UK. All related policy initiatives are predicated on the view that being NEET is an undesirable or negative position to be in and that employment or continued education is desirable and positive. The Social Exclusion Unit (SEU) was created in 1998 and reflected the then Labour Government's commitment to addressing and supporting marginalised communities and reducing social exclusion among these groups. This was highlighted by the Bridging the Gap report in 1999 where NEET status at 16 was reported to be a major predicator of unemployment at age 21 and beyond. Later in life, young people who had been NEET are reported to be more likely to be unemployed, dependent on benefits, living in an unstable family structure and depressed about their life (Tunnard Barnes and Flood, 2008). They do not accumulate human capital gained through engagement within education, training or employment which can have a knock on effect with regard to future employment outcomes and earning potential (Eurofound, 2012) .This is summed up in the following quote from the Prime Minister at the time of the report ,Tony Blair, and taken from its introduction:

The best defence against social exclusion is having a job and the best way to get a job is to have a good education with the right training and experience

Forward to Bridging The Gap (SEU, 1999:6).

The reference to kittens at the start of this chapter refers to the longer term health difficulties that have been attributed to being a young person that is NEET. Data from Hull suggests that one in six of Hull's NEET population who experience being NEET for two years or more will be dead by the time that they are 30 (Brindle, The Guardian, 29.7.10). Described as 'health disasters' by Hull's NHS Chief Executive the high mortality rate within this group of young people can, it is assumed, be explained by levels of drug addiction and misuse and other risk taking behaviours, identified in both Nutzor's (2010) categorisation and the Bridging the Gap report (1999). The need to address the number of young people who are NEET could therefore be considered to be of the utmost urgency if this statistic is to be reduced. What is clear from these statistics is that time spent in the NEET category as a young person can lead to longer lasting consequences or scars - not just in relation to employability but with regard to an individual's long term health and well being (Bell and Blanchflower, 2010).

Three key proposals were made by the SEU (1999) which were: the need for young people to stay on in education, an increase in opportunities for young people; and a less fragmented pattern of services to be made available for young people. These translated into the 14-19 strategy (2005) and increased participation age in formal education, the introduction of Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA) for students from low income families and the *Every Child Matters: Change for Children agenda (2003)*. In addition, the Connexions service was set up following publication of *Bridging the Gap* with a remit to provide impartial advice and guidance to all young people aged between 13-19 to help them learn the skills that they may need to prepare for their future careers (Yates and Payne, 2006).

Connexions services have since been abolished, marking the end of the right for 16-19 year olds to receive personalised, face-to-face careers guidance. Under new guidance schools are legally required to secure independent careers guidance for

all year 8-13 pupils (Department for Education, April 2014), transferring the responsibility for careers guidance and support back to schools to buy in careers services from private providers. This can translate into student access to a web or telephone based resource rather than to a more traditional 'careers advisor'. The potential effects for young people are summarised below:

> Connexions services – which are about information, advice and guidance, for example on careers, or sexual health – they've cut all those as well. So a 16 to 17 year old who can't get an EMA and who can't sign on until they're 18, there's no one for them to talk to (The Guardian 16.8.11).

The change of Government from a Labour administration to a Coalition followed the general election of 2010. At the time of writing, EMA is no longer available, having been replaced by The 16-19 Bursary Fund. The Bursary Fund, which became available in September 2011 provides a £1200 annual bursary to students aged 16-19 accessing full time education or training who fall into one of the following categories: young people in care and care leavers; young people in receipt of income support; and disabled young people receiving both Employment Support Allowance and Disability Living Allowance.

The categories above narrow the availability of the new bursary. Previously, EMA was based upon household income with three levels of payment available. The way in which the bursary can be spent also means that students in need may not directly receive a cash payment as it can be used to provide 'in kind' support, for example equipment required for a course.

The lack of skills and difficulties that young people may have in order to traverse the education or job market following leaving school was highlighted by *Bridging the Gap* which identified a number of risk factors that were not only associated with being NEET but were problems in their own right and powerful predictors of social exclusion. These were (p.42):

- Offending behaviour
- Substance misuse
- Health problems and/or disabilities
- Learning difficulties and/or Special Educational Needs
- Emotional and/or behaviour problems

- School resistance
- Academic underachievement
- Looked after child (LAC) or homeless
- Asylum seeker/refugee
- Having parental/caring responsibilities

These reflect the range of situations and circumstances that young people who are NEET may experience, as discussed earlier and also the difficulties that young people in these categories may face in a society where there is an increasing significance placed upon 'identity capital' (Cote, 1996 cited in Bynner and Parsons, 2002 p.291). This is described as being the personal agency which enables individuals to navigate their way into and through the modern labour market. A lack of these attributes is reported to typically originate in a childhood marked by disadvantage and one with family values that do not place an emphasis on educational achievement. The experience of being NEET therefore could be viewed as compounding a young person's history of educational failure or disengagement, reducing their prospects of employment and for not acquiring or building upon their human capital through continued access to either education or employment. Whilst it is difficult to disagree with the notion that identity or social capital is important in supporting a young person's transition post school it is a further indicator that the problems associated with being a young person who is NEET are viewed as situated within the individual; referred to by Simmons (2009, p.137) as the 'common tendency to individualise social risk'.

The desire for movement of young people from NEET status into EET status (being in education, employment or training) undoubtedly reflects the Government's desire to increase the social inclusion of this group of young people, by negating some of the effects of NEET status outlined above. It also however, reflects the financial implications of having approximately 10% of 16-18 year olds in this group. Whilst traditional unemployment benefits ceased to be made available to most under the age of 18 in 1988, the cost of youth unemployment (or perhaps disengagement) was estimated by the Prince's Trust in 2007 to be around £70 million a week in lost production (Tunnard et al., 2008, p.11). The Prince's Trust repeated this costing calculation in 2010 and at that time estimated that UK taxpayers paid £22 million per week in job seekers allowance and £133 million per

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week in productivity loss (Eurofound 2012). Lifetime costs associated with being NEET have been estimated at £7 million in resource costs and £8.1 billion in public finance costs at 2000/2001 prices (Nutzor, 2010). There is clearly a dual purpose to engaging with young people who are NEET – to reduce social exclusion and to reduce Government costs. It is perhaps an over simplification however to see an increase in the number of young people in education or employment equating directly to any associated economic gain, a point made by Wolf (2002) who found little evidence of a direct relationship between education and economic growth. This relationship is described by Coffield (2000, p241) as 'overplayed' by Government.

2.3 Policy Development – Increased Participation Age

Until very recently, young people in Britain by law remained in education until the age of 16 with the majority of young people continuing in education past that age. The participation age was increased to 17 in 2013 and will be raised again to 18 in 2015. The term participation highlights a misconception that this change in law not only indicates a change in the school leaving age but also that young people continuing to access education will be, in some way, active participants in this process.

 The new regard in which young people between the ages of 16 and 18 will be viewed, as continued participants in some form of educational pursuit reflects a longer held view that this group's non-participation in employment or training should not be included in unemployment statistics. Since 1988, income support benefits have not been payable to those without employment under the age of 18, thus removing them from unemployment statistics as well as financial support. With an increased participation age, it will no longer be possible for a young person to be classified as being NEET up to age of 18, as the presumption will be that all young people must continue to be engaged in educational study or job related training.

Proposals regarding an increase in participation age within the education system have a history that extends from the early twentieth century to the present day. Each of the previous attempts, summarised by Simmons (2008) were not entirely successful in their objective, constrained by employers and industry in the case of

the Fisher Education Act (1918) and by additional post war financial difficulties in the case of The Butler Act (1944). All of these education acts, including the current one have at their centre a desire to upskill the workforce, driven by competitive market situations across world economies. This is reflected in the following quote, made over 100 years ago:

> Upon the speedy provision of elementary education depends our industrial prosperity. If we leave our workfolk any longer unskilled they will become overmatched in the competition of the world (Forster, 1870 cited in Simmons, 2008)

Simmons (2008) points out that the main difference between the current proposal and similar proposals made in the past is the number of young people who will be affected by them – young people who are NEET make up a minority of 16-18 year olds with over 80% already continuing to participate in education after completing year 11, the final year of compulsory schooling at that time. The impact of this legislation and the subsequent impact upon the economy and skill level of potential employees is therefore uncertain. With regard to increasing the participation age, Simmons (2008, p,435) believes that:

> For most, this engagement will not be with high level vocational knowledge and skills but with preparation for a life of social and economic risk and uncertainty

The changes to the current participation age are predicated on the assumption that an increased skill base is required within the UK workforce to meet the demands of industry in the UK and to remain competitive with other countries. The nature and type of employment within this country has shifted, for example far fewer jobs are now available within manufacturing industries implying that lower skilled employment opportunities are less available and therefore that different or higher level skill sets are required for the dominant occupations that have overtaken domains such as manufacturing. This thinking is countered by the 'knowledge economy myth' (Coffield, 2000 p.241) which states that low skill jobs still exist in abundance with the biggest areas of employment growth being in the areas of hospitality and tourism. Coffield's point is reflected in data which suggests that the fastest growing types of employment include call centre work

and care work, roles that do not generally require the high level knowledge and skills considered to be needed for a 21st Century workforce in this country. A report by the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) reported that there was a shortage of 4 million employees to fill jobs that require no qualifications in all sectors from service industries to manufacturing (Quinn et al., 2008). This is further described by Simmons et al. (2014a, p.87) who write that the assumption that an improved education system is the key to overcoming social and economic inequalities has prevailed in policy development in Britain in the Post War period . This leads however to 'social congestion' (Brown, 2013 p.683) rather than the social mobility that would be expected by this policy direction as increasing numbers of young people remain in education in an attempt to 'stand out from the crowd'.

Whilst government policy should not be precluded from being aspirational in its objective of up skilling its workforce, of equal importance is a clear rationale of what the policy hopes to achieve by increasing the age of participation. It would be counterproductive of educational policy reform to fail to acknowledge the varied nature of employment that is available within the UK and the skills required to support this.

2.4 Policy Development – Changes to Vocational Training

Alongside developments to increase the participation age of learners in education is the need to consider the nature and type of qualifications that will be made available to young people, including the ongoing development of vocational qualifications mentioned earlier. There have continued to be qualifications that are deemed to be more academic in nature, such as GSCEs and A level examinations which form the more traditional route for Key Stage 4 and post 16 study. Alongside these have been alternative qualifications, more vocational in nature which have been designated as equivalent to their more academic counterparts, using a system of credits. Vocational qualifications however do not yield the same economic benefits as academic qualifications and the benefits in particular in vocational qualifications at level 2 (equivalent to a GCSE grade A*-C) or below have been reported to be negligible (Spielhofer et al. 2007).

The situation above is acknowledged in the *Review of Vocational Education – The Wolf Report* (2011, p.44) where it is stated that 'too many of our young people are being short-changed' and that at least 350,000 16-19 year olds get little to no benefit from the post 16 education system. The report acknowledges that for many young people who have gained level 2 vocational qualifications they would have been better off not to have taken them and to have been employed instead. This is a view which is reinforced by Fergusson et al. (2000, p.295) who report that in a sample of 800 young people, engagement in post 16 education was viewed as being a 'least intolerable option' available to them and further that participation in post 16 education occurs 'by default'. The authors summarised their findings by saying of their participants (p.286):

> Their lives are characterised by a melange of movement in and out of training courses, part time, low paid work and unemployment.

It is difficult to see how changes in the conception and provision of compulsory education will have an impact upon those learners who could be considered to be difficult to engage, perhaps by virtue of having a negative educational experience or experiencing learning difficulties. It would seem that from a learner's perspective they are being offered an opportunity to experience more of the same with little understanding of how their educational experiences and outcomes are conceptualised.

A new initiative launched in July 2012 by the Government acknowledges the flexibility and creativity that is required in order to 'get young people back on track' (DfE press release, 30.7.12). Launched as a 'Radical Scheme to rescue NEETs' the proposals include funding being made available to employers or organisations for employing young people. This is undertaken with a view that the employers will re-engage young people in education or employment with further payment to employers being based upon the success of these organisations in engaging young people in education or employment. The programme which will take place over three years will initially focus upon 16 and 17 year old NEETs with no GCSE qualifications and will enable support to be provided in applying for courses and jobs and enable participation in skills training and improving literacy and numeracy skills. Whilst any initiative which seeks to improve the educational

and employment status of young people is to be welcomed, on the basis of the information available there seems to be little difference between this initiative and other previously available support, for example that provided by Connexions and providers of skill based programmes such as Entry to Employment, 'E2E'. The purpose of E2E was to enable young people to progress to an apprenticeship, further learning or a job by enabling them to develop motivation and confidence. The scheme was funded by the Learning and Skills Council and the Jobcentre plus network with referrals to the scheme being made primarily by Connexions advisors. The information provided about this scheme further supports the idea that being NEET is viewed fundamentally as a problem that exists within an individual, requiring young people to be supported to 'get back on track' as proposed by the DfE scheme. Furlong and Cartnel (2007, p.41) note that training programmes tend to be based on deficit models with unemployment being viewed as linked to 'the supposed personal failings of those affected'. Lawy (2010, p.434) writes that vocational education and training has been presented as a 'panacea', providing a resolution to individual problems and a way out of poverty for young people.

The literature considered so far indicates a somewhat negative or sombre view of NEET status. Young people who are NEET experience a range of difficult risk factors, tend not to succeed during their time at school and are costly to the wider society; requiring rescue by successive Government initiatives. Being NEET can have a scarring effect on an individual and continue to affect them throughout their lives. Despite the introduction of the Connexions service and financial incentives to continue in education (EMA), the numbers of young people who are NEET remained fairly constant. An increase in the age of educational participation may serve to increase baseline skills for some learners but may not provide an economically meaningful outcome for this group of young people and therefore increase their social inclusion, thus perpetuating the marginalisation of the same groups that the SEU initially sought to redress. Paradoxically, if these attempts are successful in their aims they can serve to create social congestion rather than the mobility that is sought.

The sections above present a brief introduction to some of the issues surrounding the term NEET, and some policy directions relating to aims to reduce the numbers

of young people who are described in this way. This provides an important backdrop to the current study, in order to make sense of the lived experiences of the participant and understanding of his 'status' as a young person who is NEET.

2.5 Introducing Jake

In the previous chapter I made reference to my work as an applied psychologist and how through the work I undertake with learners I attempt to consider and make sense of the whole person through consideration of their social interactions and experiences as well as their approach towards learning. This reflects the idea that individual motivations and social influences have no clearly defined demarcations and should therefore be considered together (Erben, 1998). This approach is summarised succinctly in the following quotation (Lewin, 1935 p. 68):

> For, in the investigation of the fundamental dynamic relations between the individual and the environment, it is essential to keep constantly in mind the actual total situation in its concrete individuality.

An interpretation of these views indicate that behaviour is a function of the person and their environment. The word behaviour should be considered in its broadest terms here and may relate to behaviours which are directly observable, for example those seen within a school or classroom setting and those which are seen in a person's approach or reaction to a situation. It may also relate to behaviours seen in a short, one off observation or situation or behaviours which impact upon a person's reactions and emotional responses over time. Similarly, the word environment could relate to a single situation, for example a classroom which can be manipulated or altered with relative ease or to a more complex messy environmental situation such as an individual's family or home environment or a societal environment which encompasses the educational and political landscape outlined above. It makes sense therefore, that information gained through consideration of the above adds to an understanding of both the individual and the wider society of which they are part.

2.5.1 Who is Jake?

Jake is a young man aged 17 at our first meeting who has been NEET since leaving school. He was supported by his local Connexions service in West Sussex which is how he was identified as a potential participant in this study.

Jake lives in a district in West Sussex which is the most deprived in the County. This district is made up of 26 wards, two of which are in the most deprived 10% of wards in England (2010 index of multiple deprivation).

 Jake remained in full time education until the end of compulsory schooling and undertook some GCSE examinations. He has had involvement with his local Youth Offending Team through offences relating to drug possession. Jake has a number of areas of interest in terms of work and has explored some of these with the support of Connexions and independently following his eighteenth birthday when Connexions support was no longer available to him. He has family members living locally but lives by himself, in rented accommodation following a breakdown in the relationship with his dad. His mum lives in London with a new partner. Both of Jake's parents work, as do his grandparents.

Working with a single individual case as I have done may initially seem to be a straightforward or easy way of gathering information. The complexity arises however from the level of detail which can be considered from the information gathered and the subsequent analysis of it. Erben (1998 p.4) notes that the reader of biographical research requires a degree of 'vicarious participation' which is not required in a quantitative investigation. In many ways, this reflects the type of work that I undertake in my role as an Educational Psychologist - casework aims to gather the best quality information to be reflected and interpreted through a psychological framework in order to collaboratively work towards solutions to an identified problem. However, a point of difference between my role as a psychologist and as a researcher needs to be acknowledged. In this study, I was not offering professional advice or support as I would in my day-to -day work. Instead, my professional position was as a researcher.

Working with Jake over time and hearing about his experiences of being a learner and latterly a job seeker enabled a rich level of detail to be obtained about him, his life lived and the experiences that he has as a young person who is NEET. This can then be considered in terms of his individual experiences but also with a consideration of the social world in which he lives.

2.6 Chapter Summary

This chapter has presented a background to the policy and practice which has direct relevance to young people who are NEET. The recent historical backdrop to youth unemployment was presented along with more recent Government initiatives which have been implemented in an attempt to reduce the numbers of young people in this category and to change the vocational qualifications available to school leavers. The increased individualisation of young people's transition from school to work was highlighted along with the view that the category label of NEET has further situated the problems of being NEET within the individual. The chapter concluded with an introduction to Jake, the young person who participated in this research.

The following chapter will consider research that has been undertaken with young people who are NEET.

Chapter 3: Literature Review

> **It is necessary to recognise the patchwork of experiences of today's youth. This must involve an acknowledgement that vulnerability is not simply a consequence of personal deficits. (Furlong 2006, p567)**

The purpose of this chapter is to consider the existing research literature regarding young people who are NEET, what this tells us about the NEET population in the UK and how useful this is in furthering an understanding of this group and informing the present study. Consideration will be given to the research available and the way in which it has been undertaken. Research that has utilised large participant numbers will be considered along with that which has used small sample sizes. Difficulties with categorisation will be discussed with particular reference to young people who are NEET. The positioning of the current study within the existing research will be explored. The notion that in order to more fully understand young people who are NEET a more holistic viewpoint is required, including how an individual views themselves will be considered. The remainder of the chapter will look at how 'self' can be defined in relation to the work undertaken and the theories of Carl Rogers and his view of the development of self and his theory of education. This will be discussed as a theoretical framework to be utilised for the current study. The final section of the chapter will consider what is known about young people who are NEET and their sense of self including the known vulnerabilities and protective factors for this group of young people.

3.1 What does research tell us about the NEET population in the UK?

There is a considerable amount of information available about the numbers of young people who are NEET both in the UK and within Europe, some of which was presented in the previous chapter. Quarterly updates are made available by the Department of Education providing available statistics on young people who are NEET drawn from three data sources; Statistical First Release, Quarterly Labour Force Survey and Local Authorities Client Caseload Information System (SFR8/2015).   These statistics enable consideration of current numbers of young people who are NEET as well as consideration of trends in the data. The inclusion of data drawn from Local Authorities also enables regional data to be considered in addition to the national picture. Data such as this is further summarised in

information provided by the House of Commons for Members of Parliament. The scope and limitations of this type of summary are acknowledged; 'This information is provided to Members of Parliament in support of their parliamentary duties and is not intended to address the specific circumstances of any particular individual' (Mirza- Davies, 2014, p.1).This type of information provides an insight into the quantitative characteristics of this group, both at a regional and national level. It enables some consideration of trends of numbers of young people who are NEET over time and further consideration within different age phases. The quality and rigour of this data set is dependent upon the sources from which it is drawn, in the case of the information provided by Local Authorities, for example, the reduction in services whose role it is to report on statistics relevant to this data set, for example the loss of Connexions advisors could potentially impact upon the reliability of the data provided. This change in personnel reporting information from Local Authorities could subsequently impact upon its usefulness in providing accurate data about the broad picture of the numbers of young people who are NEET and related trends. Putting issues of reliability and validity aside, this type of information provides a background to young people who are NEET, providing the broad brushstrokes of information associated with this group. What it cannot do, as it makes clear, is enable any consideration of the young people subsumed within the statistics or to consider any of the wider societal factors or structures which impact upon young people who are NEET.

In contrast, qualitative data collection methods are less concerned with the provision of the broader picture of conceptualising young people who are NEET and are more concerned with gathering data that allows an in-depth understanding of this particular group.

The existing research literature will now be considered. First, research that has included responses from large numbers of young people, enabling some grouping or 'segmentation' of participants to be undertaken will be examined. Secondly, research that has considered responses from smaller numbers of participants is discussed. All of the research included here has attempted to utilise the voice of this group of young people in some sense. The variability in how this has been undertaken and achieved will be considered. With regard to studies that aim to

group or categorise young people, a key question is whether the level of categorisation that would need to be undertaken to successfully encompass all young people who are NEET, can be undertaken through the use of this method. This would be necessary in order to ensure that future planning and strategy can be targeted effectively for all within the NEET group.

3.1.1 Research with large samples of young people who are NEET

Many of the publications commissioned by various Government departments include information which is drawn directly from young people, for example research commissioned by the Department for Children, Schools and Families and undertaken by Spielhofer, Benton, Evans, Featherstone, Golden, Nelson, and Smith (2009). The research aim in this instance was to achieve a better understanding of those who are NEET or in jobs without training (JWT) by consideration of the 'types' of young people within these two groups, the structural and personal issues that they face and the likely routes into participation in learning for each group. This research comprised three elements; literature review, statistical analysis of Youth Cohort Study data and qualitative interviews with 120 young people and 39 professionals. This study is of interest here as , in contrast to the collection of impersonal quantitative information described above, it aimed to understand the barriers to participation and engagement that young people who are NEET face and as such, each element is summarised briefly below:

Statistical Segmentation Analysis

A statistical segmentation analysis was undertaken based on data from 1637 young people classified as being NEET and 1878 young people classified as being in JWT using data available through the Youth Cohort Study. The segments that emerged and the characteristics of the young people within each segment formed the basis of the qualitative phase of the study. The largest sub-group or segment within the NEET cohort of young people was those termed 'open to learning NEET', comprising 41% of the sample. The second largest group identified in the cohort was termed 'sustained NEET', comprising 38% of the sample. The third sub group was termed 'undecided NEET' and comprised 22% of the sample. Within the JWT group, the largest sub-group comprising 48% of the cohort was termed

'sustained in a JWT'. The second largest sub group was termed 'at risk of becoming NEET' and comprised 35% of the cohort. The third subgroup comprising 17% of the cohort was termed 'transitional within a JWT'. The professionals who were interviewed as part of the study were reported to have agreed with the categorisation of young people who were NEET and those in JWT drawn from the analysis. Interestingly, some interviewees felt that the NEET subgroups identified did not fully reflect the young people who were NEET that they knew or had worked with. Specific examples included; young people who were parents, young people who were young offenders and young people who had learning difficulties.

Literature Review

The authors undertook a literature review of around 40 items. They noted that the literature reviewed was mostly qualitative in nature, noting that this is 'generally less reliable in terms of providing grounds for quantification or segmentation' (p.39). Also noted was that many of the studies reviewed looked for similarities within the NEET group rather than seeking to 'deconstruct' this group of young people. This approach is reported to lead to common characteristics or factors being identified in relation to young people who are NEET which fall into the broad categories of: educational/learning disadvantage, personal issues and structural factors. The authors note that most of the factors identified 'paint a picture of disadvantage' (p.41).

Qualitative Interviews

The authors carried out 40 interviews with young people who were NEET. The 'segments' or NEET subgroups that were identified through the segmentation analysis were reported to be relevant to the interviewees in the study, with 16 sharing characteristics of the 'sustained NEET' group, 13 with the 'open to learning NEET' and 11 regarded as 'undecided NEET'. Information from the qualitative interviews with the young people demonstrated real world examples of educational disadvantage, personal issues and structural issues. Similar findings were reported with the JWT group, with the qualitative interviews supporting the segmentation analysis that had been undertaken.

This study provides some interesting insights into the breadth of situations and circumstances which may lead to a young person being NEET. Whilst the

segmentation of the group into segments or 'sub groups' allows some consideration of how different support and solutions may be required for these groups - for example the 'open to learning group' compared to the 'sustained NEET' group it is beyond the scope and remit of these types of study to consider any further the individuals involved and to undertake the 'deconstruction' of the categories . I consider this to be a weakness with this particular study and indicative of the limitations of segmenting data. Acknowledged by the professionals interviewed as part of the study are the individuals who do not 'fit' within the segmentation analysis and therefore by definition are then not included or incorporated in further consideration of the groups identified for example young parents, offenders and those with learning difficulties. It is also not clear how movement between the categories might take place and how this could be captured as the categories identified and the numbers of young people within them represent a snapshot or moment in time of this particular group. The research undertaken enabled categorisation of this group, that were generally supported by the professionals involved in the study. The qualitative element of the research, which may have enabled some individual stories of the participants to 'filter through' comprised a small number of participants, in comparison to the number considered in the segmentation.

A further example of research carried out with young people who are NEET is that undertaken on behalf of the Department for Business and Skills (BIS research paper 87, 2013) by the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE). Qualitative interviews with 806 with young people aged between 18-24 with experience of being NEET were undertaken. The aims of the research included improving an understanding of the aspirations, motivation and behaviours of young people and adults not in education, employment or training. The data obtained was segmented according to the attribute 'Learning Status' which was given five values: recent experience of being NEET, applied for a course, looking for learning opportunities, want to learn in the future and no plans regarding future. The authors acknowledge that membership of one of the categories above may not be permanent, in common with the notion of churn cited by Wolf, (2011) and further that the categories were not equally represented in the sample. Numbers in the categories recent experience of being NEET, looking for learning opportunities and want to learn in the future were reported to be roughly equal

with numbers in the categories applied for a course and no plans regarding learning reported to be significantly smaller. A key finding from this research was that young people are motivated by a number of factors to engage in learning but that a wide range of barriers to taking part can be experienced that are both practical and attitudinal. The 12 barriers identified were: family, partner and peers, course content and format, cost and finances, behaviour attendance or attitude, accessibility and availability of courses, lack of professional support, information, advice and guidance, lack of skills or qualifications, personal circumstances, health and disability, lack of motivation or direction, poor previous learning experiences and offers of employment without training

The aspirations of the sample were reported to be variable, as indicated by the five categories above. A key finding of this study relates to the poor previous experiences of education reported by the participants. This was reported to be most significant in the group categorised as 'no plans regarding learning'. Paradoxically, this group of young people contained a higher proportion of participants qualified to A-level or first degree than in any of the other segments. This implies that a negative experience of school and education may not simply relate to poor educational attainment and outcomes, instead being reflective of educational disaffection rather than educational disadvantage.

The authors note that (p.7):

> While categorising and labelling young people is not a desirable process, identifying commonalities and differences in the motivations and barriers of learning of groups of individuals can be a useful strategy in enabling policy makers and providers to identify and develop effective interventions in supporting young people back into education, training or employment.

This supports the approach taken by Spielhofer et al. (2009) which also sought to categorise or segment young people who are NEET. The categorisation of such a diverse range of young people can further be argued to be important in maintaining them as a focus of policy, proposed by Furlong (2006). He argues that there is an effectiveness in the categorisation of young people who are NEET which enables prediction of future vulnerability, thus enabling support to be

considered and targeted for this group. It is my view, in contrast, that by virtue of categorisation there are participants whose experience and voice are not 'captured' and as such, no further consideration of them or their situation is undertaken, future support cannot therefore be considered or targeted for them. Continued categorisation or segmentation negates the individual characteristics of the members of the group under consideration. The difficulties inherent in categorisation or segmentation are noted by Colley and Hodkinson (2001, p.342) who suggest that aggregating young people in this way 'relegates young people into categories and stereotypes'.

3.1.2 NEET research with smaller sample sizes

Large sample sizes, such as those presented in the research cited above are in contrast to work such as that presented by Russell, Simmons and Thompson (2011a). Here three case studies of young people who are NEET were presented in order to explore the actions of the young people and the opportunities and barriers that they face. The research aimed to 'give voice to these young people by exploring their views, understandings and aspirations' (p.94). The research was undertaken over a three year period. This longitudinal approach enabled the researchers to engage in 'prolonged close involvement' (p.94) with the young people, in part driven by a wish to move away from methods such as formalised interviews and focus groups in which they felt 'participants may feel pressurised by external agendas' (p.94). The authors describe the volume of data collected over this period of time, including over 150 hours of participant observation, 47 interviews and photographs taken by the researchers and participants, described as 'another medium to enter, discuss and explore the young people's world'. Interestingly, the researchers utilised 'life history maps' to elicit key life events of a young person , a commonality with my research methodology. The authors conclude that whilst the actions and beliefs of young people can have an influence upon their life chances, broader structures in society are also important - for example national policy decisions can impact upon the availability and type of work, education and training which in turn shapes the allocation of resources such as paid work, state benefits and educational provision. Informal resources available to young people such as those through their family or neighbourhood are also affected by wider social and economic changes. A further observation by

the authors is how the participants in this study utilised their circumstances and dispositions as resources to help them negotiate everyday life and to maintain a focus upon preferred outcomes and aspirations, reinforcing the notion of individual agency as an important factor. The authors conclude that 'being NEET is not merely a state of absence; such young people do not spend their time merely doing nothing or abstaining from choices' (p.104).

Other work which similarly utilises this type of smaller scale more individually focused approach includes Russell, Simmons and Thompson's (2011b) ethnographic study into Entry to Employment (E2E) programmes. The research comprised 63 interviews with learners, tutors and Connexions staff and 87 hours of observation focused on learner behaviour, relations with staff and learning activity. Learners engaged in these programmes are described as being 'among the most vulnerable in society' (Simmons and Thompson, 2011a p. 448). The authors note that almost half of their sample reported negative school experience with a third having stopped attending school prior to compulsory leaving age. Many of the young people had been excluded and others had truanted due to dissatisfaction with school or because of bullying. In contrast however, the authors report that a range of positive characteristics were also found. Half of the participants had experienced paid work. Only a quarter had no GCSE passes and nearly half had one pass at grade C or above. Virtually all had specific aspirations for employment or further education with some aiming at university and professional occupations. Simmons and Thompson (2011a p.449) noted that:

> Far from being drawn from an 'underclass' with antisocial attitudes, little history of employment and an antipathy to education, the learners in our sample can be seen as 'ordinary people' from families not greatly different from working-class learners in more mainstream provision

A focus upon individuals' experiences is also reflected in work undertaken by Ball, Macrae and Maguire (1999). Their research involved tracking a group of 59 students through three years of education, starting with their last year at school. The participants were drawn from one comprehensive school in South-west London and from two nearby Pupil Referral Units (PRUs). The authors note that by the time the students were in year 11 of secondary school they had positioned themselves to a route following the end of compulsory schooling (as it was at the

time of the research) and note that 'the possibilities of choice at 16 are in this sense as much constructed and constrained by the young people's educational pasts as they are by promises of anticipations of the future' (p.203). It is also noted that at this stage, the boundaries between routes seem relatively 'watertight' (p.204). An example given is that of Kirsty (p.204), described as a 'classic A-leveller' having achieved 10 GCSE grades A-C and having parents who work in professional roles. Kirsty is described as following a 'well trodden trajectory' through familiar territory towards a clear end point, reflecting the family habitus as 'a world of already realised ends - procedures to follow, paths to take' (Bourdieu, 1990 cited by Ball et al. 1999 p.204). An alternative trajectory is presented through the story of one participant, Gabrielle (p.206). Gabrielle attended one of the PRU settings having had a 'relatively trouble-free primary education'. Gabrielle's attendance at school during year 7 and 8 reduced and she stopped attending altogether in year 9. At the beginning of year 10, Gabrielle put herself into care and shortly afterwards was offered a place at a PRU. Gabrielle's subsequent experiences of college attendance, work placements and periods of unemployment are charted, as are the importance of her family dynamics and the interrelationship between these and her work, for example her work as a dental assistant began to break down as a result of the actions of her parents (p.209):

> The thing is, you see, my mum and dad used to drink in the pub on the corner and the dentist's was in the same road. And then my mum used to come down the dentist's and she'd been drinking and she used to try and get me to come out and I had to say ' I can't mum, I'm working'. But she used to carry on and, well they didn't like it.

The authors suggest that one way of making sense of post 16 decision making is in relation to the role of 'imagined futures' (p.210). For some, such as Kirsty illustrated above, this is relatively clear, stable and possible. For others, their 'imagined future' may be vague, relatively unstable and uncertain and for others they may have nothing that can provide a focus or locus for decision making, such as Gabrielle. Limitations such as those presented above can also be viewed as examples of what has been termed 'bounded agency' (Evans, 2002 p. 262) whereby an individual's agency can be constrained by 'a number of boundaries or barriers' and is as such influenced by structures such as history, class and place.

3.1.3 The problem of categorisation

The research methodology used in these examples enables some consideration of wider factors which impact on individuals' difficulties in finding and maintaining learning opportunities or work. In some of this research, this is drawn out from the analysis of large scale studies, for example the research undertaken by Spielhofer et al. (2009) and that of NIACE (2013) and in others from smaller samples and utilising different research techniques and methodologies. With a large sample of data, whether that is drawn from interviews or questionnaires the treatment of it can lead to further categorisation of the group under study, as shown in the study by Spielhofer et al. (2009). It should be acknowledged that utilising this method in order to understand and potentially target resources will result in young people who do not 'fit' into a category being left out, as was acknowledged by the authors of this research. This brings into question how valuable this type of research is to young people who are NEET in addition to the appropriateness of further aggregating this diverse group of young people . A deeper and more detailed consideration of this group can provide a different lens through which to view the data that has been collected - it may not be possible to categorise it in the same way but instead the information can be reflected upon in a more individualised manner. Ethnographic research, such as that undertaken by Russell et al. (2011b, p.482) seeks to 'understand the experiences, expressions and relationships of participants within their broader social contexts'. This also allows, amongst other things, regional variations in experiences to be recognised and acknowledged. An example of this is the issue of gang culture and the impact that this has on young people, predominantly occurring in large cities highlighted in the Nuffield Review (Haywood, Wilde and Williams, 2008). A further example is where transport and mobility difficulties impede young people's ability to access job opportunities, highlighted in Quinn, Lawy and Dimment (2008) in their longitudinal work with young people in JWT in the South West of the UK. A lack of understanding of the landscape in which individual young people who are NEET, or those in other vulnerable situations, operate can mean that misconceptions or mis-categorisations can take place. Colley (2006 p.9) provides an example of this from one of the case studies presented where a young mother's wish to remain at home (and therefore to remain as NEET) could be construed as continuing 'failure' or non engagement but instead reflected the strong view of the mother that 'a

child needs its mother when it's young' , which was a reflection of her own experiences of having been placed in care at a young age. In order to gain an insight into individual's circumstances, experiences and reasons for being NEET requires research to ask questions of individuals about their decisions, choices and experiences in order to provide a holistic picture of their circumstances and avoid them being missed out of categories or being miscategorised.

Categorisation may also occur by less intentional means. Mercieca and Mercieca (2012, p.67) argue that professionals often resort to using 'shorthand' in order to convey information succinctly and efficiently and as such, create categories by doing so. The authors argue that doing so provides a shortened version of a history of complexity but that this shorthand also produces reality and becomes a reality in itself. It is my assertion that using a category label such as 'NEET' or a subcategory or segment associated with it, for example young parents, can become examples of shorthand in the way the authors describe.

A similar concept to that of 'shorthand' described above is that of a 'grand narrative'. Lyotard (1984, p.15) felt that modern scientific study led to the creation of a 'grand narrative' which 'claims to be the story that can reveal the meanings of all stories, be it the weakness or the progress of mankind' (Readings, 1991 p.63). The complexities of events and people are lost when this type of narrative is created and a consequence of this can be that other interpretations or understanding of events are not possible due to the dominance of the 'grand narrative'. By being able to 'reveal the meaning' of narratives (through the construction of a 'grand narrative') this essentially ends further narration (Readings, 1991 p.63). The danger inherent in these types of narrative are that they by themselves become self validating, for example by being encouraged by bureaucratic and administrative systems which require the shorthand provided and its neat categorisation of people or situations in order to provide an explanation or rationale for a phenomenon. This is acknowledged by White (1989, cited in Billington and Todd, 2012, p6) who writes that people can experience difficulty embracing their own knowledge in the construction of their own story 'because of the dominant and disqualifying stories or knowledge that others can have about them and their relationships'. Lyotard (1984) argues that it is the little narratives which have some level of power, value and knowledge, not only in

being able to displace the grand narrative but also in being able to displace themselves. Each story 'evokes new stories by the manner in which in its turn it has displaced preceding narratives in telling a story' (Readings, 1991 p.69). Although Lyotard uses the word narrative to describe both grand and small stories this is somewhat misleading as what he describes as a 'grand narrative' is far removed from what would be considered a narrative here. Perhaps 'grand account' would be a better description of what Lyotard is describing as it fulfils much of the professional, and perhaps societal need for 'shorthand' that was outlined earlier - that is to group young people who are NEET into subgroups or categories.

3.2 Where does my work fit in with previous research?

A similarity between my research and that of others is the concern with the categorisation of young people who are NEET. Within Educational Psychology the term 'within child' is used to describe deficit based conceptualisations of difficulties with which children and young people may present. It is my assertion that the term highlights how young people who are NEET can be considered - with a somewhat deterministic label of what they are not rather than with an appropriate consideration of what they are or perhaps what they could be. This is not a unique viewpoint nor is it only relevant to the NEET population. Simmons and Thompson (2011a, p. 449) write; 'official discourse tends to essentialise disengagement, portraying it as a function of individual deficits and diverting attention from structural factors within society and the economy which contribute to high NEET rates'. With reference to young people in JWT, Quinn et al. (2008, p.185) note that; 'those classified as "young people in jobs without training" are defined entirely in terms of lack: their job lack such accredited training and they themselves are deemed to be lacking in prospects'. This is also noted by Colley and Hodkinson (2001, p.340) in their critique of *Bridging The Gap,* writing that the report describes the young people to which it refers 'almost exclusively in terms of their lacks and needs' and note that 'disadvantage is defined as deficit or disease, which deftly locates it within the individual'.

The view that young people who are NEET are unwilling to work or are disinterested in the pursuit of work has been shown in many cases to be untrue. For example Elliot (2010, p8) reported that many of the 35 young people

interviewed were 'a long way from the stereotype of the poorly qualified, de-motivated and inarticulate individual often associated with the label "neet"'. The FutureYou (2011) online survey of 754 young people aged 16-24 also showed that for the majority of young people, willingness to work is not the limiting factor in accessing employment. Simmons and Thompson (2011b, p.172) also found that in the young people with whom they worked 'we found no evidence of fecklessness or an ingrained dependency'. The implication of this is that the 'shorthand' descriptions associated with young people who are NEET could be relatively easily challenged and refocused and that by continued categorisation, these broad groupings allow many to become further marginalised or ignored.

The commonality between the research considered thus far is its presentation of some of the difficulties experienced by some young people who are NEET. These include difficulties at school relating to learning and other factors relating to family and environmental issues. These difficulties usually pre-date the movement of the young person into the NEET category and therefore have a longstanding impact upon the development of that young person which may last into young adulthood. The Effective Pre-School, Primary and Secondary Education Project (EPPSE) research report, a longitudinal study of over 3000 children from 1997 (Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons, Siraj, Taggart, Smees, Toth, Welcomme and Hollingworth, 2014, p.18) shows that there is an 'enduring legacy of pre-school' whereby attendance at pre-school is a significant predictor to total GCSE scores and higher grades at GCSE in English and maths.

It is clear that to capture the essence of individuality is important in any attempt to fully understand the detail of being a young person who is NEET. What is of equal importance however is how that information is treated or interpreted - misinterpretations or a within person conceptualisation can further reinforce views of young people in this group as having a number of areas of deficit or lacks. A focus upon the individual however should not detract from consideration of wider societal influences or structures and their role or place in the lives of young people who are NEET. It would seem that more is known about how young people who are NEET are viewed than we know about how these young people view themselves or the world in which they live. It makes sense that in order to

understand an individual then there needs to be an understanding of how they view themselves.

The following section considers the development of the self and how this incorporates external or societal experiences as well as factors within an individual and how this relates to an individual's lived experience with particular reference to their educational experience.

3.3 How can we define 'self'?

Movement away from the categorisation of a group to consideration of individual lived experience by definition results in a greater focus upon an individual's sense of self. To hear, listen and understand the experiences and views of an individual for any purpose requires an understanding of how that person views themselves and by doing so this can then lead to a greater understanding of that person and their experiences. In order to be able to conceptualise and make sense of this sense of self, a framework or theory of what constitutes self is required.

Philosophers have long struggled to define what constitutes 'self' or personal identify. For example Phillips and Barbules (2000, p.6) outline Descartes' description of himself as 'a thinking thing'. The phrase 'Cogito ergo sum' - I think therefore I am, provides a simplified summation of his complex considerations. Others theorised the division of the self, Leary and Tangney (2003, p.7) for example describe William James' assertion that self consisted of 'me' self and 'I' self, with the former consisting of aspects of a person that come from their experiences and the latter linked to the soul of an individual.

The purpose of any theorising or study relating to self, whether undertaken in centuries past or contemporaneously is to develop further the understanding of the individual - why people think, act and behave in the way that they do. McLeod (1997) writes about historical changes and developments of communities which have impacted upon cultures with a view that the dominant culture at any time impacts upon what is viewed as 'self'. He charts the transition from what he terms 'traditional culture', when people lived in small rural communities with basic technologies and lived according to moral guidelines driven by religion and myth. This type of culture is reported to have broken down in the eighteenth century to be replaced by the 'modern' era, symbolised by advancements in

science and technology and more urban and industrial ways of life. At this time, rationality and progress replaced religious views. The 'post modern' era of the late twentieth century is viewed as representing a fragmentation of the structures and assumptions of modernity with an uncertainty about where society is heading to. McLeod summarises these themes in a table which is reproduced below:

Table 1: The Key Characteristics of traditional, modern and postmodern cultures McLeod, 1997 p.3

Traditional	Modern	Postmodern
collective, family-orientated way of life	individualistic	awareness of 'relational' self
self defined in terms of external factors: importance of honour	autonomous, bounded self: importance of dignity	fragmented, 'saturated' self
belief in religion	belief in science	belief that knowledge is socially constructed
moral certainty	moral relativism	search for moral framework
static society	commitment to 'progress'	fear of anarchy and chaos
localised forms of political control	nation state	'global village'
agricultural work	industrial work	information- processing work

McLeod emphasises that differences exist between the three 'worlds' above not only at a social organisational level but also at the level of the individual person; 'the sense of what it is to be a person is socially constructed' (p.4). In addition, the sense of what it means to be a person has changed over time and will continue to do so. When considering the construction of the postmodern person, Mcleod notes the inclusion of what he terms 'new stories-to-live-by'. These are narratives that wouldn't have existed in traditional cultures and include examples such as 'seeking fulfilment', 'falling in love', 'getting divorced', 'being in therapy' and 'choosing a new car' (p.5).

McLeod's work indicates that in order to understand the individual, an understanding is also required of the temporal and cultural environment in which the individual operates. Whilst definitions of self abound, their usefulness and applicability to an individual or group are reliant upon this wider consideration.

This notion is reflected in Giddens' theory of structuration (1979) which describes both 'structure', relevant to the social systems which are in existence and 'agency' which relates to an individual's actions. Giddens' writes that there is a mutual dependency between structure and agency and that structure can be both enabling and constraining on an agent's ability to act. Structures are not viewed as being barriers to actions, rather as being 'essentially involved in its production' (p.70).

To gain an understanding of the 'agency' or action that an individual engages in undoubtedly requires some understanding of the wider social situation or 'structures' that are in existence and an acknowledgement that these reflect both cultural and temporal considerations. Ecclestone et al. (2010 p.12) describe agency as being 'shaped, constrained and sometimes determined by material conditions and normative expectations of different structural factors'. Whilst the two are linked, in the way described, to further understand the actions or agency of an individual requires a consideration of how an individual views themselves.

3.4 Rogerian views of the development of self

In this chapter I have asserted that consideration of the lived experience of being NEET is important to capture a sense of this group of young people which encompasses their strengths as well as their areas of difficulty. It is also important to avoid using a 'grand narrative' or shorthand description in order to describe and conceptualise this group of young people.   This view rejects a positivist viewpoint which would postulate that human behaviour, in this case the behaviours or features associated with being NEET, can be characterised by regularities and universal laws. In contrast, it is my view that individuals and their unique experiences need to be understood in order for their social world to be better conceptualised and understood. Furthermore, I would assert this is as relevant and useful a pursuit in understanding a person and their situation as a larger scale quantitative analysis. Humanistic psychology sets out to study

individuals as a whole through representation that is positive, active and purposeful. In addition, humanistic psychologists are dedicated to studying the individual rather than the group. To understand people individually requires consideration of human development, and in particular consideration of the development of self - the essence of individuality. In this section I will outline a particular approach to understanding the development of self and consider how this is relevant to the research undertaken here and how it will be utilised for the remainder of this study. In the next sections I will consider Carl Rogers' theories of the development of the self and his theory of education which followed that theorised that educators were important figures in developing, shaping and maintaining an individual's sense of self.

Carl Rogers' work (1959, 1969, 1980) marked a departure from the psychoanalytical and behaviourist paradigms which had dominated psychology and psychiatry from the beginning of the twentieth century. In a contradiction to these, and in utilising his own clinical experiences, Rogers came to believe that the way in which a person experiences reality was of the utmost importance rather than the conceptualisation of objective reality. This is summarised by Thorne (1992, p.24); 'the surest route to understanding a person's behaviour is to come to a knowledge of that person's subjective awareness of himself or herself and of the world in which he or she exists'. At the heart of Rogers' work was the idea that an individual's subjective experience was worthy of both interest and respect even when to others it may present as being misguided or unusual. This then, placed the client at the centre of a therapeutic relationship. Whilst initially Rogers' work focused upon the therapeutic relationship between therapist and client, he acknowledged that 'if our views of therapy have any validity they have application in all those fields of human experience and endeavour which involve a) interpersonal relationships and b) the aim or potentiality of development or change in personality and behaviour' (1959, p.193). Rogers was a psychologist, in contrast to other leading figures including Freud and Jung who were medically trained. The importance of this difference lies in how the approach to working with a client is viewed - Freud's approach, and that of others, was grounded in science and led to a medicalised relationship between doctor and patient in the sense that the doctor was viewed as the 'expert' or authority figure within that relationship who was able to 'cure' the client. In contrast, Rogers believed that it

was the client who knew and understood themselves best and that it was the therapists role to aid the client in the exploration and discovery of their own inner resources - not to impose strategies, solutions or explanations (Thorne, 1992). Practitioners with a medical background such as Freud were also able to legitimise their work through reference to the scientific knowledge base of medicine (McLeod, 1997) whereas Rogers and others without this background were required to demonstrate the efficacy of their work through research.

Rogers cited his own personal beginnings and subsequent experience at the outset of much of his work, acknowledging that 'no theory can be adequately understood without some knowledge of the cultural and personal soil from which it springs' (1959, p.185). Rogers was critical of the development of theory which resulted in it being considered to be 'truth', commenting that 'every theory contains an unknown (and perhaps at that point an unknowable) amount of error and mistaken inference' (1959, p190). Rogers' own clinical experiences demonstrated to him that an over reliance on theory could lead to a therapist attempting to fit the client to the mould of a theory rather than attempting to engage with the client's world as he or she experienced it. This is reflected in Rogers' comment, written with regard to the application of Freud's theories that 'the gossamer threads became iron chains of dogma' (1959, p.191) Rogers' optimistic view of human nature was at odds with the psychodynamic view which was somewhat more pessimistic. Rogers believed that in order to support an individual to behave in a way which could be considered to be positive and forward moving, a commitment to an understanding of a client's subjective world was necessary (Thorne, 1992).

Rogers presented his theoretical views in 1959 . This included the following theories (in the order of their development); a theory of therapy, a theory of personality, a theory of the fully functioning person and a theory of interpersonal relationships. Each theory consisted of a number of constructs of which there were forty in total.

The first of Rogers' constructs relates to what he believed was the only human motive, which he termed the 'actualizing tendency' (p.196). Rogers believed that humans serve to maintain and enhance themselves through this process. This encompasses what Maslow (1943) had previously termed deficiency needs such

as a need for air, food and water along with other more generalised activities. Rogers viewed concepts relating to motivation such as need-reduction, tension-reduction and drive-reduction as being included within the concept of the actualizing tendency. Rogers viewed the actualizing tendency as; 'development toward autonomy and away from heteronomy, or control by external forces' (p.196). Rogers described congruence and incongruence with regard to this tendency, viewing a congruence between the self and the total experience as enabling the actualizing tendency to remain relatively unified. Incongruence between self and experience however can lead to this tendency being frustrated to a damaging degree for the individual.

Rogers describes the developmental pathway that humans experience from infancy. At this point, the infant has an inherent tendency towards actualization and as perceiving their experience as reality. At this time then, there is no conflict or incongruence between the infant's interaction with reality and their basic actualizing tendency. The infant is able to establish what experiences are good and which are bad, embracing positively valued experiences and avoiding those which are negative and potentially damaging. The difficulty for the developing infant comes when they begin to experience themselves as being a self different and separate from others. Through relationships with others, the infant develops a concept of self which requires nurturing and protecting. At this point, the infant develops a 'need for positive regard' (p.223). Rogers described this need as being 'universal in human beings' and 'pervasive and persistent' (p.223). Allied to the need for positive regard is the need for self regard, that is to feel good about oneself. An individual's ability to feel positive about themselves is dependent upon that quality and consistency of the positive regard shown to us by others and in situations where this has been selective, the individual is the victim of 'conditions of worth' (p.224) whereby they have worth only on condition that they think, feel and behave in ways that others have communicated are worthy of love and respect.

Rogers described what he termed movement toward 'the good life' or becoming a more 'fully functioning person', noting both that the good life is a process, not a state and that it is a direction not a destination (1961, p. 186). Rogers describes the characteristic qualities of this process of movement as being: an increasing

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openness to experience, increasingly existential living and an increasing trust in his organism. Rogers (pp. 192-196) viewed the implications the good life as enabling the following: a new perspective on freedom versus determinism, creativity as an element of the good life, basic trustworthiness of human nature and a greater richness of life.

In summary, Rogers' experiences in working in therapeutic environments led him to develop his theory which viewed individuals in positive terms as being fundamentally good with aggressive or antisocial behaviours being provoked by frustration of basic needs or perceived threat. Rogers viewed self actualisation as the one basic motive possessed by people and conceptualised this as occurring when a person's ideal self became congruent with their actual behaviour.

3.5 Rogerian view of education

Rogers published *'Freedom to Learn'* in 1969 which applied and developed his earlier theory to education and teaching. Rogers' view that experience impacts upon the development of self supports the notion that in order to consider and understand an individual their life experiences including education and how these are viewed by them should be considered. With regard to the population of young people who are NEET, quantitative evidence indicates that this group do not experience success through their schooling. A high number do not attain qualifications that would enable them to undertake further study and in addition many not completing their studies due to exclusion or non attendance. Furthermore, many young people who are NEET do not view their educational experience positively. This is of interest here because if learning (both in an academic and social sense) is successful and experienced as such by an individual then this has the potential to lead to movement of the self towards self actualisation. The opposite is also true, whereby a detrimental impact upon the development of self can be experienced through negative learning experiences including a lack of positive self regard.

As with his theory of interpersonal relationships, Rogers utilised his experience and research in psychotherapy to present his views and as before there is an emphasis upon the attitudes of the individual, in this case the teacher and their

relationship with learners, rather than an emphasis upon the techniques or methods that they employ in their work. This is summarised below (p.105):

> We know that the facilitation of such learning rests not upon the teaching skills of the leader, nor upon his curricular planning, not upon his use of audiovisual aids, not upon the programmed learning he utilizes, not upon his lectures and presentations, not upon an abundance of books, though each of these might at one time or another by utilized as an important resource. No, the facilitation of significant learning rests upon certain attitudinal qualities which exist in the personal relationship between the facilitator and the learners

Rogers identified a number of questions relating to what he considered to be the crisis in education. Whilst some of these are clearly reflective of wider societal crises of the time, for example the threat of nuclear war, many remain applicable to learning and education today. For example (p.vi):

- can education free itself from the past and past goals and prepare individuals and groups to live in a world of accelerating change, if it is possible for human beings to do so?

- can the conservative, traditional, bureaucratic, rigid educational system break out of the shackles of pressure for social conformity and deal with the real problems of modern life?

- will education be taken over by business, with more innovation and responsiveness, but with the motive of profit making and emphasis upon producing profitable 'hardware'?

In an attempt to address these questions Rogers distinguishes between two kinds of learning, what he terms 'meaningless learning' which has no personal meaning for the student, does not involve feelings or the whole person and is described as learning 'occurring from the neck up' (p.4). Secondly, Rogers talks about experiential learning which has meaning and personal relevance. It is quick and retained and influences the total person including their attitudes and behaviour, having a 'quality of personal involvement' (p.5). Rogers viewed the latter as learning which leads to the learner becoming a more fully functioning person and as such the 'goal' of education is deemed to be the same as the goal of

psychotherapy - supporting an individual towards self-actualization or to becoming a fully functioning individual.

Rogers viewed learning as taking place when the subject matter is deemed to be relevant by the learner. A learning environment which is accepting, understanding and supportive is viewed as reducing threat or fear and enabling to the learner to try something and to experience success. Rogers viewed threat as both a disorganiser of thinking and an inhibitor to learning.

Rogers identified 'realness' as being the facilitator of learning and wrote that learning is facilitated when a teacher is not 'playing a role prescribed by the education system but is rather himself or herself'. Rogers believed that a learner should be accepted as a person of worth, a unique individual and be respected and that this should be unconditional - that there is no demand that the learner be different or conform in some way in order to be accepted and respected. Rogers also emphasised the importance of empathic understanding, described by Patterson (1977 p.306) as 'understanding which comes from putting oneself in the place of the student to understand his or her reactions from the inside, to experience the student's perceptions and feelings about what is happening'.

In addition to identifying what was important for a teacher to demonstrate for learning to occur, Rogers (p.306) also outlined three conditions involving the learner . These are:

Perception of the facilitative conditions - the realness, acceptance and empathic understanding must be perceived or felt by the student

Awareness of a problem - the student needs to perceive a learning situation as being a problem to be solved and therefore to be relevant and meaningful to the student, in order for learning to take place

Motivation - there is a natural motivation for learning in all individuals and that this motivation is the tendency to fulfilment or toward self-actualization. Threat inhibits motivation and Rogers viewed the facilitative conditions within a learning environment as reducing or minimising threat.

Rogers' humanistic view of education did not neglect the idea that cognitive and intellectual development should be promoted in addition to affective and

emotional growth but proposed that when interpersonal relationships between students and teachers are present in the way described then cognitive development can effectively be achieved through delivery of the curriculum. This interaction between students and educators underlines the importance of relationships and their impact upon an individual's capacity to move towards self actualisation and is summarised below (Patterson, 1977 p.329):

> The drive towards self-actualization is not simply an unfolding from the inside, automatic and without regard to the environment. Rather it requires certain conditions if it is to manifest itself and lead to the development of a self actualizing or fully functioning person.

I consider Rogers' theories of self development, including his application of this theoretical ideas to learning and education, to be a useful framework when considering young people who are NEET with an emphasis upon the individual rather than the group or category of young people. Rogers acknowledges the importance of an individual's interactions with others in shaping their sense of self and also acknowledges the importance of understanding the individual 's situation, referencing 'cultural and personal soil'. Rogers holds a positive view of people and their ability to grow and develop - at odds with the deficit model and the notion discussed earlier of 'within child' factors and provides clear ideas of what a learning situation should look like in order to facilitate the development of learners, both in the sense of their cognitive development and to their personal, affective development.

3.6 What do we know about young people who are NEET and their sense of self?

Rogers' theory makes clear the links between an individual's experience, including their interactions with others, and the development of self. Where an individual is acknowledged, nurtured and is a recipient of positive self regard they are better placed to move toward self actualisation - bringing with it the opportunity to become, in Rogers' words, a 'fully functioning person' or to experience 'the good life' (1961, p.184). Rogers viewed aggressive or antisocial behaviours as being reflective of or provoked by a frustration of basic needs or perceived threat. Research summarised previously found that a number of risk factors have been identified which place young people at more risk of becoming NEET or are

reported as being present within the NEET population (Tunnard, Barnes and Flood 2008).

Of interest here is not what this information tells us about the observable behaviour of young people who are NEET or the frequency of this but rather what it tells us about these individual's sense of self - according to Rogers' these behaviours are driven by a movement towards self actualisation not taking place which in turn could be related to incongruence between an individual's sense of self and their experience. Rogers makes clear in his theory of education the importance of educators in supporting movement towards self actualisation and therefore reinforcing the sense of an individual's identity as a learner as being a product of their wider learning experience.

3.6.1 Young people who are NEET and their view of themselves as a learner

Research indicates that the development of learning identities is not fixed and that these can develop and change according to the situation in which a young person is in. Higgins (2013) reported on work undertaken with young people in New Zealand where learners who had previously been classified as NEET presented with an apparent rejection of the identity associated with that status and also a rejection of their school identity both of which they associated with failure. Rogers' notion of conditions of worth is supported by Higgins's assertion that schools communicate what an ideal student identity should be and that this may often be associated with the majority culture and dominant social class. Learners who do not identify with this ideal may find it difficult to fit in and assume another identity such as that of 'school resister' (p.183). The fragility of learning identities is outlined here with Higgins identifying two assumptions from work with this group of learners. Firstly, that those who have taken seriously the need to gain an education will be rewarded with work and secondly the belief that 'if I fail, it is all because of me' (p.187). This indicates that young people require positive reinforcement from those providing education and training but that also structures need to be in place which facilitate a transition into employment following education or training. The former has resonance with Rogers' views of what a teacher/learner relationship should be. The latter, as has been discussed is problematic and is made more problematic if there is an incongruence between what the learner perceives as being an appropriate or meaningful employment

opportunity and what is actually available to them. The factors that influence and limit the choices that are available to young people require acknowledgement in order to ensure that an 'over-agentic' view of human action does not dominate (Ecclestone, Biesta and Hughes, 2010 p.11). Allied to this is the observation that the aspirations that young people at the age of 16 have play an important part in shaping their life trajectories as 'an increasing number form aspirations for the limited number of high level occupations able to provide stable careers' (Yates et al., 2011 p.530). If these aspirations are not realised then there will be an incongruence between what is considered to be an individual's ideal self and their lived experience. This, in Rogerian terms, will affect an individual's ability to move towards self actualisation. It makes sense that feelings of failure, particularly when these are associated with experiences relating to a number of learning environments and experiences will impact upon an individual's emotional wellbeing, which is considered in the section below.

3.6.2 Young people who are NEET and their emotional and mental health

An online survey of over 700 young people reported that being NEET has a severely detrimental effect on the mental health and wellbeing of individuals (FutureYou, 2011). The same study reported that 34% of the sample reported feelings of depression since becoming NEET, 30% reported feeling excluded from society and 43% reported that thinking about the future made them feel 'desperate or hopeless' (p.13). A quarter of respondents reported that they had contemplated suicide. Haywood et al. (2008 p.22) report similar findings stating that the young people demonstrated multiple barriers to making progress with their lives including low self confidence and self esteem and 'above all a feeling of failure'. This sense of failure further impacts upon the young people by affecting their capacity for self motivation and for identifying, realising and implementing their aspirations. An online poll of over two thousand young people aged 16-25, of whom 281 were NEET, found that young people who struggle at school are less happy in all aspects of their lives including home life, working lives and with regard to their mental and physical health (youth index, 2014). Of the sample, 9% of the young people agreed with the statement 'life is not worth living' and 40% reported experiencing a mental health problem as a direct result of being out of work.

Research undertaken with year 10 and 11 pupils through semi-structured interviews indicates that the learner identities held by this group did not always reflect or correlate with actual levels of achievement, with some learners over estimating their level of skill (Halsall, Hollingworth and Mendick, 2005). A number of pupils in this sample were reported to lack confidence due to literacy difficulties, leading to feelings of low confidence and low self esteem resulting in an increased likelihood of truancy from school. The same study found however being given new responsibilities or defined roles at school created a positive impact upon the self esteem and engagement of a number of pupils. This supports Rogers' views about positive regard being displayed by educators towards learners.

As perhaps would be expected, given the multiplicity of risk factors to becoming NEET and the difficulties inherent in grouping young people by virtue of their NEET status, the risks associated with membership of this group and the subsequent negative impact this can have on mental health are not reported to be seen across all young people who are NEET. A study by Eurofound (2012) identified two broad subcategories of young people who are NEET:

The vulnerable NEETs - at risk of marginalisation and often lacking social, cultural and human capital

The non-vulnerable NEETs - rich in cultural, social and human capital and despite being NEET are at little risk of marginalisation

(Eurofound 2012, p.57)

The reference to capital and how it can be viewed almost as a protective factor here is perhaps not all that surprising. Young people who have access to positive features of a social life are perhaps positioned more favourably to engage more successfully in what Phillips (2010 p. 493) terms 'forward movement' for example securing accommodation, completing an educational course or gaining employment.

The sub categorisation of young people who are NEET into those that can be considered vulnerable and non vulnerable carries with it the same difficulties inherent in attempting to describe this group as have previously been discussed. It is evident that in a group of this size there will be individuals whose vulnerability

and marginalisation is greater than that of others. It would also be expected that there could be movement into and out of these categories. The usefulness of this dichotomy, in terms of how it supports young people who are NEET, is difficult to identify. What is important however, is an acknowledgement that for an individual or group of individuals who experience the difficulties described above the consequences of this can last beyond the age of classification of being NEET:

> Falling into NEET status is a loss of young people's potential. Research
> suggests that spending time in NEET status at a young age can have
> long lasting consequences or 'scars'. These scars can have a negative
> effect in future employment outcomes and earnings as well as negative
> consequences on physical and mental health and can lead to
> disengagement from life and society (Eurofound, p.58)

It is important to recognise and acknowledge the vulnerability that can sit alongside NEET status, particularly given the long lasting consequences that this can have upon individuals. It is however equally important to recognise the factors which help to protect young people against risks and assist to inhibit rather than to reinforce vulnerability or disadvantage. These factors, termed protective factors include: *strong relationships* with parents, family members, teachers or other significant adults, *clear, high expectations and role models* provided by parents, teachers and community leaders, *active involvement* in family, school and community life, *feeling valued* - parents and teachers who value the skills and contributions of young people, *individual characteristics* - outgoing and intelligent children are more likely to exploit opportunities and be resilient to dangers and *persistence* and the ability to be able to pick yourself up after failure (Bentley and Gurumurthy, 1999).

There is a significant overlap between the protective factors above and Rogerian theory around the role of education in development of the self. Rogers writes of the importance of the relationships between learners and educators, the realness of the educator and their acceptance of the learner for who they are. Strong relationships with family members and significant others are reflective of a concept of self which has been supported and nurtured through the provision of positive self regard.

3.7 Chapter Summary

This chapter has presented research that has been undertaken with young people who are NEET. There is a large amount of quantitative information about this group which is updated frequently. The limitations of this type of data were discussed as were the limitations of research which seeks to categorise this group of young people. Further, the notion of shorthand was discussed and how this can service to present an edited version of young people who are NEET, often with a focus on what they aren't able to achieve or successfully engage with rather than what they can do. Consideration was then given to development of the self, using Roger's theories of self and education as a framework for this before research relating to young people who are NEET and their sense of self was presented and considered.

The following chapter will present the methodological framework used in this research.

Chapter 4 Methodological Considerations

Science has always been in conflict with narratives. (Lyotard, 1984 xxiii)

4.0 Underpinnings of the Narrative Approach

This chapter provides the methodological backdrop to the research and aims to outline the rationale for the methodology employed, including the single case design.

The quote above neatly summarises the 'tension' that exists between different approaches to observing, analysing and presenting information gathered through research, including my research presented here. A narrative approach is essentially qualitative in nature and differs from a positivist approach that aims to generalise its findings. Reliability and validity of quantitative research are held to be of importance whereas qualitative research is less troubled by its scope to be replicated and repeated by others. It does however espouse a rigorous approach that enables veracity and trustworthiness. A distinction can be drawn between qualitative evidence and data with the former being viewed as data brought to bear upon specific questions, theories or experiences; 'Evidence is data with a purpose' (Lincoln, 2002 p.9). If 'validation' of this type of research is held to be a useful construct then Erben (1998, p.4) writes that it can be based upon 'the degree of consensus among those for whom the investigation is thought to be of interest and relevance'.

The popularity within literature of qualitative research reflects shifts in the popularity of a positivist view of research. Despite the apparent popularity of qualitative approaches, a review of the journal *'Psychological Abstracts'* for 1960-1978 showed that only 1% of published reports were devoted to the investigation of individuals (Polkinghorne, 1998). This may reflect an acceptance of the usefulness of this approach within sociology that perhaps was not matched within the field of psychology where positivist paradigms prevailed in the mid and latter stages of the 20th Century. The increase in the use of narrative to inform qualitative research is acknowledged in Plummer (2001, p.11) who writes of the 'narrative turn' and how narratives and stories have become 'major concerns' within the human sciences.

Any attempt to make sense of an individual's experience or story requires some positioning of it to the time in which it has been lived and relevant issues, for example the political and social landscape of the time, reflecting that 'neither the life of an individual nor the history of a society can be understood without understanding both' (Wright Mills, 1959, p.3). This reflects the notion of 'structures' and their importance discussed in the previous chapter and was acknowledged in research undertaken over fifty years ago with school leavers in the UK:

> Other aspects of the world about them may have affected our young people less directly, but should nevertheless be noted. (Veness, 1962, p12)

The author describes contemporary events at the time of the research in 1956 'one famous public school banned crepe-soled platform shoes' (p10); 'early in the year, milk bars were still the usual meeting place for a teenager' (p.10) as well as providing a description of the current employment situation (p.13).:

> The employment position in the country was very good: a report in the middle of the previous year claimed that for every person unemployed there were two vacancies. There was fierce competition for young workers and high starting pay was offered in the City. Many feared that starting pay was too high and was attracting young people away from skilled jobs and more advanced courses at school.

The influence of 'public material' upon the *construction* of narratives as well as in the interpretation of them means that they can never be regarded as being completely subjective (Tedder and Biesta, 2009 p.80). The public material which becomes part of the construction of narratives undoubtedly changes over time, as the quote above indicates. At the time of writing, Britain is experiencing a troubled economy (as is much of the rest of the developed world), radical educational reforms are underway and public events, for example the riots in cities around the country in 2011 stimulated much debate and consternation regarding the behaviour of citizens, with a particular focus upon British youth. Events such as these are assumed therefore to affect a person's narrative and therefore the construction of their narrative is impacted by the events that are

occurring around them. As an applied psychologist, my interest in understanding how and why people behave and respond in the way they do lies in attempting to understand the interactions between an individual and the environments and situations they experience. A narrative approach acknowledges the status that can be afforded to one person's lived experience - that is, that it can be considered as a stand-alone account which both informs those who read it and enables reflection to take place with regard to the issues and themes that can be drawn from it. I would agree with Emerson and Frosh's (2009, p17) assertion that 'the intense scrutiny of individual accounts is an activity worthy of research attention'. Within the field of psychology, interventions with individuals comprising of 'talking therapies', including those of Rogers, were popular in the first half of the century and gained prominence again towards the end of it. Developments within the field of sociology are summarised in Denzin (1989) and include research published in the early part of the century including *'The Polish Peasant in Europe and America'* (Thomas and Znaniecki, 1927), considered to be the first publication of a 'sociological life history', *'The Jack Roller'* (Shaw, 1930) and others reflected in particular the University of Chicago's influence upon literature relating to narrative and storytelling which was promoted during the 1920s and reflected the social psychology of Mead as well as the presence of contemporary researchers within the institution at the time. Mead held that individuals were active in shaping their own lives and that to study the events in a person's life required a method that would provide information about the person's own interpretation of his or her actions (Polkinghorne, 1998). Texts such as these allowed social issues to be presented as well as enabling the voice of an individual to be heard. Becker's (1966, p.viii) introduction to *'The Jack Roller'* presents the idea of a 'mosaic' of Chicago which was created and added to through the undertaking of this type of work, with each piece of mosaic adding a little to the total understanding of the character and form of the city. This image is important as the research produced was never intended to make an attempt to describe all the members of a particular population but rather to add or contribute to the knowledge and understanding of it, hence the idea of small pieces contributing to a much larger image. The subsequent reduction in the publication and popularity of this type of research and presentation can in part be seen as reflective of the increasing dominance of a scientific hypothetico-

deductive method. Becker (1966, p.xvii) contrasts the idea of the creation of a 'mosaic' of knowledge with research projects whose findings are 'to be used as another brick in the glowing wall of science'. Becker views a single study as being self sufficient and self contained and providing of all of the knowledge needed to accept or reject the conclusions provided. Increased emphasis upon other forms of 'measurement' with an increased importance placed upon reliability and validity meant that when the two methods met, the results were 'a trivialisation and distortion of the original intents of the method' (Denzin, 1989 p8). This further highlights the 'tension' which was mentioned earlier regarding these two types of research. To present a study which is qualitative in design requires careful consideration about how to present its findings and even more careful consideration about presenting what these might 'mean' and what they tell us as a reader or fellow researcher - this could be viewed as being the 'so what' factor of research, that is, what it is telling us and why.

When considering the interplay between the experiences of an individual and the societal influences which impact upon that same individual, the publication of *'The Sociological Imagination'* in 1959 by C. Wright Mills is acknowledged as being of significance within sociology (Erben, 1998; Plummer, 2001). The assertion made by Wright Mills (1959, p3) that 'neither the life of an individual nor the history of a society can be understood without understanding both' reinforces the notion that to understand an individual is, in some way, to understand the world in which they live. Further, Wright Mills asserted the interrelationship between an individual and history – that is that an individual and their actions shape society and history as well as being shaped by it, and considered that in order to understand people, it was necessary to be 'continuously and closely related to the level of historical reality and to the meanings of this reality for individual men and women' (p 134). The two-way relationship between an individual and their social environment and experiences is highlighted by Wright Mills - the notion that an individual can shape society as well as be shaped by it is an important assertion.

4.1 What is meant by 'narrative'?

The information that I present in this thesis is taken from a number of face to face meetings with an individual over the period of a year. Whilst the general theme of discussion concerned his educational experiences, and latterly his experiences of

seeking work and training the discussions often contained information about other aspects of his life and experience which, whilst not always directly related to his educational experiences, were felt to be relevant to him as the story teller. At this point, it is useful to consider what I can term the information that I have gathered or how I would choose to describe it in its entirety. A useful source for this purpose is a list of terms presented by Cole and Knowles (2001) in order to delineate different research approaches. Whilst the authors acknowledge that the purpose of this list is not to 'get caught up in the terminology' (p. 15) they also acknowledge the importance of language in describing life history research. The list presented includes, amongst others, a description of: autobiography; autoethnography; biography; case history; case study; ethnography; interpretive biography; life story; narrative accounts; life history; personal history and story. The terms which best describe the information to be presented here are 'life narrative or life story' and 'narrative'. The focus of narrative research, as presented by the authors, is upon the individual and the fact that life may be understood through a recounting and reconstruction of the life story. Using Plummer's (2001, p.19) description of stories, what I am presenting here can be described as a 'short life story' which is described as being gathered through in-depth interviews and a more truncated version of a 'long life story' which is a full length account of one person's life.

The popularity accorded to individuals and their lives can be seen by a perusal of any bookshop, with the top selling books containing a number of biographies and autobiographies within their number. Added to the publication of narratives from people who are known, for example celebrities, are memoirs and writings from people whose pursuits have been considerably more 'ordinary', for example books relating to childhood experiences and those relating to job related experiences, for example those made popular by Jennifer Worth relating to Midwifery in the 1950s. Alongside popular fiction, is the increase in interest in verbatim theatre whereby the words are used from real people for dramatic effect in order to tell their story (Guardian, 12/8/10). The function that these stories possess is of interest here, in particular the purpose of storytelling, other than to provide an insight into times past and to entertain the consumer of the book, play or television series.

The influence of societal factors upon individual narratives has been explored throughout this chapter. Ricoeur (1984) aims to understand the meaning of stories within lives recognising that lives have a particular time based relationship with narrative, viewing time as 'the structure of existence that reaches language in narrativity' (Erben, 1998). The accounts which people provide for themselves are viewed by Ricoeur as 'emplotment', whereby individuals create and manage plots for themselves from the series of events which they experience composing a sustainable narrative of themselves. Ricoeur viewed the role of the researcher as one whereby a plot is devised in order to communicate with the plot of the subject.

Ricoeur's account makes no reference to the 'truth' about stories as they are told, reflecting the fact that within narrative research there is no expectation that every story need be accepted as 'truth'. The researcher is less focussed upon whether individual narratives can be believed but more about whether a focus can be placed upon the contexts within which particular narratives can emerge, thus placing an emphasis upon the relationships between the protagonists in their stories. This has particular relevance to work undertaken over time as the temporal dimension enables these relationships to be explored over a series of discussions and relationships or themes which reoccur to be acknowledged and considered as part of the analysis of the information gathered. This is acknowledged by Heath, Brooks, Cleaver and Ireland, 2009 who report that;

> Repeat interviews allow for an engagement with change as it unfolds over time, and also allow research participants to reflect back upon what they might have said in a previous interview

4.2 Working with Participants

Todd (2007, cited in Billington and Todd 2012) proposes a set of principles and operational characteristics for narrative approaches. These relate to work with children and young people but are by no means exclusive in their scope and, in my view, could be considered equally relevant when working with participants of any age or situation and are principles which I have subscribed to whilst undertaking this piece of research:

- Evaluating in a manner attuned to the development of relationships, for example between the researcher and young people; between professionals and parents
- Supporting interventions that acknowledge the importance of children's participation and 'voice'
- Valuing the individual
- Providing a means by which the research participants can better understand their own experiences (for example in social groups)
- Providing ways of assisting participants to make sense of their experiences

In presenting a narrative in the following chapters I hope to avoid the difficulties which can be associated with the commentary which accompanies it 'saccharine in its sentimentality and overambitious in its justification' (Crapanzano, 1984 p.954). By presenting the narrative gained through meetings with a young person who is NEET I hope to present his story, as told over the year of meetings. As has been acknowledged, his story is steeped in temporal and cultural influences. It is also coloured by his emplotment and presentation of it. Cole and Knowles (2001, p.112) write that 'inherent in the interpretation and representation of lives are political, ethical and relational complexities'. It is the researchers role to attempt to make sense of these and to interpret these influences in the presentation of the narrative whilst at the same time retaining the sense of the individual. Erben (1998, p.9) summarises this role saying; 'while the researcher must contextualize lives within economic conditions they must also seek to comprehend their specifics'.

Without wanting to engage in the verification which accompanies a more scientific endeavour and as such does not sit comfortably with this approach, it will be necessary to consider wider applications of the narrative in terms of what it tell us about young people who are NEET and the possible social and political implications of this, as formulated in my research questions. Squire (2005, p.3) reports that stories can often seem to function in research as forms of politics in that they often allow voices to be broadcast or heard which can be excluded or neglected within more dominant political structures and processes. She also notes that; ''story' does often seem to operate in social research and practice as a

kind of Trojan Horse, an initial sortie carrying politics into the walled city of the personal'. This is an important observation and requires consideration with regard to what will be presented in the next chapters, how it is presented and the purpose of its presentation.

4.3 The Single Case

> Clusters of individual lives make up communities, societies and cultures. To understand some of the complexities, complications and confusions within the life of just one member of a community is to gain insights into the collective'. Cole and Knowles (2001, p.11)

My rationale for selecting to undertake consideration of a single young person who is NEET rather than to consider the experiences of a number of young people stems from my professional experience of working with young people. The single case design is reflected in my day-to-day work with children and young people. When I am commissioned to undertake a piece of work with a young person I must consider what is it I am hoping to find out through the piece of work, or more specifically what questions I am hoping to address or answer. This then guides my decisions regarding how I will undertake my work in order to address these questions, for example through observation, individual assessment or less formalised consultation with the young person and other key people. Most usually, my work involves a mixture of all of these methods. If a report of the work is undertaken, careful consideration is given to the purpose of this, and to also ensure that is an accurate reflection of the work undertaken and the views shared by the young person and others involved. Where possible, the young person's views are directly sought. Billington (2006) refers to 'five questions' which should be considered when attempting to represent children and young people in assessments:

- How do we speak of the young person (to others)?
- How do we speak of the young person?
- How do we write of the young person (to others)?
- How do we listen to the young person?
- How do we listen to ourselves?

These questions sum up the careful consideration I mention above and demonstrate that the methods chosen, in relation to my day to day work relate to what I (and others) are hoping to find out. The method chosen for this research is no different in that it was selected to be able to address the gap identified in research available relating to young people who are NEET and to address the research questions by understanding their lived experience in order to answer them. There are however differences between my day-to-day work and the work presented here. As a researcher, I am not aiming to provide recommendations or suggested outcomes for Jake as I would if I was working with him as an applied psychologist. With the research presented here, suggested recommendations are made with regard to the consideration and development of policy and the direction of future research.

Rather than providing a generalised view of being NEET, the single case approach employed in this study seeks to reflect on and interpret the events of a particular life in order to gain a better understanding of the life lived (Erben, 1998). However, insights into the specifics of being NEET will emerge and may illuminate more generally lives of other young people who are categorised as such. As Frankenburg (1963, xi) notes an important element of this type of research approach:

> Is a methodology in which the discussion of small segments of society in great detail is used to throw light on the general. It is my view that only the particularistic can illuminate the universalistic

These insights into the specifics of being NEET that emerge from Jake's narrative may thus have transferability beyond the single case. In utilising a single case, I am mindful of Erben's (1998, p.6) assertion that the sample chosen by a researcher 'must correspond to the overall aims of the study'. In this instance, the use of a single case is very appropriate to the aims and research questions that this study aims to address.

4.4 Chapter Summary

This chapter sought to provide the methodological 'backdrop' to the present study. This chapter has presented a summary of the historical underpinnings of a narrative approach, as well as providing an overview of what is meant by

'narrative'. Alongside this was consideration of how a researcher works with participants, drawn from my professional practice of working with children and young people. The chapter concluded with consideration of the single case and the rationale for this approach in the current study.

The next chapter provides a detailed overview of the methodology employed in this research including details of the pilot and main phases of the research. It also describes thematic analysis and how this will be utilised in reporting the data gathered through the meetings with Jake.

Chapter 5: Methodology

Concentrating on individual accounts should not be confused with a notion of mere story telling as entertainment. (Billington, 2006 p143)

5.1 Introduction to the Methodology

It has been argued throughout that a more fulsome understanding of an individual and their experiences may be gained by looking at information in its entirety, encompassing societal and cultural elements and influences, attempting to present an insight into both the structure and agency at work. At the heart of this however, is an acknowledgement that research seeks to do more than just to present information gathered from a participant - a point acknowledged in the quote above, it seeks to provide information upon which a level of analysis can be undertaken and also to allow consideration of what the information means to others and to the development of policy and practice.

The research presented here was undertaken in two phases, a pilot phase with two participants and a main phase with one participant. Pilot participants were young people in West Sussex who were engaged in an E2E programme and the main participant was NEET. Information was gathered from all participants in an initial meeting using a 'Life Road Drawing' approach (Sharp, 2001). This was followed in the main phase of the research by a number of meetings with the participant to explore issues and experiences shared in the initial meeting. The research journey undertaken in order to both pilot and undertake the main phase of the research will be discussed, including consideration of the methods through which data was gathered in both phases. This will be followed by consideration of thematic analysis, explaining what this approach is, and why and how it has been used here. The notion of 'critical moments' (Henderson, Holland, McGrellis, Shapre and Thomson, 2007 p.20) will also be discussed. This will be followed by a description of how the information collected will be presented in the following.

5.2 Research Journey

This section of the chapter will outline the process undertaken in piloting and undertaking the collection of information.

Prior to undertaking the pilot phase I considered the methods that I wished to use to guide my discussion with the young people taking part in the research. I was able to reflect upon my usual working practices when working with young people and felt that a visual representation of an initial discussion would enable the discussion in its entirety to be recorded and inform the direction of future meetings, enabling issues or themes to be revisited and discussed further. Similar techniques have been employed elsewhere (Shildrick and MacDonald, 2007; Russell at al., 2011a).

A way of undertaking this is described by Sharp (2001), in this instance as a way of introducing the concept of emotional literacy to professionals working in a Local Authority setting. The following guidelines are provided for its completion:

1. Start from when you were born, at the bottom of the sheet
2. Put in all the milestones and events that you feel have been important in your life
3. Include any achievements that you're pleased about, and some less happy experiences that have influenced you
4. You can use words, images, dates or symbols that help to tell the story of your journey so far to consider things they feel 'good' about in their lives and about the jobs that they do and further, to consider how they could help to nurture their own emotional literacy and that of the children and young people with whom they work.

These guidelines were not given to participants to read but were used to guide their thinking about what they wanted recorded onto their life map.

Sharp's own example of a life road drawing is shown below:

Figure 1: Life Map - 'My Journey Along Life's Highway Sharp, 2001 p. 21
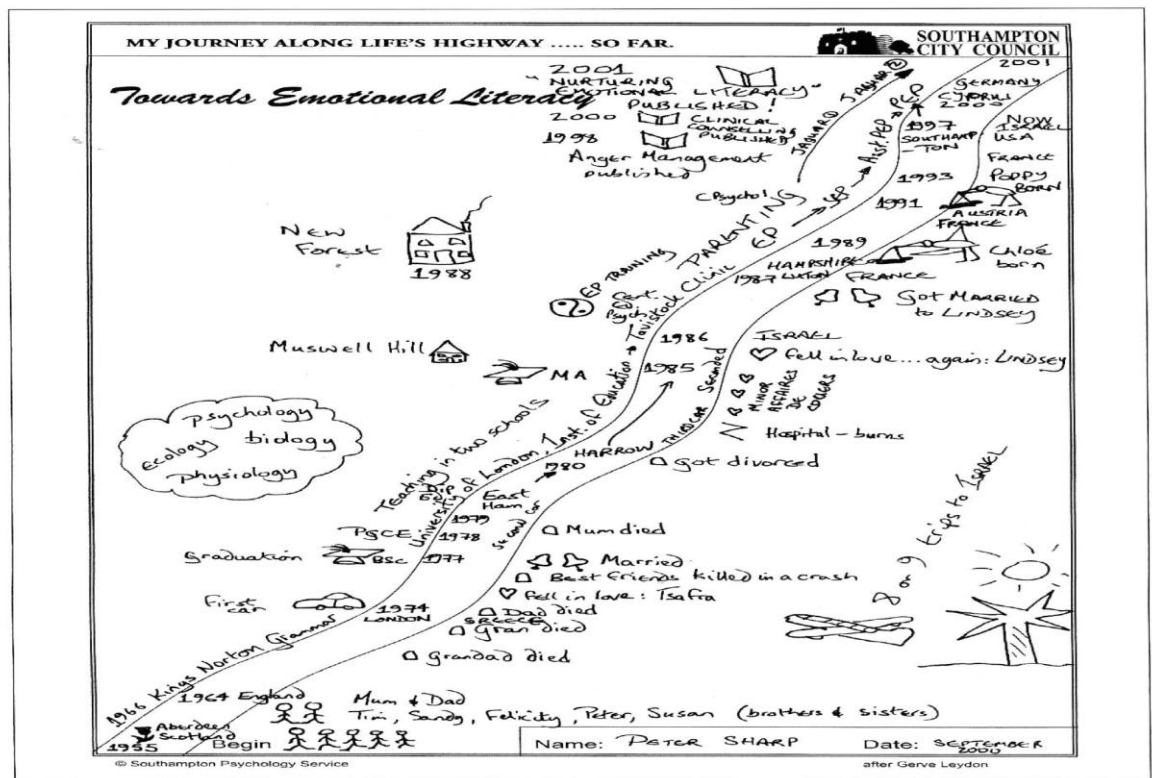
Collecting information regarding a person's history or 'journey' in this way is also used in Making Action Plans (MAPs) meetings. These are meetings which are designed to help individuals, organisations and families discuss and plan an effective move into the future. The meetings are person centred with invitations to attend being sent by the focus of the meeting, most usually a young person. The meetings have two facilitators, a 'process facilitator' who welcomes the group, explains the process of the meeting, guides the questions and keeps the sessions paced and on track. A second facilitator is the 'graphic guide'. This facilitator records, listens and creates a graphic record of the meeting (Falvey, Forest, Pearpoint and Rosenburg, 2003). As part of the meeting the family or individual's story is requested, shared and recorded graphically. The creation of a 'map' is part of the MAPs process which is essentially about placing the young person at the centre of the process of discussion, problem solving and designing a way forward for them and those around them. This is in contrast to situations where discussions are held about a young person without their active participation in this process. Todd (2003, cited in Gilling 2012 p.34) reports that 'children are often the "absent special guest" in reports and meetings that form professional practice'.

The use of visual approaches to gathering information enables information to be gathered and presented in a simple and clear way and takes account of the participants in providing this information - they are central to the process of providing this information and to its recording. The 'life road drawing' also enables significant events and experiences to be recorded in a simple, non detailed way, for example Sharp notes the death of his parents, relationship breakdowns and the birth of his children. It provides an 'overview' of a person's experiences and current situation and as such I felt it to be of use for this piece of research. I wanted to provide as comprehensive an overview of the individual's educational and life experiences as possible and felt that a visual representation or overview such as this would be a useful starting point to further discussion about these areas.

The research was undertaken in the Local Authority in which I work. As a newcomer to the authority I sought information from the Connexions service as to how best to locate and access local young people who were NEET to participate in the pilot and main phases of my research. A Connexions advisor working with young people who are NEET in West Sussex was able to support the identification of young people who may wish to take part in the research. Young people who are NEET have been described as a group for which gaining and maintaining access is 'challenging' (Simmons, Russell and Thompson 2014b , p.582) and the participants here in both the pilot and main phases, in common with Simmons, Thompson and Russell (2014a, p.74) were 'selected as much by serendipity as by theoretical design'

5.3 Ethical Considerations

Consideration was given to ethical issues relating to the research. This included consideration of gaining informed consent from participants and how to ensure confidentiality and anonymity to participants involved in both the pilot and main phases of the research I devised information for participants which is contained in appendix A.

Ethical clearance was obtained both from my educational institution and from the E2E provider prior to the pilot phase of the research. This was a relatively lengthy process and required some written communication between myself, the E2E

provider and my course director in addition to the provision of the documents contained in appendix B.

 I gave some consideration to my role as researcher with particular reference to the power relationship which may exist between a researcher and a participant. This is described by Billington (2006, p.133) as traditionally being a relationship in which the researcher or professional has 'dictated the content, scope and direction of the interaction'. Whilst I hoped that the relationship in this research would not be akin to this description I was also mindful of what Coles and Knowles (2001, p.28) call the 'implicit expression of hierarchy' that can exist even when researchers attempt to 'denounce their exclusive authority over the process'. I hoped that the roles of researcher and participant in this research would be what Coles and Knowles (2001, p.29) term a 'natural part of relationship formation' and that a 'collaborative stance' would be established. I viewed my relationship with participants in the pilot and main phases of the research as being that of an acquaintance, as presented by Plummer (2001, p209) where 'cordiality is extended without intensive intimacies'.

In addition I was mindful that the meetings with participants in either the pilot or main phases were not intended in any way to be therapeutic in nature. The outcome of the discussions was to inform the research undertaken rather than to bring about a change in the participants' situation. I was also aware however that the content and nature of the conversations may bring about some reflective thinking on the part of the participants and that this may impact upon their willingness and level of interest in wishing to continue as a participant. This process was undertaken in an attempt to negate what Plummer (2001 p. 215) describes as the goals of this type of research bordering on the 'abusive and exploitative'.

5.4 Pilot Phase

Piloting was carried out with two young people in West Sussex in 2010. Both young people at that time attended an Entry to Employment 'E2E' scheme, available at the time of piloting for young people aged between sixteen to eighteen who were not participating in any form of post-sixteen learning. The purpose of E2E was to enable young people to progress to an apprenticeship,

further learning or a job by enabling them to develop motivation and confidence. The scheme was funded by the Learning and Skills Council and the Jobcentre plus network with referrals to the scheme being made primarily by Connexions advisors but also from workers within social services and youth offending teams.

The piloting phase consisted of the following:

-A meeting with two young people currently attending E2E to share information regarding the research. Consent forms were left following this for the young people to complete if they were willing to take part

-A further meeting where discussion regarding the two young people's educational and life experiences took place and was recorded using a 'life road' drawing. The two participants opted for this meeting to take place 'jointly', so both were present to share their own life history and to hear the other participant's story.

The pilot phase enabled a large amount of information to be gathered from the two participants regarding their educational experiences. The piloting of the life road drawing enabled me as a researcher to consider the usefulness of this technique and how to effectively record the information gathered during this process. The benefit of using this technique was to enable a structured discussion of the participants' experiences, enabling reflection from their earliest memories to the current time. The process also had an 'informal' feel which perhaps enabled participants to feel a greater level of confidence in sharing their thoughts and experiences than a more formal, situation may have allowed such as a structured interview. The drawback of using the technique alone, without the presence of a second 'facilitator' or an audio recording is that it can be difficult to capture all of the information shared – the drawing enabled key points to be recorded but the 'richness' of the discussion can be lost without a recording to accompany it. This was reduced somewhat by converting the drawing into a word processed format soon after the meeting took place. Whilst putting the drawing into a word processed format enabled me to anonymise elements of the 'life road' I also felt that it detracted from the more 'free form' nature of the task and decided against converting the drawing from the main phase in this way.

In addition to considerations of the technique used to gather information, the piloting phase enabled consideration of the information gathered from the participants. Of particular interest are the aspirations of the participants. Both participants had clear ideas of the careers that they wished to pursue. What was less clear was whether these were realistic given the participants' level of skill and attainment reflecting Atkins (2013). Furthermore, I wondered whose role it may be to discuss this with the young people attending E2E, reflecting Simmons and Thompson's (p.135) observation that 'there could be difficulties in providing careers advice which reconciled personal ambition with reality'. The participants' educational histories share similarities with the experiences cited in other research for example the categories reported by Nudzor (2010).

5.5 Main Phase

Following completion of the pilot phase, consideration was given to how best to undertake the main phase of the research. The pilot phase enabled me to gather information using a graphic method and I felt that this would be useful for the main phase. The point made above, that it allows a less formal face to face opportunity to talk whilst familiarity and rapport is built up between participant and researcher was of significance here – by virtue of having NEET status it is likely that a young person has had a varied, complex and perhaps difficult educational experience over time and an initial meeting where they are asked to share information about this in what may be perceived to be an interview may be off-putting and potentially anxiety provoking.

Following the pilot phase both participants were asked, by their E2E tutor, if they wished to further participate in the main phase of the research. Neither wished to do so which meant that I needed to find a participant elsewhere within West Sussex. I contacted Connexions at this time and my contact indicated that he was currently working with a young person who was NEET whom he felt may wish to take part in the research. The covering letter and participant information sheet were shared with the young person (by the Connexions advisor) and the young person agreed to meet with me.

5.5.1 The Participant

My intention was to hold an initial meeting with my participant and use the life road drawing technique to gather information regarding their educational history and experiences. This was undertaken and the life road drawing was summarised following the meeting. Following this, the participant was invited to a series of meetings to discuss issues or themes that had been discussed in the initial meeting. Consent was obtained from Jake (a pseudonym), using a consent form at the initial meeting with him. Following the initial meeting, Jake was asked if he continued to wish to participate in the main phase of the research. At the end of each meeting following this Jake was asked if he wished to continue to a following meeting. At the final meeting, the next steps regarding the use of the information gathered were explained again to Jake. Jake had both email and mobile telephone contact details if he needed to contact me at any time between meetings. At times, throughout this process I experienced what Russell (2013, p.50) terms 'unanticipated behaviour' when previously regular and reliable contact with Jake became lost.

In total, I met with Jake on 5 occasions over a 12 month period. This longitudinal approach to my work with him enabled a temporal element to emerge in his narrative - changes in his circumstances, experiences and relationships were included within his accounts. This approach was undertaken with my research questions and aims in mind - in order to present as fulsome an account of a young person who is NEET I felt that information gathered over time would be required. The issue of 'escaping the field' or 'completing' relationships that have been ongoing over time has been acknowledged elsewhere (Calman, Brunton and Molassiotis, 2013 p.3). In order to do this, discussion took place in the penultimate meeting regarding the next 'final meeting' and what would happen following that, in terms of the process of transcribing and writing up of the research undertaken with him.

The interviews took place as follows:

Meeting 1: life road drawing February 2011. This meeting took place in a Connexions office, a location which Jake was familiar with and which he visited regularly to meet with his Connexions PA.

Meeting 2: April 2011 this meeting and the three which followed took place in a local coffee shop. They were recorded and transcribed

Meeting 3: July 2011

Meeting 4: October 2011

Meeting 5: February 2012 This meeting was agreed to be the final one. Contact details were shared to enable further communication to take place between Jake and myself.

The first meeting enabled the life road drawing to be completed and the further four meetings took place without further graphic facilitation. Jake was given a copy of his life road drawing. The format of these four meetings was a relatively unstructured discussion which enabled Jake to set the agenda of the discussion and to determine its direction and content. There were, however, areas that were outlined in his life road drawing that I wished to find out more about most notably about the teachers and other adults he had talked about positively and also about the relationship breakdown with his dad, and I asked Jake directly about these areas during meetings with him. Each of these meetings was audio recorded and then transcribed. The interviews amounted in total to approximately six hours of recorded discussion.

In summary, the information gathered from Jake consists of five meetings, one of which resulted in the completion of a life road drawing and four further, recorded and transcribed, unstructured interviews. The findings are considered in Chapter 6.

5.6 Analysis of Information Gathered

This section of the chapter discusses the method of analysis used with the transcribed interview data. The research aims include the assertion that this piece of work will present a 'comprehensive account' of a young person who is NEET. In addition, it is stated that a conceptualisation of the issues associated with being NEET will occur, in relation to the participant in this instance. Allied to this is the need to consider how information presented here may contribute to understanding other young people with NEET status. It is obvious that a great deal of information is obtained through an interview process such as that used here,

especially given the time period over which the interviews took place. What is perhaps less clear is how this vast array of information can and should be presented and considered. The need to maintain the essence of narrative in case study research is espoused by Thomas (2011, p.184) who writes that 'in a case study you must make sense of the whole by *retaining* the fibres that bind a whole story together. Those fibres concern time, place, meaning, intention and much more, all interrelating'.

Having undertaken the research, I wished to maintain the essence of the meetings which took place with Jake with respect to the breadth of information gathered. I was keen however not to lose sight of the purpose of these meetings – that in addition to getting to know more about Jake and his educational experiences and NEET status that some reflection and 'analysis' of what he shared could be considered useful to both a reader's understanding of him but also to their understanding of other young people who are NEET.

When considering a framework of analysis I have drawn upon a paper which provides an overview and guidelines associated with the use of thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The paper was selected on the basis of the clarity of the presentation of thematic analysis, in essence its user friendly approach. In addition, two recently published examples of studies using thematic analysis were considered in order to see 'real world' examples of research utilising this method. The first of these was an impact study of a home-based parenting intervention (Byrne, Holland and Jerzembek, 2010) and the second considered the experiences of women with anorexia nervosa (Ross and Green, 2011). Finally, a paper which considers longitudinal qualitative research was also consulted (Calman et al., 2013) .

5.7 What is Thematic Analysis?

Thematic analysis is reported as being a 'foundational method' for qualitative analysis consisting of skills which are useful for conducting many other forms of qualitative analysis (Braun and Clarke, p.78). Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns or 'themes' within data. In their paper, Braun and Clarke (p.80) acknowledge that there is no clear agreement of how a researcher should utilise thematic analysis and argue that clarity on the

process and practice of the method is vital in order to enable an evaluation of research and comparison and synthesis of it with other, related work.

Ross and Green (2011, p. 113) report that their research, based on interviews with two women with anorexia nervosa, was about 'letting their voice be heard' and that the use of thematic analysis enabled the narrative context to be considered in addition to the individual units of meaning drawn from the interview transcripts. This would seem to adhere to the point made by Thomas (2011) about retaining the sense of a whole story alongside analysis of its constituent detail and was appealing to me as a researcher in keeping the voice of the participant evident throughout. The idea of themes emerging from the data gathered is reported by Byrne et al. (2010, p.115) making reference to the 'inductive approach' used with the data collected, in contrast to a deductive or 'top down' approach which would be characterised by the researcher's theoretical or analytical interest in the area of study. This approach may provide a less rich description of the data and instead provide a more detailed analysis of some aspect of the data (Braun and Clarke, p.84). Comparison of a 'top down' versus 'bottom up' approach within thematic analysis illustrates the variety of ways in which this approach can be employed to examine and present data which has been gathered. This reflects the notion of thematic analysis as a tool to be used across different methods rather than as a specific method (Boyatzis, 1998 cited in Braun and Clarke p.78).

Strategies used in a longitudinal qualitative study are explored by Calman et al. (2013). Whilst the theme of the study, the experience of symptoms in cancer patients, is very different from the aims of the current study some of the considerations made by the authors do have relevance to the research presented here. The authors' consider that Longitudinal Qualitative Research (LQR) is able to capture critical moments and processes involved in change and helpful in capturing transitions in care (p.2). Thematic analysis is reported to be widely used in this type of health research but the authors note that it 'can lead to cross-sectional descriptive accounts (what is happening at this time point) rather than focusing on causes and consequences of change' (p.2). When considering the amount and breadth of data that is gathered in LQR such as the one I present here it is easy to see how the data gathered can lead to static descriptions from the

time points from which it is gathered rather than a consideration of changes between the different time points. This would appear to be a potential danger when utilising a thematic analysis framework. Calman et al.'s (2013) paper serves as a reminder as to why research undertaken over time is undertaken in this way - it is not about gathering more information or data it is about looking at the information gathered over time and the changes that take place across those points in time.

Whilst the breadth of processes which utilise thematic analysis render it flexible for researchers and encompasses research across a range of research fields, for the purpose of the current research it is useful to examine further what thematic analysis looks like and to present why and how it has been used in this instance.

In their paper, Braun and Clarke provide detail of the six phases of thematic analysis which are presented below in an amended version of the table presented in their paper (p.87). Added to this table is a third column which outlines the process I undertook in this study to identify themes from the data I had collected from interviews undertaken with Jake.

Table 2: Thematic Analysis Process Proposed by Braun and Clarke with a

Description of the Process Undertaken in this Study

Phase	Description of the process (Braun and Clarke)	Description of the process undertaken in this study
1. Familiarising yourself with the data	Transcribing data, reading and re-reading the data, noting down initial ideas	Re-visiting and re-reading of interview transcripts
2. Generating initial codes	Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code	Re-reading interview data and noting down initial codes on an interview by interview basis. Page references used for easy reference to relevant data extracts (example contained in Appendix C). Word processed table for each interview with initial codes identified (example contained in Appendix C).
3. Searching for themes	Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme	Word processed tables considered together and common codes/potential themes identified.
4. Reviewing themes	Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (level 1) and the entire data set (level 2) generating a thematic 'map' of the analysis	Data set re-read. Initial handwritten notes revisited and a simple visual map produced to consider whether the potential themes were clearly evident in the data sets (example contained in appendix C).
5. Defining and naming themes	On-going analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme	Page references used to revisit extracts/examples within the data set, looking at the aspects of data that the theme captures. Final theme names identified.
6. Producing the report	Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis	Results chapter presents the identified themes, illustrated by quotations from the interviews.

5.8 How Will Thematic Analysis be Used Here?

By approaching the data collected in this way I have aimed, in line with Braun and

Clarke (p.78), to 'provide a vocabulary and 'recipe' for people to undertake

thematic analysis in a way that is theoretically and methodologically sound'. In

doing so however, I also seek to retain the voice of the participant and at the

same time aiming to avoid the potential pitfalls of this methodology as outlined

by Calman et al. (2013). As acknowledged above, to retain voice in addition to undertaking a thorough analysis of the information gathered is not a simple process. I am not implying that I am able to simply 'give voice' to the participant by virtue of presenting his words and conversation – a position described as a 'naïve realist view' (Fine, 2002 cited in Braun and Clarke p.80). It is intended that the presentation of the information gathered enables what Thomas (2011 p.184) terms the 'fibres' of the story to remain intact as well as addressing the research aims and questions outlined earlier.

I am also mindful of what have previously been termed 'critical moments' (Henderson et al., 2007 p.20; Thomson et al. 2002). These are events within individual biographies that have consequences for the individual and are likened to Denzin's (1989) notion of epiphanies. Henderson et al. (2007) report a varied range of critical moments in their cohort of around one hundred young people which include family-related situations, moving, illness and bereavement and events associated with the education system. Leisure and consumption were also reported to be an important source of critical moments, providing opportunities to meet new groups of people or by obtaining new skills such as learning to drive or possessions such as a mobile telephone. Examples of these will be highlighted and discussed in the next chapter.

5.9 Chapter Summary

This chapter has described the processes undertaken during both the pilot and main phases of this research. Elements of the methods employed in order to gather information, for example the use of the 'life road drawing' were also discussed. Thematic Analysis was then considered, with reference made to a published example of the steps or stages in undertaking this type of qualitative analysis. This enabled the way in which the collected data was considered to be made clear and to provide in some sense a 'recipe' which has been followed on this occasion. The following chapter will present the information gathered from the participant.

Chapter 6: Results

This chapter presents the information gathered through meetings with Jake. Jake's 'life road drawing' is presented along with a thumbnail summary of the information that it contains. This is followed by a discussion of the themes that emerged from the meetings with Jake which includes consideration of these with regard to existing literature, including Rogers' theories of self and education.

6.1 Chronology of working with Jake

My relationship with Jake developed throughout the year of meeting as 'interviewer' and 'interviewee'. This was in part due to an increasing familiarity with each other and the way in which the interviews would be undertaken. The approach to each of the interviews was informal and always commenced with the question 'how are you?'. Often, no further prompts were required as Jake was happy to talk in an unrestricted way. I was mindful of what Plummer (2001) terms 'non-possessive warmth' in an interviewer and was keen to embody this in my approach. Jake had an understanding from discussion at our first meeting about the core theme of my research and often seemed to have given some thought to his educational experiences before our meetings and to have prepared some of what he wanted to share. Halfway through the year, it became very difficult to contact Jake and I was concerned that I may have lost him as a participant. At this point, I used social network websites to make contact with him to see if he wished to meet again. This was successful and enabled us to complete the full year of meetings. In our final meeting, Jake reported that:

It takes me a lot to trust someone. I was a lot more vague with you when I first met you to now. That's because it takes me a lot to see that I trust you.

Jake's view of me as someone he could trust reinforced that the method I had used to engage with him had been viewed positively by him.

6.2 Jake's Life Road

At the time of the initial meeting Jake was 17 years old. Jake left school in 2009 having achieved 2 GSCEs (grades D or below) and a NVQ level 1 in bricklaying. Jake had also undertaken a mechanics course, but was uncertain as to what type of course this was or whether it had conferred a qualification. Jake had not had a

job since leaving school and as such had been NEET for around 18 months at the time of our first meeting.

The life road drawing shown below was put together during discussion with Jake during our first meeting in February 2011. The rationale behind using this technique was discussed in the previous chapter. The drawing provides some background biographical information about Jake, key life events and his current situation. This then enables a broad overview of his life to this point to be summarised, including the key life events which may be further considered to be critical moments (Henderson et al., 2007) in Jake's life. The biographical data together with the researcher's knowledge of the socio-economic and political environment at the time important contextual information for the data analysis. Direct quotes are shown in quotation marks. Elements of the discussion which related to Jake's educational experiences were recorded on the right hand side of the 'Life road' and discussion relating to relationships and familial factors on the left.

As noted previously, this discussion was not audio recorded or transcribed.

Figure 2: Life Road Drawing

6.2.1 Summary of the life road drawing

The guidelines proposed by Sharp (2001) and outlined in the previous chapter were used to complete the drawing. These were discussed with Jake with the drawing being completed by me, using Jake's words. The drawing can be 'read' from the upper left corner which starts with Jake's birth to the bottom right corner which outlines where Jake is at the time of the first meeting. The following summarises the information gathered from this initial discussion with Jake.

Jake was born in 1993 in Surrey, the youngest of 3 children. He attended school in Surrey until he was around 7 years of age. Around this time, Jake's parents separated and he moved with his siblings and father to West Sussex, living initially with his grandparents. Jake reported that problems at school started once the family move had taken place and when he was between 7 and 12 years of age. When dropped at school in the morning, Jake would make efforts to abscond - on occasion with some success. Throughout this time, Jake reported that he had issues with attendance and exclusions, with work being sent home for him to complete. During this time, Jake had no contact with his mum. In year 6, when Jake was aged 11 he reported that his class teacher encouraged him to write poetry and also ensured that he had access to a school counsellor. The teacher also liaised with the head teacher about the difficulties that Jake was experiencing. By this time, when Jake was aged 11 the family had moved out of the grandparent's home. Jake recalled violence at home around this time and reported that he was 'shit scared of dad'. Jake began to smoke cannabis at this time which he attributed to hanging out with older teenagers. Jake's mum remarried and annual contact with her resumed.

Jake recalled that by his transition to secondary school his dad was finding it difficult to cope. Jake reported that there was often little food in the house and that his dad was often drinking to excess. Jake reported that his attendance at school throughout this time, from the age of 12 to 15 was very good; he would often be early having got himself up and to school without any support from his dad. Jake described himself at that time as having a violent temper and being a 'bit of a prick'. He had one-to-one sessions with a teacher 'Miss F' whom he described as being his 'second mum' and was able to access these in an area of the schools called 'The Bridge' which provided lesson support away from the

classroom setting. Jake did not receive any fixed term exclusions during his attendance at secondary school.

Jake completed a NVQ level 1 in bricklaying whilst at school and also a mechanics course. He also achieved 2 GCSEs at the end of year 11. Jake reported that he 'made a real mess of GSCEs' and that when he came home with his results 'dad didn't look at them, just put them on top of the fridge'. Jake's relationship with his dad at this time became very difficult and resulted in Jake leaving the family home aged 16 and spending a period of time 'sofa surfing', which he acknowledged was a 'horrible time'.

Jake's cannabis use resulted in a final warning from the Police for possession of cannabis and subsequently Jake was allocated a Youth Offending Worker, Danny. Jake's relationship with Danny was positive and led to Jake meeting regularly with Danny through choice rather than in relation to his final warning from the police. Jake obtained some work experience through Danny which involved him talking with young people about drug use.

Jake's reported that currently, aged 17 he was attempting to cut down on his cannabis use and that he no longer saw his best friend from school due to his own heavy use of cannabis.

Jake talked about his flat, which he was able to move into aged 17 following a period of being homeless. The flat was a private let which meant that Jake had to save up a deposit in order to move into it. Jake reported that he would like to have a driving license and be able to pursue either becoming a paramedic or bricklaying.

When summarising his current situation, Jake reflected that his dad was now effectively on his own, without the support of Jake and his siblings. The quote 'only God can judge me' refers to a tattoo which Jake had recently had put onto his arm. Jake reported that he chose this text as he felt that it was a comment about his past, where he had felt overly 'judged' by his dad to his current situation where he felt that he was now free from his dad's views about him and his life.

The series of meetings undertaken with Jake over the course of a year enabled his story to be further explored. Jake's relationship with his dad developed over the period of meetings to a point where Jake felt they had a relationship and that his

dad was accepting of who he was. This led to Jake reflecting upon why his dad had acted in the way that he had, feeling that it was related to the way that his dad had been parented. Jake's cannabis use also reduced over the course of meetings, acknowledged by him to be a result of an increase in his work activity. Jake started working on a voluntary basis for a local charity in September 2011, aged 18 and was continuing to work for them when we met for our final meeting in February 2012. This work was viewed positively by Jake and he was able to share examples of how accepted he was by his co workers and trusted by them too.

Jake's life road drawing indicates that he fulfilled many of the category labels associated with being NEET discussed in previous chapters. Jake is male, white, did not enjoy school and achieved low level qualifications upon leaving schools; all presented by Spielhofer et al. (2007) as being descriptions consistently applied to this group of young people. Furthermore, Jake is an offender and described himself as being a regular user of cannabis. Both of these are subgroups within the NEET category described by Nudzor (2010). The purpose of this research however is to provide a somewhat deeper and more analytical presentation of a young person who is NEET and as such required a move beyond labels, categories and descriptions.

6.3 Themes from meetings

Themes were identified from the transcriptions of meetings 2,3,4 and 5. This was achieved by utilising phases 1-5 of the processes outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), discussed in the previous chapter.

This process required a period of time spent re-reading the data collected through the interviews with Jake followed by the identification of initial codes. These were identified within separate interviews initially before being considered across the whole data set. The initial codes were examples of important ideas or subjects and were relatively easy to identify using the interview transcripts. Following this, codes were collated into potential themes. These were then checked against the interview transcripts to ensure that they captured the data collected from the interviews. These themes were evident throughout each of the interviews.

The table below shows the initial codes that were generated and the final themes:

Table 3: Initial Codes and Final Themes

Final Themes and Examples of Initial Codes
Relationships family, changes to dad's circumstances, positive changes to dad, relationship with dad, family and friends, family, selling family home, historical parenting, male role models, Miss F, Danny, dad standing up to grandad
Cannabis cannabis related experiences, reflections on cannabis use, drugs education, thoughts about drug use, cannabis, moving on
Money initial codes: being owed money, money, impact on financial situation, owed money, money - a tenner a day, signing on, bank account problems, minimum wage, money situation, housing benefit, views on benefits
Learning and work frustration around qualification, other career options, knowledge about qualifications, job seeking experience, hunting for qualifications, range of job opportunities, views from an 'old man', security certificate, SIA complications, signing on, positive experience of work, continuing to work

As would be expected, there is significant interrelatedness between the themes, for example Jake's cannabis use and its impact upon key relationships he has with others and also the impact it had upon his schooling. In addition, the relatedness between money and Jake's job-seeking status is evident in the transcripts, in particular in an ongoing story of being owed money by a training provider - an example of where seeking qualifications in order to work led to unexpected negative financial outcomes for Jake.

These themes will now be considered in turn using extracts from the discussions with Jake to illustrate them and with reference to existing literature and Rogers' theories.

6.3.1 Relationships

Use of the life road drawing enabled discussion in the first meeting with Jake about his relationships with family members and other significant adults, for example teachers at school. This then enabled me to raise questions about these during our subsequent meetings. The relationships that Jake reported with key adults in his life indicated that where elements such as realness and empathy were present Jake experienced a greater degree of acceptance, and was better able to trust those around him.

In our first meeting Jake spoke of his difficult relationship with his dad. Jake talked of 'violence at home' and also of his dad drinking to excess. Jake acknowledged that around the time that he transferred to secondary school his dad was finding it difficult to cope and that his drinking was resulting in little food being available for Jake at home. Jake reported that his dad showed little interest in his exam results and shortly after asked Jake to leave home due to his use of cannabis.

Jake's relationship with his dad could be considered to be representative of an 'unstable family structure' (SEU, 1999) and more likely to be observed in young people who had been NEET than in other groups of young people. Literature also highlights that a category of young people who are NEET are those with caring responsibilities (Yates and Payne 2006). Whilst Jake did not have caring responsibilities for others during his adolescence, his life road drawing indicates that he was required to become self sufficient in ensuring that he attended school and other aspects of his self care.

Within his family, Jake's relationship with his dad became a recurrent topic of our discussions. The relationship developed over the year moving from a situation where Jake felt overly judged by his dad to a situation where Jake considered, in our last meeting, that they had a 'relationship':

He's been alright. I have seen more of a change in him in these last few months than anything..... as I said before something has to happen to you for him to realise who you are and what you're there for.

There is clearly some overlap between Jake's own behaviour change and that of his dad in the creation or rediscovery of the relationship between them. Jake reflected that his father's attitudes were linked in turn to his own upbringing:

When dad was drinking or gambling and that he was slowly turning into his dad. If he (grandfather) saw his nipper doing something wrong he would smack him and that's how dad was trying to sort me out as well.

In our second meeting, Jake reported that his dad had stopped drinking and smoking following a period in hospital after a work-related accident and this had had an impact upon his dad:

There is more of a relationship now since he's been on his own - he's sat back and thought about it. You can tell he is seeing everything in a new light.

Both Jake's and his dad's ability to reflect upon the past is demonstrated here and is indicative of the relationship shift that occurred over the period of meeting with Jake. Jake's feeling that his dad was 'seeing everything in a new light' is shown below:

Before it was drugs and nothing to do with what he was doing but now he can see that the things I am getting angry at him for, he is getting angry at me for. So we are both doing it.

In the final meeting with Jake when asked about his relationship with his dad he gave the following example of a family visit to a pub with his dad and grandad:

You know I went for a drink with him myself, which is not something I would have done normally.... This is the first time my dad's actually stood up to his dad... he said to him 'if you say anything to him that's going to be the end of me and you because me and Jake are just getting back on a level again'.

Jake's description of his relationship with his dad and the positive direction that this took over the period of our meetings demonstrated the impact that this had on both Jake and his dad and reflects the changes that they both made during this period which facilitated this renewed positive relationship. Jake reflected that the change in his dad could be attributed to a realisation of the impact of his behaviour upon his family, perhaps reflecting a critical moment for his dad:

I think he's suddenly realised, 'shit, I'm pushing everyone away'.

Rogers (1980, p116) writes that 'as persons are more accepted and prized, they tend to develop a more caring attitude towards themselves' This is perhaps true of both Jake and his dad's view of themselves and further reflects an increased congruence between the self and experience, through positive self regard.

In addition to family relationships Jake talked about significant adults throughout his school experience. Jake's experiences reflect Bynner's (2012, p.49) assertion that young people need 'to be placed in situations of opportunity with supportive adults where education....becomes an opportunity for achievement and fulfilment'.

Jake's positive experiences included adults from all phases of his education. Jake described Miss F, a teacher at his secondary school as his 'school mum';

With Miss F, yeah she knew everything about me.

Jake was asked what he felt would have happened to him if Miss F had not been available to support him at secondary school:

I would have been out of that school. I would have just come out of education. I would have just given up, I was close to giving up anyway. Literally, she was the one that kept me in.

Rogers' (1969) view of education highlighted the importance of the personal relationship between the facilitator and the learner and further what he termed 'realness' as being a facilitator of learning. Jake's experience implied that adults who he considered to have had a positive relationship with him have shown an interest in him and talked to him 'like a human being'. They could also be considered to have demonstrated empathic understanding. Jake's assertion that Miss F 'kept me in' indicates the importance of her role in supporting him.

Jake also talked about Danny, his YOT worker whom he chose to spend time with when he was no longer required to do so. His description of Danny again indicates the importance of what Roger's termed 'realness' in relationships between facilitators and learners :

The way he works as well, I don't know it's different...when you meet some of the other Youth Offending Officers they like to think they are like the Police... but Danny approached you as a friend..and that's what made the difference. You know, you are not going to get anyone to talk to you if you're going to be bossing them about and stuff like that.

6.3.2 Cannabis

Drug use is highlighted in much of the research around young people who are NEET which seeks to group and categorise these young people, as a subgroup in its own right (Nudzor, 2010) as well as being a predictor of social exclusion (Bridging the Gap, 1999). Furthermore, drug use has been highlighted as a 'risk factor' to becoming NEET in addition to being observed within the NEET population (Tunnard et al., 2008).

Jake's life road drawing indicated that he had used cannabis from around the age of 12 when he started to spend time with older young people. Jake's cannabis use can be considered to have been instrumental in 'critical moments' in his narrative. The first of these is being asked to leave home by his dad due to his cannabis use. The second is Jake's 'final warning ' from the Police which subsequently led to his introduction and subsequent relationship with Danny, his YOT worker.

Jake's use of cannabis changed throughout the course of the year during which the meetings took place. At the beginning of the year, Jake acknowledged that he wished to cut down his use but, explained that it helped him to reduce his stress levels:

So I only smoke 1 or 2 a day now. Its only when I'm stressed out. I try to push myself to not smoke for 2 days then I lose my temper, then I smoke it then I'll be all right. I have been to the doctors so many times to ask them to help me and they are always saying 'yeah,yeah we'll get back to you - we've got a meeting once a week you can come to' but they never get back to me. So, it's no help to me at all.

Jake's attempt to seek support with his cannabis use highlights his efforts or 'agency' when confronted with difficult situations. The response he receives indicates a 'structural' barrier to his attempts to seek support. Simmons et al. (2014a p. 127) note that 'individual choices are shaped, at least to some extent, by opportunity structures'.

In Rogerian terms, Jake's use of cannabis at this time could be attributed to 'tension reduction', considered to be a concept within self actualisation and reflected in his assertion that he smoked in order to reduce his stress. The level of 'control' however that cannabis has over Jake is exemplified in the following comment, made during meeting 2:

I am in control of it but it is when you haven't got it then I will get angry. I don't know why. It's not about smoking it, it's knowing that it's in my house and that I've got it. Then it's fine.

This indicates that whilst Jake may consider his use of cannabis to have positive effects, such as reducing his stress, he is some way from Roger's conceptualisation of the actualising tendency as development away from 'control by external forces' (p.196).

By meeting 4, Jake reported that his use of cannabis has significantly decreased:

It's no problem now. I've got myself down to just smoking it at weekends now. I have been so happy with it - like last weekend I didn't have nothing to smoke.

Jake attributed his reduction in cannabis use to increased activity, such as his voluntary charity work. This may reflect a shift in his priorities from non-engagement to engagement, reflective of what Henderson et al. (2007, p.77) noted in some of the young people that they worked with and their ability to limit their use of alcohol and illegal substances to 'settings and times that would not jeopardise their main priorities'. It is also clear from his narrative that other changes took place alongside this, perhaps most notably the development of the relationship with his dad which perhaps also signifies a further change of priority.

Rogers writes of the universal need for positive regard (p.223) and also that positive regard which is selective leads to an individual being a victim of 'conditions of worth', whereby they only have worth on condition that they think or behave in a way that has been communicated as being worthy of love and respect. Jake's description of his relationship with his dad in early meetings, and in particular the fact that he felt unable to share with his dad any information that he was using cannabis indicated that this was a 'condition of worth' evident in their relationship, shown in Jake's assertion about the need to 'lie' to his dad, exemplified in the following:

He doesn't know I'm still smoking it. He thinks I completely quit it....if he knew we wouldn't be able to carry on..... we would be arguing, there would be no point.

If he mentions it then that means that I've got to lie to him. I don't like lying to him, I don't want to lie to him but if I don't lie to him we're not going to move on. We're not going to have a relationship.

Rogers viewed anti-social behaviours, which cannabis use could be considered, as being provoked by an individual's frustration of basic needs or perceived threat. Using Rogers' theory it could be hypothesised that Jake's cannabis use stemmed in part from the threat posed by his basic need for positive regard not being met- Jake acknowledged in his initial meeting that he has felt overly judged by his dad. Jake's positive view of the developing relationship with his dad suggested that this was an important change for him and therefore that there is an increasing

congruence between his 'ideal self' and the situations that he experienced leading towards self actualisation.

Jake reported that the support of his YOT worker enabled him to cut down on his cannabis use:

Most habits are in your head. That's why I did quite well when I was working with Danny. You know, he would set a goal and because I can see the end of it and I want to make him proud then I tell myself I don't need that.... I couldn't have done it without him.

Jake's assertion that he wanted to make Danny 'proud' is indicative of the positive relationship that existed between them and is suggestive of the existence of empathetic understanding, a positive affective attitude and a genuineness being present in their meetings. Rogers (1961, p.47) writes of therapeutic methods which have proved to be unsuccessful in securing behavioural change and how these were based upon impersonal interactions and that 'to withhold oneself as a person and to deal with the other person as an object does not have a high probability of being helpful'. Whilst Danny and Jake's relationship was not a therapeutic one there are commonalities between their relationship and those of therapist and client described by Rogers, for example both are concerned with bringing about behavioural change.

In our final meeting, Jake was able to reflect on his previous use of cannabis and the impact that it had upon his functioning and relationships:

It got to the stage that I was smoking so much that I needed to have a joint to actually function. I would smoke a joint as soon as I woke up. Back then, it was I needed it or I would be sat there shaking. I wouldn't be able to come here and have a conversation with you now unless I had a spliff.

Jake's description of himself was indicative of the 'distance' he placed between himself at the beginning of our year of meetings and who he perceived himself to be at the end of the discussions. This might further signal the 'failure' that he associated with himself at that time and the contrasting way he viewed himself at this point. Similar dissociations have been reported in young people who have been NEET with regard to their previous school and NEET identities (Higgins, 2013).

6.3.3.Money

NIACE, 2013; Shildrick and MacDonald, 2007 indicate that one of the barriers to successful engagement with learning relates to the costs and finances involved. Jake's particular circumstances meant that during the period of our meetings he was reliant upon state benefits to pay for his accommodation and living costs.

Many of Jake's discussions about money related to barriers involved in accessing money through the benefit system. Underpinning much of Jake's narrative in this area was his day to day management of money, including his ability to pay for housing, food and services and the inflexibility that his income allowed for this. Jake's income at this time is very much under the control of what Rogers terms 'external forces', both in a wider sense of policy relating to the benefit system but also in a narrower, more localised sense of accessing resources and the individual lived experience of this.

An example of how Jake's finances had a direct impact upon his ability to successfully seek and achieve work was given through discussion of an issue related to a course which had been set up by Connexions to enable Jake to obtain a security licence. This is known as 'SIA training', which, following completion, means that work in a security setting can be applied for, such as in a hospital or in shop security. Attendance at the course should have led to Jake being paid but this had not happened:

They started to ring me saying 'are you going to come in?' and I said well I'm not coming in until you start paying me. You lose me the £20 out of my benefit per fortnight and you're expecting me to run a flat on £20. You know, I'm not coming in I said I would rather quit and have my full benefits back. I can't live on £20 per week.

This is an example of the extreme difficulty Jake experienced in 'seeing through' training opportunities. Jake's difficulties in achieving a suggested 'outcome' related to structural difficulties rather than an unwillingness or inability to complete training. Jake was able to complete the training and to receive his SIA license but this took him nearly a year and required the involvement of Connexions to liaise with the training provider. This reflects what Ecclestone et al. (2010 p.10) term the 'rhetoric of agency' which suggests that 'people can navigate

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transitions without regard for factors that influence, structure and limit their actions and choices'. On a surface level it would appear that Jake had been offered an opportunity and not engaged with it, by virtue of not completing the course and receiving his licence. However the actuality of the situation was somewhat different. This was captured by the temporal element of this research which enabled Jake's progress with this to be revisited at each meeting.

Jake's protracted wait to complete the course affected his level of available benefit but also the jobs that he was able to apply for and, therefore, perpetuated his NEET status:

All the jobs I have seen, I have seen so many security jobs. I should have my licence [SIA] by now. It was only meant to be 10 weeks.

Jake's frustration at his difficulties in completing this course were also demonstrated in an example he gave regarding his experiences at the Job Centre, and in particular his annoyance at the perceived difference between him and the security guard working there:

Honestly, it's the sort of looks you get even when you're walking into the Job Centre, from people walking past, quite old people. They walk past and see you going into the Job Centre and they kind of look down on you. Especially the security guard in the Job Centre. All they do [security guard] is the messages..and it's just the way you can walk in there and they talk to you like you're this big.

It's just because he's got the licence. I even said that to him the other day.... I said I've got the exact same licence, you know there's no difference between you and me.

Jake's assertion that there is 'no difference' between himself and the security guard perhaps explains his level of frustration at this time between the experiences he had of the systems or structures and people with which he was involved.

At the time of meeting, Jake received Jobseekers Allowance and Housing Benefit. Housing Benefit is reduced once work is undertaken in paid employment in excess of 16 hours per week. A reduction would have a significant impact upon Jake's finances, making it difficult for him to be able to pay for food and utilities:

*Just say that I'm earning more than they think I should in 16 hours then they will
either lower my benefit or completely take it.... They pay £165 per month for my
Housing Benefit. It used to be £303 per month. They cut all of them in April. My
rent is £525 and they give me £165. My giro is only £109 every 2 weeks.*

*I won't get Council Tax until I'm 21. That's worse, if I had that I wouldn't be able to
be in this flat now. I would have to go back to a bedsit. Gas and electricity,
because they are with the same servers is £50 per month. That's quite a lot. Then
you've got £30 per month for your food.*

Jake's description of his finances indicates that he was to some extent in control
of his finances by virtue of knowing and understanding his monthly 'budget'. He
was however in deficit every month and only able to put aside a small amount for
necessities such as food.

When Jake began undertaking voluntary work with the local furniture charity he
was able to receive some money in order to supplement his benefits:

*Well, it's meant to be £6.15 a day, just lunch kind of thing. Chris knows I'm having
a bit of a hard time with my rent and bills so she's been giving me a tenner a day.
She said just don't tell the Job Centre.....Fifty quid, you know that pays the water
bill or something else.*

This indicates the difference such a relatively small amount of money was able to
make to Jake's financial situation.

Discussions with Jake highlighted a number of barriers relating to money. His
difficult experience with a training provider prevented him from applying for jobs
and his NEET status meant that he was reliant upon state benefits in order to pay
for rent, food and utilities.

6.3.4 Learning and Work

Nutzor (2010) indicates that young people who are NEET often present with low
educational attainment and can be described as having achieved low
qualifications upon leaving school as well as not enjoying school - exemplified by a
history of truancy and exclusion (Spielhofer et al., 2007). Much of Jake's reference
to his secondary school learning experiences relates to the relationships with key
adults, presented in the previous section. This, according to Rogers' view of

education, would be expected given the close interplay between the learner and the facilitator in order for learning to occur. With regard to Jake's experiences post schooling, the same importance was placed upon a facilitator's interpersonal skills in enabling effective learning to take place, for example Jake's description of his relationship with Danny his YOT worker and his interactions with workers in others settings such as the Job Centre where Jake perceived that they took less of a personal interest in him and his situation.

Rogers viewed movement towards 'the good life' as enabling a new perspective on freedom versus determinism and a greater richness of life. Towards the end of our meetings Jake's experience of working with the charity had afforded him what Rogers terms 'experiential learning'. Jake's description of his experiences indicated that the work had meaning and personal relevance. Rogers views experiential learning as influencing the whole person, including their attitudes and behaviour. An example of this is shown in the following, relating to Jake's changed views regarding the benefit system based upon his own experience:

It's made me feel that I need to get out and work. It changed my thoughts...Obviously if you are smoking weed or you are taking anything stronger then you're not going to want to work at all. Not voluntary. You'd think they were joking if they asked you to do that. The reason I would want the Job Centre to actually give that a try would be to see if you could change those people. It changed me.

My ideas of my benefits has changed a lot. Like if you're accepting Job Seekers, unless there is something wrong with you that you can't do it..... you should have to work voluntary at least every day or 3 days out of the week. So you are doing something for that money. They are not just giving you the money for free.

When Jake was asked what would happen if someone did not do the voluntary work that had been agreed he felt that their benefit monies should be stopped:

They would have access to that money because all they've got to do is pull their finger out to actually get out and do a few days voluntary...ok I would make a rule. You can sign on JSA, you can then be entitled to that for 2 months and then you start voluntary work. Unless you start voluntary work you won't be able to claim JSA or your claim will go down to the absolute minimum, say £20 per week.

This is a further example of Jake's ability to reflect upon his own experiences and consider how these have impacted upon his own actions, shown through his assertion that 'it changed me'. His viewpoint about the unemployed 'pulling their finger out' reflected his distancing of himself from his NEET status, as has been reported elsewhere (Higgins, 2013). This is perhaps further reinforced by Jake's sense of failure when he wasn't in a position to undertake voluntary work to a position where he currently was alongside the more positive way that he viewed himself and was viewed by others. Jake's views are also reflective of the notion of the 'deserving and undeserving poor' (Rowntree 1937, cited in Simmons et al. 2014a).

Learning

Discussion with Jake included consideration of both his school learning experience and his job-seeking experiences after leaving school. In particular, Jake was asked about 'The Bridge', the provision at secondary school which enabled him to have some lessons away from the mainstream classroom environment. Jake's observation that different teaching methods were used within The Bridge reflects Rogers' view that a learning environment in which empathy and 'realness' are evident enables more effective learning to take place:

It's a totally different way of teaching in there to what it used to be in the classroom. They are trying to get a different way around it than getting you to write out of a book.

Jake spoke of the relationships between teachers and learners in The Bridge as being different to the main school environment:

They talk to you like a human being - not like to you like a teacher to a pupil. They talk to you like a friend. They talk to you like they actually care; they want to know what is wrong with you. They want to know what is going on at home...they've got a totally different way of teaching I was learning more in The Bridge than I was in lessons.

This is further exemplified in the following which indicated that there was acceptance of the learners in this environment:

I have always worried about being in class and that, you know my spellings not good, my writing isn't good you know. I was always worried that you know I would see other people in the class getting A*s and that and obviously I am lower than a C and it makes you feel like shit really doesn't it? That's another reason why I liked being in The Bridge because everyone was the same kind of level as you. They knew what you were going through. It was easy to end up with a group of people going through the same shit as you instead of the people that were academic. I didn't like school but I don't think anyone does.

Jake's description reflected research which indicates the lasting, negative impact of schooling upon attitudes towards learning (Shildrick and MacDonald, 2007). Whilst negative schooling experience does not necessarily negate a successful re-engagement with learning at a later point, disengagement with school and learning can take place sometime before a young person leaves school (Higgins, 2013). The young people in Higgins' study in New Zealand often blamed themselves for negative experiences at school, identifying themselves as having been a young person who was not tuned into learning. This is true of some of the language that Jake used to describe himself when at school, for example describing his teenage self as 'a bit of a prick' and stating that he 'made a real mess of my GCSEs' in our initial meeting.

Jake was tested for dyslexia whilst at school and spoke of the impact that his difficulty with literacy had had upon him and his behaviour in class and further, how this added to his negative experience of school:

they know I was dyslexic straight away, the way they were giving me something to read...that's why I never used to read anything out in class. I think that is more to the fact of why I was a little shit to be honest with you. I didn't want to be caught out and made to read that. That's another reason why I hated teachers at school. They were always kind of putting me down kind of thing or making me feel put down. You know. That's why you would try and battle against someone.

Jake's reflections on experiencing literacy difficulties further reinforce the importance of the relationship between facilitator and learner in enabling effective learning to take place. Jake's memory of this did not reflect the learning conditions that Rogers' views as necessary - that is accepting, understanding and

supportive. Furthermore, Jake's behaviour in class may have led to him being labelled as a 'troublemaker' and his lack of academic progress led to a label of 'failure' by adults in the school setting. The 'threat' or 'fear' that Jake reported about being asked to read suggested that as Rogers theorises this can act as a disorganiser of thinking, and an inhibitor to learning.

Work

During the period of meetings, Jake was 'signing on' in order to receive Jobseekers Allowance. Jake explained that in order to receive Jobseekers Allowance he needed to apply for a minimum of 2 jobs per week and show evidence of this and he talked about the processes involved in his visits to the Job Centre:

I take my book. Because I've got to be there at 9am my appointment time is 9am....if I'm late it doesn't normally matter because they are normally late getting ready

You have to fill out 6 jobs a fortnight, 6 jobs you've applied for or sent in your CV. They just read through your book and make sure you've done 6 and then they sign it and put it back. I've not seen my advisor once. Like she'll get the book....and then once I've finished the book, she'll read the names of where you've applied for and make sure they are real companies...Then she'll just sign it at the bottom

The need to apply for six jobs a fortnight required Jake to be regularly looking for employment opportunities:

I'm always checking for work. On a Thursday I always get the papers, and then you know every other day I'm on the internet on my phone.

The amount of times people say they will ring you when the work comes up...if you're not hearing from anyone and then they think you aren't doing anything and then you think well what else am I meant to do? No-one wants to give me any work, who else am I meant to be sending them to?

This is an example of Jake's efforts or agency in making attempts to secure work and highlighted some of the difficulty he experienced in being able to do so. Importantly, it also highlighted the lack of face-to-face support that Jake received as a young person who is NEET. He reported that his 'advisor' at the Job Centre offers little in the way of job-related advice and support.

In the third of our meetings Jake discussed voluntary work that he was undertaking, organised himself, and in the meeting which followed talked extensively about it. Jake was working for a local charity which picked up unwanted furniture from the local area and then re-sold it. It appeared that this work played a crucial role in Jake's development of himself as a worker that was valued by others.

In addition to the nature of the work Jake talked about the social elements of this work, in particular the customers that he met, indicating a growth in his level of self confidence:

You do meet some lovely people....I had a little old lady the other day and we were trying to rush because we had another job. I didn't want to be rude and she was trying to tell me all the names of her kids..... We had a lady that grows strawberry plants. She gave us a box of strawberries and some biscuits. You do get some nice people.

Jake reported that he felt trusted by his employers at the charity. Jake was trusted, valued and liked at his place of work which are important factors in Rogerian theory for movement towards self actualisation and what Rogers terms 'learning in a total way'. This is shown in the following:

I see it with Chris [manager], you know you're opening the safe and there is a lot of money in there and I know ok, say I worked in a counting factory or a bank I wouldn't be able to help myself and I would get into trouble... but here I know that I would never do something like that. Because one, I wouldn't want to lose my job and two I wouldn't want to lose the friends....and I think that's why she's got the trust in me, because I've proved it to her. I'm not just there for a free ride, I'm not there for nothing. I'm there to help her.

In our final meeting Jake talked about his ongoing work for the charity following an accident, in which he broke his leg. Although unable to carry out the removal work which Jake had described previously he continued to volunteer at the charity store. His efforts in continuing to work had obviously been noted by other staff members:

All of them keep saying down there that nothing stops you from getting in. Even with two broken legs I would still get in...now I'm not smoking, well I'm doing

something with my day instead of just sitting there. They're just happy to have me in the yard I think.

The work with the charity had also enabled Jake to build up his skills in dealing with customers and to experience 'success':

I have a favourite customer at the minute. She's lovely. She comes down and she brought me a tin of Quality Street. She said 'these are just for you'.....you know, I think it's brought me out a lot, a lot more confident.

Mel [co-worker]was stood there...and she's got a mug that says 'the best man for the job is a woman' and all of them love that cup in there...and she was like 'well no, I think the best man for the job is you. You did a cracking job'. It made me feel good. I had to go up 2 flights of metal stairs, fire exit stairs... It was bloody heavy. I got it upstairs on my own for her and put it all back together for her. That makes me happy.

Jake's job with the furniture company represented a critical moment in his life - his narrative provided evidence of how it enabled him to experience both employment and social success. Jake talked of the trust that his manager had in him and also referred to his co-workers as friends. This suggested that Jake was accepted by them as a person of worth, and this was reinforced by the stories that he told about his work in this environment and his assertion that he was more confident and that his work experiences have made him happy. These indicate that Jake was respected by both his co-workers but also by service users or customers of the charity. A consequence of this, in Rogerian terms is a movement towards self actualisation.

6.4 Chapter Summary

This chapter has presented Jake's narrative, gathered over a year of meetings. Thematic analysis enabled consideration of his narrative in a structured way, utilising key themes identified through transcripts of the meetings.

Jake's life road drawing indicated some of the life events he has experienced over time. This includes those that could be viewed as being 'critical moments'. Jake's narrative indicates the changes he experienced over the course of the year. His life road drawing highlighted the difficult relationship he had with his father which

improved significantly throughout the period of meetings. This was a reflection of changes that both Jake and his dad were making in their lives. Rogers writes that where individuals experience a relationship focused upon growth:

He becomes more like the person he wishes to be. He values himself more highly. He is more self-confident and self-directing. He has a better understanding of himself, becomes more open to his experiences, denies or represses less of his experience. He becomes more accepting in his attitudes toward others, seeing others as more similar to himself (1961, p.36)

This is clearly reflected in how Jake described his experiences of voluntary work and also how he described his renewed relationship with his dad.

Jake's 'growth' reflected both his own personal agency as he navigated his way through his life during this year but also the experiences that came from outside of himself - his interactions with others through his job seeking including the Job Centre, Connexions and training providers as well as structures such as the benefit system. His narrative also indicated the bounded nature of his agency in terms of the limitations imposed upon him by some of these structures.

Jake spoke highly of a number of adults or 'significant others' that he has met throughout his educational experience and articulated the qualities that resulted in his positive view of them - realness, trust and empathy, all of which are highlighted by Rogers as attitudes which promote what he terms 'whole person learning' (1980, p261). Latterly, Jake experienced at his place of work what Rogers terms 'non possessive caring' that is a belief that a person is fundamentally trustworthy. Jake's views of trust are shown in conclusion of the chapter below:

I think that once you find trust in someone you will always find trust in other people.....You know, I didn't talk to no one until I was put in college and until I was put with the counsellor. You know, it took me months to chat to him, I was really vague with him...until my teacher went and asked him what was going on with me. He said 'I can't tell you nothing' it's all confidential. When I saw that I thought 'well I can trust you...that's when I finally started talking. Then when I found trust in him it was easier to trust you, trust everyone else.

Chapter 7 Discussion and Conclusions

Narrative is the fundamental scheme for linking individual human actions and events into interrelated aspects of an understandable composite. (Polkinghorne, 1998 p.13).

7.1 Introduction

In this chapter I return to the aims of my research and the research questions posed in chapter one and discuss what contribution this study makes to existing knowledge including policy and practice about young people who are NEET.

Throughout, I am mindful of Thomas' (2011, p.3) assertion that a case study 'concentrates on one thing, looking at it in detail, not seeking to generalise from it' but I am keen however to reinforce what Simmons and Thompson (2011b, p.167) term the 'important role for research in challenging assumptions about young people' and this requires some extrapolation, where possible, beyond the individual.

The research aims were as follows:

1. To provide an understanding of the lived experience of a person who is NEET, from the perspective of the young person himself, and of the social, economic and political factors that shape this

2. To conceptualize the issues associated with being NEET, for the young person in question, utilising the theory of Carl Rogers and consider how this may enhance our understanding of young people who are NEET

3. To consider if and how this narrative account can be useful when considering other young people who are NEET

The research questions were:

What is the lived experience of an individual who is NEET?

Can understanding the experience of an individual who is NEET usefully add to the knowledge base regarding this group of young people?

Can understanding the experience of an individual who is NEET enable consideration of the policy and practice around this group of young people?

In order to address the research questions a critical analysis of Rogerian theories of the development of self and of education with respect to the findings is provided, and where appropriate the discussion goes beyond the single case. A consideration of current educational policy and its relevance to Jake and other young people who are NEET is also provided. This is followed with consideration of the limitations of the present study and possible directions for research of this type. This will be followed by a chapter summary and conclusion to the study.

7.2 Using Rogerian Theory to Consider 'Self'

Carl Rogers' theory of the development of self and the rationale for using it in the present study was provided in chapter three. The 'essence of individuality' involved in the study of the development of self was acknowledged as was the notion that an understanding of a person's behaviour requires a knowledge of a person's subjective awareness of themselves and the world in which they exist. To make sense of what the experience of being a young person who is NEET is requires an understanding of how this person views themselves.

Much of Rogers' theory was derived from therapeutic relationships between himself and a 'client'. Whilst the relationship that I had with Jake was not of a therapeutic nature it did enable consideration, through his narrative, of changes which he acknowledged had occurred in his day-to-day life and further to make observations regarding these with reference to Rogers' theory.

Rogers writes of the 'actualising tendency' as reflecting 'development towards autonomy and away from heteronomy or control by external forces' (1959, p.196). Rogers asserts that this further enables an individual to be able to cope with life more constructively, more intelligently and in an increasingly socialised and more satisfying way (1961). Jake's narrative provided detail of his increased 'satisfaction' in areas of his life over the period of meeting. These areas include changes in his relationships with others for example Jake's assertion that he had 'more of a relationship' with his dad , his decrease in his use of cannabis resulting in Jake commenting that 'it's no problem now', his positive experience of work, and his view that his voluntary work experience 'has brought me out a lot, a lot more confident'.

These developments seen in Jake's narrative can be considered with respect to Rogers' description of 'the person who emerges' (1961, p.115) as a result of self actualisation taking place. This includes an increased openness to experience, enabling an individual to become better able to deal with new people, new situations and new problems and to be able to tolerate ambiguity. Rogers (1961, p.189) also viewed what he termed 'trust in one's organism' as being evident through self actualisation. This is characterised by an increasing discovery of the self as trustworthy and an immediate awareness of unsatisfying consequences and a quicker correction of choices which are made in error. Thirdly, Rogers viewed self-actualisation as enabling the development of an 'Internal Locus of Evaluation', characterised by an increased acceptance of a locus of evaluation being within. This leads an individual seeking less approval or disproval from others.

The focus upon the individual and their increased ability to understand and address decisions and choices from within does not negate the impact and importance of those around them and their actions in supporting the developments outlined above. In Jake's case, he acknowledged the difficulties in his relationship with his dad which presented initially as a relationship which was based upon what Rogers terms 'conditions of worth', and reflected in Jake's assertion in our initial meeting that 'only God can judge me'. This impacts upon the positive regard that is experienced by an individual which then further affects development of self regard, whereby 'we have worth in our own eyes only on condition that we think, feel and behave in ways that others have told us are worthy of love and respect' (Thorne, p.31). Jake also talked of the way he was viewed by his co-workers in his place of work, placing an emphasis upon the way that he was trusted by them.

The findings reported here indicate that a young person's sense of self is able to alter and change in ways which are positive to themselves as an individual, enabling them to develop and grow as a person. This happens through an individual's interactions with others which shape the development of their self-concept to enable them to move towards self-actualisation. Of equal importance however is the acknowledgement that the opposite effect can also occur whereby conditions of worth imposed upon a relationship can negatively impact upon an

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individual's self-regard and subsequently upon their self-concept. Effectively stunting an individual's ability to develop and subsequently placing limitations upon their ability to be what Rogers terms a 'fully functioning person'. This limiting factor was evident in Jake's early description of his relationship with his dad and his view that his actions and behaviours were overly judged by his dad.

7.3 Using Rogerian theory to consider learning and education

Rogers (1961), drew parallels between the conditions required for learning to take place in a therapeutic relationship and those necessary for learning to take place in a context such as a school including the need for unconditional positive regard to be demonstrated and empathetic understanding to be evident between teachers and learners. Jake's narrative provided examples of both positive regard and empathy demonstrated by staff during his school experience. Jake talked of a 'different way of teaching' within the provision he attended within his secondary school and also that this facilitated learning to a greater extent compared to lessons in the main school, supporting Rogers' theory. Jake's narrative contained examples of the way in which some teachers talked to him, demonstrating both an understanding of him and a genuine interest in him; 'they talk to you like a human being...they talk to you like they actually care'. This reflects what Rogers' (1969, p161) terms 'perception of the facilitative conditions' and relates to students feeling or recognising the characteristics described above. These positive experiences of adults in and outside of school have relevance to other young people who are NEET; teachers and other adults who demonstrate an empathetic approach and are able to promote what Rogers' calls 'realness', respecting individuals as a person of worth may be familiar to many other young people, including those who are NEET. This is supported by research undertaken by Halsall et al. (2005) which reported that teachers considered by the participants to be 'good' were described as building positive relationships with young people and demonstrating that they respect, relate to and care for pupils. The study further reported that teacher-pupil relationships were identified by participants as a crucial factor affecting their engagement and achievement at school and that where they were poor, pupils disengaged or absented themselves from learning.

The importance of staff in supporting young people during their schooling was demonstrated by Jake's assertion that Miss F 'was the one who kept me in'. A

similar comment is reported by Halsall et al. (2005) with a participant describing a teacher as 'she is like half my mum in this school'. Whilst the positive experiences of learning shared by Jake are noteworthy and reinforce Rogers' ideas of what constitutes 'conditions for learning' to occur his narrative showed that this was not his predominant experience of school and education and as such may not be the experience of other young people who are NEET. This is supported by the Haywood et al.'s (2008 p.33) study which reports that amongst participants there was a pronounced feeling of alienation from school and 'unhappy memories of schooling' and by Shildrick and MacDonald (2007) who report that disaffection with school captured the experience of many of their participants. Coffield, Edward, Finlay, Hodgson, Spours and Steer (2008, p.53) undertook interviews with students in further education colleges engaged in level 1 and 2 courses and report that many of these learners recounted negative experiences of learning at school with their time at school frequently described as one where they were 'treated like babies' or 'like little kids'.

 Jake reported that his experiences away from the supportive environment of 'The Bridge' were very different, both in terms of the lesson content described as being 'getting you to write out of a book' in class as well as level of support available. Jake described the peer group within The Bridge as being 'the same level as you' and made a distinction between himself and peers who he described as 'academic'. Feelings of frustration and embarrassment were also reported by participants with regard to their learning skills (Halsall et al. 2005). Many participants reported difficulties and a dislike of reading and writing, in turn leading to feelings of low confidence and self esteem.

The facilitation of personal growth through the conditions outlined above have continued relevance and importance within the workplace, indicative of learning and development continuing beyond school attendance. The narrative gathered from Jake indicated the importance of his relationships with his co-workers and his exposure to experiential learning in his development of self. It is tempting to generalise too widely about Jake's success in a voluntary work placement and consider this as an experience that could be useful or necessary for other young people who are NEET. Whilst there is no evidence to suggest that in this instance voluntary work was an 'exploitative' experience (Simmons et al. 2014a, p.221) it

can perhaps be viewed as conferring 'short term satisfaction' (p.219). Jake's involvement with this particular voluntary work can be described in the same manner as my involvement with him - serendipitous and as such, not the result of a planned or co-ordinated work placement. His experience at this placement was clearly valued by him, as reflected in his narrative. Jake's co-workers demonstrated an acceptance of him which impacted upon the positive experience he had undertaking this work, exemplified in his description of a job he had completed; 'it made me feel good'. Jake's narrative about his work indicated two further conditions described by Patterson (1977, p.306) involving the learner in a successful learning experience; awareness of a problem and motivation. The former relates to the need for a learning situation (in this case within a work experience context) to be perceived as a problem to be solved which is relevant and meaningful. This was shown through Jake's discussion of the work he undertook and his assertion that 'I'm not just there for a free ride, I'm not there for nothing. I'm there to help her'. Secondly, motivation is described by Rogers as being the tendency to fulfilment or towards self-actualisation and is demonstrated by Jake's continued efforts to engage and participate in work even when physically unable to complete his usual tasks and his assertion that 'even with two broken legs I would still get in'.

The importance of others in supporting Jake's success within his work has been described above. The notion of role models was outlined earlier as being a protective factor (Bentley and Gurumurthy, 1999). Phillips (2010, p.495) writes that the elements identified by young people as being important in relationships with a 'significant person' included a guarantee of confidentiality and a sense of control in the relationship based on reciprocity and empathy. This would seem to indicate that the experience of work can positively impact upon an individual's sense of self, if the conditions listed above are in existence. Colley (2006) describes the effectiveness of this type of relationship as being underpinned by an essence of trust and care. Yates and Payne (2006) write that the provision of support and intervention to young people can have a major impact on their outlook. Jake's description of the care and trust shown to him by the staff at the voluntary work placement is echoed in Simmons et al. (2014b, p.588) where a young person, Cayden is recognised by his manager as being vulnerable and describes 'taking him under her wing'.

It is clear from the narrative presented here that experience and personal growth was evident over the period of time I spent with Jake. This took place however against a backdrop of being subsumed within the NEET category in which Jake remained throughout the research period. Jake's experiences reinforce that success can be conceptualised in a variety of ways, an observation made by Phillips (2010 p.502) that her ethnographic work undertaken with young people 'draws attention to the relevance of extending success criteria beyond the narrow confines of participation in education, employment or training'. This is reinforced by Foster and Spencer (2011 p.138) who report that many of the young people they spoke to might have been classified as 'at risk' in other studies and that 'they would have appeared with their stories parsed into bits, sorted into risk factors or resistant attributes'. By categorising young people who are NEET in this way, I would assert that important successes cannot be captured and are therefore subsequently lost.

To consider the implications of Jake's narrative to policy and practice with young people who are NEET is it useful to first consider the current direction of educational policy in the UK which is discussed below.

7.4 What is education for, and how should this be reflected in policy?

As part of the consideration of how this research can contribute to policy and practice for young people who are NEET it is worthwhile examining what the purpose of education is deemed to be and what the policy direction is within the UK at the present time. This requires revisiting some of the backdrop to the current education system which was outlined in Chapter Two.

As noted in Chapter Two, the educational and employment choices and prospects for young people have changed significantly in the last forty years. In the 1970s the majority of young people left school at 16 and secured full time employment with 'relative ease' (Fergusson et al., 2000 p.283). The reduced labour market opportunities since that time mean that the range of post school options for young people changed, leading to what Bynner (2012, p.41) terms 'the disparate array of traditional vocational qualifications'. This also reflects successive Government policy, predicated on the assumption that new skills are required from the workforce in order to contribute to the newly developed 'knowledge

economy'. This now includes the increased age of participation in education until the age of 18, signifying a delay in the start or nature of the transition from school to work and an increased range of qualifications and training opportunities made available.

Interestingly, the rhetoric of the 'relative ease' described above does not necessarily summarise the school to work transitions of school leavers in earlier decades. Whilst employment was undoubtedly easier to attain the type of job secured often differed from the aspirations of the young person; 'there was, overall, a reduction in the average level of skill, training, and education required in the jobs actually obtained compared with those originally preferred' (Maizels, 1970 p.307). King (2009, p. 203) notes that the representation of the 'golden age' of the 1950s and 1960s of youth employment was one that 'occluded individuals' own experiences' further indicating that transitions were not universally straight forward for all school leavers at that time. An emphasis upon increasing the literacy and numeracy skills of the school aged population has recently been given further emphasis with the Minister for Education announcing a 'war on illiteracy and innumeracy' (Adams, The Observer, 1/2/15). The 'war' appears to have been declared upon head teachers who will be sacked if they 'fail to ensure that standards are being met'.

The metaphor of a 'battle' being waged between the Government and schools regarding failure of schools to enable learners to be literate and numerate is rather curious given the number of young people who attain the benchmark of 5 GCSE examinations graded between A*-C (63.8% in 2014). What is perhaps of greater concern, and interest here is what is happening or targeted to those students who do not attain this benchmark. Whilst the number of young people 'engaging' in education has continued to rise, the number of young people who are not engaged appears to have remained relatively static. The 'blame' for non attainment at the current time seems to be directed towards individual head teachers rather than at individual or groups of learners but there is a sense of failure being directed at both; teachers who fail to impart knowledge leading to learners who fail to learn effectively, what Simmons (2009, p.139) describes as 'the ineffectiveness of mainstream education to provide them [learners] with the necessary skills and abilities to become "employable" . This reflects what Archer

(2008) views as policy discourse overwhelmingly concerned with the notion of underachievement rather than conditions for success and which fails to consider achievement in a holistic way. This is in contrast to Rogers' theories which are positioned to clearly define what 'works' in the development of self and learning. Consideration of attainment or 'success' measured by examination outcome misses the important elements reported by Jake and other young people regarding their educational experience and in particular elements that worked well and that they viewed positively and the success that they experience. A continued focus upon attainment measured by examination is on this basis, a somewhat shaky foundation upon which to build education policy. This is supported by Lawy (2010, p.430) who writes that the policy narrative of young people as needing 'more support and more schooling' is not borne out by evidence and also by Haywood et al. (2008, p.34) who report that educational policy predicated on an assumption that the aspirations of young people need raising is incorrect and that their aspirations are no different than from those of other young people; 'listen carefully to them and you will find these young people remarkably normal'.

The idea of policy being grounded in an understanding of what 'works' or is 'successful' for learning is encapsulated in Rogers' theory of education and his notion of 'conditions for growth'. The question Rogers' poses at the outset of his theory has particular resonance (1969, p.vii):

Can education free itself from the past and past goals and prepare individuals and groups to live in a world of accelerating change, if it is possible for human beings to do so?

The relevance of learning and its impact upon a learner's attitudes and behaviour are important concepts that should not be lost in the formulation of local and national policy. Jake's assertion that his educational successes occurred against a backdrop of care, acceptance and empathy exemplify the need for a more personalised approach to learning. The notion of understanding the individual should perhaps also include consideration of a broad range of experiences and 'voices'. This is reinforced by Shildrick and MacDonald (2007) in relation to studies of school to work transition. The authors write that research less commonly involves the voices of less vulnerable, more advantaged young people. Inclusion

of this group would enable comparison to take place between narratives of young people who have presented with various educational 'outcomes' and further consideration of how and when learning is deemed to be successful. Archer (2008, p.92) reports that work which focuses upon notions of success does not simply seek to identify factors that contribute to educational success but also to problematise the nature of success, drawing attention to the 'continued hardships, tensions and inequalities experienced by 'successful' pupils'. As was acknowledged earlier, young people who have realised 'success' in terms of educational attainments form part of the NEET population and as such, their experiences are also worthy of research interest.

Of interest too is the time point at which the Government aims to penalise head teachers for their perceived lack of success. Jake's narrative highlights that for him, disengagement with school was evident some time before his transition into secondary school, let alone at the end of his compulsory school experience when he was undertaking GCSE examinations. Longitudinal research indicates the 'enduring legacy of pre-school' (Sylva et al., 2014 p.18) with attendance at pre-school being a significant predictor of higher GCSE results compared to pre-school non-attenders. This can be used as a basis for predicting future lifetime earnings with attendance at pre-school associated with an estimated benefit of £26000 for an individual. Whilst this reinforces the notion that early engagement can lead to increased learning success, albeit with 'success' measured by GCSE examination outcomes, the recommendations made to ameliorate the difficulties experienced by the young people who were NEET in the study remain fixated upon post 16 options (p. 165) rather than any consideration being given to the young people's earlier educational experiences or outcomes. This seems to be a missed opportunity to consider how learning success can be engendered through policy and practice from the beginning or start of a child's learning journey to ensure that 'success' is achieved.

Thus far, the purpose of education can be summarised as enabling young people to have gathered the necessary skills and aptitudes to progress into adulthood and to make the transition from school to further study or work. This movement into adulthood has also traditionally been associated with a movement from dependency to independence. It is difficult to assert that Jake moved from 'a state

of dependency to independence' described by Fergusson et al. (2000, p.286) as a dimension of traditional transitions discourse. This perhaps reflects the authors' assertion that there are an increasing number of young people who neither seem to be 'in' or 'out' of NEET status (p. 289). Jake's narrative indicated that this is certainly true of his experiences. Over the year spent I working with him he engaged in some training opportunities, including completing his SIA training and secured voluntary work as well as having periods being more traditionally NEET and not being engaged in any work or training. This is a further example of the churn associated with this group of young people but signifies that this exists *within* the 'category' of being a young person who is NEET as well as being observed in the movement into and out of being NEET. This further supports the limitations of categorisation of young people who are NEET - it is impossible to ascertain at which point the categorisation has 'captured' in any meaningful way the position of the individuals within the group. Jake's experiences and the churn observed in his situation supports Fergusson's assertion that non-traditional post-16 learners experience 'a melange of movement in and out of training courses, part time, low paid work and employment' (2000, p.286). Jake's experience is also reflected in Quinn et al. (2008, p.194) who write that 'conceiving of transition as a fixed point in a linear life is wrong. We are all permanently lost in transition and flux'.

To develop effective policy and practice around young people who are NEET requires consideration of the purpose of education and allied to this the purpose of supporting and encouraging young people to engage in a meaningful way with education, employment or training. This further requires an acknowledgement by policy makers of the experiences that learners have already had in addition to those proposed for the future. This is summed up by Coffield, Edward, Finlay, Hodgson, Spours, Steer and Gregson (2007, p. 8):

> Policy makers are not writing upon a blank slate but on a page already taken up with 'eulogies of practice': past and present initiatives and specific local factors

This may relate to the experiences of individuals, exemplified through narratives such as that presented here as well as consideration of the wider societal factors at play. This would include the relationship between the education level of young

people leaving education and economic renewal, a correlation which Lawy (2010, p.430) describes as a 'largely unchallenged assumption'. Some of the structures and barriers, faced by Jake and other young people who are NEET will now be considered.

7.5 Structures and Barriers

Examples of difficulties faced by Jake and other young people who are NEET in relation to educational and work experience have been discussed above. The dichotomy of 'agency' versus 'structure' in attempting to make sense of these experiences has been termed 'unproductive' (Coffey and Farrugia 2014, p463) with these authors reporting that agency has been 'unjustifiably celebrated' by some authors and by virtue of this, important structural issues have been ignored (p.461; MacDonald and Marsh, 2005 p.382). In Jake's case his agency in securing work was limited by factors including the working of the benefits system. This will be discussed below and is an example of how his agency can be considered as 'bounded'. The notion of 'bounded agency' (Evans, 2002, 2007) is described when boundaries or barriers exist which circumscribe or prevent the expression of agency (Evans 2002, p.262). In this sense, agency is viewed as something that young people possess but which is bounded by society and places restrictions on young people's identities and biographies. Career outcomes for young people can therefore be bounded as they have been shown to be dependent not only on the behaviour of young people but also on the 'institutional and labour market settings and social support available' (Evans, 2007, p. 87).

By virtue of being a young person who is NEET and in receipt of state benefits there will be experiences shared by many of this group which are similar to those shared by Jake. The regular visits to the Jobcentre and the process of signing on are one example of this shared experience but also an example of the institutional settings outlined by Evans as being an important factor in determining career outcomes for young people. Jake's description of this process indicates some of the tensions and difficulties he experienced with this - in particular the apparent lack of any advice or support offered as part of this process. This reinforces Aaltonen's (2013) assertion that young people are relatively well aware of the institutional constraints on their agency. Allied to Jake's difficulty with the process of signing on was the process of continuing to seek and apply for work

opportunities over time, in Jake's case with little feedback from employers. Similarly, Jake's financial situation and the limitations imposed upon him, it can be surmised, is shared by many young people who are NEET. Jake's narrative about these experiences highlight not only his agentic endeavours to undertake all of the expectations placed upon him by the Job Centre system but also the structures in place which limit, or perhaps inhibit this. MacDonald et al. (2005, p.882) note the 'wholly ineffective' methods encouraged by job centres in searching for jobs. This is echoed by Elliot (2010, p.7) who reports that out of the 35 young people interviewed, only three said that they had been supported by Job Centre Plus in finding a job, with one participant commenting 'they don't do much, just check you've been looking for work', echoing Jake's comment that 'they just read through your book...and then sign it'. The notion of systems such as this as being a 'barrier' is further reinforced by Simmons et al. (2014a) commenting that in some instances the logistics of the benefits system can act as a barrier to moving into employment or work.

Whilst I have posited that the structure around Job Centre processes can serve to inhibit or negatively impact upon young people who are NEET and their ability to exhibit positive or successful job seeking behaviour, it may well be the case that this is not the viewpoint of young people themselves. This may be true even when they have some insight, as outlined by Aaltonen (2013) into the limitations placed upon them by such as system. This was reinforced by Jake's experience of the Job Centre and latterly his views regarding benefit payments to those who are not in work. Foster and Spencer (2011, p. 139) report that participants in their study:

> Largely took on the sole responsibility for their self defined successes and failures. That is, their involvement in identifying the systemic challenges they faced did not lead to a critique of socio economic systems and norms operating at levels 'higher' than their own lives but rather to the powerful and pervasive neoliberal discourse of individual responsibility.

This indicates that the view of failure can be positioned within the self, rather than with the system or structure that is experienced. This is further supported by MacDonald, Shildrick, Webster and Simpson (2005, p.883) who report young people's experience of searching for jobs as becoming 'a demotivating series of personal knockbacks'. In Rogerian terms, these experiences will clearly have an

impact upon an individual's movement towards self-actualisation. The placement of failure or success within the individual does little to challenge the structure as it currently operates. If we celebrate examples of young people who have successfully navigated their way through the Job Centre requirements and constraints in order to successfully find work, by virtue of their agency or determination, those who do not could equally be viewed as lacking these attributes; as Foster and Spencer (2011, p.128) note 'How can we attribute individual successes to individual determination without also blaming individuals for individual failures?'.

The Rogerian notion of 'conditions of worth' was discussed earlier with regard to Jake's relationship with his dad and others. This can equally be applied however to settings and procedures such as those relating to the Job Centre. The outcomes of the Job Centre experience of signing on can serve as structural conditions of worth in that young people are only deemed to be valuable or worthy on condition of their successful navigation of the processes and systems associated with job seeking. If success is not experienced then this can further lead to feelings of failure as a young person continues to experience unemployment and a continuing dependency upon state benefits. This has relevance to the development of future policy and practice. A system which is predicated on supporting young people to navigate their way through their experience of unemployment, through the provision of active and positive support may benefit young people to a greater degree than their current experience indicates.

 7.6 Limitations of the Present Study

The limitations of the present study will now be considered. The limitations are related to the scope of the study undertaken, both in the sense of the time frame in which it was undertaken but also with consideration of the resources available in order to research and present my findings.

My rationale for undertaking my study was presented in chapter four and made reference to the historical underpinnings associated with this type of research as well as the commonality between the work I undertake in my professional role as an Educational Psychologist and the presentation of a single life here. Throughout,

I was keen to present Jake using his own words but also to ensure that his narrative was framed within an appropriate theoretical model.

In the present study, information was gathered solely through the use of a life road drawing and discussions with Jake. What Plummer terms 'accessories to a life story' (2001) were not utilised as part of the gathering of information from Jake. These might include diaries, letters, photographs and could also include more contemporary forms of communication including the use of social media sites such as Twitter and Facebook. This approach is outlined by Simmons and Thompson (2011b, p.11) with reference to their study of young people and also by Simmons et al. (2014a, p.66). Whilst the present study did not set out to utilise an ethnographic approach, there are undoubtedly aspects of this which may have been of value here. In particular, the use of multiple sites discussed by Russell (2013) to conduct research and the important contextual information that this can add to research with young people is an element which may have added an additional dimension to the present study, for example to gather direct observations of some of the situations which make up the day-to-day experience of Jake such as 'signing on' at the Job Centre.

The use of additional person-centred approaches, in common with the approach of using the life road drawing would have added some further detail to the information gathered from Jake. I have become more familiar with this type of approach through my day-to-day work and, if undertaking a similar piece of work in the future, would utilise these tools and techniques to a greater extent.

I had hoped to be able to maintain contact with Jake in order to share with him my progress with this piece of work and to remain updated regarding his progress. Unfortunately, this has not proved to be possible.

7.7 Addressing the Research Questions

The research questions will now be addressed in turn.

1. What is the lived experience of being NEET?

The narrative gathered over a year of meetings with Jake was categorised according to its dominant themes and presented in some detail in chapter six with reference to Rogerian theory and existing literature in order to present Jake's

lived experience. The findings indicated that change was evident over the period of the year in terms of Jake's relationships with others, his own behaviours with reference to his use of cannabis and his work experiences. This reflected Jake's personal growth and development over this period. Jake remained NEET throughout this period and, as such, his successes were not formally acknowledged because of his NEET categorisation or status.

Jake's reflections upon both his school and work experience indicate that the 'conditions for learning' theorised by Rogers were evidenced during particular points during Jake's school and work experience. In particular, Jake spoke of the empathy and understanding which he experienced from some key adults including school staff but also through support outside school including from his YOT worker and the manager at his place of voluntary work.

Parallels drawn between Jake's narrative and that of other young people in similar circumstances have been explored. The purpose of presenting a single life however was to enable transferability where it is appropriate rather than to generalise or to provide a 'shorthand' description of young people who are NEET.

The transferability of Jake's narrative will now be considered with regard to its place within the knowledge base around this group of young people .

2. Can understanding the experience of an individual who is NEET usefully add to the knowledge base regarding this group of young people?

It is my assertion that the experience of an individual who is NEET is able to usefully add to the existing knowledge base regarding this group of young people. I am mindful of the image presented by Becker (1966) in chapter four of narrative work as a mosaic which is added to by each individual piece of work which together form a larger picture of the area under study. I view this current study as a contribution of this type - it does not intend to create the total experience of being a young person who is NEET, nor to present a 'grand narrative' which purports to present an understanding of all young people who are NEET. Instead, it aims to present the experience of an individual gathered over time.

The methodology employed in the study was selected because of its scope to enable the presentation and analysis of information from one participant and therefore to present a deeper dive into their experiences than other methods

would have allowed. This method also enabled challenges to be made to the categorisation associated with young people who are NEET, explored in chapter three, which were considered to be too broad to be able to explain satisfactorily the experience of being a young person who is NEET and on occasion were not able to capture some members of the category at all. This was borne out through the findings presented in this study. On a surface level, Jake demonstrated many of the characteristics associated with being NEET but this belied the movement towards self actualisation which was observed over the year of meeting with him and the subsequent development of his opinion of himself and the world in which he inhabits. This movement took place whilst he remained within the category of being a young person who was NEET and would in effect have remained 'hidden' without the study utilising the opportunity to highlight his experiences. This serves to reinforce the limited use that the category label has in this instance. It does not adequately capture the breadth of experiences that Jake had over the time period not does it enable any evaluation of why he remained within this category. The commonalities drawn between Jake's experiences and those of others indicates that this may be equally true for other young people who are NEET.

The narrative gathered here also highlights and supports literature around what 'works' for young people in terms of the support available to them at school and through other agencies, for example Youth Offending Teams. Jake spoke of significant adults he had encountered at school and outside of it and his descriptions of these relationships reinforced Rogers' assertions about the skills required by teachers and others in order to provide positive self regard to others and in turn to contribute to learner's personal growth and movement towards self actualisation. Jake's narrative also provided some examples of interactions in the workplace which have resulted in him feeling trusted by those around him and enabled him to experience pride in the work he is undertaking and the importance of that to him.

Conversely, his narrative also indicated less satisfactory experiences. This included some of his experiences of school, his challenges in addressing his cannabis use and his description of managing his finances, including his experiences of signing on and the apparent lack of support available to him throughout this process. The

boundaries inherent in Jake's experiences are demonstrated through these descriptions. This further reinforces that young people such as Jake are not able to move beyond being NEET by virtue of personal agency alone and that some structures that exist within the education system and within job seeking systems can impose 'structural conditions of worth' upon individuals including those who are NEET.

3. Can understanding the experience of an individual who is NEET enable consideration of the policy and practice around this group of young people?

The experiences of individuals who are NEET should be considered as part of the development of policy and practice relating to them. Individuals are well placed to comment upon their experiences and the challenges of their situation including challenging the assumptions and categories associated with NEET status, what Atkins (2013 p.145) terms the 'uncritical stereotypes of marginalised youth'. Narratives are also able to provide what McLeod (1997) terms 'new- stories -to- live- by'. In Jake's narrative these would include for example; managing finances and benefits, seeking work, signing on and managing cannabis use. By enabling these to be researched, identified and considered can subsequently ensure that policy and practice is predicated upon a contemporaneous understanding of being a young person who is NEET. Narratives are by their nature individualised and attempts to draw out generalisations from these could lead to the difficulties inherent in categorisation or 'shorthand' accounts discussed in chapter three. However, interpretation of an individual's experiences can help to illuminate the general and this could be utilised to promote or refocus attention upon young people who are NEET. For example, the research presented here and by others highlights young people's desire to seek and find work; reflecting what MacDonald et al. (2005, p.882) term a 'hyper-conventional' attitude to finding work. This is in sharp contrast to a view of young people who are NEET as being feckless, workshy or content to be in receipt of state benefits and is reflective of Simmons et al.'s (2014b, p. 584) assertion that young people who are NEET present with low expectations rather than low aspirations.

Discussion around young people who are NEET should enable further consideration of individual and societal responsibilities and whether the separation or division of these is useful in any case. An overly-individualised view

of young people who are NEET positions their situation and lack of work within them as individuals, whether it is asserted to a lack of agency or a lack of opportunity; the 'within child' approach outlined in chapter three. The opposite viewpoint however is equally lacking as it negates the agency that is demonstrated by this group of young people. The 'eulogy of practice' cited by Coffield et al. (2008) acts as a reminder that the formulation of policy and practice requires a starting point which encompasses both the experiences of individuals at the current time and an acknowledgement and understanding of the initiatives and structures developed for this group in the past.

In order to undertake further work of the type outlined above, an up to date understanding of the group of young people for whom this is targeted is required, including knowledge at a local level. Acknowledged in chapter one was the number of young people in the 16-18 year old age bracket who are described as 'activity not known'. It is difficult to treat separately the categories of NEET and 'activity not known'. It can be assumed that the latter group includes young people who are NEET and should therefore be counted into this grouping, whilst acknowledging the challenges that using a category label can bring.

Systems for tracking young people's destinations post-school would benefit from being refreshed - both in terms of considering who gathers the information and for what purpose it is collected. As has been acknowledged throughout here, there are wider and more interesting stories to be heard and shared than statistics regarding the numbers of young people who are NEET but this should not prevent Local Authorities from considering how well they know and understand their cohorts of young people and their destinations post-school. A challenge to undertaking this however, is the level of resource that exists within Local Authorities in order to carry out and analyse the findings of this kind of work. The Connexions service previously held localised information regarding young people who were NEET ensuring that accurate information was held by Local Authorities. In addition to accurate numbers however was the knowledge of the young people themselves that was held by Connexions workers, including an insight into the individuals and their lives within and beyond the NEET category. The loss of this service and the depth of information that was held could mean that it is tempting for those who shape the development of policy at a local level

to consider young people who are NEET according to the type of shorthand descriptions described earlier. This could then lead to a view of individual failure, in terms of educational progression, as an individual responsibility rather than more fully considering the interplay between individuals and structures that they encounter.

7.8 Where should research go next?

In considering the future direction of research around the group of young people who are NEET I am mindful of Rogers' quotation from one of his own teachers regarding the need to make use of knowledge; 'don't be a dammed ammunition wagon; be a rifle!' (1961, p.281). This highlights the need to fully realise and utilise knowledge gained through research rather than simply to undertake research and 'stockpile' it for possible future use. Throughout this study, it has been recognised that there is no grand narrative or 'blueprint for practice' (Simmons and Thompson, 2011b p.167) with regard to this group of young people but I would suggest that there is certainly research that would be useful to further understand and refine intervention and support them.

The 'category label' of NEET was discussed in earlier chapters. It has been reported to have been useful to group a diverse range of young people under one umbrella description in order to maintain this group's political and policy focus (Furlong, 2006). However, it can also be viewed as a catch all term which fails to include all those who are not in education or employment and by virtue of this may further marginalise these individuals or create 'missed' opportunities to understand and explore their situation. This includes young people who are 'exceptions' to the predominant categories associated with the label, for example young people who leave school with high levels of qualification. The category also does not include other vulnerable young people or populations, for example those engaged in what Macdonald et al. (2005, p.880) term 'cyclical careers and poor work 'who are also worthy of acknowledgement and support. The age range associated with the label also means that it potentially masks the differences in school to work transitions in different age groups which may be indicative of differences or changes in transition patterns, perhaps reflecting what Arnett (2007) terms an 'extended youth phase'. A continuation of the usage of the term requires renewed consideration regarding who is encompassed within this term

and why - a consideration is necessary of whether it brings value to researchers, policy makers and young people themselves to be categorised in this way. In addition, research should perhaps also concern itself with what works for the majority of young people - longitudinal data such as that provided by Sylva et al. (2014) contains some of this type of information and also enables a long view to be taken, from pre-school to beyond the age of participation. Of interest could be narratives of young people who are not NEET or those who have successfully reengaged with education, employment or training. This would enable a consideration of what constitutes success and also to enable consideration of difficulties and barriers which these groups experience; a broader focus upon the purpose of education which was discussed above.

The historical backdrop associated with school to work transitions has been presented. Whilst there is agreement that change has occurred in this transition within the UK in the last forty years there remain many commonalities, for example the continued availability of work requiring low level qualifications and the continued desire from the majority of young people to be either in employment, education or training. As was acknowledged previously, the range of vocational and training opportunities for school leavers in the UK has been variable and there continues to be evidence which suggests that vocational education has somewhat less value than more academic study pathways. Research focussed on vocational pathways in other countries, for example Brockmann (2012) indicates that this need not be the case and as such that the possibilities to redevelop and redefine vocational qualifications and experiences have potential for change within the UK.

The main focus of what education is for, what purpose it has and what it aims to instil in learners continues to require consideration and refinement. A polarised viewpoint can emerge from the current discourse around the perceived success or failure levelled at schools where pupils do not make the required GCSE grade. This renders our education system in danger of reproducing the 'Matthew Effect', described by Stanovich (1986, p381) in relation to reading skill development, whereby the 'rich get richer and the poor get poorer'. This means that research attention and policy development should have its focus not only upon the outcome for the majority of post 16 learners, successful transition to sixth form or

college but also upon the minority of learners whose transition is not so linear. This will necessitate consideration of educational pathways for learners before the end of year 11 and needs to take into account existing longitudinal research, for example that provided by Sylva et al. (2014).

7.9 Summary and Conclusions

The study has presented a narrative gathered over a year of meetings with a single participant and provided an insight into his lived experience over this period of time. This has been considered using the theory of self and theory of education proposed by Carl Rogers as a framework and in relation to the existing empirical research available. The study has contributed to the knowledge base that exists with regard to this group of young people by providing a narrative particular to and unique to Jake. Whilst the narrative is one person's experience, there are some areas of commonality with other young people who are NEET and where appropriate these parallels have been drawn. The study has challenged the practice of viewing this group as homogenous. Furthermore, the study has shown that important development and movement can occur whilst remaining within the NEET category. This detail would not be captured or noticed without this type of research. The details of the individual lives and experiences of young people who are NEET are important to gather and to understand because, without this, a deeper dive into their lived world is not possible.

The narrative gathered provides an useful insight into Jake's educational experiences, relationships with others and his experiences of seeking work. As such, it provides a contribution to the development of policy and practice around this group of young people. Using Rogers' theories of self and education some analysis of this was undertaken which was relevant both to Jake's life but also to that of other young people who are NEET. Jake demonstrated agency as he attempted to effect change in his life and situation over the period of working with him. The bounded nature of this was demonstrated and has been conceptualised here as indicative of 'structural conditions of worth' being experienced by Jake and others which can serve to further reinforce feelings of failure. The dichotomy of structure and agency and conditions of worth should be considered in the formulation of policy and practice in education and with reference to this group. The purpose of education and a fuller understanding of

when and how 'success' is achieved is required in addition to a conceptualisation of when success is not achieved.

In conclusion, the research presented here provides more than a glimpse into one life lived. It enables consideration of some of the difficulties and barriers to progress which are experienced by young people who are NEET and enables both the development of self, and educational experiences to be considered using a theoretical framework. As has been acknowledged throughout, an individual's experience is a sum of parts, including their own actions and agency as well as that of other individuals, groups and social structures.

Appendix A

Participant Information

Consent form (version 1). To be completed and signed by young person, parent/carer and researcher

Study Title: Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET). The Educational History of a Young Person in West Sussex (working title)

Researcher: Cate Mullen

Ethics reference:

Please initial the boxes if you agree with the statements:

I have read and understood the information sheet (date/version no) and have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study

I agree to participate in a group discussion regarding my educational history and experiences

I understand that following the group discussion I may be invited to take part in a number of further discussions with the researcher which would be undertaken individually

I agree for information to be recorded (through drawing and discussion) during the group discussion and   for this to be used for the purpose of the study

I understand that information given during interviews will be treated confidentially and anonymously and that data will be handled in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998. All data will be managed in accordance with the University of Southampton data protection policies.

I understand that certain details gathered during the discussion may be changed in order to protect individuals and organisations, for example people's names and the names of schools

I understand that participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time

Name of participant: (print name) -

_____

Signature of participant:

_____

Name of parent/carer (print name):

_____

Signature of parent/carer:

_____

Name of researcher (print
name):_____

Signature of researcher:

_____

Date: _____

Consent form (version 1). To be completed and signed by young person, parent/carer and researcher

Study Title: Not in Education, Employment or Training(NEET). The Educational History of a Young Person in West Sussex (working title)

Researcher: Cate Mullen

Ethics reference:

Please initial the boxes if you agree with the statements:

I have read and understood the information sheet (date/version no) and have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study ☐

I agree to participate in a number of discussions regarding my educational history and experiences ☐

I agree for the discussions to be recorded and transcribed and for the information to be used for the purpose of this study ☐

I understand that Information given during interviews will be treated confidentially and anonymously and that data will be handled in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998. All data will be managed in accordance with the University of Southampton data protection policies ☐

I understand that certain details gathered during the discussion may be changed in order to protect individuals and organisations, for example people's names and the names of schools ☐

I understand that I will be given a transcribed version of the discussions to read through before the study is completed. ☐

I understand that participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time ☐

Name of participant: (print name) -

_____

Signature of participant:

_____

Name of parent/carer (print name):

_____

Signature of parent/carer:

_____

Name of researcher (print name):_____

Signature of researcher:

_____

Date: _____

Dear _____

My name is Cate Mullen and I work as an Educational Psychologist for West Sussex County Council. At present, I am studying for a doctorate in education (EdD) at Southampton University and am undertaking a research thesis under the supervision of Professor Alison Fuller from the School of Education at the university.

The aim of this research is to provide information about young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET). Young people involved in the pilot phase of the study will meet with me on one occasion in order to talk about their school and educational experiences. One young person will be asked following this to meet with me for a number of further discussions and this information will be included in my thesis. Young people involved will be given another name (a pseudonym) to protect their identity and to ensure confidentiality. Information given during interviews will be treated confidentially and anonymously and data will be handled in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998. All data will be managed in accordance with the University of Southampton data protection policies.

The research has gained ethical approval from the school of education and as part of that we will need you to complete a consent form. A parental signature is also required in order for you to take part in the study. A consent form and an outline of the research are attached to this letter.

I will be glad to answer any questions regarding the research before or after it has taken place. A message can be left on the telephone number below in order for me to contact you regarding the research.

Yours sincerely

Cate Mullen

Participant Information Sheet

Study Title: Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET). The Educational History of a Young Person in Southampton (working title)

Researcher: Cate Mullen. I work as an Educational Psychologist for West Sussex County Council. At present, I am studying for a doctorate in education (EdD) at Southampton University and am undertaking a research thesis under the supervision of Professor Alison Fuller from the School of Education at the university.

Please read this information carefully before deciding to take part in this research. If you are happy to participate both you and your parent/carer will be asked to sign a consent form.

What is the research about?

There are high numbers of young people who leave school and don't move onto college, a job or training. These young people are known as 'NEET' which stands for Not in Education, Employment or Training. The government is keen to reduce the number of young people who are NEET and various things will be put into place to try to achieve this, for example raising the participation in education age to 18.

Much of the research about young people who are NEET looks at groups and key issues or themes that arise from these groups. Whilst this is useful, this type of research isn't able to look in any detail into the life experiences of young people, for example their experiences of school.

The aim of my research is to look at presenting the educational experiences and history of one young person from West Sussex. There might be themes that emerge from this that link to other, previous research but I hope that this piece of work is able to stand alone as a piece of writing about a life history.

Why have I been chosen?

You have been asked to meet with me because you are in year 11 and school staff, and perhaps you, are unsure as to what you will do when you leave school this year. It might be that you haven't made up your mind yet

about whether to look for a job or training course when you leave school or it may be that you already know that you don't want to do either of these things.

You haven't been chosen to try and help you to make your mind up about these things, the research is designed to find out more about you and your experiences of school.

What will happen to me if I take part?

If you take part you will meet with me and four other year 11 students for one session. During the session we will talk about your school and life experiences, starting from the earliest that you can remember up to where you are now. We will use a 'Life Road' drawing for this. You will be able to give me a lot of information during this session if you wish but won't be expected to talk about anything that you don't want to. I will write down the key areas or themes that we discuss during this session and share them with you all at the end to check that I have listened carefully to what you have all said. The session will probably last for between one and one and a half hours. The drawing that we produce during the session will be kept for 6 months following the session and then be destroyed.

Following this session, I will ask one of the group to meet with me if they were happy to do so, for some more discussions about their school and life experiences. This would involve around six more meetings of about an hour each. These discussions would be recorded using a Dictaphone. The recordings will then be transcribed, which means that they will be typed out. A copy of these would be given to you so that you could look through it. If there was something that you didn't want to be included then you would be able to let me know.

Your name would not be used when I write up the information that I gather from the discussions. We would decide on a 'pseudonym' or made up name to use for you and other people or places that could be identified in our discussions.

The information that I gather during the group session and the individual interviews will be written up into my thesis, which is a long piece of writing which looks at all of the research available about young people who are NEET and presents my own research. This will then be marked by examiners and I will be asked to talk to them about what I did and why I did my research. The thesis will then be available for other students to read and look at.

Are there any benefits in taking part?

The research will add to the current knowledge that we have about young people who are NEET. It will also be different to lots of the previous research as it will look at the experiences of one young person in depth.

You may enjoy talking as part of a group or to me in a series of discussions.

Are there any risks involved?

Sometimes it can be difficult to talk about things or times that have been hard, for example if you haven't enjoyed being at school or have experienced things that have upset you or made you angry.

Discussing your experiences of education may make you confused about which path you want to follow when you have left school.

I will try to help and support you with either of these risks.

Will my participation be confidential?

Information that is collected as part of this research will be available only to the following people:

- The researcher
- The project supervisor
- The participants
- The transcriber (only for the series of discussions)

All of the information collected will be kept for a period of one year following submission of my thesis and then will be destroyed or returned to the participants. Data will be kept in accordance with the Data Protection Policy of the School of Education which complies with the Data Protection Act.

What happens if I change my mind?

You have the right to refuse to answer any questions asked as well as to withdraw from the research at any stage. You have the right to require that information gathered from you, including recordings of discussions, be destroyed.

What happens if something goes wrong?

If you had a complaint that you wished to make about the research that you didn't want to or feel able to discuss with me you can contact the chair of the ethics committee for the School of Education. Their contact details are below:

Dr Gill Clarke
Building 32 School of Education
University of Southampton
Highfield Campus
Southampton
SO17 1BJ
gmc@soton.ac.uk

Alternatively, my supervisor could be contacted in the event of a complaint:
Professor Alison Fuller
Building 32 School of Education
University of Southampton
Highfield Campus
Southampton
SO17 1BJ
a.fuller@soton.ac.uk

Project Outline

Study Title: Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET). The Educational History of a Young Person in West Sussex. (working title)

Researcher: Cate Mullen. Project and related dissertation form part of Ed D studies in the School of Education

Background

There are high numbers of young people who are NEET in the UK. Government is keen to reduce these figures and various initiatives will be employed in order to achieve this, for example raising the participation age in education and training to 18 years.

Much of the available research is concerned with looking at groups of young people who are NEET and examining key issues or themes arising from these groups. Whilst useful, it is beyond the scope of this type of study to look at the educational history or experiences of young people in any detail.

The current study aims to provide a narrative of the educational experiences and history of a young person in West Sussex. Themes arising from this may link to those identified by previous studies but it is the intention that this piece of work is able to stand alone as an example of life history writing.

West Sussex has been chosen as the participating authority as I will be working there as an educational psychologist from February 2010. My work involves a significant amount of one to one and small group work with children and young people and I am therefore familiar with this type of interaction.

Method

Identifying Participants

Providers of key stage 4 education will be approached in one secondary school in West Sussex Local Authority with details of the project and its intended outcomes. Permission will be sought from the Headteacher

before the students are approached. Potential participants will be given full details of the project and information sheets to take home and discuss with parents/guardians.

Gaining Consent

The participants will be under the age of 16 so parental consent will be sought in addition to their own informed consent. The option to withdraw at any time during the project will be impressed upon the participants when they give consent and reminders will be given at intervals during the data collection process. Informed consent will be an ongoing process as interviews are conducted during different stages of the academic year. After each interview in the main phase of the study, the participant will have the opportunity to read transcripts and add/amend/delete as they see fit. Permission will be gained to use the contents of the transcripts at each stage.

Pilot Phase

A small scale pilot study will be undertaken with 5 (approx) year 11 students who are identified as being at risk of becoming NEET upon leaving school. One meeting will be held with these students. A 'life road' exercise will be used with the group in order to produce a visual representation of their educational history and experiences. This consists of using flip chart paper to draw a 'road' that leads from the top to the bottom of the paper. Key points are recorded pictorially on the road according to when they occurred, early events at the beginning and later events further along and so on. Discussion during this meeting will be recorded via the life road exercise and through written notes.

The pilot will enable the researcher to experience data gathering from a small group of individuals and will enable key questions to be drawn from this which will be used to structure the main interview sessions. The 'life road' diagram and written notes will be kept for a period of 6 months in a locked filing cabinet in a secure building following completion of the pilot phase and then destroyed.

Main Phase

A number of interview sessions, between 4 and 6, will take place with one identified individual who is NEET following leaving school and who took part in the pilot phase of the study. These interviews will use as its initial

focus the 'life road' exercise and follow a semi-structured format using questions drawn from the pilot phase. These interviews will be recorded using a Dictaphone and transcribed for use in the study.

There will be no covert observation of the participants in either the pilot or main phases of the study and no requirement for deception within the project. Participants can be actively involved in the process of anonymising themselves and their school/college in the information that is collected. The nature of the study should not mean that establishments or individuals are easily identifiable from the research. Participants will have the opportunity to amend information if they feel they are at risk of being identified.

Materials

The following materials will be required for both the pilot and main phase of research:

- Flipchart paper and marker pens to complete the 'life road' exercise
- Dictaphone (for main phase)
- Semi structured interview schedule (for main phase). This will be devised following the pilot phase

Participants

The participants in this study are young people in West Sussex. The students in both phases will be aged 15 or 16 years old.

Five students will be used for the pilot phase and one for the main phase. The students will be approached via a West Sussex secondary school.

The inclusion criteria will be:

- Students attending/previously attending a West Sussex school/education provider
- Students identified as being 'at risk' of becoming NEET upon leaving school or have already left school and are now NEET

The exclusion criteria will be:

- Students who are due to start a job/college placement within 6 months of leaving school/within 6 months of study date

Procedure

Data collection:

October to December 2009: schools approached regarding participation in the study

January to April 2010: Pilot study data gathered and considered. Semi structured interview schedule devised for main phase. Participant or possible participants for main phase identified and approached

September to December 2010: interviews for main data gathering to take place and transcription of information gathered

Report writing ongoing throughout this time with a tentative submission date for the research of autumn 2011.

Statistical Analysis

Analysis will be undertaken with the data collected during the main phase of the research using a Grounded Theory approach.

Ethical Issues

The following ethical issues have been identified:

Age of participants: parental/carer consent will also be sought for the study

Possible anxiety relating to interview discussion/themes: ensure that participants are fully briefed and debriefed following each session. Contact details of researcher to be given to each participant, and clear information regarding whom should be contacted in case of a concern or complaint.

Possible discussion of sensitive issues: signpost to appropriate support/agencies as appropriate

Consideration of identification of young person who has been interviewed: pseudonym to be used throughout

Consideration of identification of educational institutions/professionals in interview data: pseudonyms to be used throughout

Ensuring participant is aware of information relating to them which will be presented in thesis: participant to be given transcript of interviews and relevant drafts for approval

Data Protection and Anonymity

Data collected as part of the study will be available only to the following people:

- The researcher
- The project supervisor
- The participants
- Transcribers (interview data only)

Data will be kept in accordance with the Data Protection policy of the School of Education which complies with the Data Protection Act. Participants will be made aware of this at the outset in order to protect their confidentiality. Unforeseen changes to the project may well involve reassessing ethical considerations and advice will be sought at any stage should issues arise.

All personal information including consent forms, written notes from the pilot phase and transcripts from the main phase will be stored in a locked filing cabinet, accessible to the researcher only in a secure building. Information recorded onto a memory stick will be electronically shredded both from the computer of the researcher and the transcriber. An e-mail will be sent from the transcriber to confirm that this has taken place. Information recorded onto tape will be erased once a completed transcript is available.

On completion of the project, findings will be made available to all participants in full or summarised formats. Ongoing permission will be sought before the information is used in papers or presented to third parties.

Ultimately, responsibility to protect the participants is paramount and all reasonable steps will be taken to ensure that this is the case and that the integrity of educational research is upheld.

All data collected will be kept for a period of one year following submission of the report and then will be destroyed or returned to the participants.

Appendix B

Ethics Information

Insurance and Research Governance Application for Projects Requiring Approval by Ethics Committee and Involving Research on Human Subjects, their tissues, organs or data, by Staff and/or Students of the University of Southampton

The project must not commence until insurance, ethics approval and sponsorship are obtained

PART A - PLEASE COMPLETE ALL QUESTIONS

1.
Ethics Submission Number:

Title of Study: Not in Education, Employment or Training. The Educational History of a Young Person in West Sussex (working title)

Start date: January 2010 End date: January 2012

2.

Researcher's Details

Title: Miss   Name   Cate Mullen

University School: Education

University Department/Division: School of Education

Address: University of Southampton

Highfield Campus

Southampton Hampshire

Tel: Email   cmem@soton.ac.uk

3. Are student researchers involved with this project? Yes ☐ No X

4. Is the study based solely on questionnaires, or other research **not** involving invasive techniques or medicinal products? Yes ☐ No X

5.

Please estimate numbers of volunteers participating in the study:

	Adults	Minors *
Patients		
Healthy human volunteers		6

* Minors under 18 years of age

Is this a Multi Centre Trial? Yes ☐ No X

If yes and the trial is sponsored by UoS or SUHT, or managed by UoS, please estimate numbers of volunteers participating in the study overall:

	Adults	Minors
Patients		
Healthy human volunteers		

6.	Does the study involve invasive techniques?	Yes ☐ No X
	Does the study involve the use of a medicinal product or the testing of a medical device?	Yes ☐ No X
7.	**IF AN INVESTIGATIVE MEDICINAL PRODUCT IS INVOLVED**	Phase 1, 2, 3, 4
	Please indicate which phase category the study falls into	
8.	Who is the Research Sponsor?	
9.	Who is the Funder? N/A	
10.	**For Commercial trials only**, is an ABPI Indemnity being given?	Yes ☐ No ☐
	IF YES: the ABPI Indemnity form, preferably in triplicate, should be forwarded with this form for signature by an Authorised Signatory on behalf of the University.	
	Will any part of this study take place outside the UK?	Yes ☐ No X
	If Yes, in which country(ies)?	

PART B - PLEASE COMPLETE QUESTIONS AS APPLICABLE		
	For Student projects Student status: PG		
11.	**Supervisor's Details**		
	Title: Professor Name: Alison Fuller		
	University School School of Education		
	University Department or Division Building 32		
	Address: Highfield Campus		
	Southampton		
	Hampshire SO17 1BJ		
	Tel: 023 80 598864 Email a.fuller@soton.ac.uk		
12.	**For multi site studies**		
	How many sites are involved?		
	Is Southampton the lead site?		
	Are any sites outside the UK?		
	Are contracts/site agreements in place?		
13.	**For studies involving the NHS Patients, staff or resources**		
	Is the study approved by the NHS Trust R+D office?	Yes ☐ No ☐ Pending ☐
	Is the study approved by NHS ethics committee?	Yes ☐ No ☐ Pending ☐
14.	**For Clinical Trials involving drugs, devices or clinical interventions** **Reference Number**		
	Is the study registered with the MHRA?	Yes ☐ No ☐

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	Is the study registered on the European Clinical Trials (EudraCT) database?		Yes ☐ No ☐
	Is the study registered on the National Research Register (Clinical trials database)?		Yes ☐ No ☐
15.	**For studies using tissue samples**		
	Are the tissue samples accessed via a licensed tissue bank?		Yes ☐ No ☐
	Are you seeking ethical approval for your study?		Yes ☐ No ☐
16.	**For all studies, will the Applicant be responsible for:**		
	Reporting amendments to the protocol		Yes X No ☐
	Reporting adverse events and significant developments		Yes X No ☐
	If No, who will be responsible?		

For Research Governance information, please contact:

Research Governance Office,   Email: rgoinfo@soton.ac.uk   Tel: 02380 598849

Website: http://www.soton.ac.uk/corporateservices/rgo/index.html

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For Insurance information, please contact:

Finance Department, Insurance Services,   Email: insure@soton.ac.uk   Tel: 02380 592417

Website   http://www.soton.ac.uk/finance/insurance/index.html

Please send this form with all other supporting documents to:

Research Governance Office, University of Southampton, B37/4055, Highfield, Southampton SO17 1BJ

or email to rgoinfo@soton.ac.uk.

This checklist should be completed by the researcher (with the advice of the research supervisor/tutor) for every research project which involves human participants. Before completing this form, please refer to the Ethical Guidelines in the School's Research Student Handbook and the British Educational Research Association guidelines (http://www.bera.ac.uk/guidelines.html).

Project Title:

Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET). The Educational History of

a Young Person in West Sussex

Researcher(s): Cate Mullen   Student ID number: 21895481

Supervisor: Professor Alison Fuller   Email: cmem@soton.ac.uk

Part One	YES	NO
1. Does the study involve participants who are particularly vulnerable or unable to give informed consent? (e.g. children with special difficulties)		X
2. Will the study require the co-operation of an advocate for initial access to the groups or individuals? (e.g. children with disabilities; adults with a dementia)		X
3. Could the research induce psychological stress or anxiety, cause harm or have negative consequences for the participants (beyond the risks encountered in their normal life and activities)?	X	
4. Will deception of participants be necessary during the study? (e.g. covert observation of people)?		X
5. Will the study involve discussion of topics which the participants would find sensitive (e.g. sexual activity, drug use)?	X	
6. Will the study involve prolonged or repetitive testing or physical testing? (e.g. long periods at VDU, use of sport equipment such as a treadmill) and will a health questionnaire be needed?		X
7. Will the research involve medical procedures? (e.g. are drugs, placebos or other substances to be administered to the participants or will the study involve invasive, intrusive or potentially harmful procedures of any kind?)		X
8. Will financial inducements (other than reasonable expenses or compensation for time) be offered to participants?		X
9. Will you be involving children under sixteen for whom additional consent will be required?	X	
10. Will you have difficulties anonymising participants and/or ensuring the information they give is non-identifiable?		X
11. Will you have difficulty in explicitly communicating the right of participants to freely withdraw from the study at any time?		X
12. Will the study involve recruitment of patients or staff through the NHS?		X
13. If you are working in a cross-cultural setting will you need to gain additional knowledge about the setting to be able to be sensitive to particular issues in that culture (e.g. sexuality, gender role, language use)?		X
14. Will you have difficulties complying with the Data Protection Act (e.g. not keeping unnecessary personal data and keeping any necessary data locked or password protected)?		X
15. Are there potential risks to your own health and safety in conducting this research (e.g. lone interviewing other than in public space)?		X

If you have answered NO to all of the above questions and you have discussed this form with your supervisor and had it signed and dated, you may proceed to develop an ethics protocol with the assistance of the Ethical Protocol Guidance Form which must also be completed. If you have answered YES to any of the questions, please complete PART TWO of this form below and adopt a similar procedure of discussion with supervisor, signing and proceeding to develop an actual ethical protocol with the assistance of the Ethical Protocol Guidance Form. Please keep a copy of both forms and protocol for your records. Only in exceptional circumstances will cases need to be referred to the School's Research Ethics Committee.

Part Two For each item answered 'YES' please give a summary of the issue and action to be taken to address it.

Item 3: possible anxiety relating to discussion regarding educational history and experiences
Action: ensure that young person is aware of possible outcome when consenting to participate
Action: ensuring that young person is fully debriefed following each discussion/interview session, including contact details to discuss further as required

Item 5: possible discussion of sensitive issues eg those relating to friendships/relationships as part of school experience
Action: as above plus signposting to relevant agencies as appropriate

Item 9: additional parental consent required
Action: separate covering letter to be sent to parent/carer in order to gain parental consent

Please continue on a separate sheet if necessary

Signed :
(Researcher)   Date:

To be completed by the Supervisor (PLEASE TICK ONE)

☐ Appropriate action taken to maintain ethical standards – no further action necessary. **This project now has ethical approval.**

☐ The issues require the guidance of the School of Education's Ethics Committee. **This project does not yet have ethical approval.**
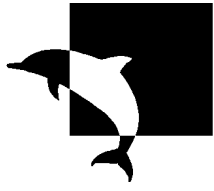
COMMENTS:

Signed (supervisor on behalf of SoE Research Ethics Committee):

Date:

There are aspects to research governance that lie outside 'ethics', but which are important for you to consider. These include data protection, insurance, and health and safety issues. You should seek advice re same from your

University **of Southampton**	**School of Education**	**RISK** **ASSESSMENT** **FORM**

To be completed in accordance with the attached guidelines

Activity:

A one off group discussion with students under 18 years of age followed by a series of interviews with one young person under 18 years of age regarding the young person's life experiences with a focus upon educational events and experiences.

Locations:

Educational settings within a local authority.

Significant Hazards:

Lone working with young person (for series of interviews)

Discussion of potentially sensitive issues

Who might be exposed/affected?

Researcher

Young people/person involved in the study

Existing control measures:

Participant information provided for all young people involved and informed consent required from young person and parent/carer

Researcher has enhanced CRB clearance

Interviews will take place within educational setting

Risk evaluation: **Low / Medium / High**

Can the risk be further reduced?   **Yes / No**

Further controls required:

Date by which further controls will be implemented:

Are the controls satisfactory: **Yes / No**

Date for reassessment:

Completed by:

name	signature	date

Supervisor/manager:

If applicable

name	signature	date

Reviewed by:

name	signature	date

Appendix C

Coding and Themes from Participant Interviews

Results Chap 1   'I'll get there, it's just trying to
find the work'

Temp. Constructs   Pg

'disasters'

relationship
with dad   Job
                            seeking
Cannabis   money
relationship   qualifications
with
friends   career
                     aspirations

                work

- talks about a no of different career options
SCS, paramedic, YOT, bricklaying

Data set = chapters
Data corpus = all interview data.

lack of money
being oned money
frustration at not having qualification
family relationships
changes to dads circumstances
'changes in relationship with dad
'discrete' narrative
other career options
money
job seeking frustration / experiences
knowledge about qualifications
cannabis related experiences
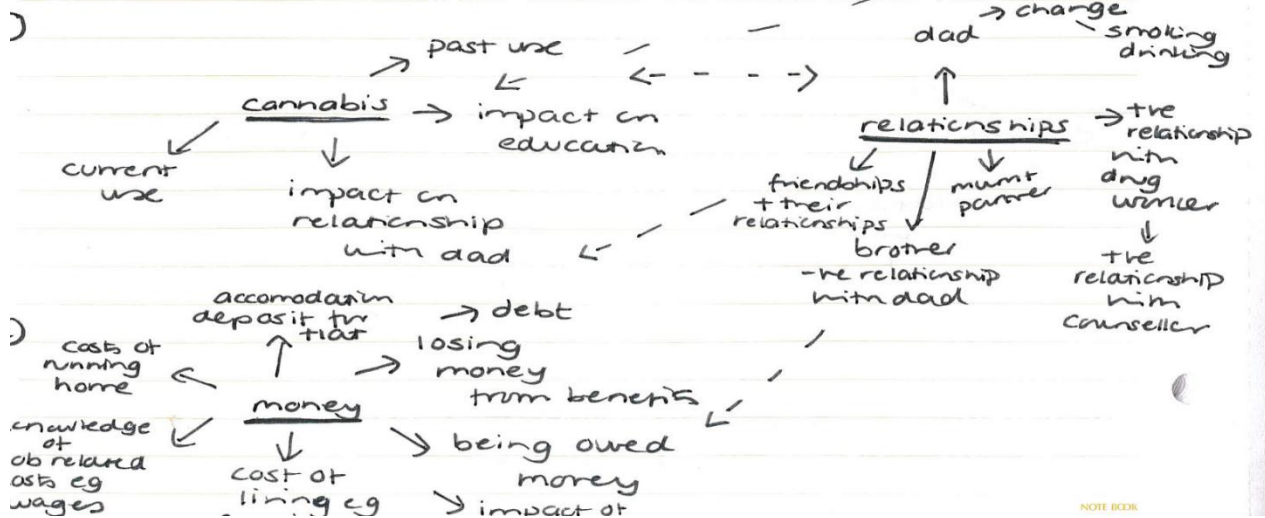reflection on cannabis use
Job seeking experiences
training experiences
Relationship with dad
family relationships
relationships with friends

chapters
→ change

qualifications
/exams
security
work
paramedic
bricklaying
SIS card

Stories

Job seeking

cannabis ←
money ←
relationships ←
job seeking ←

process
of
application

work
experience
with yp

→ Job
Centre
story

past use

cannabis → impact on
            education

current
use

impact on
relationship
with dad

dad → change
     ↘ smoking
        drinking

relationships → the
                relationship
                with
                drug
                worker

friendships
+ their
relationships

mum +
partner

brother
-he relationship
with dad

↓
the
relationship
with
counsellor

accommodation
deposit for
flat

→ debt

losing
money
from benefits

costs of
running
home

money

knowledge
of
job related
costs eg
wages

cost of
living eg

→ being owed
   money
→ impact of

Interview 2 July 2011

theme	page reference	comment
lack of money	1	
being owed money	2	
frustration relating to qualification	3	
family relationships	3	
changes to dad's circumstances	3	
positive changes with dad	4	
'disaster' narrative	4	
other career options	5	
money	6	
job seeking frustration	7	
knowledge about qualifications	7	
cannabis related experiences	8	
reflections on cannabis use	8	
job seeking experience	10	
training experiences	11	
relationship with dad	13	
family relationships	13	
relationships with friends	14	

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