"All the Small Things": Research Exploring the Positive Experiences of Teachers Working with Pupils with Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties.

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO CARDIFF UNIVERSITY'S SCHOOL OF PSYCHOLOGY

DOCTORATE IN EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY (DEdPsy) 2016-19

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Abstract.

Pupils labelled with Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties (PMLD) have the most complex needs in our education system and may be the most excluded population. Research into the experience of working with these pupils is scarce. Using a positive psychology framework can help us to understand the positives of working with pupils experiencing PMLD, as well as to elicit information about teachers' strengths and resources. It can help educational psychologists (EPs) to work more effectively with pupils, families, and teachers. A semi-structured interview using a positive psychology framework was undertaken with seven teachers of pupils with PMLD to explore these areas. A thematic analysis of the data reported the teachers' expression of many positives arising from the unique characteristics of their pupils. The personal character strengths that teachers identified in themselves were related to their need to explore different ways of working with their pupils, and for working effectively as a team. Despite the teachers' limited experience of working with educational psychologists they were able to provide suggestions for their desired future practice with EPs. The positive psychology framework enabled a rich variety of positives to be explored in relation to pupils labelled with PMLD. The characteristics that may be viewed as deficits in traditional models of disability were viewed as opportunities for positive experiences for the teachers. The implications of the research for EP practice and the impact of the implementation of a positive psychology framework are discussed.

Summary

Part 1. Literature Review

Part 1 provides a narrative review of the literature relevant to the area of study. Initially, the characteristics of pupils with profound and multiple difficulties are explored, along with their educational needs in school. A consideration of how these needs can be met in schools follows, with a review of the existing research about their teachers. The positives experienced by parents of children with disabilities is then discussed. Research in this area has identified positive affect and positive appraisal as being helpful. A review and critique of positive psychology is then provided, and in particular the area of positive affect and appraisal in relation to stress and coping. There is a discussion of the role of the educational psychologist in working with pupils with profound and multiple difficulties. Part 1 then concludes with a rationale for the current study.

Part 2. Research Article

Part 2 is a report of the current study. The study explored the positive experiences of teachers working with pupils with profound and multiple difficulties, their strengths and resources, and their view of the role of the EP in working with pupils with profound and multiple difficulties. A brief introduction to the literature in the area is given, followed by a description of methods used in the research. The results of the thematic analysis of the participants' interviews are discussed in relation to other relevant literature and in regard to the role of the educational psychologist.

Part 3. Critical Review

Part 3 is a reflexive and reflective account of the entire research process from the researcher's perspective. This includes a discussion of decisions made during the process, methodology, future research directions and how the research has impacted on the researcher.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank all the tutors on the course, but in particular my supervisors; Dr Rachael Hayes for her calming and reflective supervision; and Dr Simon Claridge for his support during placement. Studying with my cohort during these three years has been a great experience, they were an incredibly supportive and enjoyable group of friends to take this journey with.

I am grateful to my family for their emotional support and encouragement, and in particular to my dad for inspiring me with a love of learning, set from his own lifelong example.

Without my friend Sharon, I would not have envisaged that I had the capacity to attempt this path.

My children have been so patient, helpful, and supportive during this journey. I hope to repay them now with all the time I have missed.

Finally, my husband Carwyn, I thought that I was the rock in our relationship, it turns out it was you. Your support and encouragement have been unfaltering.

"It's all the small things…I think it's, …seeing how tiny things can make a big difference to somebody with PMLD".

"Let's celebrate the positives of these children and support them properly to fulfill their potential, in whatever way they need".

Thank you to all my participants for your inspiring words.

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Part 1. Literature Review

Word count 10947

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1.   Introduction

Pupils labelled as having profound and multiple learning difficulties (PMLD) are pupils with a complex spectrum of needs, due to their multiple difficulties in various areas. The interaction of severe learning difficulties with physical, communication, or sensory needs results in their requirement for intensive support for both their learning and their care needs in school (Salt, 2010). They are likely to be our most excluded pupils, due to being mainly taught in special schools and their reliance on a few key adults to interpret their communications. These factors also contribute to their being our most vulnerable pupils (PMLD Network, 2001).

It is argued that due to the complexity of their needs, these pupils are not having their needs met in our education system and they challenge even experienced teachers of pupils with PMLD (Carpenter, 2007; Rochford, 2016). Teachers working in this area have to develop and adapt curricula to meet their pupils' needs, and constantly review their pedagogy to ensure engagement and learning (Carpenter, 2007). Teachers of pupils with PMLD are likely to experience additional emotional pressures from challenging behaviours, interaction and communication difficulties, medical needs, increased multi-agency working, and managing a team of support staff (Aird, 2001).

Positive affect has been found to support people under stress, and positive reappraisal of difficult circumstances can increase positive affect and psychological well-being (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2000). Viewing positives during times of difficulties has been asserted to improve resilience (Fredrickson & Branigan, 2005). These areas are part of the field of positive psychology (Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Viewing disability through a framework of positive psychology can lead to a better understanding of strengths and resources and can

be used to explore the positive impact that people with disabilities can have on society.

Parents of children with disabilities have benefitted from a positive psychology focus in research. Exploring the positives of parenting a child with a disability has led to a better understanding of resilience, and how families have learnt or benefitted from their experiences. This can help to develop positive practices in this field. The experiences of teachers who work with pupils with PMLD is neglected in the literature. It is important for us to develop an understanding of their work as they have a great deal of unique knowledge from working with their pupils. Educational psychologists (EPs) have a statutory assessment role with pupils with PMLD and need to work with pupils with more severe and complex needs (Farrell, Woods, Lewis, Squires, Rooney, & O'Connor, 2006; Welsh Government, 2018a). They also have a role to support the teachers and families of these pupils (BPS, 2019). There is very little research regarding the role of educational psychologists in supporting pupils with PMLD, their teachers and their families, therefore, the role of the EP in this field will be explored.

This literature review will initially explore the category and label of profound and multiple learning difficulties to provide a clear understanding of the population and its diversity, and their educational needs (section 2). Then the role of teachers working with pupils with PMLD will be considered (section 3), along with relevant research in this area (section 4). This will be followed by a consideration of the implementation of positive psychology in the research with parents of children with disabilities (section 5). The use of positive psychology techniques in mediating stress and exploring positive emotions in difficult situations will then be undertaken (section 6). Next, a discussion of research surrounding the role of the educational psychologist in supporting pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties, their teachers and families (section 7). Finally, the use of positive psychology to explore teacher experience will be discussed along with a rationale for the current study.

1.1. Description of Narrative Literature Search and Review

This narrative review of the literature was undertaken to provide an examination and overview of the literature and research in the relevant areas under study. As there was limited research in some of the areas under discussion, a narrative literature review method was chosen. This allowed the consolidation of knowledge from literature in these areas, enabled the inclusion of a variety of methodologies, and enabled the identification of gaps in the literature (Grant & Booth, 2009). An iterative search of the literature took place from November 2017 to September 2018 using the following search databases; Web of Science, PsycArticles, and Google Scholar. Search combinations using the following terms were used; profound and multiple learning difficulties, profound and multiple learning disabilities, severe learning disability, positive psychology, teacher, child, pupil, school, educational psychology, intellectual disability, multiple disability, school psychologist, positive affect, and positive reappraisal (for full results see appendix 1). Different terminology and combinations of search terms were used to extend the literature included. A hand search of the journal 'Educational and Child Psychology' was undertaken as it is particularly relevant and is not available through a database search. Reference lists from relevant articles were used to explore other relevant articles, along with articles suggested from the databases arising from the search terms. Literature relating to profound and multiple difficulties was generally excluded if it related to adults or pre-school children or was not within the school system of the United Kingdom, as other education systems may be significantly different. Literature relating to positive psychology was included if it related to adults, as the teachers were the focus of this area of study.

2.   Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties

2.1. Definitions and Characteristics of PMLD

The pupils with the most complex and multiple disabilities and that require the most support in schools are those labelled as having profound and multiple learning difficulties (PMLD) according to the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Code of Practice (Department of Education (DfE) & Department of Health (DoH), 2015). The children that have been ascribed these labels have a spectrum of needs that includes severe and complex learning difficulties, and in addition to this will have a

physical disability or sensory impairment. They are also likely to have severe medical conditions, and difficulties with communication, mobility, and self-care (Salt, 2010). In their review of definitions of PMLD, Bellamy and colleagues (Bellamy, Croot, Bush, Berry and Smith, 2010), asserted that other common characteristics will also include challenging behaviour, profound social functioning impairment (reduced ability to be self-dependent), and mental illness. Imray (2008) reported that along with severe intellectual difficulty, which he valued as being below the developmental level of a typically developing eighteen-month-old, children with PMLD will also have the following characteristics; communication that must be interpreted by someone who knows them well; pre-verbal communication based on wants and needs; are physically reliant on others; have limited understanding of cause and effect; and are unable to conceive of abstract concepts. These difficulties will have a large impact on the learning and educational needs of pupils with PMLD (Imray, 2008). They will need support in all areas of the curriculum (DfE & DoH, 2015).

2.2. Prevalence of PMLD

The number of pupils experiencing PMLD in maintained schools in England and Wales was 11,814 according to the 2018 school census' and constituted just less than 1% of pupils with a special educational need (Department for Education, 2018; Welsh Government, 2018). The number of children with these complex and multiple difficulties is increasing, primarily due to improved early survival rates for premature babies and advances in medical technology and care (Marlowe, Wolke, Bracewell & Samara, 2005; Salt, 2010).

2.3. Additional Needs of Children Experiencing PMLD

Children experiencing PMLD are a particularly vulnerable group as they are highly dependent on adults for most of their care needs, interactions, and mobility (Salt, 2010; Simmons & Bayliss, 2007). They are reliant on familiar adults to interpret their communication and to facilitate communication with others. Their inclusion in school and society is dependent on the people around them. Children with intellectual disabilities are also more vulnerable to mental health issues (Pote & Goodban, 2007), and are six times more likely to experience psychiatric disorders (Emerson & Hatton, 2007). They are more likely to receive medication to address these difficulties, even where evidence does not support it (Vedi & Bernard, 2012).

Children with profound and multiple learning difficulties are likely to display challenging behaviour on a daily basis, which can have an impact on relationships, as well as their access to learning and inclusive activities (Imray, 2008; Poppes, van der Putten, & Vlaskamp, 2010).

2.4. Definitions and labelling.

Despite being a term that is widespread, there is no universally agreed definition of PMLD. Defining a complex and diverse group such as those labelled with PMLD can be difficult (Bellamy et al, 2010). Part of the label 'PMLD' is changeable; the terms learning disability and learning difficulty are used synonymously in different fields of legislation or practice. Along with the difficulties in agreeing a shared language which is acceptable to service users themselves, there are difficulties in determining clear and distinct categories for people. There are also moral and philosophical objections to the use of labels. These include the belief that labels tend towards a medical model that places the difficulty within the person and neglects the impact of society on disability (Ho, 2004).

Labels are applied and decided by society, and how society labels groups can reflect society's views towards them. Labels can also impact on the group members themselves. The language that people use to describe groups will impact on the constructions that are formed of those belonging to that group, and the world itself is constructed by the language society uses (Burr, 1995). However, labels are necessary in service delivery and in research, to enable others to identify the members under discussion (Bellamy, Croot, Bush, Berry and Smith, 2010).

2.5. Definitions Based on Strengths

Some authors have attempted to promote a more positive definition of PMLD that is not defined by deficits, by focussing on the positive views of carers and professionals (Lacey and Ouvrey, 1998) and the impact of community and society on the difficulties encountered by the person (Aird, 2001; Jones, 2005). These definitions take a more holistic view of PMLD and also recognise the strengths and resources that people have. Bellamy and colleagues (Bellamy et al, 2010) asked professionals and carers their opinions of definitions of PMLD. Most (61%) preferred a definition

based on the person's strengths and what they can achieve with the right support, rather than deficit-based definitions.

2.6. Models of Disability

People with disabilities have traditionally been categorised by their deficits and by the pathology of their disability (Buntinx, 2013). Although it is necessary to understand causes of disability and deficits, concentrating solely on these can ignore the strengths and potential of people with severe disabilities (Narayan, Bruce, Bhandari, & Kolli, 2010). Over the last few decades, models of disability have been moving towards a more positive view of disability (Buntinx, 2013). Both the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF) (World Health Organisation (WHO), 2001) and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (WHO, 2006) emphasise the impact of society on the functioning of the person and place value on identifying personal strengths and resources.

Whether we define people with disabilities by their deficits or their strengths may have an impact on how society responds to them (Buntinx, 2013).   The Joint Committee on Human Rights (2008) advocated for a more positive approach, to move away from the negative attitudes that dehumanise people with learning disabilities. People with PMLD are described as being the most excluded and vulnerable in our society. They are particularly vulnerable to breaches of their human rights and are more liable to social exclusion, poverty, and isolation (Foundation for People with Learning Disabilities, 2011; Joint Committee on Human Rights, 2008; PMLD Network, 2001).

3. <u>Special Teaching</u>

3.1. Inclusion

There is ongoing debate about whether pupils experiencing PMLD are being excluded in our school system. Most children categorised by the label of PMLD (83%) are taught within specialist schools or centres (Jones & Riley, 2017). Male and Rayner (2007) reported that most headteachers of specialist schools were

providing occasional, or zero, opportunities for their pupils experiencing PMLD to be included in mainstream education.

However, there are arguments about what inclusion means (Colley, 2018). Most commonly it is understood to mean access to mainstream education settings which include all children (Colley, 2018).

Some authors have asserted that not providing specialist education for pupils with PMLD is neglecting their human right to an education that meets their needs (i.e. Hornby, 2015). Much of the international human rights policy and legislation endorses full inclusion in educational settings that are suitable for all pupils (i.e. United Nations, 2006; UNESCO, 1994). However, UK government policy appears to endorse the principle of inclusion, but maintains that there is an important role for special schools (DfE & DoH, 2015).

3.2. Pedagogy

Much of the debate over whether pupils with PMLD need specialist education is concerned with whether there are teaching pedagogies that are able to meet the needs of all pupils. Norwich and Lewis (2007) argued for a continuum of teaching pedagogy, that is adaptable for all pupils. They suggested a model of teaching that included three interacting parts; teacher knowledge, curriculum, and pedagogic strategies. They suggested that in the areas of extreme need, such as pupils with PMLD, it is the teacher knowledge of their pupils that allows the teacher to adapt the common curricular and pedagogy to the needs of their pupils. They concluded that there was a need for much more research in this area.

3.3. Education of Pupils with PMLD

The complexity of need of pupils with PMLD has led to debate about whether society is meeting their needs in education, a debate that has been ongoing for 20 years (Aird, 2001, Carpenter, 2007; Department of Health, 2009; Rochford, 2016). Effective teaching of pupils with PMLD can occur in many different settings, however, it is commonly agreed that pupils with PMLD do need provision that is extra to other pupils (Carpenter, 2007; Norwich & Lewis, 2007). The uniqueness and

complexity of needs of this population, combined with the compounding interaction of these needs, requires teachers to have specialised and individualised knowledge (Carpenter, 2007; Colley, 2018). In the Rochford review (Rochford, 2016) of assessment for pupils working below the national curriculum level, she asserted that pupils with PMLD need specialised processes and pedagogy that allow for their non-linear, atypical pathways of development.

Whether provided in mainstream or specialist schools, pupils experiencing PMLD will require a high level of individualised support across the curriculum, for their learning needs as well as their personal care. They need their learning broken down into very small stages and are likely to remain below the level of the national curriculum for the whole of their education (DfE, 2012). Teachers of pupils with PMLD require skills across a range of areas including care, social, medical, physical, sensory, emotional, and learning (Simmons & Bayliss, 2007). The learning profiles of children with PMLD do not usually follow the linear progress of other children, as they may plateau and can appear to regress in their learning (Rochford, 2016).

3.4. Impact of Aetiology on Learning

A discussion of the complexity of the needs of pupils with PMLD should include the impact of aetiology on development and learning. Complex learning profiles are often linked to specific disorders i.e; Down's syndrome or Autistic Spectrum Disorder, which then requires teachers to have specialist knowledge of these disorders (Carpenter, 2007). When the aetiology of PMLD is due to premature birth this is likely to result in different learning profiles that may be even more complex. Earlier pre-term survival due to advances in medical care results in an increased risk of disability and other medical complications (Marlow, Wolke, Bracewell & Samara, 2005; Woodward, Mogridge, Wells, & Inder, 2004; Salt, 2010). Very pre-term babies (pre 32 weeks gestation) have alterations in their brain anatomy and activity due to differences in white matter development and brain haemorrhaging that can occur (Wolke, 2013). This is likely to cause atypical learning pathways and may impact on the pathways for sensory development also.

3.5. Mental Health and PMLD

Along with an understanding of multiple needs, complex learning profiles, and individualised pedagogy, teachers need to be able to identify mental health difficulties and know how to respond to them (Carpenter, 2007). Teachers of pupils with PMLD are one of a limited number of people who know the pupil well and will be able to identify any small changes in behaviour, communication, or physical changes that could indicate a mental health difficulty (Carpenter et al, 2015). However, teachers have reported that it can be very difficult to distinguish mental health concerns for pupils with PMLD (Ferguson, Howley & Rose, 2008).

3.6. Specialist Knowledge and Training

There is no requirement for specialist training to work with pupils with PMLD (Salt, 2010). Specialist teacher training was withdrawn in the mid-1980's, which has led to a population of specialist teachers who are now nearing retirement, and a generation of teachers that have not received specialist teacher training (Salt, 2010). It is the responsibility of individual schools to research and finance any specialist training. Carpenter (2013) argued that the lack of specialist training, research, and policy in this field have caused a decrease in specialised practice and knowledge, resulting in a lack of evolving pedagogy and research-based knowledge. The Salt Review of teacher supply for pupils with SLD/PMLD (Salt, 2010) concluded that often the complex needs of these pupils are insufficiently understood and are therefore not being met within schools. Headteachers of special schools have reported concerns about the decreasing number of staff with additional qualifications, and more teaching assistants (TAs) are being employed to meet the increasing complexity and numbers of pupils experiencing PMLD (Male & Rayner, 2007). Teachers themselves have reported that they felt inadequately prepared to teach their pupils experiencing PMLD (Salt, 2010).

Simmons and Bayliss (2007) in their study of a special school for pupils with severe learning difficulties (SLD), reported that staff who were highly experienced and knowledgeable about SLD did not have adequate skills or knowledge to work effectively with pupils with PMLD. The researchers subjectively evaluated the teaching and knowledge of the teachers, through interview and observations. However, there was no indication of the qualifications or experience of one of the

researchers to enable him to make these judgements, although there was triangulation of data and reliability checking with participants. One of the researchers acted as a learning support assistant within the school, which reportedly reduced observer reactivity. His presence in the school was not explained, nor whether he was working there prior to the research. It is necessary to consider the impact of his presence on the participants and potential bias that may have existed in the research, however, the authors did not explore these issues in their paper.

3.7. Support for Teachers

Teachers of pupils with PMLD have had insufficient support from the government for some time. Continuing professional development is inconsistent and is often not focussed on PMLD, and is also not quality assured (Salt, 2010). There has been little government-led development of pedagogy or curricula, and teachers are expected to develop their own curricula and teaching strategies (Carpenter, 2007; Lacey, 2011; Salt, 2010). Teaching staff reported that they had little or no contact with an educational psychologist (Winter, 2017). The main assessment tool that they have been using since the late 1990s, performance scales, has recently been declared as unfit for purpose in a government review (Rochford, 2016). Some support for teachers in Wales has been provided through the Welsh Government's Routes for Learning assessment tool (Welsh Assembly, 2006). However, both performance scales (P-scales) and Routes for Learning were based on typical development, and it is argued that typical infant developmental stages are inappropriate for pupils with PMLD (Lacey, 2011).

More recently some support has been developed for teachers and their pupils with PMLD. One of the recommendations of the Salt Review (2010) was to result in the Complex Learning Difficulties and Disabilities (CLDD) Research Project (Carpenter, Egerton, Brooks, Cockbill, Fotheringham, & Rawson, 2011). This research team has developed the Engagement Profile for Learners with Complex Learning Difficulties and Disabilities. The Engagement Profile is now recommended by the English government for use with pupils with PMLD (Rochford, 2016). Although the authors conducted research into the Engagement Profile, it will be important for further research to continue, and to measure progress over time for those implementing it.

The Engagement Profile is not a curriculum or standardised assessment, therefore teachers will need to make adjustments to their practice to implement this new intervention.

3.8. Emotional Pressures of Teaching

Being a teacher of pupils with PMLD can place significantly more emotional pressures on teachers due to; the severity of needs; difficulties with interaction, communication, and feedback from pupils; medical responsibility; and challenging behaviour (Aird, 2001). The impact of bereavement on their own and their pupils' wellbeing must also be considered, as mortality rates for children with PMLD are 50% higher than children with SLD (Emerson, 2009). Aird (2001) also reported that multi-agency working, the coordination of these services, and managing a team of support staff can add additional pressures.

4. <u>Research about Teaching Staff working with Pupils with PMLD</u>

A review of the literature revealed that there is very little research investigating the experiences of teaching staff who work with pupils with PMLD. The research has looked at teachers' own training and learning, (Lacey, 1998; Jones & Riley, 2017; Simmons & Bayliss, 2007), how they define their pupils (Jones, 2005), teachers' own identities (Jones, 2004), and the experiences of teaching assistants (Halcrow, 2014; Martin & Alborz, 2014).

Jones (2004; 2005) interviewed 14 teachers of pupils with PMLD working in special schools about their views of their pupils. The participants reported a strong belief in special education and viewed themselves as very different to mainstream teachers. Jones suggested that there can be negatives in having a strong identity to the exclusion of others. She suggested that teachers of pupils with PMLD need to be aware of the similarities between their role and other teachers' role to decrease feelings of segregation and exclusion. It is an unfortunate consequence that their feelings of being distinct from other teachers may exacerbate or contribute to their feelings of isolation. The participants were all working in a specialist provision, which may have influenced their feelings of identity and isolation. Jones (2005) concluded that the participants held positive views about their pupils and advocated the

necessity for society to be made aware of the positive contribution of people with PMLD.

Halcrow (2014), in his unpublished doctoral thesis, explored the subjective experiences of teaching assistants (TAs) working with pupils with severe learning difficulties and profound and multiple learning difficulties in special schools. He concluded that TAs working in this area developed close relationships with pupils, with increased individual knowledge and attunement. These relationships, which often have more flexible personal boundaries than with other pupils, resulted in the TAs taking on feelings of fear and anxiety from their pupils.

Halcrow believed that TAs would benefit from supervision to enable them to consider any difficult feelings in relation to their practice and their relationships with their pupils. He also asserted that the lack of specialist knowledge and training were a potential barrier to inclusive practice by the TAs.   The researcher himself had previously worked as a TA, which may have impacted on his views on the role and the participants. As there was an emphasis on the role of the TA it may have been beneficial to triangulate other peoples' view of the TA role. There were only three participants in this study within one special school, therefore, the results may be limited to the particular situation of those participants, which was reflected in the social constructionist epistemology.

Martin and Alborz (2014) asked 22 teaching assistants (TAs) and teachers their views about whether the training received by TAs was adequate to support their pupils with PMLD. TAs reported that they wanted more planned and regular workplace learning, with an emphasis on understanding the underlying causes of behaviour and the psychological principles underlying them. This is similar to findings in the majority of specialist schools with pupils with complex learning difficulties (Hastings, 2005). Training in managing challenging behaviour is most effective when it focuses on developing understanding of underlying causes and psychological principles, as this knowledge enables prevention as well as more appropriate intervention (Grey, Hastings & McClean, 2007).

Jones and Riley (2017) took a constructivist approach to investigate how teachers learn to teach pupils with severe learning difficulties (SLD) and PMLD. Jones and Riley (2017) concluded that continuous learning is essential for teachers of children with PMLD. They need to be able to constantly reflect on and adapt their pedagogy to adjust to their pupils' perceived engagement and learning. The authors highlighted the importance of reflective practice and learning collaboratively with other teachers. They also emphasised the use of classroom coaching for development and sustaining changes. The study used purely online communication with participants which may have limited the depth and richness of the data, due to hindering the development of rapport (Coolican, 2004). The participants had all been previous members of a study tour, and therefore may have had a particular interest in developing their skills and pedagogy.

Teachers of pupils with PMLD feel that they need extra support and training to do their job effectively (Salt, 2010). They need specialist and individualised knowledge of their pupils and are expected to develop their own curricula and constantly reflect on their pedagogy. Teachers develop an in-depth knowledge of the complex needs of the children they work with, and the support that is successful for them. This is important information for educational psychologists to know about so that they can work effectively with teachers and their pupils. Teachers of pupils with PMLD can experience more emotional pressures in their work, therefore, exploring the experiences of teachers may increase understanding of how they manage these pressures and deal with the challenges that they face.   Sharing their experiences may enable educational psychologists to have a better understanding of working with pupils with PMLD. The little research that exists about teachers of pupils with PMLD neglects to explore the experiences of the teachers themselves. Teachers of pupils with PMLD are a small group who may feel isolated within their work and have had little voice in the literature (Jones, 2005).

5.   <u>Positive Experiences of Parenting Children with Disabilities</u>

There is very little research exploring the experiences of teachers working with pupils with PMLD or those who teach children with disabilities (Winter, 2017). Teachers of

children with disabilities may be likely to experience some of the same stressors as parents of children with disabilities. Teachers of pupils with PMLD take on a caregiver role as they must meet the personal, social, emotional and learning needs of their pupils (Aird, 2001). This caregiving role can result in more flexible interpersonal boundaries when working with pupils with PMLD (Halcrow, 2014), that can be similar to that of a parent-child relationship (Aird, 2001). It is possible that the knowledge gained from research with parents of children with disabilities can help increase the understanding of the experiences of teachers of children with disabilities.

Recently there has been an increasing number of studies about the positive aspects of parenting children with disabilities (Buntinx, 2013). These have led to the identification of strengths, an increased understanding of resilience, factors that contribute to supportive families, and how families have adapted to meet the challenges of raising a child with a disability (Greer, Grey & McClean, 2006; Reuman, Mitamura & Tugade, 2013). In a survey of 543 parent-carers of children with a disability, approximately two thirds reported that having a disabled child had been positive for their family (Mcconnell, Savage, Sobsey & Uditsky, 2014). An exploration of the positive impact of parenting a child with a disability by Scorgie and Sobsey (2000) reported that the major impacts identified were personal growth, improved relations with others, and changes in philosophical or spiritual values.

A study by Szarkowski and Brice (2016) into the positive experiences of parents of children who were hearing impaired reported that parents felt that they had experienced personal growth and had learnt to appreciate everyday positives. As well as reporting many positive experiences of parenting, the positive experience of the study also impacted on the parents. They appreciated the opportunity to talk positively about how their child had made a difference in their lives. Parents felt that the focus on growth and strengths made them better people and parents and helped them to notice more positives about their child.

5.1. Positive Cognitive Reappraisal

Thompson, Hiebert-Murphy, and Trute (2013) reported that mothers' positive appraisal of their child's disability was positively related to family adjustment and parental stress (f = 21.02, p < 0.01). However, this study included both positive appraisal and self-esteem together in their regression analysis. They concluded that interventions to help mothers to identify positive aspects of having a child with a disability could be important.

Graungaard, Anderson and Skov (2010a) studied why some parents coped better than others and concluded that some parents use cognitive reappraisal to transform their experiences into resources. Paczkowski and Baker (2008) also found that positive beliefs about their child moderated the effects of stress on mothers of children with developmental delays. Higher positive beliefs were related to lower parenting stress (r = -0.58, p<0.001) and to lower child externalising behaviours (r = -0.54, p<0.001). However, these analyses were correlational therefore causality cannot be inferred. It has been asserted that parents reporting the positive impact of their child can mediate the stress felt when child behaviour problems occur as it is argued that positive affect moderates the effects of stressful experiences (Blacher, Baker & Berkowitz, 2013).

A study by Minnes, Perry, and Weiss (2015) found an association between parents who were able to reframe situations more positively and reduced parental distress (f = 24.97, p < 0.001). The above research may be explained by Folkman and Moskowitz' (2000) theory of coping and stress, which is part of the field of positive psychology. Folkman and Moskowitz (2000) studied the effects of positive cognitive reappraisal and concluded that this technique may be particularly helpful for people who are long-term caregivers by helping them to reappraise difficult tasks and stressors into more positive constructs that are easier to maintain.

Research has shown that positive psychology has been useful to the world of disability and has been helpful in understanding parents of children with disabilities (Blacher, Baker & Berkowitz, 2013). It has identified how parents' appraisals of their situation and positive beliefs about their child have helped them to cope better. This

may be useful knowledge for understanding the experiences of teachers of pupils with disabilities and supporting them to manage their work.

Although we do not fully understand the relationship between positive cognitive reappraisal, positive impact and coping, it is clear that this area of positive psychology can be useful in reducing stress, and increasing coping, adjustment, and resources. Research in the field of positive psychology has attempted to explain possible processes underlying these relationships.

6. <u>Positive Psychology</u>

6.1. Positive Psychology Summary

As previously discussed, teaching pupils with PMLD can be seen to be a difficult job with additional emotional pressures. Research with parents of children with disabilities has reported that how people view a situation can have an impact on their ability to cope with, and even to derive positives from difficult circumstances. These relationships may be explained by research in the field of positive psychology.

Positive psychology is defined as "the scientific study of positive experiences and positive individual traits" (Duckworth, Steen & Seligman, 2005, p. 650). It is a strengths-based model of understanding human functioning, that focuses on the development of capabilities and competencies. It is about a life that is well-lived despite challenges (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Positive psychology is inspired by people under extreme adversity who have been able to find positives from their experiences and to grow from them.

Viewing disability through the framework of positive psychology can help us to focus on the strengths and resources of the individual. It can help us to explore the positive impact that society can have on the well-being of people with disabilities, and also the positive impact that people with disabilities can have on society. It is commensurate with the move towards more positive, strengths focussed, social models of disability that are endorsed in international legislation (WHO, 2001; 2006).

6.2. Stress and Coping

The findings of their research on stress and coping have led Folkman, Moskowitz and colleagues to conclude that coping is influenced by positive cognitive reappraisal, and how we view the stressor (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2000; Moskowitz et al, 2017). (See Frydenberg, 2014 for a history of the research into stress and coping). They have concluded that people are able to view positives and to experience positive affect under very difficult circumstances. They have also asserted that positive affect increases positive appraisal which leads to better coping outcomes (Moskowitz, Folkman, Collette & Vittinghoff, 1996). Lazarus, Kanner and Folkman (1980) suggest that during stress positive affect can support coping efforts by providing psychological respite. Positive affect is defined by Moskowitz et al (2017) as; "subjective positively valenced feelings that range from happy, calm, and satisfied, to excited and thrilled…is uniquely related to better psychological and physical well-being, independent of the effects of negative affect" (p.410).

Folkman and Moskowitz (Folkman, 1997; Folkman & Moskowitz, 2000; Moskowitz et al, 2017) have extensively studied the three aspects of coping that they consider to be effective in reducing feelings of stress and increasing positive affect. These three aspects are; positive reappraisal (cognitive strategies used to reframe a difficult situation more positively); infusion of ordinary events with positive meaning; and goal-directed problem-focussed coping (efforts to solve/manage the problem). These coping strategies are normally associated with more positive outcomes (Moskowitz, Folkman, Collette & Vittinghoff, 1996).

In their longitudinal study (Moskowitz, Folkman, Collette & Vittinghoff, 1996) on the relationship between mood and coping, Moskowitz et al (1996) interviewed caregivers for people with acquired immunodeficiency syndrome over a ten-month period. They were interviewed bimonthly, and measures of mood and coping were conducted. Positive appraisal was significantly associated with increased positive mood and was negatively associated with negative mood. Positive appraisal also had a significant association with coping. Moskowitz and her colleagues reported that positive affect had an important function in helping people to cope and to find

additional resources to continue to care for loved ones. Positive affect helped people to mediate stress, and to find additional resources to care for loved ones by positively reappraising difficult tasks as being helpful (Moskowitz et al, 1996).

Due to the correlational design of their study, it was not possible to infer causality, as it is equally possible that better coping caused increased positive affect. The tool used to report positive emotions measured quantity of positive emotions that were experienced, but it could be argued that the number of positive emotions may not be as important as the intensity of emotions. The quantity of emotions was measured retrospectively over the last week, which can be a less accurate source of measurement than immediate sampling measures (Moskowitz et al, 2017). The study relied on participants' recall of both their emotions and their coping strategies over the last week, which is also likely to be a less accurate method of measurement. Moskowitz et al (1996) used a very specific population of male caregivers, who were going through a very unique set of circumstances in providing palliative care for their partners. It is therefore difficult to generalise their findings to other populations. It is still unclear how different coping situations are impacted by different coping strategies, as the participants used significantly different coping strategies during the caregiving and bereavement processes.

In a further study, Moskowitz, Shmueli Blumberg, Acree, and Folkman, (2012) examined the role of positive affect in self-regulation in the performance of roles during stress. The three studies, with students, maternal caregivers and people newly diagnosed with Human Immunodeficiency Virus, looked retrospectively at the impact of negative and positive affect on role performance (i.e. duties, self-care) during a recent stressful period. Positive affect was significantly correlated with better role functioning ($r = .37$, $p<.0001$), but negative affect was not ($r = -.069$, $p = .16$). They asserted that their study provided evidence towards the beneficial effects of positive affect in mediating stress, by preventing a stressful event from impacting on other roles that people hold. However, this does not predict causality, as it is possible that people who are performing better in their roles experience higher positive affect. Again, they relied on participant recall of affect and stressful

event from the preceding week, which may be subject to recall bias, or impacted by current stress or affect.

Wichers et al (Wichers, Myin-Germeys, Jacobs, Peeters, Kenis, Derom, & van Os, 2007) implemented a twin study to investigate the impact of positive affect on stress and genetic pre-disposition to depression. They used an experience sampling method to monitor affect and personal events that had occurred. There was a strong and significant interaction between stress and positive affect in the association with negative affect (x^2 = 321, d.f. = 1, p < 0.001). They asserted that positive affect moderated the effect of stress and reduced the negative affect response to stress that is normally associated with having a twin who had a lifetime depression diagnosis.

More recently Moskowitz et al (2017) have implemented a randomised controlled trial (RCT) of a positive affect intervention for people newly diagnosed with Human Immunodeficiency Virus. The intervention consisted of instruction in cognitive and behavioural techniques designed to increase positive affect. They achieved some interesting results. Participants in the control group increased in their use of anti-depressants compared to stabilised use in the positive affect intervention group (p=0.06, d=-0.78, at 15-month assessment point). They also reported increased positive affect in the intervention group at the 5, 10 and 15-month assessment, but not initially. Effect sizes increased over time, which may be indicative of the time participants needed to practice or perfect the techniques they had learnt, or a cumulative effect of the techniques. The authors suggested that the measurement of previous day affect may have been more sensitive to changes in affect than the previous week measure, and they suggested that multiple daily measurements may show larger effect sizes.

However, they reported that despite increases in positive affect, neither positive nor negative affect appeared to consistently mediate any of the intervention effects. There is a possible confounding variable that there is likely to be an increase in positive affect as time moves away from the date of diagnosis. The authors

themselves acknowledge that their subjective measurement of emotion was lacking in standardised benchmarks or norms. Their intervention consisted of a variety of strategies, which made it difficult to separate the efficacy of positive reappraisal on its own. However, this was a study of high methodological quality meeting five out of six of the Cochrane Collaboration criteria (Higgins & Green, 2008). It will be important for the development of this field for further quality RCTs to be performed.

6.3. Broaden and Build Theory

Barbara Fredrickson's research (1998, 2001) has added to the understanding of how people cope and experience positive emotions in difficult situations. Her broaden and build theory of positive emotions, which sits within the field of positive psychology, can help to explain why positive affect can buffer the impact of stress. Fredrickson asserted that positive emotions broaden thought-action repertoires, enabling people to be more creative in finding solutions (Fredrickson & Branigan, 2005). In addition to this, positive emotions help to build social, intellectual and physical resources by increasing your attentional focus and behavioural repertoire. These processes enable the broadening of both internal and external resources for coping. Fredrickson (2001) also stated that broadened mindsets lead to adaptive benefits which increase long-term personal resources and resiliency. Fredrickson's research can help us to understand the benefit of positive affect during times of stress and difficult circumstances. This research can help to explain the benefits of positive emotion and attempts to provide an explanation of Folkman's research into stress and coping.

According to Fredrickson, (2001) when people experience negative emotions their thought-action tendencies are limited to a few responses, for example, fear causing the tendency for fight, flight or freeze. Positive emotions, by contrast, enable people to consider a wider range of thoughts and actions (Fredrickson, 2001). Broadened thought-action tendencies may be helpful in stressful circumstances, as they allow people to consider a wider range of possible options.

Fredrickson and Branigan (2005) investigated the broadening effect of induced positive emotion on students' scope of attention. Students who watched a positive emotion-inducing film were able to list significantly more things that they would like to do whilst feeling positive emotion, than induced neutral emotion (t(98) = 1.86, p = .033) or induced negative emotion (t(98) = −1.53, p = .064). Participants watching the positive emotion films also had a significantly larger global bias score compared to the neutral film (t(99) = 1.87, p = .032) or the negative film (t(99) = 1.83, p = .035).

Fredrickson and Branigan (2005) asserted that this research supported the theory that positive emotion broadens the scope of attention and increases peoples' repertoires of action. However, a great deal more research is needed in this area, by an extended range of authors. Global bias is peoples' normal initial focus, so it is Fredrickson's inference that a larger global bias is better, however, there are also situations when local bias and attention to detail would be more important. It is also difficult to generalise Fredrickson's research as her participants were students, watching films. It is impossible to induce isolated, singular emotions from watching a film clip, as participants experienced a range of emotions.

Frederickson and Joiner (2002) investigated the theory that positive emotions build resilience. They theorised that the broadened attention caused by experiences of positive emotion facilitates coping, by increasing possible options for thoughts/actions, and in turn, this improved coping increases experiences of positive emotion. This continuing cycle should increase psychological resilience and enhance emotional well-being. They measured positive and negative affect and the coping strategies that the participants reported that they had employed. The authors reported that positive affect was significantly related to changes in broad-minded coping over the time of the study ((pr = .19), t(134) = 2.25, p <.05), but negative affect was not. They also reported that broad-minded coping significantly predicted increased positive affect ((pr = .32), t(135) = 3.83, p <.05). From their analysis, they concluded that participants who experienced more positive emotions became more resilient over time. This increased coping then also led to increased positive emotions, causing what they describe as an upward spiral of increased resilience

and positive emotion. It is difficult to effectively critique this study as the authors did not report cut-off scores for positive or negative affect, they only report that higher scores indicate positive or negative affect. It has been reported in other research that negative and positive affect can be correlated themselves (Moskowitz, Folkman, Collette & Vittinghoff, 1996). The participants were all American psychology students, so generalisation is again limited.   This study was repeated by a doctoral student colleague of Joiner, (Burns, Brown, Sachs-Ericsson, Ashby Plant, Thomas Curtis, Fredrickson, Joiner, 2008), which reported to replicate their claims. However, the statistical analysis used in Fredrickson and Joiner, (2002) was disputed by Nickerson (2007), who asserted that the analysis used was not able to support the upward spiral effect of their broaden and build theory. Fredrickson and Joiner (2018) have recently acknowledged that the statistical analyses capable of testing their theory have only recently been developed. However, they have also asserted that other studies have indicated causality for their theory, in support of their own correlational results.

More research is needed into this area, which includes repetition of these studies by other authors, statistical analyses that are appropriate, which will need larger samples (Nickerson, 2007), as well as research to further our understanding of how and why this relationship may occur, such as the neurological mechanisms underlying the processes (Fredrickson, 2001).

6.4. Positive Psychology Critique

Positive psychology is a relatively new field of research, even though it's origins in humanism are older (Joseph, 2017). A major problem with research in the field of positive psychology is the wide range of interventions that are labelled under it. Fredrickson's (1998) broaden and build and Folkman and Moskowitz' (2000) stress and coping theories are not part of Seligman's work, although they are considered to be part of positive psychology (Frydenberg, 2014).

Positive psychology interventions are defined as "treatment methods or intentional activities that aim to cultivate positive feelings, behaviors or cognitions" (Sin & Lyubomirsky, 2009 p.468) rather than reducing symptoms or problems. Positive

psychology interventions can often include interventions from other fields, which already have established evidence of their effectiveness, including cognitive reappraisal from cognitive behavioural therapy, breathing techniques, and mindfulness. Since these techniques are often employed together in the research it is difficult to separate effects (Bolier et al, 2013).

Meta-analyses of positive psychology interventions (Bolier et al, 2013; Sin & Lyubomirski, 2009) have reported a significant impact on subjective and psychological well-being with small to moderate effect sizes, (r = 0.29, standardized mean difference Cohen's d = 0.61), with Bolier et al (2013) reporting effect sizes of d = 0.34 and d = 0.20 respectively for subjective and psychological well-being. There was some evidence that these effects were partly sustained over time. However, Bolier et al (2013) reported that the quality of the studies was not high, that more diverse populations need to be included, and that more randomised controlled trials are necessary. They also reported a publication bias in positive psychology and encouraged researchers to publish with small samples or where null effects are found. Perhaps surprisingly in an area of such subjectivity as emotions, there is a dearth of qualitative research, which could be due to an over-reliance on quantitative research in short-sighted efforts to legitimise this new area of study.

Both Fredrickson's (1998; 2001), and Folkman and Moskowitz' (2000) research are susceptible to the same critiques, that measuring positive affect is subjective and difficult to measure without confounding variables. Individual positive emotions can have a different impact on people (Branigan & Fredrickson, 2005), therefore being able to isolate emotions is important, however, this is likely to be impossible. Emotions can be fleeting in duration, many of the studies use retrospective rating of feelings experienced during the last week (i.e. Moskowitz et al, 1996). Often the intensity of emotion reduces over time. Studies so far have relied on recall of emotion and coping techniques, which may be affected by a person's emotional state at the time of recall, and their memory.

It is difficult to quantify subjective concepts such as positive affect. Measuring positive affect does not have standardised norms, and there is no standardised method for measuring improvement, so it is not possible to measure what improvement is clinically significant (Moskowitz et al, 2017). There are no standardised criteria for how much positive affect people need for emotional well-being, and whether this differs between people, or according to personality characteristics or circumstances. There are also discussions around whether the intensity or quantity of positive affect is more important. It can also be argued that positive psychology neglects the important role of negative emotions. Negative emotions have positive outcomes in enabling us to take aversive action and to stay safe. Negative affect such as crying can be a social indicator to others that induces social support from them.

Although there is need for ongoing research in this area, positive psychology theorises that positive affect and positive reappraisal can have an impact on coping, resilience, and psychological wellbeing. There is a strong correlation between stress and negative affect (Hamama et al, 2012) so it is likely to be more important that we try to induce positive affect in times of stress. Positive psychology provides a preventative approach as well as treatment, as its focus is to strive for optimal functioning and growth, and to facilitate strengths and well-being. Using a positive psychology focus to explore the experiences of teachers of pupils with PMLD may help us to understand their strengths and resources and lead to positive practices in this field (Field, 2013). Educational psychologists can use positive psychology in their work with teachers to help them to cognitively reappraise difficult circumstances, to increase their experiences of positive emotions and to build their resilience and psychological well-being.

7.   Role of the Educational Psychologist

All pupils with PMLD will have a statement of special educational needs in Wales (Welsh Assembly Government, 2004) or the equivalent education, health and care plan (EHCP) in England (Department for Education and Department of Health, 2015). It is the role of the EP to assess needs and to provide psychological advice

for EHCPs and statutory assessments. There is likely to be a significant and varied role for EPs in working with pupils with PMLD, their teachers and their families.

The British Psychological Society (2019) described the role of the EP as mainly to support children and young people in educational settings, but also to support parents, provide training to staff, research and evaluation, multi-agency work, and strategic work. These areas will be looked at in more detail to help develop an understanding of the role of the EP with pupils experiencing PMLD.

7.1. Individual Work with Children and Young People

In their major review of the EP role (Farrell, Woods, Lewis, Squires, Rooney, & O'Connor, 2006) stakeholders reported that EPs have an essential role in working with individual pupils with severe and complex needs, and to provide intervention and support for vulnerable pupils. Pupils with PMLD are particularly vulnerable as they rely on a few key adults to interpret their needs and wishes. The EP has a role in determining the voice of the child as part of their statutory assessment (DfE & DoH, 2015; Welsh Government, 2018a). They should use relevant research and their knowledge of communication and behaviour to enable this and teach others to do so also. It has been argued that EPs should act as advocates for pupils (Fox, 2015) and to ensure that they have the resources necessary to meet their needs, including effective curricula and pedagogy.

Pupils experiencing PMLD are more vulnerable to mental illness and to exhibit challenging behaviour, (Emerson and Hatton, 2007; Imray, 2008) which are areas where EP knowledge may be invaluable. EPs can use their skills to analyse the function of behaviour and the underlying meaning for the individual, as well as being able to implement interventions to address them. It is essential practice for EPs to ensure that others do not assume that challenging behaviours are always part of the pupil's disability, as behaviour is often the only way for pupils with PMLD to communicate that their needs are not being met. EPs should also be able to use their knowledge of individual disorders and mental illness to be able to distinguish the behaviours associated with different disorders from those that may be associated with mental health difficulties.

Recently the age range in which EPs work with children and young people has increased to 0-25 years of age (DfE & DoH, 2015; Welsh Government, 2018a). This provides increased opportunities to support children with PMLD earlier in their development and also later in their educational career. Intensive early intervention is vital for children with PMLD, as it may lessen the developmental impact of the disability, reduce secondary disabilities, and help families to function better to support their child (Carpenter, 2005; DfE, 2011). EPs can also work with young people with PMLD to support them into further education, extending the length of time that they will be the recipient of educational provision rather than care alone.

7.2. Working with Parents

A role for EPs in supporting parents and carers has also been identified (BPS, 2019; Farrell et al, 2006) which was valued by parents, and included the areas of direct work, assessment, and training. Due to their systemic working practices, EPs were seen to be able to help build bridges between school and community (Farrell et al, 2006). This is particularly important as pupils in special schools are often transported to school by LA transport, so parents do not have regular face to face contact with their child's teacher.

EPs can also have a role in supporting and working with parents in the home. With the extended younger age range of the EP role, they can be involved much earlier to support parents. This may initially be to support families with acceptance and adjustment following the diagnoses of severe disabilities of their child. Using positive psychology to help parents to see a positive and hopeful future, despite difficulties, can play a large part in their successful management of a difficult diagnosis (Graungard, Skov & Anderson, 2010b). The EP role can also include teaching and training parents about their child's needs and how they can support their child's learning and development at home.

Valuing People Now (DoH, 2009) declared that we must fully include families and carers in discussions about children with learning disabilities, which is reiterated in special educational needs legislation (DfE & DoH, 2015; Welsh Government, 2018a). EPs are in the privileged position of being able to work with families in their home

and are able to ensure that the family's distinct and individual knowledge of their child is heard and included. Goss (2006) conducted research with parents and carers of pupils with PMLD to obtain their unique knowledge of their child, through combining psychotherapy and special education. By exploring family relationships and history, Goss was able to ascertain what was individually meaningful for the pupil and would engage him in learning. This information was then employed in school to inform planning for his learning. Although there were limitations in generalisability of this pilot study, Goss argued for more systemic working and fuller involvement of parents and carers to provide more individually meaningful learning for pupils with PMLD. Information from parents about how their child learns is vital, as they are the first teachers of their child, and are likely to have a great deal of insight into their engagement and learning (Carpenter et al, 2015). They can also provide invaluable information about early childhood experiences and relationships (Goss, 2006).

7.3. Working with Teaching Staff

EPs have a variety of roles in working with teaching staff, which includes providing advice and training to teachers, supervision and consultation, and support for teachers' own emotional well-being (Farrell et al, 2006; Scottish Executive, 2002). Teachers of pupils with PMLD have to develop their own curricula and pedagogy for their pupils (Lacey, 2011). EPs can support schools in adapting or developing curricula and pedagogy to meet the needs of pupils with PMLD, supported by their knowledge of developmental psychology and the psychology of learning. EPs should also be able to provide training on the impact of aetiology on learning pathways and disseminate new evidence from neuro-psychology (Carpenter, 2015).

Special schools have indicated that they would benefit from more training on complex needs from EPs (Winter, 2017). This could include providing training in the use of the Engagement Profile to enable an individualised approach to learning (Carpenter et al, 2015). EPs can also teach staff about the causes of challenging behaviour and the psychological principles behind interventions, as has been requested by TAs (Martin & Alborz, 2014).

Teaching staff must be reflective and reflexive practitioners to ensure engagement and learning for their pupils with individualised and complex learning pathways (Carpenter, 2007). EPs can use their skills in coaching psychology to support teachers and TAs to develop their practice. Coaching psychology is a practice-based format that is likely to be more effective than online or formally taught learning (Adams, 2015). Consultation is another approach used by EPs to develop a reflective approach to practice that enhances a deeper understanding of behaviour, learning and interactionist factors, and assists in collaborative problem solving (Wagner, 2000). This could also be useful for teachers of pupils with PMLD (Wills, 2006).

The emotional well-being of teaching staff is vital to the well-being of pupils (Aird, 2001; Landers, 2018). EPs can support this by providing group supervision for teachers and TAs, or by training staff in techniques to implement supervision for their team, such as solution circles, which would enable both teachers and teaching assistants to benefit from group supervision where school hierarchy is set aside (Brown & Henderson, 2012). Staff working with pupils with PMLD may benefit from additional support from EPs during times of bereavement, for themselves, and to support their pupils.

Emotional well-being can be supported through the use of positive psychology, according to the research about coping. Through reappraising difficult situations, increasing experiences of positive affect, and finding positive meaning, EPs should be able to support teaching staff to improve their psychological and emotional well-being.

7.4. Multi-Agency Working

In the review by Farrell et al (2006) stakeholders highlighted that EPs' contribution to multi-agency work was distinctive due to their use of psychological skills and knowledge, as well as their systemic knowledge. Wills (2006) advocated EPs being able to take a multi-agency approach over time, to provide an in-depth systemic and holistic assessment. EPs are able to gather and coordinate information from various

sources. The benefits of EP multi-agency working may include implementing the Engagement Profile, which involves coordination of other professionals to gather and analyse their individual information about the pupil. The benefits of multi-agency working have also been seen in the research by Porter, Ouvry, Morgan, and Downs (2001). They interviewed various people who had a role in one child's life who experienced PMLD and gathered information about how he expressed and received communication. The sharing of the information resulted in people becoming aware of a wider range of communication abilities, which all parties were able to employ to increase interactions with the pupil.

7.5. Working Systemically

EPs are able to take a systemic view due to their different roles working in schools, in the home, and as part of the local authority (LA) (Scottish Executive, 2002). They are often able to instigate systemic change due to working in LA consultations and policy planning groups (Joseph, 2017). Wills (2006) suggested that EPs have a systemic role to support effective inclusion. This could involve teaching peers and staff about PMLD and giving training on ways to facilitate communication between peers. EPs can work systemically to ensure that pupils with PMLD are viewed positively and raise awareness of the positive impact pupils can have on those around them. This may encourage more teachers to work in this field (Salt, 2010).

EPs can help to share information and pedagogy between schools and help to increase links that may enable the development of opportunities for inclusion. Encouraging teachers to find similarities in practice and pedagogy may decrease feelings of isolation. EPs can support specialist schools to develop outreach support to mainstream schools that also have pupils with PMLD.

7.6. Research and Evaluation

EPs can also be involved in the research and development of psychological and educational methods, and their evaluation (BPS, 2019; Farrell et al, 2006). Most of the literature in the field of PMLD has been written by a limited number of authors

and was formed from practice-based experience. There is a dearth of research about pupils with PMLD themselves as well as pedagogy (Norwich & Lewis, 2007). It would be helpful for EPs to address this lack of research as part of their role as a scientist-practitioner. Research with pupils with PMLD needs to occur over a long period of time, as changes can be very small. EPs working long term in schools are able to take this longitudinal approach.

7.7. Research on the Role of the EP with Pupils with PMLD

Only one research report, which was a Doctoral thesis, was found that investigated school staff's and EP's perceptions of the role of the EP in supporting pupils with PMLD (Winter, 2017). Winter developed a survey for educational psychology services and school staff, to investigate their views into the contribution of EPs to special schools with pupils with PMLD. School staff valued the role of the EP and suggested that EPs were uniquely able to provide knowledge and theory that was underpinned by research evidence. Staff also valued EPs' in-depth knowledge and insight, especially with more challenging situations or behaviours.

However, the participants identified some barriers to EP work in special schools with pupils with PMLD. More than half of the school staff in the study reported that they had had little or no contact with an EP over the last year, despite three quarters of the EPs in this study asserting that it is the responsibility of all EPs to work with pupils with PMLD.

Both EPs and school staff reported that a lack of confidence in EPs' skills and knowledge about pupils with PMLD was a barrier. Lack of confidence and lack of experience were consistent in EP responses, which seemed to arise from EPs feeling that school staff were specialists in this area. EPs also believed that school staff did not feel that EPs could contribute (Winter, 2017). EPs' beliefs that pupils with PMLD and their teachers need an expert may be hindering their work with PMLD. The lack of confidence of teachers in the knowledge and skills of EPs in the area of PMLD may be caused by a lack of knowledge of the EP role by school staff (Ashton and Roberts, 2006). If teachers were more aware of the range of roles that

EPs can provide they may be able to see more value in other roles apart from expertise.

This indicates a need for EPs and school staff to examine further the role of the EP in supporting schools and pupils with PMLD. Teachers and EPs need to clarify the role, and co-construct what an effective role would be.

Winter (2017) provided an interesting introduction to the role of the EP in the area of PMLD, however, her research is limited by the participants involved. This was a self-selecting sample using an online survey, so the participants may have had an increased interest in or knowledge of PMLD. The majority of her participants were EPs, only 44 school staff responded to her survey, and 64% of these were school management staff. It is important that we ascertain the views of teachers themselves, as they are the people working directly with the pupil. Most EPs preferred to work directly with the teacher, however this rarely occurred (Winter, 2017).

EPs have a varied role to take in the support of pupils experiencing PMLD and their families and teachers. However, they lack the confidence to do so, due to viewing the teacher as the expert, and both teachers and EPs feeling that EPs have little expertise (Winter, 2017). Many EPs would normally resist taking on an expert role (Ashton & Roberts, 2006), however, they seem to feel it is important when working in the area of PMLD (Winter, 2017).

7.8. Positive Psychology Framework

Using a positive psychology framework alters the underlying assumptions about human nature. It endorses the capacity for growth within everyone, it enables people to help themselves, it supports people to be their own agent of change, and works towards well-being for everyone (Joseph, 2017). A positive psychology framework is increasingly being used by EPs in their work with pupils, their teachers, and families (Joseph, 2017).

The practice of an EP is underpinned by their individual philosophical assumptions (Joseph, 2017). An EP whose theoretical assumptions are that people are striving for growth and well-being will ask questions that facilitate growth and well-being. It can be argued that the same principle would apply to conducting research. In research, the use of a positive psychology framework relates to asking questions that aim to increase positive feelings, behaviours and cognitions. Asking questions using a positive psychology framework could help to discover how people can be resilient, grow, and discover positives from challenging situations.

Using a positive psychology framework to explore the experience of teachers working with pupils with PMLD can help to increase understanding of their strengths and resources, as well as the stressors and challenges that they face. Using a positive psychology framework will encourage a positive discourse about disability and is also commensurate with the move towards a positive view of disability that is encased in the guidance within the ICF (World Health Organisation, 2001) and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (World Health Organisation, 2006). Disability is a social construction, (Brueggemann, 2013) therefore viewing it in a positive way may affect society's attitudes towards individuals with a disability. Positive responses to children with disability are often a neglected area (Carroll, 2013).

Positive psychology may also have benefits for the teacher participants. Using a positive psychology framework to interview teachers may increase their feelings of positive affect and may provide opportunities for cognitive reappraisal. In a study of student-teacher reflections on their practice, Janssen, De Hullu and Tigelaar (2008) found that student teachers who reflected on their positive experiences of teaching were more innovative, motivated and had more positive feelings regarding their teaching practice compared to students who reflected on problematic experiences. Teacher beliefs about their students and teacher affect are also likely to have an impact on their students (Landers, 2018). It is possible that teachers may experience the same benefits when discussing their pupils in a positive framework, as parents did when discussing their children in this manner. Similar to the research

by Janssen, De Hullu and Tigelaar (2008), teachers may feel improved affect and experience cognitive reappraisal when being asked to think positively about their experiences of working with children with PMLD.

8.   <u>Summary and Rationale for Current Research</u>

The needs of pupils with PMLD are unique, they are the pupils in our education system with the most complex needs, the most vulnerable, and the most excluded (PMLD Network, 2001; Rochford, 2016; Salt, 2010). The compounding interaction of their multiple needs results in learning pathways that may be unique to the individual (Carpenter, 2007). They require intensive individualised support across the developmental range and for personal care (Salt, 2010). Their teachers have to adapt and individualise curricula, and constantly review their pedagogy to ensure engagement. Their teachers are likely to experience increased stressors from challenging behaviours, interaction and communication difficulties, medical issues, bereavement, increased multi-agency working, and managing a team of support staff (Aird, 2001).

Educational psychologists can use positive psychology to support teachers working with pupils with PMLD. Viewing positives can increase positive emotion and resilience (Fredrickson & Branigan, 2005). Increasing experiences of positive emotion has been found to be helpful for people experiencing difficult circumstances (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2000).   Positive reappraisal of difficult situations can lead to improved emotional and psychological well-being (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2000; Fredrickson, 1998). Positive psychology has been used to explore the experiences of parents of children with disabilities to learn about their resources, resilience and how they have adapted positively to meet new challenges (Blacher, Baker & Berkowitz, 2013; Greer, Grey & McClean, 2006; Reuman, Mitamura & Tugade, 2013). Parents reported that they had gained new insight, had achieved personal growth and learnt to value positives (Swarkovski & Brice, 2016).

Much of the information in the literature about pupils with PMLD is based on opinion and practice of a limited number of professionals working and publishing in the field. There is very little research about the pupils themselves or their teachers (Colley,

2018). Research investigating the experiences of teachers is important as teachers have an individualised and comprehensive knowledge of their pupils. EPs would benefit from having a better knowledge of the experiences of teachers as it will assist them to provide effective support to teachers and their pupils. When EPs understand the strengths and resources that teachers have, they will be able to support teachers in ways that are useful to them. A positive psychology framework may be helpful to determine this information, as well as providing an opportunity for positive discourse about pupils experiencing PMLD. EPs are lacking confidence in their role in the area of PMLD, and it would be useful to increase our knowledge of good practice by EPs, and what support teachers would like.

There is a gap in the literature regarding the experiences of teachers working with pupils with PMLD. This research study aimed to contribute to the understanding of the strengths and practice of working with pupils with PMLD and also contribute to the literature within the emerging field of disability and positive psychology.

8.1. Research Questions

1. What are the positive experiences of teachers working with pupils with Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties (PMLD)?

2. What strengths and personal resources support teachers of pupils with PMLD in their role?

3. How can educational psychologists support teachers of pupils with Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties and the pupils themselves?

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Part 2. Research Article.

Word count: 6289

"All the Small Things": Research Exploring the Positive Experiences of Teachers Working with Pupils with Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties.

1. Abstract

Pupils labelled with Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties (PMLD) have the most complex needs in our education system and may be the most excluded population. Research into the experience of working with these pupils is scarce. Using a positive psychology framework can help us to understand the positives of working with pupils experiencing PMLD, as well as to elicit information about teachers' strengths and resources. It can also help educational psychologists (EPs) to work more effectively with pupils, families, and teachers. A semi-structured interview using a positive psychology framework was undertaken with seven teachers of pupils with PMLD to explore these areas. A thematic analysis of the data reported the teachers' expression of many positives arising from the unique characteristics of their pupils. The personal character strengths that teachers identified in themselves were related to their need to explore different ways of working with their pupils, and for working effectively as a team. Despite the teachers' limited experience of working with educational psychologists they were able to provide suggestions for their desired future practice with EPs. The positive psychology framework enabled a rich variety of positives to be explored in relation to pupils labelled with PMLD. The characteristics that may be viewed as deficits in traditional models of disability were viewed as opportunities for positive experiences by the teachers.   The implications of the research for EP practice and the impact of the implementation of a positive psychology framework are discussed.

2. Introduction

2.1. Pupils with Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties

Pupils labelled as having profound and multiple learning difficulties are the pupils with the most complex and multiple disabilities, and they require the most intensive

and comprehensive support in schools (Department for Education and Department of Health, 2015). They are a group of pupils with a spectrum of complex and multiple needs. In addition to severe learning difficulties, they will also have physical disabilities, possible sensory impairments or severe medical conditions (Salt, 2010). They have difficulties with communication and mobility (PMLD Network, 2001). Children and young people with learning disabilities are six times more likely to have mental health problems than other children (Emerson & Hatton, 2007; Vedi & Bernard, 2012). They are a group that is increasing in numbers and complexity of need, primarily due to advances in medical care and improved survival rates for premature babies (Marlow, Wolke, Bracewell & Samara, 2005; Salt, 2010).

Some authors have attempted to promote a more positive definition of PMLD that is not defined by deficits, by focussing on the views of carers and professionals (Lacey and Ouvrey, 1998) or by looking at how society causes or impacts on their difficulties (Aird, 2001). Bellamy and colleagues (Bellamy, Croot, Bush, Berry and Smith, 2010) asked professionals and caregivers their opinions of definitions of PMLD. Most preferred a definition based on their strengths, not deficits.

Pupils labelled as PMLD will have a statement of special educational needs in Wales (Welsh Assembly Government, 2006) or the equivalent Education, Health and Care Plan in England (Department for Education and Department of Health, 2015). They require support across all areas of the curriculum, as well as specialised and individualised curricula and assessment processes. The inter-relationship of their needs and differing causality of need leads to further complexity in their learning profiles, which is often unique to the individual (Welsh Assembly Government, 2006; Carpenter, 2007).   It is also recognised that they do not progress in a linear manner, they are likely to plateau and may even appear to regress (Rochford, 2016). In addition to this specialised learning, they are likely to require health and personal care, sensory stimulation, and a high level of individual support.

Children with PMLD are also likely to be the most excluded people in our society (Jones, 2005; PMLD Network, 2001). Pupils with PMLD are mainly taught in special

schools (Jones & Riley, 2017), and due to their needs are often limited to particular classrooms containing the technology and equipment that is necessary to support their care and learning. They are also our most vulnerable pupils due to the limited number of people they interact with and their reliance on a small number of adults to interpret their communication (Bellamy, Croot, Bush, Berry and Smith, 2010; Salt, 2010).

2.2. Teachers of Pupils with PMLD

There is very little research about the teachers of pupils with PMLD. The research that exists is related to teachers' own learning and training (Lacey, 1998; Jones and Riley, 2017; Simmons and Bayliss, 2007), their definition of their pupils (Jones, 2005) and their own identity (Jones, 2004). There is no literature or research exploring their work or experiences from the point of view of the teachers themselves.

The Salt Review (2010) of teacher supply for pupils with PMLD concluded that often the increasingly complex needs of these pupils are insufficiently understood and are therefore not being met within schools. The complexity of their needs can challenge the most skilled teachers of PMLD (Carpenter, 2007; Carpenter, Egerton, Brooks, Cockbill, Fotheringham, and Rawson, 2011; Simmons and Bayliss, 2007). Teachers of pupils with PMLD need specialised knowledge of their pupils' individual health, social and emotional needs, as well as specialised curricula and teaching practices (Carpenter, 2007). These teachers are constantly having to review and reflect on their pedagogical decisions, according to the perceived engagement of the individual child (Jones & Riley, 2017).

Carpenter (2007) also stated that teachers need to ensure the emotional well-being of their pupils and be able to identify mental health concerns. It can be very difficult to distinguish between mental health difficulties and behaviours that are associated with their conditions, such as excessive sleeping or pain (Ferguson, Howley & Rose, 2008). Teachers of pupils with PMLD are one of a limited number of people who know the child well enough to notice any small changes in behaviour, communication, or physical aspects that may indicate a mental health difficulty

(Carpenter, Egerton, Cockbill, Bloom, Fotheringham, Rawson & Thistlethwaite, 2015). However in their study of mental health in special schools, Fergusson and her colleagues (Fergusson, Howley, & Rose, 2008) found that many teachers reported a lack of understanding of the relationship between learning needs and mental health needs.

There may also be additional emotional pressures on teachers working with pupils with PMLD, due to challenging behaviours, difficulties with communication and interaction, the severity of needs, medical illness, bereavement, and challenging behaviours (Aird, 2001). The intensity of the relationships that teaching staff develop with pupils, due to the longer and more intimate time spent in a relationship may also be a factor affecting the emotional well-being of teaching staff (Halcrow, 2014). In addition to this, they experience additional pressures from coordinating an extensive range of professionals as well as managing and supporting their own learning support staff (Aird, 2001).

2.3. Coping and Positive Emotion

Teachers of pupils with PMLD have difficult roles to fulfil. How we view a situation and our experience of positive emotions can have an impact on our ability to deal with stressful situations. In their review of research into coping and positive appraisal, Folkman and Moskowitz (2000) concluded that coping with stressful events was influenced by cognitive appraisal, and how people viewed the stressor. In a number of studies, Folkman and colleagues reported that positive affect helped people to mediate stress, and to find additional resources to continue to care for loved ones by positively reappraising tasks (Folkman,1997; Folkman and Moskowitz, 2000; Moskowitz, Folkman, Collette, & Vittinghoff, 1996). Other researchers have reported that positively reframing a difficult situation was associated with reduced stress and increased adjustment in parents of children with disabilities (Graungaard, Anderson and Skov, 2010; Minnes, Perry, and Weiss, 2015; Thompson, Hiebert-Murphy and Trute, 2013).

The effect of positive emotion has also been studied by Barbara Fredrickson, who developed the broaden and build theory (Fredrickson, 1998). This states that

positive emotions enable people to be more creative in finding solutions and increases long-term personal resources and resiliency (Fredrickson, 2001; Frederickson and Joiner (2002). Both Folkman and Moskowitz' s stress and coping theory (2000) and Fredrickson's broaden and build (1998; 2001) theories sit within the framework of positive psychology.

2.4. Positive Psychology

Positive psychology is defined as "the scientific study of positive experiences and positive individual traits" (Duckworth, Steen and Seligman, 2005, p. 650). It is about a life that is well-lived, despite challenges (Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Positive psychology is inspired by people under extreme adversity who have been able to find positives from their experiences and to grow from them. Viewing disability through the framework of positive psychology can help us to focus on the strengths and resources of the individual. It can be used to explore the positive impact that society can have on the well-being of people with disabilities, and also the positive impact that people with disabilities can have on society.

2.5. Positive Psychology Research and Children with Disabilities

There has recently been a move toward studying the positive impact that children with disabilities have on their families, (Carroll, 2013). This has led to increased understanding of resilience and strengths, factors that contribute to supportive families, and how families have adapted positively to meet the challenges of raising a child with a disability. (Blacher, Baker & Berkovits, 2013; Greer, Grey & McClean, 2006; Reuman, Mitamura & Tugade, 2013). Investigating the positive impact of parenting a child with a disability can provide new interventions that focus on strengths and resilience and can encourage the development of positive practices (Field, 2013). The research process itself may also have had a positive impact on participants from discussing these positive experiences (Carroll 2013).

Swarkowski and Brice (2016) used a positive psychology framework to explore the positive experiences of parents of children who were hearing impaired. The parents reported that parenting a child with a hearing impairment had led to their own personal growth. They had learned to appreciate and to relish everyday positives, both large and small. However, the authors found that as well as reporting many

positive experiences of parenting, the positive experience of the study also impacted on the parents. Parents appreciated the opportunity to talk positively about how their child had made a difference to their lives and felt that the positive focus on growth and strengths made them better people and parents (Szarkowski & Brice, 2016).

A positive psychology framework relates to asking questions that aim to increase positive feelings, behaviours and cognitions. Asking questions using a positive psychology framework could help to find out how people can be resilient, grow, and discover positives from challenging situations.

Research has shown that positively focused research has been useful to the world of disability and to families of children with disabilities (Blacher, Baker & Berkovits, 2013; Szarkowski and Brice, 2016). It is likely that taking a similar positive approach towards teachers of children with PMLD will also help us to gain insights into their strengths and personal resources. We can learn whether teachers, similar to parents, feel that children with PMLD have had a positive impact on them, and what this impact might be.

2.6. Positive Psychology Research and Teachers

Using a positive psychology framework to interview teachers may increase their feelings of positive affect and may provide opportunities for cognitive reappraisal. In a study of student-teacher reflections on their practice, Janssen, De Hullu and Tigelaar (2008) found that student teachers who reflected on their positive experiences of teaching were more innovative, motivated and had more positive feelings regarding their teaching practice compared to students who reflected on problematic experiences. It is possible that teachers may experience the same benefits when discussing their pupils in a positive framework, as parents did when discussing their children in this manner.

2.7. The Role of Educational Psychologists

There is likely to be a significant and varied role for EPs in working with pupils with PMLD. It is part of their role to support pupils with complex needs (Farrell, Woods, Lewis, Squires, Rooney, & O'Connor, 2006). Winter (2017) explored the role of the

EP in special schools with pupils with PMLD according to school staff and EPs themselves. School staff suggested that knowledge and theory underpinned by research evidence, along with the methodology/pedagogy of learning were unique to the role of the EP. They valued EPs' in-depth knowledge and insight, especially with more challenging situations or behaviours. Three quarters (n=154) of the EPs in her survey believed that it is the responsibility of all EPs to work with special schools who have pupils with PMLD. However, more than half (52%) of the school staff participants said that they had had little or no contact with an EP over the last year. This is despite the fact they are arguably our most vulnerable pupils with the most significant and complex needs, and our most excluded (PMLD Network, 2001; Salt, 2010).

2.8. Rationale

There is a gap in the literature regarding the experiences of teachers working with pupils with PMLD. This research study aimed to contribute to the understanding of the practice of teachers working with pupils with PMLD and also contribute to the literature within the emerging field of disability and positive psychology. Teachers develop specialised and in-depth knowledge of the complex needs of the children they work with, and the support that is successful for them. EPs need to understand the experiences of teachers of pupils with PMLD to be able to provide effective support to teachers and their pupils. EPs also need to develop an understanding of teachers' strengths and personal resources, so that they can help teachers to build on these. It will be useful for EPs to discover what teachers regard as the best ways for EPs to work effectively with teachers, pupils, and families. Using a positive psychology framework, consisting of positively focused interview questions, to explore the teachers' experiences may produce information about how to positively support the teachers and their pupils, as well as providing a positive experience to the teachers themselves.

2.9. Research Questions

1. What are the positive experiences of teachers working with pupils with Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties (PMLD)?

2. What strengths and personal resources support teachers of pupils with PMLD in their role?

3. How can educational psychologists support teachers of pupils with Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties and the pupils themselves?

3. <u>Method</u>

3.1. Ontology, Epistemology and Methodology

This research is taking a relativist ontology, with a social constructionist epistemology. A relativist ontology would view that the construction of PMLD does exist, but that it will be different according to the individual, and the individual's construction may change according to different circumstances (Burr, 2015). It is important to acknowledge the variety of changing constructions that individuals and society may have, to highlight the uniqueness and diversity of pupils with PMLD. A social constructionist epistemology aligns with the relativist ontology and enabled the exploration of the unique constructions of the participants, whilst recognising that our unique social situation and the positive questioning may have an impact on our constructions.

There is little research relating to the experiences of teachers of pupils with PMLD, therefore, this study took an exploratory approach. Using a qualitative approach allowed a richer depth of exploration of the views of teachers of pupils with PMLD. The research used a positive psychology framework (e.g. Szarkowski & Brice, 2016) as research has indicated that valuable information can be gained from using positive questioning (Greer, Grey & McClean, 2006; Reuman, Mitamura & Tugade, 2013). A positive psychology framework aims to increase positive feelings, behaviours or cognitions.

3.2. Participants and Recruitment

Participants were recruited via headteachers of Local Authority maintained special schools who listed pupils with PMLD in their cohorts and who responded positively to a gatekeeper letter (see appendix 2). Nine schools were approached, and five schools located in four local authorities in England and Wales responded within the necessary timeframe. From these five schools, eleven teachers were approached to participate and seven responded. Participants were given an information sheet (appendix 3) and were asked to give consent (appendix 4) The participants were female teachers aged between 30 and 65, who were currently working in a class with pupils with PMLD. The average amount of experience participants had working with pupils with PMLD was eleven years, ranging from 2 years to more than thirty years.

Ethical considerations were reviewed by Cardiff University School of Psychology Board of Ethics. Participants were given a debrief information sheet after the interview (see appendix 5).

3.3. Interview Methods

The research used semi-structured interviews (see appendix 6). A set of open questions were employed to allow participants to explore and express their experiences and thoughts with fewer constraints as this was a new area of research (Coolican, 2004). The positive bias of the questions is acknowledged, however, the purpose of this was to enable different information to be gathered. Participants were given an open question in which they could discuss negative experiences. Interviews took place at each participants' school, and were audio recorded and transcribed by the researcher. The qualitative data were analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) method for thematic analysis using an inductive approach (see appendix 7 for details). Thematic analysis was chosen as it is not restricted to a particular theory and allowed flexibility in addressing this new area of research. Braun and Clarke's (2013) criteria for thematic analysis were used to assess quality.

4. <u>Findings</u>

4.1. Research Question 1. What are the Positive Experiences of Teachers Working with Pupils with Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties (PMLD)?

The participants in this study were able to identify a wide variety of positive experiences through working with pupils with PMLD as well as the positive impact on themselves.

4.1.1. Overarching Theme 1: Positive Experiences Arising from Pupil Characteristics

The participants' positive views of the characteristics of the pupils were dispersed and prominent throughout the data and across all the participants. They believed that pupils with PMLD have unique characteristics that resulted in positive experiences. It can be illustrated by the comment; "*Working with the children I think is particularly satisfying because you wait a long time for your results on the whole*" and "*But I think, when you have a very positive experience, and it may only happen once, and you may not see that again, and you may only have one a week, over a*

class, that means so much more, that means so much to me". This was the theme
that had the most prominence in terms of importance to participants.

Within the overarching theme of 'Positive Experiences Arising From Pupil
Characteristics' there were six themes, five of which were similar in significance, with
one theme; 'Relationships and Interactions', seeming to be more important than the
others. The themes contained in this overarching theme are displayed in Figure 1
and Table 1 below.
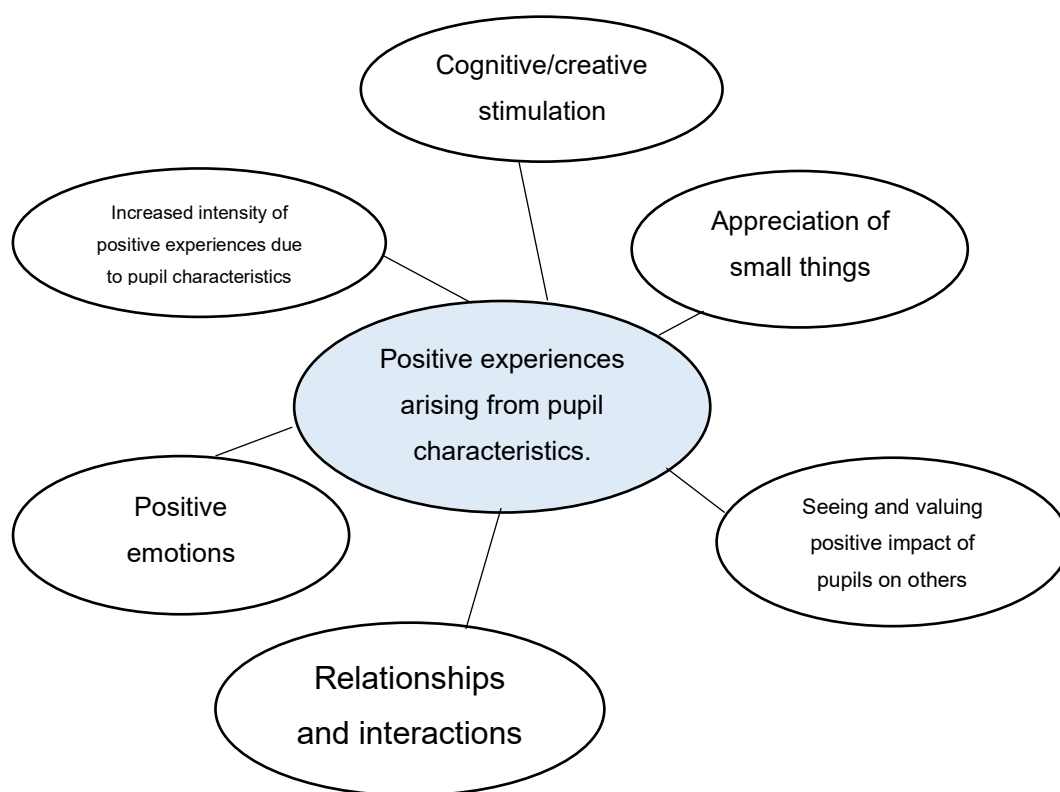
Figure 1. Overarching Theme 1; Positive Experiences Arising from Pupil Characteristics, Showing 6 Themes

Name of theme	Description of theme	Example of theme
Relationships and Interactions.	The positive experience of participants in developing relationships with pupils, and of observing positive interactions between pupils	*"they sit facing each other doing this, and every now and then, they'll look up and laugh, and they'll just sort of put each other's faces in each other's ways, so it's that's starting up having a relationship, it's just lovely".* *Participant 3, page 17*
Positive Emotions	Positive emotions that they experienced as a result of interactions with pupils with PMLD	*"there are some days where it really sort of like, tugs at you inside, and it is like, you go home and you're thinking 'wow that was just so, that was amazing'"* *participant 1, page 3.*

Cognitive/Creative Stimulation	Working with pupils with PMLD interests them cognitively and enables or causes them to think more creatively, and to be thoughtful or analytical about their work	*"you really have to think about how children learn for instance, what is it, what do they have to know, what must they be able to do, to even begin to learn, a sort of pre learning skills which is what is what we are basically doing all day here"* or *"it's really stimulating trying to find different ways of, of doing the same kind of skills"* *Participant 3, page 2.*
Appreciation of Small Things	Appreciating small instances of behaviour or progress	*"I enjoy the little feedback that you get, the very small things, they mean a lot to me"* *Participant 1, page 1.*
Increased Intensity of Positive Experiences.	Teachers experiencing more intensive positive experiences related to the increased needs or length of time spent working with pupils	*"But I think, when you have a very positive experience, and it may only happen once, and you may not see that again, and you may only have one a week, over a class, that means so much more, that means so much to me"* *Participant 1, page 4.*
Seeing and Valuing the Impact of the Pupils on Others	Teachers talked about the positive impact of the pupils with PMLD, and related a positive view of their characteristics and they may gain positive experiences from helping others to see these positive traits, and by working towards inclusion for pupils with PMLD	*"parents of these children shouldn't be made to feel that, that it's a disaster when they have a disabled baby, that actually there are huge positives that can come out of it, and society should support them in that, rather than saying "oh you poor things" but actually let's celebrate the positives of these children and support them properly to fulfil their potential, in whatever way they need"* *Participant 3, page 17*

Table 1. The six themes within the overarching theme of Positive Experiences Arising from Pupil Characteristics

4.1.2. Overarching Theme 2. Positive Impact on Teaching Approach/Experience

The second overarching theme related to research question 1 was the 'Positive Impact on Teaching Approach/Experience'. This can be illustrated by the following comment. "*It's personalised,…….each child is different, you know, this particular thing for one child might be massive and take all year, we're sort of given that*

freedom to be a bit more relaxed, and work on what's really important". Four themes were linked to this (see Figure 2 and Table 2 below).
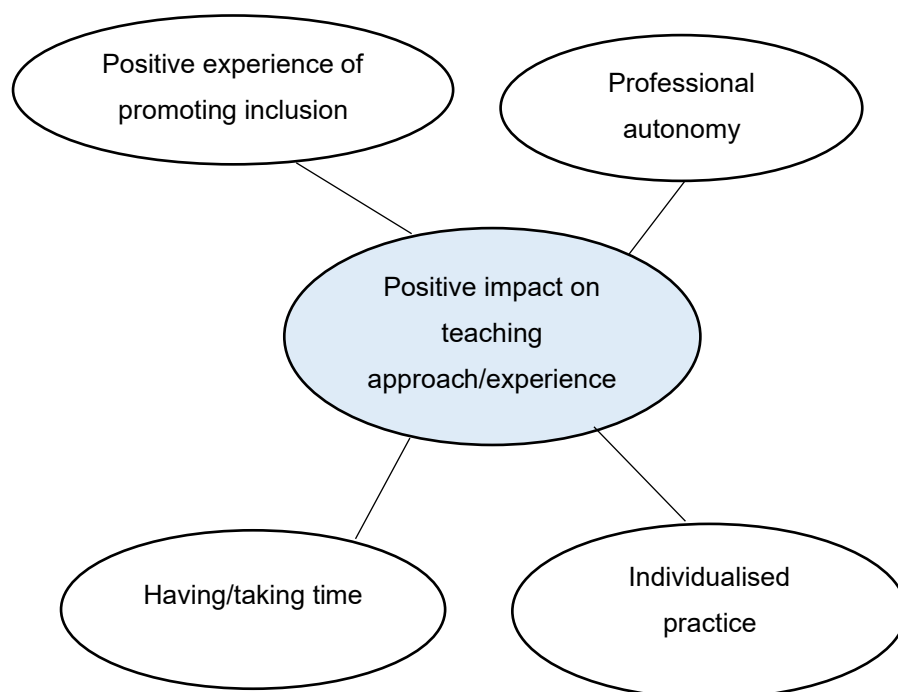
Figure 2. Overarching Theme 2; Positive Impact on Teaching Approach/Experience, Showing Four Themes

Name of theme	Description of theme	Example of theme
Positive Experience of Promoting Inclusion	They experience and create opportunities for their pupils to experience inclusion	*"our PMLD pupils are, they're included, people will wander past and somebody will say "hello" or they'll stop for a chat, and they might not get a reaction back, but as staff we can see that that makes a difference to that pupil".* *Participant 6, p.1*
Professional Autonomy	Increased ability to choose their own teaching pedagogy and adapt it to needs of the pupil	*"And that freedom is wonderful, because the rest of the education system is so prescriptive"* *Participant 7, p.2*
Having/Taking Time	Having time to spend with the pupils, and taking the time	*"whereas now if you offer him a choice, he will focus on what he's being asked, and that is purely, I*

	necessary for progress was a positive experience	*would say, because he's had that input from one person, on a, every morning he has a 10 minute eye gaze session in a quiet room, and it's taken two years, definitely that input".* *Paricitpant 6, p.2*
Individualised Practice	Positive experiences of person-centred practice	*"we can completely tailor it to the child, look at what the child needs, and just work to that basically"* *Participant 7, p.1*

Table 2. Description and examples for the themes contained in the overarching theme of positive impact on teaching approach/experience.

4.1.3. Overarching Theme 3. Having a Positive Impact

The third overarching theme for research question 1 was; Having a Positive Impact, (see figure 3 and table 3 below). This included the experience of having a positive impact on their pupils and their families such as *"you do this job because you want to make a difference".*
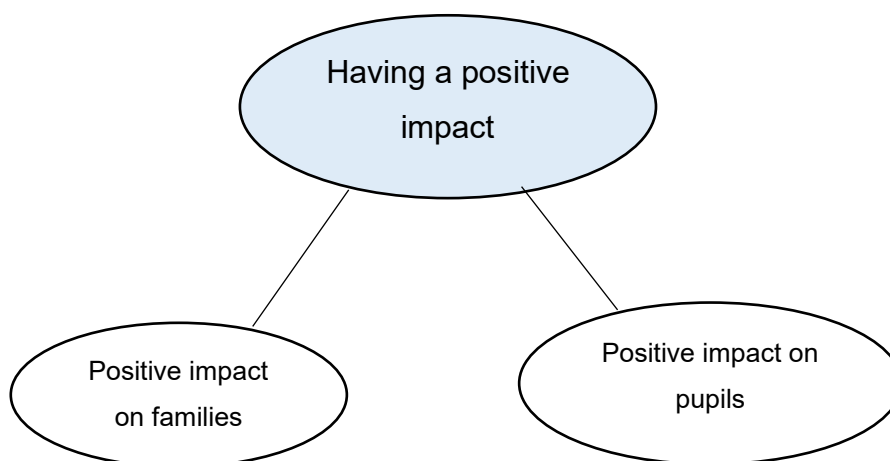
Figure 3. Overarching Theme 2; Having a Positive Impact, Showing Two Sub-Themes.

Name of theme	Description of theme	Example of theme
Positive Impact on Pupils (major theme)	Positive experiences of participants seeing the impact of the work that they do on the pupils	*"a year ago, was just sort of, could lift her arms up from her shoulder, her shoulder muscles, but today we are going on a bear hunt and she started copying; big one and lifting, throwing her arms, right up, so she's sort of. Now to somebody coming in a year ago and now, she's just a kid waving her arms about haphazardly, but we could see that was purposeful"* *Participant 3, p.4*
Positive Impact on Families (minor theme)	Positive experiences of the impact that the work that participants do has on the families of the pupils	*"that can be quite satisfying knowing that you've helped somebody through their family issues"* *Participant 2, p.1*

Table 3. Description and Examples for the Themes Contained within the Overarching Theme of Having a Positive Impact

4.2. Research Question 2. What Strengths and Resources Support Teachers of Pupils with PMLD in their Role?

The participants spoke separately about strengths and resources. Strengths seemed to refer to personality characteristics and skills that supported the participants to do their role on a daily basis, while resources were linked to responses to difficulties.

4.2.1. Strengths

The coded data for strengths were named according to the character strengths researched by Peterson and Seligman (2004), who obtained six categories of strengths (Justice, Wisdom and Knowledge, Courage, Humanity, Temperance and Transcendence), which are then divided into further individual strengths. Descriptions of the character strengths are contained in Appendix 8, as there are too many to describe within the confines of this report.
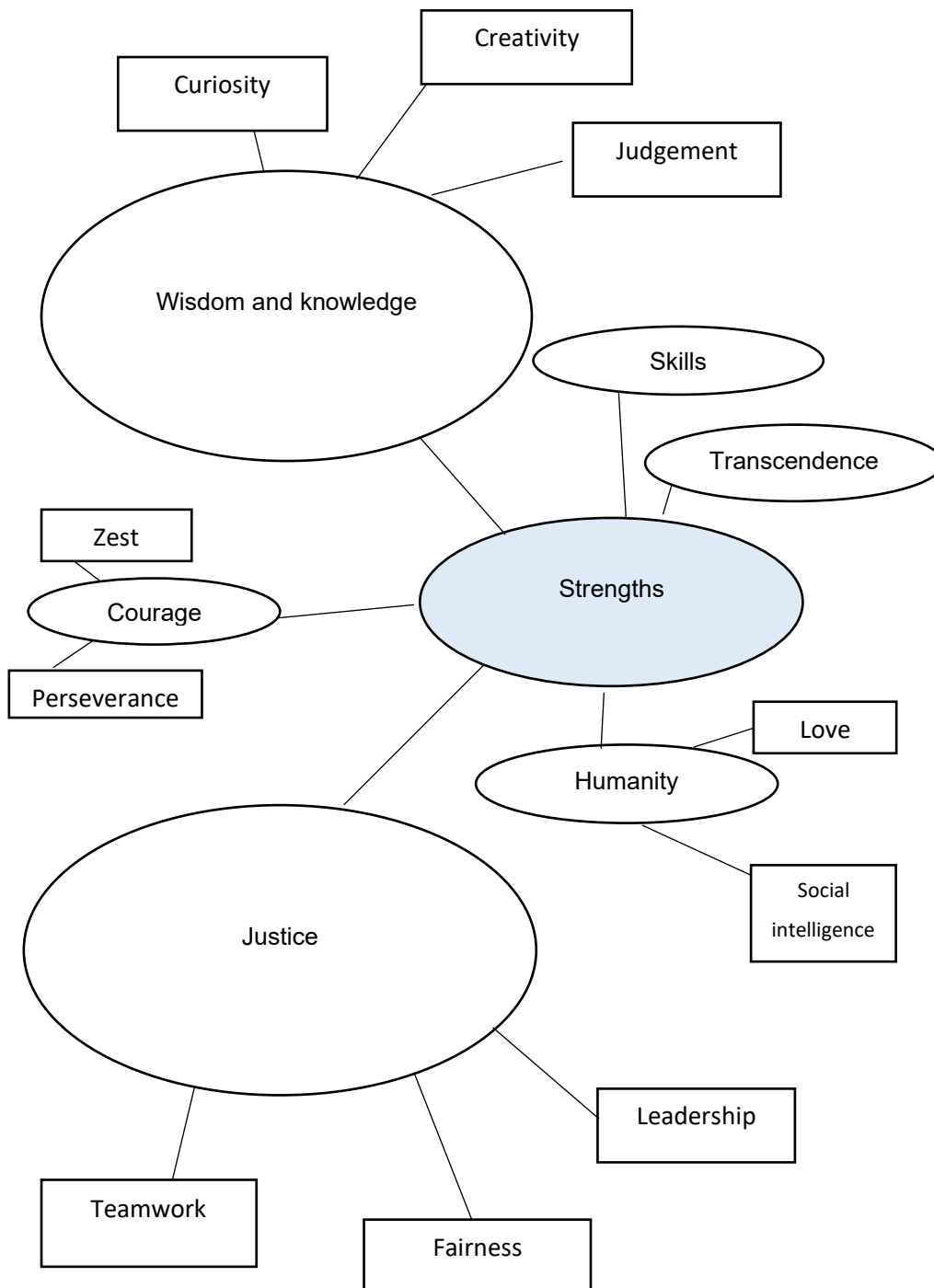
Figure 4. The six strength themes and 10 sub-themes, including strength categories and then individual strengths. Strengths categories are in white ovals with the additional theme of Skills. Individual strengths are in rectangles.

The two themes of 'Wisdom' and 'Justice' were the most prominent in the data regarding strengths. The individual skills within these two themes were more prominent than all the other strengths categories.

Name of sub-theme (From Peterson & Seligman, 2004)	Description of theme (From Peterson & Seligman, 2004)	Example of theme.
Creativity (a sub-theme of Wisdom and Knowledge)	Originality, ingenuity: thinking of novel and productive ways to conceptualise and do things; includes artistic achievement but is not limited to it.	*"You're not changing things constantly, but obviously your creativity's stretched in trying to find, you know, different ways.." Participant 2, p.2*
Curiosity (sub-theme of Wisdom and Knowledge)	Interest, novelty-seeking, openness to experience: Taking an interest in ongoing experience for its own sake; finding subjects and topics fascinating; exploring and discovering.	*"you really have to think about how children learn for instance, what is it, what do they have to know, what must they be able to do, to even begin to learn, a sort of pre learning skills". Participant 3, p.2*
Judgement (sub-theme of Wisdom and Knowledge)	Critical thinking: Thinking things through and examining them from all sides; not jumping to conclusions; being able to change one's mind in light of evidence; weighing all evidence fairly.	*"when you actually look at it properly, scientifically, no they're not actually doing what you're assuming, that you're assessing, they, they're working on a much lower level and once you start.." Participant 3, p.2*
Love of learning (sub-theme of Wisdom and Knowledge)	Mastering new skills, topics, and bodies of knowledge, whether on one's own or formally; obviously related to the strength of curiosity but goes beyond it to describe the tendency to add systematically to what one knows.	*"I think you have to be willing to learn, on the job, all the time" Participant 4, p.5*
Perspective [wisdom] (sub-theme of Wisdom and Knowledge)	Being able to provide wise counsel to others; having ways of looking at the world that make sense to	*"a child that's trapped in a chair with their, and their hands don't work, 's got no idea about temperature, and weight, and volume and surfaces, and all those sort of fundamentals that*

	oneself and to other people	*build the mental images" Participant 3, p.9*
Teamwork [citizenship, social responsibility, loyalty] (a sub-theme of Justice)	Working well as a member of a group or team; being loyal to the group; doing one's share.	*"We do try and share so like I'll come up with an idea and I will discuss it and everybody can chip in," Participant 1, p.7*
Fairness (a sub-theme of Justice)	Treating all people the same according to notions of fairness and justice; not letting personal feelings bias decisions about others; giving everyone a fair chance.	*"it's really important, as a, for a society to realise that these people are worth just as much, why shouldn't they be worth just as much as we are, high earners and all of the rest of it" Participant 3, p.6*
Leadership (a sub-theme of Justice)	Encouraging a group of which one is a member to get things done and at the same time maintain good relations within the group; organizing group activities and seeing that they happen.	*"Adults, and staffing, and working out how you can best, get the best out of them" Participant 1, p.4*

Table 4. Description and Examples for the Sub-themes for the Strengths of 'Wisdom and Knowledge' and 'Justice'.

4.2.2. **Resources**

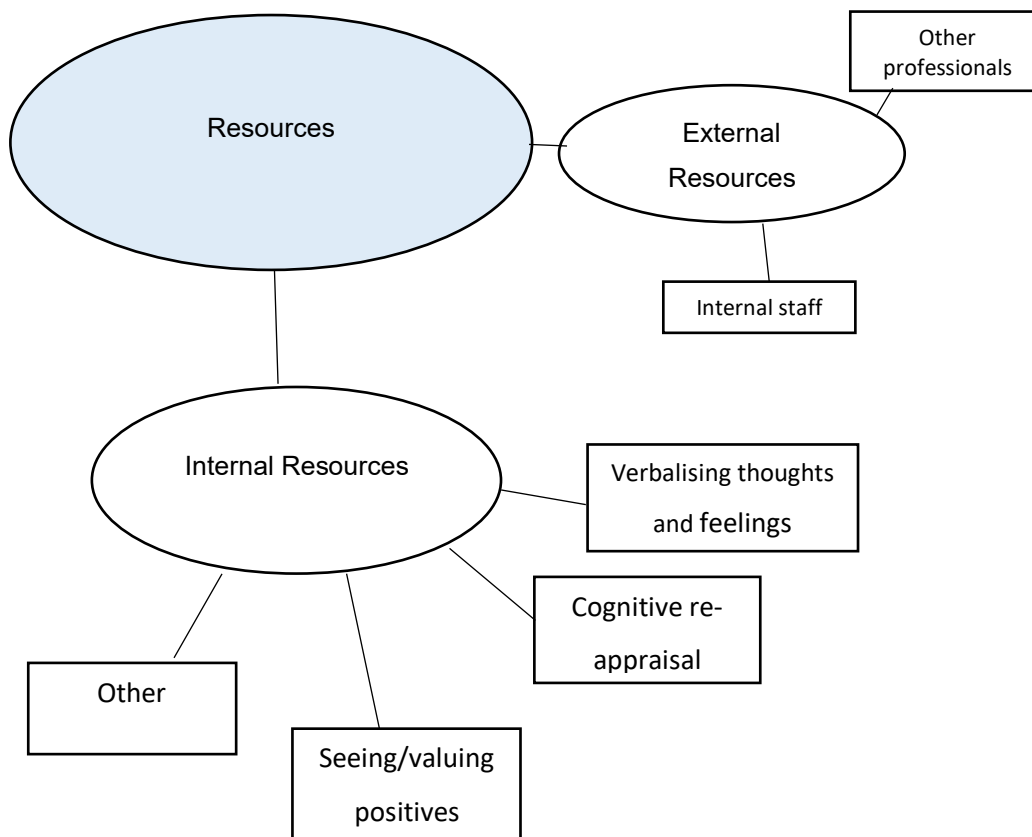Analysis of the theme of 'Resources' resulted in the following thematic map.

Figure 5. Thematic Map of Resources, Showing 2 Themes and 6 Sub-themes

'Internal resources' refers to resources that are located within the participant and 'External resources' are those resources that are exterior to the participant.

Name of sub-theme	Description of theme	Example of theme.
Seeing/Valuing Positives	Looking for positives helped participants to manage difficult times at work	*"parents of children with these severe problems are in a horrible situation, very often of grief and anger, and if we can do anything to be pos.. I'm, I'm a naturally very positive person, and I look for the positives in everything".* *Participant 3, p.4*
Cognitive Re-appraisal	The process of thinking about possible positive solutions or finding positive aspects in negative situations	*"let's work out why it went wrong, and we'll work out a way to make it better because we now have a better understanding, actually it was a learning opportunity, and so next time, let's try this, and we'll try that tomorrow and hopefully the next day you try, and it works".* *Participant 3, p.13*
Verbalising thoughts and feelings	Talking to colleagues and partners after difficult situations.	*"I think it is talking for me, because I do tend to take things personally, so I would probably have to talk it through".* *Participant 1, p.8*
Other	Related to physical activity, experience and resilience;	*"but I go and ride, or I take the dog for a long walk or a run, and yeah, I think physical activity is a great leveller on that sort of score".* *Participant 3, p.13*

Table 5. Above shows the Four Types of Internal Resources that were Identified from the Thematic Analysis

Name of sub-theme	Description of theme	Example of theme.
Internal Staff	Staff within the school who were an external resource of support during times of difficulty for the participants	*"in terms of strengths and resources your TA - TAs are my biggest asset, biggest asset".* *Participant 4, p.14*
Other Professionals	Colleagues outside school who were an external resource of support during times of difficulty	*"Well, it's having those other professionals, who you can go to for advice"* *Participant 1, p.6*

Table 6 above shows the sub-themes within the theme of External Resources.

4.3. Research question 3. How can Educational Psychologists Support Teachers of Pupils with Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties and the Pupils Themselves?

The thematic analysis of data relating to research question three resulted in four themes and seven sub-themes.

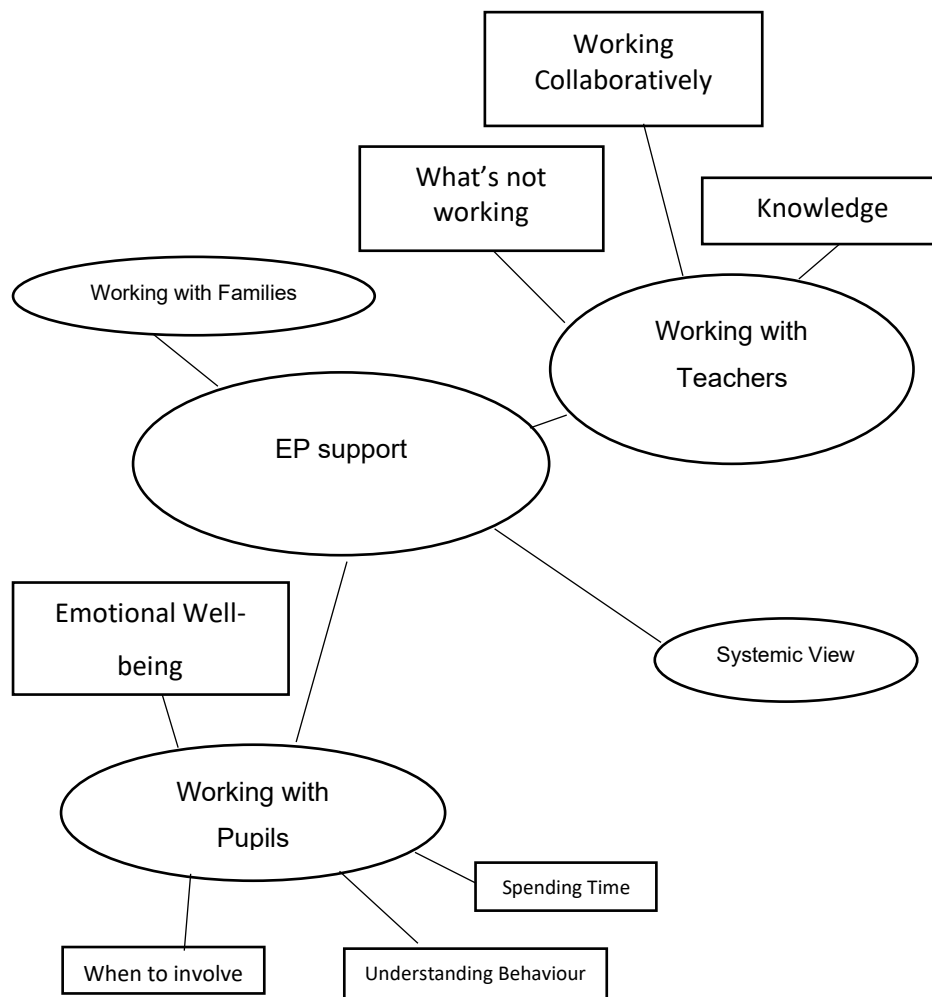Figure 6. Thematic Map Showing the 4 Themes and 7 Sub-Themes Related to how EPs can Support Teachers of Pupils with PMLD and the Pupils Themselves

4.3.1. **Working with Teachers**

The most important theme for research question 3 was 'Working with Teachers', which included the sub-themes of 'Working Collaboratively', 'Knowledge', and 'What's not Working'. Descriptions of these themes are shown in the table below.

Name of sub-theme	Description of theme	Example of theme.
Working Collaboratively	When EPs value teachers' contribution and knowledge, and they work together to find solutions	*"it being a shared process not a, "I've come in and I've seen this do this", actually to listen to,."* *Participant 1, p.16*
Knowledge	New information and research that would be useful for participants to know about, and also recognises the specialism of the field that teachers work in	*"any sort of new tools, new bits of information about, that would be really useful to me, would be new bits of really useful, new bits of information, research about learning, about the fundamentals of learning, how it works and, things like environment, and those sort of things that are perhaps new, would be really useful to have fed in".* *Participant 3, p.15*
What's Not Working	What is not helpful in supporting them, which includes not working collaboratively and not having specialist knowledge	*"sits down and does like an assessment and then we get a report, and then "ahh, off we go" and "you've got to do this, and then, there's that".* *Participant 6, p.16*

Table 7. Table of Descriptions of the Sub-Themes Related to the Theme of Working with Teachers

4.3.2. **Working with Pupils**

The second theme related to research question 3 was 'Working with Pupils', which included minor themes of 'Emotional Well-being', 'Understanding Behaviour', 'When to Involve' and 'Spending Time'. 'Emotional Well-being' was the most interesting of these themes, and participants felt that there was a role for EPs in supporting pupils with emotional well-being, and participants felt that this was an area outside of their own expertise, that may be being missed. This included an understanding of self-harming behaviours and mental health. Descriptions of these themes are shown in the table below.

Name of sub-theme	Description of theme	Example of theme from data
Emotional Well-being	EPs can support emotional well-being of pupils.	*"they sit as a family and watch TV and she is kind of left on that bed, and she never goes off on these outings at weekends because she's always with someone else, and I think she carries a lot of that, with her. I don't know if it is an educational psychologist, but someone's*

| | | got to help her, I can't, I haven't got the skill set to even try to begin to work out what's going on in that child's head".
Participant 7, p.13 |
|---|---|---|
| Understanding Behaviour | EPs can support a better understanding of the purpose of behaviours. | "and say 'well actually, do you realise that this happens and when that happens, that happens, and when that happens, that happens, and that's why that person's doing that?'"
Participant 1, p.15 |
| When to Involve | EPs were seen to be useful at the point when situations were in difficulty. | "I think that it tends to be when we get to the end of the road, and we literally don't know, we've tried every avenue that we know about"
Participant 1, p.14 |
| Spending Time | This theme encompasses the belief that to be effective EPs need to spend time with pupils and teachers, due to the complexity of needs. | "I think it's having somebody to come in and spend time regularly if there was a pupil that you were really concerned about that it's not just, it wouldn't be that, a one-off assessment report and then "there you are", is fine, but..".
Participant 6, p.17 |

Table 8. (above) Shows Descriptions of the Sub-themes Related to the Theme of Working with Pupils

4.3.3. Working with Families and Systemic View

Name of theme	Description of theme	Example of theme
Working with Families	Supporting participants to manage relationships with parents as well as having an overview of difficult family situations	"formally working with me, looking at the child, and bringing the parents, very difficult parent, into the arena as well, and the sensitivity that he [EP] had when we were discussing those issues with the parent".
Participant 5, p.10
Systemic View	Understanding systemic issues that affect pupils and teachers	"impacts on that, the wellbeing and the behaviour of the rest of the class impacts on that child, so it's looking at the whole"
Participant 1, p.15

Table 9. (above) Table of Descriptions of two of the themes Related to Research Question 3, 'How can EPs Support Teachers of Pupils with PMLD and their Pupils'.

5.   <u>Discussion</u>

This study used a positive psychology framework to explore the positive experiences of teachers working with pupils with PMLD, the teachers' strengths and personal resources, and how educational psychologists can support teachers and their pupils with PMLD. There is very little research into teachers' views of working with pupils with PMLD or EP work in this field. The positive approach taken by this research to exploring this area enabled a rich variety of positive experiences to be discovered.

5.1. Unique Characteristics of Pupils with PMLD

The participants were able to relate many positives arising from the unique characteristics of the pupils. These are the unique characteristics that are usually defined within a deficit model of disability, which may be seen by others as challenging traits or 'deficits'. However, the participants in this study saw these 'deficits' as an opportunity for increased number and intensity of positive experiences, for creativity, intellectual stimulation, and positive emotions.   The ethos of the participants reflected a positive view of disability. This is similar to the teachers in the study by Jones (2005), who advocated the need to value the contribution that people with PMLD make to our society and which therefore increases the well-being of society itself.

The overwhelming theme captured in this study was the range and depth of positive experiences that occurred that were due to the characteristics of their pupils with PMLD. These seemed to be highly related to the severity and uniqueness of need of the pupils. The participants believed that working with the pupils led them to experience positives that were increased in intensity, built close relationships, valued the impact of their pupils and made them appreciative of small positives. The participants also felt that the characteristics of the pupils gave them intellectual stimulation and made them more creative in their work.

These are similar to the positive impacts that parents of children with disabilities have reported in the research literature. Parents have also reported gaining an

appreciation of small positives, acquiring personal growth, valuing positive impact (Szarkowski & Brice, 2016), valuing what is important (Scorgie & Sobsey, 2000), stronger relationships (Bayat, 2007), and opportunities to learn (Hastings and Taunt, 2002).

Research in the field of parenting children with disabilities reports that viewing the positive impact of the child can have a moderating impact on stress and resilience (Blacher, Baker, & Berkowits, 2013). It may be that this is occurring with teachers and their pupils with PMLD, but further research would be required to investigate this. McConnell, Savage, Sobsey and Uditsky (2014) suggest that parents may benefit more from being supported to realise the positives, than from helping them to cope with the negatives. This has implications for how educational psychologists provide support to parents and teachers.

5.2. The Experience of Teaching

The unique characteristics of the pupils also had a positive impact on the experience of teaching. The participants felt that they had increased professional autonomy, were able to promote inclusion, individualise learning, and take the time necessary to ensure that pupils needs were paramount. The specialist and unique knowledge that the teachers have of their pupils may contribute to their professional autonomy, however it may also mean that they have increased feelings of responsibility and may find it difficult to find professional and personal support in their work. They did not have the pressure of conforming to assessments and attainment levels to the same degree as other teachers, which allowed more autonomy and fewer time pressures. There is likely to be increased pressure from having to develop their own schemes of work and to adapt curricular, however, this was spoken about positively by participants.

The way that teachers of pupils with PMLD currently experience teaching is more commensurate with projected plans for the future in education. With the implementation of the new curriculum in Wales in 2022 (Welsh Government, 2017) teachers will have more professional autonomy to develop their curricula and to create personalised levels and targets for pupils. The emphasis on individualised

support and person-centred planning is prevalent in recent and forthcoming legislation in both England and Wales (Department for Education and Department for Health, 2015; Welsh Government, 2018). It is important to reflect further on whether these experiences will be positive for the large numbers of teachers who will be implementing these changes into their practice.

The review of teacher supply for pupils with PMLD (Salt, 2010) concluded that the positive aspects of this job should be publicised to entice new teachers into the field. However, perhaps even more important than this is the impact on pupils themselves of people seeing their positive impact and their strengths. Rutherford (2011) in her study of relationships between teaching assistants (TAs) and children with severe disabilities concluded that the TAs knowledge of their pupils' strengths and competences enabled them to make opportunities for the pupils to show these to others and changed the deficit view.

5.3. Strengths and Resources

5.3.1. Strengths

The character strengths identified by the participants belonged overwhelmingly to two categories of Peterson and Seligman's (2004) positive psychology character strengths; 'Wisdom and Knowledge', and 'Justice'. Within the category of 'Wisdom and Knowledge' the participants felt that critical thinking, being interested and exploratory, and finding new ways of thinking and doing, were important strengths that they possessed. This may be due to the specialist knowledge and skills that they need to develop and apply to work with their pupils.

The strengths that the participants identified related strongly to their unique way of working. They are often the leader of a team of support staff and teaching assistants, as well as working closely with other professionals and families. The 'Justice' strengths are related to leadership, teamwork, civic responsibility and a healthy society, and alongside 'Social Intelligence' and 'Fairness' may be necessary strengths that teachers use to work effectively with their team and other professionals. These strengths may also be helpful in enabling them to promote the

inclusion of their pupils, which was prominent throughout the interviews.   This aspect of the study also corroborated many of the findings in the Salt Report (2010), which highlighted the core characteristics of teachers of SLD and PMLD. These included a focus on improving outcomes, creativity, patience, ability to manage a team and work with others.

5.3.2. Resources

The resources that supported the teachers of pupils with PMLD were both internal and external, although internal resources were more significant in this study. This would appear to contrast to the team environment that is an essential element of working with these pupils, as well as the participants' expressions of valuing their teaching assistants. It would seem that although participants value their teaching assistants and work closely with them, it is possible that they do not find them a source of support during times of particular difficulty. Although it is necessary and beneficial to have internal sources of resilience this should also be balanced with external sources of support.

The participants independently identified many internal resources that are part of positive psychology. These included; looking for positives; gratitude for good things; positive cognitive re-appraisal; and refocussing their attention on what is important to have a positive impact on the pupils. The other internal resources that participants revealed were verbalising thoughts and feelings, which is recognised in the research as an effective method for helping people to emotionally process difficult circumstances.

The way in which people think about situations affects their coping as well as their emotions. Positive cognitive re-appraisal can alter emotional reactions to a situation by cognitively reframing the way people view the situation, (Miller, Nickerson, Chafouleas & Osbourne, 2008), and acts as a coping strategy during difficult situations (Blacher, Baker & Berkovits, 2013). Cognitive reappraisal is recognised as a technique that enables people to overcome difficult caring situations by helping them to reappraise difficult tasks and stressors into more positive constructs that are

easier to maintain (Folkman and Moskowitz (2000). Teachers may be using cognitive reappraisal in the same manner.

5.4. The Role of the Educational Psychologist

The experience that the participants had of working with educational psychologists was extremely limited, therefore the results from this section should be interpreted as potential ideas from the participants.

The participants in this research wanted EPs to avoid taking on the role of expert, which was in contrast to other research exploring how teachers wish to work with EPs (Ashton & Roberts, 2006). The participants would prefer to work collaboratively with EPs, and to gain a better understanding of behaviour. They felt it would be helpful for EPs to be able to pass on new research and information. EPs are not able to gain the in-depth knowledge of the pupil that their teachers or family have, and traditional EP assessments are more difficult with pupils with PLMD.

In Winter's (2017) research, one of the major barriers that EPs felt to their working with pupils with PMLD was their lack of confidence, knowledge and skills in this area. It may be that this EP lack of confidence and belief in the specialist skills needed to work with pupils with PMLD is limiting EP work in this field. Maintaining a perception of having specialist skills and it being specialist work may also contribute to maintaining exclusion for these pupils. However, the teachers in the current study seemed to feel that it is the application of knowledge and skills where EP work is important. They did not want or expect EPs to have the level of knowledge of the pupil that they have, nor their teaching skills.

There are many ways that EPs can support teachers and their pupils. These may include supporting the development of knowledge of unique learning patterns, individualising curriculum response, and developing a dynamic, practitioner led research culture (Carpenter, 2007). EPs can support teachers to be reflexive and reflective practitioners to enable them to continually monitor the engagement of their

pupils in their learning. The EP can support teachers to adapt and deliver the curriculum in an effective way for pupils with PMLD (Wills, 2006).

The teachers in this study also felt that EPs could contribute a systemic view, that was not available to themselves. EPs are in the privileged position of being able to work with families in the home. They can also support and provide training to teachers to enable them to work more collaboratively with families. As with any population of pupils there can be difficulties within families, and the participants emphasised that pupils with such severe needs can also have difficulties within their families that are separate to the pupils' individual needs. Jones (2005) in her interviews with teachers of pupils with PMLD concluded that teachers need to experience professional development that will enable them to obtain greater partnership and collaboration with parents and families.

The participants suggested that emotional well-being is an area of need for their pupils that may be neglected. Analysis of national statistics regarding mental health in young people in Britain has found that children with learning disabilities are six times more likely to have a psychiatric disorder or mental health needs than other children, which are often un-recognised (Emerson & Hatton, 2007; Vedi & Bernard, 2012).   EPs should also be able to use their knowledge of mental illness to be able to distinguish the behaviours associated with PMLD from those that may be associated with mental health difficulties. EPs can also support teachers to understand challenging behaviour. They can use their skills to analyse the function of behaviour and the underlying meaning for the individual, as well as being able to implement interventions to address them.

There are many roles for the EP when working with teachers and their pupils with PMLD within the research literature, that were not suggested during this study. These include providing training on effective communication, helping to understand behaviour, supervision groups for emotional support, disseminating good practice, developing effective multi-agency practices, researching and implementing effective programmes, supporting staff to develop an inclusive ethos, amongst others (For

further information see; Farrell, Woods, Lewis, Squires, Rooney, & O'Connor, 2006; Halcrow, 2014; Wills, 2006; and Winter, 2017). However, these roles were not mentioned by participants in this study. This is likely to be due to their lack of knowledge and experience of working with EPs, which is important for EPs to address. EPs need to inform teachers of the different roles they can undertake with pupils with PMLD and co-construct the support that may be helpful and effective.

5.5. Limitations

It is not clear from this research whether the positive experiences that the teachers reported were an impact of their work with pupils with PMLD, or if this role attracts professionals who have that positive ethos, or whether it was bias due to the positive framework of the research.

This research is also limited in generalisability due to the methodology employed. This research studied the unique constructions of participants that were co-constructed during a positively framed interview. This is likely to be a unique situation, and therefore any conclusions are limited in their applicability and generalisability to other teachers of pupils with PMLD who may be able to identify similarities with their own situations (Nowell, Morris, White, & Moules, 2017).

The positive bias of the research was acknowledged, with the reasoning that this leads to a different type of information being recognised, which was felt to have benefits for this population in discovering positive experiences. It can be argued however, that it is necessary for the negatives of a situation to be discovered to be able to address them.

There was limited information from the teachers regarding the best practice of EPs, as they had little experience of working with EPs. It would have been better to address the lack of research in this area through a different method or using a range of participants.

5.6. Further Research

This research has extended the knowledge base about pupils with PMLD, however they are still greatly neglected in the research literature. There is a scarcity of research in the area of pupils with PMLD, as well as their teachers. More research needs to be conducted in this area, which may include an evaluation of pedagogy, emotional well-being, the causes of challenging behaviour, as well as the development of programmes to address these issues.

It may be that the people who choose to do this work with pupils with PMLD are people who are able to see positives, or it may be that they develop the ability to see positives through their experiences with these children.   Further research is necessary to explore whether teachers cognitive reframe their difficulties, and if they then experience reduced stress and are therefore more aware of positives.

Further research that co-constructed the role of the EP with teachers of pupils with PMLD could lead to better working practices and may result in EPs having more confidence to work in this field. This research could take the form of an Appreciative Inquiry (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987) between EPs and teachers of PMLD to find the best ways for working together.

5.7. Future research and directions for positive psychology.

Research into the impact of using positive frameworks could develop information and practice that is useful for EPs in working with teachers and parents/carers. Further research is necessary to explore whether using positive questioning has an impact on the well-being, resilience and practice of teachers or parents/carers. The impacts of positive cognitive reappraisal and increased positive affect would also need to be considered. Educational psychology practice may benefit from the development of a positive psychology consultation framework.   This would need to be followed by research and practice-based evidence. EPs may wish to consider using positive psychology in their own supervision practices.

There is also a role for positive psychology in research methodology. Research can have an impact on its participants. In his Doctoral thesis, Oates (2010) investigated the role of the EP with early years using an Appreciative Inquiry, interestingly, at the end of the study the stakeholders reported that their way of working had been transformed from a deficit model to a strengths-based model. Parents in the study by Szarkowski and Brice, (2016) also reported positive effects from participation in the study. The impact of positively framed research on its participants could be investigated further.

It is possible that positive psychology can provide a framework that is both assessment and an intervention. Further research is necessary to determine whether using a positive psychology framework is able to elicit information at the same time as being an instigator of change. This could be applicable in both practice and in research.

As seen in this research report, positive psychology can offer a new approach to research with marginalised or oppressed groups. It can provide a sensitive approach for discussing difficult topics. Positive psychology can provide a different voice to those already heard in the literature and in society.

6. <u>Conclusions</u>

Using a positive psychology framework has led to a richer understanding of the views of teachers about their pupils' unique characteristics, the strengths and resources of teachers, and the support that they would like from EPs. The characteristics of the pupils, which would often be defined in traditional or medical models as 'deficits' were seen as opportunities for more intense positive emotions, better teaching experiences, cognitive stimulation and better relationships. Viewing positives in this way may be a source of resilience for teachers facing a variety of challenges.

The teachers also reported that the characteristics of their pupils had an impact on their teaching practices, allowing them autonomy, time, and to individualise their practice, which was a positive experience for them. There may be benefits for other teachers to experience these features in their practice.

The strengths and resources that were reported were related to the field of positive psychology and included positive cognitive reappraisal and viewing positives. Cognitive reappraisal and viewing positives may be particularly pertinent with this population of pupils, as their level of need may make it helpful to think more positively about the situation as well as to provide a source of resilience.

The personal strengths that the teachers identified were related to the way they need to work with their pupils, which involves critical thinking and exploring new ways for their pupils to learn and develop. Strengths identified also related to their need to work effectively with other staff and professionals.

In working with educational psychologists, the teachers felt that an expert model would not be effective, and preferred joint working to develop understanding, and working systemically with families. They acknowledged a need for support to address emotional well-being for their pupils.

It was hoped that this research would give us a better understanding of working with pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties, whilst encouraging a positive discourse around disability, and providing a positive experience for participants themselves. Although there are limitations to the conclusions that can be drawn from this research, hopefully it will contribute to the positive discourse about pupils with PMLD.

It is important for society to be made aware of the positives of working with pupils with PMLD. It is claimed that discourse is a method of changing society, and language gives us a way to share and develop our constructions (Burr, 1995).

Changing the language that we use to talk about pupils with PMLD may help to change the constructs that society has of them. Burr (1995) wrote that seeing people through deficit constructs helps us to find out what they need to do to change, and can lead to pity. Discussing the positive aspects of disability may lead towards more helpful social constructs, better inclusive practices, and help society to understand the benefits that people with disability have, and how they can contribute to society. The next move forward for society may be amending the current social model of disability to incorporate a positive model of disability.

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Part 3. Reflective Account

Word count: 6201

1.   Introduction

This reflective account is composed of two sections: 1) Critical account of research practitioner, and 2) Contribution to knowledge. Part 1 will be a reflection on the development of the research idea, with a consideration of the methodology, data collection and analysis, and ethical concerns. Part 2 will consider the implications for practice, the contribution to research and literature, the contribution to my own development as a researcher and practitioner, and then suggest future research directions. As a reflexive piece of work this section is written informally in the first person.

2.   Part 1: Critical Account of Research Practitioner

2.1. Rationale for Thesis

During a visit to a class for pupils experiencing profound and multiple learning difficulties (PMLD) I realised that I had little knowledge about how to provide support to them as a future educational psychologist. During my training to become an educational psychologist I had become aware of a lack of information and discussion about pupils experiencing PMLD, both in the literature and in practice. These are the pupils with the most significant and complex needs in our education system, and yet it seemed, from my experience, that they were being neglected in the research literature and possibly within EP practice.

A conference was organised by the Doctorate in Educational Psychology department on working with pupils with PMLD, which I found very interesting. EPs and headteachers gave an insight into the ways that EPs can support pupils with PMLD. I felt that this conference was providing a small insight into the possibilities for EPs to work with this group of pupils, and I became interested in this as an area for my thesis.

There was very little research regarding pupils with PMLD, and especially in relation to EPs and teachers. Through my literature search it became apparent that there was a great deal of research about parents of children with severe disabilities, and much of this research investigated the positive impact of these children. This

positive view of disabilities fitted in with my own personal views about disability, as well as my tentative interest in positive psychology. The research on parents of children with disabilities reported their strengths and sources of resilience, and how parents benefitted and grew (Buntinx, 2013). Parents who were using positive reappraisal and had positive beliefs about the impact of their child experienced less stress, increased family adjustment and were able to manage their child's behaviour better (Paczkowski & Baker, 2008; Thompson, Hiebert-Murphy & Trute, 2013). This led me to research the fields of stress and coping (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2000), positive affect (Fredrickson,1998; 2001) and positive psychology (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). I wanted to explore these areas in relation to teachers working with pupils with PMLD and thought there might be similar experiences as with parents of children with disabilities. Although I was aware that teaching and parenting roles are different, there are also similarities, especially with the increased caregiving role of teachers of pupils with PMLD. Since there was very little research about teachers of pupils with PMLD it seemed ethical to take a positive stance about disability from the start.

Through supervision it became clear to me quite early on in the research process that I wanted to effect change through my research. I was not satisfied with a journey that only included collating information, I also wanted something beneficial to come from it. I read a piece of research that seemed to fit with this ideal, as well as combining the other ideas I had. This research, by Szarkowski and Brice (2016), used a positive psychology framework to investigate the views of parents of children with hearing impairments. Although not part of their data analysis, the parents reported that they found looking at positives helpful and that it had resulted in their recognising further positives in their children.

A narrative literature search revealed very little research regarding the views of teachers working with pupils with PMLD or EP work with pupils with PMLD. An article by Wills (2006) also explored the role of the EP with pupils with PMLD, however this was very specific to her local authority circumstances, where they had just completed closure of all their special schools, so the purpose of the article was

specific to how EPs can support inclusion. The article was practice based evidence, not research based, so more research is required in this area.

There was only one research study investigating school staff and EPs' perceptions of the role of the EP in working with pupils with PMLD. In this doctoral thesis by Winter (2017), EPs rated teachers as the person they would most like to have as their main point of contact, although only 3% of EPs said that the teacher was actually their main contact.   The views of teachers themselves were underrepresented, as only a minority (18.2%) of school responses were from teaching staff, the majority of school staff respondents being management. EPs reported a lack of confidence and knowledge in working with pupils with PMLD, with both school staff and EPs feeling that school staff were the 'experts' in this area. The notion of 'expertise' for school staff was a belief that EPs did not possess the specialist knowledge about PMLD, and felt that they needed a specialist EP role. EPs however, felt that school staff viewed themselves as 'experts' which was displayed through rigidity in their practice, being closed to new ideas and not seeking support from other professionals. The label of expert can be used to validate individuals and their roles, which can be particularly important in financially difficult times. However the role of the EP does not usually allow for expertise across the many areas of need in which they work. EPs therefore need to help others to understand how they can provide support without this specialist knowledge. It seemed a dichotomy that the teachers in this current study did not want expertise from the EP, but are likely to consider themselves to be specialists, working in specialist provisions.

Teachers' views about working with pupils with PMLD, and their experience of working with EPs, were both sparse in the research literature. I wanted to explore teachers' views of their own strengths and resilience in working with pupils with PMLD. I felt that this is useful information that may be helpful for others to know; how teachers working in this area manage their challenges.   I also wanted to establish what good EP practice might look like. I believed that participating in research should be a positive experience for the teachers and hoped even possibly to increase their positive affect and coping through positive reappraisal. Through supervision I

realised that I wanted to be an agent of change, in providing and promoting positive views about pupils with PMLD. This led to my decision to use a positive psychology framework to explore the experiences of teachers working with pupils with PMLD, the strengths and resources that support them, and their best experiences of working with an EP.

Due to the lack of research directly related to teachers of pupils with PMLD it was necessary to read widely around the subject, which included research on parents of children with disabilities, and teachers in special schools. The majority of research literature does not distinguish between severe learning difficulties (SLD) and PMLD, which made comparing the research literature and separating the needs of each group difficult. There is a great deal of research in the area of positive psychology, so I only included research about coping and positive affect, as this was what the research with parents of children with disabilities had indicated was relevant. I included research about teaching assistants working with pupils with PMLD, due to the lack of specific research about teachers.

2.2. Method

2.2.1. Ontology and Epistemology

This thesis explored the views of teachers, and sought information related to their individual beliefs and experiences. Each participant would be likely to be working in different circumstances in different local authorities. They may have developed their own ways of viewing their pupils, themselves and their work, possibly due to isolation of the role and lack of coordinated training (Salt, 2010). I wanted to be able to explore these individual constructions. This aligned with a relativist ontology, where there are multiple, subjective versions of events, and that each person constructs their own view and each is equally valid (Burr, 1995; Willig, 2008). I chose not to pursue a critical realist stance, as I wanted to elicit the teachers' unique constructions and views, and I was not seeking to establish an idea of one truth or reality in their situation. I wanted to explore what pupils with PMLD meant for them. It is possible to argue that there is a truth to PMLD and in describing the population for the literature review it was necessary to put a standardised description of them. It did not feel that this use of a definition was appropriate to a social constructionist

epistemology, however it was felt necessary to describe the population for potential readers.

The use of positive psychology as an overarching theory to the interview will have had an impact on our joint constructions as participant and researcher. I considered that this specific situation would develop unique constructions that may not be elicited in other interactions at other times. The interviews between myself and the participants were a co-construction of their situation that was developed through the interaction between the two of us, and therefore there could be many possible versions of this experience. The epistemology that aligned with this view was social constructionism (Burr, 2015). The impact and importance of language is acknowledged in social constructionism (Burr, 1995), and it was important in this research to acknowledge the impact of the language used in a positive psychology framework on the social constructions formed.

In choosing a social constructionism and relativist paradigm there are disadvantages in the lack of ability to generalise the data. This caused me concern as I wished to provide relevance to practice for people reading this research. However, if the methodology is rigorous and follows guidelines for trustworthiness as outlined by Lincoln and Guba (1985), it enables readers to judge if the situation is similar enough to their own to allow for transferability of data (Nowell, Morris, White & Moules, 2017). (Details outlining the method of the thematic analysis are provided in appendix 7 and an example of coding is in appendix 9).

It was important for me to consider the effect that using a positive psychology framework had on the methodology and acknowledge the effect that I, as researcher, and in using a specific framework, would be likely to have on the participants (Willig, 2008).

2.2.2. Methodology

There is very little research exploring the area of teachers working with pupils with PMLD, therefore an exploratory approach was warranted. A qualitative approach

was taken to allow a richer breadth and depth of data and allowed scope for the exploration of the participants' constructions of their unique situations (Braun & Clarke, 2013). A quantitative approach would have limited the investigation of teachers' experience and there was insufficient previous research to narrow the scope in this way (Nowell, Morris, White & Moules, 2017).

The ontological and epistemological stance of the research indicated that an appropriate method of data collection was individual, face to face interviews, which was considered the best method to enable the participants to relate their experiences to the interviewer (Braun & Clarke, 2013). I wanted the participants to enjoy the experience, to feel valued, and to potentially feel more positive and resilient as a consequence of the interview. I also wanted to give participants the opportunity to have their voice heard without interference from others, as their voice had not been heard in the literature prior to this.

The interview was semi-structured, using open questions, (see appendix 6) to allow the participants to enable the development of rapport and to allow flexibility in exploration in this new area of research (Coolican, 2004; Braun & Clarke, 2013). An exploratory question at the end of the interview gave participants an opportunity to discuss missed aspects that were important to them. This question also gave participants the opportunity to discuss negative issues if they wished. It seemed ethical to allow them this chance to discuss aspects of their work that were difficult for them.

It is acknowledged that the views of the participants were likely to have been affected by the positive stance of the questions, however, research (see literature review) has indicated that valuable information can be gained from using positive questioning. The interview questions were developed in relation to the research questions and were sent to a teacher with experience and expertise in the area of PMLD for her consideration. She felt that the questions were relevant and did not suggest any alterations.

Other approaches were considered during the planning process. An appropriate alternative could have been to undertake an appreciative inquiry (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987) which could have explored the best hopes and practice for EPs working with pupils with PMLD. I did not feel that this would achieve much insight into this area, as I construed that EPs may not have a great deal of experience of working in this field, and therefore may find it difficult to consider or develop ideas for best practice. I also considered appreciative inquiry or focus groups with EPs and teachers of pupils with PMLD together, however, the logistics of organising teachers and EPs from numerous, widespread, local authorities would have been prohibitive. This method would also have only answered one of my research questions on the role of the EP.

2.2.3. **Participants**

Participants were all female, current teachers of pupils with PMLD, working in local authority maintained special schools, and were recruited through their head teachers. All teachers who agreed to be participants were included in the study. It is possible that an element of bias may be present, due to the self-selection of participants. They may have had an interest in an area of the study or may have been interested in the area of educational psychology. They may be teachers who are more vocal about their work or pupils. Within my cohort of participants I felt that I had covered a variety of experience, skills and knowledge, within different LA contexts, which is what I aimed for to increase naturalistic transferability (Smith, 2018).

The interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. I felt that a great deal of the construction between the researcher and the participant was apparent in the recorded interviews, that can be lost in the written transcriptions, therefore I used the recorded interviews to become familiar with the data. I chose not to ask a second researcher to validate the themes that I had composed as I felt that the themes were a reflection of the interactive interview that took part, where both myself and the participant would have our own construction of the verbal, and non-verbal communication that passed between us. It was for this reason also that I chose not to send transcribed versions of the interview to the participants for their verification,

as it is possible that their constructions would have changed since this time. The constructions developed between us and then later during analysis by myself, as a researcher, are a product of the interactions and questions, and that unique situation, that cannot be replicated or analysed by other researchers (Burr, 1995).

2.2.4. Data Analysis

The method chosen for analysing the data was thematic analysis. This is one of a number of methods in keeping with the chosen ontology and epistemology, however thematic analysis was more appropriate for this research as it is not constricted to a particular theory. This research was exploratory as there is no prior research in this area and thematic analysis provides an unrestricted method that allows for exploration. It is a flexible method that allowed me to address the variety in my research questions and allows for unanticipated insights yet provided a systematic way of analysing qualitative data (Nowell, Morris, White & Moules, 2017). However, its flexibility has been criticised for a possibility of lack of consistency and coherence (Holloway & Todres, 2003). I hope that I was able to address this through methodological rigour by my use of Braun and Clarke's (2006) six step process (see appendix 7) and employing criteria for trustworthiness as suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985). Their criteria is composed of four elements of credibility, transferability, confirmability and dependability. A reflexive audit trail and a clear method of analysis is also necessary according to Nowell, Morris, White, and Moules (2017). These criteria were met in the current study through the use of a reflexive diary, supervision, a clear description of the participants, a clear methodology, an outline of decision-making processes, and examples of raw data (see appendix 9) and the thematic analysis (see appendix 7). The credibility is less evidenced as the themes were not checked with the participants, however the interviews and the themes were discussed regularly in supervision, which provides some indication of credibility (Nowell, Morris, White, & Moules 2017).

An inductive approach to the data analysis was taken, as this allowed themes to be developed from the data, and enabled teachers' experiences and constructions to be organised by the researcher. However, when analysing the data for research question 2, a shift to a more deductive approach was taken. Research question 2

was a more convergent question which leads to a limited number of possible answers, which may suit a more deductive approach.

In analysing the data for research question 2, I struggled to determine names for themes that indicated strengths. The coding within the themes were similar, but defining a name for them was difficult. I wondered whether a ready-made list of names of strengths would be useful. Peterson and Seligman (2004) had compiled a list of universal strengths (see appendix 8) which seemed to fit with the codings and with the positive psychology framework which was used. To check coherence I went through each data item in the theme, to ensure that they matched the description of the strength, and to ensure that I wasn't trying to fit items into names of themes that were not right. It is possible to use both deductive and inductive approaches to analyse research (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006), as they can serve different purposes (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

It was necessary to reflect on whether the use of a deductive approach, which used Peterson and Seligman's (2004) pre-existing framework, was appropriate with my social constructionist epistemology. I felt that it was acceptable as I had already analysed and coded the data, before obtaining names for themes. According to Braun and Clarke (2006) it is impossible to conduct research without being impacted by the researcher's own knowledge and beliefs, but by being aware of my own beliefs and being transparent about the methods and theory employed, this should add to the trustworthiness of the research (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

2.2.5. Other Methodologies

A phenomenological approach such as Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) could have provided an alternative methodology, as it also focuses on the lived experiences of participants (Oxley, 2016). However, IPA is used to make sense of participants' experience of events and would not have allowed the breadth of information necessary to answer all my research questions. IPA also requires homogeneity between participants and each participant was likely to have different experiences and circumstances due to the differences in their working circumstances, which would be likely to vary between local authorities.

Grounded Theory is also a data driven approach to qualitative analysis (Sutcliffe, 2016), but as my research was placed within the existing theory of positive psychology this method would not have been suitable. Narrative theory could have provided an alternative method, however this approach is used to allow participants to tell their stories, and the emphasis would have been on the teachers and their sense of self and identity, rather than on the pupils (Crossley, 2000).

2.3. Ethical Concerns

The research proposal was submitted to the Cardiff University School of Psychology Research Ethics Committee, and approval was granted. The participants were professional adults and able to give informed consent. The main ethical concerns were anonymity and possible impact of the interview. Anonymity was ensured by following thorough procedures for data protection, labelling data recordings and transcripts anonymously, and removing data that could identify participants. This was particularly important due to the limited number of participants, and the small field in which they work. Participants were given an information sheet prior to interview (see appendix 3) a consent form (see appendix 4) and a debrief sheet (see appendix 5).

More ethical concerns became apparent as I reflected on the research. I became aware that I had been implementing a positive psychology intervention on the participants, according to the commonly used definition, that positive psychology interventions are "intentional activities that aim to cultivate positive feelings, behaviours, or cognitions" (Sin & Lyobomirsky, 2009, p.468). I should therefore have made this clear to the participants.

Ethically I should have included mainstream teachers in my study, as their experiences are equally valid. Using only specialist schools resulted in a focus on the issue of inclusion, as much of the literature was talking about pupils needing specialist teaching. It became necessary that I address this topic to enable opposing arguments to be addressed.

I have reflected that I made a major assumption that the work of teachers with pupils with PMLD is stressful and can be difficult. This is unfair to the teachers, who may or may not hold this view, as well as being unfair to their pupils, as well as being contrary to the positive disability ethos of this study. I found it hypocritical to write about the difficulties of pupils with PMLD, when I was encouraging a positive view of this population, but I felt it was necessary to do this to describe the population and to validate the research.

3.   Part 2. Contribution to Knowledge

This research has enabled a greater understanding of the teachers' experiences of teaching pupils with PMLD, as well as an exploration of their strengths and resources, and their constructions of how EPs can support them. This research has provided a clear picture of the numerous and varied positives gained from working with pupils with PMLD. Information gained about teachers' strengths and resources and their ideas of effective support have led to a better understanding of how EPs can support them and their pupils.

The role of the EP was difficult for the teachers to discuss as they had very little experience of working with EPs. It would be helpful for teachers to have a better awareness of the possible roles of the EP, so that they are able to request this support, for themselves or for their pupils. A number of the participants suggested at the end of the interview that they may approach their own EP for support now.   The literature review along with the research article have suggested a wide range of roles for the EP to consider when working with pupils with PMLD and their teachers. This can provide a basis from which EPs may co-construct their roles with their stakeholders.

This research has contributed a range of knowledge to the field of pupils with PMLD and their teachers. There is a scarcity of research in this area. It is possible that this lack of research reflects the attitude of society towards these groups.   However, the style of literature review undertaken for this research was less comprehensive than a

systematic literature review would be and may have missed relevant material (Grant & Booth, 2009).

Arguably, the most important element of this research has been a significant contribution to the positive discourse about pupils experiencing profound and multiple learning difficulties, and the positive impact that they can have on other people. It is important to change the way in which the world talks about and views pupils with PMLD. Pupils with PMLD are the most excluded population in our society (PMLD Network, 2001), they are neglected in government legislation, and usually segregated in their education (Jones & Riley, 2017). Their teachers are an important resource for changing the discourse about these children, and in making sure that their needs are met by society. As well as changing the discourse about these pupils this research can also change the discourse about their teachers, who often feel neglected and isolated, and can be considered low status carers (Salt, 2010). If teachers feel excluded themselves they may need support to change this discourse. It is claimed that discourse is a method of changing society and language gives us a way to share and develop our constructions (Burr, 1995).

After conducting the interviews, I was glad that I had enabled this opportunity for the participants, as many of them expressed their gratitude at being heard, and at being given the opportunity to speak positively about their pupils. They articulated that it was important for the wider community to hear this, to enable more inclusive attitudes. I was lucky to be able to secure participants with ease, and I believe this was due to their wish to speak out about their pupils.

This research has applied a relatively new framework to a novel population. Research that employs a positive psychology approach is rare. This research adds to the body of positive psychology in education. This research has also explored a new way of eliciting the experiences of teachers. Using a positive psychology framework has enabled a positive discourse about pupils experiencing PMLD and may be helpful in studying other populations that are excluded or vulnerable. A positive psychology framework has also been able to improve our understanding of

strengths and resources and may be useful in exploring challenging situations in other fields.

3.1. Future Research

Using a positive psychology framework is a new methodology for research and needs further exploration. The participants were able to view positively aspects of PLMD that other people might view as difficulties. Due to the design of my research it was not possible to conclude whether this is due to the participants themselves, a result of their work with pupils, or a result of the interview that took place and the social constructions that may have been developed within it.   Further research exploring the impact of positive interviews with teachers would be beneficial, looking at changes in cognitive appraisal or positive affect. In using a positive psychology focus it is possible that I was helping the participants to construct positive versions of their subjective realities. However, the definition of a positive psychology framework would need to be defined more clearly, as that used in my own and others' research to date has not been specific enough.

Research by Szarkowski and Brice (2016) exploring the experiences of parents of children with hearing impairments used a positive psychology framework, and parents commented that the experience of talking about their children positively resulted in their finding more positives. Ethically this type of research may have a more positive effect on participants, but there is no evidence yet of the impact of positive psychology as a research method.

There has been a great deal of research into positive psychology interventions, but it would be interesting to develop and research the use of a positive psychology framework during consultations with EPs. This would require the development of a positive psychology consultation framework.

An appreciative inquiry methodology is a positive psychology framework that could provide an excellent method for generating ideas and best practice for EP practice This could take place with a combination of EPs, teachers and potentially Additional

Learning Needs Coordinators (ALNCos), establishing co-constructed good practice. A possible difficulty with this is that the participants would not be from one organisation so there would need to be adjustments to the appreciative inquiry design to accommodate this.

Through the literature review it became apparent that there are opposing views about whether pupils with PMLD require specialist education. There is very little research about pedagogy in general (Norwich & Lewis, 2007), and less about the pedagogy needed for pupils with PMLD, and whether it is the same or different. This is an area that needs further research, as clearer answers could have a significant impact on the inclusion of pupils with PMLD.

3.2. Implications for Practice

EPs have a duty to work with pupils with PMLD and have a role in supporting inclusion (Wills, 2006). They also have a role in supporting the emotional well-being of pupils, which was identified by some of the participants in this study. Pupils with PMLD are likely to experience the same range of family, social, and mental health difficulties as other pupils (Emerson & Hatton, 2007). It is important for EPs to be able to support pupils across the spectrum of their needs.

As well as providing support to pupils, EPs have a role in supporting teachers. This research has identified strengths and resources that the participants construed supported them in their work. EPs can help teachers to build on these strengths and resources which will increase their resilience.

There is governmental concern about the lack of teachers of pupils with PMLD (Salt, 2010) and we need to ensure that there is a continuous supply of teachers for these pupils. This research may encourage teachers into this field of work. It would be useful for teacher training institutions to make this research available to trainees, to encourage them to consider working with pupils with PMLD. Dissemination of this research could also highlight similarities for those teachers working with pupils with PMLD in special schools and in mainstream schools.

There are also potential implications for practice for all teachers. This relates to the positive experience of autonomy and person-centred practice that is a necessary component of PMLD work. It is possible that increased autonomy and person-centred practice would result in more positive experiences for all teachers. There is certainly a move towards person centred practice identified in recent legislation and guidance (Department for Education & Department of Health, 2015; Welsh Government, 2018) and the new welsh curriculum is likely to expect a larger degree of autonomy from teachers in creating and implementing individualised curricula and pathways for pupils (Welsh Government, 2017).

3.3. Personal Reflections on Development as Researcher and a Practitioner

As a researcher I believe that I was trying to answer too many research questions, and I would have been better to focus my research on either the first two or just the last one. However, I feel that there is now some introductory research in this area, which can be built upon. Co-construction of terms would also have been useful during the research. My participants had a different construction of the term 'resources' to myself, they described physical resources, while my intention had been to explore personal resources, such as social, emotional and mental resources. I have an increased awareness of the need to be explicit and co-construct terms, and to pilot interviews to explore these potential misunderstandings.

Undertaking this research has made me more aware of my views about the world, as I have had to learn about and examine ontology and epistemology. When I started the Doctorate in Educational Psychology I would have described myself as a positivist, now I would describe myself as a social constructionist. This is evident in my practice and has consolidated the importance of co-construction with service users, rather than taking on an expert role and identifying within child difficulties.

I have been interested in positive psychology since I learnt about it in my first year placement. Although I was interested in positive psychology as an underlying ethos, I was aware of the limitations of Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi's (2000) theory. I am more interested in positive psychology as an overarching framework rather than

the specific interventions that have been developed by Martin Seligman and others (Seligman, Ernst, Gillham, Reivich, Linkins, 2009). For this research I wanted to combine my interest in positive psychology whilst enhancing my knowledge about how, as an EP, I could work with pupils with PMLD.

I was aware from the start of the potential for bias from myself and inducing bias in the participants. Within this study there was already a bias due to the questions used in the interviews, so it was important that I monitored potential bias, through my reflective diary. On reflection it is possible that I should have chosen a different term to "positive" when asking about their experiences.

It is impossible for researchers to conduct research and not have an impact on the participants, and it is not possible to be totally objective (Braun & Clarke, 2013). It is suggested in texts for qualitative analysis that the process of keeping a reflective diary allows those unconscious thoughts, feelings and beliefs to become conscious, and it is only when they are conscious that you can help to limit their impact (Chan, Fung & Chien, 2013). I used supervision and a reflective diary to assist me in making conscious my thoughts and feelings about the research process, and my supervisor suggested that I keep specific notes of my feelings about positive psychology throughout the process. The effect of my constructions on the participants was highlighted to me when one participant asked me about the study and I talked about the ethos behind the study and how viewing positives can be important. I made a note in my reflective diary about this and when I came to analyse the interview I noted that this participant used the term 'positive' often.

During the course of the interviews and the research, my awareness of my motivation for doing the research became clearer and may also have altered. Supervision and my reflective diary helped me to notice these changes. I have considered that this journey may have been initiated through a desire to increase my own knowledge, but I hope that it has since developed into a more altruistic goal of believing that pupils with PMLD have a great deal to give to society. I was greatly affected by the way that the teachers spoke about their pupils and the pupils' level of

inclusion. I wanted to ensure that their voices were heard and that people understand the positives that children with PMLD give to society. I came to realise, through the participants, and reading literature, that I actually wanted to effect social change. I feel that it is important to publish the research so that their voices are heard and hope that it may change people's views. I feel a responsibility to the participants to ensure that this happens, in gratitude for their time and for helping me to see the positives too. I felt it was a real privilege to be able to listen to the participants, talking so positively about their role and their pupils.

The participants often spoke strongly about issues of inclusion, however they also conveyed that they felt that their pupils needed special education. This made me reflect on the seemingly opposing standpoints of children needing specialist education, and inclusive education.   This has made me more reflective in my own practice when working with schools, and in particular thinking about what characteristics make a school inclusive. We may regard a school as inclusive but there is often a limit at which they report that they can longer include a pupil. Inclusion should not be a spectrum that includes only some.

I have always strongly believed in the principle of inclusion for all. Through this study I have had to consider my opinion on this. Much of the literature around pupils with PMLD asserted that they need specialist teaching and used the reasoning of their being 'extra' special. However, having had to consider the other side of the argument by Norwich and Lewis (2007) that there are pedagogies adaptable for all children, and that it is teacher knowledge that makes the difference, I realise that there is still a great deal of research to be done in this area. I believe that both groups of pupils are missing out if they do not allow pupils with PMLD to fully engage with their mainstream peers.

4.   Conclusion

This research has been a learning experience for me as a researcher and as a practitioner. It has contributed to the literature in an area where there is very little research; that of the views of teachers working with pupils with PMLD. It is important that this unique group of pupils are talked about positively by society, and that their

needs are understood. Teachers, as a professional group, who may be seen as having less personal bias than parents, may have more power to persuade society of the positives of this group of children. It is important to society, and in particular EPs, to understand the perspectives of teachers. This research has given me a great deal of insight into the working experiences of teachers of pupils with PMLD.

Using a positive psychology framework gave the research a unique perspective that enabled me to investigate the strengths and resources of teachers and their positive experiences in their work with these pupils.   It has also allowed us some insight into the role of the EP in supporting pupils and teachers in the field of PMLD.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

Table of search terms for literature review.

Search terms	Articles from databases searched
"profound and multiple learning difficult*"	95
"profound and multiple learning disabilit*"	112
"learning difficult*" AND "educational psycholog*"	154
"intellectual difficult*" AND "teach*" AND "child"	782
"learning difficult*" AND "school psycholog*"	425
"teach*" AND "child" AND "severe learning disability*"	18
"teach*" AND "multiple disability*"	304
"positive psychology*" AND "school psycholog*"	54
"severe learning difficult*" AND "child*"AND "school"	33
"positive psychology*" AND "educational psycholog*"	38
"positive affect" AND "coping" AND "review"	27
"positive affect" AND "child*" AND "disability*" AND "parent*"	36
"positive reappraisal" AND "stress" AND "review"	7

Appendix 2

Gatekeeper Letter

Clare Jones Trainee Educational Psychologist

CUCHDS

Cardiff University

Park Place

Cardiff CF10 3AT

JonesCM33@cardiff.ac.uk

Head teacher.

Dear ,

I am writing to request your permission to conduct research involving one or more teachers in your school. The title of the research is; Research exploring the positive experiences of teachers working with pupils with Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties. I have enclosed an information sheet that will be given to participants, which outlines the purpose of the research, for your information.

If you give your consent, I will ask you to seek consent from any teachers, who work mainly with pupils with profound and multiple difficulties (PMLD,) to provide me with their contact details (name and email address). I will then contact these teachers, provide them with the information sheet and ask if they wish to be part of this research. Any teachers who consent to participate will then be interviewed by myself. The interview will take approximately thirty minutes to one hour, and will take place at school at a time that is convenient to the teacher.

The interview will involve asking teachers questions about their positive experiences of working with pupils with PMLD. Participants will be recruited from a number of other schools also. If a participant from your school has been affected in any way by the interview I will try to resolve any difficulties with them myself, through further discussion and support immediately after the interview. If however they remain affected by issues regarding their work I will direct them to seek support from their line manager or yourself.

The research will form part of my written submissions for the Doctorate in Educational Psychology at Cardiff University and may be published or used in presentations. Any information used in the report will be anonymised, ensuring that all teachers and schools will not be able to be identified.

The research has been approved by the School of Psychology Research Ethics Committee. I am being supervised by Dr Rachael Hayes, professional tutor on the Doctorate in Educational Psychology. If you require any further information please contact myself, Dr Hayes or the Ethics Committee.

Yours sincerely,

Clare Jones,
Trainee Educational Psychologist

Dr Rachael Hayes Research Supervisor
School of Psychology
Cardiff University
HayesR4@cardiff.ac.uk

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Cardiff University
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http://psych.cf.ac.uk/aboutus/ethics.html

Appendix 3

Information Sheet for Participants

As part of my Doctorate in Educational Psychology at Cardiff University I am conducting research into the positive experiences of teachers working with pupils who have profound and multiple learning difficulties (PMLD). The aim of the research is to increase knowledge of the positive impact of working with these pupils and the resources and strengths that teachers of pupils with PMLD may have. I hope that it will enable educational psychologists to gain a better understanding of the experience of working with pupils with PMLD and to gain knowledge of how to support their teachers in their work.

Participating in this research would involve taking part in an individual interview with myself. This would take place in your school at a time and date that is convenient to you. The interview will take between approximately thirty minutes and one hour. The interview will be audio recorded. The audio recording will stored securely by myself, until the end of the research, when it will be destroyed. The audio recording will be assigned an identification number, so that your name is not attached to any data. I will be the only person who knows which number corresponds to your name, this information will also be stored securely locked to ensure confidentiality. Once the data has been transcribed your assigned number will be removed and the data will therefore be anonymous, as no-one will be able to identify you. The transcribed data will be kept securely by myself until the end of the project, from which point it will be stored by the School of Psychology, Cardiff University. The anonymised data may be given to a second researcher for verification of my analysis.

Taking part in this study is voluntary and you may withdraw from the study at any point until seven days after our interview takes place. At this point the data will be transcribed and analysed and it will not be possible to separate the data from other participants'. The information from the interview will be used as part of a research project by myself at Cardiff University. You should be aware that the information you provide may form the basis of a research paper which may be submitted for

publication.   Any responses from the interview that may appear in the research paper will be anonymous and unidentifiable.

I am being supervised in this research by Dr Rachael Hayes who is an academic tutor for the Doctorate in Educational Psychology course at Cardiff University.

If you would like to ask any questions about the study or make a complaint you can speak to myself, Dr. Rachael Hayes (Research Supervisor at Cardiff University), or the Ethics Committee at Cardiff University.

Thank you for taking for taking the time to read this information. Many thanks in advance for your consideration of this project.

Kind regards,
Clare Jones
Trainee Educational Psychologist
Email: jonescm33@cardiff.ac.uk

Dr. Rachael Hayes
Academic Tutor (DEdPsy)
School of Psychology
Cardiff University
HayesR4@cardiff.ac.uk

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Appendix 4

Consent Form

By consenting to participate in this study I understand that:

- I agree to participate in an interview with Clare Jones, Trainee Educational Psychologist, about my experiences of working with pupils with Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties. This will take about 30 minutes to an hour of my time on one occasion.

- Taking part is voluntary. This means that I don't have to take part if I don't want to and I can leave at any time without giving a reason.

- I can choose to omit answers to any or all questions if I so wish.

- The responses that I provide will be held anonymously by the researcher (unless there is concern that I or someone else is in danger or at risk of harm). The recorded interviews will be stored electronically and access will be password protected. The transcribed interviews will also be password protected and paper copies will be stored in a locked cupboard only accessible by the researcher.

- I agree that the interview can be audio recorded.

- The audio recording will be transcribed seven days after the interview. Once this has occurred the data will be collated with other participants' data and will not be removable. At this time I will no longer be able to withdraw from the research. Once the information has been collated it will not be possible to trace it back to me: no one will be able to identify me from the data.

- I am aware that the information I provide in the interview may form the basis of a research paper which may be submitted for publication.

- If I want to talk to someone about the study or make a complaint, I can contact the researcher Clare Jones or her supervisor, Dr. Rachael Hayes (Educational Psychologist and Research Supervisor), or the School of Psychology Research Ethics Committee (all contact details are given on the Information Sheet provided with this form).

I _____ (name) would like to take part in this study with Clare Jones, Trainee Educational Psychologist, Cardiff University.

Signed: _____ .

Appendix 5

<u>Research exploring the positive experiences of teachers working with pupils with Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties.</u>

Debrief Sheet

Thank you very much for taking part in this research and completing the interview. The aim of the interview was to explore the experiences of teachers who work with pupils with Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties. I hope that this will enable a better understanding of working with these pupils and the strengths and resources that teachers use. I hope that it will also enable educational psychologists to support teachers more effectively.

All data collected will be held anonymised and securely. At no point will your name be attached to any data. If you do feel upset about anything that we have talked about, you may discuss the matter further with myself or you may wish to speak with your line manager or head teacher. Support can also be sought from your own General Practitioner or your union representative. If you would like any further information about this research, you can speak to myself or Dr Rachael Hayes (Research Supervisor, Cardiff University).

Thank you for your time.

Clare Jones

Trainee Educational Psychologist

School of Psychology

Cardiff University

JonesCM33@cardiff.ac.uk

Dr Rachael Hayes Research Supervisor

School of Psychology

Cardiff University

HayesR4@cardiff.ac.uk

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Appendix 6

Questions for Interview

1. Can you tell me about the positive aspects of being a teacher for pupils with PMLD?

2. What personal strengths and resources help you to be an effective teacher?

3. What support would or does help you to work with pupils with PMLD more effectively?

4. When work is difficult are there any thoughts or feelings that you have that help to make the situation better?

5. Can you tell me about a time when an educational psychologist had a positive impact on a child with PMLD, either by working with yourself or directly with the pupil.

6. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about in relation to your work with pupils with PMLD?

Appendix 7

Method for the thematic analysis.

Phase 1. Familiarisation with the data corpus and transcription.

- Listened to the audio recordings of the interviews.

- Transcribed each interview, using google docs voice typing, whilst listening to the audio recording at half-speed.

- Listened to the audio recordings to familiarise myself and to ensure that the transcripts were accurate.

- Read and re-read each individual transcript.

- Anonymised each transcript.

- Wrote notes with initial ideas and underlined data items that were interesting, felt important, or related to the research questions.

Phase 2. Generating initial codes

- Each data item was marked on the transcript for which research question the data item related to.

- Read through the full data set using each individual research question one at a time.

- Initial ideas for codes were noted down for each research question.

- The data set was read again. The initial codes were colour coded for each research question.

Phase 3. Searching for themes.

- Coding of the same colour were grouped together to check for coherency and to generate ideas for themes.

Phase 4. Reviewing themes.

- Each theme was reviewed within itself and against the others, for each research question, to ensure internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity. Necessary corrections were made, and new themes were created, or themes combined.

- At this point the data corpus was read again to check that the themes were an accurate reflection of the whole, and to check for any missed data items that were important.

Phase 5. Reviewing and refining themes

- The coding for each theme were reviewed and ideas for what the set contained were written down. Names of the themes were generated and checked to ensure that they applied to all the data within.

Phase 6. Producing the report

- Thematic maps were created to help the reader to understand how the themes related to each other and to over-arching themes. Tables provided a description and an example of each theme for clarity.

When naming the themes relating to strengths (research question 2) it was felt that an objective system of naming and categorising strengths was necessary. Therefore, where appropriate and accurate, the strengths themes were named

following the descriptions of universal strengths identified in research by Peterson and Seligman (2004). Themes of strengths that did not align with descriptions of those of Peterson and Seligman were given another appropriate name by the researcher.

The theme of Strengths was analysed and coded as described in the method section above. The coded data were named according to Peterson and Seligman (2004) character strengths, and the description of the theme is also taken from their description of the character strength. Data that were not considered to be character strengths were placed in a theme named Skills, due to their component data.

Appendix 8

The VIA Classification of Character Strengths

1. Wisdom and Knowledge – Cognitive strengths that entail the acquisition and use of knowledge:

• **Creativity** [originality, ingenuity]: Thinking of novel and productive ways to conceptualize and do things; includes artistic achievement but is not limited to it

• **Curiosity** [interest, novelty-seeking, openness to experience]: Taking an interest in ongoing experience for its own sake; finding subjects and topics fascinating; exploring and discovering

• **Judgment** [critical thinking]: Thinking things through and examining them from all sides; not jumping to conclusions; being able to change one's mind in light of evidence; weighing all evidence fairly

• **Love of Learning**: Mastering new skills, topics, and bodies of knowledge, whether on one's own or formally; obviously related to the strength of curiosity but goes beyond it to describe the tendency to add systematically to what one knows

• **Perspective** [wisdom]: Being able to provide wise counsel to others; having ways of looking at the world that make sense to oneself and to other people

2. Courage – Emotional strengths that involve the exercise of will to accomplish goals in the face of opposition, external or internal:

• **Bravery** [valor]: Not shrinking from threat, challenge, difficulty, or pain; speaking up for what is right even if there is opposition; acting on convictions even if unpopular; includes physical bravery but is not limited to it

• **Perseverance** [persistence, industriousness]: Finishing what one starts; persisting in a course of action in spite of obstacles; "getting it out the door"; taking pleasure in completing tasks

• **Honesty** [authenticity, integrity]: Speaking the truth but more broadly presenting oneself in a genuine way and acting in a sincere way; being without pretense; taking responsibility for one's feelings and actions

• **Zest** [vitality, enthusiasm, vigor, energy]: Approaching life with excitement and energy; not doing things halfway or halfheartedly; living life as an adventure; feeling alive and activated

3. Humanity - Interpersonal strengths that involve tending and befriending others:

• **Love**: Valuing close relations with others, in particular those in which sharing and caring are reciprocated; being close to people

• **Kindness** [generosity, nurturance, care, compassion, altruistic love, "niceness"]: Doing favors and good deeds for others; helping them; taking care of them

• **Social Intelligence** [emotional intelligence, personal intelligence]: Being aware of the motives and feelings of other people and oneself; knowing what to do to fit into different social situations; knowing what makes other people tick

4. Justice - Civic strengths that underlie healthy community life:

• **Teamwork** [citizenship, social responsibility, loyalty]: Working well as a member of a group or team; being loyal to the group; doing one's share

• **Fairness**: Treating all people the same according to notions of fairness and justice; not letting personal feelings bias decisions about others; giving everyone a fair chance.

• **Leadership**: Encouraging a group of which one is a member to get things done and at the time maintain time good relations within the group; organizing group activities and seeing that they happen.

5. Temperance – Strengths that protect against excess:

• **Forgiveness**: Forgiving those who have done wrong; accepting the shortcomings of others; giving people a second chance; not being vengeful

• **Humility**: Letting one's accomplishments speak for themselves; not regarding oneself as more special than one is

• **Prudence**: Being careful about one's choices; not taking undue risks; not saying or doing things that might later be regretted

• **Self-Regulation** [self-control]: Regulating what one feels and does; being disciplined; controlling one's appetites and emotions

6. Transcendence - Strengths that forge connections to the larger universe and provide meaning:

• **Appreciation of Beauty and Excellence** [awe, wonder, elevation]: Noticing and appreciating beauty, excellence, and/or skilled performance in various domains of life, from nature to art to mathematics to science to everyday experience

• **Gratitude**: Being aware of and thankful for the good things that happen; taking time to express thanks

• **Hope** [optimism, future-mindedness, future orientation]: Expecting the best in the future and working to achieve it; believing that a good future is something that can be brought about

• **Humor** [playfulness]: Liking to laugh and tease; bringing smiles to other people; seeing the light side; making (not necessarily telling) jokes

• **Spirituality** [faith, purpose]: Having coherent beliefs about the higher purpose and meaning of the universe; knowing where one fits within the larger scheme; having beliefs about the meaning of life that shape conduct and provide comfort

https://www.viacharacter.org/www/Portals/0/Text%202.pdf

Appendix 9

Examples of thematic analysis.

Examples of initial coding for research question 1.

Example of transcript with colour coding (see key on page below).

I: That's lovely. So you were saying about acting as a kind of a coordinator for the services for families, so you mean like health and..

P: Yes, most, most of, *all* of the children in my class have got an occupational therapist, and a speech therapist, and sometimes a community nurse, depending on whether there are feeding or sleep issues and things like that at home, and a physiotherapist as well. So it's just trying to co-ordinate everything really and...

I: And most of that happens here.

P: and make sure that happens, everybody's got the same sort of information so most meetings are held in school and we have the email contact constantly really, on a weekly basis I would say.

I: With parents?

P: With parents, with and with other professionals, so with occupational therapists looking at things like feeding implements and things like that.

I: So what do you find rewarding about your work?

P: It is just the best job in the world, it's never ever dull. It's really good and it's, it's really stimulating trying to find different ways of, of doing the same kind of skills, if you understand what I mean. There, there are limits to how many *different* things you could perhaps deliver to a child, so you've got to think of lots of different ways. There's a lot of repetition. You're not changing things *constantly*, but obviously your creativity's stretched in trying to find, you know, different ways..

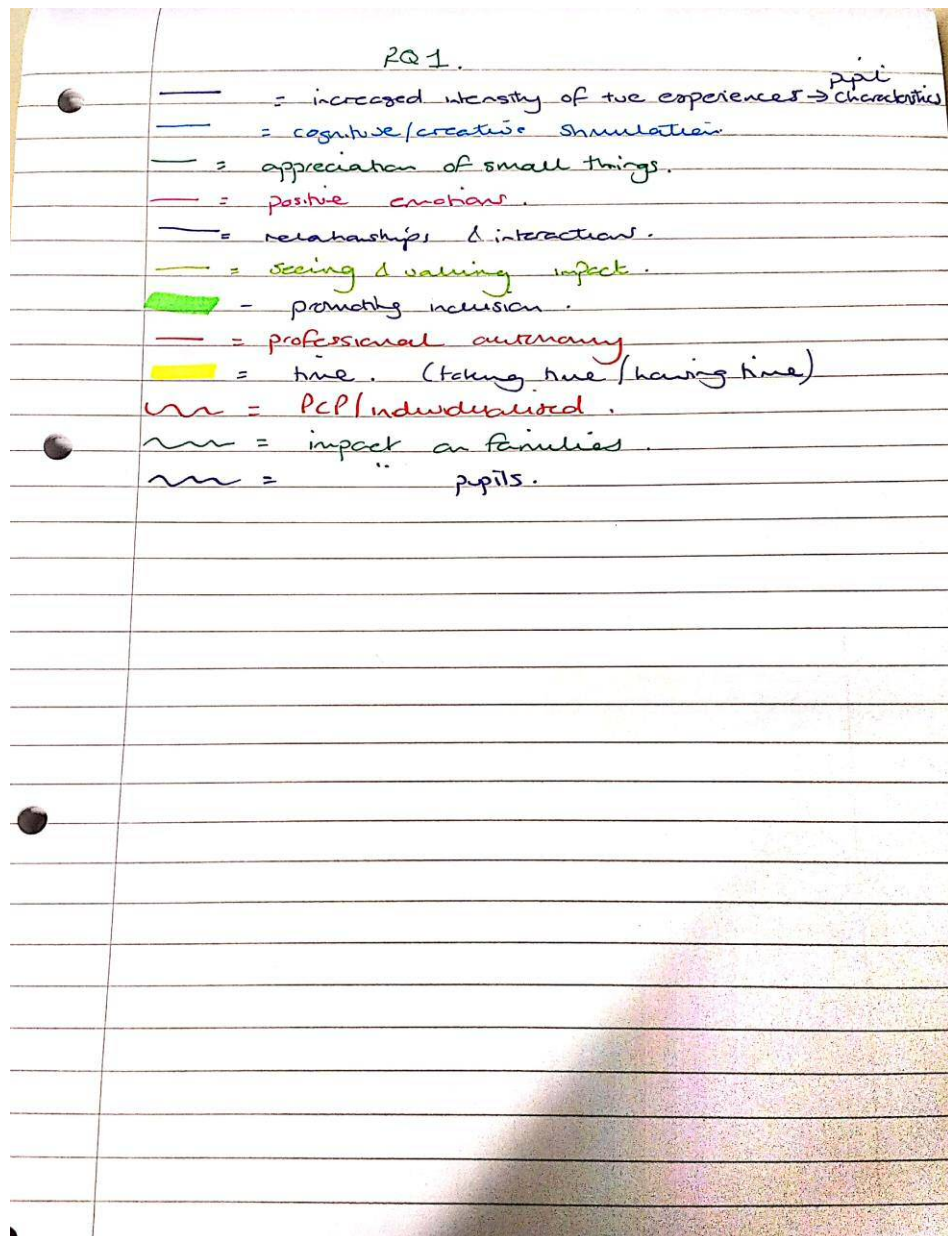*I:* Different ways for different children to meet their different...

P: and catching their attention because some children may not tolerate sounds as well as others, so you know, you lose that opportunity really to deliver skills through auditory stimulus so then you've got to think of other things.

I: There's a big emphasis on personalising....

P: Yes, yes.

I: their education.

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Example of colour coding scheme for research question 1.

RQ1.

_____ = increased intensity of tue experiences → pupil characteristics

_____ = cognitive/creative shimulation

_____ = appreciation of small things.

_____ = positive emotions.

_____ = relationships & interaction.

_____ = seeing & valuing impact.

_____ - promoting inclusion.

_____ = professional autonomy

_____ = time. (taking time/having time)

∿ = PCP/individualised.

∿ = impact on families.

∿ = " " pupils.

<u>Coding for Research Question 1. What are the positive experiences of teachers working with pupils with PMLD?</u>

Positive experiences arising from pupil characteristics. (Overarching theme)

Increased intensity of positive experiences due to pupil characteristics.

(*teachers experiencing more intensive positive experiences related to the increased needs or length of time spent working with pupils*)

Working with the children I think is particularly satisfying because you wait a long time for your results on the whole. I know that's a generalisation, but you wait a long time for your results, so when they come they are really golden moments. That can be immensely satisfying.

There are so many positive aspects, I think because they are children and young people with the most considerable needs, erm, that any difference that you can make, however small, has the biggest amount of outcome for everybody, including the parents as well.

but that doesn't come without its battles, but I said it's definitely comes with a heartfelt positivity that you couldn't get, you couldn't get that euphoria from anything else.

the highs are very high but the lows are very low

we know that we have to work really hard to make them smile when we do it's like "yes".

But I think, when you have a very positive experience, and it may only happen once, and you may not see that again, and you may only have one a week, over a class, that means so much more, that means so much to me.

Appreciation of small things

(*appreciating small instances of behaviour or progress*)

I enjoy the little feedback that you get, the very small things, they mean a lot to me.

I get so much from those little tiny things that they do.

it's little

But I think, when you have a very positive experience, and it may only happen once, and you may not see that again, and you may only have one a week, over a class, that means so much more, that means so much to me.

you have to look for the tiny, tiny, tiny, little things that actually have a big significance,

to not to have to have everything flash, bang, wallop, but to look for the beauty and the positive in the little things.

because you have to look for the tiny, tiny, tiny, improvements or new things, new.

There are so many positive aspects, I think because they are children and young people with the most considerable needs, erm, that any difference that you can make, however small, has the biggest amount of outcome for everybody, including the parents as well.

that positive bit is there, seeing how tiny things can make a big difference to somebody with PMLD

they're little reactions I think, they're small facial expressions, and changes, and just whole demeanour you can tell that they're happy.

I don't think I realised how much the little things can affect somebody, and how much you can make a difference to PMLD pupils.

Cognitive/creative stimulation.

(teachers talk about how working with pupils with PMLD interests them cognitively and enables or causes them to think more creatively, and to be thoughtful or analytical about their work)

I love doing sensory stories, and doing, coming up with creative ways to do stuff,

it's never ever dull.

it's really stimulating trying to find different ways of, of doing the same kind of skills

there are limits to how many *different* things you could perhaps deliver to a child, so you've got to think of lots of different ways

You're not changing things *constantly*, but obviously your creativity's stretched in trying to find, you know, different ways..

catching their attention because some children may not tolerate sounds as well as others, so you know, you lose that opportunity really to deliver skills through auditory stimulus so then you've got to think of other things.

I think as being a teacher, and as being a human being, you, you get to understand the fundamentals of what, of what being a human being is. I think they abso.., everything is stripped away, you get down to real bare bones of humanity, which is a really interesting sort of thing to have to deal with, and, it, it, in terms of psychology, fascinating looking at how humans function at a very, very, very, lowest level, what we would call the lowest level of function I suppose, the most basic, simple.

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you really have to think about how children learn for instance, what is it, what do they have to know, what must they be able to do, to even begin to learn, a sort of *pre* learning skills which is what is what we are basically doing all day here.