# Excluded Girls' Stories of Belonging

A thesis submitted as part of the requirements of the University of East London for the Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology

Nicola Warner

U1614536

University of East London

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**Abstract**

Exclusion from school is an issue of national and local concern. With more boys experiencing exclusion than girls the research is dominated by a male perspective. This research aimed to provide an in-depth exploration of the experience of girls who have been excluded and are currently attending Alternative Provisions (AP). A sense of belonging is linked to more positive outcomes therefore this research was underpinned by an exploration of the belonging these girls have experienced in their previous and current settings along with their hopes for the future.

This exploratory research had a constructivist epistemology and an ontological position of relativism. It accepts that multiple realities are constructed through lived experience and individually constructed and focuses on the stories of three secondary age girls. The research took a narrative approach and a guided interview and life grids were used to support the gathering of data remotely. Participants' narratives were re-storied according to Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) three-dimensional space, offering rich and detailed insights into the complexity of their experiences. In the second phase of analysis, the three storied narratives were analysed using narrative thematic analysis, and several themes and subthemes were identified for each of the research questions.

The girls were found to experience higher levels of belonging in their alternative provision, feeling a lack of autonomy in their mainstream experiences. Positive teacher relationships contained the most powerful narratives. The girls found in the alternative provisions that male students can experience increased support from staff and that more resources were directed towards their experiences. The girls outlined hopes and aspirations for the future, but these were limited by a fear of a repeated experience of a lack of understanding around their needs. The implications of the research findings for both national strategy, Educational Psychology practice and Educational settings are discussed.

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List of Abbreviations

| Abbreviation | Term in Full |
|---|---|
| ADHD | Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder |
| AP | Alternate Provision |
| ASD | Autism Spectrum Disorder |
| CASP | Critical Appraisal Skills Programme |
| CYP | Children and Young People |
| DfE | Department of Education |
| EHCP | Educational, Health and Care Plan |
| EP | Educational Psychologist |
| IPA | Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis |
| KS | Key Stage |
| LA | Local Authority |
| PRU | Pupil Referral Units |
| PSSM | Psychological Sense of School Membership Scale |
| RQ | Research Question |
| SEMH | Social Emotional Mental Health |
| SEN | Special Educational Needs |
| SENCO | Special Needs Co-ordinator |
| TEP | Trainee Educational Psychologist |

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1. Introduction

The aim of the current research is to understand children and young people's (CYP's) views on exclusion. By gaining CYP's narratives this research aims to offer another dimension to the understanding of the experience of exclusion in relation to school belonging. It appears little is known about females who experience exclusion and spend time in Alternate Provisions (APs). Within this chapter, the national context for exclusions will be presented followed by the theories that support understanding of school belonging and the position of the researcher.

## 1.2 Key Terms Related to School Exclusions

APs are settings that provide education for pupils up to 18 years old who do not attend mainstream school for a number of reasons, including exclusion, mental and physical health needs, early intervention and alternate education pathways (Department for Education (DfE), 2018a; DfE, 2018b). APs can be used in a reactive or proactive way, although the ability for them to be proactive and involved in early intervention has been reduced due to the increase in excluded children needing placements (DfE, 2018a).

Permanent exclusions refer to students who are removed from the school roll and fixed-term exclusions refer to students who are out of school for a specific period (Michelmore & Mesie, 2019). A pupil may receive more than one fixed term exclusion but in any one academic year they can only be excluded for a maximum of 45 days (Michelmore & Mesie, 2019; Timpson, 2019). The DfE guidance states that pupils can only be permanently excluded in response to serious or persistent breaches of the school's behaviour policy or where allowing the child to remain in school would seriously harm the education or welfare of the pupil or others (Michelmore & Mesie, 2019).

## 1.3 School Exclusions and the National Context

The Timpson Review (2019) states that exclusions have been rising since 2013/2014 with an average of 40 CYP permanently excluded every day and 2,000 receiving fixed-term exclusions. In 2014 there were 42,995 CYP in APs which rose to 49,477 in 2018, with permanent exclusions

increasing by 15% between 2015/16 and 2016/17 and fixed term increasing by 13% in the same period (Michelmore & Mesie, 2019; Timpson, 2019).

The main reason for referrals into APs was in response to behaviour incidents. However, this behaviour maybe an indication of Special Educational Needs (SEN), including Social Emotional Mental Health (SEMH) or Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), which are often undiagnosed at the point of referral (DfE, 2018b). APs report that the CYP they educate have a higher level of need than mainstream schools feel able to cater for (Timpson, 2019). Many come from deprived backgrounds where they have been exposed to drinking, drugs, mental health issues, domestic violence and family breakdowns which can mean they are often trapped in patterns of negative and self-destructive behaviour (Taylor, 2012).

### *1.3.1 Outcomes for CYP who Experience Exclusion*

Exclusion has a significant impact on pupils, leading to a loss in confidence and self-esteem which can adversely impact their academic outcomes (Michelmore & Mesie, 2019). A lack of understanding of the reasons for exclusion plus a sense of not being listened to can cause a deterioration in behaviour (Michelmore & Mesie, 2019). When CYP experience repeated fixed term exclusions it can lead to an increase in anxiety or disengagement from their educational setting (Michelmore & Mesie, 2019; Timpson, 2019).

Academic outcomes for CYP excluded from mainstream settings are often poor; these CYP often have behaviours that can influence these outcomes, and these may be the reasons they are excluded (Timpson, 2019). The intervention by APs usually happens late on in students' school careers and therefore they may have been failing academically for an extended period because of poor behaviour, attendance, SEN and a lack of intervention (Taylor, 2012; Timpson, 2019). Only 7% of permanently excluded CYP and 18% of those with fixed-term exclusions achieved good GCSE passes in English and Maths compared to 65% of CYP in mainstream settings (DfE, 2018b; Timpson, 2019). Only 57% of pupils from APs go on to sustained employment, education, or training after Key

Stage Four (KS4) compared to 94% in mainstream settings (DfE, 2018b). Pupils in APs are aware of these negative outcomes and some feel that their futures are bleak (Michelmore & Mesie, 2019)

***1.3.2 Experiences of APs***

Parents and pupils reported strong feelings of anxiety and stigma prior to starting at APs (DfE, 2018b). Despite the anxiety they felt prior to starting at the AP, once children settled into their placements, they felt that they benefited from the smaller class sizes, the fresh start, and more personalised support (DfE, 2018b). Pupils were generally positive about the AP they attended, reporting that they found them calmer and preferred the more vocational curriculum (Michelmore & Mesie, 2019). Pupils felt the AP gave them more choice and ownership over their actions and this supported an improvement in behaviour (Michelmore & Mesie, 2019). Pupils reported an increase in self-esteem, partly linked to feeling encouraged and supported by the teachers. This support helped them overcome the negative labels they had been given in previous settings (Michelmore & Mesie, 2019).

Secondary students take 84% of places in APs and they are less likely to return to mainstream provision, especially if they are in KS4, with only 10% of year 11's reintegrating (DfE, 2018a; Timpson, 2019). The transition from primary to secondary settings may account for an increase in exclusions; the CYP must adjust to a new environment alongside an increase in teachers, classrooms, and peers (Timpson, 2019). DfE (2018b) found that most APs aimed to reintegrate students, but in some instances it was felt that reintegration would be too disruptive, and these students completed their education at the AP. Additionally, the parent or pupil may want to remain in a setting with increased individualised support (DfE, 2018b). The best APs can create bespoke, well-planned interventions preparing these students for transitions and adult life, alongside understanding the barriers to education that exist for them (Taylor, 2012; Timpson, 2019). To do this, they need to understand the complex make up of their student population. Data shows they are likely to be children with SEN, boys and those who have been supported by social care (Timpson,

2019). 40% have free school meals, 26% are children in need, 79.6% have SEN and of those 11.2% have Education, Health and Care plans (EHCPs) (Timpson, 2019).

#### *1.3.3 Gender and Exclusion*

Boys are more likely to be excluded than girls with the same characteristics, such as SEN status, however exclusions of girls are increasing; In 2004/5 there was one girl to every four boys and in 2012/13 there was one girl for every three boys (Frederickson & Cline, 2002; Timpson, 2019). Timpson (2019) reports that boys' disaffection with school may manifest differently to girls. Boys may display this disaffection outwardly through physical or verbal reactions; this challenging behaviour directs the focus of the in-school support (Osler & Vincent, 2003; Timpson, 2019). Girls are more likely to internalise their emotions and this can result in them not being offered the support they need (Osler & Vincent, 2003; Timpson, 2019). Osler & Vincent (2003) found that girls form the minority of excluded students and the concern around boys' underachievement has led to girls being overlooked in exclusion prevention strategies and research. When attending APs girls tend to be in the minority in mixed gender settings (Lloyd & O'Regan, 1999). Some of the pedagogical approaches reinforce masculine behaviours and attitudes by creating 'boy-friendly' classrooms and including programmes that specifically address some boys' problematic behaviours associated with particular forms of masculinity (DfE, 2018b). In addition, there is some evidence that the vocational programmes offered in APs can be gender stereotypical, with girls doing hair and beauty and boys doing mechanics (DfE, 2018b).

### 1.4 Theoretical Perspectives

#### *1.4.1 School Belonging*

The need to belong is a feature of numerous psychological theories. Belonging can be associated with differences in cognitive processes, emotional patterns, behaviour and health and well-being (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Within the literature there are several different definitions of school belonging. Baumeister and Leary (1995) describe belonging as seeking regular positive interactions within the context of long-term caring relationships. Goodenow (1993) defines school

belonging as a sense of being accepted, valued, included, and encouraged by others in the academic setting and feeling an important part of interactions in the classroom. This involves the student feeling supported as an individual (Goodenow, 1993). Allen et al. (2018) define school belonging as the extent to which students feel personally accepted, respected, included and supported by others in the school social environment. This reflects the broader socio-ecological context of peers, students, and teachers (Allen et al., 2018). Osterman (2000) suggests that the experience of belonging for CYP links to five areas of the student experience: the development of basic psychological processes, academic attitudes and motivations, social attitudes, engagement and participation and achievement. Allen et al. had three areas of focus within school belonging: school-based relationships and experiences, student-teacher relationships, and students' general feelings about schools. In this research a broad definition of school belonging has been applied: the extent to which the student feels accepted, included, and supported by others in the school environment and their engagement with the academic and social setting.

School belonging is positively related to good academic performance, prosocial behaviours, and psychological well-being such as students feeling calm and content (Allen et al., 2018; Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Evidence indicates that belonging correlates with a reduction in absenteeism, truancy, and misconduct alongside more positive attitudes towards learning and academic self-efficacy (Allen et al., 2018). Where students experience belonging, they are likely to experience higher levels of happiness, psychological functioning, self-esteem, self-identity, and intrinsic motivation (Allen et al., 2018; Osterman, 2000). It is inversely related to incidents of fighting, bullying and vandalism, disruptive behaviour, emotional distress, and risk-taking behaviours such as violence, substance abuse and sexual activity (Allen et al., 2018; Osterman, 2000). The experience of belonging is linked to more positive attitudes towards self and others, which leads to an increase in prosocial behaviour (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Osterman, 2000).

Maslow (1968) saw belonging as a central need; people require their basic needs such as hunger and safety to be met first but before they can achieve esteem or self-actualisation, they need

to feel that they belong. Maslow (1968) developed a hierarchy of needs linked to motivation which included: physiological needs; safety and security needs; love and belonging; self-esteem needs and self-actualization needs. Maslow's theory suggests that the need for belonging is more central to motivation than the need for knowledge and understanding (Goodenow, 1993). If students do not feel like they belong they may lack the motivation to focus on their achievements and aspirations. Although Maslow originally proposed this as a hierarchy in later works it was suggested that the order in the hierarchy is not rigid and might be flexible based on external circumstances or individual differences (Maslow, 1987). Geobel and Brown (1981) carried out research into the applications of Maslow's hierarchy of needs over the life span. The results highlighted that adolescent girls had the highest need for love and belonging across the genders and age groups (Geobel & Brown, 1981)

Belonging is an important factor in understanding student behaviour and performance and when student needs are not met in the school environment it can lead to diminished motivation, impaired development, alienation and poor performance alongside maladaptive coping skills, depression, fear of failure and anxiety (Allen et al., 2018; Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Osterman, 2000). Rejection from the group is linked to behavioural problems in the classroom, decreased interest in school and lower achievement (Osterman, 2000). The suggestion that a lack of belonging creates emotional problems leads to the implication that belonging is a need rather than a want (Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

### *1.4.2 Ecological Framework of School Belonging*

Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems model can help to conceptualise the development of CYP; it covers the five levels of systems within which the CYP interacts (Allen et al., 2016; Frederickson & Cline, 2002). The five levels are the individual, microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem and macrosystem. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) highlights the importance of social relationships in the environmental, physical, and ecological variables which they exist within. Human development is influenced by the interactions between different systems of a person's environment. For the CYP

this means that school belonging does not just exist with the individual but is impacted by other people and systems (Allen et al., 2018; Waters et al., 2009).

The individual system covers the child's personal characteristics such as emotional stability and academic motivation (Allen et al., 2016). The microsystem is most closely linked to the relationships and belonging; these are the relationships experienced by the CYP in which they actively participate, such as home, school and the playground (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Frederickson & Cline, 2002; Rendall & Stuart, 2005). It includes aspects such as teacher supportiveness and caring, presence of friends, engagement in academic progress and academic and social support from peers and parents, which are all important to belonging (Allen et al., 2018). The mesosystem is the relationship between two or more of the settings in which the child actively participates; this includes the school's culture and interactions with parents (Allen et al., 2018; Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Frederickson & Cline, 2002). It covers school policies, extracurricular activities, staff professional development, rules, and practices (Allen et al., 2016). The exosystem includes settings in which the child is not involved but that affect and are affected by the child, this includes elements such as whole school vision, neighbourhood and extended family (Allen et al., 2016; Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Frederickson & Cline, 2002). The macro system covers the sub culture and culture around all the systems, which can include government policies and reforms, social climate and legislation alongside norms and values (Allen et al., 2018; Allen et al., 2016; Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Frederickson & Cline, 2002). These dynamic interactions between systems and individuals influence the development of the CYP (Waters et al., 2009).

Relationships are an important aspect of the eco-systems model. CYP look to peers for acceptance, connections, and support, which is associated with positive social behaviour (Allen et al., 2018; Osterman, 2000). Unsupportive peers can be a source of stress and social anxiety, peer rejection is consistently associated with anti-social behaviour (Allen et al., 2018; Osterman, 2000). When children experience positive involvement with others they are more likely to demonstrate intrinsic motivation to accept the authority of others, alongside establishing a strong sense of

identity and accepting responsibility to regulate their own behaviour in line with classroom norms (Osterman, 2000). Students who experienced a greater sense of acceptance by peers and teachers were more likely to be interested in and enjoy their classes and have higher expectations of success (Osterman, 2000). The feeling of belonging changes dependent on the activity or subject and in turn performance is better in the areas where students feel a higher level of belonging (Osterman, 2000). Osterman (2000) goes on to highlight major factors for dropping out of school are not connected to home but to academic failure and alienation from school, CYP perceive school as uncaring environments. Teachers, as well as peers, can shun those who are perceived as less capable or engaged, but it is not clear as to whether low achievement is a cause or result of the rejection (Osterman, 2000). The quality of student-teacher relationships with teachers is significantly associated with students' sense of autonomy, personal control, and active engagement in school (Goodenow, 1993). School structure and policies impact a sense of fairness and the setting itself relates to how safe and secure a student may feel at school (Allen et al., 2018). Currently there is a lack of clarity on how schools can support students to develop a sense of school belonging. There is a gap between understanding the importance of belonging from research and how it is transferred into day to day practice within schools (Allen et al., 2018).

### *1.4.3 Adolescence*

Adolescence is a period of change; CYP become less reliant on their parents and look to their peers to provide support, while seeking more responsibility in decision making. Schools need to be adaptive during this period of development to maintain the CYP's sense of belonging (Waters et al., 2009). During this period there are changes to cognitive processing in the developing brain (Banyard, 2015). Adolescence is an important period for identity formation; it can be impacted by changes to self-esteem and interactions with peers (Banyard, 2015; Goodenow, 1993).

Early adolescence is a turning point for CYP; there is a move to self-reflection and identity exploration which can lead to a commitment to education or for some it can lead to an increase in school anxiety (Goodenow, 1993). Relationships with peers and a want to conform to the group can

have a positive or negative influence on school engagement, motivation, and achievement (Goodenow, 1993). Where there are threats to social bonds it can create negative emotional states where the result can be destructive behaviour to maintain relationships (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Young people tend to spend more time with peers than adults and these friendships play a key role in identity formation (Allen et al., 2018; Banyard, 2015). Fear of rejection alongside disconnection from school and peers can limit the sense of belonging experienced (Allen et al., 2018; Banyard, 2015). It has been suggested that girls have more emotional investment in relationships than boys, and this intensifies in early adolescence (Goodenow, 1993). The interpersonal elements of school can have a greater influence on the motivation and participation of girls. Girls are more likely to view teacher support as a major influence on their success and failure when compared to boys (Goodenow, 1993). Girls are more likely to respond to evaluations by teachers whereas boys are more likely to respond to peer evaluations (Goodenow, 1993).

Osterman (2000) draws the conclusion that student relationships with adults and peers at home and at school link to motivations and self-regulation as well as self-esteem. DfE (2018a) states that a sense of belonging is a protective factor in building resilience in children. "Schools should be a safe and affirming place for children where they can develop a sense of belonging and feel able to trust and talk openly with adults about their problems" (DfE 2018a pg. 13). However, for a few children school does not meet these criteria. Through educational testing children are categorised and where they do not fit the mean or norm it can be used to justify their social and physical exclusion (Billington, 1996; Billington and Williams, 2015). Through the terms that others use to describe CYP it can encourage their exclusion from educational communities, as it categorises them as different to the norm (Corcoran, 2014). Bradley (2017) reported that in her research with excluded young women, the dominant experience was one of not being heard when they wanted to talk about their problems, and through losing their voice they lost their identity. Through this loss of voice, the girls then withdrew from the social and educational settings and became mentally excluded before actual exclusion from school occurred (Bradley, 2017). Many children who are

excluded are exhibiting the behaviours that illustrate a lack of belonging; girls are perceived to have socially acceptable ways of addressing these whereas boys' patterns of interactions can become counterproductive. Bradley argues that as some young women adopt these male patterns of interactions it makes them more visible to senior leadership and at risk of disciplinary action from schools. Osterman suggests that boys experience less belonging than girls; with girls experiencing higher peer acceptance ratings, a higher sense of belonging and more friends. Boys appear to feel unsupported emotionally in school (Osterman, 2000). Therefore, for girls who are excluded are they experiencing a lack of belonging that is usually linked with boys' experiences of education and are they categorised as being outside the norm?

**1.5 The Researchers Position**

This research is influenced by the experiences and values of the researcher. It reflects core values and beliefs related to respect, beneficence, social justice, and advocacy. Prior to training as an Educational Psychologist (EP), the researcher was a teacher in a secondary school and became interested in those CYP who struggled to find where they belonged and the difference it made to their educational experience. During the first year of training the researcher had the opportunity to spend time in a Pupil Referral Unit (PRU). Whilst at the PRU it was noticed that school staff only had spare uniform for the male students due to the low number of girls attending. This led to the researcher wondering how girls feel in a setting that catered mainly to male students. Did they feel a sense of belonging to the PRU or was this another setting where they struggled to find their place? The researcher considered if these girls experienced a lack of belonging in their previous settings and if this lack of belonging had contributed to their exclusion. In their second placement the researcher had the opportunity to discuss the experiences of girls in APs with AP providers. To support girls in APs it is vital that there is an understanding of what they want and need from these settings to feel that they belong and therefore can make educational progress. It is the researcher's belief that, in line with their core values, listening to the perspectives of CYP is crucial in working towards positive change and creating better outcomes for them.

**1.6 Summary**

This chapter explored the wider context of school exclusions in the UK and the outcomes for the students who experience exclusions. It looked at the theory around exclusion and the long-term outcomes for the CYP. It establishes the potential for links between school belonging and exclusions. School belonging can be affected by several factors including the eco-system and the development characteristics of adolescence. It explores some of the reported differences between girls and boys in relation to educational experiences and school belonging. The next chapter takes a systematic approach to exploring the research in this field and the any gaps that might exist.

# Chapter 2: Literature Review

## 2.1 Introduction

This chapter will present a critical review of the existing literature in the field of school belonging and CYPs experiences of exclusion in the UK since 2010. It starts by outlining the search process before critically analysing the papers and exploring the common themes. Conclusions drawn from the critique of previous research and the gaps in the field will then be discussed and explored in relation to the current study and its research aims.

## 2.2 Systematic Review

In September 2020 a systematic literature review was carried out to identify research that had sought the views of young people attending APs or PRUS regarding their experiences of belonging. In the initial search only one article was identified. To broaden the field two literature search questions were developed to capture more research that explores the student experiences of belonging and exclusion. The literature review aimed to critically evaluate the current research base in relation to the following questions:

1) To what extent has research explored the experiences of secondary students attending APs?

2) To what extent has research explored the experiences of secondary students of school belonging?

The databases APA PsycArticles, APA PsycInfo, Child Development & Adolescent Studies, Education Research Complete were searched for peer reviewed research carried out in the past 10 years with secondary students. This age range was selected as exclusions increase during secondary school. However, where research covered primary and secondary settings it was included. Prisma was used as a guide to support decision making; the stages of this review can be found in Appendix 1. Search one generated 95 papers and search two generated 28 papers. After duplicates were removed a total of 83 papers remained. The titles and abstracts of each of the 83 papers were read and using the exclusion and inclusion criteria 65 papers were excluded, (see Appendix 2 for inclusion

and exclusion criteria along with search terms). For those that did meet the criteria the full text was read. After reading the remaining 18 papers in detail seven pieces of research were identified as relevant to the current research; this was based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria in Appendix 2.

The seven papers identified from the literature search were critically evaluated using the 'Critical Appraisal Skills Programme' (CASP) framework. CASP was applied as a framework to evaluate the studies as it encourages reflection on the validity of the findings, results and the research value of the studies as well as looking at the process of data gathering and analysis. A table outlining the aims, participants, methodology, analysis, and findings of each study is provided in Appendix 3. Five key themes were identified; relationships, understood as an individual, policy and structures, identification and response to needs and future.

## 2.3 Themes from the Literature Review

### 2.3.1 Relationships

Relationships was the most common theme discussed in all seven papers.

**2.3.1.1 Peers.** Craggs and Kelly (2018) gathered the perspective of four secondary school students, three male and one female, on their experiences of managed moves using semi structured interviews which were analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). Their findings highlighted four superordinate themes that the students raised as components of school belonging. Making friends was the most dominant subtheme of 'Making Friends and Feeling Safe'. Friendships were essential for settling into receiver schools and having existing friends at the setting or being able to make new friends was seen to increase feelings of safety and security (Craggs & Kelly, 2018). However, it is not possible to generalise this finding from this study alone due to the limited number of participants. Having existing friends, or acquaintances, at a new educational setting was identified as a theme in both Cockerill (2019) and Michael and Frederickson (2013); it was seen to help increase a sense of belonging through providing reassurance and reducing anxiety.

Cockerill (2019) used the Psychological Sense of School Membership Scale (PSSM) and semi-structured interviews with 11 students undergoing a shared placement with a mainstream setting and an AP to explore the impact of on school belonging. In addition, 19 staff contributed to the study through semi structured interviews. Overall, the findings suggested that shared placements could lead to greater engagement for students with their mainstream setting and improvements in behaviour. However, this was not the case for all students where under certain circumstances a disparity in a sense of belonging resulted in higher levels of disengagement from the mainstream setting. Cockerill found that CYP who feel isolated from their peers in their mainstream schools due to being sent out of the classroom had a limited sense of belonging to that setting, however if they felt missed by their peers from their mainstream setting their sense of belonging in that setting increased. Cockerill's study focuses on the sense of belonging to the mainstream setting rather than the sense of belonging to the AP and this resulted in the experiences with peers in the AP not being explored in detail.

Michael and Frederickson (2013) explored the barriers and enablers of successful outcomes from the perspective of 16 students attending PRUs using semi structured interviews. Thematic analysis was employed, and five themes were identified for enabling positive outcomes, three themes as barriers to successful outcomes and three themes for potential changes. Positive relationships emerged as the most widely mentioned enabling theme. A subtheme within this was relationships with peers and the results showed that this was connected to feelings of reassurance and safety for the students when they first arrived at the PRU. Michael and Frederickson felt that preconceptions were brought to the process of analysis, due to a deductive analytical approach which was influenced by previous research. However, there was an inductive element to the analysis which was more data-driven and aimed to identify factors not previously reported in the literature. In relation to peer relationships this approach supported building on themes developed in previous research.

Jalali and Morgan (2018) compared the perceptions of primary students (n=8) and secondary students (n=5) who attend PRUs to explore if their views changed based on age. Life grids and semi structured interviews were used to gather the data and Moustaka's framework for phenomenological data analysis was then used to identify common themes. Eight themes applied to both age groups; seven themes were specific to secondary experience and two themes were specific to primary experience. Jalali and Morgan found that students reflected on feeling targeted or bullied by students in their mainstream settings and often linked this to their exclusion. This data emerged from the shared theme of attribution, but from the data presented it is unclear whether the element of peers was raised by both age groups.

In APs students can develop a stronger sense of group membership; in mainstream settings they often felt like the only student experiencing challenging behaviour, but within the AP they find peers who have experienced similar challenges (Cockerill, 2019; Craggs & Kelly, 2018). Conversely, Hamilton and Morgan (2018) found that it was the differences between students, rather than similarities, which facilitated change. Hamilton and Morgan investigated the experiences of eight students attending FE AP settings using semi structured interviews and analysed using thematic analysis. They focused on the theories of Appreciative Inquiry and Positive Psychology and this resulted in a global theme of supportive and personalised learning experience supported by five organising themes. Peer relationships did not feature as a standalone theme but fitted in to the organising theme of the adult environment. The presence of adult students in the FE environment lead to the AP students adjusting their behaviour to facilitate belonging in their new environment (Hamilton & Morgan, 2018). Friendships were not explicitly discussed or included with any theme in Hamilton and Morgan's study.

Shaw (2019) was the only study which focused on belonging in a mainstream setting. In addition, this was the largest study, with PSSM used to collect data from 184 students from two mainstream secondary schools. Tutor groups were used as focus groups to gather qualitative data, however the focus group data from school two was unable to be used as the focus groups had

students from different years meaning the data could not be correctly attributed. Thematic analysis was used to identify the themes from the qualitative data collected at school one. Three themes were identified, and the meaning of belonging was seen to be subjective. Friendship was a consistent theme across all year groups; however, it was more dominant in Years 7 to 9 with students linking being part of friendship groups with a sense of belonging to school. This study focused on a mainstream setting and there were a large number of participants in the focus groups. This means that students who were not having a successful experience may have felt unable to share those views and therefore the research may not be representative of the variety of school experiences.

Hart (2013) explored the protective factors of PRUs from the perspective of CYP (n = 6) and staff (n = 4) using semi structured interviews, supported with visual aids. Coding was used deductively to identify four themes. Staff and students mostly identified the same themes and sub themes, with the adult perspective adding deeper meaning to the items identified by the students. The theme of relationships included the children identifying they had developed friendships at the PRU and the staff exploring the support offered to facilitate these friendships. The method of coding and developing the themes was not explored in detail in the paper however risk factors discussed by the participants were removed. The addition of the risk factors may have helped develop a balanced view of the experience of the students. Adult support in developing peer relationships was important in Cockerill (2019) as the staff in APs can support the CYP in developing friendships and managing conflict with peers which facilitated a sense of belonging. Students who have experience of being moved between settings may have doubts around their ability to make friends, with many expressing that they had difficulties with their peer group in their previous settings and a feeling that all schools are the same (Craggs & Kelly, 2018). The previous negative peer relationships hinder their ability to develop bonds with peers and can limit their sense of belonging in their new settings (Craggs & Kelly, 2018). Where the receiver school was able to support in facilitating improved

relationships with peers this was seen to enhance the feelings of belonging. However, the CYP recognised that the school's ability to do this was limited (Craggs & Kelly, 2018).

**2.3.1.2 Teachers.** It was not just relationships with peers that came out as important, but positive relationships with teachers and school staff (Cockerill, 2019; Michael & Frederickson, 2013). Cockerill (2019) found that where CYP had stronger relationships with the staff within the AP, they had an increased sense of belonging and the relationship with staff in the AP was described as positive even when the placement ended. Where students experienced success in both placements, the adult relationships were key; having members of staff in both settings they could get on with (Cockerill, 2019). Students felt that over time the relationships with staff in the mainstream became more positive and one participant linked this to an improvement in their achievements and behaviour (Cockerill, 2019). Some students reflected on the differences in their relationships with staff across the two settings, finding that staff in the AP put more trust in them, treated them fairly and were more available to them (Cockerill, 2019; Hart, 2013). Students described the staff at APs as treating them like equals and not using authority to control them (Cockerill, 2019). However in Cockerill (2019) the focus is on belonging in the home school during shared placements with an AP and highlights that these positive AP staff relationships did not impact engagement at their home school, unless positive relationships were also occurring in that setting. This was supported in the PSSM results, showing an increase in belonging to the AP for all students whereas the school belonging at the home school was variable.

Hart (2013) found that the participants contrasted their negative experiences with teachers in previous settings with their current experiences with PRU staff, often expressing reciprocal trust between them and the staff in PRUs. However, as discussed previously, Hart explored what was working and therefore challenges with staff in the AP may not have been included in the data analysed. Michael & Frederickson (2013) identified that the positive relationships with teachers were described in terms of positive learning outcomes through providing academic support when students are struggling. In addition, the staff in PRUs were found to provide emotional support to

the CYP which reduced emotional and behavioural difficulties (Michael & Frederickson, 2013). Michael and Fredrickson carried out their research in two London PRUs and therefore the results are representative of these PRUs and are not generalisable to all settings. Emotional support was important in a number of alternative school settings. Students reported that when staff were available to talk it supported their behaviour management strategies, helped them to feel safe within the setting and explore the reasons they were excluded (Hamilton & Morgan, 2018; Michael & Frederickson, 2013). Shaw (2019) found that relationships between teachers and pupils were seen to gain more importance within the older year groups. The CYP expressed needing these relationships to be reciprocal and the interactions to be mutual (Shaw, 2019). Shaw's study was cross sectional not longitudinal so gathers views reflective of a moment in time not the changes to perspectives over time, so the differences in perceptions of teacher relationships may not be related to age but other school-based factors.

**2.3.1.3 Home.** Five of the seven papers considered the impact of home on belonging. Where students saw a relationship between school and home this was a protective factor as it showed a concern for their well-being out of the school environment (Hamilton & Morgan, 2018; Hart, 2013). Students spoke positively of the home school relationship where it led to a shared understanding of their needs (Cockerill, 2019). Regarding relationships within the family, belonging develops where parents or carers are supportive through facilitating and encouraging attendance to the AP (Michael & Frederickson, 2013). Shaw (2019) suggested that the parental or home role in developing and maintaining school belonging needs further research. Some participants raised parental support, but it was not explored further in this research. For all studies the impact of home on school belonging only had limited exploration and the focus was on the relationship between the school and home.

### *2.3.2 Understood as an Individual*

In several studies, students expressed that they want to be understood as individuals. One aspect of this was linked to others understanding the challenges they had previously experienced

(Cockerill, 2019; Craggs & Kelly, 2018; Hamilton & Morgan, 2018). Under the theme of 'Staff Understanding of SEBD' Hamilton and Morgan (2018) found that where there is a holistic approach, students found through an understanding of both their personal and academic background the college was more able to cater to their needs. However, Hamilton and Morgan reflected that this is something that may not be possible in a mainstream setting. The concept of tailored experience based on staff knowledge of students was raised in other studies where CYP reported experiencing more success where staff had the ability to personalise the learning experience (Cockerill, 2019; Hart, 2013). Cockerill's (2019) study found a theme called 'Partnership Working' where belonging to the mainstream setting was strengthened through them taking an interest in the CYP's experiences at the AP and linking the mainstream curriculum with the AP curriculum. Michael and Frederickson's (2013) study had a superordinate theme 'Ideas for Change' with a subtheme 'Feeling Understood and Listened to"; within this subtheme students suggested that to create successful outcomes being understood and listened to was important. They valued a curriculum that was built around their needs as then lessons were perceived to be relevant and engaging which limited disruptive behaviour (Michael & Frederickson, 2013). Students experienced higher belonging in settings or placements that placed student voice at the centre of the decision-making process and adopted a person-centred planning approach (Cockerill, 2019; Hamilton & Morgan, 2018). Craggs and Kelly (2018) superordinate theme of 'Feeling Known, Understood and Accepted as a Person', found that when students felt accepted and understood by the receiver school and peers, they felt more comfortable being themselves. This was more likely to be the case when they felt peers had similar educational experiences as they felt this led to increased understanding (Craggs & Kelly, 2018). Within this study two of the four students already knew peers in the receiver school which formed a large part of the data relating to this theme. Therefore, it may be different for students who do not have established friendships when they experience changes in settings.

Within Michael and Frederickson's (2013) study the concept of being understood as an individual related to the CYP's ability to understand themselves and was the focus of the theme

'Self'. Within this theme the support provided by the PRU helped them to develop self-motivation and self-belief which was an enabler for successful outcomes (Michael & Frederickson, 2013). However, this theme was developed from the responses of a small number of participants and therefore may not be generalisable (Michael & Frederickson, 2013). Hamilton and Morgan (2018) found a theme around the reflection on self for students: 'Student Motivation'. Within this theme students who felt they had realised the importance of their future experienced an increase in motivation. From the data presented it is not clear how many of the participants had experienced this. These CYP identified their own role in managing their behaviour and acknowledged where they are unable to do this it creates challenges for successful outcomes. This may be partially linked to the FE setting and the need to modify their behaviour to adapt to the norms of their older peer group (Hamilton & Morgan, 2018). Craggs & Kelly (2018) found that students in the early stages of managed moves had a sole responsibility narrative where they felt responsible for adapting to and settling in at their receiver school. This individual motivation was seen in Hart (2013) where the willingness of the students to have a go, make progress and want to grow was perceived to be important in successful PRU placements.

There was an acknowledgement of the impact of the group on individual behaviours in PRUS; when peers disrupted lessons it also led to others disrupting lessons as they want to feel accepted as part of the group (Michael & Frederickson, 2013). In Jalali and Morgan's (2018) study within the theme of 'Attribution' they found that students struggled to understand the consequences of their behaviour. Students attributed their behaviour to how they perceived others treating them which led to a lack of responsibility for their behaviour (Jalali & Morgan, 2018). This theme was driven by the primary participants in their study, with the secondary respondents showing an increased awareness of the impacts of their actions alongside a sense of learned helplessness in capacity to change (Jalali & Morgan, 2018).

### *2.3.3 Policies and Structure*

In the previous section several studies showed that the CYP looked for a flexible, tailored approached by the teachers and this was seen again within the literature around school structures. In Hamilton and Morgan (2018) the global theme 'Supportive and Personalised Learning Experience' explored a school structure that was adaptable in teaching, facilities, resources, and behaviour management. However, most studies reflected on flexibility in approach as important for belonging. Alongside this flexibility several studies explored the importance of consistency and clarity as being important for belonging and successful placements. For Craggs and Kelly (2018), in the superordinate theme of 'Supportive vs Unsupportive School Protocols/Practices', a subtheme of 'Management of Trial Period' explored the impact of clarity. Craggs and Kelly's participants were undergoing managed moves and found where there was a lack of clarity in the management of trial periods this caused a decrease in belonging and could increase anxiety. Where it was managed well with the student understanding the process it supported belonging in their new setting. The trial periods created a barrier to belonging as the CYP struggled to make friends due to worry about failing with the placement (Craggs & Kelly, 2018). The participants in Craggs and Kelly's study had all undergone managed moves although the length of time at the receiver school varied, with two of them still on trial periods and waiting to find out if they were going to be accepted on roll. Cockerill (2019) found consistency between the two settings important for a sense of belonging in 'Partnership Working'. Where there was a strong partnership between the mainstream setting and the AP, the AP becomes an extension of the mainstream school rather than a separate environment.

Several of the studies revealed challenges around reintegration. In Cockerill (2019) the aim of a shared placement was to reintegrate the students into the mainstream setting. However, a strong sense of belonging to the AP often meant there were issues with reintegration. The relationship between the school and AP and joint attitude to the students was an element within several of the themes explored. However, these themes appeared to be driven by the adult participants rather than student voice. One challenge with reintegration is the time in the AP and

the age of the student, Hart (2013) found that as students got older, they were less willing to return to a mainstream setting. This was supported by Jalali and Morgan (2018) who found that students attending a secondary PRU were more reluctant than primary students to return to a mainstream setting, citing perceived pressure and high expectations of the mainstream settings as the main challenge. The primary participants had maintained a sense of belonging to mainstream education, viewing the PRU as a temporary placement, but the secondary participants had developed increased belonging to the PRU setting (Jalali & Morgan, 2018). In Hart (2013) the adult participants reflected on reintegration in the theme of 'Environment' where they raised concerns about students returning to the same setting they were in previously and a system that had not worked for them. Craggs and Kelly (2018) found that students who had moved between settings had a fear of previous issues reoccurring and looked for support in overcoming these.

CYP looked for clarity in the management of behaviour and discipline. Where there was clarity around the implementation of sanctions it was an enabler to a successful placement; in a number of studies this was revealed to be more successful in APs when compared to mainstream settings (Cockerill, 2019; Hart, 2013; Michael & Frederickson, 2013). CYP felt where there were clearly communicated targets and expectations it gave them something to work towards and a sense of ownership but where there was a lack of clarity it led to negative emotions and became a barrier to successful relationships (Hart 2013; Michael & Frederickson, 2013). The availability of staff to talk with students was an important factor in managing behaviour; students felt safer in the environment which positively impacted behaviour (Hamilton & Morgan, 2018). Where staff were seen to be in control of classrooms and students it created calm classrooms which increased belonging and motivation through reducing tension and creating a positive learning environment (Hamilton & Morgan, 2018). As discussed previously, Hamilton and Morgan (2018) took a positive approach and therefore their data was focused on what was working. For the secondary students attending PRUs in Jalali and Morgan (2018), adult support formed part of the 'Supportive Factors' theme, with the

students stating the increased adult support created the control which supported their improved behaviour.

Michael and Frederickson (2013) found that curriculum was the second most discussed enabler for a successful outcome. A curriculum that focused on functional skills increased engagement for several of the CYP in their study, whereas for others a curriculum that focused on their emotional development was required, again highlighting the need of settings to tailor what they are able to offer to the needs of the student population (Michael & Frederickson, 2013). However, Michael and Fredrickson found that a barrier to success was that the smaller size of APs meant they were unable to offer all subjects the CYP might want to take. Hamilton and Morgan (2018) found that for the students in colleges a full, accessible, and diverse curriculum was important. Hart (2013) stated both student and staff participants reported academic progress in the 'Teaching and Learning' theme. The adults developed this to identify that students made large gains with reading and writing during their placements (Hart, 2013). Jalali and Morgan (2018) explore changes to academic progress being experienced by their participants in the 'Supportive Factors' theme, but they do not explore what is judged to be academic progress.

Extra-curricular activities were reported to facilitate belonging in several studies. In a mainstream setting Shaw (2019) found that extra-curricular activities fitted into two themes, 'Inclusion' and 'Membership'. The younger students in the study spoke about participating in activities and this was an active aspect of belonging as it was about the CYP choosing to take part (Shaw, 2019). The older students in Shaw's study saw taking on roles and responsibility as a way of building relationships with staff which fitted into the theme of 'Reciprocity'. 'Extra-curricular Opportunities' was an explicit theme in Craggs and Kelly (2018) where students explored how the opportunity to participate in extra-curricular activities and use existing skills to make a positive contribution appeared to facilitate a sense of school belonging. Michael and Frederickson (2013) found that extracurricular activities were an enabling factor for students at APs, and something that occurred more in the APs than their mainstream settings. Being taken out of the educational setting

was supportive and valued by the CYP in APs; they saw it as enhancing their experience (Michael & Frederickson, 2013).

The size of the setting came out as important in several studies. It was felt that small class sizes help create a positive learning environment and could lead to increased adult support which students saw as important (Hamilton & Morgan, 2018; Michael & Frederickson, 2013). In the 'Relationship' theme, a high adult to pupil ratio in PRUs was reported as protective for students by both the CYP and the adult participants (Hart, 2013). The size of the setting and number of adults linked to feeling safe for those students in APs (Hamilton & Morgan, 2018; Michael & Frederickson, 2013). The smaller setting helped staff to have increased knowledge of students which led to less misunderstanding of their needs (Hamilton & Morgan, 2018). Shaw (2019) identified a number of themes within the interviews relating to the school and the link to belonging; firstly a familiarity with the environment and the ethos of the school was seen as important, students wanted to feel that they identified with the values and expectations represented by the school. Support and seeing the school as a place of safety was important; this came from the people and the environment (Shaw, 2019). However, Shaw's study took qualitative data from only one setting so this maybe reflective of that school's culture.

The AP environment or building was an important aspect in the research. In Michael & Frederickson (2013) study in the superordinate theme of 'Ideas for Change' the most prevalent subtheme was 'The Learning Environment'. The participants wanted changes to the learning environment; the investment ranged from covering graffiti, new computers and areas that clearly belonged to the CYP (Michael & Frederickson, 2013). In the FE environment the appearance of the setting formed part of the 'Positive and Holistic Learning Environment' where participants raised that an aesthetically pleasing environment can increase learner motivation (Hamilton & Morgan, 2018). In Hart (2013) the theme of 'Environment' explored safety and an environment that felt calm, quiet, and having a family feel from the perspective of both the adult and student perceptions. When comparing PRUs and mainstream settings the increased space in the PRUs created a sense of

calmness which was seen in the theme 'supportive factors' (Jalali & Morgan, 2018). The primary students reported the space as positively contributing to changes in behaviour, such as having a quiet or calm room; this was not echoed by the secondary participants (Jalali & Morgan, 2018).

#### *2.3.4 Identification and Response to Needs*

Nearly all studies had themes that related to the additional support that settings and schools were able to provide. Craggs and Kelly (2018) had a theme around 'Identification of and Support for SEND'; for students undergoing managed moves they recognised that the provision of appropriate and timely support for additional needs increased their sense of belonging, often as they had previous experiences of support being denied even when it was explicitly requested. This involved the ability to access outside agencies for tailored support in both emotional and academic areas (Craggs & Kelly, 2018). Cockerill (2019) included a theme that looked at the 'Willingness to Include Pupils with Complex and Demanding Needs'; the evidence for this theme was directed by the adults in the study rather than the CYP. With students on a shared placement the AP was often seen as being able to provide specialist support for students with additional or complex needs, including SEMH needs. This led to increased belonging in both settings, if the home school had a willingness to include these students within the mainstream setting (Cockerill, 2019). In the 'Attribution' theme in Jalali and Morgan (2018) students attending PRUs reflected that they felt unsupported and disliked by their teachers in mainstream settings.

In Michael and Frederickson (2013), response to needs was not identified as a theme, however elements of support were included in themes within both enablers and barriers to success. As an enabler for success, 'Personalisation of Learning Tasks' looked at the positive impact of differentiation of the work to suit their learning needs and the impact on improving academic self-concept (Michael and Frederickson, 2013). 'Failure to Individualise the Learning Environment' was a barrier to success but it was the least commonly mentioned. Nonetheless, when learning tasks were not differentiated appropriately it could create additional challenges (Michael and Frederickson, 2013). Some of the students in the study clarified that this included making work more challenging

to keep them engaged (Michael and Frederickson, 2013). Hart (2013) found that all students interviewed perceived they had made progress in the PRU, which was supported by the staff. They were given opportunities to succeed through a personalised approach to learning and a focus on life skills. The personalised learning experience and the staff support were viewed to be a protective factor for CYP (Hart, 2013). In Hamilton and Morgan (2018) responding to needs featured in two themes, firstly 'Full, Accessible and Diverse Curriculum' which was mentioned by all participants, stating that small classes and a high level of teacher support improved their ability to access the curriculum. The second theme was 'Staff Understanding of SEBD' where the students found the staff understanding of SEBD in the FE setting was important as it enabled them to put in place appropriate strategies to support their development (Hamilton & Morgan, 2018). They found this led to a calm environment which lacked the tension of their previous settings where the staff had less control of classrooms (Hamilton & Morgan, 2018).

#### *2.3.5 Future*

Only three studies looked at the students' hopes for the future. Hamilton and Morgan (2018) found that an awareness of future educational opportunities for students and the link to career goals were important for the CYP to support engagement in their current setting. Within Michael and Frederickson's (2013) enabling factors the theme of 'Relevant and Engaging' explored the participants' view that the curriculum could contribute to positive outcomes; for some participants this meant it was specifically teaching them the skills they needed to go on to the career of their choice. This was supported by Hamilton and Morgan who found that the support from the participants' setting in helping them identify an area of interest and supporting this with opportunities such as work experience was a motivator (Hamilton & Morgan, 2018). In Jalali and Morgan (2018), the secondary PRU students felt that the role of the PRU in shaping their aspirations was a 'Supportive Factor'; it helped them see the impact of achieving GCSEs on their future prospects and helped them consider what they could do in the future. When students understood the importance of their future and the choice to change is their decision, they often began to reflect

on the impact of their previous behaviour (Hamilton & Morgan, 2018). One participant in Michael and Frederickson (2013) expressed determination and self-belief that he was able to affect his future school placements through his actions. A barrier to successful outcomes were the negative labels that could be associated with attending a PRU and the impact these could have on future employers (Michael & Frederickson, 2013).

**2.4 Summary of the themes**

The research highlights that relationships are the central element to belonging. Positive relationships lead to positive outcomes in relation to both social-emotional and academic factors (Michael & Frederickson, 2013). Relationships are linked to feelings of safety for the CYP which suggests that belonging and safety needs are linked for students (Craggs & Kelly, 2018). However, school belonging encompasses a wide range of factors, beyond establishing secure relationships, and it is subjective. What creates belonging for one student may not create belonging for the next student (Shaw, 2019). School belonging is a socially constructed phenomenon dependent upon social interaction which students who have undergone changes in educational setting might struggle with (Craggs & Kelly, 2018; Shaw, 2019). For students to experience successful outcomes at school it is important they experience a sense of belonging. Due to its subjective nature, asking pupils what it means to belong is important to effectively support them (Shaw, 2019).

**2.5 The Rationale for the Current Research**

Some clear themes developed from a review of the literature, however there were gaps in knowledge in the field. Cockerill (2019) and Craggs and Kelly (2018) explored school belonging for students who were moving between educational settings due to challenges they had experienced, however moves to APs were not the focus. Cockerill looked at shared school placements with the mainstream setting as the focus for belonging. Craggs and Kelly looked at managed moves to a mainstream school. Shaw (2019) carried out a large-scale study on school belonging however all participants attended a mainstream setting and therefore their experience of belonging may be different to students who have been excluded. Hamilton and Morgan (2018) focused on the

experiences of older students in AP colleges. Michael and Frederickson (2013) and Hart (2013) both studied APs however school belonging was not the focus of their studies; they both focused on what enabled or created a barrier to successful placements. Jalali and Morgan (2018) compared the experiences of primary and secondary students in PRU settings, with a larger number of primary participants the research focused on a primary students experience of belonging rather than secondary students. In addition, Hart focused more on the perspective of adults in the setting. All these studies included a mix of genders in the research, however there is a larger number of male participants in each study which leads to a male dominated discourse around experiences of exclusion. This is representative of the PRU population, which was the aim of these studies, but means that results can lead to actions supporting a male driven need over female needs. Hamilton and Morgan found that their female participant brought a unique perspective to the research and suggested that their journey needs further exploration.

From the systematic literature review, it is evident that there is a gap in understanding the sense of belonging for female students excluded from mainstream settings. A lack of school belonging is cited as a reason for behaviour that usually leads to students getting excluded. The research that has been carried out is mixed gender with a larger number of male participants. All the studies were cross sectional and explored the sense of belonging in a current setting; this led to the researcher questioning the level of belonging girls experienced in educational settings prior to exclusion and then during their time in mixed gender AP units and the impact this has on them. Where students experience a change in placements this creates uncertainty. For the CYP there is concern that previous challenges to belonging may impact their ability to feel like they belong in their new setting. This led to the following research questions (RQs) being developed:

1. How do girls experience belonging in their previous setting/s?
2. How do girls experience belonging in APs?
3. How do girls hope to experience belonging in the future?

# Chapter 3: Methodology

## 3.1 Introduction

This chapter will cover the research aims and purpose before covering the ontological and epistemological position underpinning the study. The research method and design will then be discussed and justified along with an outline of the framework of the analysis. Finally, the validity and ethical considerations of this research will be explored.

## 3.2 Purpose

Robson (2011) suggests four possible purposes for research; exploratory, descriptive, explanatory or emancipatory. Many research questions call for an exploratory or descriptive focus as they have not been covered in existing research (Robson, 2011). The purpose of this research is to explore the sense of belonging of girls who attend APs experience as this was identified as a gap in the literature.

## 3.3 Ontological and Epistemological Position

Ontological and epistemological position can be referred to as worldview or paradigms and they are general philosophical orientations about the world and the nature of research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Ontology considers what constitutes reality and the researcher needs to take a position on the nature of being and how it is known (Moore, 2005; Scotland, 2012). Epistemology explores how knowledge is created, acquired, and communicated. It is concerned with the knowledge and the relationship between the researcher and what can be known (Moore, 2005; Scotland, 2012). There are four worldviews which a researcher may position themselves within; these are post positivism, constructivism, transformative and pragmatism.

Post positivism developed from the positivist position, where it was thought that object knowledge could be gained from direct experience or observation and it was seen to be the only knowledge available to science (Robson, 2011). It became post positivism because the position of absolute truth in knowledge is being challenged and the evidence from research is viewed as being

fallible (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Robson, 2011). Post positivism research aims to develop statements which can help explain causal relationships (Robson, 2011).

Constructivist or social constructivist positions are an approach to qualitative research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This is the view that social properties are constructed through interactions between people; and these interactions allow the construction of meanings. The researcher believes that individuals seek to understand the world in which they live (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Robson, 2011). The researcher relies on the participants views and needs to understand multiple social constructions of knowledge (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Robson, 2011).

The transformative worldview developed from researchers believing that postpositive assumptions - imposed theories that did not fit with marginalised individuals within society (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). It encompasses several types of research positions, including but not exclusive to, critical theorists, participatory action researchers, feminists, and racial and ethnic minorities (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

A pragmatic worldview developed from actions, situations, and consequences rather than antecedent conditions (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). It uses pluralistic approaches to establish knowledge about a problem, often employing mixed methods (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

### *3.3.1 The Researcher's Position*

In this research a world view of social constructivism has been adopted as the researcher is aiming to understand the world from the perspective of the participants through accessing the meaning they have constructed as they engage with their environment (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Creswell & Poth, 2018). This leads to an ontological position of relativism which accepts individual lived experience leads to the possibility of different realities being constructed (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Mertens, 2010; Scotland, 2012). A constructivist epistemological position is adopted which accepts that reality is co-constructed between the researcher and the participants as the interpretations of experiences are shared (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Mertens, 2010). This study seeks to prioritise the participants' interpretations of the world and their

experiences of it (Braun & Clarke, 2013). It will lead to a construction of a contextually relevant truth that may not generalise to other contexts as it accepts that the CYP in the study will have individual constructions of the phenomenon (Moore, 2005).

**3.4 Research Design and Techniques**

The researcher has employed a qualitative design to support understanding of the participants' individual lived experience (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Mertens, 2010). Due to the nature of qualitative research, a flexible design will be adopted allowing the study to be informed by the data collection (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Robson, 2011). After investigating several methods of qualitative data collection, narrative inquiry was selected. Narrative inquiry is a method that allows participants to construct meaning from their experiences and this focus on participants' interpretations as an important aspect of social constructivist thinking (Hiles et al., 2009). It was felt the girls' stories were key to exploring their experiences of belonging in different educational settings and it is hoped that through the process of capturing their voice and sharing their lived experiences they will feel empowered.

***3.4.1 Data Collection and Analysis***

**3.4.1.1 Interviews.** Narrative inquiry begins with the telling of stories (Clandinin, 2013). The researcher will need to spend time with the participants gathering their stories through multiple methods (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Braun and Clarke (2013) define interviews as a professional conversation with the goal of encouraging a participant to discuss their experiences while capturing their language and concepts in relation to a predetermined topic. Interviews can take a variety of forms that range from structured to unstructured.

Structured interviews are where each respondent is asked the same question in the same way; any variances in response are then a reflection on the meaning given by the respondent to the question and answer not the interviewer's expression of the question (May, 2001). Responses can be selected on a pre-populated list and therefore are easy to compare and analyse (Bell & Waters, 2018; May, 2001).

Semi-structured interviews have specified questions, but the interviewer has greater freedom to probe into the answers given and can allow the respondent to give longer more developed answers as the questions are no longer standardised (May, 2001). As clarification and elaboration can be sought, it leads to more understanding of the meaning respondents attribute to social life (May, 2001). Although there is more control for the respondent there is still a structure for the interviewer to follow and therefore this supports comparisons (May, 2001).

Unstructured interviews are open ended and allow the interviewee to respond in their own frame of reference which can help to challenge the interviewer's preconceptions (May, 2001). Unstructured interviews centre around a topic and can be a wealth of valuable data as the respondent can develop the topic in any way they choose, revealing an insight into their understanding and interpretations (Bell & Waters, 2018; May, 2001).

Guided or focused interviews take elements from semi-structured interviews and unstructured interviews. These allow meanings that interviewees ascribe to events and relationships to be understood while retaining the central focus of the study (Bell & Waters, 2018; May, 2001). They utilise a framework but depend on the interviewer adapting to the situation and using follow up questions or probing (Bell & Waters, 2018). They provide an opportunity for discovery of meaning while retaining the focus (May, 2001).

Within this study, guided interviews are the most appropriate method of gathering data as an extended narrative is needed (Riessman, 2008). For narrative inquiry it is suggested that the interviews are unstructured or semi-structured as these particularly encourage a narrative mode of expression and allow the researcher to enter the psychological and social world of the participant (Crossley, 2000; Hiles et al., 2017). Guided interviews provide opportunities for the researcher and participant to build rapport and the participant can have a greater influence over the direction of the interview (Crossley, 2000). The study has a focus on school belonging, so it is important that the narratives capture this theme. It is felt that by using guided interviews there are opportunities for the interviewer to adapt to the answers and direction given by the respondent which will support

the discovery of meaning (Crossley, 2000; Riessman, 2008). If structured or semi-structured interviews are used there is a risk that brief answers and general statements will be generated that would prevent the development of rich accounts (Riessman, 2008).

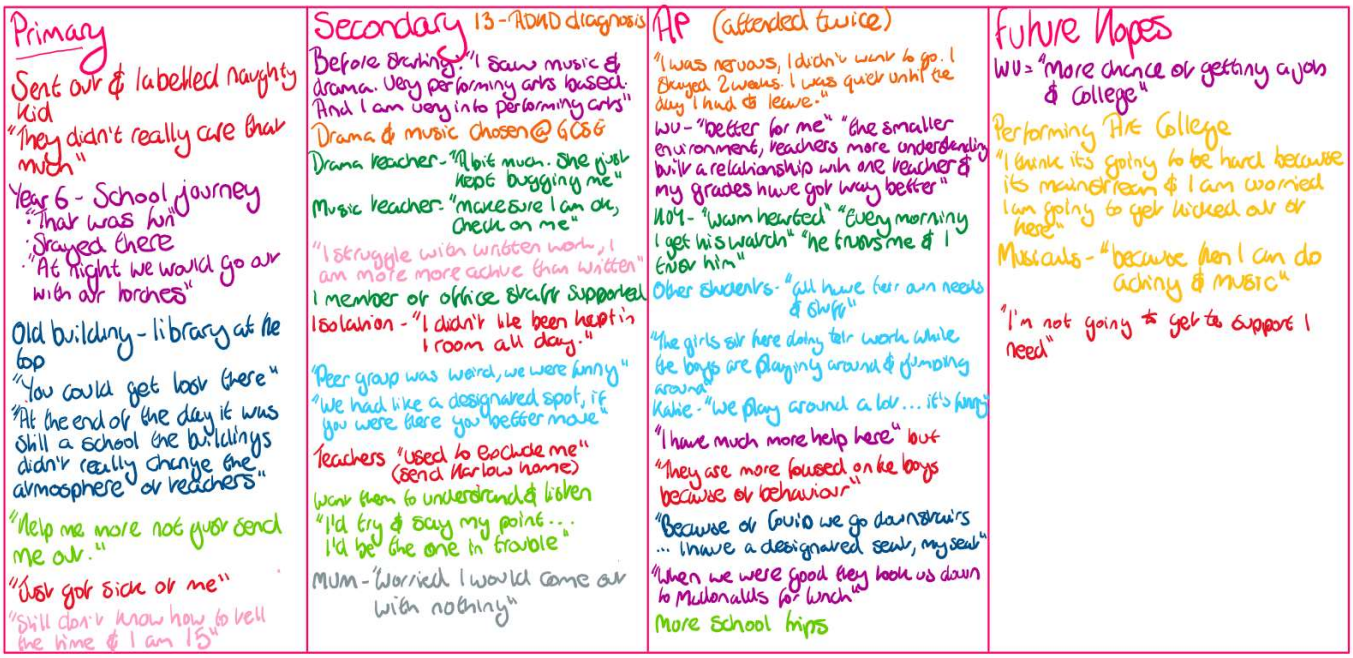
Guided interviews need careful consideration and planning. It is suggested that an interview guide (see Appendix 4) is prepared that contains suggested topics and trigger questions (Braun & Clarke, 2013). After the initial request for a story the main role for the interviewer is to refrain from interruption except for requesting clarification and assisting in the continuation of narration (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). The interviewer needs to ensure that during story telling they remain neutral so they do not encourage a particular narrative; the use of encouraging nods and comments can support the interviewee to develop their narrative (Murray, 2015). For this interview technique to be successful the researcher needs to establish a rapport with the respondent (May, 2001). Firstly, the interviewer needs to limit apprehension, which can be done through descriptive questions such as "Describe a typical day in the AP" (May, 2001). Then the interview moves on to exploration, where both parties discover what they are both like and explore how the interviews will proceed (May, 2001). Where there is a mutual understanding around expectations it leads to participation (May, 2001). Participation is key and it takes time to get to this stage; at this point the researcher becomes able to explore responses (May, 2001).

**3.4.1.2 Life Grids.** In order to support data collection and the recollections of the participants life grids will be used alongside the interviews (Riessman, 2008). For CYP who may have moved between several educational settings the life grid can help to structure their narrative (O'Riordan, 2011). Wilson et al. (2007) found that it helped researchers to facilitate conversations with CYP and create a more holistic view of their lives which kept their voice at the centre of the process. Life grids allow the respondent to raise issues at their own pace and encourages open ended conversation over direct questions (Wilson et al., 2007). Wilson et al found that the creation of the grid reduced the hesitance of the CYP to discuss sensitive topics, supported relationship building and the CYP responded to this method with enthusiasm.

Life grids allow for the construction of a visual framework, which has the passage of time on one axis and selected aspects of the respondent's life, such as school, home and other, on the other axis (Wilson et al., 2007). Where life grids have been used with CYP, they often include the passage of time grouped into school years but do not include specific aspects of the CYP's life to avoid the researcher imposing their own meaning on to the grid (Tellis-James, 2013; Thacker, 2017). In this study the girls will be able to decide if the data is collected by school years or by school setting. The grid will include a future column to support RQ3. Other research has allowed participants to choose whether to scribe themselves or whether to give the researcher this role (Tellis-James, 2013; Thacker, 2017). This research had to move to online data collection due to COVID and although ideally choice of scribe would have been left to the participants, by the researcher taking this role it meant the life grids could be shared on screen and updated in real time, allowing the participants to review the content and amend if needed (see Figure 1 for an example).

**Figure 1**

*Example of a life grid*



**3.5 Research Participants**

To address the proposed research questions the participants selected were KS4 females on fixed-term exclusions. It is hoped that these students may have had more opportunities to consider and discuss their future, especially as they have selected their GCSEs and may have started exploring college or career options. Secondary APs in the LA where the researcher worked as a Trainee Educational Psychologist (TEP) were approached to take part in this study. The original introduction was made by the link EP to the AP Special Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO). Two APs were interested in taking part and the researcher met virtually with both SENCOs to discuss the project. COVID presented several challenges in the recruitment process. Originally it had been planned to meet with potential participants and their parents in person to explain the research. However, this was not possible and both SENCOs took the role of gatekeeper. After discussing the project and outlining the participant characteristics (female, KS4) the SENCOs created a list of potential candidates and spoke to the parents and the girls to gauge interest in the project. The parents of excluded children are often hard to reach and engage with and both APs faced challenges with this. At this point there was another national lockdown and one AP withdrew due to the challenges experienced at this time.

In November 2020 the remaining AP had 4 potential participants; virtual meetings with the school and home were held to discuss the project giving an opportunity for consent to be explained and allow for any questions. This was a point where the issue of virtual interviews and location was discussed. It was decided that the girls should take the lead on this decision if they were happy to take part in the research. Following the verbal consent information sheets and consent forms were posted and emailed to the parents (Appendix 5). This included information and consent forms for the CYP. The SENCO co-ordinated the return of these forms from both the parents and the CYP.

UNICEF Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) states that gaining parental consent is not adequate on its own; the child as well as the parent must be aware of the implications of the research and give informed consent (Greig et al., 2013; *The Convention on the Rights of the Child.*, 1989). Informed consent from the CYP is essential and to support this child-friendly information

sheets were created. Consent was gathered through an opt in method, where the CYP agreed to respond by formally responding. This is perceived to be a more active form of consent rather than opt out where consent is assumed if CYP have not responded in a given period (Munro et al., 2005). The researcher met with the girls and SENCO virtually to explain the project following the meeting with the parents. This was an opportunity to answer questions and explain the process of consent. There were four girls at this meeting, one student who would take part in the pilot study and 3 for the final research project. The potential locations of the virtual interviews were discussed. The participants wanted the interviews to happen in school and the SENCO to be nearby to help manage any technology issues or any issues regarding safeguarding or consent. The pilot interview was scheduled to take place the following day with the other interviews the following week. As one participant stopped attending the setting and due to no changes being made following the pilot interview it was decided to include the pilot interview in the data set. The participant characteristics are outlined in table 1.

**Table 1**

*Participant Characteristics*

| Participant Pseudonym | Age | School Year | Heritage | First Language | SEN |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Harlow | 15 | 11 | White British | English | Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) |
| Grace | 14 | 10 | Chose not to disclose | English | None |
| Khaiah | 14 | 10 | Other Mixed Background | English | Tourette's, ADHD |

Originally it had been planned to carry out member checking, however due to another national lockdown this was not possible. The re-stories were sent to each of the girls for them to read and highlight any changes or misunderstandings. Due to the challenges presented by COVID the researcher had prepared for this through carrying out member checking on the life grid during the interview itself. These challenges are explored later in this chapter and in Chapter 5.

The initial meeting with the CYP involved the researcher covering confidentiality and anonymity. The CYP were made aware that the research may enter the public domain and that any issues relating to their or other people's safety will need to be passed on to their school safeguarding lead. It is important that this limit to confidentiality is covered as disclosures are occasionally made with in interviews with CYP (Munro et al., 2005). The participants self-selected pseudonyms; the process of naming was used to build rapport but show respect to the participants, as it is their story and it was felt to be important that they gave the lead character an identity beyond a participant number or initial (Allen & Wiles, 2016

***3.5.1 Pilot Interview***

A pilot study is a small-scale version of the research methods so that the feasibility can be assessed (Robson, 2011). Creswell and Poth (2018) suggest that researchers undertake pilot studies to help them anticipate issues that might occur alongside helping develop relevant lines of questioning. In this study a pilot study was originally planned to trial the use of the life grid to support the interview, however due to the changes in data collection due to COVID it was felt that it would help to trial the virtual interviews format. The participant was recruited in the same method as the other participants through the same AP setting, but the invite letters and consent forms differed (see Appendix 6). The student in the pilot reflected positively on the use of the life grid online and the researcher found it supported the interview focus. No subsequent changes were made to the structure of the interview and due to the narrative methodology not having set questions but using a guided interview schedule, the decision was made to include the data in the study.

**3.6 Narrative Inquiry**

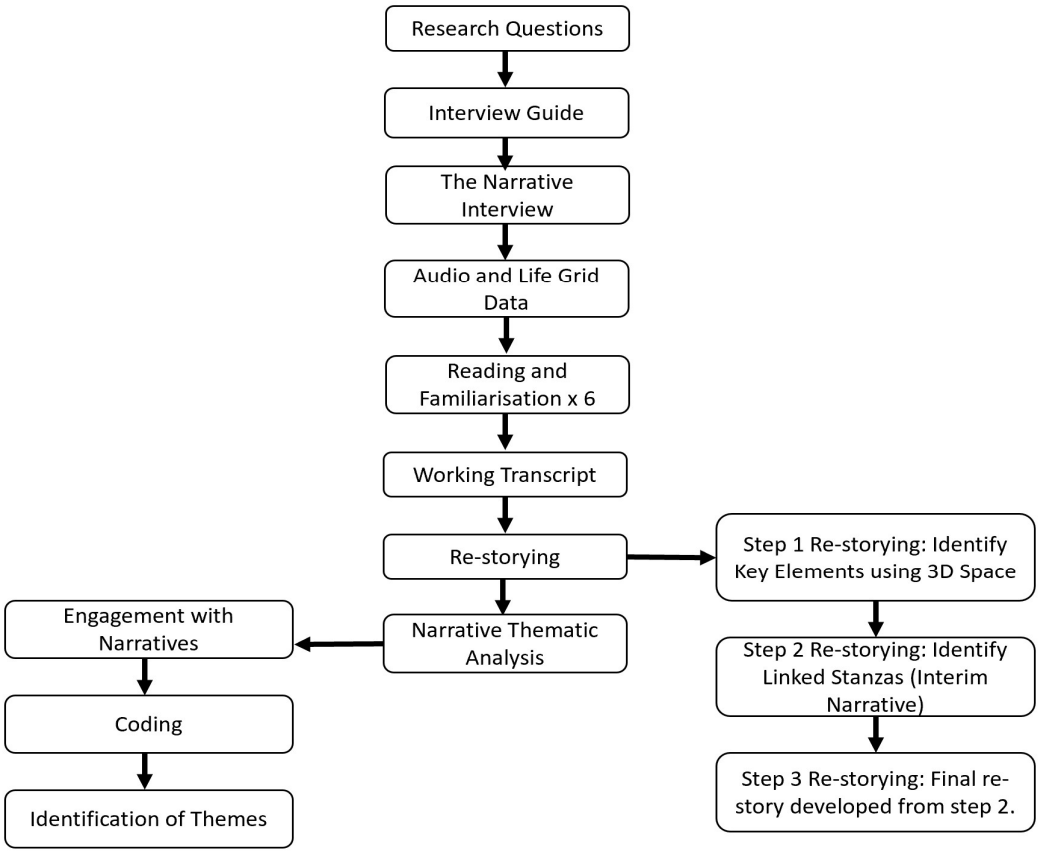
Narrative inquiry seeks to elicit an account from a participant through which the way they organise, structure and interpret their past experiences and possible futures can be shared (Clandinin, 2013; Hiles et al., 2017; Howitt, 2011; Silver, 2013). Narrative is "an approach to the study of human lives conceived as a way of honouring lived experience as a source of important

knowledge and understanding" (Clandinin, 2013, p17). Narrative inquiry allows participants to develop an understand of self through sharing commentary around past actions and current activities alongside anticipating possible futures within a social context (Hiles et al., 2017; Howitt, 2011; Murray, 2015). Narrative inquiry allows participants to attribute agency to characters and suggest links between events through sharing their story with others (Howitt, 2011; Murray, 2015). Through choosing the stories to share the participants can construct their own identities (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Hiles et al., 2017; Murray, 2015; Silver, 2013). Narrative allows an investigation of the connections between the participant and the cultural, social, institutional, and familial structures around them (Clandinin, 2013; Hiles et al., 2017; Murray, 2015). Narrative was selected for this study as it seeks to explore and understand how girls construct their experiences of belonging through the stories they tell of their experiences.

The stories that are told within narrative research are the outcomes of a series of reconstructions, initially by the participant as they recall and then describe their experience, then by the researcher as they reconstruct, transcribe, analyse and interpret the experience, and finally by the reader as they read and react to it (Mccormack, 2004). As narrative is a co-constructed the researcher becomes part of the story and therefore the researcher needs to reflect on their role in the process (Clandinin, 2013; Silver, 2013). Knowledge constructed in this manner is characterised by multiple voices, perspectives, truths, and meanings. This can present challenges with the validity of data due to the subjective nature of the data and this is explored later in this chapter (Mccormack, 2004). Several approaches were explored and combined as when undertaking narrative analysis, it is important not to just impose a framework but be flexible and innovative to make sense of the story being told (Murray, 2015). The structure of this research is presented in Figure 2 and an exploration of the elements follows.

**Figure 2**

*Steps for data analysis adapted from Clandinin and Connelly, (2000); Clarke et al (2015); Crossley, (2000); Hiles et al (2017)*




Narrative analysis relies on persistent engagement with the text as the meaning given by others to their narrative is often not transparent (Crossley, 2000). Mccormack (2004) advises using active listening during the engagement process, listening to the tape several times to support checking for the accuracy of the transcription. The researcher should also seek to understand their own reactions to the interview and assumptions they make (see appendix 7 for an example transcript). The interviews will be audio recorded to create a whole account of the interaction and facilitate the ability of the interviewer to concentrate on the interview and rapport building (Crossley, 2000; Hiles et al., 2017).

In this study the analysis will be based on the raw transcripts, recordings of the interviews and the life grids. Preliminary coding can be employed to this data. This will begin to look for

sequences of episodes or events that can be highlighted or numbered (see Appendix 8). To support this, the Crossley (2000) approach to analysis has been explored. The transcripts and data will be engaged with several times to identify important concepts within the data. An important feature of narrative is that beyond respecting the individuals' story it values the interpretation of relationships and the contexts within which they are set (Goodley & Billington, 2017). To support the identification of these concepts and the initial coding Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) three-dimensional space framework will be used to help understand and highlight the elements of the participants' stories (see figure 3 and appendix 9). The three-dimensional space framework explores the interactions the participants describe, the continuity in the stories and the context of them (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Through using this lens for analysing the field texts, it is hoped that it will capture the detail and richness of the stories that are shared (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002). One of the reasons for selecting the three-dimensional space framework as the first stage in analysing the transcripts in that it allows for a broader, more holistic lens than some other narrative methods (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002). Ollerenshaw and Creswell (2002) state that three-dimensional space framework allows the grouping of thematic stanzas from the data. Stanzas are a way of organising transcribed speech through grouping of lines that contain similar content. In addition the stanzas can be given titles and the researchers presence can be removed from the conversation (Riessman, 2008).

**Figure 3**

*Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) Three-dimensional space framework. Adapted from Clandinin and Connelly (2000) and Ollerenshaw and Creswell (2002)*

| **Interaction** | | **Continuity** | | | **Situation** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Personal | Social | Past | Present | Future | Context |
| Look inward to internal conditions. For example: feelings, hopes, aesthetic reactions and moral dispositions. | Look outward in existential conditions in the environment with other people and their intentions, purposes, assumptions and points of view. | Look backwards to remembered experiences, feelings and stories from earlier times. | Look at current experiences, feelings and stories relating to actions of an event. | Looking forward to implied and possible experiences and plot line. | Look at context, time and place situated in a physical landscape or setting with topological and spatial boundaries with character intentions, purposes and different points of view. |

Once the stanzas have been grouped and put into Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) three-dimensional space framework the next stage of re-storying can begin. This is rewriting the story within a chronological sequence and therefore supporting a better understanding of the narrative by the reader through order and sequence (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002). Firstly, an interim narrative is created (see appendix 10). This is where the direct quotes from the transcripts are drawn together in the identified stanzas and a basis for re-storying is developed (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). According to Polkinghorne (1995) this is narrative analysis where researchers gather descriptions of actions and events as their research data and then these are used to generate stories. During re-storying there needs to be an awareness of the participants' own language as it helps construct their interpretation of events and through keeping their language it best communicates the unique elements of what their experience of life is (Kramp, 2004). The re-storying was done in third person to acknowledge co-construction.

The final stage in the data analysis is narrative thematic analysis where themes that occur across the three stories will be identified (appendix 11). According to Polkinghorne (1995) this is analysis of narratives where the stories have become the research data, and these are analysed to

identify themes that reoccur across the stories. Through narrative thematic analysis the research looks for units of analysis, looking to identify common themes across stories (Polkinghorne, 1995; Riessman, 2008). To identify these common themes in the narratives the researcher undertakes coding. Codes can provide a description or summary of the data and these codes aim to stay close to the data and the participants' meanings, or they can be more interpretative and look to reveal the meaning behind the narrative (Braun & Clarke, 2012). To develop themes, the coded data is reviewed, and areas of similarity are identified (Braun & Clarke, 2012). In narrative thematic analysis the themes appear in the structures of the stories rather than focusing on the language or form, although appropriate words or phrases can be lifted from the text (Kramp, 2004; Riessman, 2008). The text, coding and themes were revisited to clarify the selection (Clarke et al., 2015).

A deductive form of analysis has been opted for in this study. Although school belonging is the focus of the research it was felt that there was an opportunity to explore novel theoretical insights (Riessman, 2008). The codes and themes are generated from the narratives rather than using pre-existing coding frames or theories. This was in line with exploratory nature of the research, allowing for the researcher to develop an understanding of belonging in relation to the participants' unique experiences rather than letting existing theories of belonging direct the findings. This remains true to a constructivist epistemology as it develops themes from the views and constructs of the CYP through their narrative rather than the reality of the experience. The identification of themes in this way allows commonalities across the stories to be identified while reflecting the personal experience of the participants (Kramp, 2004). As analysis of narratives and narrative analysis are complementary in this research the original stories are presented alongside the themes (Kramp, 2004; Polkinghorne, 1995).

**3.7 Establishing Reflexivity, Validity and Reliability**

Qualitative research differs from traditional quantitative research as results are reported in words rather than numbers (Stiles, 1999). The events are situated in unique contexts and evidence selected as good examples rather than a representation of a larger population which means that the

researcher's interpretations are tentative (Stiles, 1999). Judgements need to be made about how well research has been carried out and whether the presented findings can be regarded as valid and trustworthy (Yardley, 2015). The criteria used for quantitative research (objectivity, reliability, and statistical generalisability) are not transferable to qualitative research and even within qualitative research the methods vary considerably in terms of data collection and analysis (Yardley, 2015). However, it is important for qualitative researchers to be able to show that studies are rigorous and valuable and justify the decisions they have made to reveal new meanings (Yardley, 2015).

### *3.7.1 Reflexivity*

Qualitative research is subjective as the researcher brings their own history, values, and assumptions into the research. (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Yardley, 2015). When taking a social constructivist approach to research the researcher must explore their own understanding and construction of knowledge and truth (Moore, 2005). Reflexivity is essential for the researcher to clarify their positioning and the context within which they were making decisions in order to ensure that this subjectivity does not invalidate the research (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Fox et al., 2007). Reflexivity is a process of critically reflecting on the knowledge produced, the reasons for its production and the researcher's role in its production (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Fox et al., 2007). Within social constructivist research, reflexivity is about the researcher's relationship with participants and how the data collection and analysis were co-constructed (Fox et al., 2007). This co-construction can occur at several levels, primarily between the researcher and the participants (Fox et al., 2007).

It is important that reflexivity creates clarity around the research position, however it is easy for the research to become self-centred or introspective and add additional confusion into the process (Fox et al., 2007). This study will utilise two types of reflexivity: functional, which explores the tools and methods used, and personal, which involves the researcher reflecting on the influences of their background and experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Creswell & Poth, 2018). During the initial engagement with the raw transcripts the researcher will reflect on

their assumptions that may influence their interpretations in their research journal (Mccormack, 2004). The researcher will also engage with peer and member checking alongside the use of a research journal to support this process (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

### *3.7.2 Validity and Reliability*

Validity looks to determine if the findings are accurate from the perspective of those involved in the study: researcher, the participant, and the reader (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Yardley, 2015). The paradigm of this research assumes that reality is socially constructed by the participant and therefore through using member checking the participant has the opportunity to ensure their narrative has been accurately represented (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Creswell & Miller, 2000; Stiles, 1999). Within this study it was planned to use member checking on the life grids and the re-storying of the narratives. The involvement of participants in member checking can lead to them experiencing catalytic validity (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Creswell & Poth, 2018). Catalytic validity to is where the research can re-energise participants or produce a change, growth, or empowerment for them (Stiles, 1999). Although narrative research is distinct from narrative therapy it is hoped that through sharing their stories the participants will feel empowered. The full extent of member checking that was planned for this study was not possible due to COVID; Chapter 5 has further discussion of this issue.

As a flexible design has been employed an audit trail is important to aid transparency in the research process (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Robson, 2011). In this study this will be managed through use of a research journal, documenting research decisions and activities as well as maintaining clear records. Transparency and coherence can be supported through ensuring a fit between the research questions, theoretical framework and the methods used (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Yardley, 2015). Validation is the degree to which research is accepted as sound, legitimate and authoritative and whether the findings can be regarded as trustworthy and useful in revealing the researcher's ideas to the reader (Stiles, 1999; Yardley, 2015). Through the reflexivity of the researcher and the transparency of the methods used alongside the presentation of analytical

findings, data set and the steps taken in analysis it is hoped that the researcher can allow the reader to explore the methods used and build trust in the research process (Mishler, 1990; Yardley, 2015).

**3.8 Ethics**

There are several ethical considerations that were explored while designing this research, especially due to the involvement of CYP. Greig et al (2013) stated that the process should start by considering the four values: autonomy, non-malfeasance, beneficence, and social justice. In order for the CYP to demonstrate their autonomy, consent should be provided through free choice. Information from the researcher must be accessible to the participants so that they understand what they are consenting to (Greig et al., 2013).The benefits of the study need to outweigh the risks. All reasonable steps should be taken to avoid causing any pain and suffering, thereby meeting the criteria of non-malfeasance and beneficence (Greig et al., 2013). Finally, to respect social justice, there was clarity around participant selction (Greig et al., 2013).

There were several gatekeepers that the researcher had to approach to proceed with this research, including the University, the LA, the APs, and the parents of the CYP. It was important to be familiar with the formal ethics process from the university and LA. There was also a more informal approach with the APs and parents which was based on relationship building and communication. Several ethical issues were considered within the university ethics form and risk assessment (see appendix 12 for ethical approval) and the LA ethics form (appendix 13 for the LA approval). The researcher carried out the research in line with the guidelines from the Health Care Professions Council (2016) and the British Psychological Society (2018).

Due to COVID restrictions additional ethical issues had to be considered in relation to data collection. Data collection was no longer able to happen in person and needed to happen using virtual meeting technology. In this case in line with university policy Microsoft Teams was used. To ensure ethics were maintained, an ethical amendments form was submitted to reflect the changes (appendix 14 for amendment approval). The changes also led to the researcher reflecting on their own ethical position. The researcher used open discussions with the APs, CYP and parents around

the changing ethical environment in order to ensure that informed consent was maintained and ensure the CYP retained autonomy. The location of the interviews were negotiated with the AP, CYP and their parents. As the research was virtual it allowed flexibility in location; all three girls chose to take part in the interviews at the AP. Parents and the SENCO supported this decision, with the school being willing to ensure a private safe space for the girls to take part in the research. The participants were also given the choice whether to have the camera on or off during the interview. They selected to have their cameras off but wanted the researchers camera on. MacDonald and Greggans (2008) state that consent can change during the interview process and that interviewers can use body language to help them know when to discuss this. In this instance as the CYP chose to turn their cameras off the researcher needed to employ active listening and checking in to manage the consent and well-being of the CYP. The presence of a teacher during the interview process was also discussed with the participants and their SENCO. As the research explored the girls' experiences within their current settings it was important to reflect on how to protect the interests of the CYP and the integrity of the research (MacDonald & Greggans, 2008). When exploring how to manage interviews with children MacDonald and Greggans (2008) found that narratives changed when parents enter the room. This could be the case with a teacher from the AP being present during the interviews. The issue of safeguarding and consent was explained to the CYP and it was decided that the SENCO would not be in the room but close by and check in with the girls on an agreed time frame. This was then discussed with parents due to the age of the girls. The researcher was also able to contact the SENCO by email during the interviews in case any urgent concerns arose.

As all three participants attended the same AP and were aware of the identity of the other participants, consideration also needed to be given to how the data was fed back to the participants and the setting in order to maintain anonymity. In order for member checking to occur each girl was sent a copy of their own story in a sealed envelope which the SENCO then distributed. In relation to feedback of the results of the study following Viva; a summary of the study will be written which will not include any direct quotes or reference individual contribution to the study this will then be

shared with the CYP and the AP. From this the important findings will be able to be communicated; along with a summary of the impact of CYPs contributions but participants will not be identifiable. The CYP were made aware through the invite letters and the initial stages of recruitment that the research may enter the public domain through publication and consented to this.

# Chapter 4: Findings

## 4.1 Introduction

As outlined in Chapter 3 the research findings will be presented in relation to the two phases of analysis. The storied narrative is central to the research and aims to capture the diversity of the girl's experiences; all three re-storied narratives are included below. The re-storied narratives are then followed by the common themes identified which provides the opportunity to explore the narratives in more detail.

## 4.2 Storied Narratives

### *4.2.1 Harlow's Story*

*Who Am I?*

Harlow is a 15-year-old girl who can be stubborn and defiant. Harlow can get obsessed over things. Harlow can be an anti- social person, who does not like going out and prefers to stay in her bedroom. When her mum goes to her dad's house with her sisters she stays at home as she does not like being in the same house as all of them. Harlow's sense of humour is like her dad's, it can sometimes be hurtful, and people can take it the wrong way, but she does not mean for that to happen. Harlow has no filter; her dad's filter is better than hers, but her cousin's is worse. Most of the time Harlow does not care if other people judge her but when they assume that she is acting up, being tough or acting bad it does affect her because she is not a bad person.

*Primary School*

Harlow attended Mossdown Primary and she cannot remember any positive teacher relationships there. Harlow recalls the school as being big and old. It was big enough that if you were new, you could get lost there and Harlow does not remember how to get to the library at the top of the building. Harlow did not mind that the building was old, because it is still a school and the building does not change that.

Harlow did not have a favourite year at Mossdown. Harlow was often kicked out of class and would then walk around the school. When Harlow was annoyed at the boys in her class, she would throw their stationery out of the window and then at break they would see it all outside. Harlow felt that Mossdown did not care about her, she felt they saw her as the naughty child. Harlow wanted them to help her more, not just send her out. Harlow felt that this would mean that they cared and wanted to teach her, but instead they got sick of her. Harlow's mum thought that there was something wrong with Harlow, but Mossdown just told her that Harlow was naughty.

*School Journey*

One positive memory Harlow has from Mossdown is School Journey. Harlow cannot remember where they went but that it was with all the Year Six students from the school. They stayed over for a couple of days and nights, and at night Harlow and other students went out with their torches, playing around and telling stories. Harlow enjoyed the activities they did during the day.

*Favourite Subject*

Harlow went to Cherry Grove secondary school. When she went to see it before starting, she saw that they had a focus on performing arts including music and drama. Harlow enjoys performing arts, she especially loves playing music and singing. Harlow finds drama calming and finds that it gives her chance to express herself. For Harlow drama is like wearing a mask because she can play different characters and experience different moods.

Harlow chose to do music and drama for GCSE. She got on okay with the music teacher and Harlow felt that the music teacher checked that she was alright. Harlow did her music homework as she found it easy. The music homework was usually having to choose something to bring to class, such as a song. She found that music involved more performing than writing and Harlow preferred that.

Harlow loved drama but struggled with the written work, she can answer questions better verbally rather than writing the answer down. Harlow had more challenges in drama, she felt that the teacher 'bugged' her as she did not complete her homework. Harlow had a problem with a piece of practical work with other students. Harlow had to meet these students at lunch and break to practise, but they kept changing days and as she did not have their numbers, she did not know what days they were practicing. The other students told the teacher that Harlow did not attend, and Harlow was punished by being made to sit in a classroom to complete work. This did not feel fair to Harlow as she was not told about the change in days.

*Secondary Struggles*

Harlow did little in her books at Cherry Grove and was getting 1s and 2s in her subjects. Harlow does not remember any academic support at Cherry Grove. Harlow was aware that her mum was worried that she was going to come out with no GCSE and therefore would not be able to do anything with her life.

Harlow felt the teachers at Cherry Grove were worse than the ones at Mossdown, as they would exclude her from class and when she refused to go into isolation, they would send her home. Harlow wanted them to try to understand her more. She often felt that the teachers' side was listened to, but she was not, and Harlow does not feel that that Cherry Grove could change this approach.

Harlow felt that she was isolated a lot while her peers continued to go to lessons. Harlow did not like being kept in one room where she was not able to talk and the only break she got was lunch. One woman oversaw isolation, but she often left, and it would be the on-call staff who would take over from her.

Although Harlow felt that she could not talk to anyone at Cherry Grove because they did not listen to her she did have a positive relationship with one member of office staff who protected her from isolation. If Harlow felt she had been excluded for 'a stupid reason' she was able to stay in the office with this member of staff. She would give Harlow jobs to do that reduced Harlow's time in isolation.

*Diagnosis*

In both primary and secondary school Harlow was told there was nothing wrong with her and felt that she was labelled the naughty kid. In Year Eight or Nine this changed, and Cherry Grove started picking up that something was not right. When Harlow was 13, she was diagnosed with ADHD, however Harlow remembers her mum having to push the school for the diagnosis. Harlow's mum attended weekly meetings at the school and kept telling them that something was not right. Harlow is now going to be assessed to see if she has ASD.

Harlow is not bothered by having a diagnosis of ADHD as she knows she does struggle with some things and this can lead to her becoming frustrated and angry. This anger means that Harlow can say things in the moment that she does not mean, or she can punch or kick things. When Harlow is angry her eyes which are usually blue go bright green.

*Peers*

Harlow found her peer group at Cherry Grove weird and funny. This peer group gave Harlow an overall good feeling and they used to entertain each other by telling jokes and annoying the teachers. They had a spot in school and if anyone else sat there they had to move. This spot was in the playground on a huge flight of steps. Originally their spot had been hiding behind a building, but they were caught there so moved to being sat by a tree and then they decided to steal the steps. Harlow does not speak to some of those friends anymore.

*School Trips*

Harlow went on a few school trips at Cherry Grove but only remembers one. Harlow went to an Art Museum instead of attending Sports Day. Harlow found the museum weird and remembers not being allowed into certain parts of the museum because of the pictures there. Some of Harlow's friends were on this trip but others went to sports day.

*Starting at the AP*

Harlow was nervous about starting at Endeavour. She did not want to go or understand why she had been moved there. Harlow's first placement there was for two weeks. During this two weeks Harlow was quiet and did not misbehave, until her last day when she played up all day. On that day there was a meeting with Cherry Grove who said she had to return. Harlow did not want to go back as she felt Endeavour was better for her.

On her return to Cherry Grove Harlow kept getting into trouble. She did not want to be there, but Cherry Grove told her that she did not have a choice. Harlow felt this decision came down to money, that Cherry Grove did not want to pay for her to attend Endeavour.

Harlow returned to Endeavour and she still feels the smaller environment is better for her and that the teachers understand her more. Harlow feels Endeavour care more about her, they do not just send her out but try to keep her in the classroom. If she has a problem, they let her leave the classroom to calm down. Harlow's grades have improved, and she is on a 4 in English and a 5 in Citizenship. With these better grades Harlow hopes she will get better GCSEs.

*Positive Teacher Relationship*

Harlow has built a positive relationship with one teacher at Endeavour. Harlow says that he really understands her and has a warm heart. Every morning this teacher gives Harlow his watch, she then wears it all day and then returns it. Harlow believes he does this because he trusts her, and she trusts him. Harlow has not been able to trust teachers before. This teacher is now head of a different year group and this means he does not have as much contact with Harlow and she finds this difficult. Through having his watch Harlow knows he can't go anywhere.

*AP Peers*

When Harlow started at Endeavour last year all the years were able to mix in one room at break and lunch but now, they must stay upstairs in their classrooms for break and they are only allowed downstairs at lunch. Because of COVID they now must sit with their year group, but they mostly end up mixing anyway. Harlow has a designated seat in the room which she describes as her seat.

Harlow finds some of the other students obnoxious but understands that they all have their own needs, including anger issues. Harlow does not judge them as she gets angry a lot, but the behaviour of other students can still be distracting. Harlow has a good relationship with two of the girls but sees only one as being a long-lasting friendship. She says it's because they just 'muck' around and that it's funny. They annoy each other or team up to annoy the teachers.

*Boys v Girls*

The boys in Harlow's class can play around a lot and can be annoying. The girls will sit there doing their work while the boys are playing around and stabbing each other with pens. This means that the help can be focused more on the boys as their problems are with their behaviour and they need someone by them to stop the outbursts they have. This means Harlow does not always get the help she needs with her work. Although Harlow can play up when she gets distracted.

Harlow had one incident at Endeavour where they would not let her out of a classroom even though the boys had been the ones causing the trouble. This led to Harlow getting angry and breaking a plug socket when she kicked it.

*AP Trips*

At Endeavour Harlow has been to a post-16 college and been taken to McDonald's as a reward for good behaviour. In future Harlow would like Endeavour to do more school trips.

Harlow has suggested going to the London Dungeons, because it fits in with what they have been covering in History and English. Endeavour have listened to Harlow and told her they would take it into consideration.

*Future*

Harlow goes to college next year. Because of Endeavour, Harlow feels like she has more of a chance of getting a job and getting into college. Harlow is unsure what college to go to study performing arts, as she is not sure what's best for her. She is going to speak to her aunt and her cousin as they know more about this; her aunt works in a performing arts college and her cousin studied at one. Other than her granddad who was in a popular band neither her mum or dad's side of the family are interested in performing arts. Harlow has started to research colleges.

Harlow is worried that she will get kicked out of college as it is a mainstream setting. Harlow is worried that she cannot help her behaviour and the things she does. Harlow tells people if she finds something wrong or something annoys her, and she is concerned that teachers might take this the wrong way. Harlow is worried that she will not get the support she needs.

### *4.2.2 Grace's Story*

*Who Am I?*

Grace is 14 and in Year Ten. Grace describes herself as confident, loud and over the top. Grace has always had a small social circle and she does not like people to get too comfortable around her so has clear boundaries. Grace cannot identify anywhere she has belonged or feels like she belongs now.

*Primary School*

Grace went to Mayfield Primary School. Grace has positive memories of Mayfield and she did not have too many issues when she was there. Grace remembers a few school trips while she was at Mayfield. They were positive memories for her. She remembers repeat trips to one history museum. Grace loves history and on these visits, she got to learn more about things she did not already know about.

Grace remembers Mayfield having blue gates with a walkway, surrounded by flowers and benches. This walkway lead to the school reception. After the reception there was another gate to the playground and beyond this gate a two-storey school could be seen in a big playground. Grace remembers going to the little park behind the school for PE sometimes.

*Favourite Year*

Grace's favourite year at Mayfield was Year Four where Miss Spencer was her teacher. Miss Spencer was an anger management teacher and a counsellor at the same time. Grace had a bad temper and it could go in seconds; Miss Spencer helped Grace with this. Miss Spencer built a bond with Grace through taking her out of lessons and doing one on one work with her. During this one on one work, Miss Spencer tried to get to know Grace. Grace and Miss

Spencer would do baking in the large kitchen at Mayfield. Grace appreciated that Miss Spencer was straight with her, telling Grace when she was in the wrong and putting her in her place. In Year Five students were given jobs in the school. Miss Spencer helped Grace get three jobs. At lunch Grace would water the flowers by the walkway and Grace missed some lessons to be in the nursery with the little kids and help them with what they needed to do. Grace's bond with Miss Spencer lasted until she left in Year Six, and she has not seen Miss Spencer since.

*Friendships*

Grace's strongest friendship developed from a small circle of three friends she had at Mayfield Primary. One of these girls, Sarah, she still speaks to now, they have known each other since they were babies and as well as attending Mayfield together. They went to the same secondary school. Their mums are close, and Sarah's family moved next door to Grace. This resulted in them playing out together at weekends as well as playing together at primary. Grace says that they have never really had time apart and they are still close now.

*Secondary School*

Grace's first secondary school was Grenoside. Grace hates change and new places where she does not know anyone. However, Grace did not feel like that about Grenoside, it was something new for her. Part of the reason Grace did not mind it is because her brother already went there and her friends from primary school would be going there. This meant that Grace would not be on her own or the only new person there. Grace enjoyed Year Seven, especially science and history which are her favourite subjects. In Year Seven Grace was a calm child who was trying to figure out where she was meant to go and which children, she should be friends with.

*A Change*

Things started to go wrong for Grace in Year Eight. She became the bad child with the "hot" temper that was always fighting and had an attitude. Grace does not know what caused the change, but everything changed, it was not just her behaviour at school but at home as well. At this time if Grace did not want to go to a lesson she would truant with other people or climb out of the school gates and go home. Grace thought these people were her friends but has since realised that they were just people at school she would be naughty with. Grace was getting into fights and had a problem with teachers, she did not like them or even want to talk to them. Grace and her mum both recognise that when she is around big groups of people, she changes her behaviour.

Grace felt that Grenoside did not deal with her behaviour well as they were quite strict, and they would just send Grace home or put her in isolation. Isolation was a tiny room with nine tables and nine chairs, when Grace was isolated, she had to stay in this room all day doing work, the only break she got was lunch. Being in isolation meant that Grace had to stay for an hour after school.

Grace does not know why things did not work out at Grenoside, but she really wanted it to work there. She has talked with her mum about how different her life would be if she was

still there, even though Grace says that she did not have a positive journey while she was there.

*More Moves*

From Grenoside Grace underwent a managed move to Fulwood Academy. Grace's mum was invited into school for a meeting where Grenoside said they wanted to do a managed move for 12 weeks to see whether a new placement would work out. At first Grace did not want to go, as she does not like change. However, when she did start at Fulwood Academy Grace did not find it too bad even though she did not enjoy it there. Grace only stayed at Fulwood Academy for three days. On her first day she was worried about how the other students would react to her and whether they would all be talking about her because she is new. Grace got over this feeling and Fulwood was alright, but on the second day she had a problem with another student. This led to a fight on the third day and then she was permanently excluded from Fulwood Academy. Grace returned to Grenoside and then she moved to another centre called Wrotham Grove.

Grace feels awful about all these moves as she never thought that this would happen to her. One of her brothers was a "bad" child who used to be naughty at home, but he was only excluded from Grenoside and went on to Endeavour. Grace does not feel like the bad child, but she was excluded from three schools. Grace moved to Endeavour after two years at Wrotham Grove, in Year Ten.

*Starting at the AP*

Grace was relieved to go to Endeavour as her and her mum felt like it would be a fresh start for her. Grace felt that she did get this clean start but recently she has been struggling with her behaviour again because her home life is tough now. Grace likes the fact that Endeavour know how to calm her down when she is in an angry mood, they know how to deal with the situation. They give Grace time to sit without surrounding her. Grace likes this time and space. Grace likes the teachers at Endeavour, she finds them down to earth and likes that they know when the students are playing with them and this means they know when to stop joking. Grace finds the lessons fun, but this does depend on the teacher. Grace finds the support at Endeavour different to her previous school. Grace knows if she needs anything one of the teachers would support her, and if something happened at home the teachers would be there for her. Grace can talk to the staff about anything. The only thing she does not like about Endeavour is the journey, she must get up at 6.30am to get there.

*AP Peers*

There are 3 other girls in Grace's class and 5 boys. Grace notices a difference between how the girls and boys behave. Some of the girls have matured already when Grace compares them to the boys. The boys in Grace's class jump around and play fight, they are little terrors. Grace has found that COVID has impacted her experiences with peers at the AP, she has only mixed with her class but from what she has heard she believes the rest of the students are alright.

*GCSEs*

Grace wants to stay at Endeavour to do her GCSEs. However, she is unsure as to whether her results will be better than those, she would have got at Grenoside. Grace feels that Grenoside would have kept pushing her until she had been pushed over the point of what she can do, whereas Endeavour push, but it is only until a certain point and then they slowly start to give up.

*The Future*

Grace wants to get her GCSEs and then go on to college and university. Grace is trying to decide between two options. Grace is interested in working with children due to the number of babies in her family and she is interested in a career in beauty. Grace is worried that she will let herself down and not get what she wants out of the future. She says this will happen if she keeps getting into trouble through doing the wrong things. Grace is going to try and keep her head down and do what she needs to do to make sure this does not happen.

### *4.2.3 Khaiah's Story*

*Who am I?*

Khaiah is 14 and in Year Ten. Khaiah is mixed race, her mum is British, Irish, and Scottish and her dad is Jamaican and Indian. Khaiah does not speak to her Dad. Khaiah is bubbly and gets along with a lot of people. Khaiah has ADHD and this can make her do stupid things as she does not think before she acts but says her friends like this as it makes her thrill-seeking. Khaiah has Tourette's and this is worse when she is stressed, she has both verbal and physical tics. Sometimes her Tourette's causes her to drop to the floor, hit herself or other people. Khaiah feels judged for the way she looks; people refer to her as prestige as she is a light skinned mixed race girl. She does not believe people when they say she is pretty. Khaiah finds her looks mean people think she thinks she is better than them but once they get to know her, they see that she is easy to talk to and nice. Khaiah identifies as bisexual.

*Primary*

Khaiah went to Lidgett Primary school. When Khaiah was at Lidgett half the building was closed off and it was renovated after she left, which she felt was unfair. The only thing Khaiah liked at Lidgett was the food. Khaiah found the environment at Lidgett toxic. Khaiah was bullied at Lidgett and feels that Lidgett did not know how to deal with bullies. Khaiah wanted them to try and understand her mood swings more and put more support in place. She felt they focused too much on wanting students to be normal and do the work, but Khaiah did not feel like a normal child.

Khaiah's Year 5 teacher, Miss Murphy, was the best teacher she had at Lidgett and Khaiah felt supported by her. Miss Murphy tried to work with her and understand her. Khaiah does not remember much more about Miss Murphy other than the fact she was fun and looked young.

*Accepting herself*

Khaiah found it hard at Lidgett as no one understood her, and she did not understand herself. Khaiah believed that she was ugly at primary school and feels that therefore people made fun of her. She says that she developed her figure earlier than the other girls. Khaiah's early development meant the uniform did not fit her the same as the other girls and she got teased for this. Khaiah found this hard.

At Lidgett Khaiah found that the other children were pretending to be good when the teacher was present. When the teacher was not around Khaiah found these other children rude and mean. The other children used to tell the teacher on Khaiah. Khaiah would not recommend Lidgett as she feels it made her how she is now and that they did not know how to adapt to her needs. For these reasons Khaiah believes that children with disabilities should not go there, only children who are able to ignore outside influences would do well at Lidgett. Khaiah's little sister is there and is getting bullied.

*A Change*

In Year Six Khaiah beat the girl up who bullied her and then things changed as everyone started wanting to be her friend. Khaiah found that once she left Lidgett people's opinions of her figure changed and the boys from her primary school wanted to get in touch with her. Khaiah's personality has not changed and therefore her feelings towards them have not changed as they treated her badly in the past.

*Secondary*

Khaiah went to Silverfen secondary school, she was worried about going as it was an all-girls school. Khaiah used to be homophobic and was worried that it would make her a lesbian. She was scared about starting there but her older sister went to Silverfen, so she felt protected. When Khaiah was bullied her sister and her friends protected her and threatened the older girl who was bullying her. Towards the end of Year Seven the other students started getting to know Khaiah and liked her. Khaiah felt that many of these girls were friends with her because she was the only light skinned girl in her year. They used to help Khaiah with her curly hair as she did not know what to do with it.

Khaiah was worried that things would change in Year Eight as her sister left the school, so she lost her protection. Khaiah found that other students did change towards her in Year Eight and she found this hard. She did not have any close friends. Khaiah did not behave well in Year Eight and can understand why the school had a problem with her behaviour.

*Year Nine*

The summer before Khaiah went into Year Nine was a turning point for her, she made good friends over the six-week school holidays and this led to her making a best friend in Year Nine. Although they have had problems, they have got through them.

Year Nine was good for Khaiah because she started her GCSEs and she had picked subjects she was interested in and this meant she felt more in control. She chose Health and Social Care, Hospitality and Catering and Art and Photography. These were new subjects for Khaiah, although she had done Art and Food Technology previously.

Khaiah missed seven months of Year Nine due to coronavirus so feels that her behaviour in Year Nine cannot be judged. When she returned to school in Year Ten Khaiah was mainly calm but there were a few incidents as she found the return to school stressful.

*Favourite Subject*

Khaiah's favourite subject was science, especially physics, as she liked the practical element. Khaiah's science teacher was good at explaining things. Khaiah was often ahead in these lessons and this meant her teacher would let her take breaks when she needed them. Khaiah's science teacher helped her to complete work in lessons so that she did not have to take it home, as Khaiah often forgot to complete it. Khaiah was always bottom in her classes at Silverfen but in science she was at the top of her set.

*Teachers*

Khaiah had a good relationship with a teacher called Miss Hayes, who was helping her get assessed for ADHD and Tourette's. Miss Hayes created a support plan for Khaiah which she could give to her other teachers. However, when things got hard for Khaiah and in the run up to her exclusion she no longer felt supported by Miss Hayes. This increased Khaiah's stress and she begun to feel that the support she had been offered previously was not genuine.

*Going Wrong*

Khaiah's behaviour at the start of Year Nine was not good but she always completed her work. Khaiah misbehaved because of her not understanding the work that was been set. Khaiah's ADHD made it difficult for her to remain in a classroom and stay seated for a whole hour as she got distracted easily. Khaiah felt that Silverfen and the Headteacher never tried to understand why she got distracted. Khaiah thinks that the headteacher will not believe her ADHD diagnosis as Silverfen never tried to understand the mental health challenges that some students have that make it difficult for them to focus on their work and behave.

When Khaiah returned to school following the national lockdown she was only there for two weeks before the school put her on report to monitor her behaviour. Khaiah only got one negative mark on her report. After the report Khaiah had to isolate after one of her teachers got Coronavirus. Before Khaiah returned to school after this period of isolation she was told that she was being asked to leave Silverfen. The reasons for this are not clear for Khaiah, she felt that she had a successful behaviour report, and this showed she was making improvements. The teachers who knew her said her behaviour was improving but the decision to ask her to leave was made by teachers who did not know her.

*Starting at the AP*

The building Endeavour is in can feel like a prison to Khaiah at times, but she still likes it. One of the reasons she likes it at Endeavour is that she is doing well in all her classes. Khaiah likes the teachers at Endeavour but they can frustrate her at times. The staff at Endeavour do not only say they care about Khaiah, but they show it. Khaiah is missing Food Technology

though, but Endeavour does not have a kitchen. Khaiah hopes that once COVID is over they could use the kitchen at her old school so she can continue with this.

*Students at AP*

Before Khaiah started at Endeavour she was worried that the other students would be rude and want to fight, but she has found it is fun. She says it's important to listen to people's stories to understand why they are there. Khaiah appreciates that it is normal to be different at Endeavour and this means that the other students do not judge others. When students do make judgements, she feels that they are questioned about this. As the only student with Tourette's at Endeavour, Khaiah at first felt the other students did not understand some of her behaviours, but when she explained it, they understood. There is one boy who has found it challenging but Khaiah feels this is because he does not like change and therefore, she does not blame him for this.

*Returning to Silverfen*

Khaiah has been at Endeavour for nearly six weeks, which was the original length of her placement. However, it has been decided to extend her stay. She prefers Endeavour as there are less students which for her means less stress as there are less people and less rumours for her to deal with. She feels like she belongs at Endeavour and worries about returning to Silverfen. She feels that Silverfen will not see that her behaviour has been improving. Khaiah is concerned that with the lack of support she received at Silverfen her behaviour will not continue to improve.

*Gender*

Khaiah's class is mainly boys; although there are three other girls in her class they do not attend very often. This means the only other female Khaiah sees some days is a teacher. Khaiah says that this limits the choice of activities as if the teacher is male, they will choose the activities the boys want to do.

Khaiah feels that there is time to do more activities as they currently have park sessions and play football. Endeavour have talked about replacing these with boxing once the gym reopens. Khaiah would get a better work out and energy release from boxing as it uses the whole body and she does not play football. Khaiah would like Endeavour to have more girl orientated activities. One teacher suggested her friend coming in to teach them to do nails. Khaiah would enjoy this as she likes getting her nails done. She would be happy for the boys to do these activities with the girls or they could do the boxing then.

*The Future*

Khaiah wants to go into beauty, she plans to do a year of beauty at college and then get an apprenticeship. She does worry that beauty will not be successful. Although she wants to be a manager, she wants to be able to do the treatments and she worries that her tics will mean she will not be able to do this, or she would risk clients getting hurt. She wants a workplace that understands her needs and that she needs time off when she is stressed. Khaiah wants a job that pays well so she can live somewhere nice and support her future children or a partner. She says she would not take advantage of taking time off but that she

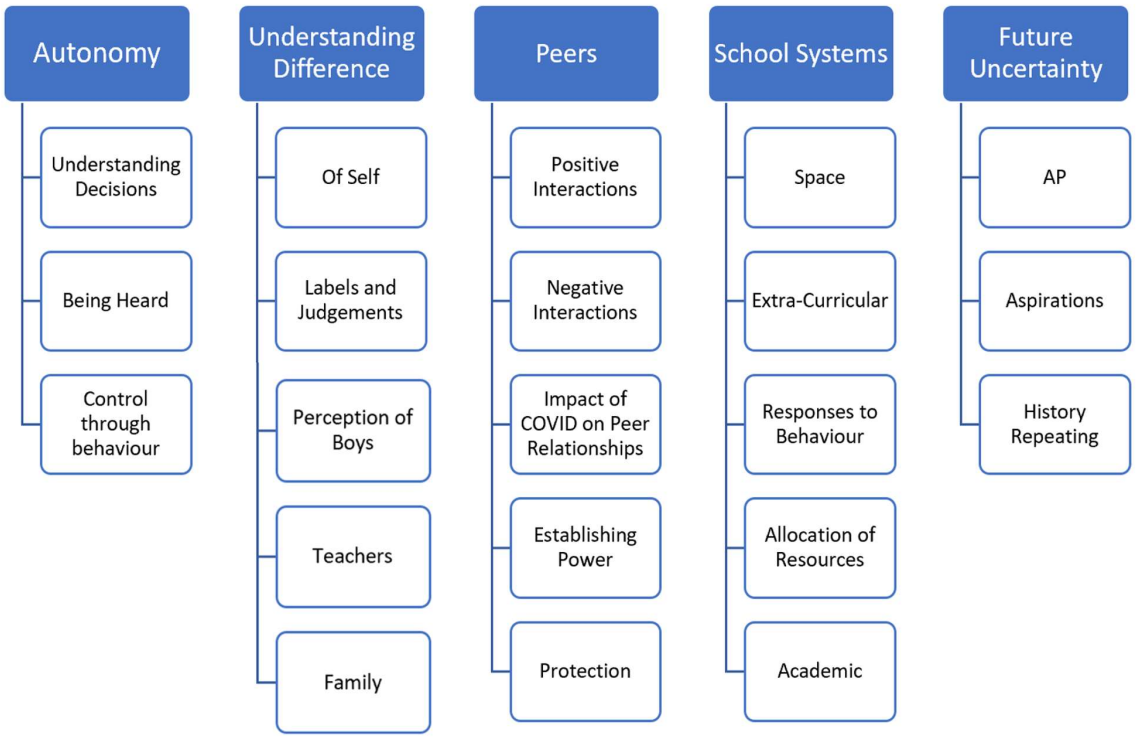
does need time off when her tics are bad, and she worries that this would lead to her losing her job.

### 4.3 The Identification of Shared Storylines and Narrative Themes

To fully explore the CYPs experiences of school belonging, the narratives were analysed according to thematic stanzas using the method outlined in the previous chapter. Figure 4 provides a Thematic Map of the narrative themes and sub themes identified in the CYPs storied narratives. The following sections will now explore the narrative themes and subthemes in more detail.

**Figure 4**

*Thematic Map*




### 4.4. Theme: Autonomy

Autonomy was a dominant storyline in all three narratives. There were moments for all three CYP where they felt choices were being made about or for them without consultation. Changes in school placement were described as decisions already made without the CYPs input, "Cherry Tree told her she did not have a choice" (Harlow, line 118).

Both Grace and Khaiah were informed about school placement changes in meetings; the young people come across as observers in the process. Khaiah felt "the decision to ask her to leave

was made by teachers who did not know her" (Khaiah, line 112). For Grace there was a meeting where "Grenoside said they wanted to do a managed move for 12 weeks to see if a new placement would work out" (Grace, lines 77-78).

Harlow further explored the power shown by her home school when it came to her educational placement; for her "this decision came down to money, that Cherry Tree did not want to pay for her to attend Endeavour" (Harlow, lines 118-119).

#### *4.4.1 Subtheme: Understanding Decisions*

An aspect of lacking autonomy for all three CYP was linked to not understanding the decisions that were being made in relation to their schooling. For all three students it was a lack of understanding around the movement to the AP, not understanding fully why things had not been successful in their mainstream placements, "She did not want to go or understand why she had been moved there" (Harlow, lines 111-112). For Khaiah having a successful behaviour report just prior to her exclusion caused confusion "the reasons for this are not clear to Khaiah, she felt that she had a successful behaviour report" (Khaiah, lines 109-110). Additionally, Grace had wanted it to work in her mainstream school which adds to her uncertainty round the decision, "Grace does not know why things did not work out at Grenoside, but she really wanted it to work there" (Grace, lines 70-71).

#### *4.4.2. Subtheme: Being Heard*

All three CYP expressed moments where they wanted to be heard or listened to during their educational journeys. For Khaiah and Harlow this starts with their mainstream primary and secondary schools understanding them. This lack of being heard was often linked to a failure of the school to provide support. For Harlow this included the exclusion from class she experienced in primary school, "Harlow wanted them to help her more, not just send her out. Harlow felt that this would mean that they cared and wanted to teach her" (Harlow, lines 24-25). Khaiah felt that this was a problem with her secondary school, "Khaiah felt that Silverfen and the headteacher never

tried to understand why she got distracted" (Khaiah, lines 100-101). With her primary school Khaiah felt they could have been more active in their support, "Khaiah wanted them [Lidgett] to try and understand her mood swings more and put more support in place" (Khaiah, lines 18-19).

Harlow is more explicit in her description of not being listened to in her secondary setting and this led to her not attempting to engage with her teachers, "Harlow felt that she could not talk to anyone at Cherry Tree because they did not listen to her" (lines 76-77). For Harlow this was even more of a challenge during moments of conflict with school and in the run up to her exclusion, "She wanted them to understand her more. She often felt that the teacher's side was listened to, but she was not" (lines 67-68). Additionally, Harlow felt that her mainstream primary and secondary school did not listen to her mother either, "Harlow's mum thought that there was something wrong with Harlow, but Mossdown just told her that Harlow was naughty" (Harlow, lines 26-27).

Harlow presents a different experience at Endeavour. She feels "that the teachers understand her more" (Harlow, line 122). Harlow goes on to explicitly state that the AP have listened to her ideas, "Endeavour have listened to Harlow and told her they would take it into consideration" (Harlow, lines 167-168). Grace supports Harlow's view of Endeavour treating her voice differently, "Grace finds the support at Endeavour different to her previous school . . . Grace can talk to the staff at Endeavour about anything" (Grace, lines 102-105).

#### *4.4.3 Subtheme: Control through Behaviour*

All three CYP expressed moments of physical reactions while at school; these were often linked to moments where the girls felt out of control. The behaviour is presented by the girls as something that controls them, rather than something they are in control of. Grace experienced this while at her secondary school, "She became the bad child with the "hot" temper that was always fighting and had an attitude. Grace does not know what caused the change" (Grace, lines 54-56).

Following her managed move Grace, experienced an escalation in this behaviour which eventually led to her permanent exclusion. Grace is worried about this happening again as she is

experiencing uncertainty at home, "recently she has been struggling with her behaviour again because her home life is tough at the moment." (Grace, lines 96-97).

Harlow describes her behaviour as something she is not in control of, "This anger means that Harlow can say things in the moment that she does not mean, or she can punch or kick things" (Harlow, lines91-93). For Harlow this came to the fore after a brief placement at Endeavour when the meeting about her return to Cherry Grove happened; "Harlow was quiet and did not misbehave, until her last day when she played up all day. On that day there was a meeting with Cherry Grove" (Harlow, lines 112-114). This decision was out of Harlow's control and as previously presented she was told she had no choice. This behaviour escalated on her return to Cherry Grove as "she did not want to be there" (Harlow, lines 117-118).

Khaiah describes her behaviour in her secondary school as a reaction to struggling with the academic work, "Khaiah's behaviour at the start of Year Nine was not good . . . Khaiah misbehaved because of her not understanding the work that was set" (Khaiah, lines 97-99).

**4.5 Theme: Understanding Difference**

This theme explores the girls' acceptance of self, alongside the acceptance of the girls that comes from others. In addition, it explores the use of labels by others on the girls and by the girls on others.

***4.5.1 Subtheme*: *Of Self***

All three students can reflect on their challenges in school and moments when they do not behave in the most appropriate way. Harlow reflects on displaying the same behaviour she does not like in her peers, "Although Harlow does say that she can play up when she gets distracted." Harlow, (lines 156-157). For Grace it is a recognition of her challenges with her temper, "Grace had a bad temper and it could go in seconds" (Grace, lines 22-23).

Khaiah does give a more balanced view on her behaviour than Grace and Harlow, "When she returned to school in Year Ten Khaiah was mainly calm but there were a few incidents as she found

the return to school stressful." (Khaiah, lines 77-78). Khaiah struggles following classroom expectations, "Khaiah's ADHD made it difficult for her to remain in a classroom and stay seated for a whole hour as she got distracted easily" (Khaiah, lines 99-100). Khaiah is open to the fact she has struggled to understand herself in the past and this makes it difficult to be understood by others; "Khaiah found it hard at Lidgett as no one understood her, and she did not understand herself." (Khaiah, lines 29-30).

Grace can reflect on the changes she has experienced in her behaviour but is unable to identify what has caused these changes,

> In Year seven Grace was a calm child who was trying to figure out where she was meant to go and which children, she should be friends with . . . Grace does not know what caused the change, but everything changed. (Grace, lines 49-56)

Grace has spent time reflecting on her friendships and is able to reflect on the impact they have on her behaviour, "[Grace] has since realised that they were just people at school she would be naughty with" (Grace, lines 59-60). Grace reflected on the positive impact a move to Endeavour may have, "it would be a fresh start for her" (Grace, lines 95-96). Both Harlow and Khaiah reflect on Endeavour being a more positive environment for them and related this to the smaller size of the setting, "[Harlow] still feels the smaller environment is better for her and that the teachers understand her more" Harlow, (lines 121-122). Khaiah preferred the smaller environment, "She prefers Endeavour as there are less students which for her means less stress as there are less people and less rumours for her to deal with" (Khaiah, lines 135-137).

#### *4.5.2 Subtheme: Labels and Judgements*

Harlow and Khaiah have a formal diagnosis which assigns labels and descriptions to their challenges. Khaiah uses these labels to define herself when asked;

> Khaiah has ADHD and this can make her do stupid things as she does not think before she acts but says her friends like this as it makes her thrill-seeking. Khaiah has Tourette's and this is worse when she is stressed, she has both verbal and physical tics. (Khaiah, lines 5-8)

Khaiah uses her diagnosis to help her understand the challenges she experiences, "Khaiah's ADHD made it difficult for her to remain in a classroom and stay seated for a whole hour as she got distracted easily in lessons" (Khaiah, 99-100). Harlow is accepting of her diagnosis and similar to Khaiah it appears to help her understanding of her behaviour, "Harlow is not bothered by having a diagnosis of ADHD as she knows she does struggle with somethings and this can lead to her becoming frustrated and angry" (Harlow, lines 91-92). Harlow highlights that getting diagnosed and changing her label from that of a "naughty" kid was challenging; "When Harlow was 13, she was diagnosed with ADHD, however Harlow remembers her mum having to push the school for the diagnosis. Harlow's mum attended weekly meetings at the school and kept telling them that something was not right" (Harlow, lines 83-88).

For both Harlow and Khaiah a lack of understanding from schools around behaviour and labels contributed to their challenges in belonging, "In both primary and secondary school Harlow recalls being told there was nothing wrong with her and felt that she was labelled the naughty kid" (Harlow, line 83). Khaiah reflects that the lack of understanding is an ongoing issue for her secondary school, "Khaiah thinks that the headteacher will not believe her ADHD diagnosis as Silverfen never tried to understand the mental health challenges that some students have" (Khaiah, lines 100-103).

Harlow used the label 'naughty' more than once in her story; she felt that she was assigned this label at primary school, "she felt they saw her as the naughty child" (Harlow, lines 24-25). Grace assigns herself a label connected to her behaviour;

> One of her brothers was a "bad" child who used to be naughty at home, but he was only excluded from Grenoside and went on to Endeavour. Grace does not feel like the bad child, but she was excluded from three schools. (Grace, lines 88-91)

Khaiah felt that her primary school wanted her to be normal, "they focused too much on wanting students to be normal and do the work, but Khaiah did not feel like a normal child" (Khaiah, lines 20-21). This label resurfaces when Khaiah is talking about her experiences at Endeavour, but from a different perspective; "Khaiah appreciates that it is normal to be different at Endeavour and this means that the other students do not judge others. When students do make judgements, she feels that they are questioned about this" (Khaiah, lines 126-128).

In addition to feeling judged on behaviour and SEN need Khaiah feels that she is judged on her appearance;

> Khaiah feels judged for the way she looks; people refer to her as prestige as she is a light skinned mixed race girl. . . Khaiah finds her looks mean people think she thinks she is better than them but once they get to know her, they see that she is easy to talk to and nice. (Khaiah, lines 9-12)

Harlow and Khaiah reflect on their judgements and acceptance of others at Endeavour in their stories; "[Khaiah] says it's important to listen to people's stories to understand why they are there" (Khaiah, lines 124-125).

> Harlow finds some of the other students obnoxious but understands that they all have their own needs, including anger issues. Harlow does not judge them as she gets angry a lot, but the behaviour of other students can still be distracting. (Harlow, lines 144-146)

Harlow reflects on being misjudged and this may support her openness to the differences other students display, "Most of the time Harlow does not care if other people judge her but when they assume that she is acting up, being tough or acting bad it does affect her because she is not a bad person" (Harlow, lines 9-11).

### *4.5.3 Subtheme: Perception of Boys*

Differences between genders in relation to behaviour were only raised during the girl's stories of the AP. For Harlow and Grace, the behaviour of the boys presents challenges in lessons; "The boys in Harlow's class can play around a lot and can be annoying. The girls will sit there doing their work while the boys are playing around and stabbing each other with pens." (Harlow, lines 152-153).

Grace reflects on the differences in behaviour, the description of the boys being little terrors was delivered with humour;

> There are 3 other girls in Grace's class and 5 boys. Grace notices a difference between how the girls and boys behave. Some of the girls have matured already when Grace compares them to the boys. The boys in Grace's class jump around and play fight, they are little terrors. (Grace, lines 110-113)

### *4.5.4 Subtheme: Teachers*

All three girls talk more about positive experiences with teachers during their school journeys than negative relationships. Grace had a more positive primary experience that the other two CYP and had a strong connection with a teacher there;

> Grace's favourite year at Mayfield was Year Four where Miss Spencer was her teacher. Miss Spencer was an anger management teacher and a counsellor at the same time. . . Miss Spencer built a bond with Grace through taking her out of lessons and doing one on one work with her. . . In Year Five students were given jobs in the school. Miss Spencer helped Grace get three jobs. . .. Grace's bond with Miss Spencer lasted until she left in Year Six. (Grace, lines 21-32)

Khaiah can remember a positive teacher relationship at primary;

> Khaiah's Year 5 teacher, Miss Murphy, was the best teacher she had a Lidgett and Khaiah felt supported by her. Miss Murphy tried to work with her and understand her. Khaiah does not

> remember much more about Miss Murphy other than the fact she was fun. (Khaiah, lines 23-26)

She had a strong bond with the science teacher at secondary; "Khaiah's science teacher was really good at explaining things. Khaiah was often ahead in these lessons and this meant her teacher would let her take breaks when she needed them" (Khaiah, lines 82-84).

Although Harlow struggled to remember any positive teacher relationships from her primary school, she had two positive experiences with staff at her secondary school which she reflected on. First was the relationship with her music teacher. "Harlow felt that the music teacher checked that she was alright" (Harlow, line 44). Harlow had a positive relationship with a member of office staff;

> She did have a positive relationship with one member of office staff who protected her from isolation. If Harlow felt she had been excluded for 'a stupid reason' she was able to stay in the office with this member of staff. (Harlow, lines 77-79)

Grace has a more blanket approach to her relationships with teachers at her mainstream secondary school. "[Grace] had a problem with teachers, she did not like them or even want to talk to them" (Grace, lines 60-61). Harlow reflects on a more specific challenging relationship at her mainstream secondary school; "Harlow remembers having more challenges in drama, she felt that the teacher 'bugged' her as she did not complete her homework" (Harlow, lines 50-51).

Khaiah had a more complex relationship with a teacher in her secondary school which may have led to lack of trust in teachers;

> Khaiah had a good relationship with a teacher called Miss Hayes, who was helping her get assessed for ADHD and Tourette's. Miss Hayes created a support plan for Khaiah which she could give to her other teachers. However, when things got hard for Khaiah and in the run up to her exclusion she no longer felt supported by Miss Hayes. This increased Khaiah's stress and she begun to feel that the support she had been offered previously was not genuine. (Khaiah, lines 89-94)

Although all three girls reflect on positive teacher experiences at Endeavour, Harlow has the most strongly described connection, where there is a display of trust that Harlow has not experienced before;

> Harlow has built a positive relationship with one teacher at Endeavour. Harlow says that he really understands her and has a warm heart. Every morning this teacher gives Harlow his watch, she then wears it all day and then returns it. Harlow believes he does this because he trusts her, and she trusts him. Harlow has not been able to trust teachers before. (Harlow, lines 129-132)

Khaiah and Grace describe more general positive experiences with the teachers at Endeavour, "Khaiah likes the teachers at Endeavour but they can frustrate her at times. The staff at Endeavour do not only say they care about Khaiah, but they actually show it" (Khaiah, lines 116-118).

> Grace likes the teachers at Endeavour, she finds them down to earth and likes that they know when the students are playing with them and this means they know when to stop joking. Grace finds the lessons fun, but this does depend on the teacher. (Grace, lines 100-102)

#### *4.5.6 Subtheme: Family*

Acceptance and understanding from family came across as important for Harlow and Grace. Harlow positions her mother as her advocate throughout her educational journey, "Harlow remembers her mum having to push the school [Cherry Grove] for a diagnosis. Harlow's mum attended weekly meetings at the school and kept telling them that something was not right" (Harlow, lines 86-88). This search for more understanding from Harlow's mother started when Harlow was at primary school, "Harlow's mum thought that there was something wrong with Harlow, but Mossdown just told her that Harlow was naughty" (Harlow, lines 26-27). Harlow highlights her mother's concerns for her future, "Harlow was aware that her mum was worried that

she was going to come out with no GCSE and therefore would not be able to do anything with her life" (Harlow, lines 61-63).

Grace positions her mother and her as a team through their joint understanding of Grace's challenges, "Grace and her mum both recognise that when she is around big groups of people, she changes her behaviour" (Grace, lines 61-62). Grace has used conversations with her mother to reflect on her experiences, "she has talked with her mum about how different her life would be if she was still there, even though Grace says that she did not have a positive journey while she was there" (Grace, lines 71-73). The conversations with her mother provide hope for Grace "Grace was relieved to go to Endeavour as her and her mum felt like it would be a fresh start for her" (Grace, lines 95-96).

**4.6 Theme: Peers**

Peers form an important part of the educational journey of all three CYP.

***4.6.1 Subtheme: Positive Interactions***

Harlow was clear in explaining what was important to her within her friendships with others and this is the inclusion of humour; "Harlow found her peer group at Cherry Grove weird and funny. This peer group gave Harlow an overall good feeling and they used to entertain each other by telling jokes and annoying the teachers" (Harlow, lines 96-98).

> Harlow has a good relationship with two of the girls but sees only one as being a long-lasting friendship. She says it's because they just 'muck' around and that it's funny. They annoy each other or team up to annoy the teachers. (Harlow, lines 146-149)

Grace is more reserved about her friendships; she describes herself as "always having a small social circle" (Grace, line 4). She has one long standing friendship which she values highly;

> Grace's strongest friendship developed from a small circle of three friends she had at Mayfield Primary. One of these girls, Sarah, she still speaks to now, they have known each other since they were babies and as well as attending Mayfield together, they went to the

> same secondary school. . . Grace says that they have never really had time apart and they are still close now. (Grace, lines 35-41)

Khaiah has had a varied experience around interactions with her peers. Acceptance by her peers comes across as being important in her school experience, however these positive interactions are often linked to appearance, "Towards the end of Year Seven the other students started getting to know Khaiah and liked her. Khaiah felt that many of these girls were friends with her because she was the only light skinned girl in her year" (Khaiah, lines 55-57).

Khaiah developed more resilient friendships in Year 9;

> The summer before Khaiah went into Year Nine was a turning point for her, she made good friends over the six-week school holidays and this led to her making a best friend in Year Nine. Although they have had problems, they have got through them. (Khaiah, lines 67-69)

#### *4.6.2 Subtheme: Negative Interactions*

All three girls have been involved in negative interactions with peers that have led to them getting into trouble at school. For Harlow this was a round communication and delivery of a piece of work;

> Harlow had to meet these students at lunch and break to practise, but they kept changing days and as she did not have their numbers, she did not know what days they were practicing. The other students told the teacher that Harlow did not attend. (Harlow, lines 52-55)

Khaiah felt that her peers spoke to teachers about her negatively;

> At Lidgett, Khaiah found that the other children were pretending to be good when the teacher was present. When the teacher was not around Khaiah found these other children rude and mean. The other children used to tell the teacher on Khaiah. (Khaiah, lines 35-37)

Harlow "does not speak to some of those friends" (Harlow, lines 101-102) from secondary anymore, with whom she had originally described good relationships with. Grace has seen her view of her secondary friendship change on reflection;

> At this time if Grace did not want to go to a lesson she would truant with other people or climb out of the school gates and go home. Grace thought these people where her friends but has since realised that they were just people at school she would be naughty with. (Grace, lines 57-49)

Khaiah experienced similar interactions and changes in friendships during her time in secondary school. She "found that other students did change towards her in Year Eight and she found this really hard. She did not have any close friends" (Khaiah, lines 61-62). Khaiah experienced more challenging interactions with peers throughout her educational journey' "Khaiah was bullied at Lidgett and feels that Lidgett did not know how to deal with bullies" (Khaiah, lines 17-18). She felt that later these students changed their opinions towards her; "Khaiah found that once she left Lidgett people's opinions of her figure changed and the boys from her primary school wanted to get in touch with her" (Khaiah, lines 45-48).

#### *4.6.3 Subtheme: Impact of COVID on Peer Relationships*

Both Grace and Harlow describe how COVID has impacted their interactions with peers while at the AP, "Grace has found that COVID has impacted her experiences with peers at the AP, she has only mixed with her class but from what she has heard she believes the rest of the students are alright." (Grace, lines 113-115).

> When Harlow started at Endeavour last year all the years were able to mix in one room at break and lunch but now, they must stay upstairs in their classrooms for break and they are only allowed downstairs at lunch. Because of COVID they now must sit with their year group, but they mostly end up mixing anyway. (Harlow, lines 138-141)

#### *4.6.4 Subtheme: Establishing Power*

All three girls have experienced negative influences on their behaviour during interactions with peers. For Khaiah this was trying to regain control in a situation where she had been bullied. "In Year Six Khaiah beat the girl up who bullied her and then things changed as everyone started wanting to be her friend" (Khaiah, lines 44-45).

During Grace's time on her managed move she had a physical altercation with another student which lead to her permanent exclusion; "on the second day she had a problem with another student. This led to a fight on the third day and then she was permanently excluded from Fulwood Academy" (Grace, lines 83-85).

Harlow had physical reactions toward male peers' behaviour while at primary, "she would throw their stationery out of the window and then at break they would see it all outside" (Harlow, lines 22-23). Harlow describes an incident with male peers at Endeavour;

> Harlow had one incident at Endeavour where they would not let her out of a classroom even though the boys had been the ones causing the trouble. This led to Harlow getting angry and breaking a plug socket when she kicked it. (Harlow, lines 159-161)

#### **4.6.5 Subtheme: Protection**

Both Grace and Khaiah reflected on the positive impact of having a family member at their secondary school. This was expressed in the security and protection this provided during their first year. For Grace this reduced her concern around the change, "Part of the reason Grace did not mind it is because her brother already went there and her friends from primary school would be going there. This meant that Grace would not be on her own or the only new person there" (Grace, lines 46-48).

For Khaiah it was around protection from the bullying she had previously experienced, "She was scared about starting there but her older sister went to Silverfen, so she felt protected. When

Khaiah was bullied her sister and her friends protected her and threatened the older girl who was bullying her" (Khaiah, lines 53-55).

However, Khaiah's sister was in her final year and this led to a concern around the impact this would have on Khaiah's Year 8 experience, "Khaiah was worried that things would change in Year Eight as her sister left the school, so she lost her protection." (Khaiah, lines 60-61).

**4.7 Theme: School Systems**

This theme looks at the girls' experiences in schools and the systems they have in place.

***4.7.1 Subtheme: Gender and Allocation of Resources***

Different responses by the school setting attributed to gender were only raised during the girls' stories of the AP. Harlow found the behaviour differences between boys and girls affected the support that she can access in lessons. This is connected to the boys' need for support with their behaviour rather than them requesting academic help;

> This means that the help can be focused more on the boys as their problems are with their behaviour and they need someone by them to stop the outbursts they have. This sometimes means Harlow does not always get the help she needs with her work. (Harlow, lines 154-156)

Khaiah experiences more male domination at the AP due to the poor attendance of the other girls in her class and being taught by male teachers;

> Khaiah's class is mainly boys; although there are three other girls in her class they do not attend very often. This means the only other female Khaiah sees some days is a teacher. Khaiah says that this limits the choice of activities as if the teacher is male, they will choose the activities the boys want to do. (Khaiah, lines 143-146)

Khaiah suggests increasing the type of activities to include more female orientated activities, however she does not exclude the boys from being included in these activities;

> Khaiah would like Endeavour to have more girl orientated activities. One teacher suggested her friend coming in to teach them to do nails. Khaiah would enjoy this as she likes getting her nails done. She would be happy for the boys to do these activities with the girls or they could do the boxing then. (Khaiah, lines 151-154)

***4.7.2 Subtheme: Space***

The only school building that is described by all three girls is their primary school. Khaiah looks at the challenges she had with her primary school building, "half the building was closed off and it was renovated after she left" (Khaiah, lines 15-16). Grace had a more descriptive memory of her primary school;

> Grace remembers Mayfield having blue gates with a walkway, surrounded by flowers and benches. This walkway lead to the school reception. After the reception there was another gate to the playground and beyond this gate a two-storey school could be seen in a big playground. Grace remembers going to the little park behind the school for PE sometimes. (Grace, lines 15-18)

Harlow provides detail to her description of her primary, but in addition limits the importance of the school building, explaining that the building does not change how the school is;

> Harlow recalls the school as being big and old. It was big enough that if you were new, you could get lost there and Harlow does not remember how to get to the library at the top of the building. Harlow did not mind that the building was old, because it is still a school and the building does not change that. (Harlow, lines 15-18)

Within Harlow's narrative she often describes space in school through ownership, she has "her seat" in the social area at Endeavour and at secondary her and her friends claimed an area of the outside space as theirs;

> They had a spot in school and if anyone else sat there they had to move. This spot was in the playground on a huge flight of steps. Originally their spot had been hiding behind a building,

> but they were caught there so moved to being sat by a tree and then they decided to steal the steps. (Harlow, lines 98-101)

Khaiah is the only one to describe the building at Endeavour, "The building Endeavour is in can feel like a prison to Khaiah at times, but she still likes it." (Khaiah, line 115).

***4.7.3 Subtheme: Extra-curricular Activities***

All three girls reflect on experiences out of the classroom. Harlow's most positive memory from primary comes from School Journey. This was linked to experiences with peers as well as the activities;

> One positive memory Harlow has from Mossdown is School Journey. Harlow cannot remember where they went but that it was with all the Year Six students from the school. They stayed over for a couple of days and nights, and at night Harlow and other students went out with their torches, playing around and telling stories. Harlow enjoyed the activities they did during the day. (Harlow, lines 30-34)

Grace reflects on primary school trips as an opportunity to learn more;

> Grace remembers a few school trips while she was at Mayfield, they were positive memories for her. She remembers repeat trips to one history museum. Grace loves history and on these visits, she got to learn more about things she did not already know about. (Grace, lines 10-13)

For Grace time out of the classroom in primary was an opportunity to build a relationship with a teacher who was supporting her. "Miss Spencer tried to get to know Grace. Grace and Miss Spencer would do baking in the large kitchen at Mayfield" (Grace, lines 25-26). Through this relationship Grace was able to take on extra responsibility at Mayfield; "At lunch Grace would water the flowers by the walkway and Grace missed some lessons to be in the nursery with the little kids and help them with what they needed to do" (Grace, lines 29-31).

> Harlow reflects on one extracurricular trip at her secondary school;
>
> Harlow went on a few school trips at Cherry Grove but only remembers one. Harlow went to an Art Museum instead of attending Sports Day. Harlow found the museum weird and remembers not being allowed into certain parts of the museum because of the pictures there. (Harlow, lines 105-108)

Both Harlow and Khaiah explore the opportunities that Endeavour must extend their extra-curricular opportunities; "Khaiah feels that there is time to do more activities as they currently park sessions and play football. Endeavour have talked about replacing these with boxing once the gym reopens" (Khaiah, lines 148-150).

> At Endeavour Harlow has been to a post-16 college and been taken to McDonald's as a reward for good behaviour. In future Harlow would like Endeavour to do more school trips. Harlow has suggested going to London Dungeon, because it fits in with what they have been covering in History and English. (Harlow, lines 164-165)

#### *4.7.4 Subtheme: Responses to Behaviour*

All three girls describe negative responses to their behaviour prior to attending Endeavour. Harlow was the only student to reflect on behaviour management in her primary, she "was often kicked out of class and would then walk around the school" (Harlow, lines 20-21). Both Harlow and Grace describe their experiences of isolation in their secondary setting, they described the choice as being to put them into isolation or send them home;

> Harlow felt the teachers at Cherry Grove were worse than the ones at Mossdown, as they would exclude her from class and when she refused to go into isolation, they would send her home. . . Harlow felt that she was isolated a lot while her peers continued to go to lessons. One woman oversaw isolation, but she often left, and it would be the on-call staff who would take over from her. (Harlow, lines 63-74)

> Grace felt that Grenoside did not deal with her behaviour well as they were quite strict, and they would just send Grace home or put her in isolation. Isolation was a tiny room with 9 tables and 9 chairs, when Grace was isolated, she had to stay in this room all day doing work, the only break she got was lunch. Being in isolation meant that Grace had to stay for an hour after school. (Grace, lines 64-68)

Harlow and Grace both reflect on the change in behaviour management at Endeavour and the space they are given to self-regulate and take ownership of their behaviour: "Harlow feels Endeavour care more about her, they do not just send her out but try to keep her in the classroom. If she has a problem, they let her leave the classroom to calm down" (Harlow, lines 122-124)

> Grace likes the fact that Endeavour know how to calm her down when she is in an angry mood, they know how to deal with the situation. They give Grace time to sit without surrounding her. Grace likes this time and space. (Grace, lines 97-100)

#### *4.7.5 Subtheme: Academic*

All three girls describe positive academic experiences in their secondary school and subjects they feel passionate about, "Grace enjoyed Year Seven, especially science and history which are her favourite subjects" (Grace, lines 48-49).

> When she went to see it before starting, she saw that they had a focus on performing arts including music and drama. Harlow enjoys performing arts, she especially loves playing music and singing. Harlow finds drama calming and finds that it gives her chance to express herself. (Harlow, lines 37-40)

> Khaiah's favourite subject was science, especially physics, as she liked the practical element. Khaiah's science teacher was good at explaining things. . . Khaiah was always bottom in her classes at Silverfen but in science she was at the top of her set. (Khaiah, lines 81-86)

Both Harlow and Khaiah express moments where they had choices. For both this was connected to GCSE subject selections. Harlow chose to do music and drama but for Khaiah this

moment had more power, "She had picked subjects she was interested in and this meant she felt more in control. . .she chose Health and Social Care, Hospitality and Catering, Art and Photography" (Khaiah, lines 71-73). However, Khaiah is currently unable to continue with these at Endeavour: "Khaiah is missing Food Technology though, but Endeavour does not have a kitchen. Khaiah hopes that once COVID is over they could use the kitchen at her old school so she can continue with this." (Khaiah, lines 118-120).

Harlow describes negative academic experiences while in secondary school: "Harlow did very little in her books at Cherry Grove and was getting 1s and 2s in her subjects. Harlow does not remember any academic support at Cherry Grove." (Harlow, lines 60-61).

Khaiah reflects on the change to her academic experience at Endeavour, "One of the reasons she likes it at Endeavour is that she is doing well in all her classes" (Khaiah, lines 115-116). Harlow believes that that Endeavour will lead to better outcomes, "Harlow's grades have improved, and she is on a 4 in English and a 5 in Citizenship. With these better grades Harlow hopes she will get better GCSEs." (Harlow, lines 124-126).

**4.8 Theme: Future Uncertainty**

All three CYP have moments of uncertainty in their future. Starting with the AP and then their next steps. Grace and Harlow are still making choices around future college courses, whereas Khaiah has already made those choices. However, the uncertainty is linked to how they will be treated in their next settings and their chances of success.

***4.8.1 Subtheme: AP***

For Khaiah and Grace this uncertainty starts at the AP and is linked to the length of their placements;

> Khaiah has been at Endeavour for nearly six weeks, which was the original length of her placement. However, it has been decided to extend her stay. She feels like she belongs at Endeavour and worries about returning to Silverfen. . . Khaiah is concerned that with the

> lack of support she received at Silverfen her behaviour will not continue to improve. (Khaiah, lines 134-140)

For Grace she is conflicted as she wants to remain at the AP, but she is unsure to the impact that this will have on her results, "Grace wants to stay at Endeavour to do her GCSEs. However, she is unsure as to whether her results will be better than those, she would have got at Grenoside" (Grace, lines 118-119). For Grace she is worried that Endeavour may not push her enough compared to her previous school, "Endeavour push, but it is only until a certain point and then they slowly start to give up" (Grace, lines 120-122).

Harlow's placement is more stable and she knows she will be staying at Endeavour to complete her GCSEs; this seems to have offered her more confidence in her outcomes, "Because of Endeavour, Harlow feels like she has more of a chance of getting a job and getting into college" (Harlow, lines 171-172).

#### *4.8.2 Subtheme: Aspirations*

All three girls are approaching a decision-making moment for their future education, all three expressed wanting to stay in education, however the clarity around their aspirations varies. Grace and Harlow both expressed exploring options open to them but are currently unsure what choices to make; "Harlow is unsure what college to go to study performing arts, as she is not sure what's best for her." (Harlow, lines 172-173). Grace's choice is around exploring what subject would be best,

> Grace wants to get her GCSEs and then go on to college and university. Grace is trying to decide between two options. Grace is interested in working with children . . . and she is interested in a career in beauty. (Grace, lines 125-127)

Khaiah has more clarity in her future career choices and the steps she needs to take to get there, "Khaiah wants to go into beauty, she plans to do a year of beauty at college and then get an apprenticeship." (Khaiah, lines 157-158). Khaiah has thought beyond college, "Khaiah wants a job

that pays well so she can live somewhere nice and support her future children or a partner" (Khaiah, lines 162-163).

#### *4.8.3 History Repeating*

All three girls are concerned that the lack of support they have experienced so far will continue and this leads to a concern around their ability to succeed in the future, "Harlow is worried that she will get kicked out of college as it is a mainstream setting. . . Harlow is worried that she will not get the support she needs." (Harlow, lines 179-183). Khaiah considers the challenges that her Tourette's would present to her aspiration;

> [Khaiah] does worry that beauty will not be successful. Although she wants to be a manager, she wants to be able to do the treatments and she worries that her ticks will mean she will not be able to do this. (Khaiah, lines 158-165)

Harlow reflects on the lack of understanding from others and the impact this could have, "Harlow tells people if she finds something wrong or something annoys her, and she is concerned that teachers might take this the wrong way" (Harlow 180-182). Understanding from the workplace is something that Khaiah is concerned about, "she wants a workplace that understands her needs . . . she does need time off when her tics are bad, and she worries that this would lead to her losing her job" (Khaiah, lines 160-165).

Both Harlow and Grace position concerns around succeeding in their next steps as behaviour concerns, "Harlow is worried that she cannot help her behaviour and the things she does" (Harlow, lines 179-180). Grace shows an awareness of her challenges along with a reflection on how she wants to counter this.

> Grace is worried that she will let herself down and not get what she wants out of the future. She says this will happen if she keeps getting into trouble through doing the wrong things. Grace is going to try and keep her head down and do what she needs to do to make sure this does not happen. (Grace, lines 127-131)

**4.9 Summary of Findings**

This chapter presents the storied narratives of the three CYP along with the shared narrative themes that will support an in-depth exploration of the RQs posed. These findings suggest that the CYP have experienced some shared experiences and emotions when it comes to their educational journey. The most dominant theme in the three narratives was around a lack of autonomy in their exclusion experiences and a sense of uncertainty related to the future. Relationships with teachers and peers dominated more of the narratives than relationships with family and home, suggesting these are more powerful in terms of their educational experiences. Labels linked to both behaviour and SEN diagnosis created a powerful theme when exploring the challenges, the participants had experienced in accessing support and understanding. All three CYP had clear reflections on their challenges in education and the impact these have had. These findings will be explored in more detail in Chapter 5 and this includes interpretation of the individual storied narratives and the shared narrative themes in relation to the RQs and theory presented in Chapters 1 and 2.

# 5. Discussion

## 5.1 Introduction

This chapter will critically discuss the research findings in relation to the central aim of the study and the three RQs. It will start by exploring the link between the findings, theory, and previous research for each RQ. The research with then be critiqued as well as exploring the impact of the COVID pandemic on the study and findings. The role of the research will be reflected on and finally the impact for EPs and APs will be explored.

## 5.2 Aims of the Current Study

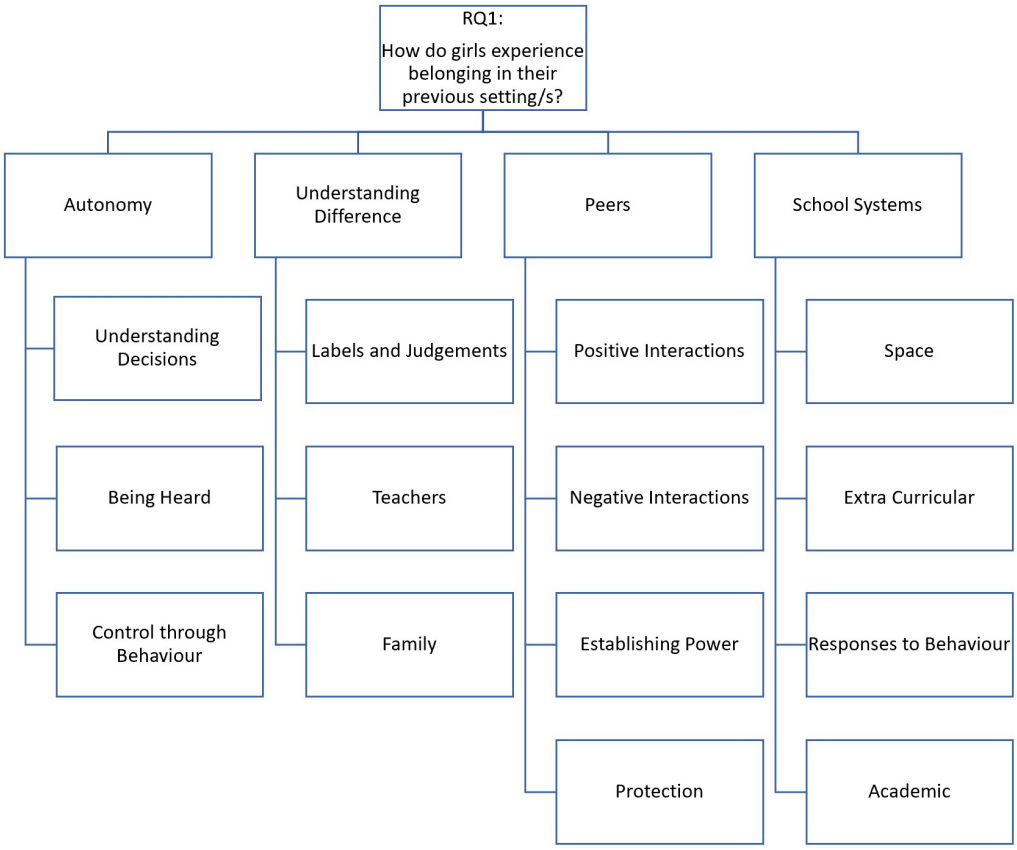
This study's central aim was to explore the stories excluded girls tell about belonging in relation to previous educational settings, APs, and their hopes for the future through their own narrative. Narrative thematic analysis was then used to identify any shared themes. In some cases, the themes identified in Chapter 4 link to more than one RQ, so thematic maps have been developed for each RQ.

### *5.2.1 RQ1: How do girls experience belonging in their previous setting/s?*

The girls had variable experiences in their previous settings, with Grace being the only one to have a positive primary experience. However, within all three narratives of previous school experiences the girls discuss moments of belonging and not belonging; no experience seems to solely be one or the other.

**Figure 5**

*RQ1 Thematic Map*




**5.2.1.1 Autonomy**. All three girls reflect on their lack of autonomy in their previous settings, especially linked to the decisions around AP placements. These were presented as actions being done to them rather than the girls taking an active role in the outcome. Previous research highlights that being part of the process and person-centred planning increased school belonging, suggesting that in their previous settings the girls' school belonging was reduced (Cockerill, 2019; Hamilton & Morgan, 2018). Osterman (2000) links autonomy to an individual's sense of agency; for these students it would be the perception of the amount of choice in these situations. Alongside not feeling part of the decision-making process the girls raised that they did not understand why the decisions had been made and what had gone wrong in their mainstream settings, even expressing experiencing success prior to the change in placement. Previous research suggests that where students experiencing managed moves had a lack of clarity around the decision, this decreased

belonging and increased anxiety, which can continue into future settings (Craggs & Kelly, 2018). Secondary students in PRUs reported a lack of understanding around their referral to the PRU (Jalali & Morgan, 2018). A lack of clarity can lead to negative feelings and be a barrier to success (Hart 2013; Michael & Frederickson, 2013). Therefore, at the point of transition to the APs, all three girls experienced a lack of belonging, as their lack of input into the decision making process could have created alienation which in turn could have been heightened by the lack of understanding around why these decisions had been made.

Khaiah and Grace did not understand the reasons behind their lack of success in mainstream settings. This is consistent with previous research which suggested that where CYP felt that there was a lack of clarity around expectations it led to negative emotions and a barrier to successful relationships with staff (Hart 2013; Michael & Frederickson, 2013). Where there was clarity around the implementation of sanctions it was an enabler to a successful placement (Cockerill, 2019; Hart, 2013; Michael & Frederickson, 2013). Bradley (2017) found that excluded girls want to understand why they are positioned as 'other' in their mainstream settings; without this dialogue they are unable to make sense of their experiences. A lack of clear boundaries, expectations and consequences means that the need for safety on Maslow's hierarchy is not being met, which therefore limits the sense of belonging (Solomon & Thomas, 2013).

The CYP felt that their previous settings did not listen to them through not providing them with the support they needed, this occurred in both their primary and secondary mainstream settings. Previous research supports this with a lack of support and being heard leading to a barrier in creating positive relationships (Michael & Frederickson, 2013). Where students perceive school to be an uncaring environment, it increases their alienation and increases the risk of dropping out (Osterman, 2000). Craggs and Kelly (2018) found that where support was denied it reduced the feeling of belonging for students. Cockerill (2019) found that students reported the ability or willingness of the teachers in the mainstream setting to respond to their needs was variable. Both Harlow and Khaiah explicitly state a desire for more support in their mainstream settings. Khaiah

found struggling with the academic work in her mainstream setting directly impacted her behaviour. For Harlow she felt that neither her primary nor secondary listened to her mother who was advocating on her behalf. In the previous research where relationships between the setting and home were positive it be a protective factor (Cockerill, 2019; Hart, 2013). On Maslow's hierarchy of needs a lack of communication and engagement with parents or carers would lead to the need for love and belonging not being met (Solomon & Thomas, 2013).

**5.2.1.2 Understanding Difference.** Relationships with teachers were variable in the participants' mainstream settings. All three girls discussed positive teacher relationships; Grace described a supportive relationship in her primary; a teacher that took time out to support her and get to know her, alongside creating new opportunities for her to engage with the school. Khaiah had positive teacher relationships in all her settings and Harlow only had positive relationships in her secondary setting. For all three the support was described in terms of being understood. For Grace this may explain the positive primary experience as she had a teacher who was able to support her on a one to one level and provide emotional support (Michael & Frederickson, 2013). Shaw (2019) found relationships between teachers and pupils were seen to gain more importance within the older year groups. In addition, the motivation of girls can be influenced by teacher support to a greater extent than males, and they are more likely to attribute success or failure to the extent of teacher support (Goodenow, 1993). The CYP needed these relationships to be reciprocal and the interactions to be mutual (Shaw, 2019). For Harlow and Khaiah, positive teacher relationships did not lead to successful secondary experiences. One of the differences between primary and secondary schools is the change in teaching styles; rather than having one teacher for most subjects students can have a different teacher for every subject. This may present a barrier in building teacher student relationships (Solomon & Thomas, 2013). Wise and Upton (1998) found that teacher workloads and differing demands on their time in mainstream settings presented challenges in developing the more personal and relationship orientated needs of pupils who are finding

mainstream education a challenging environment. This suggests that a higher level of teacher engagement is needed than that provided in one subject to support the development of belonging.

All three girls discussed challenging teacher relationships in primary and secondary; for Grace and Harlow these were more generic responses about not liking teachers or feeling alienated by them. However, for Khaiah the experience was more reactive as she felt her trust in the teacher misplaced. Previous research shows that students who experienced a greater sense of acceptance by teachers were more likely to be interested in and enjoy their classes and have higher expectations of success alongside increased self-regulation as well as self-esteem. (Osterman, 2000). The quality of student-teacher relationships is significantly associated with students' sense of autonomy, personal control, and active engagement in school; where these relationships are poor it can lead to alienation from school (Goodenow, 1993; Osterman, 2000).

Labels emerged as a theme within this study; there was limited exploration on this in the literature around school belonging in Chapter 2, however this is explored in Critical Educational Psychology theory. Both Khaiah and Harlow have SEN diagnoses that lead to labels been given; both felt previous settings had not responded to these needs. The ability or willingness of the teachers in the mainstream setting to respond to these needs was seen as variable by the CYP; where there is support and a willingness of schools to include students with SEN belonging is increased (Cockerill, 2019). Lauchlan and Boyle (2007) highlight that labels can lead to generalised strategies that can prevent teachers from considering the individual needs of the CYP. It can lead to grouping children with similar labels together and not addressing their individual difficulties (Lauchlan & Boyle, 2007). This may explain why the girls in this study feel their needs were not being met. The potential negative impacts of labelling SEN are wide ranging and include: bullying, a focus on within-child deficits to the exclusion of other and lowered expectations about what a 'labelled' child can achieve (Lauchlan & Boyle, 2007). However, for both Khaiah and Harlow they have actively sought diagnosis and use these labels to explain their behaviour. Lauchlan and Boyle acknowledge that some people seek a label to attach to their difficulties, because it provides an explanation for the 'problem'. It

maybe for these students that a label linked to SEN is more comfortable than the label linked to behaviour or not being normal.

All three students provide negative labels for themselves. For Harlow and Khaiah these labels seem to have developed from the school labelling them; Grace does not attribute her label to a setting. These labels can often become self-fulfilling, with students using the labels when talking about themselves and creating a negative self-image (Cefai & Cooper, 2010). CYP are particularly vulnerable to creating a negative self-image and low self-esteem during adolescence and through labelling them it can result in them disengaging from the system (Cefai & Cooper, 2010). Goodley and Billington (2017) highlight that those working with CYP need to be aware of the descriptions that are constructed to describe them, as these can impact on the constructs the CYP create for themselves. When students are reintegrating to mainstream settings, they have found previous labels problematic as they create a focus on past challenges, therefore where labels were avoided it enabled them to approach reintegration as a second chance (Atkinson & Rowley, 2019). These negative labels are likely to limit the belonging of the girls in their mainstream settings as they are not labels, they have chosen to describe themselves, and these terms have then been used to justify their exclusion from school communities (Corcoran, 2014).

Within all the narratives across settings the girls did reference family, especially as a form of support. Harlow discusses her mother advocating for her in her mainstream settings, Grace and Harlow briefly reflect on conversations with their mothers and both Khaiah and Grace see the presence of a sibling in their secondary school as protective. Both Khaiah and Grace briefly mention challenges in their home life. There is a sense that the girls have support and in other research where there was a relationship between home and school it was viewed as a positive and protective factor that supported a shared understanding of their needs (Cockerill, 2019; Hamilton & Morgan, 2018; Hart, 2013; Nind et al., 2012). Students viewed family as being able to support belonging at the AP through encouraging attendance (Michael & Frederickson, 2013). Communication between home and school was linked to belonging on Maslow's hierarchy of needs as well (Solomon &

Thomas, 2013). In Atkinson and Rowley (2019) they found that where students had support and encouragement from their family it aided their connection to school, but it was not seen as important as peers. The limited reflection on family by the girls may be due to the adolescence stage of development were CYP spend more time with peers than adults and concerns around peer rejection are more prevalent (Allen et al., 2018; Banyard, 2015). It is suggested that in future research this is explored further.

**5.2.1.3 Peers.** All three CYP report negative interactions with peers in their mainstream settings. For Khaiah it is in response to being bullied, for Harlow it is related to being excluded from group projects and for Grace physical reactions to her peers ultimately led to her exclusion from her managed move placement. Nind et al (2012) found that prior to an AP placement girls had histories of communicating through physical and verbal behaviours which lead to their exclusion from mainstream settings. Unsupportive peers lead to stress and social anxiety and ultimately peer rejection can be connected to anti-social behaviour (Allen et al., 2018; Osterman, 2000). Khaiah describes being bullied in both her primary and secondary settings; this creates a lack of safety for her in these school placements. Feeling safe at school is seen as an important feature of school belonging (Allen et al., 2016). Safety is the first need on Maslow's hierarchy and if this is not met the girls would be unable to achieve belonging (Solomon & Thomas, 2013). Where CYP experience challenging relationships with peers it can lead to a lack of belonging; they are looking for acceptance, connections, and support from their peers (Allen et al., 2018; Osterman, 2000).

Grace and Khaiah expressed the importance of already knowing people in their secondary settings at the point of transition as being important to create reassurance and safety. This was a theme within previous studies but related to when exclusions and managed moves occurred. Having existing friends in a new educational setting increased belonging through increased feelings of safety, reassurance, and reduced anxiety (Cockerill, 2019; Craggs & Kelly, 2018; Michael & Frederickson, 2013). However, for both students this was an older sibling who then left the setting;

for Khaiah when her older sister left the setting this reignited challenges within her own peer group and reduced the sense of belonging, she originally experienced.

Grace found that her peers influenced her anti-social behaviour in her secondary setting. This is supported in historical research, where girls who are excluded from school who have a pattern of truanting with peers find it challenging to break this pattern (Lloyd & O'Regan, 1999). During adolescence CYP may want to conform to the group to feel that they belong, and this group membership can have a positive or negative influence on school engagement, motivation, and achievement (Goodenow, 1993). This lack of group membership may be further compounded by time spent in isolation, both Grace and Harlow recalling time spent in isolation away from their peers in their secondary setting. Additionally, Harlow recalls this from her primary school, wandering around out of the classroom. Cockerill (2019) found that students often feel isolated from their peers in their mainstream settings due to being sent out of the classroom. For these students they want to be part of the group and this linked to their desire to belong which is not currently experienced in this setting.

Although all three CYP experienced negative peer interactions they describe positive peer interactions during their mainstream experiences. Harlow described positive interactions with groups of peers, Grace described one important long-lasting friendship and Khaiah described how interactions with her peers changed and she was able to build more positive peer relationships. Osterman (2000) states that when children experience positive involvement with others they are more likely to regulate their own behaviour in line with classroom social norms, however this does not seem to have been the case with the CYP in this study as they continued to have challenges in their mainstream setting; this highlights the importance of all elements that create belonging being present. Shaw (2019) found friendship groups having a high impact on belonging for mainstream secondary students, especially those in in years 7-9. It has been suggested that girls have more emotional investment in relationships especially during early adolescence (Goodenow, 1993). For

the girls in this study it may be that they are more effected by the negative interactions due to this increased emotional investment.

**5.2.1.4 School Systems.** Extracurricular experiences come across as important for Grace and Harlow in their previous educational settings. For Harlow School Journey was the highlight of her primary school experience. For Grace school trips were positive in her primary setting; a way to continue exploring subjects she enjoys. Students who attend extracurricular activities are seen in the literature to report a higher sense of school belonging (Allen et al., 2016). Grace had opportunities to play a role in school life through taking jobs on such as watering the plants and helping the younger children. This came across as supporting her positive primary experience. This is supported in previous research; where CYP have opportunities to use existing skills to make a positive contribution to the school it was seen to increase belonging (Craggs & Kelly, 2018; Michael & Frederickson, 2013; Shaw, 2019).

Both Khaiah and Harlow reflect on moments of autonomy in their secondary experience through the selection of their GCSE subjects; Khaiah links this directly to feeling in control. Through being empowered to choose their own subjects, it can increase the connection between the actions of the student and their goals. A student's sense of autonomy and personal control can be linked to their active engagement in school (Goodenow, 1993). All three girls reflect on subjects they enjoy and where they experience some success or have positive academic experiences. It has been found that teachers can be more positive towards students who are achieving highly and it may be that these students are achieving well in these classes; Khaiah states that she is the top of her set in science and that this is a positive teacher relationship (Osterman, 2000). Teacher support can be dependent on engagement levels, with students that are seen to be more engaged receiving more teacher support, in turn the more support a student receives and the better they perceive the relationship with a teacher the more engaged they become (Osterman, 2000). However, it is not clear in previous research or in this research whether teacher support improves engagement and achievement first or if higher engagement and achievement leads to more support from the teacher.

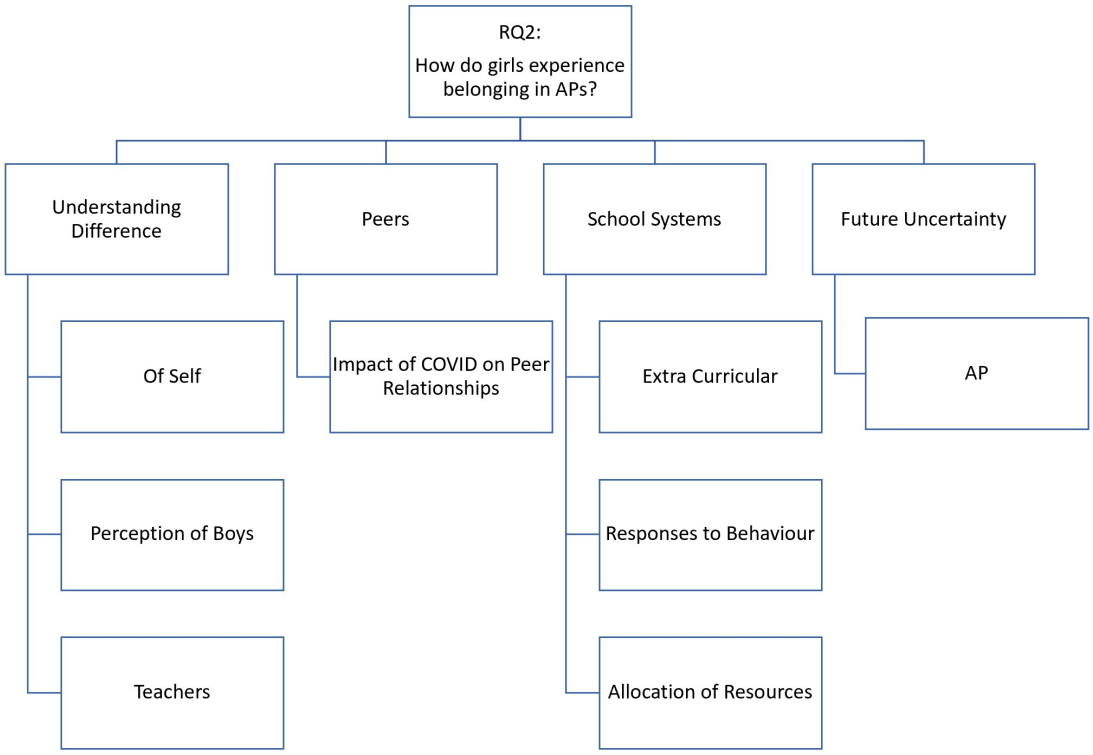
In several other pieces of research school space was identified as an important theme (Hamilton & Morgan, 2018; N. Hart, 2013; Jalali & Morgan, 2018; Michael & Frederickson, 2013; Shaw, 2019). The girls all described their primary schools; however, this was a prompt question used by the researcher to support rapport building and so it is not clear whether these narratives would have emerged spontaneously. There is little reference to space in the rest of the narratives. Harlow expresses an ownership of space in her secondary school and in the AP, having a space that her and her friends mark out as their own and Khaiah reflects on the AP building being prison like and the lack of facilities. This may mark a gender difference between this and previous research; girls can be more influenced by the interpersonal elements of school and this may mean that the space is less relevant to their experiences of belonging.

**5.2.1.5 Summary of RQ1**. Lack of autonomy comes across as the strongest theme in the analysis of this research question and autonomy links to the other themes that are present as well. Where the girls talk about experiencing autonomy or being heard it links to moments of belonging. The girls discuss moments of feeling excluded or different using labels. In relation to RQ1 the experiences of belonging in previous settings are variable for the girls, however the moments of not belonging dominate the narrative, mostly impacted by a lack of autonomy, being heard, and been given labels by others.

***5.2.2 RQ2: How do girls experience belonging in APs?***

**Figure 6**

*RQ2 Thematic Map*




**5.2.2.1 Understanding Difference.** All three participants reflect on positive interactions with teachers at the AP. Both Harlow and Grace discuss feeling heard at their AP and being able to talk to teachers. This was supported in the previous research, with being understood and listened to leading to successful outcomes. Particpants in previous studies reported that staff in the APs treated them as equals (Cockerill, 2019; Hart, 2013; Michael & Frederickson, 2013). The availability of staff to CYP provided emotional support to the students, which reduced emotional and behavioural difficulties (Hamilton & Morgan, 2018; Michael & Frederickson, 2013; Nind et al., 2012). Harlow reflects on a relationship she has with a teacher where there is mutual trust. Nind et al. (2012) found that the feelings of staff respect for students came from getting to know them in person and not through the files from their previous settings. Hart (2013) found that CYP often experienced reciprocal trust between them and the staff in PRUs. Khaiah echoes the trust in staff at AP, that they followed through on what they said. If interactions with others are positive it can

support students developing a stronger sense of relatedness (Osterman, 2000). Within the research, adult-student relationships are significant in determining whether students are a welcome part of the school community (Osterman, 2000). When developing school belonging in adolescents it is seen as important for the adults to be accessible, responsive and flexible in their approach (Drolet & Arcand, 2013). This is a feature the girls describe within their teachers at the AP and therefore is potentially an influence on their sense of belonging.

**5.2.2.2 Peers.** COVID had had an impact on the ability of the girls to make friends. Only Harlow had been at the AP prior to COVID and was able to provide context to the changes in relationships and mixing with peers. COVID has placed restrictions on the ability of the girls to mix outside their class groups. Even though COVID impacts the ability of the girls to mix with peers they all demonstrate an acceptance of peers and their challenges. Previous research discusses pupils feeling more accepted in APs due to feeling that peers had similar experiences (Cockerill, 2019; Craggs & Kelly, 2018). The reciprocal understanding of historical educational challenges was seen to support the development of peer bonds and a sense of being valued (Cockerill, 2019; Craggs & Kelly, 2018; Nind et al., 2012). Osterman (2000) found that where students experience acceptance it encourages them to be more supportive and accepting of others. In this instance due to COVID it was difficult to fully explore peer relationships in the setting and it is suggested that this is looked at in more detail. However, it was clear that the girls felt acceptance at the AP and accepted others which supports a sense of belonging.

One area the girls reflect on is the gender differences in how boys and girls behave in the classroom and the challenges this can present in accessing help within the AP. Harlow particularly reflects that the boys need more support with behaviour and this can limit the academic support she is able to access. This is echoed in the research where it is reported that boys may exhibit more physical and verbal reactions than girls when disaffected with school (Timpson, 2019). Osler and Vincent (2003) found that it was common for challenging behaviour in APs to require most of the support and this can result in girls, who are more likely to internalise emotions, not being offered

the support they require. The disruptive behaviour by the male students could lead to other students becoming disruptive. Harlow reflected that she does experience this in the AP; Michael and Frederickson (2013) highlight that this can occur in APs as students want to feel part of the group. This is linked to adolescent development, where CYP want be part of the group and this can positively or negatively influence behaviour (Goodenow, 1993).

**5.2.2.3 School Systems.** Grace found the clear boundaries set out by teachers helpful. Hamilton and Morgan (2018) found where staff were seen to be in control of classrooms it increased belonging and motivation through reducing tension and creating a positive learning environment. Both Grace and Harlow found that this classroom management extended to the AP's understanding of their needs; the behaviour management strategies used were supportive and matched their needs. The CYP in this study did not discuss sanctions in relation to behaviour management at their AP but more positive, self-regulation techniques. Where teachers can involve students in problem solving and helping them develop techniques for self-control this increases their autonomy and relatedness increasing feelings of belonging (Osterman, 2000). This autonomy can lead to an increase in self-esteem through feeling supported by teachers and can lead to students overcoming the negative labels they have previously been assigned (Michelmore & Mesie, 2019). Where students can successfully regulate, they are more likely to experience a greater sense of school belonging (Frydenberg et al., 2009). Where students experience positive interactions and belonging, they are more likely to take responsibility to regulate their behaviour in line with the classroom expectations (Osterman, 2000). It is likely that the clear boundaries and the support to become self-regulated can increase the sense of belonging.

Both Khaiah and Harlow report feeling like they are making academic progress and feeling more successful. Hart (2013) found that the students in their study experienced academic success with students making large gains with reading and writing during their placements. There is little evidence in the literature directly linking belonging and achievement, however there is evidence showing that a sense of belonging can increase engagement in school and that engagement

positively impacts achievement (Osterman, 2000). Neel & Fuligni (2013) found that school belonging was positively associated with students finding school useful and being academically motivated. This can be seen in this study where the students were pleased at their academic achievements and wanted to go on to achieve well in their GCSEs. Girls were found to place more significance on teacher support; their expectations for success and attitudes towards the value of academic learning were maintained by their perception of the relationship with their teacher (Goodenow, 1993). Grace however felt that the AP may not push her as hard as her previous setting and was concerned they may give up on her. This may be linked to the number of educational settings Grace has experienced and therefore a fear of being rejected again.

Khaiah raises that the activities in the setting are more focused on male stereotypical activities and suggests that additional extracurricular activities would help reduce this. It is seen in APs that they can often focus on creating more male orientated space and resources; in this instance it appears that Khaiah is requesting more variety in activities (DfE, 2018b). Harlow suggests more school trips as being beneficial; in the results for the previous RQ we saw that extracurricular activities and time out of the setting were beneficial in building belonging. Neel and Fuligni (2013) found that participation in extracurricular activities supports the development of school belonging. The school belonging of girls was found to decrease as they progressed through high school and this coincided with a disparity in the provision of extracurricular activities, with male students having access to more (Neel & Fuligni, 2013). These extracurricular activities can develop school belonging as they help facilitate relationships with peers, which is important on Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Drolet & Arcand, 2013; Solomon & Thomas, 2013).

**5.2.2.4 Future Uncertainty.** Uncertainty impacts the girls' AP experiences; for Grace this was a lack of control over being able to remain at the AP. This led to an increase in negative behaviour. Grace had a similar experience on a previous managed move and is currently struggling with her behaviour again. Grace says she wants to stay at the AP to do her GCSEs, but this seems to be uncertain. Khaiah has uncertainty around the length of her placement. Within previous research

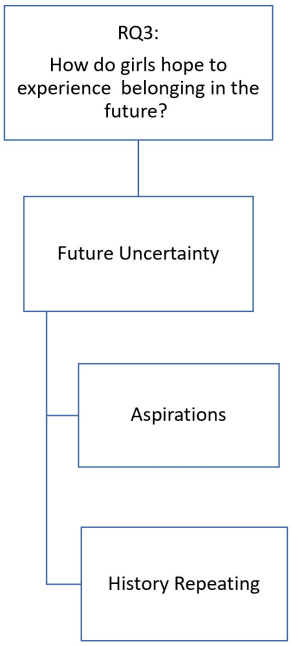
the management of trial periods for managed moves where there was a lack of clarity could increase anxiety and create a barrier to belonging, as the CYP found it harder to make friends due to worry about not succeeding with the placement (Craggs & Kelly, 2018). It looks like this is relevant to the management of placements in APs and clarity for students around the length of stay. All three girls want to remain in the AP rather than return to their previous setting and this is a common theme in previous research. Students may not want to return to a system that has not previously worked for them, especially if they are experiencing more belonging in the AP (Cockerill, 2019; Hart, 2013). The reasons for remaining in the setting that the girls raised were the small size, the limited number of staff and that peers seemed to support their feeling of belonging. This was echoed in the research with small class sizes creating a positive learning environment for those who struggle in larger educational settings; it is linked to feel safe in the school environment (Hamilton & Morgan, 2018; Hart, 2013; Michael & Frederickson, 2013; Nind et al., 2012). Students in APs can feel rejected by the mainstream settings and this can cause negative behaviour to escalate on their return (Michelmore & Mesie, 2019; Nind et al., 2012). This was experienced by Harlow on a brief return to her mainstream secondary.

**5.2.2.5 Summary of RQ2**. Within the themes that link to RQ2 autonomy can be seen to create a common thread within the experience. The girls' experiences of belonging are again varied, however through an increase in autonomy and being heard there is an increase in moments of belonging shared with the researcher. The girls share more positive interactions and in this setting their labels seem to create similarities with others rather than differences. The girls discuss more academic success and self-regulation of behaviour. The main challenge to belonging appears to be the uncertainty around the length of AP placement; Harlow who knows she will be remaining at the setting demonstrated more consistent experiences of belonging.

***5.2.3 RQ3: How do girls hope to experience belonging in the future?***

**Figure 7**

*RQ3 Thematic Map*




**5.2.3.1 Aspirations.** All three CYP express wanting to remain in education and have ideas that they want to explore further. Previous research highlights that an awareness of future educational opportunities and how these can support them to achieve their long-term career goals help CYP experience belonging in their current settings (Hamilton & Morgan, 2018; Michael & Frederickson, 2013). In Jalali and Morgan (2018) secondary students experience a change in aspiration in the PRU setting; they see the PRU as supporting their aspirations through helping them recognise what they want to do in the future and helping them see the future value in completing GCSEs. Hamilton and Morgan (2018) state an important part of this was support from the students' setting in helping them identify an area of interest; supporting this with opportunities such as work experience was seen as a motivator and this links to the previous RQ where students expressed wanting more extracurricular activities. Supporting the students' autonomy in relation to future career and educational options may help them to develop better relationships with teachers and increase their enthusiasm for school and involvement in the classroom (Osterman, 2000). Where

students experience belonging, they begin to alter their future expectations, seeing opportunities for further education and employment (Nind et al., 2012).

**5.2.3.2 History Repeating.** All three girls express concerns around experiencing success in FE education or jobs in the future. The concerns around FE relate to the fact it is mainstream and there may again be challenges around understanding their needs. These students have often experienced support being denied or feeling that their needs were not catered to (Cockerill, 2019; Craggs & Kelly, 2018). Students who had moved between settings had a fear of previous issues reoccurring, so valued support in overcoming these (Craggs & Kelly, 2018). There needs to be a reflection on the lack of understanding these students have around the reasons for their exclusions; this lack of understanding can present barriers and an escalation in behaviour on their return to mainstream. Is this potentially an issue on the move to FE education? The doubt created in previous settings around their abilities leads to doubt around their capability to face and adapt to the challenges faced by young adults (Cefai & Cooper, 2010). This may be a barrier to their future sense of belonging. Grace and Harlow took a sole responsibility narrative which was seen in Craggs and Kelly (2018) where students in the early stages of managed moves felt totally responsible for adapting to and settling in at their receiver school. As this happens in the early stages of managed moves, this suggests over time this reduces and that extra support is seen as being useful or accessible. Grace and Harlow reflect on the potential impact of their own behaviour on their success in the future; this awareness is supported by Michael and Frederickson (2013).

**5.2.3.3 Summary of RQ3.** In previous research, pupils in APs are aware of negative outcomes and feel their future is bleak, however in this research the girls all express hope for the future and outline their ambitions. If negative experiences lead to an expectation of failure do positive experience create hope for the future? More exploration is needed into the hope and aspirations the girls have for the future and how these can be supported. When students understand the importance of their future and the choice to change is their decision, they often begin to reflect on the impact of their previous behaviour (Hamilton & Morgan, 2018).

### *5.2.4 Summary of results*

In the mainstream settings, the girls experienced unpredictable relationships with peers and teachers; according to Solomon and Thomas (2013) this would mean they would not achieve safety on Maslow's hierarchy of needs and therefore would be unlikely to achieve belonging in these settings. The positive teacher relationships have taken more of the narrative than the negative relationships, which would suggest that these are more influential on the girl's experiences than the negative relationships, although do not necessarily impact the success of these placements. There appears to be more consistency in their relationships with peers and teachers in their AP settings, which suggests they are more likely to experience belonging in this setting. However, this could be further enhanced through more opportunities to participate in extracurricular activities and trips. There is an impact on belonging for the girls from attending in mixed gender APs, where more activities are targeted at male students and the additional support the boys need from teachers in managing their behaviour. This was not a strong narrative though and this may be partly through the impact of COVID limiting wider interaction with peers in the setting. Additionally, the girls seem to accept this impact and the behaviour of their peers as part of the experience.

As explored in the introduction there are several different definitions of school belonging. From this research it can be suggested that the girls experience more belonging in their AP settings as they are experiencing more positive relationships where they feel valued and included as an individual (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Goodenow, 1993) It is suggested that they feel more autonomy and feel heard by others in the school environment; there is the potential that the focus on supporting boys in the setting may detract from this element. Osterman (2000) highlighted five areas of belonging; the development of basic psychological processes, academic attitudes and motivations, social attitudes, engagement and participation and achievement. These are all met in the AP environment to a greater extent than the previous mainstream settings. The future comes with more uncertainty for the CYP in this study; they aspire for success but have doubts related to the prior negative experiences of mainstream school settings being unable to meet their needs. It is

important that how we can continue their sense of belonging during their transition to their FE settings is explored further.

Lack of autonomy in decision making seems to be the source of the lack of belonging for the CYP in their previous mainstream settings, alongside the lack of understanding around the reasons for their exclusion. Many of the definitions refer to being valued and included (Allen et al., 2018; Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Goodenow, 1993). A lack of participation in the process this leads to a sense of rejection and lack of school belonging from the CYP. As seen in the research this leads to some uncertainty around the length of placements in the AP and escalations in behaviour when they return to mainstream settings. More clarity and understanding for the CYP around these decisions may support their sense of belonging and help reintegration to mainstream. If a return to their home school is hoped for it is suggested that how to rebuild and maintain these relationships is explored.

## 5.3 Critique of Current Research

### *5.3.1 Interview Design*

Narrative Interviewing is designed to provide participants with the opportunity to share their stories (Murray, 2015). The fact that these stories were told remotely and recorded by an unfamiliar professional may have influenced the stories shared. For this research a guided interview schedule was used rather than semi-structured interviews to provide the participants with the opportunity to direct the interview and the stories they tell, which allows for the discovery of meaning (May, 2001). There needs to be careful consideration of how questioning is used to support the CYPs' narrative, therefore questioning needed to be open, judgement free and not leading. The researcher focused on remaining curious throughout the process to support this. The interactions between the researcher and participants impacts the telling of the stories through the provision of the life grids and the supplementary questions asked by the researcher to clarify understanding. The life grids helped support the structure and focus of the interview, although it was felt important to let the participants explore tangents when they arose as it is accepted that when interviewing CYP there is not a neat structure to their narratives and these tangents can support hearing the CYPs' truth

(MacDonald & Greggans, 2008). In line with social constructivism, how the CYP present their stories and create meaning from them was central to this research. Social constructivism proposes that the world is grounded in understanding how people construct their experiences, especially through the interactions with others (Burr, 2003).

In the interviews there was awareness of the positioning of a researcher and how this could impact the stories the CYP told. This was potentially compounded by doing the interviews virtually and limiting the chance to interact and rapport build in person. The researcher was concerned that the CYP may self-edit to present a particular version of events or worry about telling the truth. However, the purpose of the research was to learn about their experiences told in their voice, therefore the focus was exploring the stories they felt comfortable telling. People choose what stories to tell and through this choice they construct their own identities and by altering the stories their identity can be altered (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Hiles et al., 2017; Murray, 2015; Silver, 2013). Exclusion from school is emotive and they may have told a version that they felt was socially acceptable. The impacts of COVID on data collection are explored further in the use of the reflective diary. The researcher carefully considered the impact of these decision on the participants and explored how to ensure they were active in the decision making as it was felt this would support their participation and willingness to share their stories.

#### *5.3.2 Co-construction*

Some of the language used by the CYP to describe their experiences was emotive and could create feelings of discomfort in the reader. However, to respect the participants, the researcher felt that replacing this language with more formal or comfortable language would not do justice to the stories that had been shared and may potentially change the meaning. For this reason, when re-storying the narratives it was important that the language used by the participants was retained and included. The decision around whether to retain the language of the participant can be complex and needs careful consideration (Kramp, 2004). In this research, in line with the epistemological position of social constructivism, it was felt that the language was part of the construction and therefore the

researcher believes that when individuals seek to understand the world in which they live the choice of language supports assigning meaning to the narrative (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Robson, 2011).

Narrative research is co-constructed with the researcher through the process of re-storying, this involves reordering and editing the transcripts and therefore the researcher's interpretations are part of the re-storying process. Originally the researcher hoped to check the stories with the CYP after the re-storying process. As the research took a social constructivist epistemological position it is accepted that reality is co-constructed between the researcher, the participants, and the experiences they share (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Mertens, 2010). Due to school closures in relation to COVID the researcher was unable to check in with the students through the school setting once re-storying was completed. However, due to the rapid changes in education due to COVID this had been anticipated so the onscreen life grids were used to check in with the CYP during the interview and copies of their stories were sent to each participant.

***5.3.3 Participants***

The sample size and selection may be considered a limitation of this study; the CYP all attended the same PRU, however they all had different secondary and primary experiences. When the research was originally designed the researcher was hoping to recruit from different APs and recruit additional participants, however due to the nature of exclusion and the COVID pandemic this proved challenging. With educational restrictions constantly changing during the time of data collection and the constant changing of priorities it was a challenge to get gatekeepers on board as understandably their priority was ensuring students were accessing learning and being supported emotionally. Due to the limited number of participants, the results may not be transferable to other groups and people and contexts (Braun & Clarke, 2013). This research took an opportunist sample of CYP who were interested and willing to take part in the research and therefore may not be fully representative of students in APs. This research does not seek to generalise the finding to all girls in APs but recognises the individual meanings they assign to their experience. It is important to respect that each participant has had an individual journey and educational experience. The current

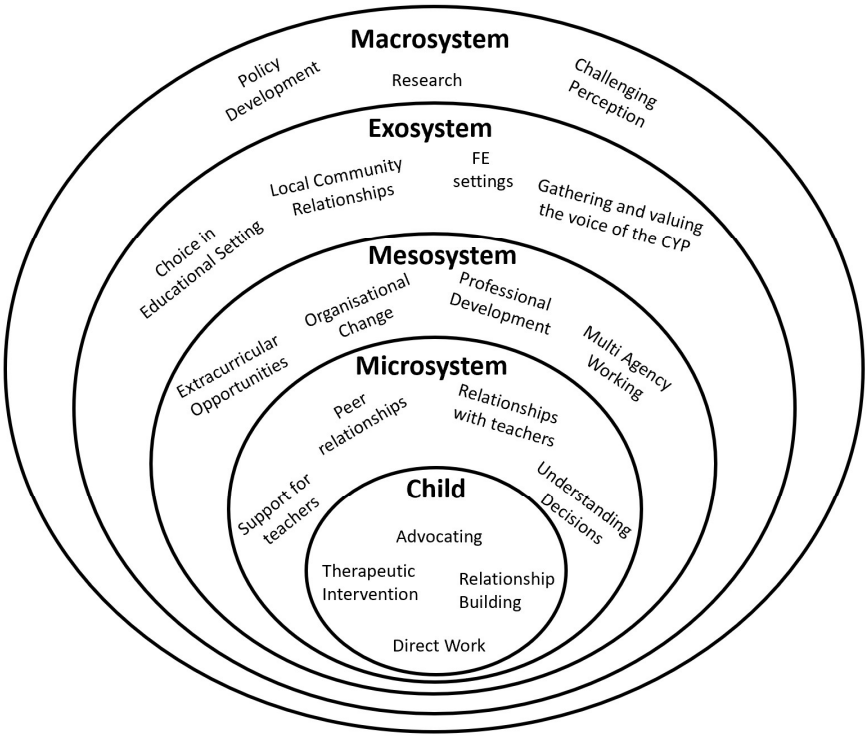
research has tried to support this by presenting each CYP's narrative individually before looking at themes across the three narratives.

**5.4 Impacts on Educational Practice**

The impacts on EP practice this have been framed within ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Although the small sample size limits the generalisability of the study it was felt it may be helpful to consider the impacts of this research on educational practice. The ecological model outlines the systems within the child's environment within which they interact. The systems are the child as an individual, microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem and the macrosystem; Figure 8 shows these elements in relation to this study. As well as the impacts on EP practice it is important to remember that these CYP have been in a number of educational settings and it is important to consider how this research impacts their practice in supporting CYP who find belonging in educational settings challenging, therefore this has been taken into consideration within the following recommendations.

**Figure 8**

*Bronfenbrenner (1979) Ecological Systemic Model adapted to reflect School Belonging*



### *5.4.1 Child as an Individual*

The child as an individual covers characteristics such as emotional stability and academic motivation (Allen et al., 2016). To support the development of school belonging in CYP in APs, EPs can engage in direct work through therapeutic opportunities designed to support the CYPs' autonomy and development of relationships. EPs can advocate for the CYP, providing them with a voice where they may not be heard otherwise. This may be particularly important for excluded girls, as through this research it is seen that they feel unheard and disempowered. The British Psychological Society (2015) suggests that EPs are well placed to advocate for CYP as they are skilled at eliciting the views of young people as a central construct of their role. Part of this work with the CYP may involve supporting them to rebuild the relationships with their home school if reintegration is hoped for or exploring the reasons round the exclusion in order to eliminate the uncertainty that continues to impact their sense of belonging . It is essential that the voice of the child is not just gathered but an important part in the decision-making process.

### *5.4.2 Microsystem*

The microsystem is the relationships experienced by the CYP in which they actively participate such as home, school and the playground (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Frederickson & Cline, 2002; Rendall & Stuart, 2005). From the research it was clear how important having a role in and fully understanding the decisions being made about educational placements was for the CYP. To help them understand this decision clarity from the home school and AP are important.

Peer relationships came through as an area of concern for the CYP in this research; they have experienced negative peer relationships in their previous settings and a lack of acceptance. EPs may be well placed to support in the development of peer bonds through group interventions. In addition, EP maybe able to support on the development of a social skills program around accepting and supporting those who have SEN or SEMH in mainstream schools.

Teachers within the AP were an important source of support for the CYP in this study. It is important that they are supported to continue offering person centred interactions; this support

may be through time to engage in one on one activities and pastoral support or through supervision. It is also suggested that students are allocated a mentor or key worker who the students are able to trust and build a bond with. EPs may be able to support through training the mentors using a program such as ELSA to help the mentors build relationships and support the CYP. In order to ensure the inclusion of student voice the EP could facilitate Person Centred Planning sessions with the mentors and CYP to support reintegration or reduce the risk of exclusion. These techniques can also help build the relationship between the CYP and their mentor.

For students to feel contained it is important for staff to feel contained (Solomon & Thomas, 2013). It may be possible to provide staff in the mainstream and APs with the time and resources to take part in group problem solving activities, such as solutions circles, in order to support the inclusion of pupils with a wide range of needs and support them to maintain a positive, creative approach to problem-solving with these CYP (Brown & Henderson, 2012).

***5.4.3 Mesosystem***

The mesosystem is the relationships between two or more of the settings in which the child actively participates; it covers school policies, extracurricular activities, staff professional development, rules, and practices (Allen et al., 2016; Bronfenbrenner, 1979). EPs can engage in organisational change within the AP or mainstream settings, focusing on developing a shared vision of school belonging. School policies could be part of this, exploring how constancy in behaviour management can be achieved, communication with students can be constant and providing them with clarity.

Professional development is important for teachers across settings. This is something that EPs are well placed to deliver. This could be focused on supporting staff in skills such as regulation or an understanding of the SEMH and behavioural challenges some students experience and how to support them in the classroom. Training and support could also be offered to help teachers understand the importance of belonging for CYP and support to staff to develop this with CYP at risk

of exclusion. Atkinson and Rowley (2019) found students valued more support around SEMH rather than academic support.

It is suggested that APs explore the extracurricular opportunities that are available to students in the setting, as students saw this as an opportunity to extend their academic involvement and build relationship with peers. Where this is done well it is seen to be key to improving belonging. It is important to consider the variety of opportunities on offer and that they are not all seen as gender specific. Within this there needs to be a consideration of the transition of these CYP to FE settings; all three participants expressed wanting to attend a college next however they had concerns about their ability to transition. An opportunity for CYP to build relationships with the FE colleges maybe a possible solution to this. Transition meetings and an opportunity meet their key worker or mentor may help to support a successful transition and reduce some of the concerns that the CYP may have around moving settings.

Multi agency working is an important consideration; multiagency meetings can be a forum to co-ordinate communication with CYP and families so that there is a culture of joint working as well as clarity and consistency in the communication (Solomon & Thomas, 2013). The EP can facilitate the meetings and ensure all parties are included. This is a point where clarity around placement length could be discussed and how decisions about further educational placements will be made and when they will be made. The EP can advocate for the CYP through capturing and sharing their voice if they are not able to attend these meetings. If the CYP is going to be returning to the home school the EP maybe able to facilitate the relationship continuing. Encouraging teaching staff from the mainstream setting to visit CYP in APs. This may help to maintain a relationship between the CYP and the mainstream setting as they will feel kept in mind rather than forgotten. It is important for the CYP to feel wanted by the home school or it may lead to further feelings of rejection.

### *5.4.4 Exosystem*

The exosystem includes settings in which the child is not involved but that affect and are affected by the child; this includes elements such as whole school vision, neighbourhood and extended family (Allen et al., 2016; Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Frederickson & Cline, 2002). The AP may look to build relationships with local businesses and other schools to provide access to a wider curriculum, extracurricular activities and the possibility for work experience. This could lead to access to resources for settings such as APs where budgets are restrictive.

It is important to remember that gathering the views of CYP is not enough on its own; those working with CYP need to see the value and significance of these views and actively involve them in the decisions and actions taken or the status quo will be maintained (Cefai & Cooper, 2010). This may involve a wider discussion around how CYP want to be included in education, from this and other research reintegration into mainstream settings is met by resistance by the CYP. If a common aim is for reintegration, we need to consider the impact of unsatisfactory educational experiences which lead to CYP feeling like they do not belong (Lloyd & O'Regan, 1999). If an AP is able to create a sense of belonging and future aspirations for vulnerable CYP in a way that mainstream is currently unable to, then we need to consider what is best for these CYP in order to improve their outcomes and take in to consideration where they want to be educated.

### *5.4.5 Macrosystem*

The macrosystem covers the subculture and culture around all the systems, which can include government policies and reforms, social climate and legislation alongside norms and values (Allen et al., 2018; Allen et al., 2016; Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Frederickson & Cline, 2002). EPs are in a position where they can contribute to educational policy development and research and highlight the importance of student voice. This is part of educational legislation, with the importance of 'pupil voice' featuring in both The Children and Families Act (2014) and the SEND Code of Practice (DfE, 2014). It is suggested that supporting students who have experienced exclusion in progression to FE colleges is researched further, along with peer relationships for girls in APs once the restrictions in

social mixing due to COVID are reduced. As mentioned earlier, autonomy and belonging are linked for students, they want to have a role in the decisions around their educational outcome. As the macrosystem considers the norms and values in society it is important to consider the assumptions held around CYP who experience exclusion and the assumptions held about gender in education.

**5.5 Dissemination of Research**

The findings of this research will be shared with the key stakeholders who have been involved in the research process. These stakeholders include the participants and their families, the AP, and the EPS within which the research took place. In the first instance this will take place through the debrief letter; for the participants this will include an additional copy of their stories (appendix 15 for the debrief letters). For the APs in the LA it has been proposed that the researcher runs an information session around the research. The researcher would like to share with other interested parties in the local authority, including mainstream settings to aid their understanding of the experiences of girls excluded from mainstream settings. Finally, to disseminate the findings to the wider EP and education community the researcher intends to submit the research for publication.

**5.6 Reflexivity**

As this research took a narrative methodology it is subjective, as the researcher brings their own history, values, and assumptions into the research (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Yardley, 2015). To ensure that this subjectivity does not invalidate the research, reflexivity supports the researcher in clarifying their position and the decision-making process they are taking part in (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Fox et al., 2007). As this research takes a social constructionist epistemology, reflexivity is focused on the researcher's relationship with participants and how the data collection and analysis were co-constructed (Fox et al., 2007). Through the reflexivity of the researcher and the transparency of the methods used, alongside the presentation of analytical findings, data set and the steps taken in analysis it is hoped that the researcher can allow the reader to explore the methods

used and build trust in the research process (Mishler, 1990; Yardley, 2015). As this is a reflection on the process and the learning from the research it will be presented in the first person.

Methods of reflexivity in this research:

- Meetings with Research Supervisor
- Supervision on placement
- Peer supervision
- Narrative group where member checking was engaged in with fellow researchers
- An audit trail supported by the research journal and an updated Gannt Chart

***5.6.1 Reflecting on a Changing Ethical Environment***

Due to the COVID 19 pandemic during the data gathering phase of this research there were changes that needed to be made to the ethics application and my own understanding of the ethics. The research journal along with discussions with the academic tutor, EPs and other researchers were vital to help ensure the ethical rigour of this study. There was an element of virtue ethics in this decision making process, where I needed to explore my own personal value system in order to make decisions around how to navigate the field of online research, due to a lack of experience in this area and the limited resources to support the decision making process (Salmons, 2016). This encompasses a consideration of respectfulness and benevolence which lead to taking account of the individual's choice and informed consent (Salmons, 2016). For my decisions to account for informed consent it was important to have open discussions around the challenges and decision points with the participants, their parents, and the APs.

Research usually happens in adult spaces, which limits the autonomy of the child in the process, and location needs to be carefully considered when thinking about how to access the child's authentic voice (MacDonald & Greggans, 2008). The location of the interviews was decided in collaboration with the AP, CYP and their parents. As the research was virtual it allowed flexibility in location to where the CYP felt most comfortable taking part and where the girls could be supported if any safeguarding issues arose. For all three girls the decision was to conduct the interviews in the

school setting. Parents and their schools' SENCO supported this decision, with the school being willing to ensure a private safe space for the girls to take part in the research.

At the point of meeting the CYP for the first time, along with their SENCO, an open discussion was held around two issues, the first being how to manage the virtual technology and the second around the presence of a teacher during the interviews. Robins et al. (1996) explore the impact of the Actor-Observer effect and the impact this may have on the interactions and in this instance the telling of the stories. In addition, the imbalance of power needed to be reflected on (MacDonald & Greggans, 2008). Therefore, I wanted the girls to be given the power to choose whether they wanted the camera on or off; all three girls felt more comfortable with the camera on their computers being off but mine being on. MacDonald and Greggans (2008) explore how consent can change during the interview process and that interviewers can use body language to help them know when to discuss this; in this instance as the girls preferred their cameras being off I needed to use active listening and checking in with them to manage consent and their well-being.

Following these decisions, the presence of a teacher during the interview process needed to be explored; this was important in managing the girls' well-being while discussing emotive content and from a safeguarding perspective. The girls have a good relationship with their SENCO, and she was willing to be available throughout the interview process. However, part of the discussion was around the girls' experiences within their current settings and it was important to reflect on how to protect the interests of the CYP and the integrity of the research (MacDonald & Greggans, 2008). When exploring how to manage interviews with children, MacDonald and Greggans (2008) found that narratives changed when parents enter the room. This could be the case with a teacher from the AP being present during the interviews, however, to respect the autonomy of the girls I again encouraged a discussion around this. I highlighted the issue of safeguarding and consent with them; in conversation with the girls and the SENCO it was decided that the SENCO would not be in the room but close by and check in with the girls on an agreed time frame. This was then discussed with parents due to the age of the girls. In agreement with MacDonald and Greggans (2008) I felt that

although I needed to remember my participants were children and therefore vulnerable, I did not want to underestimate their competency and ability to participate in and control the research process.

Through carrying out this narrative research I have learnt about the power of the stories that CYP tell and how important it is to provide them with the time and space to tell these stories. I have learnt how important choice and autonomy is for them; I tried to reflect this in the design of the study and will continue to reflect this in my role. All three girls showed powerful reflections on their experiences and were keen to continue in education. As a researcher I hope I captured the power of the stories that they wanted to share with me. When this research began, I was worried that during the re-storying of the narratives the voice of the CYP would be lost as the data was reshaped; through keeping their words and language I hope that they remained central to the narrative. This is something I will reflect on when writing reports in future, not just representing what CYP share with me but where possible using their language to retain the meaning and feelings behind what they share.

**5.7 Overall Conclusions**

The aim of this exploratory research was to use narrative techniques to gain the voices of girls in AP settings. Using guided interviews and life grids the researcher explored the sense of belonging that the CYP had experienced in their previous settings, current settings, and their hopes for the future. This research suggests that elements of belonging and not belonging exist in all settings, however the aspects of not belonging in the mainstream setting created a barrier to the overall sense of belonging, whereas the elements missing in the AP only served to enhance the belonging they were experiencing. It was found that the CYP had experienced a lack of autonomy and understanding in the decision-making process and that positive teacher relationships were more powerful than the negative ones. The CYP expressed wanting to be heard and supported, and this could be achieved through supporting emotional needs rather than academic needs. The CYP highlighted hope for the future and a desire to continue in education following the AP, although they

doubt their ability to make this a success. These findings reflected those that are in previous literature around the experiences of APs from mixed gender participants. However, there was seen to be a small impact on the experience of girls in APs resulting from the mixed gender settings. One element was the potential disruptions of boys' learning styles and the support needed for their behaviour and secondly around the resources and facilities being more targeted to the male student population.

This study was designed to provide girls in APs a voice and to explore their experiences within education, as the dominant discourse can be driven by male voices. It is hoped through exploring their perspective that their needs can be considered and reflected on in their educational settings. These findings can help inform the practice of the professionals alongside the mainstream and AP setting which these student attend. This research shows the ability of CYP to reflect on their experiences and their desire to be part of the decision-making process. It is hoped that this research may be able to support the development of belonging in female students at risk of exclusion prior to the exclusion process starting so that they do not experience rejection by education and concern about their ability to succeed.

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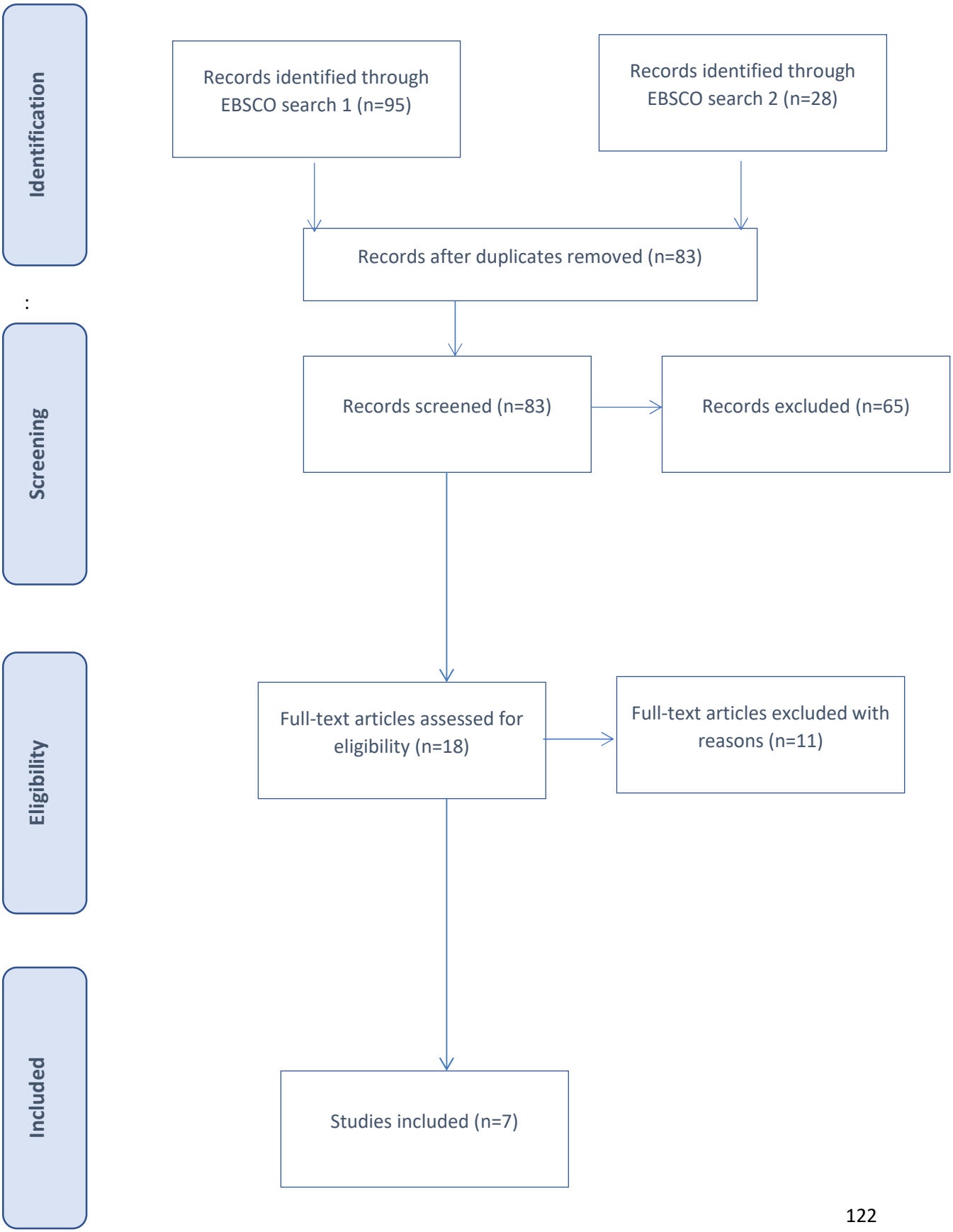
**Appendix 1**

Prisma Chart of Literature Review Systematic Search



**Appendix 2**

Search terms and inclusion and exclusion criteria

| | |
|---|---|
| Research Question | To what extent has research explored the experiences of secondary students of school belonging? |
| Search Date | 18.09.2020 |
| Databases | APA PsycArticles, APA PsycInfo ERIC, Child Development & Adolescent Studies, Education Research Complete |
| Search Terms | school belonging or school attachment or school connectedness or school bonding or school membership or school relatedness<br>AND<br>united kingdom or uk or britain or scotland or england or wales or northern ireland<br>Limiter 2010-2020; adolescents |
| Results | 95 |
| Inclusion Criteria | Whole study available in English<br>Whole study accessible through online searching or library request<br>Peer reviewed journal or book<br>Primary research |
| Exclusion Criteria | Interventions<br>Only Teacher or Parent Voice<br>Outside of the UK<br>Only Primary Students<br>Diagnosed SEN need as a focus<br>Meta-analysis or Literature Reviews |

| | |
|---|---|
| Research Question | To what extent has research explored the experiences of secondary students attending APs? |
| Search Date | 18.09.2020 |
| Databases | APA PsycArticles, APA PsycInfo, Child Development & Adolescent Studies, Education Research Complete |
| Search Terms | pupil referral unit or pru or prus or alternative provisions<br>AND<br>united kingdom or uk or britain or scotland or england or wales or northern ireland<br>Limiter 2010-2020; adolescents |
| Results | 28 |
| Inclusion Criteria | Whole study available in English<br>Whole study accessible through online searching or library request<br>Peer reviewed journal or book<br>Primary research |
| Exclusion Criteria | Interventions<br>Only Teacher or Parent Voice<br>Outside of the UK<br>Only Primary Students<br>Diagnosed SEN need as a focus<br>Meta-analysis or Literature Reviews |

**Appendix 3:**

Summary of literature review studies

| Author | Method | Participants | Findings | Critique |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Cockerill, T. (2019). Pupils attending a shared placement between a school and alternative provision: Is a sense of school belonging the key to success? *Educational & Child Psychology*, *36*(2), 23–33. | Psychological Sense of School Membership, Semi structured interviews, thematic analysis | Primary and Secondary, 19 members of staff, 11 students 10-16 years - 9 male, 2 females | School attitudes are fundamental, a partnership between the AP and mainstream school is key.<br>All student participants fit in to either:<br>1. The shared placement leads to an improvement in the pupil's behaviour and increased engagement at the mainstream school alongside positive engagement with the alternative provider. This was sometimes linked to successful re-integration and academic progress.<br>or<br>2. The shared placement leads to the pupil positively engaging with the alternative provision but behaviour deteriorates at their mainstream school and pupil remains disengaged.<br>No student participants fit into the third outcome:<br>3. The shared placement leads to the pupil disengaging from both the mainstream and alternative provision and this was associated with challenging behaviours in both settings as well as poor attendance. | • A shared placement between mainstream and AP.<br>• The aims of the study were clear due to previous limited research in this area.<br>• It was a mixed methods study and the rationale for this was clear even though the sample was limited.<br>• The recruitment criteria was clearly defined, it used a range of LAs and settings.<br>• In relation to pupil voice it had a higher number of adult participants. The researcher did reflect that some questions were specific to issues the researcher though were important and this may have limited the variety in responses.<br>• The researcher did not reflect on their own role.<br>• The only ethical issue explored was the one of informed consent.<br>• Although there were limited participants limiting the generalisability there is a clear statement of findings. |
| Craggs, H., & Kelly, C. (2018). School belonging: Listening to the voices of secondary school students who have undergone managed moves. *School Psychology International*, *39*(1), 56–73. | Individual Phenomenological interviews, analysis by IPA | 4 students' years 9-10, 3 male 1 female | School belonging is a socially constructed phenomenon. Schools can help to limit the risk in transition and support school belonging.<br>A sense of school belonging resulted from positive relationships with peers and a sense of safety, security, and acceptance.<br>Superordinate Themes:<br>• Making Friends and Feeling Safe<br>• Feeling Known, Understood and Accepted as a Person<br>• Identification of and Support for SEND<br>• Supportive Vs Unsupportive School Protocols/ Practices | • Managed move, two different mainstream settings.<br>• The research gap is highlighted.<br>• There was clear selection criteria for participants including a time frame for attendance in the receiver school.<br>• The researcher reflects on their own position and role due to dual hermeneutic and explores the use of member checking and the use of a second analyst on one transcript to support validity.<br>• There was ethical approval.<br>• The process of analysing the data was clearly outlined.<br>• There is a clear statement of findings and both research questions are addressed in the findings and discussion. |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | • The future impact of the research is not explored in detail, it suggests follow up research in order to look to develop generalisable findings but does not fully explore the impacts on practice. |
| Hamilton, P., & Morgan, G. (2018). An Exploration of the Factors That Lead to the Successful Progression of Students in Alternative Provision. *Educational & Child Psychology*, *35*(1), 80–95. | Semi structured interviews, thematic analysis | 8 16-18-year olds, 7 males 1 female | Need to respond to individual needs to support vulnerable students. Students start to change their own behaviour through increased autonomy, competence and relatedness. The CYP valued education being tailored to meet their needs through informed, personalised and well-delivered behaviour management strategies implemented by staff. It also discussed the impact of the adult environment on the social and emotional development of the CYP.<br><br>Global Theme:<br>• Supportive and Personalised Learning Experience<br>Organising Themes:<br>• Full, accessible and diverse curriculum<br>• Positive and holistic learning environment<br>• Student motivation<br>• Staff understanding of social, emotional and behavioural difficulties<br>• Adult environment. | • Mainstream college, having previously been in a FE AP.<br>• Students are going into a further education college not a mainstream school.<br>• There is a clear statement of the aims of the study.<br>• Clear rationale for methodology using AI, thematic analysis and triangulation.<br>• There was clear criteria for the recruitment of participants.<br>• Opportunity sampling was used which can be unrepresentative of a wider population and also can be subject to researcher bias.<br>• A semi structured interview schedule was developed with a clear rationale.<br>• It is not stated if ethical approval was gained but explores the management of informed consent.<br>• The methods of data analysis were presented in detail, inductive themes and the use of coding software using a second coder to reduce bias and improve validity.<br>• A clear thematic map is presented.<br>• The researcher also triangulated the data in one of the colleges.<br>• The findings are presented clearly and linked to the research aims.<br>• Although the research is small scale the researcher presents a number of suggestions for developing this research further it also outlines the impact it can have on a number of educational professionals. |
| Hart, N. (2013). What helps children in a pupil referral unit (PRU)? An exploration into the potential protective factors of a PRU as identified by children and staff. *Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties*, *18*(2), 196–212. | Semi structured interviews, thematic analysis | 6 students 9-13-year olds, 5 males 1 female, 4 members of staff | Focuses on what works. Findings reveal the powerful perspectives that CYP can bring in relation to what might be helping them within a particular environment. On the whole, staff and pupils identified many of the same themes and subthemes.<br>Themes:<br>• Relationships<br>• Teaching and Learning<br>• Expectations<br>• Environment | • Took place in one PRU that was classed as outstanding.<br>• Limited number of participants.<br>• Focuses on one moment in time.<br>• Not focused on belonging.<br>• The rationale is clearly established due to the limited research on resilience and the use of quantitative data collection.<br>• There was a clear rationale for participant recruitment and the reasons behind the selection of CYP participants was clearly defined. |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | • The presentation of the results the staff voices feel like they dominate.<br>• There is clarity around the development of the semi structured interviews which involves a reflection on the researchers position and how this is limited.<br>• Scaling was also used to support the children's participation.<br>• Ethical approval was granted and the issue of consent with vulnerable groups is explored in detail.<br>• Limited transparency in the method of analysis and the processes used.<br>• The data was deductive with codes developed prior to analysis. |
| Jalali, R., & Morgan, G. (2018). *'They won't let me back.'* Comparing student perceptions across primary and secondary Pupil Referral Units (PRUs). *Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties*, *23*(1), 55–68. | Semi structured interviews with thematic analysis | 5 secondary and 8 primary students, 85% male and 15% female | The findings add to the existing evidence regarding the educational experiences and views of primary and secondary PRU students. The stability in views across age also supports the existence of a core set of perceptions within the PRU population which could relate to the issues of failed reintegration. The main difference is that for Secondary students these views are more entrenched.<br>Primary Themes:<br>• Understanding<br>• Physical Restraint<br>Secondary Themes:<br>• Helplessness<br>• Recognition<br>• Routine<br>• Teachers<br>• Home Influence<br>• Abnormality<br>• Support<br>Joint Themes:<br>• Attribution<br>• Anger<br>• Equality<br>• Change<br>• Mainstream<br>• Relationships | • PRU<br>• There is a clear statement of the aims of the research with 3 clear supporting research questions.<br>• Higher number of primary participants there is a risk of bias.<br>• Purposive sampling is used with clear recruitment criteria.<br>• Used life grids and semi structured interviews.<br>• The researcher reflected on their position through a reflective journal, member checking and a second coder.<br>• Ethical approval is not clear but gaining consent was clear.<br>• A selection of the themes were clearly presented and clarified as to how they add to the research base in this area. However, a number of themes were not discussed. |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | • Self<br>• Challenge | |
| Michael, S., & Frederickson, N. (2013). Improving pupil referral unit outcomes: Pupil perspectives. *Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties*, *18*(4), 407–422. | Semi structured interviews, thematic analysis | 16 12-16-year olds, 10 male, 6 females | Highlights some key areas of change from the perspective of the CYP. Relationships are central. Alongside consistency in behaviour management and personalisation of learning.<br>Themes for improving PRU outcomes were categorised into three areas.<br>Enablers:<br>• Self<br>• Discipline<br>• Relationships<br>• Curriculum<br>• Learning Environment<br>Barriers:<br>• Failure to Individualise Learning Environment<br>• Disruptive Behaviour<br>• Unfair Treatment<br>Ideas for Change:<br>• Learning Environment<br>• Flexibility<br>• Feeling Understood and Listened to | • PRU<br>• The aims of research are clear and larger participant numbers were wanted in order to overcome the limitations outlined in other studies.<br>• Participants were recruited from two LAs however both London.<br>• There was clear criteria used in selection.<br>• The authors reflect on their position and outline how the bias was limited through participant validation using focus groups.<br>• There was also a pilot study.<br>• There is ethical approval and the process of informed consent is outlined.<br>• The study used Thematic analysis and the codes were developed using coding software, mainly deductive they did also explore inductive codes.<br>• There is a clear statement of findings which leads to a clear indication of changes in practice and a reflection of limitations. |
| Shaw, E. (2019). 'How do I know that I belong?' Exploring secondary aged pupils' views on what it means to belong to their school. *Educational & Child Psychology, 36*(4), 79. | Psychological Sense of School Membership and semi structured interviews with thematic analysis | 184 students, years 7-10 from two schools in London, 50.5% male, 48.9% female | Pupil definitions of school belonging are complex and wide ranging. This study found that for some it is about the relationships established with peers and staff, while for others it is about participating in school life; for a few it is about the academic aspects of learning and how this helps them in future. The study reaffirmed that school belonging is a complex, subjective and multifaceted concept.<br><br>Themes:<br>• Familiarity<br>• Identification with Others<br>• Identification with the School<br>• Reciprocity of Relationships. | • Mainstream secondary school Belonging focused but mainstream not APs.<br>• Clear aim linked to the dominance of adult voice in previous research.<br>• The gender split of the students taking part in the qualitative interview was not transparent.<br>• Only one school had there qualitative interviews analysed had this data been included it may have resulted in different findings and this is reflected on.<br>• The themes were checked by peers and a thematic map is presented however the analysis has limited exploration.<br>• Ethical approval was given and informed consent is explored.<br>• The researcher does not present an exploration of the their role. |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | • There is a clear summary of the findings with suggestions for future research and implications for practice.<br>• The study is cross sectional rather than longitudinal. |

**Appendix 4**

Interview Guide

- Introduction Questions
    - Pseudonym
    - Tell me three things about you
    - What was your primary school like?
    - What's your clearest memory of primary school
- Links to Life Grid
    - Primary School
    - Secondary School
    - AP
- Areas of belonging to use as prompts:
    - Peers
    - Teachers
    - Space
    - Subjects
    - School Trips
    - Support
    -
- Prompt Questions
    - What was your favourite year
    - How did you feel about ….. before you started
    - What would you have liked more of?
- Extending
    - That's really interesting can you tell me more . . .
    - Who else was there . . .
    - What do you mean when you say . .
- Future
    - What are your hopes for the future?
    - What do you worry about?
- Is there anything else you want me know before we finish?

**Appendix 5**

## Invite Letters and Consent

Parent Invitation Letter

Nicola Warner

Trainee Educational Psychologist

**Excluded girls' stories of belonging**

Your child has been invited to participate in a research study. Before you agree it is important that you understand what your child's participation would involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully.

**Who am I?**

My Name is Nicki and I am a Trainee Educational Psychologist in the School of Psychology at the University of East London. I work with children and young people in (name of LA). As part of my training I am carrying out a study into the experiences of girls in alternative provisions.

**What is the research?**

I am conducting research into the experiences of belonging of girls who are currently attending alternative provisions. There is currently not much research into girls experiences and it is important to understand their views so that we can think about how we better support them in future, in both mainstream settings and alternative provisions. The research will look at their views on their previous and current educational settings and their hopes for the future.

My research has been approved by the UEL School of Psychology Research Ethics Committee. This means that my research follows the standard of research ethics set by the British Psychological Society.

**Why has your child been asked to participate?**

Your child has been invited to participate in my research as they fit the kind of people I am looking for to help me explore my research topic. I am looking to involve girls in secondary school who are currently excluded from their mainstream school and attending an alternative provision.

You are quite free to decide whether or not you want your child to participate

**What will your child's participation involve?**

If you agree to your child participating they will be asked to meet with me virtually or via phone so I can explain the research and invite them to take part. I will then meet with them virtually or via phone on two or three occasions, taking no longer than an hour on each occasion, to carry out a semi structured interview and give them the opportunity to create a life grid on their school experience (this is a chart where they will describe their experiences at school and at the alternative provision as well as their hopes for the future). The interviews will also be audio recorded to help me ensure I capture their views accurately.

**Your child taking part will be safe and confidential**

Their privacy and safety will be respected at all times. The data that is collected will be confidential and all the information we work on together will be 'anonymous'. By this I mean that when I write their data up I will give your child a different name so they will not be identifiable. Their information will be confidential to me and the people involved in supervising and examining me for the study. I won't share what they say with other adults unless there are concerns about their safety. All their information will be stored securely and retained for the duration of the study and for up to 5 years afterwards.

**What if my child changes their mind about taking part?**

That is fine, your child can tell me they don't want to take part at any point in the study until January 2021 , which is when I will be writing up the study and will no longer know whose information is whose.

**How do I consent to my child taking part?**

To consent to your child taking part you just need to complete the reply slip on the next page and return it to the Alternative Provision who will pass it onto me or you can send it to me at the address above. I will then include your child in my introductory meeting to ask them if they are happy to take part.

If you would like to contact me at any point please contact me on the details above or speak with (name of the Head Teacher) at (alternative provision).

**Contact Details**

If you would like further information about my research or have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me.

If you have any questions or concerns about how the research has been conducted please contact the research supervisor Dr Lucy Browne. School of Psychology, University of East London, Water Lane, London E15 4LZ, Email: L.Browne@uel.ac.uk

Kind Regards

Nicola Warner

Trainee Educational Psychologist

Parent Consent Letter

Doctoral Research into the experiences of belonging of excluded girls in alternative provisions.

I have read your invite letter and I consent to my child taking part in this study. I have full parental responsibility for this child. I understand that you will now meet with my child to make sure they are happy to take part and that my child can choose to withdraw from the research up until January 2021.

Child's Details

Name of Child: _____

Address: _____

Date of Birth: _____

AP currently attending: _____

Parent Details

Signed:_____

Name of parent/ carer:_____

Relationship to the child:_____

Contact telephone number:_____

Date: _____

Child Invitation Letter

Nicola Warner

Trainee Educational Psychologist

**Excluded girls' stories of belonging**

**Who am I?**

My name is Nicki and I work with children and young people in xxx. I'm training to be an Educational Psychologist I am doing a project in how girls in alternative provisions describe their school experiences and their hopes for the future. I am really interested in hearing what you have to say if you can spare the time! There are no right or wrong answers, I want to learn how we can better support you at school and what you hope experience in the future. What you tell me may help other young people.

If you are happy to take part in my project after reading this I will arrange a time to come and speak to you, to tell you more about it and give you the chance to ask me any questions you may have. I will also talk to you about getting your written permission.

If you are happy to be part of my research once we have talked about it we can arrange a good time to have our conversation. When we have our conversation I will record what you say, this is to help me remember all the important things you tell me.

This conversation will happen either virtually or by phone, you will be able to tell me which you would prefer.

What you say will be kept between us. The only time I would have to speak to someone is if you tell me something that means you or someone else is in danger. Once I have talked to you and the other young people I will write about what I have found out. But don't worry I won't use your real name, you can choose a different name so that nobody will know what you have told me.

There is no pressure for you to take part and if you don't want to that's ok, just circle NO. If you are happy to talk to me please circle YES and put your name on the line.

If you have any questions about the research before I meet you can ask (head of AP) to contact me.

Thanks for taking the time to read this!

Nicola Warner

My name is _____ and I am happy to talk to Nicki about her project YES/NO

Child Consent Letter

**Excluded girls stories of belonging**

This is the part of the consent form you need to fill in if you want to take part.

Please read the statements and tick either yes or no. Underneath there is a space for you to sign your name.

| | YES | NO |
|---|---|---|
| Nicki has explained her project to me and I understand what will happen if I decide to take part | | |
| I know I can ask (head teacher) to contact Nicki at any time I want to ask her a question about the project. | | |
| I understand I can choose whether or not to take part. I know I can decide not to take part before the interview and that is ok. I know that if I want to stop at any time in the interview that is okay too. | | |
| I understand that (LA) will receive a copy of Nicki's research, but that nobody will be able to identify me because I will be given a different name. | | |
| I understand that Nicki will not share what I tell her with anyone else, unless she is worried that I or someone else is in danger. | | |

I have read the participant information sheet and I have been able to ask Nicki any questions I have about her research. I would like to take part in her research.

Signature: _____

Name in capitals: _____

Date : _____

**Appendix 6**

Pilot Study: Parent Invite Letter

Nicola Warner

Trainee Educational Psychologist

**Excluded girls stories of belonging**

Your child has been invited to participate in a research study. Before you agree it is important that you understand what your child's participation would involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully.

**Who am I?**

My name is Nicki and I am a Trainee Educational Psychologist in the School of Psychology at the University of East London. I work with children and young people in Greenwich. As part of my training I am carrying out a study into the experiences of girls in alternative provisions.

**What is the research?**

I am conducting research into the experiences of belonging of girls who are currently attending alternative provisions. There is currently not much research in to girls experiences and it is important to understand their views so that we can think about how we better support them in future, in both mainstream settings and alternative provisions. The research will look at their views on their previous and current educational settings and their hopes for the future.

My research has been approved by the UEL School of Psychology Research Ethics Committee. This means that my research follows the standard of research ethics set by the British Psychological Society.

**Why has your child been asked to participate?**

Your child has been invited to participate in my research as they fit the kind of people I am looking for to help me explore my research topic. I am looking to involve girls in secondary school who are currently excluded from their mainstream school and attending an alternative provision.

You are quite free to decide whether or not you want your child to participate

What will your child's participation involve?

If you agree to your child participating they will be asked to meet with me virtually or via phone so I can explain the research and invite them to take part. I will then meet with them virtually or via phone on two or three occasions, taking no longer than an hour on each occasion, to carry out a semi structured interview and give them the opportunity to create a life grid on their school experience

(this is a chart where they will describe their experiences at school and at the alternative provision as well as their hopes for the future).

Your child taking part will be safe and confidential

Their privacy and safety will be respected at all times. As your child will be part of the pilot study they will help me design the questions I ask other children. The data that is collected will be confidential and all the information we work on together will be 'anonymous'. By this I mean that when I write their data up I will give your child a different name so they will not be identifiable. Their information will be confidential to me and the people involved in supervising and examining me. I won't share what your child says with other unless there are concerns about their safety. All their information will be stored securely and retained for the duration of the study and for up to 5 years afterwards.

**What if my child changes their mind about taking part?**

That is fine, your child can tell me they don't want to take part at any point in the study until January 2021.

**How do I consent to my child taking part?**

To consent to your child taking part you just need to complete the reply slip on the next page and return it to the Alternative Provision who will pass it onto me or you can send it to me at the address above. I will then include your child in a meeting to ask them if they are happy to take part.

If you would like to contact me at any point please contact me on the details above or speak with (name of the Head Teacher) at (alternative provision).

**Contact Details**

If you would like further information about my research or have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me.

If you have any questions or concerns about how the research has been conducted please contact the research supervisor Dr Lucy Browne. School of Psychology, University of East London, Water Lane, London E15 4LZ, Email: L.Browne@uel.ac.uk

Kind Regards

Nicola Warner

Trainee Educational Psychologist

Pilot Study: Parent Consent Letter

Doctoral Research into the experiences of belonging of excluded girls in alternative provisions.

I have read your invite letter and I consent to my child taking part in this study. I have full parental responsibility for this child. I understand that you will now meet with my child to make sure they are happy to take part and that my child can choose to withdraw from the research up until January 2021.

Child's Details

Name of Child: _____

Address: _____

Date of Birth: _____

AP currently attending: _____

Parent Details

Signed:_____

Name of parent/ carer:_____

Relationship to the child:_____

Contact telephone number:_____

Date: _____

Pilot Study: Child Invitation Letter

Nicola Warner

Trainee Educational Psychologist

**Excluded girls stories of belonging**

**Who am I?**

My name is Nicki and I work with children and young people in (LA). I'm training to be an Educational Psychologist I am doing a project in how girls in alternative provision describe their school experiences and their hopes for the future. I am really interested in hearing what you have to say if you can spare the time! There are no right or wrong answers, I want to learn how we can better support you at school and what you hope experience in the future. What you tell me may help other young people. You would be part of a pilot study, which means you would be helping me develop the questions I ask other children.

If you are happy to take part in my project after reading this I will arrange a time to come and speak to you, to tell you more about it and give you the chance to ask me any questions you may have. I will also talk to you about getting your written permission.

If you are happy to be part of my research once we have talked about it we can arrange a good time to have our conversation. When we have our conversation I will record what you say, this is to help me remember all the important things you tell me.

This conversation will happen either virtually or by phone, you will be able to tell me which you would prefer.

What you say will be kept between us. The only time I would have to speak to someone is if you tell me something that means you or someone else is in danger. Once I have talked to you and the other young people I will write about what I have found out. You have been invited to be part of the pilot study which means you will help me to create the questions I need to ask.

There is no pressure for you to take part and if you don't want to that's ok, just circle NO. If you are happy to talk to me please circle YES and put your name on the line. If you have any questions about the research before I meet you can ask (head of alternative provision) to contact me.

Thanks for taking the time to read this!

Nicola Warner

My name is _____ and I am happy to talk to Nicki about her project YES/NO

Pilot Study: Child Consent Letter

**Excluded girls stories of belonging**

This is the part of the consent form you need to fill in if you want to take part.

Please read the statements and tick either yes or no. Underneath there is a space for you to sign your name.

| | YES | NO |
|---|---|---|
| Nicki has explained her project to me and I understand what will happen if I decide to take part | | |
| I know I can ask (head teacher) to contact Nicki at any time I want to ask her a question about the project. | | |
| I understand I can choose whether or not to take part. I know I can decide not to take part before the interview and that is ok. I know that if I want to stop at any time in the interview that is okay too. | | |
| I understand that (LA) will receive a copy of Nicki's research, but that my data will not be part of this. | | |
| I understand that Nicki will not share what I tell her with anyone else, unless she is worried that I or someone else is in danger. | | |

I have read the participant information sheet and I have been able to ask Nicki any questions I have about her research. I would like to take part in her research.

Signature: _____

Name in capitals: _____

Date : _____

**Appendix 7:**

**Extract from Transcript (Harlow)**

H: School Journey, that was fun

N: school journey, Can you tell me more about school journey?

H: School journey, umm we went to this like, I can't remember what it was called, but we stayed there for like a couple of days and nights, whatever. And at a night we used to go out with our torches and whatever and play around and tell stories and that and it was funny for the activities to do as well.

N: Ok Amazing. And who was there with you when you did that. Where there any good friends of yours there?

H: Yeah There were a bunch of my friends there. But it was all the year 6s in my class and the other class.

N: ok great. Was there any one there out of those friendship groups you are still friends with now?

H: ummm no I don't think so. I don't really talk to a lot of people from my primary.

N: Ok. Where there any teachers on school journey you felt like you had a particularly good relationship with?

H: err no I don't think I did.

N: ok. any teachers at Mossdown where your relationship felt particularly good.

H: ummm. I don't think I did to be honest. I can't remember.

N: that's fine I am sure they would have stick out. What was the school building like at Mossdown, I have not been there.

H: old (laughs)

N: old ok. Anything else that sticks out.

H: It was quite big to be honest. You could possibly get lost in there if you were new. It had a lot of ummm it had this really up and at the highest level and it have a um library. I couldn't tell you how to get up there, I can't remember, at all.

N: It's strange how some primary schools are like mazes. Trying to navigate your way through is quite difficult. Would you have preferred a modern building or where you happy it was an old building?

H: I didn't really mind, I think at the end of the day its still was a school the building didn't change the atmosphere of teachers and that.

N: fair enough. What would you have like Mossdown to have done more of?

H: help me more and not just send me out.

N: and what would that help have looked like. Could you describe that for me?

H: because then like they would actually care and teach me because they just got sick of me and then like my mum would say I think there might be something wrong because of my behaviour but they

just kept telling her I was a naughty kid. Still to this day I don't know how to tell time on the clock and I am 15.

N: and you felt you would have like them to look into that and offered you some support?

H: Yeah, because they always just said there was nothing wrong with me and that I am just a naughty kid but then by the time I got into year 8 or 9 then they started picking it up and saying yeah because like I was 13 when I got diagnosed with ADHD.

N: Ok ummm and so that would have happened at secondary wouldn't it. what secondary did you go to?

H: I did go to Cherry Grove.

N: Ok. And how did you feel about going to Cherry Grove before you started there?

H: I was I found it umm because when I went to go into there to checkout it out I saw a lot of music and drama and it was performing arts based and I'm very I'm into performing arts.

N: Ummm so you felt they could cater to that

H: yeah

N: can you tell me more about why you're interested in drama and performing arts?

H: I duno it's just I love playing music and singing and stuff like that and with drama it just I duno it just expresses me

N: Ok how does that feel to be able to express yourself

H: It feels calming because you're playing a totally different character what you are. you get to like see different moods people can be in. and just act like you're not yourself and you're just somebody else. feel like you have a mask in a way.

**Appendix 8:**

**Example of colour coded transcript according to elements of the 3d framework (Grace)**

G: yeah

N: and how did she do that because you obviously weren't offended when she did it. how was it that she told you you were in the wrong

G: Like straight up to my face. She never beat around the bush.

N: was there anything else that stuck out for you about

G: not really

N: any of the teachers

G: no

N: anything you can tell me about the people that went there did you have a group of friends anything special you liked to do with them

G: Umm I had, well literally since I was young my circles always getting very small so when I was at [redacted] and I literally only had like three friends so and the one that I still talk to her now she's we used to live next door to each other from when we was little babies like we've grown up with each other same primary same secondary still talk now we still kinda close now as well

N: can you tell me more about that relationship and why you think it's worked

G: I don't know like its just we've always been kind of close like my mum was close with her mum and then when she moved house she moved next door to us and then we was just always kind of close then on the weekends when I went out of play out she would come out or if she went to play out out I would go out. in primary school we'd played together like we've never really had time apart from each other

N: okay that's that sounds like a really important relationship to have had only. can you tell me what the score building was like at I

G: so when you first get there you'd have the first blue gates and then there would be like big like walking thingy at the time there was loads of like Flowers and benches and that and then you would have the main reception and you have another gate where the playground was and then as soon as you walk in through the gates it was literally just a school like a 2 Storey school a big playground and behind the school was a little park that we would go to at PE sometimes

N: is in xxx

G: no its in xxx, xxx, xxx

N: OK right yeah I know I know where that is and was there anything you particularly liked about the school building.

G: like the whole thing really. from when we was in year 5 we used to, kids used to get jobs to go and like work around the school and that and then actually helped me I had like 3 different jobs so at lunch and that I would have to go and water all the plants and then I would be taken out of lessons to go and sit in nursery with the little kids and help them with their with what they have to do and that

N: so you describe as been a positive experience

G: yeah

72 N: did you get to do any school trips or anything while you were there

G: Oh yeah there was always school trips

74 N: they sound like they're a good memory

G: yeah there is a few

76 N: is there anything particularly stand out that you'd like to share

G: ummm just when we went to like the museums and that

78 N: and what is it that stands out about those was it the people you were with was it what you learnt

G: yeah because there was always like, when I first went to secondary school my favourite subjects
80 have always been history and science and then in primary school we would always go to the same History Museum I can't remember what it's called but yeah I love history and when we went there
82 we got to learn more about stuff that you didn't already know about

N: OK amazing is there anything you'd have liked s to have done more of that you don't
84 feel that they did

G: ummm not really

86 N: okay that's great, that's really good. What secondary school did you go to?

G: My first one was E

88 N: and your second

G:

90 N: OK And how come you moved

G: I got a managed move so when I left primary school in year 7 I was still calm kid that was trying to
92 find where I was like meant to go and what kids I would make friends with and then year eight that's when I took the wrong turn and I started becoming the bad kid again the one with the hot temper
94 the one that's always fighting, got attitude and then we my mom came in for a meeting one day and they just said they wanted to do a managed move for 12 weeks to see how it would pan out

96 N: and how did you feel about that

G: I hate change that's one thing about me I hate change I hate new places I hate going places where
98 I don't know no one like I hate it so at first I was like I'm not going at all and then when I went it wasn't too bad but i just didn't enjoy it

100 N: OK so I'm going to go back to I :o start with. how did you feel about that before you started, you've already said you didn't like change, but how did you feel about going to
102

G: I didn't actually mind at the time my brother went there and then I knew that my friends from my
104 primary school well some of them would be coming as well so like it's not like I was gonna be on my own and I was the only new person there

106 N: OK and did you enjoy year 7

G: Yeah

N: what was it that stood out as something you like why you enjoyed it

G: it was something new for me I hate change but that that was something new for me like the new environment and that

N: and where there any teachers or anything that stood out that you remember quite positively

G: not really. I don't really like teachers I have thing about teachers I don't like them I don't like talking to them

N: okay that's fine any subject so anything you learn that you really enjoyed

G: Science and history

N: science and history okay. and what do you think changed why do you think you took that wrong turn

G: I have no idea

N: that's okay sometimes we don't know and that's alright but something changed and what was it that got pulled up was it your behaviour had changed, the way you were in class

G: literally everything changed even just not school at home as well um that changed my behaviour in lesson changed I would never go to my lessons if I didn't wanna a lesson I would just go and bunk it with people like I would just climb out the school gates to go home yeah fighting

N: and how do you feel [illegible] dealt with that

G: they didn't because they are quiet there quite a strict school they don't really allow any of that so when it first started happening what they would do is they would either exclude me send me home or make me sit in isolation

N: Ok what was isolation like

G: It was a tiny little room with 9 tables and 9 chairs and you would have to sit there and work all day until lunch and that was the only break you would get is lunchtime then when lunch is finished you have to go back to work again then you would have an hour after school

N: OK and in terms of your friendship, am I right in thinking this would probably be the start of year eight. what were your friendships like then

G: Well I thought all these people were my friends but they wasn't there were just people at school I would be naughty with

N: and then it came to the managed move which was to [illegible] and you told me you didn't like changing you were apprehensive, what was being at [illegible] I like

G: Well I only lasted there three days. so my first day obviously it was a bit like ohh no just got go meet everyone I'm gonna be that the new thing everyone's talking about I got over it was really like it was alright then my second day is when I started having an issue with someone and then the third day is when we had a fight and then I was permeantly excluded from there

Key for 3D

- Personal
- Social
- Past
- Present
- Future
- Context

**Appendix 9:**

**Examples of Completed Three-Dimensional Frameworks**

(Numbers in brackets refer to line numbers in the original transcript)

Khaiah

| Interaction | | Continuity | | | Situation |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Personal | Social | Past | Present | Future | Context |
| Makes me feel happy (242) (top) | . And if they do judge just say like, everyone looks like why you judging for just leave and let them be. I mean, obviously, when I came here, I was the first person with Tourettes here , I think so it's like, I'm the only kid in the School with it. But I don't know what it was like before. everyone didn't understand so when I was stressed out I would tic or something. Sometimes I can't write into my workload because I will tic and scratched the paper or rip it up or I will like put my pen all over the paper. So it's like yeah, and some | | I thought it was going to be a bunch of bitches here and it was all gonna be like everyones just rude and there are going to be so many fights. But it's actually fun. Like the people here are calm. And you might feel like everyone's bad that comes here blah blah it just a bad peoples school but no, if you listen to our story about what got us put in here is actually Oh, okay. (219-222)<br>and it's normal to be different here. They don't expect you to be normal, like if your normal for you wouldn't be here you know, I mean, like, | | Endeavour<br>It's fine it's kind of feels like a prison sometimes but it's fine. But like, I just wish that we had a food tech class here like maybe they could like make a kitchen downstairs or something because that will be the best for me (246-248) |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | people didn't understand that and were like why you making them noises. And I explained them and they just don't care. But there's one boy that stressed me out about it. But he's calm I'm just gonna go through with him and he just doesn't understand change (226-234). | | everybody is different here. Everybody's got their own, everybody. You know, everybodies like you, not like you just nobody judges. (224-226)<br>(teachers)<br>They fine, they are all fine. Some of them just do my head in sometimes. I like been here because I'm top in all my classes, not higher than anyone else in here just excelling in all of them so you know. (237-239)<br>They care about you and they show it? It's not that they say it they show. It's like the best feeling. (244)<br>Because I like to cook that's the only thing I miss about Silverfen is doing the cooking. I love cooking. or we can like get in touch with my school or something like that and we could borrow a kitchen but obviously like Corona, but like when corona is done we can maybe like borrow | | |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | the kitchen from my school? Because the schools in partnership with my school. My school was just bitches so yeah. (248-252) | | |
| | | | Just like more maybe taking us different places. Like we have Park sessions for two hours stuff like that. But I feel that maybe we should like go to actual places in that time not just go to the park as a park is a bit boring. I want to go somewhere that's actually going to get my energy up. They were talking about going boxing during those times. but Obviously, we have to wait til they open back up because to get our anger out get our energy out. because we play football but but because boxing is going to the whole body moving. So it's not just kicking a football around. Also I don't play football. (266-272) | | its mainly like only boys, I am like the only girl in my class, there is two other girls. But they don't come in a lot of time there is three other girls, but they don't come in a lot of times, except for one girl she does come in. She's pregnant. She has a lot of appointments. (276-280) |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | I don't mind anything. I just want them to do more activities. Something teacher said that she's still trying to get her friend in to do nails. I love, I got my nails done yesterday. But so yeah. And that's that's that's nice. Because I do nails and I like girly things. And most things here are kind of boy (274-276)<br>It's like because as most boys, because the whole class is mostly boys like, if I'm the only girl in that day the only other girl, I'll see is a teacher that's a girl. So it's like, I want to do more girly things. Because when the boys want to do things its like, there is male teachers, they want to do it too. And now with the support, it's a male teacher. So it's that, you know, like he agrees and I'm like, Oh, I don't want to do that. But that they do sort it out and that. | | |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | Because I'm a girl and I feel like it should be more, you know, the boxing I can do it but that's more boyish You know, I mean, I want to do an activity where its for girls the boys can join in, you know, or all the girls in all the years can come together and do it and then the boys can do their boxing thing. (282-289) | | |

Harlow

| Interaction | | Continuity | | | Situation |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Personal | Social | Past | Present | Future | Context |
| I duno it's just I love playing music and singing and stuff like that and with drama it just I duno it just expresses me (73-74) . . . It feels calming because you're playing a totally different character what you are. you get to like see different moods people can be in. and just act like you're not yourself and you're just somebody else. | Like my mum when I was at Cherry Grove she worried that I was going to come out with nothing, like no GCSE and like I just gonna be nothing with my life (192-194) | Yeah I did I did um coz I was doing, when I chose my GCSEs I chose music and drama and I was doing that, yeah (83-84) . . . The music teacher was fine. it was just the drama teacher was a bit much like she wouldn't, she just kept bugging me a lot (86-87) . . . Its like I am not not very good at homework so I always either forget or I just can't do it and I'm like | | | Cherry Grove<br>I was I found it umm because when I went to go into there to checkout it out I saw a lot of music and drama and it was very performing arts based and I'm very I'm into performing arts (68-69).<br><br>Doesn't remember any support with writing or academic work. |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| feel like you have a mask in a way (76-78).<br><br>no I think I just found the work easy to do, cause like, the drama, I love drama, but like I struggle with the written work. I'm more active than written like if you give me a question I'll be able to speak it but can't write it down, I struggle with that (103-105). . . (music) it was just like, what was it, choose a song, choose this, choose that and it was pretty simple. In music there was more performing and practising than written which I preferred that, I prefer to do something than write because I just get bored writing (107-109). | | no I'm not doing it and then she would constantly like she won't let me do something. Or there was once where we had to go in groups we had to like practise every lunchtime or break time but they kept mixing up the days and I didn't have any of their numbers for them to tell me anything and then they told the teacher that I've never turned up. there's a bit like well you never kind of told me so then I wasn't allowed to do anything and I had to sit in the classroom doing work (89-94). . .<br>It was annoying, because how was that fair I didn't get told the days (96) . . .(music teacher) I duno she was just really nice she was always like make sure I'm okay and just check on me. I duno. She was just really nice. I'll do her homework, her homework is easy (laughs) I just wouldn't do my drama homework (99-101) | | | Cherry Grove I used to do nothing in my books like you can checkout all my books I will do nothing and I would get like 1s and 2s, (188-189) |

**Appendix 10:**

**Examples Illustrating the Process of Creating Storied Narratives from Interim Narratives**

(Numbers in brackets refer to line numbers in the original transcript)

Grace

| Interim Narrative | Storied Narrative |
|---|---|
| Personal<br>I'm 14 (3) I'm Year 10 (5).<br>ethnicity<br>G: I don't know (9)<br>confident, loud, over the top (14) what over the top It's like exaggeration I like to drag stuff out a lot (16)<br>well literally since I was young my circles always getting very small (44)<br>Can't id anywhere she belonged or belongs (269)<br>I don't like it when people think they can get to comfy around me because I'm not that type of person (209-210) | Personal<br>Grace is 14 and in year 10. Grace did not know how to describe her ethnicity in the interview and describes herself confident, loud and over the top. By over the top she means she likes to exaggerate and drag stuff out. Grace describes herself as always having a small social circle. Grace can not identify anywhere she has belonged or feels like she belongs now. Grace does not like people to be too comfy around her so has set clear boundaries. |
| Friendships<br>when I was at Mayfield and I literally only had like three friends so and the one that I still talk to her now she's we used to live next door to each other from when we was little babies like we've grown up with each other same primary same secondary still talk now we still kinda close now as well (44-47)<br>I don't know like its just we've always been kind of close like my mum was close with her mum and then when she moved house she moved next door to us and then we was just always kind of close then on the weekends when I went out of play out she would come out or if she went to play out out I would go out. in primary school we'd played together like we've never really had time apart from each other (49-53) | Friendships<br>Grace's strongest friendship developed from a small circle of friends at Mayfield Primary. She had three friends there one of whom she still talks to now. They have known each other since they were babies, lived next door to each other and went to the same primary and secondary. They are still close now.<br>Their mum's are also close and this friend moved next door to Grace and this lead to them playing out together at weekends and playing together at primary. Grace says that they have never really had time apart. |
| Primary<br>Mayfields primary school (18)<br>Favourite Year: Year 4 (22)<br>Only remembers one teacher<br>Mayfields – positive (70)<br>so when you first get there you'd have the first blue gates and then there would be like big like walking thingy at the time there was loads of like Flowers and benches and that and then you would have the main reception and you have another gate where the playground was and then as soon as you walk in through the gates it | Primary<br>Grace went to Mayfields Primary School overall Grace has positive memories of Mayfields and she reports that she did not have too many issues when she was there. Grace remembers year 4 being her favourite year.<br>Grace says that when you get to Mayfields there are blue gates with a walkway, there were flowers and benches around the walk way and behind this was reception. After the reception there was another gate to the playground and once you were through this gate you could see a two storey school in the big |

| | |
|---|---|
| was literally just a school like a 2 Storey school a big playground and behind the school was a little park that we would go to at PE sometimes (56-60)<br>yeah it was alright I didn't have too many issues there at all (20)<br>so I've always been kind of like that one to have a really bad temper. Like my temper can go in seconds. and then in year 4 my teacher her name was Miss Spencer she was like an anger management teacher and a counsellor at the same time so she would help me with that and then we kind of grew out of bond until year 6 when I left and then I just never saw her again (24-27)<br>how did she develop that bond with you<br>like she would that she would take me out like out of lessons sometimes and that do a one on one with me and like try and get to know me a lot like we had a big kitchen in my primary school and we would go and do baking and then when I was in the wrong she would always like put me in my place and that and if I'd done something she would always bring me up on it (29-32)<br>Like straight up to my face. She never beat around the bush. (37)<br>like the whole thing really. from when we was in year 5 we used to, kids used to get jobs to go and like work around the school and that and then Miss Spencer actually helped me I had like 3 different jobs so at lunch and that I would have to go and water all the plants and then I would be taken out of lessons to go and sit in nursery with the little kids and help them with their with what they have to do and that (65-69)<br>like the whole thing really. from when we was in year 5 we used to, kids used to get jobs to go and like work around the school and that and then Miss Spencer actually helped me I had like 3 different jobs so at lunch and that I would have to go and water all the plants and then I would be taken out of lessons to go and sit in nursery with the little kids and help them with their with what they have to do and that (65-69) | playground. Behind the school was a little park where Grace would sometimes go to PE.<br>In Year 4 Grace's teacher was called Miss Spencer. Grace remembers her as being an anger management teacher and a counseller at the same time. Grace reports that Miss Spencer helped her with her anger. Grace describes her temper as being bad and going in seconds. Grace developed a bond with Miss Spencer that lasted until she left in Year 6, and she has not seen Miss Spencer since. Miss Spencer built this bond with Grace through taking her out of lesson and doing one on one work. During this one on one work, Miss Spencer tried to get to know Grace. At Mayfields there was a big kitchen, Grace and Miss Spencer would do baking. Miss Spencer would also tell Grace when she was in the wrong and put her in her place. Miss spencer did this straight to Grace and Grace apricated this. |

Khaiah

| Interim Narrative | Storied Narrative |
|---|---|
| Starting at AP<br>Endeavour<br>It's fine it's kind of feels like a prison sometimes but it's fine. But like, I just wish that we had a food tech class here like maybe they could like make a kitchen downstairs or something because that will be the best for me (246-248)<br><br>(teachers)<br>They fine, they are all fine. Some of them just do my head in sometimes. I like been here because I'm top in all my classes, not higher than anyone else in here just excelling in all of them so you know. (237-239)<br>They care about you and they show it? It's not that they say it they show. It's like the best feeling. (244)<br>Because I like to cook that's the only thing I miss about Silverfen is doing the cooking. I love cooking. or we can like get in touch with my school or something like that and we could borrow a kitchen but obviously like Corona, but like when corona is done we can maybe like borrow the kitchen from my school? Because the schools in partnership with my school. My school was just bitches so yeah. (248-252)<br>Makes me feel happy (242) (top) | Starting at AP<br>Khaiah describes Endeavour as feeling like a prison at times, but she likes it. One of the reason she likes it at Endeavour is that she is doing well in all her classes. Khaiah likes the teachers at Endeavour but they can frustrate her at times. She feels like that do not just say they are but that they actually show it, and that is a good feeling.<br>Khaiah wishes she could continue with food teach though, but they do not have a kitchen. She has wondered if once Covid is over if they could use the kitchen at her old school. |
| Students at AP<br>I thought it was going to be a bunch of bitches here and it was all gonna be like everyones just rude and there are going to be so many fights. But it's actually fun. Like the people here are calm. And you might feel like everyone's bad that comes here blah blah it just a bad peoples school but no, if you listen to our story about what got us put in here is actually Oh, okay. (219-222)<br>and it's normal to be different here. They don't expect you to be normal, like if your normal for you wouldn't be here you know, I mean, like, everybody is different here. Everybody's got their own, everybody. You know, everybodies like you, not like you just nobody judges. (224-226)<br>And if they do judge just say like, everyone looks like why you judging for just leave and let them be. I mean, obviously, when I came here, I was the first person with Tourettes here , I | Students at AP<br>Before Khaiah started at Endeavour she thought hat the other students would be rude and want to fight, but she has found it is actually. She says its important to listen to peoples stories to understand why they are there. Khaiah apricates that it is normal to be different at Endeavour and this means that the other students do not judge others. When students do make judgements she feel that they are questioned about this. As the only student with tourettes at Endeavour and at first felt the other students did not understand some of her behaviours, but when she explained it the understood. There is one boy who has found it challenging but Khaiah feels this is because he does not like change. |

| | |
|---|---|
| think so it's like, I'm the only kid in the School with it. But I don't know what it was like before. everyone didn't understand so when I was stressed out I would tic or something. Sometimes I can't write into my workload because I will tic and scratched the paper or rip it up or I will like put my pen all over the paper. So it's like yeah, and some people didn't understand that and were like why you making them noises. And I explained them and they just don't care. But there's one boy that stressed me out about it. But he's calm I'm just gonna go through with him and he just doesn't understand change (226-234). | |
| Returning to Silverfen<br>You belong to someone you belong to a place you know, I mean (324) I belong here, at Endeavour (325)<br>They are extending my time here. I don't wanna go back (254)<br>I was meant to be here for six weeks, I think this is my sixth week or maybe next week is my sixth (256)<br>There's less kids (259)<br>There's just like less stress less bitchy people less people to deal with less people chatting about things less rumours less all of that (263-264).<br>But even then I feel like if I went back now she wouldn't care its all aboutif my behaviours improving. But if you don't give me support how is my behaviour going to be improving. (192-193) | Returning to Silverfen<br>Khaiah has been at Endeavour for nearly 6 weeks, which was the original length of her placement. However it has been decided to extend her stay. She prefers Endeavour as there are less student which for her means less stress as there are less people and rumours for her to deal with. She feels like she belongs at Endeavour and worries about returning to Silverfen. She feels that they would not see that her behaviour has been improving, and that with the lack of support she felt she received that her behaviour would not continue to improve. |

**Appendix 11:**

**Examples of Identifying Shared Storylines in the 'Stanzas' of Storied Narratives**

Analysis of Stanzas in Grace and Harlow's Storied Narratives

| Graces Story |
|---|
| *Who Am I?* |
| Grace is 14 and in Year Ten. Grace describes herself as confident, loud and over the top. Grace has always had a small social circle and she does not like people to get too comfortable around her so has clear boundaries. Grace cannot identify anywhere she has belonged or feels like she belongs now. |
| *Primary School* |
| Grace went to Mayfields Primary School. Grace has positive memories of Mayfields and she did not have too many issues when she was there. Grace remembers a few school trips while she was at Mayfield, they were positive memories for her. She remembers repeat trips to one history museum. Grace loves history and on these visits, she got to learn more about things she did not already know about. |
| Grace remembers Mayfields having blue gates with a walkway, surrounded by flowers and benches. This walkway lead to the school reception. After the reception there was another gate to the playground and beyond this gate a two-storey school could be seen in a big playground. Grace remembers going to the little park behind the school for PE sometimes. |
| *Favourite Year* |
| Grace's favourite year at Mayfields was Year Four where Miss Spencer was her teacher. Miss Spencer was an anger management teacher and a counsellor at the same time. Grace had a bad temper and it could go in seconds, Miss Spencer helped Grace with this. Miss Spencer built a bond with Grace through taking her out of lessons and doing one on one work with her. During this one on one work, Miss Spencer tried to get to know Grace. Grace and Miss Spencer would do baking in the large kitchen at Mayfields. Grace appreciated that Miss Spencer was straight with her, telling Grace when she was in the wrong and putting her in her place. In Year Five students were given jobs in the school. Miss Spencer helped Grace get three jobs. At lunch Grace would water the flowers by the walkway and Grace also missed some lessons to be in the nursery with the little kids and help them with what they needed to do. Grace's bond with Miss Spencer lasted until she left in Year Six, and she has not seen Miss Spencer since. |
| *Friendships* |
| Grace's strongest friendship developed from a small circle of three friends she had at Mayfields Primary. One of these girls, Sarah, she still speaks to now, they have known each other since they were babies and as well as attending Mayfields together they also went to the same secondary school. Their Mums are also close, and Sarah's family moved next door to Grace. This resulted in them playing out together at weekends as well as playing together at primary. Grace says that they have never really had time apart and they are still close now. |

Harlow

| *Harlow's Story* |
|---|
| *Who Am I?* |
| Harlow is a 15-year-old girl who can be stubborn and defiant. Harlow can get obsessed over things. Harlow can be an anti- social person, who does not like going out and prefers to stay in her bedroom. When her Mum goes to her Dad's house with her sisters she stays at home as she does not like being in the same house as all of them. Harlow's sense of humour is like her Dad's, it can sometimes be hurtful, and people can take it the wrong way, but she does not mean for that to happen. Harlow has no filter; her dad's filter is better than hers, but her cousin's is worse. Most of the time Harlow does not care if other people judge her but when |

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| they assume that she is acting up, being tough or acting bad it does affect her because she is not a bad person. |
| *Primary School* |
| Harlow attended Mossdown Primary and she cannot remember any positive teacher relationships there. Harlow recalls the school as being big and old. It was big enough that if you were new, you could get lost there and Harlow does not remember how to get to the library at the top of the building. Harlow did not mind that the building was old, because it is still a school and the building does not change that. |
| Harlow did not have a favourite year at Mossdown. Harlow was often kicked out of class and would then walk around the school. When Harlow was annoyed at the boys in her class, she would throw their stationary out of the window and then at break they would see it all outside. Harlow felt that Mossdown did not care about her, she felt they saw her as the naughty child. Harlow wanted them to help her more, not just send her out. Harlow felt that this would mean that they cared and wanted to teach her, but instead she believed they got sick of her. Harlow's Mum thought that there was something wrong with Harlow, but Mossdown just told her that Harlow was naughty. |
| *School Journey* |
| One positive memory Harlow has from Mossdown is School Journey. Harlow cannot remember where they went but that it was with all the Year Six students from the school. They stayed over for a couple of days and nights, and at night Harlow and other students went out with their torches, playing around and telling stories. Harlow also enjoyed the activities they did during the day. |
| *Favourite Subject* |
| Harlow went to Cherry Grove secondary school. When she went to see it before starting, she saw that they had a focus on performing arts including music and drama. Harlow enjoys performing arts, she especially loves playing music and singing. Harlow finds drama calming and finds that it gives her chance to express herself. For Harlow drama is like wearing a mask because she can play different characters and experience different moods. |
| Harlow chose to do music and drama for GCSE. She got on okay with the music teacher and Harlow felt that the music teacher checked that she was alright. Harlow did her music homework as she found it easy. The music homework was usually having to choose something to bring to class, such as a song. She found that music involved more performing than writing and Harlow preferred that. |

Key to Themes:

| **Master Themes** | **AUTONOMY** | **UNDERSTANDING DIFFERENCE** | **SCHOOL SYSTEM** | **PEERS** | **FUTURE UNCERTAINTY** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Understanding decisions | Of Self | Space | Positive | AP |
| | Being Heard | Labels and Judgements | Extra-Curricular | Negative | Aspirations |
| | Control through Behaviour | Teachers | Responses to behaviour | Physical interactions | History Repeating |
| | | Perception of Boys | Academic | COVID | |
| | | Family | Allocation of Resources | Protection | |

**Appendix 12:**

**Ethics Approval**

## School of Psychology Research Ethics Committee

## NOTICE OF ETHICS REVIEW DECISION

**For research involving human participants**

BSc/MSc/MA/Professional Doctorates in Clinical, Counselling and Educational Psychology

**REVIEWER: Andrea Giraldez-Hayes**

**SUPERVISOR**: **Lucy Browne**

**STUDENT: Nicola Warner**

**Course**: Professional Doctorate in Child and Educational Psychology

**Title of proposed study**: Excluded Girls Stories of Belonging

**DECISION OPTIONS:**

1. **APPROVED:** Ethics approval for the above named research study has been granted from the date of approval (see end of this notice) to the date it is submitted for assessment/examination.

2. **APPROVED, BUT MINOR AMENDMENTS ARE REQUIRED BEFORE THE RESEARCH COMMENCES** (see Minor Amendments box below)**:** In this circumstance, re-submission of an ethics application is not required but the student must confirm with their supervisor that all minor amendments have been made before the research commences. Students are to do this by filling in the confirmation box below when all amendments have been attended to and emailing a copy of this

decision notice to her/his supervisor for their records. The supervisor will then forward the student's confirmation to the School for its records.

3. **NOT APPROVED, MAJOR AMENDMENTS AND RE-SUBMISSION REQUIRED** (see Major Amendments box below)**:** In this circumstance, a revised ethics application must be submitted and approved before any research takes place. The revised application will be reviewed by the same reviewer. If in doubt, students should ask their supervisor for support in revising their ethics application.

**DECISION ON THE ABOVE-NAMED PROPOSED RESEARCH STUDY**

*(Please indicate the decision according to one of the 3 options above)*

**Minor amendments required** *(for reviewer)*:

3.5. You mention permission will be asked to parents, but there is no reference to how permission will be asked to the children. Please, clarify.

**Major amendments required** *(for reviewer):*

**Confirmation of making the above minor amendments** *(for students)*:

I have noted and made all the required minor amendments, as stated above, before starting my research and collecting data.

Student's name *(Typed name to act as signature):* Nicola Warner

Student number: u1614536

Date: 01/03/2020

*(Please submit a copy of this decision letter to your supervisor with this box completed, if minor amendments to your ethics application are required)*

**ASSESSMENT OF RISK TO RESEACHER** *(for reviewer)*

Has an adequate risk assessment been offered in the application form?

Yes

Please request resubmission with an adequate risk assessment

If the proposed research could expose the researcher to any of kind of emotional, physical or health and safety hazard? Please rate the degree of risk:

☐ HIGH

Please do not approve a high risk application and refer to the Chair of Ethics. Travel to countries/provinces/areas deemed to be high risk should not be permitted and an application not approved on this basis. If unsure please refer to the Chair of Ethics.

☐ MEDIUM (Please approve but with appropriate recommendations)

☐ LOW

| **Reviewer comments in relation to researcher risk (if any).** |
| --- |
| |

**Reviewer** *(Typed name to act as signature)*: Andrea Giraldez-Hayes

**Date**: 22 Feb 2020

*This reviewer has assessed the ethics application for the named research study on behalf of the School of Psychology Research Ethics Committee*

**RESEARCHER PLEASE NOTE:**

For the researcher and participants involved in the above named study to be covered by UEL's Insurance, prior ethics approval from the School of Psychology (acting on behalf of the UEL Research Ethics Committee), and confirmation from students where minor amendments were required, must be obtained before any research takes place.

For a copy of UELs Personal Accident & Travel Insurance Policy, please see the Ethics Folder in the Psychology Noticeboard

**Appendix 13:**

LA Ethics Approval

RE: 200215[redacted]CS Research Governance Ethics Committee Research Proposal Form NW - Message (HTML)

File Message Help Tell me what you want to do

On Going Ca... Mark Unread Find Zoom Send to OneNote Report Message

RE: 200215[redacted]CS Research Governance Ethics Committee Research Proposal Form NW

[redacted]

Reply Reply All Forward

Mon 28/09/2020 07:51

[redacted]

**Subject:** FW: 200215[redacted]CS Research Governance Ethics Committee Research Proposal Form NW

Hi[redacted]

The research project is approved to go ahead.

Please see 2 comments from[redacted]

Many thanks

[redacted]

Senior Assistant Director Inclusion, Learning and Achievement

[redacted]

**Appendix 14:**

Ethics Approval following COVID 19

**UNIVERSITY OF EAST LONDON**

**School of Psychology**

## REQUEST FOR AMENDMENT TO AN ETHICS APPLICATION

**FOR BSc, MSc/MA & TAUGHT PROFESSIONAL DOCTORATE STUDENTS**

**Please complete this form if you are requesting approval for proposed amendment(s) to an ethics application that has been approved by the School of Psychology.**

Note that approval must be given for significant change to research procedure that impacts on ethical protocol. If you are not sure about whether your proposed amendment warrants approval consult your supervisor or contact Dr Tim Lomas (Chair of the School Research Ethics Committee).

**HOW TO COMPLETE & SUBMIT THE REQUEST**

1. Complete the request form electronically and accurately.
2. Type your name in the 'student's signature' section (page 2).
3. When submitting this request form, ensure that all necessary documents are attached (see below).
4. Using your UEL email address, email the completed request form along with associated documents to: Dr Mark Finn at m.finn@uel.ac.uk
5. Your request form will be returned to you via your UEL email address with reviewer's response box completed. This will normally be within five days. Keep a copy of the approval to submit with your project/dissertation/thesis.
6. Recruitment and data collection are **not** to commence until your proposed amendment has been approved.

**REQUIRED DOCUMENTS**

1. A copy of your previously approved ethics application with proposed amendments(s) added as tracked changes.
2. Copies of updated documents that may relate to your proposed amendment(s). For example an updated recruitment notice, updated participant information letter, updated consent form etc.
3. A copy of the approval of your initial ethics application.

| Name of applicant: Nicola Warner<br><br>Programme of study: Professional Doctorate in Child and Educational Psychology |
|---|

1.1 Title of research: Excluded Girls Stories of Belonging

| Name of supervisor: Dr Lucy Browne |
|---|

Briefly outline the nature of your proposed amendment(s) and associated rationale(s) in the boxes below

| Proposed amendment | Rationale |
|---|---|
| Moved to remote data collect – this will be via teams or by phone – depending on which method the young person feels most comfortable | COVID19 |
| | |
| | |

| Please tick | YES | NO |
|---|---|---|
| Is your supervisor aware of your proposed amendment(s) and agree to them? | Y | |

Student's signature (please type your name): Nicola warner

Date: 15/09/20

| TO BE COMPLETED BY REVIEWER | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Amendment(s) approved** | YES | NO |
| **Comments**<br><br>**Nicola's proposed change to remote data collection, given the current guidance related to Covid-19, was discussed in supervision on 17.09.20. I have read her amended ethics application, and I am happy to approve these changes.** | | |

Reviewer: Dr Lucy Browne

Date: 18.09.20

**Appendix 15:**

**Debrief Letters**

Parent Debrief Letter

Nicola Warner

Trainee Educational Psychologist

Thank you for agreeing to your child taking part in my research study on Doctoral Research into the experiences of belonging of excluded girls in alternative provisions. This letter offers information that may be relevant now the study has completed.

**What happened during the research?**

Since gaining your consent I have met with (name of child) several times. We completed a couple of interviews and the life grid. (Name of child) was very helpful and a pleasure to work with.

**What happens now?**

As I told (name of child) last time we met, I will not need to see them again. I am currently look at what (name of child) and other young people told me and trying to understand their experiences and put their views into my research. I have written it all up by May 2021 and I will send you an anonymous summary of what I have found out. Your child chose a different name so they will not be identifiable from the written work I produce.

If you have any questions about the research, you can contact me at the address and phone number at the top of the letter or you can contact my supervisor Dr Lucy Browne on L.Browne@uel.ac.uk.

Kind Regards

Nicola Warner

Trainee Educational Psychologist

Child Debrief Letter

Nicola Warner

Trainee Educational Psychologist

Thank you for agreeing to take part in my research study on the experiences of belonging of excluded girls in alternative provisions. This letter offers information that may be relevant now the study has completed.

**What happened during the research?**

It was great to work with you, thank you for sharing your experiences with me. As we discussed last time we met we will not need to meet again now.

**What happens now?**

I am currently looking at what you and other young people told me and trying to understand your experiences and put your views into my research. I will have written it all up by May 2021 and I will send you an anonymous summary of what I have found out. You chose a different name so you will not be identifiable from the written work I produce.

If you have any questions about the research, you can ask (head teacher) to contact me. If there was anything we discussed in the interviews that you would like to discuss in more detail or you would like support with you can ask (name of head teacher), speak to your doctor or contact Childline on 0800 1111.

Kind Regards

Nicola Warner

Trainee Educational Psychologist

Pilot Study: Parent Debrief Letter

Nicola Warner

Trainee Educational Psychologist

Thank you for agreeing to your child taking part in my research study on Doctoral Research into the experiences of belonging of excluded girls in alternative provisions. This letter offers information that may be relevant now the study has completed.

**What happened during the research?**

Since gaining your consent I have met with (name of child) several times. We completed a couple of interviews and the life grid. (Name of child) was very helpful and a pleasure to work with. They helped me develop some useful questions to use with other children.

**What happens now?**

As I told (name of child) last time we met, I will not need to see them again. I am currently look at what (name of child) and other young people told me and trying to understand their experiences and put their views into my research.

If you have any questions about the research, you can contact me at the address and phone number at the top of the letter or you can contact my supervisor Dr Lucy Browne on L.Browne@uel.ac.uk.

Kind Regards

Nicola Warner

Educational Psychologist in Training

Pilot Study: Child Debrief Letter

Nicola Warner

Trainee Educational Psychologist

Thank you for agreeing to take part in my research study on the experiences of belonging of excluded girls in alternative provisions. This letter offers information that may be relevant now the study has completed.

**What happened during the research?**

It was great to work with you, thank you for sharing your experiences with me. As we discussed last time we met we will not need to meet again now. You have helped me some really useful questions.

**What happens now?**

I am currently looking at what you and other young people told me and trying to understand your experiences and put your views into my research. I will have written it all up by May 2021.

If you have any questions about the research, you can ask (head teacher) to contact me. If there was anything we discussed in the interviews that you would like to discuss in more detail or you would like support with you can ask (name of head teacher), speak to your doctor or contact Childline on 0800 1111.

Kind Regards

Nicola Warner

Trainee Educational Psychologist