

A narrative inquiry into the lived experience  
of persistent absenteeism among children who have since  
returned to mainstream school,  
and the meaning they make of their experiences.

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## **Abstract**

Persistent Absence (missing at least 10% of school over a term) affects 1 in 10 young people in England, with a greater weighting towards those in marginalised communities. It has long-term negative academic, economic, social and psychological outcomes for young people, their families and communities.

This study explores the views of three young people in London who have returned to mainstream secondary school after a period of Persistent Absence. It used a Narrative Inquiry qualitative design to analyse and share their stories and experiences. Data was gathered through unstructured interviews with some narrative prompts, and then analysed according to a Narrative Oriented Inquiry model. This first involved dividing texts into two parts: *Sjuzet* (the way in which the story is told) and *Fabula* (the sequence of relayed events). A second holistic stage of analysis was employed to answer the question “what story is the participant trying to tell?” and to draw out any common themes across the three.

The findings illustrate how lonely and overwhelming secondary school can be, and how transition is a deeply difficult time for some young people, with absence being used perhaps as a coping mechanism. They also show the impressive perseverance and effort that these three young people put in to return and how relationships, a sense of agency and self-worth are crucial to their success.

Applied to the theories of Second Wave Positive Psychology, the narratives help formulate a tentative model of how young people might experience Persistent Absence as a traumatic event, and move through it to a place of growth, by drawing on the good and the bad elements of their realities. Coming from an ecosystemic and interpretive-constructivist background, the study highlights how important the people and communities around young people are in providing the right conditions

for resilience and growth. The thesis concludes by discussing the implications of the findings for future research and Educational Psychology practice.

*Keywords:* persistent absence, mainstream, narrative, second wave positive psychology

### **Declaration**

I declare that while registered as a research degree student at UEL, I have not been a registered or enrolled student for another award of this university or of any other academic or professional institution.

I declare that no material contained in the thesis has been used in any other submission for an academic award.

I declare that my research required ethical approval from the University of East London, School Research Ethics Committee (UREC) and confirmation of approval is embedded within this thesis.

I declare that, except where explicit attribution is made, the work presented in this thesis is entirely my own and has been generated as a result of my own original research.

Signature

Date 10 August 2021

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### **List of Abbreviations Used**

Alternative Education Provisions (AEPs)

Appreciative Inquiry (AI)

Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Assessment (CAPA)

Children and Young People (CYP)

Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT)

Community Based Participatory Research (CBPR)

Department for Education (DfE)

Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP)

Educational Psychology (EP)

Educational Psychology Service (EPS)

Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA)

Emotionally Based School Non-attendance (EBSNA)

Emotionally Based School Refusal (EBSR)

Extended School Non-attendance (ESNA)

Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI)

Interpretive Phenomenological Approach (IPA)

Narrative Interview Guide (NIG)

Narrative Inquiry (NI)

Narrative Oriented Inquiry (NOI)

Post-traumatic Growth (PTG)

School Avoidance Programme (SAP)

Second Wave Positive Psychology (SWPP)

Self-Determination Theory (SDT)

Special Educational Needs (SEN)

Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)

Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators (SENCOs)

## **Chapter One: Introduction**

### **1.1 Overview of the Research**

This study used Narrative Oriented Enquiry (NOI) (Hiles, Cermák & Chrz, 2009) to explore what three young people at mainstream secondary identified to be a successful return after a period of persistent absence, what those young people had found helpful in returning and what sense they made of their own experiences and stories. Persistent Absence is defined by the Department for Education (DfE) as missing at least 10% of school sessions over a term, for authorised or unauthorised reasons other than exclusion and certified illness, and it affects 1 in 10 people in England (DfE, 2019).

### **1.2 Justification of the Chosen Topic**

Most researchers and educators agree that non-attendance of school causes economic, social and psychological harm for children and young people (CYP), their families and the communities they live in. Research has pointed to problems in individual social development (Berg, Butler, Franklin, Hayes, Lucas & Sims, 1993; King & Bernstein, 2001; Vasey, 1995), academic performance (King & Bernstein, 2001) and 'neurotic disturbance' (King, Gullone, & Ollendick, 1990). The government cites a strong statistical link, suggested to be causal, between absenteeism and underachievement (maths and reading) in a study of 20,000 pupils in Philadelphia (Gottfried, 2013), even after accounting for neighbourhood, teacher, classroom, and school factors. Problems can be long term. Prolonged non-attendance has been associated with increased risk of unemployment, social isolation, mental health difficulties, and offending behaviour in adulthood (Fremont, 2003; McShane, Walter & Rey, 2001).

While we need to be cautious due to differences in terminology and definitions, there is clearly a correlation between non-attendance and the difficulties mentioned above, even if we cannot assume causation. Reid (2008) indicates that while most harm is caused to the non-attenders themselves, the issue drains attention and resources from the school, teachers, and the local authority (LA). Lauchlan (2003) cites the work of King, Ollendick, Tonge, Heyne, Pritchard, Rollings, Young & Myerson (1996) who talk of the distress caused by non-attendance for school staff and parents. The idea of family stress is echoed by other researchers (Perrotta, 2011; Wimmer, 2010).

### ***1.2.1 The Importance of this Research for Educational Psychology***

Young people who are persistently absent from school are, therefore, of grave concern to the systems around them; both informally (their families and their communities) and formally (their schools and LAs). These systems are central to the role of Educational Psychologists (EPs), whose remit includes supporting them to work together for the benefit of the child or young person. Holding that child in mind throughout the work is crucial to an EP, both according to our professional bodies and also the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Code of Practice 2014 which requires us to be child-centred and give those we work with as much autonomy as possible and input into the decisions made about them. Some have suggested that EPs are uniquely placed to support school non-attendance as they have the knowledge and skills necessary for working with young people who are absent from school due to their grounding in child and cognitive development theory, knowledge of school systems and about the behaviour of groups and individuals (Carroll, 2015). EPs are able to work both systemically and with individuals to open their minds to positive change (Hughesman, 2004).

Through Narrative Inquiry, this study aimed to help platform young people's voices, views and experiences, within Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems framework. This is not the first piece of research to attempt this. Fox (2015) for instance, talks of how we can conceptualise the core values of our work as EPs (beneficence, social justice and autonomy) through the ecosystemic framework, with the autonomy of the child at the heart of the microsystem, beneficence in the mesosystem, and the role of social justice – ensuring a fair distribution of resources across need – in the macrosystem. Nuttall & Woods (2013) have also mapped factors supportive of a return to school onto an ecological model, and Chapter two explores other research in this area.

Fox (2015 p.390) talks of “social lotteries of gender, race and class” and how legislation around schools and schooling (such as The Children and Families Act, 2014, and the associated SEND Code of Practice,) fails to address this (p.390). To be fair, the original premise for the Code of Practice, as put forward in the Green Paper (DfE, 2011), was full of good intentions. It aimed to defeat a system where children and young people with special educational needs (SEN) were not reaching their potential and were twice as likely to be out of education, training or employment after leaving school than their peers without SEN.

Some psychologists have called on their colleagues to help address this; to ‘narrow the gap’ between the outcomes of vulnerable groups and national averages (Fallon et. al, 2010). This introduction will show how children who persistently miss school become a vulnerable group in themselves, and that while absence can cut across all social classes and ethnicities, they have often already come from marginalised groups.

EPs are guided by the requirements of their professional bodies, the Health and Care Professions Council and the British Psychological Society, which outline our duty to view this lottery of marginalisation from a psychological perspective, using models of systems, processes, organisations and contexts, and to challenge social conditions, in our individual and collective work, that contribute to or compound such situations (BPS, 2014; HCPC, 2008).

### ***1.2.2 The Importance of this Research for the Researcher***

This thesis has grown out of an early interest in social justice and equality of opportunity. It is in part inspired by my earlier work in the human rights arena, where I campaigned for access to education as a fundamental right for all children and young people globally, and pushed for governments to remove the barriers – legal, physical or social – children faced.

When I moved into working in English education, I realised how hidden the problem can be. Working in a secondary school in West London that catered for students with speech, language and communication needs, learning and cognition difficulties, and social, emotional and mental health issues, I was shocked to learn how many had initially enrolled in mainstream secondaries but later felt unable to attend, or had been excluded. The attendance levels at this school itself were also pretty low. It was here that I began to understand how heterogenous the reasons are behind young people's behaviour and, equally, how anxiety or insecurity can manifest in so many ways. It seemed that judgments about character were being made by the mainstream system based on behaviours, without a closer look at cause (see section 1.4).

In Year 2 of the doctoral training I was on placement in a LA in central southern England, and the other EPs were talking about how many Education Health

and Care Plan (EHCP) requests were coming through for CYP suffering from what they termed Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA). They felt the number was increasing dramatically and set up a working group which I joined. At the same time, an increasing number of children were in receipt of fixed-term and permanent exclusions (worryingly, pupils with SEN in the authority were seven times more likely to be excluded at that time); and the numbers of those registered for Elective Home Education due to exclusive practices and unresolved school issues was rising. Added to this was a lack of information from schools and providers about CYP on part-time timetables; and increased complexity and prevalence of mental health difficulties within the LA. There was also a history (and new developing pockets) of child exploitation in the authority around drugs and sex, which heightened fears for vulnerable children not under the safeguarding care of school (OCC, 2019).

My values and epistemological position have guided the approach I took to this research and the methodology I chose (see Chapter three). While I view the world systemically, the importance of person-centred work, of agency, and the child's voice being heard – raised above others if needs be – feels crucial. As a social constructivist, I believe that all views and stories are valid and authentic and must therefore be heard if we are to approach true understanding. My teaching at the University of East London, as well as my experience on placement in Year 2, opened my eyes further to the power of using strengths-based approaches in psychology, and also reinforced my commitment to inclusion, which is why I wanted to focus my research on the young people's experiences of successful return to mainstream.



## **1.3 The National and Local Context of the Research**

### **1.3.1 National Context**

It is hard to get a true picture of how many children are absent from school nationally, probably due to the myriad definitions and conceptualisations (see section 1.4, and Chapter two). The number of children missing school across all definitions can only be estimates and a common one is that up to 5% miss prolonged periods (Pellegrini, 2007), but some estimate it may be as high as 28% (Kearney, 2001).

One in 10 children or young people (10.9%) who are enrolled in mainstream primary and secondary schools in England, were 'persistently absent' from school in the 2018/19 academic year (DfE, 2019). That is 771,863 children, roughly equivalent to the whole population of Nottingham or Bristol. The release of statistics for 2019/2020 were cancelled due to pressures from the global pandemic of Covid-19 (see Appendix A).

This study uses the term 'Persistent Absence' (PA) and its corresponding definition and terminology (unless directly quoting or referring to others' work) for clarity and inclusivity. This definition is not without its problems and its critics. The amount of school 'missed' within a specified time frame it defines has been changed by the government twice over the last 10 years; 20% or more of a school term before 2011, then 15% until 2015 and since then (and still now in 2021), 10%. The government argued that the larger percentages were not capturing enough children, and the numbers affected by the shift are staggering – 100,000s – but it is by no means a universally accepted term.

I chose it, however, because it makes no distinction between 'truancy' and 'anxiety', or between 'authorised' or 'unauthorised'. I chose it because it covers

children and young people who are persistently and consistently late, and because it makes no judgment.

It also cuts out any issues around attendance codes or inconsistencies in definitions between LAs and varied ways of tracking and recording that have been highlighted by researchers (Kearney, 2008a, Thambirajah, Grandison, & De-Hayes, 2008), or reliance on staff making arbitrary distinctions between authorised and unauthorised absences (Malcolm, Wilson, Davidson, & Kirk, 2003).

According to the DfE (2019), slightly more children in secondary school are persistently absent than in primary, with the highest incidence in Years 10 and 11 (see Appendix A), which is one of the reasons this study focuses on this older age group. Another is the particular aspects of adolescence and brain development that may affect school attendance, such as impulsive emotional responses, for example, especially in an attempt to alleviate distress, such as at the prospect of attending school or leaving home (Mortimer, 2018). Mortimer also cites researchers who talk of the increasing focus young people give relationships during adolescence and how they may become more aware of how their peers perceive them, and perhaps therefore more sensitive to social rejections that might occur at school, and the dopamine in the adolescent brain which can affect risk-taking behaviour and drive young people towards hoped-for rewards as opposed to prioritising any potential risk.

While PA can affect all children – male or female – at all ages and from all backgrounds (King & Bernstein, 2001), government figures indicate that children from poorer / more deprived households are at greater risk (See **Table 1.1**). These figures also show 16% of all persistent absentees are in the 10% of the most deprived in the Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI).

**Table 1.1***Persistent Absenteeism in England by Characteristic*

Characteristic (total no who are PA)	Percentage of school enrolment
Boys (404,627)	11.1
Girls (367,236)	10.6
Eligible for Free School Meals (256,222)	22.8
Not Eligible for Free School Meals (491,133)	8.3
Unclassified (24,508)	44.8
Statement of SEN <sup>a</sup> or EHCP <sup>b</sup> (54,081)	24.6
SEN Support (156,890)	17.9
No identified SEN (536,852)	9.0
Unclassified (24,040)	44.7

*Note:* Pupil enrolments classified as persistent absentees (PA) in schools 2018/19 by characteristic in England, adapted from [Department for Education](#). (DfE). National Statistics Pupil absence in schools in England: 2018 to 2019 (DfE, 2020).

**1.3.2 The Socio-political Context of School Attendance**

Concerns over young people not attending school have been raised for generations. When some non landowners were first enfranchised in the Reform acts of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, about another 7 million men could vote. Increasingly, the right to vote broadened further, and by 1918 women over 30 were included. This meant a lot more people needing to be educated enough to engage (Reid, 2012). More prosaically, and perhaps less romantically, England was becoming increasingly industrialised at the same time and to boost economic growth and keep industrialists rich, the country needed skilled and educated workers to do the jobs required to generate wealth. More recently, the idea of a personal *right* to education has taken

hold, first internationally with Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), then the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child (1989) and finally enshrined nationally in the Human Rights Act (1998). Even more recently, this education has been thought to need to be 'fit for purpose' and there has been a focus on exploring statistical links between 'persistent absence' and 'falling behind', sharpening the political will to respond (Pennick, 2012).

In the UK, children and young people are required by law to attend school between the ages of five and 16, and then further education, apprenticeship or traineeship until 18 (Education and Skills Act 2008). Parents of school-aged children are legally responsible for ensuring their child receives an efficient full-time education, either at school or home (Education Act, 1996). Parents can be subject to parenting orders, education supervision orders, school attendance orders, fines, or prosecution, which can result in a sentence of up to three months in prison (DfE, 2015). There is little evidence, however, that these punitive methods improve school attendance (Sheppard, 2011; Zhang, 2004).

Schools and LAs are required to provide full-time education, to promote good attendance and to respond swiftly to patterns of absence (DfE, 2016). Schools are required to provide education for children on their roll, even if the child is not attending.

### **1.3.3 Local Context**

Due to restrictions brought in by Covid-19, and a switch in placement in Year 2, this research was carried out in a in greater London LA, as opposed to the one where I initially started my enquiries. The second LA had link EPs for every school providing support to schools with non-attenders, as well as an educational welfare support system. Partly as a response to Covid-19, and partly due to a push in the

authority towards Early Intervention, the focus on Emotionally Based School Non-Attendance (EBSNA), the term used locally, was high when I arrived and the LA had just published guidance and support for schools.

As this was an authority with lower than national averages of PA at secondary school, it seemed a fit for my strengths-based research.

#### **1.4 Conceptualising and Defining School Non-attendance**

The importance of terminology, of language, is particularly crucial for a thesis rooted in Narrative Inquiry. Language is a key element of social constructionism (Burr, 2003) and creates knowledge with different realities being constructed through interaction, exchange, and language (Guba and Lincoln, 1982).

Across the literature concerning children who find it hard to attend school, the terminology ranges from ‘hallway ramblers’ in Sweden (Ekstrand, 2015) to children suffering from “school burnout” in Japan (Yoneyama, 2000), and covers a host of other terms in between.

Historically, most researchers have made a distinction between young people absent from school due to truanting, and those that are absent from school due to emotional distress (often viewed as anxiety) that they experience around attending school (Thambirajah et. al., 2008). Lyon & Cotler (2007) point out that this is a distinction that affords or bestows sympathy on one group of children and opprobrium or disapproval on another. Thambirajah et. al. (2008) teased out some specifics of how the terms are used and what they might mean (see **Table 1.2**), although they note that this may be simplistic and does not necessarily reflect the reality of the young person’s own experience. The issues and positions in the literature are discussed further in Chapter two.

**Table 1.2***Terminologies Around Non-attendance and Their Definitions*

<b>Term</b>	<b>Features</b>
'Truancy' ('wagging' or 'skiving')	School non-attendance without school knowledge or consent or parental permission
'Parentally condoned absence'	A parent keeps a child at home for their own (parental) reasons
'School phobia'	The specific fear of a situation at school or aspect of school which prevents the young person from attending (this term is now thought to be outdated)
'Separation anxiety'	Non-attendance due to the child's difficulty or fear of separating from their attachment figure
'School refusal'	The young person experiences severe emotional difficulties relating to school attendance and is reluctant to attend school

*Note:* Taken from Thambirajah et. al. (2008)

The position in this research is that all groups, however defined, are finding it difficult to attend school and hence distinctions between 'truancy', 'phobia', 'anxiety' and so on, are considered either unhelpful or unjustified.

### **1.5 Research Questions**

An initial scoping review of the literature on secondary-age children missing school showed there was very little from the CYPs' perspectives themselves and that much focused on causes and descriptions. Interventions discussed were mainly within child (such as medication or CBT for anxiety) and the success was measured often by questionnaire or parent / teacher report. My research questions, therefore, aim to home in on successful return. They require the young person's view of that 'success' not just the views of those in the systems around them. Although these questions may well highlight the heterogeneity around the issue, they go some way

to responding to critics of current psychological discourse by encouraging the participation of young people themselves in research about them.

- Question 1: What does this research tell us about young people's experiences of persistent absenteeism?
- Question 2: What does this research tell us about positive and sustainable returns?
- Question 3: What does this research tell us about the meaning young people themselves make of their experiences?

### **1.7 Structure of the Thesis**

To ensure clarity and ease of navigation, the thesis is structured into five chapters, including this introduction (see **Table 1.3** on next page).

**Table 1.3***Structure of the Thesis*

<b>Chapter</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Topic</b>
1	Introduction	This chapter presents the thesis to the reader and attempts to explain why the subject was chosen; why it is relevant to Educational Psychologists, and why it is important to the author. It draws on key literature but is not a systematic review.
2	Literature Review	This chapter provides a systematic and critical review of the literature available around the key research questions. It details the search process and terms used to explore the available literature looking at children's experiences and with a focus on return and reintegration.
3	Methodology and Data Collection	This chapter details the Narrative approach taken to the research design, and explores why it was chosen, including an outline of ontological and epistemological positions. It then outlines the data collection and analysis methods, including a discussion of all ethical considerations.
4	Findings	This chapter presents the findings of the Narrative explorations with the young people involved in the research. It looks at the research questions in detail and sees how the young people's experiences help to answer them. It pulls out themes that the young people have helped identify as pertinent and relevant to their experiences and / or to positive reintegration and inclusion.
5	Discussion and Conclusion	This chapter connects the findings above back to the literature reviewed and comments on their significance. It also looks at the strengths, challenges and limitations of the research and how it may be useful to other EPs, schools and future researchers.



## **Chapter Two: Literature review**

### **2.1 Chapter Overview**

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a review of the literature available in this field. It details the search process and terms used to explore the available literature looking at the experience of persistent absence for young people who have managed to reintegrate successfully to an educational setting.

It also builds on Chapter one's attempt to explore and demonstrate why this area of research is important and merits further exploration. It concludes with a rationale for the current study and the finalised research questions which it addressed.

#### ***2.1.1. Focus of the Literature Review***

The literature review explored four key questions, connected to the thesis' broader research questions:

1. How does the literature define and label children and young people who experience significant periods of absence from school?
2. What does the research tell us about the experiences of a prolonged period of absence from school for young people who have since managed to return?
3. What research knowledge do we have about what young people think helps a positive and sustainable return to school after they have been absent for a long time?
4. What does the research tell us about the meaning young people themselves make of their experiences of absence?

The first of these questions was answered by a broader scoping review (Grant & Booth, 2009). The remaining three are connected specifically to the research questions and so underwent a systematic critical review (Booth, Papaioannou & Sutton, 2012; Munn, Stern, Aromataris, Lockwood & Jordan, 2018).

The rationale for the literature review questions originates from the desire to explore, in a primary study, young people's perspectives of persistent absenteeism. Interestingly, an exploration of the second question reveals how scant the research is from a young person's perspective, the third, that there are few explorations of successful return and the fourth, that young people are rarely helped to make meaning of their experiences.

## **2.2 Terminology and Literature Review Question One: How does the literature define and label children who experience significant periods of absence from school?**

As the terminology around school non-attendance is multi-varied, and sometimes laden with judgment, it is important to understand what authors are specifically referring to in the papers they produce. There has been a long-lasting debate in the literature around terminology (Pellegrini, 2007), and Wilkins (2008) argues that this has made research into successful interventions more difficult. Terms such as 'school refusal', 'school phobia' and 'truancy' have been used, often interchangeably and without precision (Thambirajah, et. al., 2008), to describe the behaviour of CYP who experience significant periods of absence from school. This may partly be due to the broad fields of social work, criminal justice, mental health and education that all work in this area (Mortimer, 2018).

It is important to note that the terminology chosen for this study, Persistent Absenteeism, is not used by many other researchers, and not used by any in the

eight papers identified for the critical review (section **2.3**). Since the Sheffield Studies and David Galloway's work in the 1980s (Galloway, 1982; Galloway, Ball & Seyd, 1981; Galloway, Martin & Wilcox, 1985), very few people apart from the government, use this term. I chose it to avoid exactly the debates around categorisations and definitions highlighted in this section.

Ever since researchers began looking at why CYP do not attend school, many have made a distinction between two groups: those who 'choose' not to attend school, usually referred to as 'truants', and those who do not make a conscious choice but seem incapable of attending, referred to as 'school refusers' (e.g., Egger, Costello & Angold, 2003; Elliott, 1999; Lauchlan, 2003; Lyon & Cotler, 2007). There is a perception of one being a behavioural issue and one being emotional (Lauchlan, 2003). Berg, Nicholls & Pritchard (1969) first defined 'school refusal' as needing to meet three essential criteria: persistent difficulties attending school, severe emotional distress when faced with the prospect of attending school, and being at home with the knowledge of parents/carers. They separated it from truancy, and later stipulated a fourth criteria; that school refusers must also not exhibit 'anti-social' behaviours (Butler, Franklin, Hayes, Lucas, & Sims 1993). How (2015) points out 'refusal' implies a certain sense of agency that Lauchlan's and Berg et. al.,'s definitions do not give it.

Researchers who support such distinctions have not always been able to evidence them. Egger et. al., (2003)'s attempt to categorise young people in the US using the Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Assessment (CAPA) did not prove possible for each participant. A number of young people met the criteria for both categorisations and some moved between categories over time. The authors concluded the categories were not mutually exclusive, and there was no single

psychiatric difficulty which consistently separated 'truants' from 'refusers'. Berg et. al. (1993), using the original Berg et. al. (1969) criteria, also failed to find a clear distinction between the two categories.

Kearney (2008a) argues that the assumption behaviour can always be neatly categorised is potentially flawed and says both groups are exceptionally heterogeneous with much overlap. Kearney also points out that the 'success' or otherwise of interventions does not appear to relate to how the behaviour is categorised.

Even within these categories, there are debates around labels and definitions. Although 'school refusal', 'school phobia' and 'emotionally based school refusal' are used widely by many researchers and local authorities looking at the emotional / non truancy behaviours, as they see them, Pellegrini (2007) uses the term Extended School Non-attendance (ESNA), arguing that 'refusal' or 'phobia' implies a within-child focus that allows systemic and environmental issues to be overlooked. He believes his choice of label describes behaviour in a non-judgemental way. Others also support more neutral terms, such as 'chronic non-attendance' (Lauchlan, 2003), 'problematic school absenteeism' (Kearney, 2008a; 2008b), and 'pupils with attendance that is persistently low' (How, 2015).

Browne (2018) extends Pellegrini's idea of non-attendance and, others' 'emotionally based' premise, to use the term EBSNA. She does this to explore the systems around the child, and views all anxiety-based non-attendance as falling in this category, and in need of a descriptor that does not position the problem within-child.

Mortimer (2018) uses ESNA, following Pellegrini (2007) which was defined by How (2015) as referring to situations of 'long-term low' or 'non-attendance' at school.

Mortimer is also clear in her intention to use neutral language that does not make assumptions about the experiences and influences of others.

‘School refusal’ still seems the most prevalent term in the literature, however, even though no universally agreed definition of ‘school refusal’ exists (Thambirajah et. al., 2008), and professionals cannot seem to agree on a shared consensus around it (Archer, Filmer-Sankey, & Fletcher-Campbell, 2003). Some authors see it as a lack of motivation to attend school (Archer et. al., 2003), others that it is connected to an avoidance of emotionally distressing situations within school environments (Havik, Bru, & Ertesvåg, 2013), and others that it encompasses a range of behaviours fuelled by generalised anxiety (Kearney & Silverman, 1999).

Despite the prevalence of ‘refusal’, there is a definite move away from a within-child focus in terminology, mirroring the broader debates in the academic and practical disciplines of psychology. The decreasing reliance on standardized cognitive assessments and a move towards Consultation (Wagner 2016) and other systemic approaches (e.g. family systems therapy and narrative approaches) that also embrace social constructionism in the professional field of Educational Psychology, reinforced my decision to blend the two categories and not engage with debates on terminology. If a secondary school child without medical reasons has been absent from school more than 10%, they are included in this review; whatever their behaviour implies about cause or motivation.

### **2.3 Systematic Critical Literature Review Methodology**

For the remaining three questions (section 2.1.1), a systematic search of the literature was undertaken through a collection of databases (via EBSCO): APA Psych Info, Academic Search Complete, British Education Index, Child Development and Adolescent Studies, and Education Research Complete. Depending on the

specific terminology and thesauruses of the databases, the search terms used were chosen specifically to ensure that all elements of non-attendance were included and that a focus on positive return was present. This led to variants of: "School Phobia", "School Refusal", "Tardiness", "Truancy", "School Attendance", "SCHOOL absenteeism", along with "Return\*" and "Reintegrat\*". Each search was also conducted again with extra terms added around adolescence and experience, to narrow the results down to secondary school aged children and to try to elicit views that children themselves hold (see Appendix B for full details).

All of the searches were limited to peer-reviewed studies in English, which had been published between 1997 and 2020. Successful doctoral theses were also included as they have been 'reviewed' by independent examiners. Inclusion and Exclusion criteria were drawn up based around the researcher's ontological position and the research questions. The finalized version of these, which evolved during the initial searches, are outlined in **Table 2.1**. For example, studies looking at children in non-mainstream settings were initially excluded, but on reflection, if they included the children's views and met all other criteria, they were included as relevant for the topic. Given the limited number of relevant studies, research from outside the UK was also included, although it had to be relevant to a western style education system. The search yielded only eight studies that met each of the criteria: Beckles (2014), Davies & Lee (2006), Grandison (2011), Head & Jamieson (2006), Mortimer (2018), Nuttall & Woods (2013), Smith (2014) and Wilkins (2008).

**Table 2.1***Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria for the Systematic Literature Search*

<b>Inclusion</b>	<b>Justification</b>	<b>Exclusion</b>	<b>Justification</b>
Study focuses on school attendance / absence	That is the topic of the thesis, driven by social justice and equality of opportunity.	Non-attendance is due to a medical condition or on medical grounds	Not persistent absence
Study focuses on children and young people (CYP) moving beyond persistent absence and returning to school	This thesis is taking a strengths-based approach to change, with school inclusion outcomes for CYP	Intervention around return is within-person only – e.g. CYP undergoing CBT or medication for anxiety <u>etc. with</u> no other systemic approach	This thesis focuses on system wide changes to support school return for CYP
Study highlights voice of child – not just opinion through questionnaire, but opportunity for offering own experience through interview	Educational Psychology (EP) professional bodies require us to hold child in mind, <u>and also</u> the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Code of Practice which requires us to be child-centred and give those we work with as much autonomy as possible and input into the decisions made about them. Social Constructionism – all voices must be heard to understand 'truth'.	Young people (YP) are not secondary school-aged	There is a greater incidence of Persistent Absence at secondary school (Fremont, 2003; King & Bernstein, 2001; DfE, 2018), also at periods of transition and the development of adolescent brain may have impact
Young people (YP) are secondary school-aged (11-16)	There is a greater incidence of Persistent Absence at secondary school (Fremont, 2003; King & Bernstein, 2001; DfE, 2018), also at periods of transition and <u>the development</u> of adolescent brain may have impact	CYP are part of a clinical group linked with diagnoses of anxiety and depression OR YP have significant learning challenges other than attendance	This would affect their reasons for finding it hard to attend school and would not necessarily come up with findings that could be relatable to broader school population.
CYP who show significant reluctance to attend school (can fall short of UK government definition of persistent absence)	Definitions are disputed and government has changed thresholds over the years.	CYP have been excluded by school	This thesis is taking a strengths-based approach and trying

<p>UK based research (or research which took place in countries which have comparable education systems or broadly similar level of economic development <u>e.g.</u> across Australia, US, Canada, New Zealand, Europe and Japan)</p> <p>Written in English</p> <p>Peer reviewed literature, book chapters or theses</p>	<p>interventions according to Miller &amp; Frederickson, (2006)</p> <p>I wanted the research to be able to guide suggestions for practice, intervention or change in the UK education system, so excluded very interesting articles that looked at absence from education in Africa and Asia for example, that was due to the need to work in agriculture at a young age, or safety fears around girls travelling to and from school, or issues around shame for girls who are menstruating etc.</p>	<p>Published before 1997</p> <p>Study did not take place in countries which have comparable education systems to UK</p> <p>Not written in English</p> <p>A review of a book or article</p> <p>Magazine article with no peer review or full reference list.</p>	<p>Systems around child changed significantly at this point. New Labour, focus on education: Specialist schools, increased role of Private sector, increase in vocational training, introduction of targets, indicators, league tables, value added, <u>Sure Start</u>, Academies, also new rights coming in with new acts (Disabilities, Equalities) and then under next gov Children and Families, SEND Code of Practice, etc.</p> <p>The thesis needs to be able to make recommendations for practice for Educational Psychologists in the UK.</p>
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Twenty-two others almost met all the criteria but either lacked a focus on positive returns, or did not explore the child's own views adequately. As the purpose of an effective critical review is partly to synthesise, interpret and lead to some



conceptual innovation, through a process of successive evolution from its predecessors (Grant & Booth, 2009), I wanted to keep the critical review for those papers that were as close as possible to the work of this study. All 30 are detailed in Appendix B. The studies' findings have been grouped thematically below.

## **2.4 Critical Review and Analysis**

### ***2.4.1 Literature Review Question Two: What does the research tell us about the experiences of a prolonged period of absence from school for young people who have since managed to return?***

**2.4.1.1 Power imbalance.** Beckles (2014) looked at the experiences of 12 young people in Years 8 and 9 who had been 'non-attenders' (with an attendance rate of 85% or below) for the previous academic year and since returned. She also spoke with six staff members at the school and analysed both sets of interviews with thematic analysis. This provided rich qualitative work with depth. What emerged was a story of children feeling unheard and staff caring deeply but not always understanding the young person's perspective. The study particularly highlighted the effects of a perceived power imbalance between teachers and pupils and made a compelling case for addressing them. Most pupils in this study seemed to view their school experience as a power struggle where they fought to be heard.

Beckles is clear and transparent about the interview methodology and thematic analysis technique she used. It is a strengths-based study and she set out to use it to improve experiences around attendance for other young people in the school in which she worked.

Smith (2014) also talks of behaviour as communication and how each young person in her study had found it hard to articulate and talk about their difficulties so it came through in behaviours. They felt misunderstood by the adults around them who

put their problems with school down to physical issues such as sinus problems or other ill health, attention-seeking behaviour and “anger issues”; or had just dismissed them. Smith’s study is a narrative one, so the young people are given a lot of space to tell their stories. Smith’s study is particularly strong on systemic issues and looking at situations that are often viewed as within-child through a different lens. She allows her participants’ narratives for example to attribute their anxiety to external situations, rather than being a problem with the young person themselves. Smith provides full direct speech on all areas she covers, as opposed to finding key quotes to illustrate themes she has chosen. The oft-referenced heterogeneity of non-attendance is really brought to life in this work. Even so, all stories can be interpreted and Smith herself cautions she may have had influence in shaping the stories without realising it. She urges us not to assume there is one truth or fact or knowledge being revealed by the stories she has elicited and then chosen to share. She also only has four participants and they all attend a unit specifically established for young people with severe anxiety related to attending school – so their views are representative only of this population, indeed probably only of themselves.

In both Beckles and Smith’s studies it could be argued that when the young people realized they were not going to be heard, and were going to be expected just to listen, they perhaps sought alternative options, which manifested as challenging behaviour and attendance difficulties.

Beckles quotes studies by Solomon & Rogers (2001) and Hartas (2011) to back this up; where pupils who perceive a lack of control over their school experiences become disaffected as a behavioural response to the mismatch between their needs and how school is meeting them. The perceived power imbalance in the pupil-teacher relationship comes through in Beckles’ study when

pupils talk about being treated as children' or 'babies' by staff, through the way they speak, or the restrictive rules they enforce. The pupils appeared to feel a lack of autonomy within school which, she felt, prompted some of them to stay at home where they felt they had more freedom. This ties in with the studies detailed in section **2.4.2.2** which found that promoting autonomy (providing non-attenders with an element of choice and control) was a positive facilitator in effective reintegration.

Davies & Lee (2006) also present interesting ideas around how non-attendance has been pathologized because it is not the norm; because school is compulsory it is often overlooked that for the non-attender, absence is a solution not a problem. Their study, in which they spoke to 13 non-attenders and their parents about their experiences, and 35 low attainers but regular attenders, was aiming to act as a pilot study to promote questions and debate around issues of attendance and non-attendance. It concludes that helping young people shift their self-perception towards being an "effective learner" helps them re-engage with school. It has great value because it foregrounds the voices of young people themselves and compares two groups who perhaps find school equally difficult but have different behavioural responses to that, and suggests we can learn from looking at why some choose to attend who might be expected to find it difficult. It also admits that it is trying to "illustrate a flavour of [the] findings" (p.205) rather than produce hard evidence around facilitating successful returns. Possibly because of this there is no rigorous methodology, or explanation of terminology, or justification for analytical approach. The study is not always clear on what may be author interpretation as opposed to direct quotes, when talking of "maturity" or "the development of a work ethic", for example, and occasionally it appears to give weight to certain findings over others; for example it only directly quotes one teacher, who happens to be critical of

the current UK education system, but admits others did not share their views while not quoting them.

For these reasons, I did not assign great methodological value to this study, but its power lies in having direct quotes from young people and adds weight to the stories collected elsewhere. For all of its participants, the issue of power and authority is important. The authors talk of addressing this power in terms of a contract between schools and their students: compliance on the part of the students is offered in exchange for “a safe environment, meaningful and relevant learning, opportunities for association with friends, and dignified and respectful treatment” (p.208). Davis and Lee say that it is when this contract breaks down, and power tips too far, without consent, to one side, that attendance can break down.

**2.4.1.2 Relationships.** Across all the literature, the importance of relationships is evident. Every interaction with another human in a day at school is part of a relationship and the young people in these eight studies all refer to interactions with teachers and peers as key to their experiences, with some also talking about home relationships. In some there are interactions with support workers, with Educational Welfare Officers, with mentors, with doctors, with head teachers, and so on. And each interaction – as remembered by the participant concerned – seems to have power over shaping attendance. These interactions pop up across all the sections of this chapter. In this section, I will focus on the experience of peer relationships, bullying and social inclusion or isolation, as it affects the experience of persistent absence.

Wilkins (2008) makes a distinction between belonging and relationships. The general argument of Wilkins’ research is that a sense of school belonging certainly helps attendance (see **2.4.2.6** and a critique of Wilkins); but two of her participants

attending a School Avoidance Programme state clearly that they are there to study and get qualifications and have no interest in or time for making friends and relationships. One of them however does go on to talk about how students being willing to help each other is a positive element of the programme, and so, perhaps without realising it, does put some value into relationships.

Across the rest of the literature, however, participants, and authors, are more forthright in the importance they place on relationships. Head & Jamieson (2006) talk about sourcing their data in large part from “the web of interactions among the young people and adults” (p.33) they work with. They carried out semi-structured interviews with four pupils, two parents, and three teachers involved in a protocol the authors were helping implement to support “school refusers” reintegrate in a UK secondary school. The study’s weakness is in its unclear methodology and lack of clarity about what the ‘programme’ or ‘approach’ to reintegrating refusers precisely is. There is talk of ‘behaviour support staff’ and a ‘pupil support base’ and plenty of examples and lists of the sort of activities carried out by staff in supporting pupils, but nothing specifically replicable. The authors talk of the difficulty around school attendance as being, psychologically, an “inadequacy within the child” (op. cit., p.37). This is not a way that I conceptualise psychological difficulties, taking a more systemic approach, but the paper does try to promote a ‘protocol’ that sees it as the responsibility of the school to adapt to the needs of the child, and making the system around the child more amenable. Added to which, the views and opinions of school refusers who have managed to start reintegrating have face validity and deserve to be heard. They (not clear how many) talk of feeling “under critical surveillance” (op. cit., p.35) from their peers and talked of bullying and difficulties with making friends. There is much discussion in the paper around the concept of being “looked at” by others and

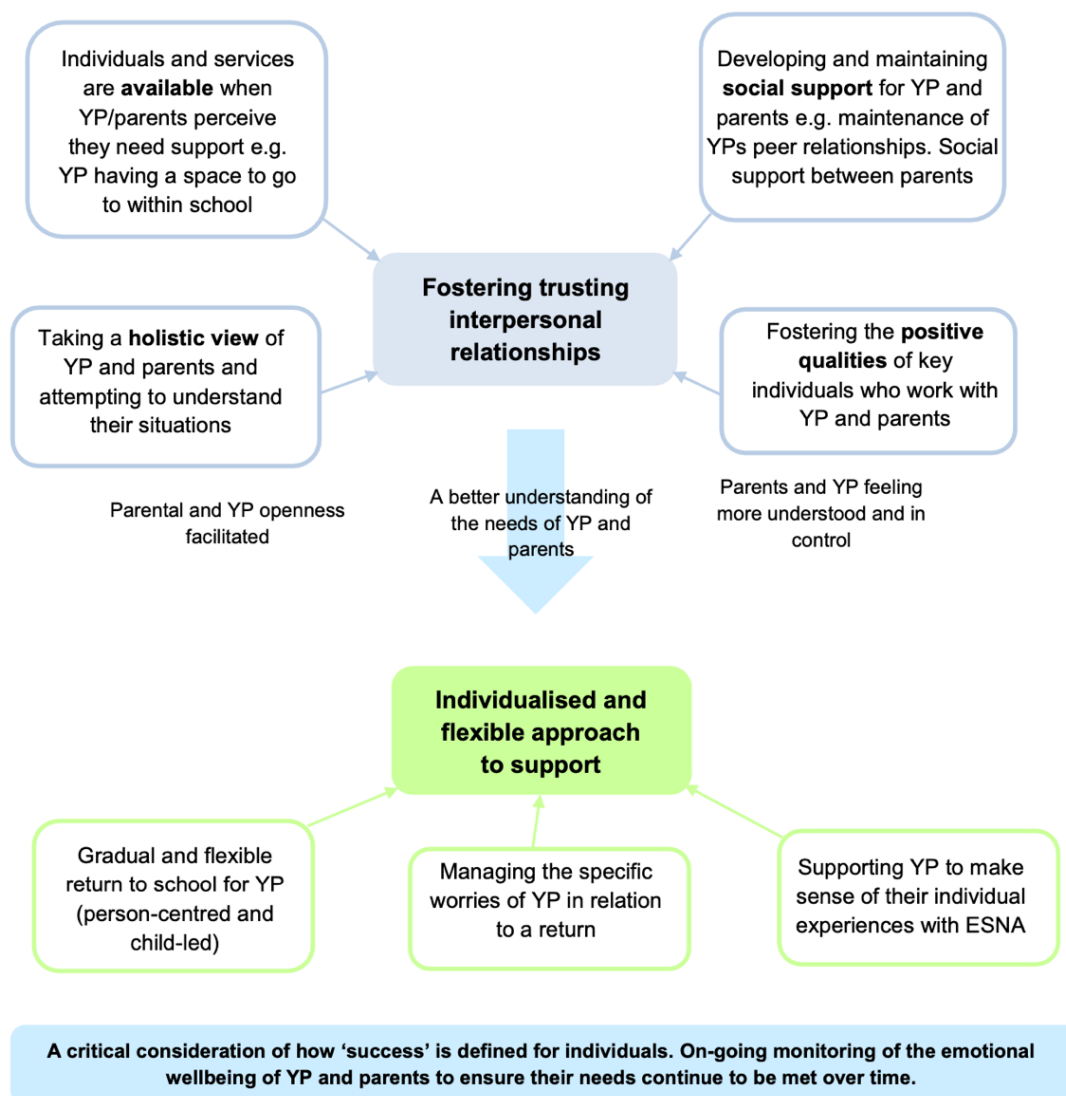
defining oneself by what you think others see. Head & Jamieson (2006) draw on Sartre and Foucault to analyse why their respondents may somehow become ‘the other’ that others see, even in their own minds, and how they then feel that they hold *deficits* as opposed to *differences* from other children. At least two of their participants talk about the effect of looking and being looked at, but there are no direct quotes around this so I cannot analyse this intriguing point further.

Mortimer (2018) found that trusting relationships in situations of ESNA have huge importance and she suggests that these underpin most other aspects of support perceived to be helpful. In her study, Mortimer develops an Appreciative Model for considering “success” and how it is defined for those who have returned to school following a period of ESNA (see **Figure 2.1**). This builds on Nuttall & Woods (2013) ecosystemic one (see **2.4.2.3**). She places “Fostering trusting interpersonal relationships” at the heart of her model (p.134). Mortimer conducted the first two stages of an Appreciative Inquiry by conducting four semi-structured interviews with two young people and three parents. She used thematic analysis to identify five themes from interview data. Despite the comparatively few voices, this is still a powerful piece of work that gives space in the literature to people’s interpretations of their own experiences. It is a strengths-based thesis – looking at what might be helpful for others in the future. Mortimer does not over interpret her participants’ responses but asks them directly for their own opinions and then draws up themes. From this she draws her model and offers recommendations for educational psychologists, local authorities and other researchers. Throughout she is clear about defining terms – such as ‘success’ and ‘trust’ – and giving a good clear rationale for recruitment of participants.

The number of participants involved and the heterogeneity of the group means the model will need further testing and developing before it could be implemented. It also does not yet include the other elements of the systems around the young people and their families, such as school, local services, local government, but implies a lot of them.

**Figure 2.1**

*Appreciative Model*



*Note:* This model, taken from Mortimer (2018), considers “success” and how it is defined for those who have returned to school following a period of extended school non-attendance

Specifically to do with the initial experience of peer relationships, Mortimer found that her participants would have appreciated more support to help build positive relationships. To reinforce her findings, she cites Hallam & Rogers (2008) who found that group work around building relationships improved school attendance. Based on her findings, in the model Mortimer develops, she highlights 'Developing and maintain social support for YP and parents e.g. maintenance of YP's peer relationships, Social support between parents' as a key block in the fostering of trusting interpersonal relationships.

Nuttall & Woods (2013) grouped their findings into four clusters, and the first one was 'Psychological Factors', two key themes of which were "Developing feelings of safety, security and belonging" and "Confidence, self-esteem and value"; and while both are detailed in other sections, they also centred around how young people felt within their peer groups (see **2.4.2.1** for critique).

Smith (2014) talks of the power of peer relationships cited by her participants particularly during transition periods, and how difficulties managing change were helped by having a strong group of friends. If that broke down for her participants, things at school became very difficult.

Fear of **bullying** was a large part of the experience leading up to and including non-attendance for participants in seven out of the eight papers; only Mortimer's (2018) did not focus on this. Three of Smith's (2014) four participants talked about it in detail, for example, and she also mentioned how isolation from peers can lead to bullying. Three out of five of Grandison's (2011) participants also cited concerns around bullying as core to their experiences. Grandison took a small-scale multi case study approach, exploring the experiences of five young people who



had reintegrated into school following a period of 'school refusal behaviour' and a period at a Short Stay School for key stage 3 and 4 pupils with mental health and medical needs. Grandison also spoke to their mothers, the learning mentor from the Short Stay School and a mentor from the receiving mainstream school. The study is heavily focused on reintegration; it is strengths based. It is not as systemic as it could be, however, and does not seem to really explore what schools could do differently, but looks more at how young people can handle school better and be supported to do so. The elements of the Short Stay School that worked well for the young people are highlighted by implication (such as smaller class sizes, perhaps, but that is my inference), but apart from around relationships, Grandison does not make any clear suggestions on replication. Other concerns with the otherwise powerful and positive study were that Grandison worked in the management team at the school where she did the research, which may have affected the way participants spoke to her. She herself admits that she may have brought prior knowledge in to interviews and analysis that a 'blind' researcher would not have. Added to this, all five young people in Grandison's study were defined as having mental health needs beyond their school refusal. These were not significant enough to merit exclusion from this review, but they may have affected their answers.

**2.4.1.3 Belonging.** Wilkins (2008) looked at the return to education of four US secondary-aged students who had previously been absent for an extended period of time but were now consistently attending a School Avoidance Programme (SAP) at an alternative provision. The participants all talked of an experience of being marginalised at their previous schools, both leading up to and during their difficulties with attendance. Wilkins cites work by Head (2006) who says that young people who do not attend school already feel that they do not 'belong' and that that feeling and

identity is re-enforced by relationships at school. For Wilkins' participants, this sense of belonging was replaced by a feeling of alienation as fights broke out at school or class teachers spent the whole time shouting at students to try to maintain order. Wilkins' participants viewed school as an ordeal and could form no attachment to it (see more on belonging in **2.4.2.6**).

**2.4.1.4 Summary.** The young people in this critical review seemed to experience absence from school as a sense of powerlessness, where all the control lay with others, and perhaps the only power they had was not to attend. In the build up to and during their periods of absence relationships with adults were unhelpful, and often troubling, and relationships with peers often painful (bullying) or non-existent, such as losing friends during transition, with little support from school on how to build friendships. Young people who experienced absence rarely had a sense of belonging to the education setting they were in when they started not attending.

***2.4.2 Literature Review Question Three: What does the research tell us about positive and sustainable returns?***

**2.4.2.1 Meaningful Consultation.** Wilkins (2008), Beckles (2014) and Smith (2014) highlight the importance of putting the young person at the heart of any return to school if reintegration is to be successful; of the power of consulting properly with young people. Beckles (2014) highlights the personal value pupils place in being consulted that comes across in the literature (see e.g. Fielding & Bragg, 2003) and from her participants.

Taking the theme of consultation further, Head & Jamieson (2006) talk of the need for young people not just to be talked to, listened to, asked questions of, but also to be given / handed some control and personal agency if they are to reintegrate successfully.

Both the young people in Nuttall & Woods (2013) study benefited from being seen holistically and having an individualised approach to their return. The authors talk of giving the young person a chance to “make a positive contribution” as being a “prominent theme” common to both cases; both in facilitating and planning their return and as a way to become more a part of general school life. They position this as key to supporting the core psychological factors at the level of the child in their ecological systems model around intervention (see **2.4.2.3**). The authors used a case study approach to explore two individual experiences of intervention for ‘school refusal behaviour’ – one was CBT and the other systemic – and aimed to provide a dynamic view of factors associated with ‘successful involvement’. Their findings are drawn from deep and rich data (multiple perspectives, eight interviews per case). They are positive and strengths-based, with the cases under scrutiny having been constant for more than a term, and the use of semi structured interviews intending to allow themes to emerge from data (with caveat that researchers understood their active role in identifying and reporting themes). However, while it is interesting to see what common success factors there are between a CBT (within-child) approach and a more systemic one, two cases is very few to build a model of intervention on. Additionally, the authors’ approach was slightly unclear at times; both constructionist and critical realist, going so far as to probe interviewees to link their perceptions and explanations with facts and events observed by others. There are also few direct quotes from the young people themselves, so it is not always clear whose views are whose.

**2.4.2.2 Practical Support with Control and Agency.** Much literature identifies how support for reintegration needs to be offered in a way that the young person wants, needs and can control. Mortimer (2018) pulls the idea of practical

support and a sense of control and agency into one theme as it came across as important in her study. If her participants felt they had 'control and agency' (p.120) over the precise use of flexible returns and reduced timetables etc, this helped reintegration greatly as it helped with them feeling comfortable and in control. Nuttall & Woods (2013) had similar findings and Grandison (2011) highlighted how much better able to cope CYP felt with a phased reintegration.

Other practical supports that seemed to help positive returns included having a safe space CYP knew they could go to if they needed a break – again at their own instigation and control (Grandison 2011; Mortimer 2018; and Nuttall & Woods, 2013). Worries ranged from homework, classwork, not wanting to be treated differently from peers, catching up on missed work, and how to explain their absence.

Grandison's (2011) case studies highlighted the power of a personalised approach, a phased return to school, collaboration between parents and school, the presence of a supportive and trustworthy mentor, support for the young person to understand and cope with their emotions, and the provision of ongoing support.

**2.4.2.3 Social Constructions and Interactionism.** Beckles (2014) argues that an interactionist approach in managing non-attendance, and presumably, providing an opportunity to create a new construction together, will help develop more effective strategies and interventions in supporting non-attenders to return. She cites Thambirajah et. al. (2008) who recommend professionals view non-attendance in terms of circular causality (reciprocal interaction between systems) rather than linear (one system causing the reaction of another system). Professionals can then understand that non-attendance is occurring due to interactions between people rather than within one person. Taking this view, the importance of gaining the perspectives of the parents, school staff, and the child is emphasised.

What come through clearly in Nuttall & Woods (2013) is that the interaction of all mentioned factors was crucial to success, and nothing worked in isolation. A key finding of the study was the significant amounts of resources spent on various strategies implemented at various levels. By unravelling the themes across the levels of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory, the authors propose a model which helps us understand where interactive factors might be targeted. They chose Bronfenbrenner's model as it looks at behaviour as a system embedded within a specific context (Ayers, Clarke and Murray, 2000). They also incorporate Maslow's (1943) thinking around hierarchy of need, and present psychological factors at the level of the child at the core and as being a basic need that must be met before learning or further actualisation can occur. This they call the Ecological Model of Successful Reintegration. Taken together these clusters highlight how successful intervention extends beyond child factors to interacting contextual and family variables, such as positive relationships.

Similarly, one of the greatest strengths of Grandison's (2011) study is its power of constructions. She successfully reveals some of the attitudes, and perhaps preconceived impressions, of staff and other professionals towards families with attendance difficulties. The theme 'Young Person Factors' relates to adult perceptions of the personality and behavioural characteristics of the individual young people who exhibit school refusal behaviours. Many of the observations of adult participants in the study tended to suggest they believed in the intrinsic characteristics of young people which contributed to their school refusal. Some of Grandison's quotes suggest professionals believe there may be a willful aspect to the young people's behavior. She references the literature which refutes this (Pellegrini, 2007; Lauchlan 2003) and wonders why it seems to form part of the

perception of most of the adult participants in this study. For some participants (mentors) the links continue further with “stubbornness and manipulative behavior” perhaps being connected to deficiencies in the parent-child relationship. Given this, it is a relief that Grandison also cites parental concerns, highlighting their worries and anxieties over their children’s futures and their desire for them to attend school and engage.

**2.4.2.5 Relationships. *Trusting Adults.*** Mortimer (2018) detailed certain key qualities her participants identified as useful in the adults around them. They appreciated those they found “genuine, respectful, nice and honest” (p.117), with honesty particularly appreciated when centred around the consequences of their absenteeism; emotional, financial and legal for themselves and their families. Participants in Nuttall & Woods (2013) also suggested that trusting interpersonal relationships with adults were key and these could be found through the right mix of skills, experience, knowledge and personality.

Both Mortimer (2018)’s and Nuttall & Woods (2013)’s studies suggest that key relationships with adults seemed to rely also on them being available when needed – either for help with homework at home or knowing where to go during school hours to find someone to talk to.

Davies & Lee (2006), highlighted the need for good relations with teachers, including mutual respect, and engagement beyond merely educational, and Wilkins (2008) reiterates this. This idea that the student is not just a number in the education system, not an object to be manipulated, but a real person comes across powerfully in much of the literature as something that can make the difference in successful reintegration. Young people in Mortimer (2018) Nuttall & Woods (2013) and Wilkins (2008) all talked of the power of being seen as individuals.

Nuttall & Woods (2013) talk of the power of positive attention from adults, and Wilkins (2008) talks of the importance of students' relationships with teaching staff in general and the ability to chat about things completely unconnected to school or attendance in particular, and how this can help belonging and thus attendance.

Four of the papers talked about the need to support the parents in a way that was comfortable to them, for trust to develop, and understand their anxieties (Grandison 2014; Head & Jamieson, 2006; Mortimer, 2018; Nuttall & Woods, 2013).

***Parent-child relationships.*** Four of the eight papers reviewed actively elicited parental perspectives, and developed some findings on the importance of family relationships from both the child and the adult (Grandison 2014; Head & Jamieson, 2006; Mortimer, 2018; Nuttall & Woods, 2013). Most children did not raise relationships with their parents as crucial to their experience and in their return, although a general belief from staff emerged that families are at fault (and I infer therefore that they felt the parent-child relationship was not 'healthy'). Davies & Lee (2006), point out that their interviews reinforce the idea (prevalent in the literature) of LAs and teachers believing home environment family relationships and personal attitudes are main influencer of school attendance, whereas families believe the main influences are within-school, such as bullying, problems with teachers and peer pressure. The parents that the authors spoke to indicated they believed in education, valued their relationship with their child, and were keen for them to return to school.

***Peer relationships.*** Mortimer (2018) talks of the value her participants expressed for supportive ongoing relationships from peers to help motivate them to return. In her study she asked participants what supports they would recommend for others in similar situations of persistent absence and a focus on peer relationships came out strongly.

While this seems intuitive, and is backed up in other research (e.g. Nuttall & Woods, 2013) it is in contrast to some of the statements made by two of the participants in Wilkins' (2008) study who claimed not to be interested in relationships with peers and just wanted to be able to study and get qualifications. For them the importance of peer relationships was being conflict-avoidant – when people were friendly, they weren't fighting, and so teachers could focus on teaching. It would have been interesting for **Literature Review Question Three** if Wilkins had explored this contradiction further.

**2.4.2.6 Safety and belonging.** Studies exploring Question Two suggest that bullying, difficult peer relationships and fears over personal safety were a key part of the experience of most young people who have difficulties attending school, and that, often as a consequence of this, they lacked a sense of belonging to the school where they were on roll. It is not surprising, therefore, that this Maslow-ian need for security emerges in the literature as something crucial for return and reintegration (Beckles, 2014; Nuttall & Woods, 2013). Positive teacher-pupil relationships, controlled and calm classes, small class sizes, positive peer relations, protected safe spaces to go when feeling overwhelmed, all run through most of the studies. They do not always seem possible in mainstream secondaries, however. Wilkins (2008) is very clear that it is the specific structural and behavioural elements of the smaller special school that have helped the young people in her study re-engage with education. As her study only had four participants, she evidenced all her findings and theories with direct quotes, but beyond that it is not clear what exact methodology and analytical framework she used. It is not clear how leading (deductive) her initial interview questions and schedule were, who set the agenda, what approach she took to information and knowledge; there is no clear stated epistemology or ontology



in her study. She also works in the alternative provision that the participants are now attending and there is perhaps a bias towards an assumption that it is the setting that makes the difference. Most frustratingly she moves back and forth between terminologies, and claims not to be talking about truancy, but references it frequently.

The young people who attended Alternative Education Provisions (AEPs) in Davies & Lee (2006) and Smith (2014) also in general preferred them to mainstream school and some saw them as a means of reintegrating to school. It is worth investigating this in future research but it seems that the smaller class sizes and higher proportion of available adults can be reassuring and help some children feel safe.

**2.4.2.7 Physical return as the goal.** The papers were divided between those where young people had returned to a mainstream setting and those where young people were in an alternative provision. In the mainstream settings most papers referenced ongoing difficulties, despite the fact of a physical return to school being deemed 'successful' by parents and teachers (e.g. Grandison, 2011; Nuttall & Woods 2013). Mortimer (2018) was surprised that physical return was deemed to be the measure of success when so many concerns remained. In her model, she adds the element of 'ongoing monitoring of the emotional wellbeing of young people and parents to ensure their needs continue to be met over time'. She does this as a warning and a challenge to the idea of 'success' as being purely physical attendance. Head & Jamieson (2006) state clearly that they do not believe it is realistic to define success around the expectation of all children attending all classes within school. They define success more as a child or young person becoming an

“effective learner” and participating in school life, more akin to the AEP approaches of the other papers.

Grandison (2011) expressly asked her participants what they thought a “successful” return to education was and only one mentioned attendance level as a marker. Three of the young people had been reintegrated for 18 months and yet some continued to struggle. Grandison believed that trying to manage the “emotional discomfort of school” (p.155) was an ongoing challenge for some.

**2.4.2.8 Summary.** The eight papers in the critical review revealed that a return to education for these young people required: meaningful consultation, getting practical support (with the young person having significant control and a sense of agency over what this entailed), good relationships (trusting adults, parent-child and peer), and creating a space where the young person felt safe, and that they belonged. It is important to note that young people in the mainstream settings still seemed to experience difficulties despite their return described as ‘successful’ by others. Again, despite descriptions by others of personality traits as potentially being responsible, most researchers looked at return (and the preceding absence), in an interactionist way, and therefore promoted the creations of new joint constructions to guide targeted interventions.

***2.4.3 Literature Review Question Four: What does the research tell us about the meaning young people themselves make of their experiences?***

The studies highlight how important it is for non-attenders’ voices to be listened to. The participants in Mortimer’s (2018) study talked of how they would have appreciated more support to make sense of their experiences of absence, with specific time and space put aside for this. They talked of not being listened to, which was hypothesised by Mortimer to be a cause of their absence.

The power of Beckles' (2014) work particularly is that not only does she hear these voices, but she tries to ensure staff have heard them too; by talking with staff and exploring their perceptions, she can unpick where any miscommunication over meaning is. For example, Beckles mentions that most staff identified how difficult it was to understand reasons of non-attendance when pupils were not willing to share their views. Beckles could then explain that some non-attenders genuinely did not know why they found it hard to attend, others found it difficult to articulate and express their feelings, and others did not want to be too open in a relationship they felt unsafe in, perceiving staff to have more power than them.

Across the studies, CYP talked of the frustration of being disbelieved, of being labelled as naughty or difficult, and how they would fight against this, trying to maintain an alternative identity. They worked hard to preserve their self-esteem, it seemed, by removing themselves sometimes from the damaging environment. Although some seemed to have internalised the meanings made by others; expressing sympathy with teachers' and schools' difficulties, and no longer holding expectations that they could be seen as individuals with individual needs.

Most of the studies identified the importance of meaning making, even if they didn't explore it in detail. Beckles (2014) talked of how some participants perceived attending school as an easy task stating simplified ways they could improve such as 'attend every day unless very ill', indicating that those with complex needs may not always perceive it as such. She posits that they may lack some meta-cognitive awareness of reason and meaning and that they may require support to understand their thoughts and bring it to their consciousness. Nuttall & Woods (2013) found that providing such support helped non-attenders to become conscious of their thoughts and reframe negative thinking to be more positive.

Of the eight papers reviewed, only Smith (2014) explored meaning making explicitly, as opposed to leaving it up to the reader to infer, helped as she was by the narrative methodology she had chosen. It was surprising, for example, that Wilkins (2008) did not explore what it may mean for young people with no SEN to be sent to an SEN school.

To try to get to meaning, Smith (2014) applied Labov's (1972) approach of identifying sequences and structural parts within the story, adapted from the work of Patterson (2008) and Riessman (2008).

One of the participants, Amelia's, narrative showed that she made positive meaning from narrative itself as she reported that her counselling sessions were positive for her mood and anxiety. Amelia's narrative has highlighted that simply having someone who she was able to talk to about her problems, who showed an interest and listened to her, was helpful.

## **2.5 Research Rationale**

The eight studies in this review reveal how school can be a deeply uncomfortable place, and how hard it can be to return to, but how staying away does not seem to make young people happy. All the studies here highlight themes that seem to compliment and reinforce each other around the importance of relationships, a sense of safety and belonging, and support for anxiety. Crucially, they also highlight the power for young people in having their own voices heard, feeling consulted, and their views acted on; that young people are more likely to thrive in school when they feel they are seen as individuals with rights and interests and unique perspectives.

All the studies in this review, however, have also highlighted how young people with attendance difficulties do not always feel heard by, or feel visible to, the

other elements of the systems around them. The fact I could only find eight studies that explored children's accounts and had a focus on return shows there is a gap in the literature. There were only 14 more studies that interviewed children, but these were without a focus on return.

As mentioned previously, statistics indicate that young people who are already disenfranchised or marginalised are at far greater risk of persistent absence (DfE, 2019). These people may be defined as "truants", and Darmody, Smyth & McCoy (2008), for example, identify truancy as of greater incidence in working class areas. They argue that young people see schools as "disordered and unsupportive" and that truancy is a resistance to a culture that reproduces classes and differences that reinforce inferiority.

Their true experiences are often hidden, therefore, and feelings expressed through perhaps more challenging behaviour. The effort to return young people to school remains focused on those with anxiety or other EBSA symptoms; truants may be classed as "juvenile delinquents" and may eventually be left to the courts and the legal system to deal with.

By refusing to make this distinction, and taking the definition of Persistent Absence, I hope to be able to look into the social and systemic implications of a society whose already socially excluded young people are at greater risk of more alienation and isolation.

One of the two families in Nuttall & Woods (2013) study was a Traveller family (their definition), who had experienced more punitive treatment from previous attendance officers and been prosecuted twice. Should this context be brought out more fully in the study? It seems that research in the 2020s perhaps need to be braver in a sense of responsibility to systemic and institutionalised prejudice against

the communities that find it hardest to engage with education. Perhaps we all as authors and research practitioners need to be explicit about the socioeconomic, racial and cultural backgrounds of everyone we are talking to and working with so that inequalities and discrepancies can be picked up. There has been a fear in the past perhaps of attributing race or background to participants because this might be added to a within-child model and be seen to be causal, or used to fuel prejudice, but if one is looking systemically and through a social constructionist lens, we need to understand that reactions to and interactions with children, and their race and background will likely determine some of this and needs to be unpicked.

Meaning-making, and agency, through narrative approaches, and going directly to the young people themselves, is missing in the literature and a gap I hope to start filling. I hope this will broaden the understanding of professionals, even if only in some small way, and help to challenge the status quo.

## **Chapter Three: Methodology and data collection**

### **3.1 Chapter Overview**

This chapter details the Narrative Approach taken to the research design and explores why this methodology was chosen, including an outline of ontological and epistemological positions. It then presents the data collection and analysis methods used, including a discussion of all ethical considerations.

### **3.2 Research Aims**

This research study aims to understand the experience of persistent absenteeism from the perspective of young people who have managed to return to mainstream school. It hopes to identify what these young people felt constituted a successful return after a period of persistent absence and what helped them achieve this. In so doing, it aims to add to the literature helping the professionals around young people respond to and support this crucial part of the persistent absence puzzle, earlier and more holistically.

As outlined in Chapter one, children and young people who are persistently absent from school are likely to have far worse academic, educational and social outcomes than their peers, and this study aims to take a small step towards redressing this.

### **3.3 Researcher Values**

As detailed in Chapter one, this research commits to Fox's (2015) conceptualisation of the values underpinning Educational Psychologists' work as being beneficence, social justice and autonomy. It attempts to plot these values onto Bronfenbrenner's (1977) ecological systems framework; with the *autonomy* of the child at the heart of the microsystem, *beneficence* in the mesosystem, and the role of

*social justice* – ensuring a fair distribution of resources across need – in the macrosystem. For me in particular, the concept of autonomy – of agency and of meaningful active participation in the systems around one – is particularly potent. I came to educational psychology via a background in human rights work which increasingly focuses on ensuring that the rights holders themselves are meaningfully involved in the decisions taken about their lives. If persistent absence is viewed from a rights angle, then the societal and legal infrastructure would need to support and encourage equitable distribution of resources and provide protections, and in return this allows the social and family structures to flourish, to be beneficent, and to promote and support the individuals within them, at the heart of the microsystem, to have true agency.

### **3.4 Methodological Orientation of the Research**

The methodological orientation of the research ordinarily reflects how the researcher's aims and values are represented through a research paradigm; the ontological and epistemological position of the researcher and the framework they choose to use.

I adopted a Positive Psychology theoretical background; with a focus therefore on the strengths of a situation and what works, and what growth may perhaps have emerged from a period of trauma or challenge. My understanding and interpretation of the experiences of the participants is rooted in a systemic view of development and psychology, as initially defined by Bronfenbrenner's (1977) ecological systems theory and developed in second order cybernetics (see, e.g., Boscolo, Cecchin, Hoffman & Penn, 1987; Hoffman, 1985; Becvar & Becvar, 2006).

I come, therefore, from an Interpretive-Constructionist paradigm. This means I believe knowledge is largely socially constructed, and we can interpret "facts" and



“experience” through the language we use and the stories we tell each other and ourselves (Boscolo et. al., 1987). However, I do not believe this psychology goes far enough and merely understanding or interpreting is not enough to bring change. In this study I also applied the values of social justice and autonomy – of agency. My review of the literature has shown that in narratives around persistent absenteeism, the language of the children and young people themselves is rarely heard, and their stories rarely told. They have little agency it seems in their lives, or in the ways their stories are told, which means their share of the truth is hidden. Constructionism tells us that language is key to understanding different truths and experiences. Burr (2003) highlights that ‘when people talk to each other the world gets constructed’ (p.8), but few people have been talking to the young children themselves. I hope therefore to bring an emancipatory element to this research through a qualitative design of Narrative Inquiry and analysis.

A final note on second order cybernetic thinking, is that, developed as much of it was within systemic family therapy, it demands a researcher take into consideration their own role in the process of gathering data from a participant. The observer is deemed to have become part of what is being observed (Becvar & Becvar, 1994) and must, therefore, take into account the impact they will have on the participant’s retelling of their story (see Chapter five and Appendix L).

### **3.4.1 Ontology**

One’s ontology is one’s philosophical belief about reality; what one thinks the nature of reality is (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Mortimer (2018) describes it as being on a continuum from ‘realism’ to ‘social constructivism’, in other words from the belief there is an objective truth to be discovered, to the belief that there are myriad subjective truths, all valid, and all based entirely on human interactions, social

constructions and perceptions. This study is situated towards the subjective and constructivist end of the continuum, from the perspective of there being value to individual insight and subjectivity when trying to understand a broader phenomenon.

### ***3.4.2 Epistemology***

Epistemology is concerned with how we believe we can know reality (Crotty, 1998), and therefore where we might seek knowledge; the nature of the relationship between the knower and what can be known (Guba & Lincoln, 1982). It is concerned with what kind of knowledge is possible, and how we can be sure that the knowledge we have is enough, and is valid. As the ontological position of this research is subjective and constructivist, it takes an interpretivist epistemological approach, acknowledging individual experiences and interpretations of events will lead to their being multiple truths to uncover (Ponterotto, 2005). This is in contrast to a more positivist approach, which would aim to reveal one specific truth that could perhaps be generally applied to many different situations, and would therefore probably use standardised measures.

### ***3.4.3 Social Constructivist Framework***

Individuals develop meaning subjectively, and this is related to their experiences, the language they hear, the language they use and how they interpret all of this. We construct our realities through the meanings we develop from this use of language and social interactions (Burr, 2003). Willig (2013) also emphasises that knowledge about a phenomenon or situation is co-constructed between a researcher and participant during the process of social research (Creswell, 2013). The constructivist underpinnings of this research also had implications for the way I viewed interviews. Rather than seeing knowledge as 'out there', ready to be 'discovered' and compared with an objective world, I considered that knowledge was

constructed, interpreted and remoulded during interviews (Kvale, 1996). Kvale (1996) suggests that this process can offer a space for participant reflection and become emancipatory or transformative for participants who begin to recognise their power in situations in which they had previously perceived themselves to be powerless. It is important to consider, however, that despite this possibility, the interviews in this study were unlikely to have led to increased participant power in terms of decision-making or social action, due to the contexts in which participants existed.

#### ***3.4.4 Positive Psychology as a Transformative Framework***

Positive psychology can be seen as the study of “ordinary human strengths and virtues” (Seligman, 2002, p. 4) in order to better understand human interaction and to reveal all the processes involved in human systems that have not been emphasised so much previously (Boyd & Bright, 2007). It evolved in response to past deficits-based approaches to research, which some say limit an understanding of successful functioning processes, strengths and outcomes, by ignoring them (Sheldon and King, 2001). Conversely, it is suggested, studies that focus on ‘what is good’, what works, and ‘what could be even better’ can help transform perceptions, and instigate organisational and social change, and therefore potentially impact greatly on the work of EPs (Cooperrider and Srivastva, 1987).

This research draws particularly on the ‘second wave’ of positive psychology (also known as PP 2.0, in contrast to PP 1.0, but abbreviated here and in other research as SWPP) which develops the work of psychologists such as Seligman (2002) and Csikszentmihalyi (2000), acknowledging it is not possible, or meaningful, to only focus on positives, as positives and negatives are dynamically related: one cannot exist without each other. It sets out instead a dialectic approach – one that

encourages and relies on discussion and engagement – rather than an either / or approach (eg see Lomas and Ivztan, 2015). In part it is motivated in this by a critical view of PP 1.0 which assumed that there were universal truths rooted in US academic psychology, that could be applied to all cultures. SWPP believes not only that different cultures have different paths to wellbeing, but also that those paths may help create a more universal path to wellbeing than the US either / or approach (Chang, 1996; Wong, 2013).

SWPP maintains that facing more difficult elements of human existence head on, and working with them to create understanding and growth, positivity, is a more effective way to achieve psychological wellbeing – for individuals and institutions. It calls on us to do this personally, such as by confronting our own mortality (Wong & Tomer, 2011), and institutionally / societally, such as by acknowledging and removing toxic elements such as bullying (Wong, Ivztan, & Lomas, 2016). While looking at the positives of a successful return, therefore, and hoping to learn from them, this research is also keen to understand from the young person's perspective the whole experience – positive and negative – and how they have moved on, grown, to be in the position they are currently in.

SWPP is not value-neutral. It actively promotes what it sees as humanistic values or global virtues, such as human dignity, kindness, and integrity. In this way it is again traditionally less Western, not necessarily focusing on Maslowian individual needs and individual actualization, but as seeing individual human values as necessary for producing kinder and gentler societies. It values qualitative research and knowledge from the humanities such as philosophy, literature, and religion.

### **3.5. Qualitative Research**

Cresswell (2009) has pulled together all the traditional and the newer perspectives of what constitutes the character of qualitative research. As well as talking of a theoretical lens that qualitative researchers tend to use to view their studies, such as those I have detailed above, he also reiterates how qualitative research is interpretive, and how as a researcher I cannot separate my interpretations from my own context and background. This fits with my approach as detailed above. Cresswell posits that qualitative research tends to take a holistic view, rather than focusing on one specific element that may be more suitable to quantitative designs. The other key elements of qualitative research that marry with my approach, as laid out by Cresswell, are: a natural setting, ie not lab based; the researcher as a key instrument in the collection of data, rather than just an analyst or user of others' instruments; the collection of multiple sources of data; inductive data analysis where themes are built from the bottom up, rather than deductive where themes are assumed in advance and searched for (the researcher and participant may work collaboratively in this process); giving importance to the meanings participants hold about the issue; and allowing an emergent design, ie the phases of the process may change in response to the participants.

#### ***3.5.1 Limitations of Qualitative Research***

Critics of qualitative approaches talk of a lack of statistical (or other) generalisability across different contexts and populations; and the lack of 'objectivity' or 'certainty' in the knowledge gained. They also talk of the difficulty in making comparisons between the outcomes of different pieces of research approached from different epistemological positions (Willig, 2013).

Another criticism is that qualitative research does not usually try to identify causality, and so is 'reduced' merely to *describing* as opposed to *explaining* the phenomena being studied (Buckner, 2005). Controversy also abounds around the role of the researcher (Buckner, 2005; Dowling, 2006), which is arguably more present in qualitative research and in various methodologies has an impact on the data produced, not just the method of collecting it (see section 3.8.3 and 3.11.2). Some methodologies – and this narrative one here to some degree – allow the researcher to become a participant, or at least present during data gathering, and therefore likely to affect responses. This does not necessarily reduce validity, as long as it is transparent.

A final reflection on qualitative research is that it can often be bolted on to an otherwise positivist approach to enquiry, as if it is a tool simply to generate or analyse data, which can lead to theoretical inconsistencies (Clarke and Braun, 2021), and less valid literature critiques, for example, if they do not marry with the researcher's stated philosophical assumptions.

### **3.6 Alternative Methodological Approaches**

Silverman (1993) warns against researchers failing to acknowledge different methodologies could have been used, or insufficiently justifying the use of the chosen methodology; the paradigm behind my choice of Narrative Oriented Inquiry (NOI), could also potentially have been shared with an Appreciative Inquiry (AI), or an Interpretive Phenomenological Approach (IPA) for example, but ultimately only NOI suited all my aims. In Appendix D I outline all the other qualitative methodologies and approaches I considered pursuing and explain why I did not, including Action Research, Grounded Theory, Appreciative Inquiry. Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis and a Case Study approach.

### **3.7 Narrative Inquiry**

Narrative approaches (Bruner, 2004, & Brockmeier, 2000) are interpretive and use storytelling methodology, with the story itself becoming an object of study. They focus on how people make sense of events and of the behaviours connected to these events. Researchers use ethnographic techniques, such as observation and interviews, to capture people's stories.

Perhaps one of the most important elements of narrative research is that of the human experience of time, or temporality. Carr (1986) says we cannot experience life as a 'mere' or 'pure' sequence of isolated events, one thing after another. He divides human experience into passive experience, active experience and experience of self/life and says each stage can be characterised by a complex temporal structure similar to the storied form (see also Bruner, 1990; 1991). Passive experience, for example is still charged with our anticipation of the future ('protention') and our memory of the past ('retention'). We cannot even experience anything as happening, without acknowledging or feeling what came before and what may come after, which is an interrelated 'configuration' of past-present-future. If passive experience is bound in time, and active too, then, Crossley (2002) argues, when we look at the more complex level of life as a whole, we need a reflexive temporal grasp, to hold the phases of phenomena together, and preserve their coherence. This, she says, is autobiography; the selecting and editing of life reflexively. Some authors such as Kierkegaard (1987) have argued that it is through this process of autobiographical selection that we become ethical beings; because the story telling makes us responsible for our lives.

I chose a Narrative Approach, and specifically the field of Narrative Inquiry (NI), as it is rooted firmly in the socially constructivist interpretive paradigm, while

also providing a structure through the temporal and emplotment elements (assembling events into a narrative) and is therefore less 'chaotic' than some other approaches (Crossley, 2002). It is also rooted in language (Haydon, Browne, & van der Riet, 2018). NI looks at how humans experience their world, and assumes that others will perceive their own differently, and that it is a valid position to hold that both perceptions can be true – i.e. that both worlds in some way exist. It focuses on the stories we live, and, crucially, those we tell (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). A key element of NI is the relationship between this element of time detailed above, described as temporality, with sociality and spatiality. Narratives are explored across these three dimensions, with the researcher noting stories of past present and future, inner and outer emotions and place (Clandinin, 2013), and even when one takes prominence, the others are never forgotten.

NI helps this study prioritise and honour, therefore, the experiences and perceptions of young people themselves. While taking a systemic approach, and understanding the young people are embedded within, shaping and shaped by the systems around them, I wanted to help fill a gap in the literature: that of the young people being able to tell their own stories.

I also wanted to add to the literature around young people making meaning out of their own stories, and NI seemed the only approach that would really support, or promote, this. NI recognises that knowledge is co-constructed through interaction and discourse. It states that the creation and exchange of stories is central to human experience (Murray, 1999).

Crossley (2002) posits that a central premise of a narrative approach is the fundamental link between experiences of self, temporality, relationships with others and 'morality'; that our understanding of our selves come from a view of where we



stand in relation to 'the good' as defined by the world we understand around us.

Narrative inquiry is a way to understand experience and a way to study experience (Clandinin, 2006, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

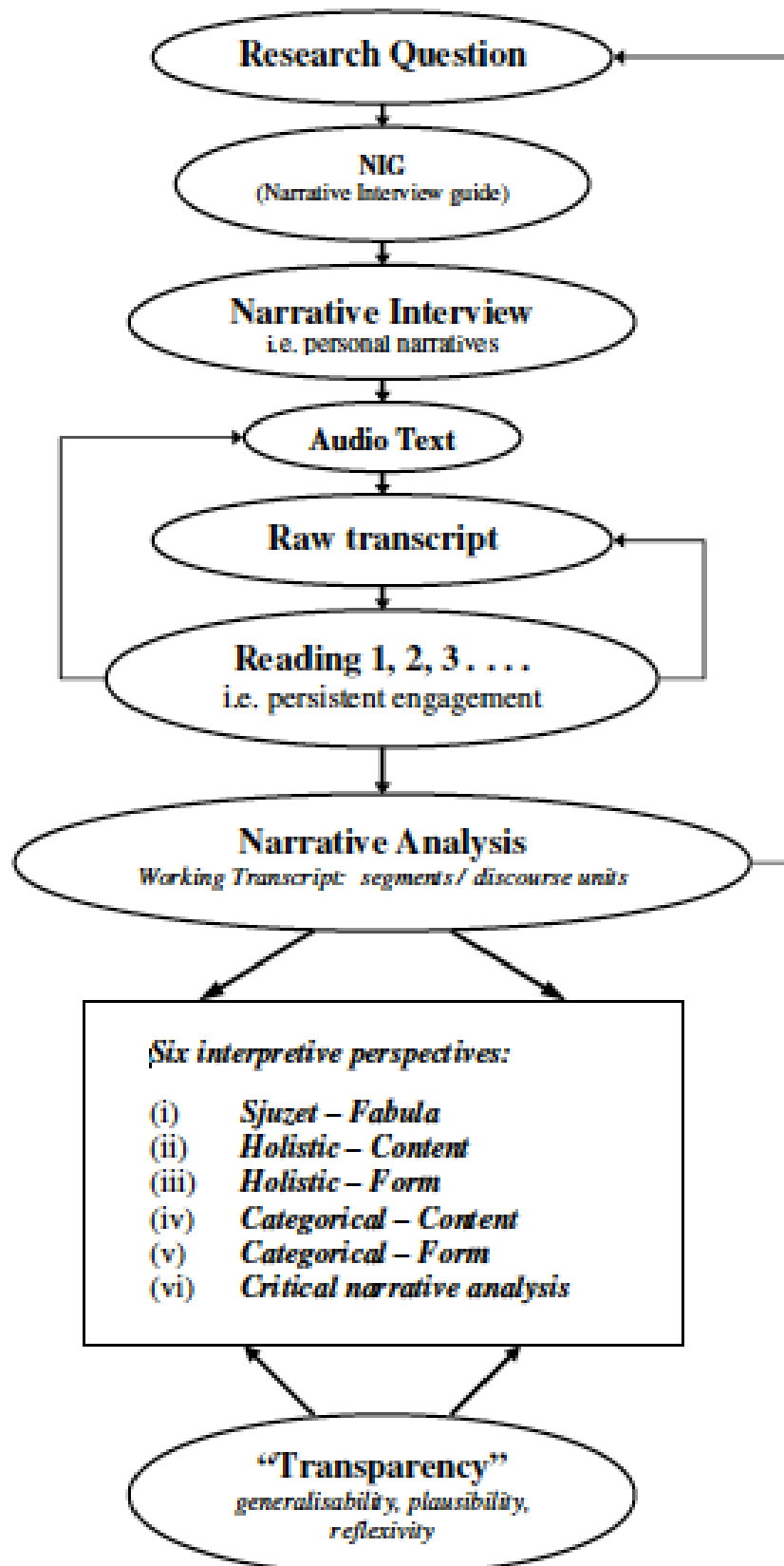
There are different approaches or frameworks to NI: Riessman (2008), for example, is used frequently in sociology and psychology research (see for eg Smith, 2008) and Czarniawska (2004) uses narrative inquiry to explore organisational narratives. I used Narrative Oriented Inquiry (NOI) (Hiles, Cermák & Chrz, 2009) for its stated emphasis on personal narratives, interviews, biographical research and a sense of agency. This approach is not interested in making predictions, or testing hypotheses, but is exploratory, and so requires very clear paradigm assumptions on behalf of the researcher (here interpretive social constructivism). It believes in the joint construction of meaning, and that narratives are a vital means of knowledge production (Mishler, 1995). Hiles et. al. (2009) also regard the individual, and their model reflects and supports this, as actively engaged in processes of meaning-making, organization and agency – with or without the researcher. Hiles et. al. (2009) believe that narrative approaches constitute a third cognitive revolution (after the second cognitive revolution they call the “discursive turn”, p.2) as they can build bridges across different disciplines within psychology and more broadly within all human sciences, offering ways to integrate psychodynamic, cognitive, discursive, humanistic and transpersonal approaches.

### ***3.7.1 Outline of Narrative Oriented Inquiry***

Hiles et. al. (2009) stress that NOI begins with research design (see **Figure 3.1**). The clarification of the research question for the inquiry is the important first step. Then the method of data collection – or story telling – is chosen. This can be a semi-structured, or narrative style of interviewing, with a Narrative Interview Guide

**Figure 3.1**

*Model of NOI (Hiles & Cermák, 2008)*



(NIG), for example, being used. It can also, however, use biographical or other methods, such as drawing lifelines, writing stories, using the river of life, etc. One of its great attributes is that the manner of story-telling can be flexible to suit the participant. Data can be collected by audio-taping, or might be written. A raw transcript is then produced, which should not be tidied up, and it is then analysed in certain specific ways (See **3.10**).

### ***3.7.2 Critique of Narrative Approaches***

While its proponents say NI can capture social representation processes, such as feelings, images, and time, and help to understand the ambiguity, complexity, and dynamism of phenomena under investigation, others believe information gathered and analysed in this way may be distorted by subjectivity, be subject to, or the victim of, manipulation, and great caution must be taken with generalisation (see, e.g., Robson, 2011). This research, however, takes the position that transparency in method and reflexivity of the researcher can mitigate against distortion and as it comes from an interpretive-constructivist standpoint, it places great value on subjective meaning.

Crossley (2002) allows that some researchers do not accept that human experience has a narrative structure and say that the 'temporal unity' of a narrative, that is the beginning, middle and end, is not intrinsic to reality. Such researchers would argue that in fact humans impose a narrative structure on to their / our experiences to help us understand life, but that that it is a construct, not a reality. This study posits that this distinction does not matter if you are searching for meaning, instead of positivist 'truths'. Crossley also details the argument of literary theorist Roland Barthes who points out that the elements that make a narrative have been put there by the author, and all those that would destroy the narrative or disrupt

it, have been left out. Life cannot be manipulated in such a way, he argues. But this is exactly what I find so interesting: what the narrator includes and why can reveal so much about the experience of a story, beyond the 'events'.

Crossley (2009) asserts that human life does in fact hold a narrative structure, perhaps an internal one, as humans constantly project themselves backwards and forwards to "maintain a sense of coherence, unity, meaningfulness and identity" (p. 11). She argues that many discursive and postmodern approaches, fail to take sufficient account of the essential unity and integrity of everyday lived experience, viewing instead a certain chaos.

### **3.8 Research Design**

This study used narrative interviews and techniques, appropriate to NOI and rooted in the study's research questions, to explore the views of three young people at mainstream secondary schools in London, who had experienced persistent absence in the past but had since recorded at least 90% attendance for more than a term. It aimed to help them share their stories, make meaning of these stories, and hopefully have that meaning heard by professionals who may then be able to work with CYP to start shifting systems towards a more CYP-centred understanding of education and the teenage years.

#### ***3.8.1 Recruitment of Participants***

Due to Covid-19 restrictions, I had not been able to recruit participants before I had to move placement in Year 3. I was then new to the LA, so initially in September 2020 I asked colleagues in the Educational Psychology Service (EPS) if they knew of any returnees or could inquire for me. Then I went direct to my allocated schools and asked the Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators (SENCOs). I found one participant this way. Then I put out an email to all the

SENCOs of mainstream secondaries in the authority, and followed this up with direct emails and phone calls. After amending my ethics form and getting permission to move beyond my local authority, I then used social media to explore further afield and across other outer-London boroughs (see Appendix F). This resulted in five more participants willing to consider being involved. Eventually three dropped out and I had three in total in the study across two LAs.

### ***3.8.2 Approach to Recruiting and Gaining Consent***

I sent each proposed participant and their parents a letter fully outlining the research and why they had been put forward and asking for consent (see Appendix E). I then met each participant via Microsoft Teams before doing any data collection, to talk through the research and ensure their consent was fully informed. At this point they also had an opportunity to raise any questions or concerns, ask me anything about myself, state a preference for timings and generally get to know me and vice versa.

### ***3.8.3 Ethical Implications of Recruitment Process***

The participants were initially identified by their schools. This means that it was the adults who had decided that their return to school was successful. They may have felt under some pressure to agree with this description and also to engage with my work. Their experience of having been “in trouble” perhaps before may have made them feel under greater pressure to do as they were asked. I tried to ensure through the interview techniques I used that they had a chance to say how they really felt.

Additionally, I was aware the participants were likely to position as me an expert, or someone in authority, however much I tried to get them to see me differently. The two boys insisted on referring to me as ‘Miss’ for example, even after

I told them to call me by my first name. This led me to wonder how comfortable they would genuinely feel in telling me I had miss-authored their stories when we went through them together after I had done the analysis.

### **3.8.4 Rationale for Sample Size**

According to Haydon et. al. (2018) Narrative Inquiry often has only a few participants and sometimes only one (but more commonly between four and six). They indicate that the requirement of in-depth collaboration, construction and relatedness between researcher and participant during data collection, processing and analysing, naturally limits the number of participants.

### **3.8.5 Participant Profiles**

In total, three participants across two schools participated in my research: a girl in Year 10, a boy in Year 8 and a boy in Year 9 (see **Table 3.1**). The criteria was that they had to be in mainstream secondary school, have returned to school successfully for more than a term after a period of persistent absence (defined as attendance below 90% for more than a term); they may have a SEN, or a diagnosis of a mental health condition, but they were being taught in mainstream classes.

**Table 3.1**

*Participant Profiles*

<b>Participant Pseudonym</b>	<b>M/F</b>	<b>School year</b>	<b>Lowest sustained attendance during period of PA</b>	<b>Current attendance (for more than a term)</b>
Clara	F	10	88%	98.3%
Michael	M	8	86%	90%
Shadow	M	9	85%	94%

### **3.9 Data Collection**

Interpretivist researchers view data collection as a negotiated interaction (Creswell, 2009). This study too sees it as a co-construction between researcher and participant (Sfard & Prusak, 2005), with both jointly responsible for the stories that emerge. That does not mean the researcher takes ownership of the story, merely that they are reflectively aware of their role in the construction and they do not shy away from relatedness in the process. Narratives are already ‘edited’ as they emerge; partly by the choices made by the interviewee, partly by researchers’ requirements of location, time, format, and speaker, for their specific research purposes.

#### ***3.9.1 The Use of Data Collection Tools***

Another way of ‘editing’ by a researcher is the tool they use to collect the data. The main tool of data collection for this study was a narrative interview. After the initial meeting with each participant, I intended to hold two further sessions with each participant. The first of the remaining two sessions was an in-depth conversation flowing on from our first, introductory, meeting, with semi structured prompts and questions if needed and other narrative prompts and tools (Appendix G describes all interview prompts and tools). The second was to be an opportunity for the participants to check their narratives and edit them or provide more data (see **3.9.2**).

Many tools used by Educational Psychologists to gather the child’s views, promote their voice, and understand their personal constructs, rely on activities such as drawing or sorting or plotting (e.g. Ideal School, Ideal Self, Scaling). Research has shown that various task-based approaches can engage even very shy young

people (Thomson et. al., 2002; Highet, 2003). Because of this I also explored the use of visual tools.

In life history research, tools such as life grids have been used more with adults than with younger people (Parry, Thomson, & Fowkes, 1999), such as for mapping lifetime exposure to variables linked to chronic illness and health inequality (Wilson, Cunningham-Burley, Bancroft, Backett-Milburn & Masters (2007). Parry et. al. (1999) highlight the power of a life grid tool to respond to qualitative researchers' desire to move away from traditional interview dynamics of power relationships and create instead something more collaborative.

In potentially sensitive research around parental substance use, Wilson et. al. (2007) set out to find a way to use life grids for both engaging young people and also to support them through process of telling their story, which was my purpose too.

I chose a 'grid' or 'table' structure, with the passage of time on one axis and selected experiences of moments of the participants' lives and experiences on the other axis – creating a grid.

When it became clear I would be working remotely due to Covid-19 restrictions, I took the opportunity to explore other narrative tools that might be easier to create together when separated by a screen. Drawing on my own experience of Play Therapy training where we created a river or path of our own personal journeys, and also lectures on Narrative Therapy and the Tree of Life, I investigated a more symbolic technique and came across the River of Life (Mercer, 2008) which sees the River as a journey metaphor. Originally used in spiritual practice, it has also been embraced by the Centre for Participatory Research in the US, particularly around Community Based Participatory Research (CBPR) partnerships (see e.g., Parker,



Wallerstein, Duran, Magarati, Burgess, Sanchez-Youngman, Boursaw, Heffernan, Garoutte & Koegel, 2020).

I liked the CBPR focus on reflection and guided questions. I also liked that this offered young people the chance to draw, not just populate a grid or talk. It was another option; a way for them to either hide a little from me if shy, or to make meaning, or to show off their skills. They did not have to share the river with me but if they wanted to, they could. Additionally, we did not have to talk through it, but again, they could.

I had a few simple guided suggestions and prompts I thought were suitable for the age of the young person I was talking with, eg:

- Can you think briefly about the course of your whole life?
- If you were able to compare your life with a river, what would the river look like?
- Are there any particularly smooth, flowing areas? What was positive about those times?
- Are there any sharp bends?
- Any rocky patches?
- Where is it flowing now?

### **3.9.2 Ensuring Authorship**

I planned a third meeting to go over my analysis of each participant's transcripts, grids and media with them, and adjust them or include further input as they wished. The two boys had not been able to take up the opportunity to plot their story visually on a grid or path or river initially, as the cameras were not working on their machines at school. So I offered them this opportunity at this meeting, sending the tools through in advance and some suggestions of what we might discuss (see

prompts above). Unfortunately, due to Covid-19 and staff isolations, I could not meet any of them for the final session. Instead, I drew up versions of their stories from the transcripts, using only their own words but editing out some extraneous “um”s and “er”s and “like”s – unless I felt they were important to the narrative. I then wrote each participant a letter which mentioned some of the themes I thought had come through in their stories, and attached the story itself, asking them to get back to me if they had any concerns or wanted to add anything (see Appendix H).

### ***3.9.3 Ethical Implications in the Data Collection Process***

As these were personal stories that were being collected, even with anonymity, it was important that participants felt they had total control over them. They (and their parents) were advised of their right to withdraw from the research study at any time without being obliged to provide a reason, up until the point where the data had been analysed. This was made clear on the information sheets and consent forms, and again at all of our meetings. If they did decide to withdraw, I made it clear their contribution (including any recordings and transcripts) would be destroyed.

As the participants were young people who had undergone, and may still have been undergoing, some element of emotional stress, and were perhaps particularly vulnerable, I ensured they knew a nominated member of school staff was available to support them if needed. I provided opportunities for taking breaks if needed, playing games and recharging batteries. Participants were reminded they could terminate the interview at any time.

Initially, having to do the interviews via Microsoft Teams seemed less safe for the participants, as safeguarding meant a staff member had to be in the room, at least for our first meeting, or joining the call remotely, and this might have made

them anxious, but then it was agreed that with recording and with a door being left open and a staff member outside they could be in the room alone, and it seemed that perhaps they felt even safer behind a screen than they would have done face to face, and in fact one of them expressed this explicitly.

### **3.10 Data Analysis**

#### **3.10.1 Narrative Analysis**

Hiles et. al. (2009) claim analyzing narrative data with NOI is a joyful process. They talk of the moment when the researcher can dive into the transcript and begin to make sense of it all, supported by the tools of NOI. The aim is that as core themes of the narrative emerge, the subtleties of how the stories have been told become clearer and this leads to deeper critical analysis.

After data collection I followed Hiles et. al.'s (2009) guidance and read through the raw transcript several times, returning to the audio recording, and then selected specific sections for further analysis. I then followed their stepped model (though not all sections are necessary for all parts of all transcripts) (see Figure 3.1).

**3.10.1.1 First step.** I divided the text into numbered segments, which is identified as roughly a self-contained episode, or “move” (p.112), in the telling of the story, sometimes simply a sentence. It usually took two read throughs to do this. I made annotations to the side with notes and comments, and this was my working transcript for analysis (see Appendix I for a sample).

**3.10.1.2 Second step: Sjuzet – Fabula.** Next came the stage that Hiles et. al. (2009) identify as the most crucial. This is the first attempt at gaining perspective. The text is broken down into two underlying and inter-related components: the sjuzet and the fabula. These have been defined as the “unbounded and bounded” parts of the narrative (Herman & Vervaeck, 2001, p.46). The sjuzet, or unbounded parts of

the text, can be changed to some degree, without effecting the basic story. It represents the action of the telling of the story, and the way in which the story is being told. The fabula, on the other hand, is the outline of the actual (or perceived) events as they occurred (or might have). Changes here change the story itself. Hiles et. al. (2009) argue that the tension between sjuzet and fabula, and defining which is which, is insightful in itself (see Appendix J for a sample).

The sjuzet is crucial to understanding the way in which the individual creates an identity position, by actively engaging in their own meaning-making (Hiles, 2007), whereas the fabula, can usually be broken down into a sequence of events or episodes being related. These two elements draw on the work of Labov & Waletzky (1967) who outlined two functions of narrative: referential and evaluative.

**3.11.1.3 Third step: gaining perspective.** Hiles et. al. (2009) leave it up to the researcher to decide which of a selection of analytic techniques are most relevant to the narratives under review. NOI argues that a story cannot be reduced to a set of themes, but needs to be viewed holistically. To this end it pays close attention to the context of the story telling, and makes a critical analysis of how the teller positions themselves in relation to what is being told. Hiles et. al. (2009) therefore adopted four further techniques from Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach & Zilber (1998) and one from Emerson & Frosh (2004), which researchers can choose from:

- Holistic–Content. This explores links across the story, linking specific content to the story as a whole.
- Holistic–Form. This focuses upon the form of the story, and the plot that is threading through it.
- Categorical–Content. This focuses upon self-contained areas of content, e.g. school, bullying, friends, parents, home.

- Categorical–Form. This involves a further very careful analysis of the sjuzet and feeds into:
- Critical analysis.

For the first two research questions ('What does this research tell us about YPs' experiences of persistent absenteeism?' And 'What does this research tell us about positive and sustainable returns?') the narratives were analysed using all five research techniques, by moving back and forth between, and comparing, the "moves", with the "sjuzet / fabula" and the "smoothed" story written for the participants themselves. Throughout this process, and particularly for then answering the third research question, the type of questions outlined by Hiles et. al. (2009) that a researcher might wish to ask were employed: "What sort of narrative account is the participant constructing for herself?" and, "How does she position herself with respect to her sense of self in the context of the series of events that she recounts?" (p.8). They stress that narrative identity is often built around inter-related identity positions (Hiles, 2007). At this point, themes to each story were identified, from the language and the plot. Each of the three narratives were then revisited to look for commonalities and differences across the three experiences.

Spence (1986) points out that researchers using narrative methodologies, who are then presenting their work to others, may tend to present a "good story more than a faithful account". It is for this reason that this study chose NOI as it allows the participants words to stay exact throughout, and does not "re-story" them. However, they are still being interpreted by the researcher and presented; first in the interviews themselves, when conversations are steered, shaped and led, even unwittingly; then narratives are presented back to the participants themselves, before being shared with other readers of the research. This process of transposing what was said to a

different context has been called ‘narrative smoothing’ (Kim 2016, citing Spence, 1986). When the “ums” and “ahs” were removed from the text sent back to the participant, and it was re-ordered slightly to follow chronology where appropriate, that was narrative smoothing. I used narrative smoothing in Chapter four when presenting the findings and themes, and in Chapter five, when I discussed these findings and transposed them onto a model around psychological theory. To make meaning, narrative smoothing is necessary but still problematic. Kim (2016) suggests following two concurrent hermeneutical approaches while analysing and presenting data to ensure the smoothing does not rub out accuracy: interpretation of faith and interpretation of suspicion. We can take and present what participants say at face value, and also our conversations with them, while also being on the look out for “red flags” (p.194). This is what Reissman (2008) describes as thinking “beyond the surface of a text ... [moving] towards a broader commentary”. By doing both at the same time, I aimed to ensure any smoothing helped raise truth rather than bury it.

### **3.11 Ethical Considerations in Data Analysis**

#### **3.11.1. Generalisation**

There is always a danger of using people’s voices in research like this as conclusions and generalisations will be drawn from their words, however tentatively, that can never be truly validated as the participants’ actual own conclusions or experiences. To mitigate this, each participant was given the opportunity to read through the narratives as developed by me, to amend them, and / or to remove themselves entirely from the research project (see Appendices E and H). The whole research project was also subject to the university’s ethical committee for approval (see Appendix C).

### **3.11.2 *The Role of the Researcher (reflexivity)***

This chapter has outlined various positions that this research has taken, not least those that are values-driven around social justice and a desire for this research to help feed into a dialectic that may promote a society with greater wellbeing. The research topic and the methodological approach were chosen because of these values, but with awareness that they must not be imposed, or projected, on to participants. While not pretending to be value-neutral, I had to hold a position of neutrality while gathering the participants' narratives, and while conducting the analysis. To support this I kept a reflective journal (see extracts in Appendix L) and I discuss this more in Chapter five.

### **3.12 Quality of the Research**

Lincoln and Guba (1986) created stringent criteria in qualitative research, known as credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability. To respond to these, the author employed the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme Qualitative Checklist (2018) to this research and was able to answer 'yes' to the 10 questions (see Appendix M).

For research to be credible, it needs to be ethical and also clearly positioned, both socially and culturally (Stiles, 1993), with the researcher being clear about their values and assumptions. This chapter has attempted to address that.

Trustworthiness can be measured by how clear and transparent the processes and procedures of the research are, so others can make their own judgments on the researcher's interpretations. Again, this study aimed to do that. Chapter one attempted to meet Tracy's (2010) other suggestions that the quality of qualitative research can be also measured by the worthiness and relevance of a research topic,

and the richness of explanations, which are addressed hopefully in Chapters four and five.



## Chapter Four: Results and analysis

### 4.1 Chapter Overview

The purpose of this chapter is to present the findings of the narrative explorations with the young people involved in the research and their consequent analysis. First, the chapter offers the young people's stories in their own words, abridged slightly from the full versions available in Appendix H. Then it presents any tensions between the fabula and the sjuzet that were revealed during the initial stage of analysis, also addressing the question: 'what story was this young person trying to tell?' Next, the chapter focuses the findings on the first two research questions, pulling out themes that the young people identified as pertinent to their experiences, as well as those identified in the deeper analysis. The chapter ends by trying to address the third research question of whether and how the process helped the young people to make more meaning from their own experiences.

### 4.2 Individual Narratives

#### 4.2.1 *"Michael's" Story*

**4.2.1.1 In His Own Words.** [I live with my mum and dad] and four of my brothers [who are] are all older. My mum [and] my brothers help [me] with school.

[I had some problems with school] in Year Six when I was kind of naughty. I'd talk non-stop and get up, talking over a teacher or something; or ... just sometimes ignoring the rules. [But] I improved later on. I wasn't used to the work [and] a lot of my friends left, I don't know why.

[I found it easier to attend school in Year Six than now] because of the pandemic. [Now] I get physically sick sometimes and I get a lot of headaches.

A lot of people came from [my primary] school to this school. [...] many are still my friends. [When I first joined] I wasn't used to the school I used to get lost. And

the teachers were always stricter and you had to behave. I liked primary school better. It was just calm and fun. Now you have to get serious.

[Here, there are these kids who] think they're so bad and they try to scare you. They try to fight me but I just don't care. I just walk away. And sometimes I argue back. They keep on telling me to ignore it, my teachers, and they keep on telling me to tell them [when it happens] but the thing is, if that was true [if it helped], then I would have done it. But I don't think that's the right thing. If I ignore them, they'll keep coming for me cos they'll think I'm scared. [And] if I tell the teachers they'll call me a snitch. And [some teachers] won't even do anything.

**Lockdown.** [When lockdown happened in Year 7] I didn't know there was online classes. My brothers asked me [if I had online classes] and they researched it and then I got on to it. Someone from school [also] called me [but] then my password [didn't] work, and I had to get that sorted out. It took a week. [During] the second [lockdown], I attended every single one. I wish I'd known my login, and I wish I knew there were online classes. I wish I had hurried it up.

My attendance was low because of the lockdown. I don't know why they counted it. I didn't even really learn anything. There's no one else there [and] there's nobody to tell you off. The screen [made it hard]. You're just sitting in one place... you're really tired. And you just don't concentrate. You just look around. I just couldn't learn it. It was like I just couldn't learn it. I just couldn't concentrate.

[I enjoyed getting more] sleep [in lockdown]. [And] it was just calm. We used to go to the park every day, and play games. [But] sometimes you couldn't get out of your house.

**Return to school.** Now it's fine [back at school]. I've got a bit back into my old days. Like the normal days. Now I find it easy, to learn. The school should know that it was the online thing and I'll not miss days again.

[At school there is a particular teacher who supports me.] They always say to never give up and keep on carrying on with the work and I enjoy spending time with them.

The work is [harder than friendships]. [I feel frustrated a lot at] school. [There are a lot more subjects at secondary school], like languages. I like PE and maths, but I don't really enjoy lunch times and break times at all. You just walk around, you can't really go anywhere.

[The last five years, from year four to now, feel] crazy. In the primary I was just a kid like who didn't like, talk back and that [to other kids]. I'm not scared of them. I used to be, but now I'm not.

I knew in high school there will be like kids that act tough and I would look like their pillow so I had to improve because they'll literally go for me, all the time. And I'd be like the underdog. So.... My friends were there for me. [When I do fight back] I get in trouble, myself. I have a report [and] I have to show my behaviour, [which is] annoying. There's this one kid that gets in my business for no reason. [He doesn't get in as much trouble] as I did because... I just don't care and I push him.

I just always wish to go home.

**The Future.** [If I didn't have to learn, I wouldn't want to be at school. There's nothing fun.] You just learn. But school gets at the top of your life, because it will get you money, then you can enjoy life. Nobody will take you in jobs if you don't know nothing. You'll just ruin it, so, you have to be qualified.

I'd like to be a footballer, but that's sports .... I want to become a plumber. Or a doctor or something. But I don't think I'll become a doctor. [It would be too hard]. And I'll get upset if I don't save anybody. [If I was a plumber, I'd] get easy money. [You have to train for] two years. My brother does it. [You need] English, science, and math. My brother said he needed like a grade four.

Right now I'm struggling. But I'll make sure to pass.

[If I could chat to the person I was in year six] I would say come to this school. So we can hang out.

[If you could wave a magic wand and change one thing at school, I'd like you to make it] peaceful, like no violence.

[I care about my attendance and want to have a good attendance record] and I know I've not gone sick lately.

#### **4.2.1.2 Analysis of Michael's Fabula and Sjuzet.**

**Presentation / sjuzet.** Michael presents his story as an experience of injustice and regret. He gives the impression that things have happened to him he had not control over, and that these may have been unfair; others' actions have not been understood by him, or they have been done to him, rather than with him: *"had to", "I don't know why they counted it.. but ...", "I have to like..." "I don't know why they ..."; "I wish I...", "I wish..."*.

Michael seems to have found it harder to cope as life has got progressively more *"serious"* and less *"fun"* and presents a sense of helplessness: such as being the youngest is *"Annoying. Because like, you can't really do anything without them?"* (29<sup>th</sup> move), and saying *"I didn't know"* twice about the requirement to log on for online learning, or saying *"I couldn't"* three times about engaging with that learning: *"But like I would get tired I would keep on looking at the screen and not learning*

*anything, I just couldn't learn it. It was like I just couldn't learn it. I just couldn't concentrate.*" (50<sup>th</sup> move). He seems to feel he is now forever unfairly tarred with a period of low absence when he hadn't even realised he was meant to be doing online learning.

Adults in Michael's life have been both needed and turned to for help, but also sometimes found lacking. His brothers helped him in lockdown: "*Then they researched about it. And then I got on to it*" (22<sup>nd</sup> move), someone from school called to check on Michael and his mum wakes him up, but apart from this, Michael gives the impression of being left struggling, with no regard to his ability to take on work or regulate behaviours: "*Some teachers. They don't do nothing. So they keep on piling on.*" (35<sup>th</sup> move), "*Yeah, yeah ... like the normal teachers, they just don't care, even if they say stop.*" (36<sup>th</sup> move). He explains that working online from home was particularly hard because he is even lonelier in coping with his struggles "*Like there's no one else. There's nobody to tell you off. Like I just didn't like learning from it*" (26<sup>th</sup> move), suggesting that without an adult / teacher helping him focus he loses concentration. Even if he refers to this as being 'told off' he appears to crave it.

Michael refers frequently to life before secondary school as being "*normal*" and presents this normal as a state of "*calm*" and "*peace*" and also sometimes "*fun*" he would like to return to. He suggests lockdown offered a little glimpse of normal again. Secondary school life for him does not therefore perhaps seem normal currently, a suggestion that he is not comfortable with his current situation or that he has yet to find his place in the new school and come to terms with it. He often seems not to understand what the purpose is of some learning tasks: "*you don't really learn anything. So why why do you have to count it?*" (38<sup>th</sup> move) and "*[it] was like a waste of time*" (41<sup>st</sup> move).

In his sjuzet, Michael seems a little conflicted as to whether certain school realities bother him or not. There are kids who are “*annoying*” and try to scare him but “*I just don’t care.*” (34<sup>th</sup> move). And it may be that a slight process of disengagement began at the point he decided he had to not care. Michael admits to minding about learning and about teachers not listening, and that stuff is unfair, but also wants to be clear that I don’t overstate all this: “*there’s not really that much things that’s been hard, hard for me, but...*” (31<sup>st</sup> move).

Throughout his story he is clear that he should be understood, and his sjuzet shows he struggles to be so: “*Not like, not like that. I’m telling, I’m trying to say ...*” (46<sup>th</sup> move).

Michael was moving his body constantly throughout our conversation, with his head and shoulders making a sort of figure of eight as he spoke. He refers in passing quite often to a need to get up, a desire to be outside, and he presents a sense of restlessness: “[being in trouble for] *like ... like getting up*” (8<sup>th</sup> move), “[not enjoying breaktimes because] *you just walk around, you can’t really go anywhere.*” (18<sup>th</sup> move), and “*like you’re just sitting in one place? You can’t learn anything because you’re really tired*” (26<sup>th</sup> move) or “*but, right now I just want to spend time outside*” (49<sup>th</sup> move). He says primary school was better because “*It was just calm*” (14<sup>th</sup> move). At one point he talks of being handed “C1s” (a detention slip) “*non-stop*”, as if he doesn’t feel he even has time to breathe, and the boys who “*try to scare*” him or who keep “*getting in his business*” he presents as being relentless. His language (body and spoken) in general suggests he may feel like perhaps he is on a roller coaster he cannot get off; perhaps because he is frequently involved in situations he has little control over, despite trying so hard to exert influence / control.

His story is one of movement, and the struggle to ensure it continues forwards. Michael uses the word “*improve*” at least three times, and refers to the teachers who support him as telling him to “*never give up and keep on carrying on with the work*” (31<sup>st</sup> move).

Altogether as a whole, and on occasion dotted throughout, Michael presents as someone lost in his own story, roaming through it, trying to find a more comfortable position; this place of “*calm*”. At the end, Michael suggests inviting his younger self to come and meet him and “*hang out*” together, as if perhaps they could help each other navigate their way through the confusion.

**Onset of Difficulties / *fabula*.** Michael’s *fabula* gives a relatively clear account of difficulties at school beginning in Year Six when some of his friends moved away and he began to get into more trouble for being “naughty”. Michael seems to understand the behaviour that was called naughty and does not at this point seem to think he was treated particularly harshly, but it may perhaps have set up the idea that teachers are not always going to be on his side. When Michael arrived in secondary school he seems to have tried to prepare himself for potential bullying by others: “*I knew in, like, high school, in high school there will be like kids that act tough and I would look like their pillow so I had to like improve because they’ll literally go for me, all the time. And I’d be like the underdog. So...*” (45<sup>th</sup> move). Sure enough, he encountered this: “*because like here there are always like those kids that are annoying ... like they think they’re so bad and like they try to scare you but they try to fight me.*” (34<sup>th</sup> move). Lockdown hit when he was in Year Seven so he had not had much time to build up a sense of belonging or engagement. He then explains he did not access remote learning (“*log on*”) at all in the first lockdown as he was not aware he should. He discovered his mistake and

logged on in the second one. He mentions briefly that illness is also a factor in his non-attendance, and says it is because of the pandemic: *“it's just I'm getting sick a bit. Because of this pandemic. I'm physically sick and sometimes I get a lot of headaches”* (9<sup>th</sup> move).

Michael is clear that his brothers and some teachers have been helpful, but he still gets into trouble for his behaviour sometimes. He briefly references friends who support him also. If he can't be a footballer, Michael says he wants to be a plumber and understands he has to pass his GCSEs with grade 4s if he is to do that, and then go on to another two years' training.

**4.2.1.3 Emerging key themes (and words) from Michael's story.** Michael's is a story of *struggle*, perseverance, and trying hard to *improve* in a world he perceives as *unfair*, and which he does not always *understand*. He finds *lessons hard* and many things, including them and other children, *annoying* and *frustrating*. Michael feels *targeted* by others, including by *teachers*, from whom he needs more *support*. He talks of the importance of *friendships*, and a search for *peace*.

#### **4.2.2 “Shadow's” story**

**4.2.2.1 In his own words.** [I live with my father, my mother, and my younger brother]. He's funny, he's good. It's a pleasure to have him!

[At the moment, my attendance has] been going good. [I first started having problems] when I was in primary school. I think around Year Five. I had to go abroad. You know, just for family business, for maybe a month. Furthermore, I had, illnesses, you know, like a cold, for instance. Those are the main reasons why I just couldn't come to school.

Then there was a transition where I was attending school [in Year Six]. Because then that's when my SATs were coming up. [Then it started] I think, again,



in Year Seven, Eight, as I previously said, it was just about general illnesses, you know, I had a cold, I had some headaches, hay fever.

[In Year Seven, school was] mostly like, a new thing. Right? Because you're so used to primary school. And ... some people, you know, they feel like it's, how do you say, unadaptable I guess you could say, because the new people there, you don't know who they are. And your previous friends, you know, they move to other schools. So you kind of lose a connection.

Once Year Six was over, after the summer holidays, I knew there was gonna be a challenge because of adapting to [a] new [situation]. I had good friends actually [at primary school].

In Year Seven, I didn't really have you know that much friends. So that was also a bit demotivating to come to school, because you know you're not going to be able to socialise with many people, and it's just going to make the day even more boring. In Year Seven, I felt the work [was] challenging. So... as we know, since I'm in high school now, everything has become so serious, you know. We're approaching GCSEs.

**The Return.** [It began to feel a bit more comfortable] in the beginning of Year Eight. Well, I think the reason I ah came to school was just, oh, I have GCSEs these years, I must take it very seriously.

Also in Year Eight, the reason I also felt more confident because I got new friends. I felt a bit more comfortable.

[There was more motivation maybe to get past some of the illnesses] in year eight; friends, I think, and also my family back home, they really helped me, they motivated me. I've carried [on] that mindset.

[Also] the staff were friendly. In a sense, when I needed help with my work... they [were there].

**Lockdown.** [In March in Year Eight there was lockdown]. It was quite okay. You know. Not that bad, because I had all the instruments at home and it was quite easy to for me to try and [connect with] the online school. [but I missed my friends].

**Return post lockdown.** [I've been back at school since] I think just in the beginning of March [and] It's felt like, everything's going back to normal. Yeah, I got to meet my friends again. Yeah, I felt more productive as well [with work]. Because when you're on online school you have a lot of free time on your hands.

[Year nine] has been quite difficult. English [is difficult], because I'm not really good at analysing. [Maths and science are] just, I guess you could say straightforward.

**Future.** [I hope to] get excellent grades [in my GCSEs, then I'm hoping to go on to do A levels, go to university to do] medical studies. [I want to be] a paediatrician. I'm not really sure [why] to be honest, I just like helping everyone to get better. [If I didn't have to earn money, I'd like to] become a sports player; cricket.

[If I could say one thing to the boy I was in year five, I'd want to say to him] things will get better one day. I hope he would [believe me]. [I'd tell him to] work hard, have a good mindset. And everything, every opportunity will just come to you.

[If I could say something to the person I'll be when I'm 18, it would be] I guess, keep going in the right direction.

#### **4.2.2.2 Analysis of Shadow's Fabula and Sjuzet.**

**Presentation / Sjuzet.** Shadow chose to present his story as a positive one of "mindset" and "motivation". His sjuzet did not allow for many unresolved tensions in this, positioning him as looking back at past / historic difficulties from the vantage

point of all this being behind him. The language he uses to tell his story is quite grown up / academic, seemingly distancing himself from events in the past, such as: *“furthermore”, “family business”, “to be honest”, “all in all”, “I guess you could say”, “expand on that point”, “striving”, “free time on your hands”*. Shadow seems to feel he has grown and learned a different way of being and is now committed to trying the path of A’ levels and university and a career as a doctor. He sometimes discusses others’ perspectives or talks about his own in the third or second person, as opposed to first. Perhaps again to give more distance: *“So I guess some people will not really, how do you say, are not really motivated to come to school. You know, they’re not really comfortable with the surroundings?”* (6<sup>th</sup> move) and *“that was also a bit demotivating to come to school, because you know you’re not going to be able to socialise with many people.”* (8<sup>th</sup> move)

This said, both grown up / academic language and third person could imply simply that he feels he is in a “professional” academic setting; that he is participating in ‘research’ and he is using language he feels appropriate to the task. When he is talking about the present times for him and his success, Shadow uses first person more often, eg: *“I guess I have now a positive mentality than before. In a sense that, you know, I’m wanting to go to school”* (27<sup>th</sup> move).

Shadow is also perhaps presenting through his sjuzet a sense of being out of control when he was missing school (too ill, moved to a secondary without friends, etc) and then being back in control when he starts attending more. Whether this is how he felt at the time, or something he presents as a distancing measure is unclear.

**Onset of Difficulties / Fabula.** Shadow’s fabula gives us a clear chronology of events. He started having difficulties with attendance around Year Five of primary school, when he had various *“illnesses, you know, had just a general illnesses, you*

*know, like a cold*" (3<sup>rd</sup> move), those, and a need to travel abroad for "*family business*" were "*the main reasons why I just couldn't come to school.*" (3<sup>rd</sup> move continued). He rallied in Year Six because of SATs, probably exams he perceives important, hence he found the motivation to attend. Then the transition to Year Seven was hard due to a loss of friends, a sense of being alone, and finding the work increasingly challenging. He suffered more illness: "*I think, again, in year Seven, eight, as I previously said, it was just about general illnesses, you know, I had a cold, I had some headaches. Hay fever. Essentially, those kind of things that, you know, restricted me from attending school.*" (5<sup>th</sup> move). He rallied again when his family helped him realise that GCSEs were approaching and he needed a different "*mindset*". "*I think and also my er family back home, they really helped me. Yeah they just motivated me, you know, like, as they say, like in a sense when you come to school, there's like, new opportunities, you know.*" (11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> moves). Shadow admits that finding friends in Year Eight helped and also "*I guess it was a natural instinct you know to just like, er, now education's, education is getting serious. So I need to attend as much lessons as I can, you know, to strive to beco.. er ... to my best potential.*" (9<sup>th</sup> move).

**4.2.2.3 Emerging key themes (and words) from Shadow's story.** Shadow presents a story of success, where his *family* have managed to help him improve his *motivation*, through developing a stronger *mindset*. *Friendships*, are important to him. Shadow looks back on a time of initially being *uncomfortable* at secondary school, when everything seemed *different*, work was *challenging*, and secondary school was much more *serious* than before. He does not have control over this move. He talks of *adapting*, overcoming *illness*, and working hard (being *productive*

and *concentrating*). He sees a future for himself of medicine and sports. He does not bring up teachers in his story but when I do he says they were *friendly*.

#### **4.2.3 Clara's Story**

**4.2.3.1 In Her Own Words.** I love animals and horses, and they make me really calm. Back in Poland [my home country], I used to go [horse riding] almost every day. I used to want to work with animals. My whole life, I wanted to be a vet. And then I think in Year Six, I already knew I kind of wanted to be [an] architect. I was just always really creative. Even as a child.

[I came to the UK in Year 6] I had a few friends [in Poland], I had my close, best friend. And then just after I came [to the UK], we don't even talk to each other anymore. Everything just cut off.

When I came I didn't speak English at all. No-one would like understand me, what I'm trying to say. And I couldn't really, like do anything about it. So I felt, kind of, alone.

In Year Seven, when I [moved to secondary school] I [still] couldn't really speak English and I was like really bullied by girls in the school. I [didn't] really have any friends... for almost a year. I [had to] learn English really fast; like in a few months. I remember at the end of Year Seven I was reading, writing a test, and I actually did it good and I moved up to Set 2 in Year Eight.

[The bullies] literally would just make up stuff, and [others] would believe them because they speak English so they know what's going on. I didn't feel confident at all. I couldn't even like speak back to them. I would just leave it. And now I would speak back.

**Period of low attendance.** Even after school, sometimes, or on the weekends I wanted to just stay home because I can't be a\*sed to do anything;

'cause I was like, really depressed and sad. My mum almost always make me go out like we just walk around. I was crying. I was doing nothing and that actually helped ... going outside.

**The return.** And then I came back.

I had this therapist and I told her everything. She understood, because, like, most people just don't understand how it feels. Everyone says that you should always tell [your] parents and that's true, you should tell them but they can't really help you that much. Because you have the kind of relationship with them, that you don't want them to worry about your damage.

[There was a supportive drama teacher and] he would involve me in stuff.

[I like to keep different problems in different areas] I don't really want to mix them. If I go somewhere else, I don't have the problem at all.

In Year Eight [things got better. I made a good friend in music class] and that really helped. The friends, and the drama class, was like the reason I wanted to go to school like every day. And then in the middle of Year Eight one boy asked me out [and we were together] almost two years.

**Difficulties again, but different.** Later, when we broke [up] our group kind of separated, because some people went with him and some with me. That was like the hard time [because people were unkind again and he was unkind and said things that weren't true]. I felt kind of alone. It feels horrible. You're like, really surprised. How did they even came up with that stuff?

[But I had] this one best friend, so it was fine. Over time, people just forget it. Or like, just everyone just moves on. So you just have to be strong.

You can't control it. If you feel like you're strong enough, you can just talk to them ... Like me and my ex, we were talking for hours. I just had to understand him, that he was depressed. And he was hurt. [You] just need to give them time.

**The future.** I want to do like, [something] artistic? Because I'm really creative, and it calms me down too. [I want to build] houses and.. er... mansions. And I want to be [an] interior designer. [To be an architect] they basically told me I need to do Maths and English and some, like creative subjects.

After university, I really want to travel, like, everywhere, and I want to get a job. And I want to buy old houses, that no one wants, and recreate them and make them, and sell them. And then after, when I have like a massive house, and everything I wanted, then I can have a child and have like, a normal life.

I'm very ambitious. Yeah. If I have a target, if I want something, I do anything to achieve it.

**Now; perspective.** I'm confident, and I believe in myself. I think [the hard time] was quite important for my life because after I learned how to defend myself, I gained self-esteem, and confidence. And it just pushed me forward.

[Schools should] maybe just talk about it more and speak about how to get help more. Because mostly kids don't even know what to do in a situation [if] they're getting bullied or something. So I think [there] should be more people, like, therapists, that kids could speak to, because there is like, one therapist in my school or something.

[If there was someone in Year Seven now who was having a tough time, someone like me could talk to them]. Cos, I've already been through that, so I understand.

I just want to say one other thing. I'm the kind of person that trusts everyone, and I don't think it's good, because, there's lots of fake people that will literally use it against you. So you need to have just a few people that you really can trust and you know it and then you can tell them. I open up to people, but I have the control.

#### 4.2.3.2 Analysis of Clara's Fabula and Sjuzet.

**Presentation / Sjuzet.** Clara chose to present a positive story of triumph over, and growth from, adversity. She has conquered her foes, taught herself skills and a new language, and come out able to play to and enjoy her strengths, such as art and drama. Clara's sjuzet presented a powerful story of a young woman who has had to leave parts of her life, perhaps even her childhood, behind, on two, even three occasions. When she left Poland to come to the UK: *"It just... like .... everything just cut off. Just, just left it behind."* (8<sup>th</sup> move). The effort to deal with this, *"you just have to be strong"* (26<sup>th</sup> move) and the success she achieved, is clearly important to her, and she did not seem to want to be reminded of the time she was persistently absent from school. She wanted to talk of the difficulties, and how she overcame them, and not about how they led to absence at the time. Clara's sjuzet was most revealing in what she did not say. The first time we met she talked of not wanting to leave the house after school and at weekends, and being really depressed and crying all the time. She did not return to that and would not be drawn on any 'absence' in our recorded transcript, just the feelings of depression during the difficult times. Her sjuzet and fabula did not have great tensions, but her language was revealing about the state of her loneliness at the time of her persistent absence and served to re-enforce the story she had to tell.

Her story was one of being powerless at the beginning through language and not being listened to. *"because when I came I didn't speak English at all, and I*



*couldn't really, like do anything about it. No-one would like understand me what I'm trying to say*" (27<sup>th</sup> move). Clara felt she was not believed: *"[They literally would just make up stuff, and they would believe them because they speak English so they, they know what's going on. So they wouldn't not like Believe me?]"* (28<sup>th</sup> move) and *"So it feels like you can't do anything, and it makes you feel like really small, that just feel, you can't do anything about it."* (26<sup>th</sup> move).

Clara gives the impression of feeling like an outsider, partly through not being believed, partly through not understanding the language and partly through having no friends: *"Anyways, so I felt, kind of, alone."* (27<sup>th</sup> move).

Clara is able to feel pride in her achievements: *"I've learned English like really fast, when [I] came to Year Seven, I just learned it like in a few months, because I remember at the end of Year Seven I was reading, writing a test, and I actually did it good."* (29<sup>th</sup> move). This perception of her coming out on top, re-enforces the sense she feels strong and has vanquished something. When asked if she finds it difficult to talk of her experiences, she answers: *"Not really, cos I'm over it. So I don't mind talking about it. Because it won't affect me."* (31<sup>st</sup> move).

**Onset of Difficulties / Fabula.** Clara's fabula did not deal with a period of absence per se, but she did talk clearly of the stages of her difficulties. Like Michael and Shadow, she experienced difficulties in the final years of primary. She arrived in the UK in Year Six, speaking no English, and was bullied and made to feel like an outsider straight away. She came to her secondary school and the bullying continued. She worked hard at learning English and became more fluent. At some point in Year Eight, she began some form of talking therapy, made a new friend and had a supportive drama teacher; all of which gave her increased confidence and

strength to move on. She now plans to study architecture at university and to travel the world.

**4.2.2.3 Emerging key themes (and words) from Clara's story.** Clara's story is a lot about *language* and about needing to be able express yourself and to be *understood*. It is also about not *understanding* others. Clara talks of having no *control* over what people thought of her and of the situation she was in, of not being *believed* or *listened* to properly. *Friendships* and *relationships* have a big significance in Clara's narrative, initially feeling like an *outsider* and *lost*, but developing *strength* and *patience*, and having *ambition* gives her back some *control*. To achieve this, Clara has had support from some *key adults*, such as her *mother*, *therapist* and maybe her *drama teacher*. Throughout her story she needs, and exercises, *control*, and she tries to keep her *different worlds* quite *separate* from each other.

### **4.3 How do the Narratives Answer the Research Questions?**

#### **4.3.1 Overview**

The narratives of Michael, Shadow and Clara have some clear common elements. They all had problems with school in primary, before they experienced persistent absence in secondary. They all found transitions from one school to another hard and found Year Seven challenging. Shadow and Michael found the work particularly challenging in Year Seven and Clara and Shadow found the lack of friends challenging. They all had adults around them who helped support in some way their re-engagement with school, even if both Clara and Michael also felt let down somewhat by some of the school adults in their world. Michael and Clara present themselves initially as victims in a cruel and confusing world, who are misunderstood and treated harshly.

Michael, Shadow and Clara all had quite complicated and complex relationships with their period(s) of absence, and how perhaps it would be defined by others. To be in this study they had to have had attendance lower than 90% for at least a full term. While Michael and Shadow openly acknowledged there had been such a period of absence, Michael did not accept that it was a fair measure, and Shadow put it down to illnesses, although admitted these were mild and could be overcome with motivation. Clara talked openly about being depressed and not wanting to leave her house, but when asked explicitly (the first time we met) how long or how often she avoided school, she replied, “oh a day or two” and then changed the subject. Not one of them told me “I did not want to go to school”. This may be because they did not understand their experiences as a choice they made not to attend, but rather they felt *unable* to attend. Or perhaps they did not want to revisit the uncomfortable parts of their past where they made a decision that others – teachers, parents – perhaps disapproved of, and wanted to present the reasons, not the facts. This was despite the research being set up as entirely non-judgmental.

All three participants also seem to have a very distinctive style of speech and may have experienced struggles with their use of English. Michael has a halting style, and finds it hard to create full clear grammatical sentences, even more than I might expect just from teenage informal conversation (“*but it gets more... school takes... it ... gets at the top of your life*”, 51<sup>st</sup> move). His language also shows flashes of being very young (this is discussed more in the reflections in Chapter Five). Shadow seems to work very hard at presenting precise and academic speech, but sometimes it deserts him (“*I didn't really have you know that much friends*”, 8<sup>th</sup> move) when he gets more personal. Clara had no English language at all when she first arrived at school, and her spoken language is still grammatically a little

disjointed and her tenses shift (*“like I had my close, best friend. And then just after I came here, we don't even talk to each other anymore”*, 8<sup>th</sup> move, and “no-one would like understand me, what I'm trying to say”, 27<sup>th</sup> move.). It is very likely that all three speak a second language at home and their struggle to express themselves was mirrored sometimes by their struggle with the English language. Their ability to overcome this and present powerful stories, which all ended with a sense of a future direction of travel and commitment to growth, was inspiring. This sense of a possible and positive future was borne out also in the fact that each participant had some solid self-esteem intact.

#### ***4.3.2 Research Question 1: What does this research tell us about young peoples' experiences of persistent absenteeism?***

##### **4.3.2.1 Theme One: Loneliness**

Michael, Shadow and Clara all felt alone in Year Seven and missed friends or other elements of security, comfort and familiarity from their past lives. They all mention friends they had lost, who had moved away, to other schools, or who they had left behind, such as when Clara left Poland. Michael, although he says some friends came with him to his new school, talks explicitly of feeling “lost in the ways” at secondary and mentions a good friend who left in Year Five. Shadow says his friends from primary all went to other schools *“so you kind of lose a connection”* (6<sup>th</sup> move).

**4.3.2.2 Theme Two: Bullying.** Clara is explicit in her experience of being bullied, using the terminology and describing it in detail – the power of another wielded over someone in a weaker position. Michael also experienced others targeting him, getting in his business, trying to scare him, acting “big”. There is a sense here of him feeling others are trying to dominate him, and he is resisting this.

He knew this might be a problem before he arrived at the high school and tried to present himself less as a “pillow” to deal with this. This does not yet seem to be resolved, and his tactic has been to fight back, and act like “I don’t care”, which he reiterates frequently.

**4.3.2.3 Theme Three: A lack of agency.** Michael particularly talks of things happening around him that he does not seem to have control of. For example, when thinking about the river of his life and what it would look like if he drew it (initially saying “*I don't know because like I don't [draw] rivers that much*”), he was offered “calm, slow, hectic, fast, crazy or scary” and he chose “crazy”. He went on to explain that in Year Six he seemed to be a different child, shy perhaps, who didn’t answer back to other kids, and now he was in this situation where “*I just like talk back and like act like I don't care*” (44<sup>th</sup> move) and it feels like he can’t quite work out how he got there. Michael also explains that he simply didn’t know he was meant to attend online classes, and when he found out he didn’t have a password, and then when he got his password, because someone from school rang up and helped him, it didn’t work for a week. He does not see that he had any control during the process of learning online, and therefore he should not be ‘penalised’ for not doing it.

**4.3.2.4 Theme Four: Feeling voiceless.** Whether they are not listened to, or whether they chose not to use their voice because they think it will serve no purpose, both Michael and Clara (initially at least) present narratives where they seem to have been muted or not properly listened to. Clara explains that other children may not use their voice because either they won’t be believed or nothing will change: “*Like even when I was getting bullied, I told the teacher, that girl that was actually bullying, she didn't even say sorry. And I was the one that had to say, sorry to her for... nothing.*” (32<sup>nd</sup> move). Michael has a similar experience: “*Like this, this teacher in X,*

*and like there's this kid that, like, hit me and that. And he's like, he just told him to not do it. How is that gonna do anything? Like he lets him do whatever he wants."* (47<sup>th</sup> move). That is also the reason he gives for not telling teachers about peers who are picking on him.

**4.3.2.5 Theme Five: A sense of injustice.** These experiences weave through Michael and Clara's narratives a clear sense that they were not treated fairly. For Clara this was mainly by other children, who would say things about her she could not respond to or defend because she initially lacked the language skills. For Michael too it is also this sense that other kids target and pick on him for reasons he does not understand: *"there's this one kid that gets in my business for no reason. Like I'm talking to someone else. He just gets in my business and just says bad words."* (47<sup>th</sup> move).

**4.3.2.6 Theme Six: Negative emotional wellbeing.** Clara was very clear that she was "depressed" in Year Seven and early Year Eight. That she would stay at home on weekends crying, and that getting outside for walks helped. Shadow talked a lot about not feeling "comfortable" and about why other children might not feel "comfortable" at a new school. He also used words such as *"unadaptable"* that reenforce this sense of emotional discomfort. Michael peppered his narrative with low-level frustration and anger he described as things being "annoying".

**4.3.2.7 Theme Seven: Negative physical wellbeing.** Shadow and Michael talk explicitly of physical illnesses that affect their attendance. For Shadow these are mild instances such as "hay fever" and "little colds", which he could overcome when he found more motivation to attend school – such as during the SATs in Year Six, or after his family got him thinking about the need for a better mindset for GCSEs. For Michael, these are headaches and stomach sickness, which he attributes to the

current pandemic. He also talks of his family members being sick in the pandemic: “like they were in their rooms for two weeks. But they, but they didn't have Covid, they didn't, it was just that they were sick.” (28<sup>th</sup> move). It was unclear why it was important to him that their sickness was not attributed to Covid-19, nor why his illnesses were due to the “pandemic”; there seemed perhaps to be some anxiety around illness itself, and also perhaps around being judged.

**4.3.2.8 Theme Eight: Indicators in primary.** All participants chose to start their narratives in primary school. Shadow said Year Five was when he first started dropping in attendance, and then described rallying in Year Six because of SATs, but falling prey to mild “illnesses” again in Year Seven. Clara chose Year Six, when she arrived in England from Poland, having left behind everything and everyone she knew apart from her mother and an aunt (who she mentioned when we first met, but not in her detailed narrative). Michael also chose Year Six, because this was when he first began to be “naughty” and getting into “lots of trouble”, and when he first began thinking about the need to “improve” – his behaviour, his maths and his ability to withstand other kids who might try to “scare you”. He is clear that there was some sort of shift between Years Five and Six, with a friend moving away, which seems to have destabilised him somewhat.

Both Michael and Shadow talk of being aware in Year Six (at the time) that moving to Year Seven would provide challenges. For Michael this was more around the other children at school: *“I knew in, like, high school, in high school there will be like kids that act tough and I would look like their pillow so I had to like improve because they'll literally go for me, all the time. And I'd be like the underdog. So....”* (45<sup>th</sup> move). For Shadow it was more to do with the sense that school was going to get “serious”: *“Because er, ah, once er Year Six was over, after the summer*

*holidays, I knew there was gonna, gonna be a challenge because of adapting to new [situation]...*" (7<sup>th</sup> move). It is not clear if this anticipation was helpful to them or not.

**4.3.2.9 Theme Nine: Academic struggle.** All three participants found the work very hard at secondary school, at least initially. For Clara this was mainly a language issue, she seems to have rallied and joined high sets once she learnt English. For Michael and Shadow however, Year Seven was "serious" and no more "fun" (Michael), unlike primary. For Michael there were significantly more subjects to navigate, including ones he found especially "frustrating", such as languages. He seemed physically, viscerally, upset by such difficulties, and unable to let them rest, perhaps: *"The test we had today was actually making, annoying me, because like I don't know Spanish much. I don't even know how to say 'is' not, like I do, but Spanish is just hard and we had the end of year test and it was annoying me, frustrating me."* (32<sup>nd</sup> move). For Shadow everything was harder in Year Seven but he has found his way with Maths and Science, where you can "get straight to the point" and only English still causes problems for him, where he admits he wishes school would *"reduce the number of times in a week of just having double lessons? One hour 15 minutes? Because it gets too tiring."* (26<sup>th</sup> move).

This quote points also to the sense with all three participants that they feel academic and emotional struggles physically, such as through illness, a need to be on the move or outdoors, a desire to stay in bed, and so on.

#### **4.3.3 Research Question 2: What does this research tell us about positive and sustainable returns?**

**4.3.3.1 Theme One: Relationships and support from key adults.** Shadow, Clara and Michael all get advice and support from the adults in their lives. Shadow and Clara are most explicit about this being helpful on a long-term basis. For Clara,



her mother urged her to go for walks, there were some kind and supportive teachers, such as her drama teacher, and she had a therapist who *“understood, because, like, most people just don’t understand. How it feels. She was just there for me.”* (5<sup>th</sup> move). She explains that it is better to talk to a therapist than her parents because it is a different relationship and you may not want them to “worry about your damage”. Clara was aided by the support offered to the extent that she thinks other people should have access to a therapist and also tried to convince her ex-boyfriend to talk with one: *“I would tell him like all the time, that it really helps and you should get one. But he was like so against it. Like I don’t know why [laughs]”* (4<sup>th</sup> move).

Shadow speaks very highly of the advice he was given by his “family back home” saying *“they really helped me. Yeah they just motivated me, you know, like, as they say, like in a sense when you come to school, there’s like, new opportunities, you know”* (12<sup>th</sup> move) and they helped him see his school experience as a potential for positive, rather than something that had to be ‘borne’ or avoided through illness. He also mentions that staff were friendly and would respond *“in a sense, when I need to help with my work.”* (25<sup>th</sup> move) but he does not expand on that.

For Michael, he seems to have good support from his brothers who encouraged him to check if he should be doing any online learning during lockdown, who talk with him about working in the plumbing industry and what qualifications he will need, and who takes him out on trips. There are also a couple of teachers at his school who he can talk to when he finds things difficult and he says: *“I enjoy spending time with them”* (31<sup>st</sup> move), which is powerful as many of the teachers in his narrative do not seem to have given him what he feels he needs.

As well as family and staff, friendships are important to all three participants, and each of them credits a friend or a group of friends as having been helpful when

they were down. They may have experienced loneliness or bullying, but they each also had someone else.

**4.3.3.2 Theme Two: Ambition and a sense of a possible future.** Each participant has a goal in life, a clear idea of where they want to work after they leave school, and an understanding of the route they need to follow to get there. Shadow and Clara want to go to university and pursue careers in Medicine and Architecture, respectively. Michael would like to be a footballer or a doctor, but has decided that being a plumber may be more realistic. He also questioned whether he would be “upset” at not being able to help people if he was a doctor. Michael perhaps sees himself as being realistic: “I’m struggling but I will make sure I pass”. Clara believes herself to be very ambitious and is grateful for this as it has kept her focused. Shadow is aiming for “excellent grades” in his GCSEs. They are all clearly on a path somewhere that they feel will make them happy, even if in Michael’s case it feels more of a “struggle”.

**4.3.3.3 Theme Three: Perseverance.** Michael, Clara and Shadow tell stories of hard work and keeping at things that are difficult. With Clara, her narrative is woven through with the need to be “strong”, and “patient”, that things “take time”, and she also talks about having dyslexia which made learning English even harder, but she is now in a top set. Michael uses the word “trying” four times, “try” five times (although not always about himself) and “improve” three times in his narrative, presenting a story of real effort. When he talked about the teachers who support him at school, he physically seemed to struggle to get the words out, as if they were important to him to get right because it is a positive experience for him: “*They like, they never like, they like, they always try to say to never give up and keep on*

*carrying on with the work and they're like um ... I enjoy spending time with them."*

(31<sup>st</sup> move).

Shadow is clear that it was his changed mindset, achieved through his own efforts with support from family and friends, that improved his motivation to conquer his mild illnesses and start attending school more regularly.

**4.3.3.4 Theme Four: Agency.** Connected to the theme of perseverance, both Shadow and Clara speak of actively taking control of their own school experiences. Clara spoke to a therapist and focused on things she was good at or enjoyed – such as art, drama and horses – which helped her get friends and build confidence. She worked hard to “learn to defend myself”. In fact, Clara has such a sense of agency that she would be happy to help other young people going through what she went through. She also talks of being quite self-directed and responding better to her own drives than external ones: *“because when someone tells me to do something, I don't really want to do it, because I need to feel like, I want to do it, to have the motivation”* (15<sup>th</sup> move). Clara’s agency feels intentional now; she peppers her narrative with the word “control” and how “I have the control”.

**4.3.3.5 Theme Five: Self-esteem.** All three participants showed signs of liking themselves. Michael’s first thought when asked what he might say to his Year Six self, would be *“come to this school, so ... so we can hang out”* (55<sup>th</sup> move) which implies he might enjoy his own company, although it also implies he is perhaps in need of company, so his self-esteem seems more fragile than the others. Shadow describes his good mindset and motivation, and thinks he is going *“in the right direction”* (28<sup>th</sup> move) and seems proud of this. Clara can describe herself positively as ambitious, strong, and confident. She can also describe how her experiences

helped to build her self-esteem: *“after I learned how to, how to like defend myself, I gained like self-esteem”* (24<sup>th</sup> move).

**4.3.3.6 Theme Six: Understanding a purpose of school.** Clara, Michael and Shadow can all see a connection between school and their adult lives, and the need to gain qualifications to reach their career goals. Although Michael feels he would prefer to be at home *“I always want to go home”*, he understands that even if it is not “fun” school *“gets at the top of your life, because er it will get you money, then you can enjoy life. Jobs. [...] Nobody will take you in jobs if you don't know nothing. So.... You'll just ruin it, so, you have to be qualified.”* (51<sup>st</sup> move). This is quite powerful language – “ruin” and the risk of knowing “nothing” – which gives the impression it has really stuck with Michael and can serve as a motivator.

**4.3.4 Research Question 3: What does this research tell us about the meaning young people themselves make of their experiences?**

Through using the narrative interview guide, the concept of a river of life, and in Clara's case, drawing one, each participant constructed a story with a beginning, middle and a future; none of them were yet at their end, and in each case they were looking towards a future that felt tangible and achievable.

Talking itself was a way of making meaning for Clara – she refers to therapy and being able to talk to the therapist. In her story she had clearly explored her narrative before, and it was more coherent – with more of a future and a rounded arc – than Michael's and Shadow's. Because of this she can talk of how her difficult experiences can also grow into positives: *“Yeah. I think it was quite important for my life because after I learned how to, how to like defend myself, I gained like self-esteem, and confidence. And it just pushed me forward.... It happened so I could like get out of my comfort zone.”* (24<sup>th</sup> move). Clara can also see how she might help

others who are having difficult experiences, taking the idea of ‘post traumatic growth’ a step further. She also gives suggestions on how the school could support children finding it hard to attend, both of which involve the power of talking – perhaps the thing she has found most helpful: *“Maybe just talk about it more and speak about how to get help more. Because mostly kids don’t even know what to do in a situation. And they’re getting bullied or something. They don’t want to tell the teachers, because they think they like they’re not gonna do anything about it. ... So I think this [sic] should be like more people, like, therapists, to speak to, that kids could speak to, because there is like, one therapist in my school or something, I don’t really know, but it was like really hard to get it, like some people have to wait few months to get it. I think there should be more of that. And it should be easier to get.”* (32<sup>nd</sup> move).

Shadow’s story is less coherent although he can look back and see what helped him through his difficult period, and can see that his motivation to attend school was so low that his mild illnesses kept him away. Shadow would also use talking, embracing the power of what his family told him, and he would choose to share this and tell his younger self to work hard and to have a “*good mindset*”, adding the knowledge he has “*learned*”, that “*good things will come*”. He presents as being happier now in school, with friends and enjoying some of the learning – particularly maths and science where he does not have to “*analyse*” or “*evaluate [sic]*”. Shadow’s difficulties with analysing and evaluating were clear in the language he presented during his narrative, which seemed full of learnt constructions and expressions, rather than immediate access to emotional and linguistic fluency. The meaning Shadow seemed perhaps to be making was to take control, to present success and confidence – through his style of language – and it will likely come. He seemed proud of the progress he had made and had belief he was on the right path;

wanting to make sure he continued, he would tell his future self to: *“Keep going in the right direction”* (28<sup>th</sup> move).

Michael’s story is least developed. He seemed to use the conversation to sort his words, and therefore perhaps his thoughts, out in his head. He would often self-correct, or correct me, if he felt I had not understood. Michael is the youngest of the three participants, and also perhaps the one who presents as most still within his story, struggling to emerge from it. His statistics – his attendance was 90% at the time of interviews – suggests that perhaps he is also still in the process of ‘returning’. Michael presented as younger than the others, partly through his less sophisticated, but no less powerful, use of language. He is yet to resolve how to deal with the students who *“get in his business”* or try *“to scare”* him. He gets into trouble for reacting and *“pushing”* the kids who he says start the altercation: *“I get in trouble, myself. They think I’m ... [the] bad guy.”* (47<sup>th</sup> move). He is advised to walk away but does not feel able to follow this advice: *“I just got told to just to not care, ignore them. But I don’t think that’s the right thing.”* (46<sup>th</sup> move) because *“if I ignore them, they’ll keep coming for me cos they’ll think I’m scared.”* (35<sup>th</sup> move). Michael also feels he cannot tell the teachers in case he is thought to be a *“snitch”*.

At the moment, the meaning Michael seems to make of his story is that work is hard and *“frustrating”*, that much of school is *“annoying”* and that he is being unfairly treated, but by the end of his narrative he knows, or perhaps decides, he needs to surmount this: *“Yeah. Right now I’m struggling. But I’ll make sure to pass.”* (54<sup>th</sup> move).

It is worth mentioning that those who find it easiest to talk seem to have managed best to make meaning from their story. Shadow has found ways to describe his new experience of school – his *“motivation”* and his *“good mindset”* and

he presents difficulties clearly in the past tense and a sense of direction. Clara has been in talking therapy which she says was useful and she finds it easy to describe her experiences and her current ambitions, and how they grew from negative experiences in the past. Michael, however, seems to find using language the hardest of the three. He corrects himself as he speaks, getting frustrated but also beginning to make meaning perhaps during our conversation, convincing himself and me with his words of what he is trying and often struggling to say.

#### **4.4 Summary**

Michael, Shadow and Clara's stories show how difficult transitions can be for some young people. When peer relationships are unhealthy or non-existent, when increasing social and academic demands are put on you at the same time, it is important to have support from adults and to be listened to and understood. All three, to varying extents, felt a lack of agency and a lack of belonging in their environment, expressed in different ways. All three struggled with this and initially had to absent themselves from the situation, before finding the strength or motivation to return, try to tackle their difficulties, and persevere with school.

## **Chapter Five: Discussion**

### **5.1 Chapter Overview**

This chapter connects the research findings outlined in Chapter four with the literature reviewed in Chapter two and available theoretical perspectives, and comments on their significance. It also looks at the strengths, challenges and limitations of the research and how it may be useful to other EPs, schools and future researchers.

### **5.2 Revisiting the Research Rationale**

There were only eight studies identified in the literature that interviewed young people and focused on a successful return to school after a period of absence, revealing a gap in the literature related to young people's own voices. Only one of these studies explicitly addressed the meaning young people might make of their experiences directly (Smith, 2014). Additionally, the eight articles available in the critical review identified how hard it can be for young people to return to school after a period of absence, and how important relationships, a sense of safety and belonging, and support for anxiety, were in that process. They highlighted how young people need to have their own voices heard and feel genuinely consulted on matters that affect them, and how those who had had difficulties attending school were those who did not always feel heard by, or feel visible to, the other elements of the systems around them.

The broader scoping review available in Chapter two identified statistics on persistent absence, truancy and some ESNA that revealed young people who are already disenfranchised or marginalised are at far greater risk of non-attendance (Darmody et. al., 2008; DfE, 2019). This study looked into the social and systemic



implications of a society whose already socially excluded young people are at greater risk of more alienation and isolation. Based on the findings presented in the previous chapter, the author argues that perhaps contributors to the literature needed to be braver in their responsibility to address systemic and institutionalised prejudice by being explicit about the socioeconomic, racial and cultural backgrounds of everyone we are talking to so inequalities and discrepancies can be picked up.

None of the participants in this study referred to their ethnicity or cultural background in their stories, apart from Clara pointing out that she only spoke Polish when she first arrived in the country in Year Six. Given what is said above, it is important to note that all three young people came from families who spoke more than one language at home, and who, while perhaps being representative of their local demographic and school population, were from minority ethnic groups when compared with England as a whole, and the makeup of those in power. I can make no assumption about their sense of marginalisation, however.

### **5.3 Summary of Findings**

The findings of this study did not differ from those in the literature review significantly. The young people in this study experienced feelings of being alone at school, of being voiceless, or feeling helpless to change their situation. Two of them experienced bullying, they all felt uncomfortable and one described herself as depressed. Two had physical symptoms of illness and all found the work hard at school when they first arrived in Year Seven. Crucially, all young people had experienced difficulties in primary school as well, although two of them said they had enjoyed primary much more than secondary school and found the size of the new school, the loss of friends and a reduction in “fun” difficult. The idea that school now was “serious” was a common theme and for one of the young people was still difficult

to adjust to. Two of the participants held a strong sense of injustice around their school experiences.

The participants shared experiences of returning linked to relationships, particularly with adults and often including their family. The NOI identified further that relationships – including having friends – allowed each participant to harness their own innate agency and connect that to an ambition, seeing school eventually as ‘a means to an end’, with a clear sense of purpose. To do this they all showed grit (Duckworth, Peterson Matthews & Kelly, 2007) and perseverance, inspired by their families and supported by some school and peer members. Two of them revealed an intact sense of what presented initially as self-esteem (Adler & Stewart, 2004). How to define these elements accurately, and how they link with positive psychology, resilience and the transition between primary and secondary school are discussed in section 5.5.

#### **5.4 Research Questions in Detail**

Chapter four looked in detail at the findings from this study in relation to the research questions, so this section will simply briefly return to the literature review and highlight any similarities or discrepancies between that and this study.

##### ***5.4.1 What Does this Research Tell Us About Young Peoples’ Experiences of Persistent Absenteeism?***

The three preponderant themes identified in the literature review for this question were: Power imbalance, Relationships, and Belonging. This study identified nine themes, most of which are directly connected to the three from the literature review but perhaps delve into more granular detail, as is often the case with a narrative approach. They could perhaps be collapsed into broader themes, and if this study had used thematic analysis or interpretive phenomenological analysis it might

have drawn out superordinate themes to house them in. This said, none of the themes identified in this study or available in the literature, are in conflict with each other.

**5.4.1.1 Power imbalance.** In this study, the theme of a power imbalance is spread out more finely across four of the themes: **Theme Three: A lack of agency** (sense of helplessness); **Theme Four: Feeling voiceless** (not being listened to or believed); **Theme five: A sense of injustice**; and **Theme Seven: Negative physical wellbeing**.

Beckles (2014) and Smith (2014) talk of school experience as a power struggle where students fight to be heard and behaviour as communication used by CYP who find it hard to articulate their difficulties to staff. Smith talks of adults dismissing young peoples' problems with school or attributing them to ill health, attention-seeking behaviour or "anger" issues, while Beckles talks of a lack of autonomy and home providing more freedom.

Davies & Lee (2006) argue that it is often overlooked that for the non-attender, absence is a solution not a problem; for all of their participants, the issue of power and authority is important and when power tips too far away from CYP, attendance can break down.

All articles correlate with the findings of this study and the narratives of Michael and Shadow, who experienced periods of "illness" that may in fact have been communication around "discomfort" (a word Shadow uses a lot) or a grabbing of power by refusing to attend, finding their own solution to the problems of school. Clara and Michael articulate a very strong sense of powerlessness at times, and both of them clearly feel they were not listened to properly or not believed.

**5.4.1.2 Relationships.** Across all the literature, the importance of relationships is apparent. Across the eight studies of the review, CYP reference interactions with teachers and peers as key to their experiences, with some also talking about family, support workers, Educational Welfare Officers, mentors, doctors and head teachers.

For this study, relationships were important in the experience of persistent absence but were limited to teachers, family and friends, except in Clara's case where she also talked about her therapist. The importance of relationships were brought out in **Theme One: Loneliness; Theme Two: Bullying;** and again **Theme Four: Feeling voiceless** (not being listened to or believed), in as far as it affected their relationships with adults. Clara made it very clear that she liked to keep these relationships separate from each other, to ensure negative experiences did not cross over between contexts. Interestingly, when disappointed or expressing negative feelings, Clara talked of teachers in general; whereas when talking about positive experiences, she identified specific teachers. Shadow did not identify any individual teachers, in fact he did not mention them at all except in response to a question, and Michael had a real sense of grievance against one teacher, and a positive feeling towards two others (although he was unclear here who exactly they were, what they did and how many of them there were). Many researchers put relationships at the heart of models of good wellbeing and also at the heart of motivation (what humans are searching for when they behave in certain ways); early Positive Psychology, for example, positions relationships as one of five components that people pursue because they are intrinsically motivating and they contribute to wellbeing: (Positive emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishments (PERMA), Seligman, 2012). The idea of relatedness as being a core psychological need central

to resilience has been around for a while (eg see SDT, Deci & Ryan 2000), and also recently interestingly explored by researchers looking into the experience of Palestinian school children living in adversity in the West Bank, which found that satisfying Autonomy, Competence and Relatedness through educational and family practices that focus on these, are related to childhood resilience in the face of adversity.

**5.4.1.3 Belonging.** Wilkins (2008) makes a distinction between belonging and relationships. One can have positive or negative individual relationships without having a sense of belonging. In the papers of the literature review and in the narratives of this study, a lack of a sense of belonging to school was clear for everyone experiencing difficulties with attendance. Much research has shown that having a sense of ‘school belonging’ leads to better mental health and academic outcomes (Allen, Kern, Vella-Brodrick, Hattie & Waters, 2018). Social psychology, and Maslow, also tell us that humans seek out belonging, and adapt our behaviours and attitudes to ‘fit in’ with the groups we have either identified as being something we aspire to, or those we are thrown into, such as school. While this is hard for all children who transition into Year 7 from a different school to do straightaway, the three participants of this study found it perhaps even harder than their peers. In this study the idea of belonging is spread across four themes: **Theme One: Loneliness; Theme Two: Bullying; Theme Eight: Indicators in primary; and Theme Nine: Academic struggle.**

### ***5.3.2 What Does this Research Tell Us About Positive and Sustainable Returns?***

**5.3.2.1 Physical Return as the Goal.** First, we must address the issue of what constitutes a successful, or positive and sustainable, return.

The review papers were divided between those where young people had returned to a mainstream setting and those where young people were in an alternative provision. Young people in the mainstream settings still seemed to experience ongoing difficulties despite the fact of a physical return being deemed 'successful' by parents and teachers (eg Grandison, 2011; Nuttall & Woods 2013). This too seems to be the approach taken by the schools who nominated participants for this study – if their attendance was 90% or above, they were deemed successful returnees, even if in Michael's case, for example, he still seemed to struggle greatly, and two others dropped out because they were too shy / deemed fragile to engage. Grandison (2011) expressly asked her participants what they thought a "successful" return to education was, and they found this hard to answer; only one mentioned attendance level. Three of the young people in her research had been reintegrated for 18 months and yet some continued to struggle.

Mortimer (2018) indicated she was surprised that physical return was deemed to be the measure of success when so many concerns remained. In her model around successful reintegration she adds the element of 'ongoing monitoring of the emotional wellbeing of young people and parents to ensure their needs continue to be met over time'. She does this to mitigate against the idea of 'success' after absence as being purely physical attendance. Head & Jamieson (2006) state clearly that they do not believe it is realistic to define success around the expectation of all CYP attending all classes within school, but instead participating as much as they are able. This is more akin to the AEP approaches presented in some of the other papers, but perhaps flies in the face of the idea of the importance of belonging or genuine inclusion.

While this study does assume a successful return to school as a positive outcome, as a psychologist and a researcher, I am acutely aware of the critical arguments against school, and of how it, in England at least, may no longer be fit for purpose for some young people (eg Wilson, 2008; Ekstrand, 2015).

In Chapter one, it was mentioned that concerns around attending school go as far back as enfranchisement and the industrial revolution. But is the system we now have the right one, culturally, morally for this century, or is it imposed on the weaker members of society by the more powerful; not just adults over children but ruling class over working class, white British over more recent migrant? Clearly many more young people manage to attend school than not, which could suggest it suits the majority. Or, it could suggest there is a *hidden* majority who attend and conform, but at psychological cost. Orford (2008) and Parker (2015) both suggest that as a critical psychologist, working in a community setting, EPs are uniquely positioned to understand, and then expose, how power relationships influence psychological functioning, how the majority exercises its power, and how that impacts on the marginalised; and agitate to change it. Foucault (1980) might view persistent absence as young people resisting the dominant structures around them, searching for a way to keep their identity intact and maintain some power. As a practicing psychologist, I believe I need to be able to understand this – and help other parts of the system understand this, and perhaps rethink their power relationships.

**5.3.2.2 Social Constructions and Interactionism.** As most of the papers in the literature review drew data from more than just the young people involved, they were able to take a systemic snapshot, as it were and look more deeply into some of the social and co-constructions around attendance that had built up in CYPs' lives and experiences, and how these then influenced the behaviour of all the players in

the situation. Adult participants in various studies seemed to suggest, for example, that attendance might be connected to personality, or family characteristics, and Grandison (2011) asks why this is as the evidence does not bear this out. Beckles (2014), Nuttall & Woods (2013) and Grandison (2011) all look at absence in an interactionist way, therefore, and promote the creations of new joint constructions to guide targeted interventions.

This study agrees that much reality is subjective; constructed by those experiencing it. It was discussed in Chapter three how people can co-produce and co-construct new realities through shared language and experience. This means that although this study only draws data from three people's subjective experiences, not from across the whole system, it does that to allow those voices to rise slightly higher in the literature. It believes that those voices, once raised, will help to co-construct new meanings in the literature, around absence, with the voices already there.

The eight papers in the literature review revealed themes around the importance of **Meaningful consultation**, getting **Practical Support** (with the young person having some control and sense of agency over this), **Relationships** (Trusting Adults, Parent-child relationships, Peer relationships), **Safety and belonging**. These themes are in the main the flipside to the ones identified in the experience of absence. They are also very similar to those found in this study: **Theme One: Relationships and the support of key adults; Theme Two: Ambition and a sense of a possible future:** and **Theme Four: Agency**. The narratives in this study did not reveal specifics around practical supports to return identified by the young people. When asked what school did to help return, none of the three participants offered a positive response, except for Michael who needed a password and information on how to access online learning. Whether they did not want to attribute



their return to the school, or they did not notice the practical support they received, or whether they received none, is not clear.

The other themes identified in this study that were part of a successful return that did not come out quite so strongly in the literature review (although were certainly present) were **Theme Five: Self-esteem**; **Theme Six: Understanding a purpose of school** (although Davies & Lee looked at becoming “effective learners” and Wilkins’ (2008) study revealed people at a SAP wanting to get their exam results); and **Theme Three: Perseverance**.

#### ***5.4.3 What Does This Research Tell Us About the Meaning Young People Themselves Make of Their Experiences?***

Most of the studies talked of the importance of meaning making, even if they didn’t explore it in great detail. Beckles (2014) posited that her participants may have lacked some meta-cognitive awareness of reason and meaning and that they may require support to understand their thoughts and bring it to their consciousness. Nuttall & Woods (2013) found that providing such support helped non-attenders to reframe negative thinking. Participants in Mortimer’s (2018) study talked of how they would have appreciated more support to make sense of their experiences of absence, with specific time and space put aside for this.

Of the eight papers reviewed, only Smith (2014) explored meaning making explicitly, as she recalls how hard it was for her to grasp meaning from the research she presented in her own literature review. She talks of the need for specific descriptions of how things happen, rather than just themes like social isolation, poor peer relationships and breakdowns within the family. She takes as an example parental attachment and her participant Amelia explaining this meant her mother not being available to listen to her. Smith says this understanding of meaning is crucial

for practitioners when thinking of support for young people experiencing persistent absence. All four of Smith's participants said that a person to talk to about their difficulties was important. Something that Clara's narrative also highlights. It seems that constructing meaning through talking, language (Burr, 2003), may have been helpful for Clara, and as we saw in Chapter four, in this study, it is the participants who have the most fluent language that seem to have made the most meaning from their experiences so far.

### **5.5 Did the Research Meet the Expectations of the Rationale?**

There were two gaps identified in the literature: a paucity of children's voices, and a paucity of strengths-based approaches; of learning from success. This study has only added three more voices to the canon, nonetheless these are rich, detailed and hopefully authentic. It is explored below whether and how the participants' voices may have been influenced by the act of research and interview, and if the interpretations here and in Chapter four can be valid: how much was the participants' own pure narrative, how much co-constructed, and how much the researcher's interpretation. The narratives presented, however, broadly serve to reinforce the findings of other papers, and add weight in particular to arguments around the importance of relationships, autonomy, and of being heard and listened to.

Additionally, Michael, Shadow and Clara's voices also add something around the importance of perseverance, ambition and being able to envisage a future. The psychological concept of 'grit' can be problematic in that it positions a key element of resilience within a person, to the detriment of considering the systems around them, but it seems to fit here. It is defined as being able to persevere to achieve long-term goals, over a significant time period, even when encountering significant set-backs and adversity (Duckworth, 2007). Due to the findings of this study, the author argues

that, in this instance, grit can only flourish in the right context and systemic conditions.

Another crucial addition, or perhaps merely an enhancement, to the story of successful returns to school that came through this study is the idea of self-esteem; Shadow and Clara both seem to present in their narratives a pretty unshakeable sense that they are heading in the 'right' direction and will find success and have made good choices. Michael is less clear about this sense of self-worth, or self-esteem, and is not as far on his journey of potential return.

In the literature review, self-esteem emerged more perhaps as an ability to cling on to an identity of one's own and resist being labelled by others (such as naughty or difficult). It was posited in the literature review that perhaps removing oneself from school was a way of maintaining a sense of self-esteem. In Nuttall & Woods (2013)'s ecological model of successful reintegration, "increased confidence, self-esteem and value of self" (p.354) is central and seen as a key psychological factor at the level of the child necessary for return. Nuttall & Woods (2013) did also however refer in the text to this being about building up the participant's sense of identity (as well as offering rewards and opportunities for involvement).

Self-esteem is a complex and contested psychological concept. Self-esteem refers to a person's overall sense of his or her value or worth. It can be considered a measure of how much a person values themselves, whether they approve of themselves, and like themselves (Adler & Stewart, 2004). Whether it is a trait that is relatively fixed in an individual over time, or whether it is malleable and developable, is debated; but it is certainly a target area for intervention and for building resilience (Daniel & Wassell, 2002). This said, some researchers maintain that self-esteem, in individualistic western cultures, is usually achieved through receiving the esteem of

others (see Maslow's last level before actualisation, which is 'esteem' and has influenced this) and can lead to depression as it is beyond one's own autonomy (Seligman, 1995, p.27).

Perhaps neither 'grit' nor 'self-esteem' are exact matching concepts for this research, and Michael, Clara and Shadow's views of themselves can be better understood if we return to the Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2017) we looked at in the power of relationships. This theory holds that there are three basic human needs: autonomy (volition, ownership, and initiative), competence (ability to respond to challenges effectively), and relatedness (a sense of belonging and connectedness). Together they provide a sense of acceptance or worth which SDT proposes to be "true self-esteem" (Deci & Ryan, 1995). This is most apparent in In Shadow and Clara's narratives in this research. Crucially too, their 'defensiveness' is not as apparent as Michael's for example, which, if following SDT's postulates, allows them to access their own intrinsic values more easily; such as Shadow's "motivation" and "good mindset" and Clara's "be strong", "be patient", "have self-control". This, according to SDT, should help to create a virtuous cycle of authenticity, where they strive for the values they prize. In Michael's case, he is yet to achieve this and probably still needs help to do so, if he is not to become trapped in what SDT calls a "vicious cycle of inauthenticity" where his self-esteem cannot flourish enough to direct his efforts.

#### **5.5.1 Connecting the Findings with the Research Theoretical Framework: A model for understanding the phenomenon of school return following persistent school absence**

Following from the previous section, this study returns now to Second Wave Positive Psychology (SWPP) outlined in the Chapter three, that sees trauma as a

potential moment of growth, that embraces the 'bad' with the 'good' for an authentic path to wellbeing and helps one explore the seeming contradictions across theories, systems and characteristics.

This study was not initially anticipated to be a story of transition, exploring as it did the experiences of teenagers, who were a year or two beyond primary to secondary transition; but it turns out to be, in part. Literature has shown that peaks in the number of young people with EBSA correspond with transition in educational phases, due to the changes they face and are required to adapt to (Thambiraj et. al., 2008; Pellegrini, 2007). Not only do the three young people of this study explicitly talk of the difficulties they faced in Year Seven, and also in Clara's case when transitioning from a different country to a new school, but so many of the themes identified in this study fit with the thinking on the three problematic areas of transition researchers have identified: a new **Physical Environment** which is larger, chaotic, noisy, and with the requirement of frequent disruption / movement between lessons (Makin, Hill & Pellicano, 2017); a more complex **Social Environment**, with greater difficulties with peer groups, higher reported rates of bullying and marginalization (Makin et. al., 2017; Carrington & Graham, 2001; Bauminger & Kasari, 2000; Humphrey & Symes, 2010); and a more challenging **Academic Environment**, with increased demands, including independent learning expectations (Jones et. al., 2009).

Given the information already explored in the available literature in Chapter two, this study proposes that persistent absence, and the experience of transition, are two possible moments of trauma in a young person's life, that CYP need help from the systems around them to overcome. This can be partly around helping develop the positive elements identified in Michael, Shadow and Clara's stories

around perseverance, grit, ambition, self-esteem, but also crucially around providing contexts where these can flourish, with relationships and positive enabling school environments.

In much literature around absence from school, researchers talk of the ‘Push’ and ‘Pull’ factors that affect attendance for young people across home and school (e.g., West Sussex, 2004, 2015). These are unique for each young person. They include school factors, such as being academically bright and forming friendships (push towards attending), or a prolonged period of absence from school, difficult transition to secondary school, academic demands, social difficulties, possible bullying (pulling away from school); they also include home factors, such as change in family dynamics, parental illness (pull away from school) and reduced anxiety around separating from ill parent, not having to complete school work (push factors towards staying at home).

This idea of push and pull resonates strongly with the SWPP dialectical nature of wellbeing (Lomas & Ivztan, 2016). Lomas & Ivztan present a complex interplay of conceptual opposites, or dichotomies, as being crucial to post-traumatic growth. They discuss how it is difficult to categorise phenomena as either definitively positive or negative, and this has been reenforced by the narratives in this study. Good friendships and bullying; trusted adults and those who treat one unfairly; agency / autonomy and feeling restricted; school belonging and feeling isolated: these seeming opposites have in fact a complementarity, and are to an extent, in Lomas & Ivztan’s term, co-dependent. It is the dialectic between these that can create growth.

Given the complementarity of this study’s findings and SWPP postulates, this study proposes, therefore, a model for understanding school absence that incorporates the concept of push and pull further into a true dialectic

complementarity, exploring the themes identified in Clara, Michael and Shadow's narratives across the five dichotomies presented by Lomas & Ivztan (2016):

Optimism and Pessimism; Self-Esteem and Humility; Freedom and Restriction; Forgiveness and Anger and Happiness and Sadness.

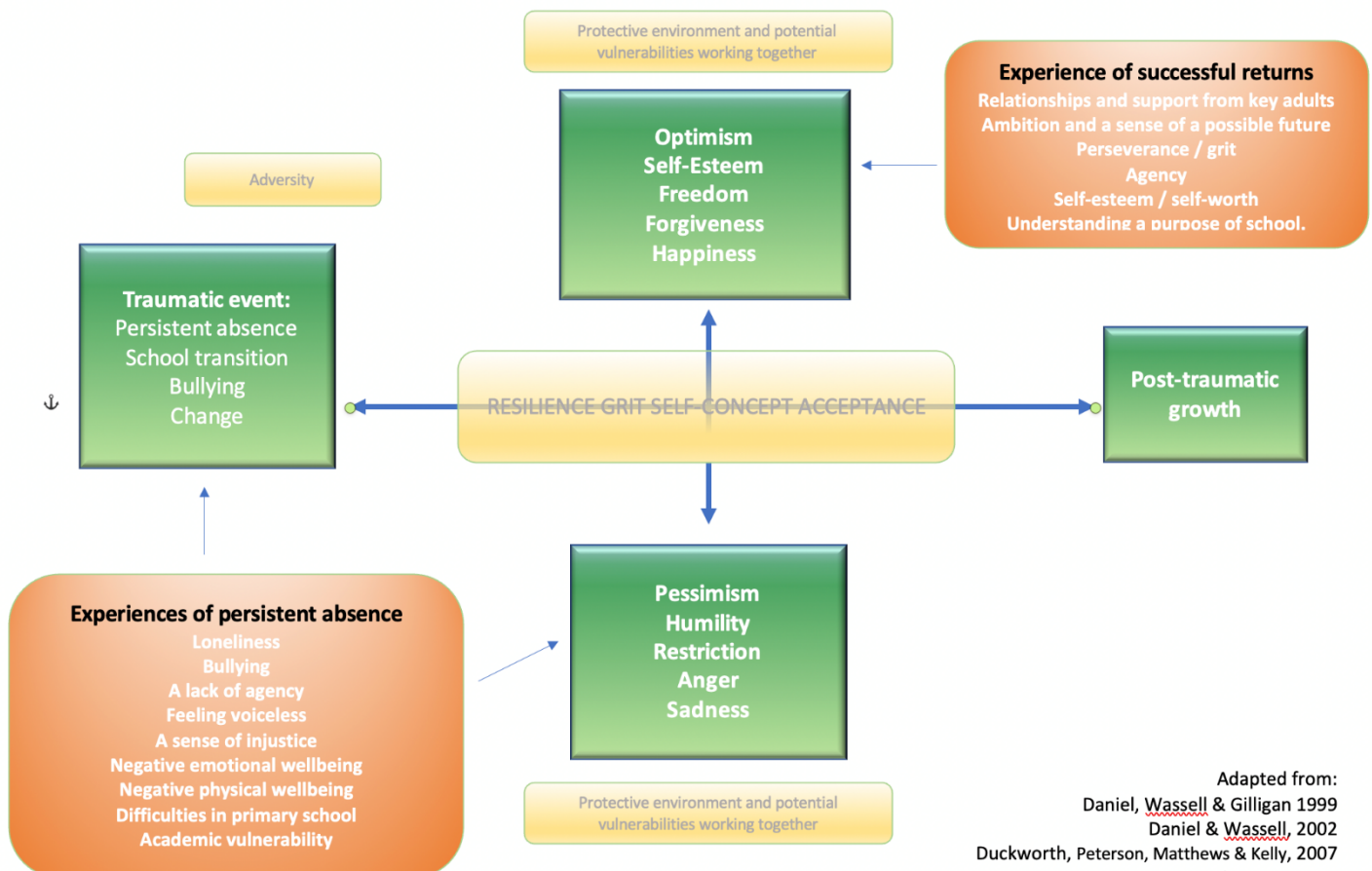
The proposed model uses as a base the resilience matrix presented by Daniel, Wassell & Gilligan (1999) and Daniel & Wassell (2002), as much research on school transitions focuses on risk and resilience; mitigating one and building the other (Bailey & Baines, 2012; Daniel & Wassell, 2002; Kvalsund & Velsvik Bele, 2010). The matrix is also able to specifically support the various risk and resilience factors to extended school absence that researchers and practitioners have identified around the topic of EBSA (West Sussex 2004 & 2015). While the matrix gives more room than the author might feel comfortable with for individual within-child characteristics, it also embraces more systemic thinking in its space for 'protective environment' and 'adversity'. Rutter (2012) warns that resilience should not be seen to constitute a theory in itself, although this is tempting as it encapsulates an understanding of how to overcome stress and adversity, nor should it be seen as equivalent to positive psychology or competence. Given this, this study attempts to instead weave a model that can help explain and understand transition and school absence through the dialectics of SWPP and the dynamic nature of Resilience. Appendix K shows the three stages of plotting of the different elements and approaches onto a matrix model.

**Figure 5.1** (below) shows the final attempted model: Persistent Educational Absence and Reengagement with Learning and School (PEARLS). The dialectical dichotomies proposed by SWPP act as a conduit to help a person move from a traumatic event towards growth (see **5.5.1.1**). In the middle of the matrix are

Resilience, Grit, Self-Concept and Acceptance, as they are judged essential. While some may argue these are within-person factors, they are shaped by the systems and people around them. The use of the word ‘grit’ brings to mind a potential metaphor of sand in an oyster shell being rubbed, or not, into a pearl; those experiencing persistent school absences need all the comfortable, uncomfortable, and comforting, elements to help make the “pearl” of the successful return: the irritant of sand, the shell, the protecting mother of pearl, the waves, the right conditions.

**Figure 5.1**

*Persistent Educational Absence and Reengagement with Learning and School (PEARLS)*



Adapted from:  
Daniel, Wassell & Gilligan 1999  
Daniel & Wassell, 2002  
Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews & Kelly, 2007  
Lomas & Ivztan, 2016



**5.5.1.1 The dialectics of post traumatic growth and the dichotomies that underpin them.** Lomas & Ivtzan (2016) postulate that post-traumatic growth (PTG) is dialectical because positive changes grow out of a negative experience. These changes can include: increased personal strength (e.g., more creative, mature), enhanced relationships (closer and more appreciative), altered life philosophy (e.g., increased existential awareness and meaning-making, including finding meaning in the trauma), changed priorities (e.g., less focus on material goals, and greater appreciation of life), and enhanced spirituality.

They also cite studies that indicate this is an ongoing process of growth (Dekel et. al, 2012) in which positive and negative are continually intertwined. Finally, Lomas & Ivtzan also talk of how ill-being and wellbeing can co-exist, even for those who have not experienced PTG; and how the human imperative of striving to flourish amidst the hardships of life extends beyond the notion of PTG.

This idea of illbeing and wellbeing being not just co-present, but co-dependent drives the PEARLS model, as even in growth, distress can still be evident. These are not specific Piagetian-type stages of change and development but ongoing processes – hence the arrow connecting trauma to growth in the model is two-way, despite the temptation to see it as only having forward momentum.

Lomas & Ivtzan conclude that ‘flourishing’, or PTG, is co-valenced, demonstrating the ‘principle of complementarity,’ i.e., that wellbeing depends upon a complex balance and harmonisation of positive and negative. In PEARLS, the adverse life experiences, the traumas and the positive environmental and personal characteristics, interplay, and when adequately balanced, lead to growth.

**5.5.1.1.1 Optimism and Pessimism.** Lomas & Ivtzan (2016) see this capturing a core component of SSWP, the importance of context. Despite many

researchers strongly associating optimism with wellbeing, they say optimism can also be dangerous if it prevents one from sufficiently appreciating risk, such as with smoking, for example. The key is being optimistic when the future can be changed by positive thinking. Michael's statement "Right now I'm struggling, but I'll make sure to pass" shows acute awareness of context, reality and ambition – which seems a healthy mix and gives hope he may move further towards his goals.

On the other side, it is argued that pessimism is not necessarily detrimental for wellbeing. While some proponents of SWPP argue the case for a Buddhist-style approach to pessimism that encourages one to make peace with the idea there may simply be no hope, this study adopts a more pragmatic benefit to pessimism. If we look at a young person's experience of transition and the anticipation, even fear perhaps, such as Shadow and Michael both reference before joining a new school, we can connect to resilience and see how it enhances one's protective environment, prompting one to prepare for potential problems. This does not just have to refer to the young person; it can include schools, families and communities being better prepared. If we remember this concept of context, and that all perceptions and conceptions of truth and behaviour are constructed and interpreted within in a context, then it makes good systemic sense.

**5.5.1.1.2 Self-Esteem and Humility.** Much research suggests high levels of self-esteem are more conducive to wellbeing than low levels. But again, SWPP postulates there is a similar risk as with optimism, which needs balancing. Even early on in the positive psychology movement thinkers such as Seligman (1995) warned that attempts by parents and teachers to boost self-esteem was "making this generation of children more vulnerable to depression", (p.27) as harsh adult life would pierce through fragile positive self-appraisals. An inflated assessment of one's

own abilities may also lead one to try to do things way beyond one, risking failure and damaging self-esteem, particularly if that self-esteem relies on external approval or goal achievement.

Humility, on the other hand, for a while perhaps seen as something that might block drive and achievement, is argued by some SWPP researchers to have great value, not just for its dampening effect on excessive self-esteem; being able to admit faults and imperfections, and be motivated by things beyond the self, can open one up to a deeper appreciation of elements of the world one would otherwise have missed, such as natural beauty. Lomas & Ivztan also point out that not always having one's own needs at the forefront of one's mind can lead to a greater appreciation of others' needs, and a drive to commit "pro-social" acts.

Lomas & Ivztan cite Wong (1998) who sees self-acceptance as the way to synthesise self-esteem and humility. Self-concept may perhaps be a better word for this study, as it embraces both sides but does not suggest stasis, and can allow dynamic growth within different contexts. Clara and Shadow both presented with positive self-concepts, aware of their strengths and difficulties, with significant levels of self-worth to keep them motivated and on target, and were willing to work at areas that needed improvement.

**5.5.1.1.3 Freedom and Restriction.** Lomas & Ivztan postulate that freedom is essential to wellbeing, particularly for the related angle of self-determination (Ryan & Deci, 2000). In the narratives presented in this study, we have identified above how Clara and Shadow seem to have moved to a place of self-determination, while Michael is perhaps still stuck in a position of being less in control of his own life. Much of Michael's language references a physical lack of freedom: being stuck

inside, for example, wanting to be elsewhere, feeling restless in class. Clara's narrative talks of restrictions in the past, and Shadow's does not reference it at all.

SWPP warns against a life of no restrictions and excessive freedoms however, and how relentless choice can be a "kind of tyranny" (Schwartz, 2000, p. 79), and to less satisfaction with the chosen item (Iyengar & Lepper 1999). Lomas & Ivtzan point out the parallels with existentialist thinking and the idea of regret for what wasn't chosen; how freedom can breed anxiety. They talk of how routine and expectations that are not prey to mood can help in education, and that wellbeing is dependent on being able to resist fleeting inclinations, on creating strategies to help override short-sighted desires. Such inhibitory control is a key executive function. In Shadow's and Clara's and Michael's stories, this can perhaps be seen as this idea of "grit" (Duckworth et. al, 2007).

**5.5.1.1.4 *Forgiveness and Anger.*** Forgiveness is another quality usually presented as beneficial to wellbeing. Lomas & Ivtzan mention, for example, the forgiveness-based therapies used to treat posttraumatic stress disorder following spousal abuse (Reed & Enright 2006). Using the same context, however, they also refer to the potential harm caused by forgiveness if it prevents someone from exiting a dangerous and violent situation.

Anger is not seen as a negative emotion per se in psychology, but rather as a sensible and understandable, even moral, response to certain situations and behaviours, either in one's personal life or across communities and social groups.

On a personal level, both Michael and Clara express a great sense of anger over injustices they believe they have faced. One notable difference between them is that Clara has also perhaps felt and appreciated forgiveness, or in some cases acceptance, whereas Michael, again, is still stuck perhaps within his anger.

**5.5.1.1.5 *Happiness and Sadness.*** This perhaps is the most important dichotomy and one that asks more questions than it answers. Lomas & Ivztan (2016) talk of how for many, the goal of life is happiness. For positive psychology, the idea of happiness, as wellbeing, has been a goal from the very beginning. It has therefore been critiqued, debated and questioned relentlessly: do we mean pure subjective happiness – referred to as hedonistic and perhaps more in the moment – or do we mean a more psychological wellbeing – eudaimonic – less subjective happiness? Does the hedonistic state block one from seeking the eudaimonic state? Was, therefore, Clara, Michael and Shadow's lack of hedonistic subjective happiness what pushed them towards a return, and in Clara and Shadow's case a successful one? Or is the search for happiness itself bound to cause unhappiness? Can we be happy while we seek it? Lomas & Ivztan reference Frankl's (1946) philosophy around how searching for meaning is more important to a Maslowian idea of actualisation than happiness.

While this study's narratives cannot pretend to answer such questions, they can nonetheless become part of the dialectic and hence, I dare to suggest that a search for something beyond sadness (perhaps happiness, perhaps meaning) is certainly spurring all three participants on. Clara shows this most clearly.

Clara also shows how sadness is an "appropriate reaction to a troubling world" (Lomas & Ivztan, 2016. p 13). Her state of depression due to bullying and great life changes was certainly not dysfunctional and while therapeutic help supported her, she did not have a mental disorder because she was sad, she had an appropriate response. Horowitz & Wakefield (2007, p. 225) call such sadness "an inherent part of the human condition", and in Clara's case at least it seems maybe

that if it had been medicalised away and treated as something that needed fixing, perhaps that would have disrupted the dialectic process towards growth.

## **5.6 Reflections on the Interview and Analytical Process**

In preparation for writing up this chapter, I reflected on Hunter (2010)'s caution around power, subjugation and romanticisation of the stories of those who have already been 'othered'. She cites Foucault's call for caution when disseminating others' stories, and quotes Fine (2003) who talked of her own ethical dilemma around the fact that the very elements of her identity and cultural capital – being white, middle class, educated – that gets the narratives heard, are also the elements of her identity that are involved in the 'othering' of the story holders in the first place. The young people I spoke to all talked of being on the margins of school at some time in their experience, of being misunderstood, not listened to, and unable to access the social world they were thrown into; a world I have easy access to and always have. Fine explains:

*The power of my translation comes far more from my whiteness, middle-classness, and education than from the stories I tell. But my translation also colludes in structures of domination. I know that when dropouts speak, few listen.*

(Fine, 2003, p.150)

### **5.6.1 The Second Author: Reflecting on the researcher's role**

Added to this, in analysing and co-constructing Clara, Michael and Shadow's narratives, I drew on second order cybernetic thinking which, developed as much of it was within systemic family therapy, demands a researcher take into consideration their own role in the process of gathering data from a participant. The observer is deemed to have become part of what is being observed (Becvar & Becvar, 1994)

and must, therefore, acknowledge the impact they will have on the participant's retelling of their story.

The researcher in a piece of narrative research can be seen to act as an overarching narrator, and is warned not to distort the underlying stories with their own intentions or needs (Bruner, 2004). To mitigate against this, I took a reflexive approach throughout the research process, through regular supervision with my academic tutor, where I was made to question my assumptions, and also through a reflective research diary where I took Creswell and Miller's (2000) advice to honestly acknowledge my own biases and feelings and see how they may be shaping the analysis and discussion. As well as stated preoccupation with rights and power (autonomy and agency) that are detailed in Chapter one, I was also aware that I had very personal and relational responses to the young people I met. This was partly perhaps maternal, and partly perhaps identifying with my own inner child, which may have led me subconsciously to have more sympathy with some of them, or with certain elements of their story, or to project emotions onto certain events. Personal reflections on interactions with each participant are presented in Appendix L.

### **5.7 Limitations of this research**

With this research, I intentionally did not attempt to give a positivist and objective account of persistent absence, as I chose a methodology that values a portrayal of experience over accurately representing 'truth' (Creswell, 2007).

I acknowledge that this means its findings on their own are not generalisable or transferable to other populations and situations, although they can add meaning and detail to the phenomenon of persistent absence. Added to this, unlike a case study approach, or other research with multiple participants, this was only going to explore the narratives of the young people themselves, not of those around them. I

did this because I found CYP voices were too absent from the literature, but in doing so I resolutely refused to fact check the events I was told, or explore other perceptions and opinions. The only objective facts in this research are the data on absence. This means I do not actually know, for example, whether adults did not believe the young people, or failed to listen and to help, only that that is how it felt for them. I do not know whether other kids get into Michael's "business", only that he has chosen to tell me so.

However, there is nothing the three participants say that goes starkly against other literature on this topic, and so they add, albeit only three voices, to the broader picture slowly being built up in the canon on school attendance that shows a consistent picture of loneliness and helplessness in the experience of absence.

By not talking to school staff, parents, even perhaps friends, this study lost an opportunity to position its data truly systemically. However, on the flip side, it ensures that the voice is not diluted by triangulation – where school and parents' voices take up two of the three slots.

Another limitation is within the context of Covid-19, which led to me having fewer participants than I would have liked, and therefore the research has less weight perhaps. I was also unable to meet the participants physically, and sometimes we could not even see each other. My work with other teenagers suggests this may not be a negative, however, as young people have told me they are more comfortable talking with people they don't know so well online, and the distance a screen provides makes them feel a little protected.

A final limitation was that in the end I was unable to check the participants' stories with them face to face and could only do this electronically. I may have had



more feedback and amendments if this process had been part of a conversation as opposed to an email.

## **5.8 Implications of the Research**

### ***5.8.1 Implications for Professional Practice***

These narratives have important implications for EP work. By looking at what has worked and how, it does not have to make guesswork around interventions based on filling a deficit. This study has shown how re-engaging with school can help drive growth and create meaning. For these young people that process required a balance of many psychological characteristics and systemic supports. EPs can help schools build systems and processes that anticipate this and PEARLS is a model that EPs can choose to try and validate in practice. There is much universal work to do around helping large secondary schools develop intimacy, belonging, and a sense of safety for young people; to mitigate against the larger buildings and social groupings and to develop personal relationships and support for peer interactions. But there is also crucial work to focus particularly on the most vulnerable. This study highlighted how potential problems can perhaps be identified in primary school, and there is good work in EPSs already around tracking vulnerability in Year five of primary and building resilience and relationships (such as in Oxfordshire and Norfolk) which could be explored and disseminated more widely.

Secondly, EPs and other adults who work with young people are required through the SEND Code of Practice to put the young person at the heart of their work and to consult them meaningfully in the decisions made around their wellbeing and education. Whether this is always possible to achieve in practice is moot. Added to which, in this study, it seemed that young people without SEN felt they were expected to conform to behaviours laid out by those in power if they wished to be

included in a mainstream setting. Those who are vulnerable, such as at key moments of transition, felt they had no voice, no conduit for their feelings to be expressed to those who could support them. There are, however, national and international laws around inclusion (including but not limited to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the UK Equality Act 2010). EPs can help local authorities and schools interpret and fulfil these better by promoting inclusion policies that do not just focus on SEN but also on all individual children and young people's perspectives. The 'Reaching the hard to reach' in primary schools initiative and the 'Inclusive Inquiry' in secondary schools (see e.g. Ainscow 2020) are two good examples of this and were initiatives of the Erasmus+ programme of the European Union across five countries in 2017-2020.

### ***5.8.2 Implications for Future Research***

It was incredibly hard to find participants, and not just due to restrictions and competing priorities around Covid-19. Young people who have been persistently absent but have now returned may still struggle in school so they fall between two stools, as it were: they are no longer a statistical problem, but they are also not necessarily so hugely engaged and successful to be held up as a noticeable success story. They can be hard to identify. They also are not necessarily very keen to talk about their experience; there were three young people identified who did not want to take part in the end. Researchers will in the future need to find a better way in to access these young people to hear their stories.

Persistent absence itself is not a 'condition' or a 'disorder' or a 'cause' with a connected interest group. It is a government definition (which has changed twice over the last 20 years) of a collection of lived experiences and behaviours. This study may help to highlight it as an under-represented phenomenon in the literature,

one that effects around 700,000 young people a year and can have disastrous consequences, as detailed in Chapter one. Future research may wish to build on this and to explore more experiences that occupy this important but rather grey area.

To do this it would be good to look beyond London boroughs to experiences in other regions of England. It would also be interesting for research to track experiences across the year groups, as Michael, Clara and Shadow were all from different years and were perhaps on different stages of their journeys.

### **5.9 Sharing the Findings**

The individual stories have already been shared with the participants, and this will be followed up with another letter presenting the broader findings and analysis once the study is passed. In the autumn term, the participants will be asked if they would like to co-present the findings to their schools' SLT, SENCo or pastoral support teams. If they do not wish to do so, I will do this on their behalf.

The findings will also be presented to the EPS where I am based during a team CPD day, in a seminar format to develop and promote discussion around implications for practice. The presentation will be sent to the original local authority where the research was germinated as well.

### **5.10 Conclusion**

Despite its stated limitations, which are all my own, I hope, and feel, that through the generosity of Clara, Michael and Shadow this study has helped me come to understand a little more of the teenage experience of persistent absence and what it takes to return. Their thoughtful narratives allow me to tentatively propose suggestions to consider trying when helping others grow from trauma. The three of them have also helped highlight new areas of much needed research into this somewhat hidden and under-reported demographic.

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## Appendix A

## Pupil Absence in Schools in England 2018 to 2019

Persistent absentees (2)										
	State-funded secondary schools					Special schools				
	Pupil enrolments classified as persistent absentees in schools during 2018/19 (3)		Percentage of sessions missed (4):			Pupil enrolments classified as persistent absentees in schools during 2018/19 (3)		Percentage of sessions missed (4):		
	Number	Percentage (5)	Overall absence	Authorised absence	Unauthorised absence	Number	Percentage (5)	Overall absence	Authorised absence	Unauthorised absence
<b>Gender</b>										
Boys	208,680	13.7	21.1	11.6	9.4	22,165	28.4	26.8	18.5	8.3
Girls	203,805	13.7	20.9	11.6	9.2	8,468	30.2	25.2	20.6	4.6
<b>Total</b>	412,485	13.7	21.0	11.6	9.3	30,633	28.8	26.4	19.1	7.3
<b>Free school meal (FSM) eligibility</b>										
Known to be eligible for FSM	126,219	28.5	23.4	10.7	12.7	13,871	34.6	27.0	17.9	9.0
Not eligible for FSM	275,504	10.8	19.8	12.0	7.8	16,424	25.0	25.8	20.1	5.7
Unclassified (6)	10,762	51.6	45.2	18.8	26.4	338	72.8	74.1	48.9	25.2
<b>Total</b>	412,485	13.7	21.0	11.6	9.3	30,633	28.8	26.4	19.1	7.3
<b>Free school meal (FSM) eligibility in the last 6 years</b>										
Known to be eligible for FSM	199,399	24.7	22.4	10.8	11.8	17,894	33.6	27.2	18.1	9.1
Not eligible for FSM	198,167	9.1	19.2	12.6	6.6	11,930	23.1	24.7	20.4	4.3
Unclassified (6)	14,919	47.2	37.7	15.5	22.2	809	63.0	50.2	32.3	17.9
<b>Total</b>	412,485	13.7	21.0	11.6	9.3	30,633	28.8	26.4	19.1	7.3
<b>National curriculum year group:</b>										
1 and below	932	10.5	16.5	9.6	6.9	1,683	29.5	20.8	18.3	2.5
2	782	8.7	16.2	8.8	7.4	1,799	27.3	21.1	18.4	2.7
3	718	8.1	16.7	8.9	7.8	1,862	24.9	20.7	17.7	3.0
4	660	8.5	16.0	8.7	7.3	1,897	23.3	21.1	17.7	3.4
5	1,300	7.0	16.9	10.6	6.3	2,049	23.8	22.5	17.7	4.8
6	1,500	7.8	17.1	11.0	6.1	2,243	24.7	22.8	17.9	4.9
7	58,756	9.5	18.6	10.9	7.7	3,101	25.2	24.2	17.6	6.7
8	75,210	12.5	19.8	11.2	8.6	3,471	28.6	26.7	18.6	8.2
9	86,296	14.7	20.8	11.5	9.4	3,871	32.2	29.6	20.0	9.6
10	90,822	15.9	22.2	11.9	10.3	4,073	34.3	32.2	20.9	11.3
11	84,618	15.7	22.5	12.7	10.2	4,075	36.9	34.0	22.0	12.0
12 and above	90	18.2	19.7	11.6	8.0	10	43.5	31.2	10.8	20.4
Unclassified or does not follow the national curriculum (6)	10,801	51.7	45.7	20.0	25.8	499	41.7	30.1	23.7	6.4
<b>Total</b>	412,485	13.7	21.0	11.6	9.3	30,633	28.8	26.4	19.1	7.3
<b>First language</b>										
Known or believed to be other than English	53,500	10.6	17.9	8.8	9.0	4,834	31.5	23.3	19.4	3.9
Known or believed to be English	356,247	14.3	21.4	12.0	9.4	25,683	28.4	27.0	19.1	7.9
Unclassified (6)	2,738	18.0	21.2	10.8	10.5	116	35.6	30.4	21.0	9.4
<b>Total</b>	412,485	13.7	21.0	11.6	9.3	30,633	28.8	26.4	19.1	7.3
<b>Special educational needs (7)</b>										
Statements of SEN/ EHC plan (8)	12,256	23.7	26.6	16.6	10.0	29,059	28.1	26.0	18.8	7.1
SEN Support (9)	80,393	23.2	24.2	13.1	11.1	1,196	55.1	37.1	26.5	10.6
No identified SEN	309,351	11.9	19.8	11.0	8.8	46	63.0	55.4	52.6	2.8
Unclassified (6)	10,485	51.4	46.0	19.3	26.7	332	72.8	75.5	49.7	25.9
<b>Total</b>	412,485	13.7	21.0	11.6	9.3	30,633	28.8	26.4	19.1	7.3

(1) See Chapter 5 of the "Guide to absence statistics" for more information.

(2) The definition of persistent absence changed from the 2015/16 to 2018/19. Pupils who are classified as persistent absentees (2) are classified as persistent absentees. See Chapter 3 of the "Guide to absence statistics" for more information.

(3) Number of enrolments in 2018/19. Includes pupils on the school register in more than one school. See Chapter 2 of the "Guide to absence statistics" for more information.

(4) The number of sessions missed due to overall/authorised/unauthorised absence. See Chapter 3 of the "Guide to absence statistics" for more information.

(5) The number of persistent absentee enrolments expressed as a percentage of the total number of pupils.

(6) Figures for pupils with unclassified or missing characteristics for more information.

(7) In September 2014 the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Regulations were introduced. For further information on these changes please see the "Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Regulations 2014" document.

(8) Education, Health and Care (EHC) plans were introduced from September 2014.

(9) From 2015 SEN support replaces school action and school action plan.

Not applicable, no schools of this type



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## Pupil Absence in Schools in England 2019 to 2020

Proposed release: March 2021

Cancellation date: 20 August 2020 11:30am

### **Statistics release cancelled**

*“As the demand increases for statistics and data to measure the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Department for Education has had to change its data gathering and release practices, focussing efforts on priority analysis and statistics. Our statement of 26 March 2020 explains this further (<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-education/about/statistics#announcements>) and, in line with guidance from the Office for Statistics Regulation (<https://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/covid-19-and-the-regulation-of-statistics/>), the decision has been made to cancel this publication. We will keep users updated of further changes via the Department for Education Statistics website.”*

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/announcements/pupil-absence-in-schools-in-england-2019-to-2020>

## Appendix B

### The Literature Search Process and Results

#### B.1 Systematic search table

Database	Search Term	Results Found	Terms added / changed to help refine or boost	Results found	No. chosen for next stage
APA Psych Info  Limits applied: 1997-Current  English Language  Via EBSCO  7.8.20	(DE "School Phobia" OR DE "School Refusal" OR DE "Tardiness" OR DE "Truancy" OR DE "School Attendance") AND ("Return*" OR DE "Reintegrat*")	52	AND (Adolescence)  then  AND (Experiences OR Perceptions OR Attitudes OR views OR Perspectives)	5   2	52
Academic Search Complete  Limits applied: 1997-Current  English Language	(DE "SCHOOL phobia" OR DE "SCHOOL attendance" OR DE "SCHOOL absenteeism") AND ("Return*" OR DE "Reintegrat*")	85	AND ("Return*" OR DE "Reintegrat*") AND ("Adolescence")  Then  AND (Experiences OR Perceptions OR Attitudes OR views OR Perspectives)  Then removed AND ("Adolescence")	7   2	19

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Via EBSCO					
7.8.20				21	
British Education Index	(DE "SCHOOL phobia" OR DE "SCHOOL absenteeism" OR DE "SCHOOL attendance") AND ("Return*" OR DE "Reintegrat*")	5	AND ("Adolescence)	0 but smart search got 51	19
Via EBSCO			Then new:	99	
7.8.20			(DE "SCHOOL phobia" OR DE "SCHOOL absenteeism" OR DE "SCHOOL attendance") AND (Experiences OR Perceptions OR Attitudes OR views OR Perspectives) = 99		
			Then: (DE "SCHOOL phobia" OR DE "SCHOOL absenteeism" OR DE "SCHOOL attendance") AND (Experiences OR Perceptions OR Attitudes OR views OR Perspectives) AND ("Adolescence)	2	
Child Development and Adolescent Studies	(((((ZW "school phobia") or (ZW "school phobia & its treatment") or (ZW "school phobia - diagnosis") or (ZW "school phobia - japan") or (ZW "school phobia - psychological aspects") or (ZW "school phobia - research") or (ZW "school phobia -	58	No need to refine		45
Via EBSCO					

## U1825071 NARRATIVE EXPLORATION OF PERSISTENT ABSENCE AND RETURN

7.8.20	treatment") or (ZW "school phobia, case") or (ZW "school phobia, etiology")) or ((ZW "school refusal") or (ZW "school refusal - assessment & management") or (ZW "school refusal assessment scale-revised") or (ZW "school refusal behavior") or (ZW "school refusal evaluation") or (ZW "school refusal syndrome") or (ZW "school reintegration")))) or ((ZW "school absence") or (ZW "school absenteeism")))) or ((ZW "school attendance - psychological aspects") or (ZW "school attendance - research") or (ZW "school attendance - social aspects"))				
Education Research Complete Via EBSCO 9.8.20	((DE "SCHOOL absenteeism") OR (DE "SCHOOL phobia")) OR (DE "SCHOOL attendance") AND (DE "school reintegration*" OR DE "school return*")"	506	Extra search terms around adolescence and experience made no difference so skimmed for relevance		129
<b>ROUND 1</b>					<b>264</b>
<b>ROUND 2</b>			Remove duplicates and non relevance	-94	<b>170</b>
			Add theses and from other sources eg reference or recommendation	+10 +14	<b>194</b>
<b>ROUND 3</b>	Read abstracts		Remove with reasons (see table)	-149	<b>45</b>

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<b>ROUND 4</b>	Read paper		Double check relevance that may not have been apparent in abstract (eg some primary school, some questionnaire only) and quality.	-15	<b>30</b>
<b>ROUND 5*</b>	Read paper		Divide into 1. Voice of Child and Focus on Return (8) 2. Voice of Child but no focus on return 3. Focus on Return but no full Voice of Child	-22	<b>FINAL FOR CRITICAL REVIEW (VoC and FoR)</b>  <b>8</b>

### B.2 Overview of the 30 papers in round five

Author and Title	Focus	Design	Main findings	Credibility and relevance	Included in CR?
Aucott, C. (2014) An exploration of pupils', parents' and teachers' perceptions of the causes of pupil non-attendance and the reasons for improvements in attendance. Professional Doctorate Thesis, University of Birmingham	Child voice and focus on return but PRIMARY!!	Multiple Case study design. Two children who had returned to primary school after a significant period of absence.	Interesting around the perceptions that children, parents, teachers and professionals all share around things that improve attendance: school-related factors, an improved understanding of the young person's reasons for their 'school refusal behaviour' and listening to the young person, and then actually acting on their views.	<p><b>Strengths</b> Triangulation of evidence is impressive.</p> <p>Rare focus on reasons for improved attendance.</p> <p><b>Limitations</b> Working with primary aged children, and the findings may not be able to be extrapolated out to a secondary school context, during which most absence peaks. She notes that there are few studies focusing on cases of return and reengagement to school.</p> <p>Aucott herself admits that the children's voices do not come through quite as strongly as the adults' around them.</p>	N
Attwood, G. & Croll, P. (2006) Truancy in secondary school	Child voice; no focus on return	1.	A major explanation given by young people themselves for their non-attendance is poor relationships with	<b>Strengths</b>	N

## U1825071 NARRATIVE EXPLORATION OF PERSISTENT ABSENCE AND RETURN

<p>pupils: prevalence, trajectories and pupil perspectives, Research Papers in Education, 21:4, 467-484</p>	<p>Young people in secondary school who self-describe as truants.</p> <p>Looking at progress and trajectory of behaviours.</p>	<p>Interviews conducted with 17 young people who had been persistent truants in Year 9 onwards at secondary school. (Missed one day a week or equivalent in past year) These 17 were drawn from a total of 34 interviews with “excluded and disaffected” young people.</p> <p>2.</p> <p>Analysis of data from a large-scale representative panel study and the other a set of detailed interviews The survey data come from the British Household Panel Survey (BHPS), a major research resource in which a representative sample of the same 10,000 people have been interviewed annually since 1991. Since 1994 approximately 770 young people aged 11 to 15 years old living in sample households have also been interviewed.</p>	<p>teachers, including teachers failing to match their expectations. Other factors mentioned by young people include bullying but also a more general dislike of the atmosphere of the school, sometimes associated with a change of school.</p> <p>Little evidence of negative responses to the curriculum leading to truancy – in fact significant number of positive comments about interesting lessons and not all lessons being bad.</p> <p>It is suggested that we can distinguish between socio-economic and attitudinal factors which make young people vulnerable to truancy and precipitating events or processes which result in truanting behaviour.</p> <p>Truancy increases through the years.</p>	<p>Apart from ‘truancy’, the paper explains its terms well and so is accessible to broad audience.</p> <p>Spoke to CYP themselves in depth so they could present their own perspectives on and explanations for their truanting behavior. But when interviews were collected they were not about truancy per se – but disaffection with school. So perhaps some probes missed or follow up questions not explored?</p> <p>Provides two sources of evidence and brings them together.</p> <p>Addresses issue of truants being even less represented in surveys and analysis than other forms of absentees.</p> <p>Looks at school career of those missing education – over time. Not just a snapshot – through the data.</p> <p>Attempts to look systemically and holistically, by analysing SES data and background etc, and points out that background does not predict truancy behaviour – so something else is going on in the system to act as a catalyst for truancy.</p> <p><b>Limitations</b></p> <p>It is not clear why Attwood and Croll refer to the students’ experience and behaviour as “truancy” as opposed to non-attendance, persistent absence or school refusal etc. There is no attached “delinquent” behaviour. And most of the reasons given from interviewees seem to be a fear of bullying or having to go to a new</p>	
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## U1825071 NARRATIVE EXPLORATION OF PERSISTENT ABSENCE AND RETURN

				<p>school where they know noone etc etc.</p> <p>The survey data does not look at schools specifically, but at family life etc, so any information that young people provide about their school or relationship to it, is likely by chance and self-selecting. This slightly suggests a within-child, or at least within-family view of school disaffection.</p> <p>It is not a strengths-based paper, and the identified issues – relationships, bullying disordered and stressful environment of school – do not come with clear suggestions for intervention or approach.</p>	
<p>Baker, M., and Bishop, F. L. (2015). Out of school: a phenomenological exploration of extended non attendance.</p>	<p>Child voice; no focus on return</p> <p>Young people in secondary school in South of England (maintained, mixed sex comprehensives)</p> <p>Trying hard to get CYP voices heard – much of paper spent drawing attention to lack of child voices in the research</p> <p>Hoping to be able to inform practice of EPs</p>	<p>Semi structured interviews with Four children (four male, two female) with extended non attendance difficulties. Interviews in their own homes.</p> <p>Analysed interviews using IPA.</p> <p>Questions in semi structured interviews designed to explore early school experience, participants' perceptions of the causes of non-attendance, the attributions made by others, support received (hooray!!), and anything they felt might have been done differently.</p>	<p>Perception of causes for non attendance markedly different across the four participants, but experiences of support markedly similar: being disbelieved, fragmented support being blamed and punished.</p> <p>Master themes that emerged:</p> <p><b>Initial school experiences</b> (not sure they've justified why this is relevant to a year 10/11)</p> <p><b>Participants' perceptions</b> (nb interesting choice of lang...) of the causes of non-attendance</p> <p><b>Social and other support experiences</b> – subordinate themes were initial responses and being disbelieved, pressure to return quickly or remain in school, slow or inappropriate support, fragmented support experience, medication and prescribing, things that might be done differently.</p> <p><b>Punishment blame and control</b> ☹ - being labelled as naughty, being punished and controlled – adults deciding reason for non attendance, not asking YP themselves etc</p> <p><b>Friendship and belonging</b></p> <p><b>The future</b></p> <p>Impact on the child's phenomenon – sub themes eg anger, fear, hiding emotions and keeping secrets, seeking meaning and making sense.</p>	<p><b>Strengths</b></p> <p>Spoke to CYP themselves</p> <p>Quite clear methodology. Have done rigorous search for voices of children (although I think only non attenders – as they define them separate to truants or all persistent absentee-ers). They highlight paucity. Find six papers.</p> <p>In contrast with paper above (Att and Croll) makes clear case for why used term 'extended non attendance' and defines it clearly. But defines it in contrast to 'truancy', thereby perhaps making a judgment about the deserving or not nature of these 'conditions'</p> <p>Clear that the focus on individual CYP voice is needed due to issues with no heterogeneity in Non attendance and that individual accounts can help explore the</p>	N



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			<p>All make interesting points about size of schools and difficulties teachers have to keep control, organise everyone. That “the teacher isn’t a scary man, just trying to keep class under control”, or “they’ve got hundreds more to worry about” or “they’ve got too many students to deal with”. School is “massive” so staff try to push “same quick fix on everyone”.</p> <p>Sense of belonging easier / greater at primary. But not clear why. Felt like “family” to two of them</p> <p>All four have a sense of future.</p> <p>Most interesting = bit on impact on the child’s phenomenon. “The impact of these lived experiences on the participants’ perceived selves, their behaviours and the way they construe and act upon the world (their consciousness and phenomenon – Husserl &amp; Heidegger, 1927) appears clear in all cases.” Anger; Needing to talk but not finding right person; Hiding emotions; “putting on a smile”. Anger again. Refusing to assimilate others’ perceptions into sense of self. (well done!) Or in other case temporarily sometimes accepting others’ explanations. Viewing experience through series of ‘conditions’ eg OCD, Anxiety, Aspergers (!) etc.</p> <p>Sense made by each participant is highly unique to them and individual. Authors agree hard to find one answer. But all shaped by external influences, such as adult interpretations. And all feel lost in a system that was slow to respond to or understand their needs. Schools made it worse.... Say authors.</p> <p>Authors say that despite recent studies saying non attendance is multifactorial, and experiences individual – this does not seem to have had an impact on the way schools respond. They question therefore whether current practice around intervention is evidence based. (but they don’t use examples except these four). Schools still see absence as disciplinary issue. Other support from outside school hard to find.</p> <p>Language important to all participants – did not like labels naughty, lazy or refuser. Authors point out that if</p>	<p>purpose served by non attending behaviours for young people</p> <p>Hoping to be able to inform practice of EPs</p> <p><b>Limitations</b> Not really strengths based! Or PP. Cites Miller (2008) saying extended non attendance cannot be seen as unitary concept. But still uses it as such... Only four kids. See above. But at least male and female.</p> <p>B and B repeat / cite Pellegrini (2007) and Berg (1996) findings about extended non attendance crossing cultural, gender and socio economic and academic or SEN boundaries. But when you look at persistent absence this is not true. Kids who are already a little disenfranchised or marginalised are at far greater risk. Persistent absence includes truants – those whose behaviour we find particularly difficult. By refusing to look at persistent absence – and not giving it as much priority as extended non attendance or any other softer sort – well meaning researchers are ignoring the social / systemic implications of a society whose excluded kids are at risk of more exclusion.</p> <p>Quite dismissive of papers that aren’t IPA when looking at YP voice. Didn’t like Shilvock’s paper because YP were at school – but I would say that is a positive starting point.</p>	
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## U1825071 NARRATIVE EXPLORATION OF PERSISTENT ABSENCE AND RETURN

			<p>you were off work with stress and were labelled a work refuser you would not be impressed.</p> <p>Practical suggestions for schools mainly around the multifactorial understanding and swifter more engaged understanding and response. EP early stage involvement. Multi agency involvement. Train all staff and have key member.</p>		
<p>Beckles, C. (2014) An exploration of the perceptions and experiences of non-attenders and school staff within a secondary school context. Professional Doctorate Thesis, Institute of Education, University of London</p>	<p>Child voice and focus on return.</p>	<p>Semi-structured interviews were undertaken with twelve pupils and six staff members</p> <p>Interviews with Years 8 and 9 pupils who had had low attendance previous academic year pupils, and teachers and staff at the school.</p> <p>Analysed both sets of interviews with thematic analysis.</p>	<p>Reasons around avoiding school:</p> <p>Negative feelings anticipating what they'd face if they went – eg bullying, peer conflict, staff reprimand, and difficult and boring lessons. [nb – curriculum is expressly thought NOT an issue in other papers. Interesting. And in this case pupils are focusing on teacher approaches not subject]</p> <p>Desire for quieter classroom environment</p> <p>Impact of family and friends – contrary to school perceptions – family and friends encouraging to return. More so than some school staff in perception of pupil Where there are home /family factors pupils seem aware</p> <p>Desire to attend but benefits of staying at home outweigh.</p> <p>Generally pupils exhibit low levels of school belonging</p> <p>Schools offering support but pupils not seeing it. Or aware but it's not helping. Esp in fear over bullying etc.</p> <p>Complexity clear / stated, but not perceived by participants themselves. They feel they just need to go in every day.</p> <p>Importance of relationships</p> <p>Infantilisation</p> <p>Despite supportive strategies in place, nonattenders do not always perceive them as effective.</p> <p>Emphasized the importance of using an interactionist and systemic perspective to support nonattenders rather than a within-child or family perspective.</p>	<p>Strengths</p> <p>Spoke to CYP themselves</p> <p>Worked in a school that had high absence rates and needed support – so a genuinely useful piece of research</p> <p>Very good stuff on belonging and on power – pulls together ideas from other papers and puts evidence behind them. Also – from perspective of pupils themselves as opposed to us adults positing and theorising.</p> <p>And on academic self-concept.</p> <p>Good justification for research – clear: says regular school attendance important for social, economic, educational and emotional well-being.</p> <p>UK schools have high levels of school non-attendance for several years.</p> <p>Government legislation and research highlight the importance of early intervention and to involve pupils in decisions affecting their lives. But still paucity of research eliciting the views of non-attenders, particularly nonclinical samples and those at the early stages of non-attendance.</p>	<p>Y</p>

# U1825071 NARRATIVE EXPLORATION OF PERSISTENT ABSENCE AND RETURN

			<p>School issues included a lack of opportunities to gain pupils' views, poor pupil-teacher relationships and ineffective school systems.</p> <p>Recommendations around promoting collaborative working, pupil participation and early intervention.</p> <p>Warns against tokenistic approaches from schools re participation.</p>	<p>My interest is return but early non attendance also a more positive strengths based approach</p> <p>Limitations Six participants had SEN so quite a specific demographic. All were white. 12 is good sample size but it's not generalisable from one v white school.</p> <p>Although the recruited absence statistic was about the previous year the students were maybe still struggling with attendance – not so clear – which means the strengths-based angle is not as strong as it might be. And it is not clear.</p>	
<p>Billington, K. (2018). Using an active listening approach to consider the views of three young people on the topic of missing education, Educational Psychology in Practice, 34:4, 337-351</p>	<p>Child voice; no focus on return</p>	<p>Three teenage males aged 15–17 years</p> <p>Had missed at least 15% of their termly education</p> <p>Active listening approach within a narrative inquiry methodology</p> <p>Unstructured individual interviews</p> <p>Missing education defined as “not receiving a suitable education or being on a school roll”.</p> <p>The participants' accounts were analysed using a Voice-Centred Relational Method</p> <p>“A post-modern, constructivist-interpretivist philosophy underpinned the approach to this research, illuminating the subjective</p>	<p>The importance of individual experience and supportive adult–pupil relationships.</p> <p><b>And specifically perceptions</b> of relationships with others as this was a poignant theme for all three participants.</p> <p>Perceptions of self and personal experiences *Being treated as an individual School systems *Teacher relationships Reflective thinking Feeling able to talk Feeling valued The importance of active listening The approach to understanding views Liam suggested that his opinion was not sought by teachers; he was encouraged to write his views down following incidents but was unable to communicate what he really wanted to. He expressed a desire to have been asked his opinion.</p> <p>Importance of not assuming or labelling</p>	<p><b>Strengths</b></p> <p>Spoke to CYP themselves Adds to scant / scarce accounts from YP perspective. Powerful.</p> <p>Fabulously young person centred Power of narrative</p> <p>Attempt to identify the complex interplay of systemic factors,</p> <p>Creates a model to support the approaches educational psychologists (EPs) can use to support school staff, parents and other professionals in their work: 'The "Person-centred Active Listening" model'</p> <p>Social justice – attempt to use narrative approaches to promote understanding and empathy for</p>	N

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		experience of individuals and reality as a social construction (Ponterotto, 2005 ).”	This too comes out a lot in other work .	<p>individuals who are marginalised and under-represented.</p> <p>Really interesting stuff on Active Listening and relationship to Kolb learning cycle</p> <p><b>Limitations</b> Admits it is hard to work in this way and takes time. [But perhaps it could be built in earlier and then wouldn’t need researchers doing it??]</p> <p>Small sample size. Not generalisable / relatable.</p> <p>But – says the same! At some point it needs to be thought to be generalizable. Be brave!!</p> <p>Not sure I am totally comfortable with definition of Missing Education – is it too broad? OR is it right? In fact she uses persistent absenteeism as her measure for participants – not missing education. But then includes someone who has been excluded. So a bit unclear.</p> <p>V V rooted in ideology around social construction and subjective experience. But only looked at one experience. No co constructing of future. No strengths-based return.</p>	
Brouwer-Borghuis, M., Almelo, S., Heyne, D., Sauter, F. and Scholte, R. (2019). The Link: An Alternative Educational Program in the Netherlands to Reengage School-Refusing Adolescents with Schooling. Cognitive and Behavioral Practice 26 (2019) 75-91	Focus on return; no child voice	<p>Reviews 30 case files from a Dutch alternative education provision. Plus takes a closer look at one case ‘Lily’</p> <p>Considers a range of school-related factors associated with School Refusal (SR), grouped according to five domains of</p>	<p>Five domains of school climate: Order, safety, and discipline Academic outcomes Contact with school peers / Contact with teachers and other school staff School facilities School connectedness</p>	<p><b>Strengths</b> Very interesting. Draws on a lot of other research and is very recent. The case of Lily is full of rich data.</p> <p><b>Limitations</b> Doesn’t really seem to have its own findings – a lot of the description of</p>	N

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		<p>school climate. It also describes school-based interventions for SR in the form of alternative educational programs (AEPs). The paper then presents the Link, an AEP for Dutch adolescents with SR. The Link offers an educational setting that addresses school-related factors associated with SR. After participation in the Link, adolescents are helped to return to a more typical educational setting.</p>	<p>Review of 30 case files revealed that most adolescents were completely absent from school prior to commencement at the Link. Many had been absent from school for the previous 6 months, and one-third had attendance difficulties at primary school. Regarding psychopathology, one third had a primary diagnosis of anxiety or depressive disorder, more than one-half were diagnosed with ASD, and 40% reported suicidal thoughts. In addition, one third of adolescents reported being bullied before commencement at the Link. In these ways, the Link provides a service for a distressed group of SR adolescents.</p> <p>Bullying warrants special consideration. Thirty-three percent of Link participants had experienced bullying prior to Link. This corresponds with bullying rates in other samples of SR youth (Egger et al., 2003; Havik et al.</p> <p>But points out while bullying has role in the development of SR other factors combine with the experience of being bullied to contribute to the development of SR.</p>	<p>how The Link works is based on other literature.</p> <p>No real examination of this as a successful alternative to other interventions. Just a justification for its existence.</p> <p>Does not speak to CYP.</p>	
<p>Browne, R. (2018) An exploration into the parental experience of Emotionally Based School Non Attendance in young people: an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. Professional Doctorate Thesis, Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust/University of Essex</p>	<p>Focus on return; no child voice</p>	<p>This study explored the experiences of parents of young people aged 13-15 years old who present with EBSNA, who no longer attend mainstream school and who attend an alternative educational provision.</p> <p>Interviews conducted with five parents</p> <p>Transcripts were analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA),</p>	<p>Four superordinate themes: 'It turns your life upside down'; Power and the battle to be heard; Loss and fear and Retrospective clarity.</p> <p>Far-reaching effects on parents impacted on relationships within the family, their own mental health and poor relationships between home and school.</p> <p>Parents shared their concern for their child's future and described the need to understand the origins of their child's condition.</p>	<p><b>Strengths</b></p> <p>Really respectful feel, Goes deep IPA seems to add to parents own interpretations rather than overtake them. Powerful.</p> <p>Implications for Educational Psychologists (EPs) and other professional agencies suggest that it is important to increase our understanding and awareness of the parental experience and consider ways of improving the quality of parental and professional relationships.</p> <p>Suggests future research on parents of children in early stages</p>	<p>N</p>

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				<p>of EBSNA and who are still attending school, but with low attendance rates – more positive.</p> <p><b>Limitations</b> No child voice</p> <p>Small sample size and IPA nature = not generalisable.</p> <p>Didn't check findings back with participants</p> <p>Admits that participants were white middle class brits – perhaps because easiest to find and most confident and most likely to want to contribute / be heard and able to make themselves so. Whereas a more representative sample might have different views / findings.</p>	
<p>Childs, J., &amp; Grooms, A. A. (2018). Improving School Attendance through Collaboration: A Catalyst for Community Involvement and Change. Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk, 23(1/2), 122–138.</p>	<p>Focus on return; no child voice</p>	<p>Eero public school in central Texas (EPS) EPS has 70,000 students 13% chronically absent in 2013-14 Percentages hide gap – well off whites have much higher rates of attendance so it pulls averages up – hides less well-off Hispanic and black communities.</p> <p>Semi structured interviews with up to 25 people involved – principles, non profit staff, community members, parents, district administrators,</p> <p>Also observed meetings etc</p>	<p>Outlines a framework for moving on from understanding causes to addressing / practical steps for improvement. Has three elements: Networks, Collective Impact, Supply Chain Management</p> <p>Framework based on results of research: Power of working with local partners Using data to highlight importance of attendance</p> <p>Mentoring models in selected schools - national programme "Success Mentors" – possible with v little funding as long as you have buy-in Praise for attendance rather than penalise for absence Understanding contextual factors is crucial – not blaming the student School leadership crucial Community driven not district led approaches work best</p> <p>Highlights danger time of transitions - moving to different level of schooling Public health awareness campaigns</p>	<p><b>Strengths</b></p> <p>Positive and strengths based.</p> <p>Holistic and systemic in intention</p> <p>Really broad and inclusive – a bit more like a case study of an area.</p> <p>V good review of literature around three main areas: Attendance tracking – inconsistent, probs with definitions and compulsory ages different across states and authorised / unauthorised etc, Criminalisation – 1990s zero tolerance policies, led to expulsions and suspensions. Not effective. In fact sometimes expulsions lead to arrest lead to further lack of education. Lots of pushback luckily. Social / emotional interventions – school districts introducing</p>	N

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			<p>Lit Review justified led to need to examine further community-led efforts.</p>	<p>programmes around tutoring, therapy, peer support, behaviour management.</p> <p>Outlines trad approaches and summarises neatly the lack of evidence / research.</p> <p>Sees causes as societal (therefore systemic but not explicitly stated) issue not within-child</p> <p>Looking at interorganisational networks – nice collaborative and holistic approach</p> <p><b>Limitations</b> Not v rigorous on why it chose to interview the people it did, and includes ‘philanthropists’ and ‘retired educators’ etc who may not really be involved in getting kids back.</p> <p>No kids... and only one parent</p> <p>Seems perhpas a little focused on getting kid to school – accepting they need to be there – rather than changing school itself.</p>	
<p>Davies, J. D., &amp; Lee, J. (2006). To Attend or Not to Attend? Why Some Students Chose School and Others Reject It. Support for Learning, 21(4), 204–209.</p>	<p>Child voice and focus on return.</p> <p>Speaks to 13 non attenders about their experiences and 35 low attainers but regular attenders.</p> <p>Aim to act as a pilot study to promote questions and debate around</p>	<p>“Discussions and conversations”. Interviewed – but not clear what sort – young people from a ‘large English city’</p>	<p>The non attenders had preferred AEPs to school and some saw them as a means of reintegrating to school.</p> <p>Davis and Lee say that their interviews reinforce the idea (that I have also come across) of LAs and teachers believing home environment and personal attitudes are main influencer of school attendance, whereas families / parents believe the main influences are within-school – bullying, probs with teachers, peer pressure etc.</p> <p>Kids don’t think curriculum a problem, teachers do. [nb see also Attwood and Croll]</p> <p>Parents they spoke to believed in education and were keen for kids to return to school (Roma in Oxon)</p>	<p><b>Strengths</b></p> <p>Direct quotes</p> <p>A lot of YP</p> <p>Lovely ideas around school should be seen as a contract rather than a ‘compulsion’ and how the contract breaks down.</p> <p>Also nice ideas around how non attendance has been pathologized because not the norm and because school is compulsory. Which means that it is often overlooked</p>	Y

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	issues of attendance and non attendance.		<p>Terminology debate not just semantics – eg truancy – in this paper which is about truancy – the writers refer to parent condoned absences like shopping or holidays or relative visits as being perceived by authorities as potential truancy. Usually the definition requires lack of parental knowledge as to where child is.</p> <p>Echoes my observation of the lit search that most studies or papers are about why children don't attend, or broad initiatives to get kids back, but no one really looking specifically at which interventions work. So how can you get them back? And D and L say it's really worth doing because Croll and Moses (2005) paper which showed that "less satisfactory educational trajectories are highly changeable and may therefore be susceptible to educational interventions to make successful outcomes available to all young people." (p204)</p>	<p>that for the non attender, absence is a solution not a problem. [Comes up in Pellegrini and Yonoyama too]</p> <p>Limitations Draft data / pilot / provisional findings. V interesting but can't find more recent version that's actually been published.</p> <p>Not clear about precise levels of absence – not defined what they mean by "severe attendance problems"</p> <p>No clear methodology – not replicable.</p> <p>Not clear how much interpretation – quotes not always illustrating points made – eg re "maturity" etc or "the development of a work ethic is seen by several of those interviewed as an intrinsic and valued attribute of school attendance". Unsubstantiated statements.</p> <p>Kids at school made no criticisms of the teachers – but that could be because they were at school. Only gives quotes from one teacher – who is critical of current system – admits the rest weren't the same</p>	
Donat, M., Gallschütz, C., & Dalbert, C. (2018). The relation between students' justice experiences and their school refusal behavior. <i>Social Psychology of Education</i> , 21(2), 447–475.	Child voice; no focus on return	1,658 German students age 12-17 Cross-sectional questionnaire  Bootstrap mediation analyses	<p>Personal belief in just world (BJW) – relationship to school absence – building on recent studies looking at relationship w BJW and rule breaking behaviour.</p> <p>Lerner (1980) work on just world hypothesis.</p> <p>Fascinating – adaptive function of believing the world is just we all get what we deserve and therefore can deal</p>	<p><b>Strengths</b> Spoke to CYP themselves</p> <p>Assuming that absenteeism is a 'justice-driven reaction'</p> <p>Really important to consider justice – easy to talk about social justice re</p>	N



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			<p>with our social environment as though it were stable and orderly. No need to fight for social justice I guess because already there!</p> <p>Assimilate function, trust function, motive function.</p> <p>1.High BJW = lower depressive systems and not needing to avoid school due to negative affect</p> <p>2.High BJW = lower social probs and worries re school so no need to escape aversive social evaluative situations at school</p> <p>High BJW = positive attitude towards and enjoyment of school.</p> <p>Nb teacher justice and feelings of exclusion form school – ties in with belonging stuff.</p>	<p>education but what about individual justice.</p> <p>Again interesting – although I found a little difficult – distinction between school reluctance – which they controlled for – defined as an inner feeling as opposed to the outer behaviour of refusal but said it correlated. I was not convinced the two are so distinct – and this was not really explored or evidenced enough.</p> <p><b>Limitations</b></p> <p>Does it look enough at causes of BJW? Or just imply it is innate in some?</p> <p>Is it suggesting perhaps that you should build it if you want to tackle school ‘refusal’ 0 if so – it is saying that acceptance is best way to be happy. Which sits uncomfortably with my understanding of social justice</p> <p>Questionnaire – inductive – directive</p> <p>I found the opening sentence off-putting so it was hard to read the rest of the paper neutrally:</p> <p>“School absenteeism represents a breach of school rules and societal norms. Thus, it can be interpreted as a form of students’ deviant behavior. Just-world researchers have shown that deviant behavior can be explained by individual differences in the need to behave justly, that means, belief in a just world.”</p>	
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				Do not recognise the concept of non attendance as deviant...	
Ekstrand, B. (2015). What it takes to keep children in school: a research review. Educational Review, 67(4), 459–482	Focus on return; no child voice	literature review of 155 peer reviewed articles published since 2000, including meta analyses and extended quantitative studies; so in fact the research covered goes back before 2000. She looked across different education systems in the UK, the US, Scandinavia, Hungary, Romania Turkey, Japan, Korea, Russia, Australia, Canada New Zealand and South Africa.	<p>Highlights how most research still focuses on causes and determinants and profiles, not interventions or methods of reintegration. She also has evidence of the ineffectiveness of sanctions and harsh penalties (Zhang 2004, 2007 and others) which resonates with much of the research that also includes child voice. Ekstrand also offers reintegration suggestions, citing Baker (2000) for example and the claim that attendance groups and rewarding children who choose school are far more effective measures. She also refers to the power of mentors (eg Sherman, 2012) and mentoring programmes as highlighted in the literature, such as those in Atlanta, New Orleans and Maryland, US, which ran big city-wide programmes responding to attendance crises and were very effective, particularly in Atlanta with early intervention. . Ekstrand also strike a note of caution and reminds us to remember that short-term effects may not be sustained long term (as she references the Hawthorne effect), and follow up is needed.</p> <p>Ekstrand discusses the literature that promotes organisational change as opposed to personal change, from a systemic perspective, such as the Chicago Community Adult Health Study which identified the importance of “structural changes in the surroundings”, and Reid’s two 2014 books which call on reorganisation in the school rather than in the young person. She seems to agree with Harvey (2003) that we are all busy investigating the children, but school is the biggest cause of absence.</p>	<p><b>Strengths</b></p> <p>Very broad and inclusive review of the 15 years pre publication</p> <p>Professes to be looking at what works.</p> <p>Powerfully and seductively written.</p> <p><b>Limitations</b></p> <p>The criteria for choosing the papers under review is not always very clear and the author admits that the review has come up against problems with definitions.</p> <p>Unfortunately, the definition problem is not just about cause, or semantics, it is also about understanding the current situation; it is unclear whether children have returned to school, attend occasionally, attend but do not engage, or do not attend at all in any given paper. It is also not always clear what age group the author, or the papers under review, are referring to.</p> <p>The author rightly highlights the impressive geographical and cultural reach of the work, but sweeps aside any critique of heterogeneity with the statement that the “similarities [of these cultures?] outweigh differences”. There are quite a few other sweeping statements in the text and it is not always clear which</p>	N

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				research they have been inspired by; for example: "If researchers in medicine were to invent an elixir that cured most diseases it would be education", or "The significance of the teacher is, as we all know, incontestable". Finally, and perhaps most dangerously, Ekstrand seems to come from a specific ideology (she talks of the cultural reproduction of school and highlights hidden agendas) but does not spell out her ontological position, hence her review cannot be helpfully positioned into a specific paradigm	
Ferrell, E. W., Nance, C. N., Torres, A. L., & Torres, S. M. (2014). Using participatory action research to address absenteeism. <i>Action Learning: Research &amp; Practice</i> , 11(2), 201–214.	I think there is no child voice.  Still haven't been able to find paper. 26.8.20 UEL recommended I go into British Library as they couldn't send e version due to copyright issues. Library currently closed. Have sent email 28.11.20. BL says I need to go in or pay £35...		<b>Abstract:</b> Many urban high schools serving low-income families have below-average attendance rates, which can indicate that fewer students are prepared to matriculate into college and career opportunities. Through the use of participatory action research (PAR), we--a group of four educators at Wilson High School-- have changed school policies and procedures in order to address our school's most problematic behavior: students cutting class. Through the processes and outcomes that our group, the Class Cutting Task Force, has experienced, we have called upon action learning (AL) in our focus on practical and experienced problems, and we have learned an important lesson: without clear and consistent school-wide expectations, our students cannot meet their potentials. Additionally, we have become empowered to drive a school-wide improvement initiative from the ground up by using the four-stage PAR process. It is our experience with the PAR process as a method of engagement in AL for school practitioners that we aim to share in this account of practice.		N
Grandison, K. J. (2011) School refusal and reintegration from short stay school to mainstream. EdD Special Educational Needs Thesis, University of Birmingham	Child voice and focus on return.	A small-scale research around a multi-case study approach.  Five secondary age YP who reintegrated into school following	<b>Findings underline the heterogeneous nature of cases and an experience of school refusal associated with intense emotions for the young people and their parents.</b>	<b>Strengths</b> Spoke to CYP themselves Also triangulated - holistic	Y

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		<p>'school refusal behaviour' and a period at a Short Stay School for key stage 3 and 4 pupils with mental health and medical needs. Also their mothers, the learning mentor from the Short Stay School and a mentor from the receiving mainstream school.</p> <p>Explores views about the nature of 'school refusal' and the perceived barriers and facilitators to re-integration</p>	<p>Change associated with school and home factors are implicated in school refusal as are factors including social anxiety, bullying, the child/parent dynamic and characteristics of the young person.</p> <p>School refusal is found to be a long-term matter requiring ongoing support even after reintegration.</p> <p>A lot on the nature of school refusal – interesting combined factors diagram pg 133</p> <p>V interesting on questioning how you judge what a successful reintegration is. P155</p> <p>More facilitators than barriers to reintegration identified:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Personalised approach to reintegration</li> <li>Phased reintegration</li> <li>Collaboration between parents and mentors (SSS) and school</li> <li>Positive attitude of young person to reintegration</li> <li>Young person helped to understand and cope with his/her emotions</li> <li>System of support in school clearly communicated to young person</li> <li>An identified key worker to support young person in school (non teaching)</li> <li>Collaboration and trust between mentors from SSS and school</li> <li>School (mentors) committed to providing on-going support for young person</li> <li>A clear focus on return to mainstream school communicated to young person and parents from beginning of placement at SSS</li> <li>Mentor from SSS maintains relationship with young person beyond initial stages of reintegration</li> <li>Young person trusts mentor from SSS</li> <li>Parent and young person effectively involved in planning reintegration</li> </ul> <p>Rather upsetting bit: Young Person Factors</p>	<p>All about reintegration. V Positive and strengths based.</p> <p>Powerfully reveals attitudes and perhaps preconceived impressions and ideas on behalf of staff / professionals to families with attendance difficulties. V respectful to include parents too in this case. Highlights their anxieties and concern.</p> <p>Highlights importance of ongoing care after initial reintegration.</p> <p>Limitations</p> <p>Does not explore what schools could do differently so much – more how YP can handle school better and be supported to do so. But I suppose the elements of the SSS that worked well for them are highlighted by implication – but apart from relationships, not suggested these should be replicated (smaller class sizes I am guessing etc). Is this my own issue or a genuine gap?</p> <p>Grandison worked at the school where she did the research and was on the management team so might have affected way participants spoke to her – with all best intentions. Also she herself admits may have been bringing prior knowledge in to interviews etc that a 'blind' researcher would not have.</p> <p>YP all defined as having mental health needs – outside / beyond their school refusal. Not significant enough to merit exclusion from my lit review but may have affected</p>	
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			<p>The theme 'Young Person Factors' relates to adult perceptions of the personality and behavioural characteristics of the individual young people who exhibit school refusal behaviours. Many of the observations of adult participants tended to suggest the existence of intrinsic characteristics which contributed to complex and entrenched situation regarding school refusal. Narrative quotes 27-34 suggest there may be a wilful aspect to the young people's school refusal behaviour, an idea on which there is debate in the literature (Pellegrini, 2007, Lauchlan 2003) and yet would seem to form part of the perception of most of the adult participants in this study. For some participants (mentors) there would appear to be an implied link between the young person's characteristics of stubbornness and manipulative behaviour with possible deficiencies in the parent to child relationship.</p>	<p>answers while only being a correlation not a causation /effect of situation.</p>	
<p>Gregory, I. R., &amp; Purcell, A. (2014). Extended school non-attenders' views: developing best practice. <i>Educational Psychology in Practice</i>, 30(1), 37–50.</p>	<p>Child voice; no focus on return</p>	<p>IPA</p> <p>School non attenders and families</p> <p>Five families (five mums and three young people)</p> <p>Semi structured interviews. Parent and child interviewed separately. Diff versions for each.</p> <p>Clear research qn: Can the views and experiences of extended school non-attenders and their families be elicited in order to inform best practice in Educational Psychology Services?</p>	<p>Reminds us of our statutory and legal duties as EPSs:</p> <p>"Since Kearney and Silverman's research on the different categories of extended school non-attendance in the 1990s, there has been an increased awareness of the importance of the child's voice and this is reflected in national and international legislation (Woolfson et al., 2008). The legislation highlights the duty professionals have to consult with children with matters that affect their lives. The Special Educational Needs Code of Practice (Department for Education and Skills, DfES, 2001) states that "all children should be involved in making decisions where possible right from the start of their education" (p. 28). EPs need to take an active role when considering recent legislative changes to ensure that the child's voice is obtained."</p> <p>Three families yp had received diagnoses after non attendance that might have been contributory. Anxiety, depression, Aspergers.</p> <p>Concluded each case is highly individual and needs to be approached in terms of systemic rather than within-child conceptualisation.</p>	<p><b>Strengths</b></p> <p>Spoke to CYP themselves as well as their families</p> <p>Explored 'rhetoric' around terminology</p> <p>Rare in literature to have such clear and loud child voice in a paper.</p> <p>Very clear around role of EP – very practical focus on what and how to do with the information we have.</p> <p>Eg: What are the function(s) served by school refusal? Kearney and Silverman (1993) put forward four categories: (1) Avoidance of specific school-based stimuli that provoke negative affectivity, for example, toilets, corridor.</p>	N

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			<p>Emerging themes: Being bullied, feeling blamed, being threatened with punitive action. V similar to Baker and Bishop the following year (2015)</p> <p>Parents feeling to blame.</p> <p>Parents and YP found it hard and upsetting to talk about. Noting positive in the experience. Despite getting some (various levels of ) support</p> <p>Label of school refuser found to be unhelpful.</p>	<p>(2) Escape from aversive social situations, for example, negative relationships with peers, teachers. (3) Attention-getting or separation anxious behaviour. This may be displayed by somatic complaints or tantrums where the child seeks to remain at home with the parent. (4) Rewarding experiences provided outside of school, for example, watching television, spending time with friends. Kearney goes on to describe how knowing the type or the function of school refusal can help inform the appropriate intervention. EPs should therefore aim to link the assessment of non-attendance to an intervention programme designed to address the presenting problems (Elliott &amp; Place, 1998).</p> <p><b>Limitations</b> The focus on allowing and exploring child voice meant conversations not necessarily guided towards a focus on return or on ideas on what could have supported them to stay.</p> <p>No focus on sense making by young people themselves.</p> <p>It should also be acknowledged that it is possible that this group had shared characteristics, such as a possible anti-establishment view of school or education, or particularly negative experiences they wanted to discuss. However, identifying such trends in a self-selected sample is very difficult.</p>	
Hancock, K. J., Gottfried, M. A., & Zubrick, S. R. (2018). Does the reason matter? How student-	Child voice; no focus on return	Analysed Longitudinal Study of Australian Children - big longitudinal	Adolescents whose most recent permitted absence was due to stress, anxiety or depression (64%), school or social problems (58%) or other reasons (26%) also	<b>Strengths</b>	N

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<p>reported reasons for school absence contribute to differences in achievement outcomes among 14–15 year olds. British Educational Research Journal, 44(1), 141–174.</p>		<p>data set looking with data drops through to teenage years.</p> <p>Their focus on it was to examine the reasons for school absence as reported by 14–15 year olds and how these reasons relate to achievement outcomes in Year 9.</p> <p>Used Linear regression models</p>	<p>reported higher levels of absence (i.e. more of them reported having seven or more permitted absences) compared with those who were absent due to illness (14%). This would indicate that while only 6% of adolescents said school-related problems were the reason behind their most recent absence, these do not necessarily reflect the proportion of all absences that can be attributed to each reason. As such, the proportion of absences that can be attributed to reasons like stress, tiredness or school problems is likely underestimated.</p> <p>Students whose most recent permitted absence was due to stress, anxiety or depression, school or social problems or other reasons had substantially and statistically significantly higher levels of almost all of the characteristics examined than students who had no absences</p> <p>Students whose most recent absence was due to tiredness were more likely than students with no absences to be in a single parent family (27% vs. 12%, <math>p &lt; 0.001</math>), have SEWB problem (26% vs. 13%, <math>p &lt; 0.01</math>), have ever skipped class (23% vs. 10%, <math>p &lt; 0.001</math>), report low school acceptance (29% vs. 22%, <math>p &lt; 0.05</math>), high rejection (28% vs. 16%, <math>p &lt; 0.001</math>) and low academic self-concept (24% vs. 15%, <math>p &lt; 0.05</math>).</p> <p>across all learning domains, the scores of adolescents who were absent due to illness, out-of-school activities, family events or tiredness were not statistically different from those who were never absent. Students who were absent due to stress, anxiety or depression had significantly lower prior numeracy scores in Year 7 than non-absent students (but not reading or spelling), with the difference equivalent to nearly half a standard deviation (0.23 vs. -0.23, <math>p &lt; 0.001</math>). Adolescents who were absent for family health or caring responsibilities, school or social problems or other reasons scored significantly lower on all learning domains than non-absent students</p>	<p>Makes distinction between authorised and non authorised, but includes both.</p> <p>Highlights importance of child voice, and uses a longitudinal data set that includes YP own responses and reporting on absence behaviours and reasons,</p> <p>Says if you don't understand the reasons kids miss school you can't provide right intervention / support.</p> <p><b>Limitations</b> But with data set - all the possible alternative answers pre-provided, so makes a huge amount of assumptions already. Valid ones maybe, based on literature, but still closed.</p> <p>Also – authors themselves say – not clear how many YP from disadvantaged backgrounds are represented in the survey particularly as time goes on – when they get older will they bother to reply / engage.</p> <p>No real focus on return; not strengths-based. No real learnings for practice. Kids still absent. Data all from last six months.</p> <p>Quite a lot of sympathy for school – implying things are outside their control but they are held responsible. But they accept that some of the reasons kids don't attend is because they are scared or unhappy or anxious at school.</p>	
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			<p>"This study found that most parents are aware of and sanction the absences of their 14–15 year old children. The majority of absences relate to family and student factors, suggesting that even though schools typically bear the responsibility for monitoring and responding to absenteeism, the drivers of absences among 14–15 year olds may not be factors that schools can realistically address alone. This study also showed that only some reasons for absence (e.g. family caring responsibilities, illness, stress, anxiety or depression) were problematic for achievement outcomes. Given that these absences will be both avoidable and unavoidable, addressing absenteeism requires a dual approach of preventing avoidable absence and mitigation strategies for when either avoidable or unavoidable absences occur. Schools require assistance from families, communities and support organisations to enable both prevention and mitigation strategies.</p>		
<p>Havik, T., Bru, E., &amp; Ertesvåg, S. K. (2015). <i>Assessing Reasons for School Non-attendance. Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research</i>, 59(3), 316–336.</p>	<p>Child voice; no focus on return</p>			<p><i>Spoke to CYP themselves</i></p>	<p>N</p>
<p>Havik, T., Bru, E., &amp; Ertesvåg, S.K. (2015b). School factors associated with school refusal- and truancy-related reasons for school non-attendance. <i>Social Psychology of Education: An International Journal</i>, 18 (2), 221–240</p>	<p>Child voice; no focus on return</p>	<p>investigation into students' perceptions of relationships with peers at school and teachers' classroom management and how they impact on school nonattendance – crucially looking at both school refusal-related and truancy-related non-attendance in the same paper. It drew on data from more than 3,000 young people in Norway who had been absent from school in the past three months.</p>	<p>Even so, it tells us that, with controls for emotional stability and relevant parental variables, poor relationships with peers at school could be an important risk factor for school refusal and could be a moderate risk factor for truancy.</p>	<p>Spoke to CYP themselves</p> <p>It was not clear how long that absence was so it may not class as persistent.</p> <p>It used structural equation modelling on answers from a questionnaire and has statistical significance and breadth, but it does not necessarily have rich explanatory voices.</p> <p>It is one of the few studies that pose truancy as an escape from a tricky situation at school, as opposed to a draw towards more 'juvenile delinquent' behaviour.</p> <p>No focus on return; not strengths based</p>	<p>N</p>



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Head, G., & Jamieson, S. (2006). Taking a Line for a Walk: Including School Refusers. Pastoral Care in Education, 24(3), 32–40	Child voice and focus on return.	Semi structured interviews Four pupils, two parents, and three teachers All at the same xxxx	Says that a shift from identifying as ‘school refuser’ to ‘effective learner’ is part of explanation for success in coping with school  Don’t expect linear progress – will go up and down	Spoke to CYP themselves  Strengths based and positive – took a bunch of kids who had been through a programme / approach and who were now engaged in school and asked them what worked. Wanted to make it sustainable – and to work for others too.  Positions school refusers firmly in SEBD camp – it’s thoughtful and trying to understand their problems, but also a bit medical model / within child? Except article does also seem to see importance of school shifts and approaches too.  Interesting discussion of terminology but I’m not sure it goes far enough – it still thinks they are ‘refusing’ which implies active choice.  Talks of changing culture of school re expectations – yes!!  Cons Very unclear what the ‘programme’ or ‘approach’ actually is!! Is it just the way these two professionals happen to work with children who are identified as school refusers? Or is it a specific scheme in as specific setting? They refer to themselves “as a busy department” – department of what?!?!?!? They seem to be describing themselves as Behaviour Support staff. They also talk of a ‘pupil support base’  Before the interview results there are some v v interesting claims but not supported w evidence.	Y
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How, K. (2015) Exploring the experiences and perceptions of Key Stage 4 students whose school attendance is persistently low (an interpretative phenomenological study). Professional Doctorate Thesis, University of Sheffield	Child voice; no focus on return.	Five students, Year 11 (3 m; 2 f) Semi structured interviews IPA	<p>Key questions</p> <p>What are YP experiences of becoming low attenders and how do they understand and give meaning to these experiences</p> <p>What are YP perceptions of barriers to regular attendance</p> <p>What are YP experiences of school transition</p> <p>What are goals and priorities</p> <p>Themes:</p> <p>Superordinate theme 1: Social and relational experience 94</p> <p>Superordinate theme 2: Passivity and lack of control 97</p> <p>Superordinate theme 3: Values, beliefs, motivations and priorities 100</p> <p>Superordinate theme 4: Personal competence, agency and control 101</p> <p>Superordinate theme 5: School systems and the establishment 103</p> <p>Superordinate theme 6: The emotional self</p>	<p><b>Strengths</b></p> <p>Spoke to CYP themselves</p> <p>Works hard to be inductive – but obviously has pre conceived assumptions about transition being key.</p> <p>Good detailed argument for IPA</p> <p>V interesting stuff in discussion re motivation:</p> <p>Cites the work of Ryan &amp; Deci (2000) when she explores the responses of one of her participants, Eden, who says he does not “like being educated [because he does not like] being told what to do” (p102). How was exploring the experiences and perceptions of five Year 11 students whose school attendance was persistently low. Ryan &amp; Deci talk of intrinsic motivation and how people need to have a sense of control, competence and autonomy if they are not to disengage from an activity such as learning and How argues that her research backs this up; with ‘personal competence, agency and control’ and ‘passivity and lack of control’ being two of the superordinate themes her Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis of the semi-structured interviews revealed. How worked very hard through these interviews to be inductive, not deductive, in her work and to let the pupils tell their own stories without pre-assumptions. She was originally asked to investigate mental health issues in low attenders, for example, but decided she did not want to presume within-child mental health difficulties as causal.</p>	N
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				<p>In relation to control, one of her participants, despite saying he hated being controlled, talks about the need for parents to “control” (p103) their children if society is going to run smoothly. How argues that this means the idea of school and control being optimum is so deeply engrained in society that it is even believed by those fighting against it, such as her participant Michael.</p> <p><b>Limitations</b> All mainly at home with levels of attendance still PA Not v strengths-based or positive.</p>	
<p>Keppens, G. &amp; Spruyt, B. (2017). The Development of Persistent Truant Behaviour: An Exploratory Analysis of Adolescents' Perspectives. Educational Research, 59 (3), 353-370</p>	<p>Child voice; no focus on return</p> <p>Looking at way truancy develops. In contexts and relationships.</p>	<p>Part of a larger study 20 adolescents from Flanders, Belgium</p> <p>Interviews Qualitative analysis.</p>	<p>Building on research saying truancy should be understood as a process of complex interactions between CYP, parents, peers, teachers and staff. Wants to add more research on these relationships vis a vis truancy.</p> <p>“What begins as occasional truancy can easily evolve into persistent truancy that eventually could lead to permanent non-attendance. For many of the interviewed pupils, the development of their truancy can best be described as ‘truant spirals’. Compared to the seemingly easy transition towards truanting for the first time, the narratives suggest that it is extremely difficult to curtail the pattern of persistent and intensifying truant behaviour.”</p>	<p><b>Strengths</b> Spoke to CYP themselves - Really rich accounts from CYP</p> <p>Looks at interactions, contexts, relationships Clear definitions and detail around methodology</p> <p><b>Limitations</b> Uses word “truant” ... Not v strengths-based Doesn’t really explore relationships as much as it says it will – talks of disengagement more.</p>	N
<p>Kljakovic, M., &amp; Kelly, A. (2019). Working with school-refusing young people in Tower Hamlets, London. Clinical Child Psychology &amp; Psychiatry, 24(4), 921–933</p>	<p>Focus on return; no child voice</p> <p>Exploring local context of Tower Hamlets PRU and the YP on an individual tuition programme – who can’t be at</p>	<p>Mixed methods design</p> <p>quantitative data from a subset of young people seen within a Pupil Referral Unit (PRU)</p> <p>Qualitative group interviews with professionals who work with the CYP</p>	<p>“Professionals reported that these young people were highly complex in terms of their needs and presentation and that there is a lack of clarity around what causes these young people to withdraw. They agreed that a more intensive multi-layered intervention was required to meet their needs. Interventions that include gradual socialisation, parental involvement and which address the role of technology were indicated. However, more research is needed to clarify how to effectively intervene.”</p>	<p><b>Strengths</b> Looks at a disadvantaged / marginalised group with little voice and tries to understand their experience V relevant and important issues for YP and community of Tower Hamlet Broad mix of professionals involved – PRU, CAMHS and LA Inclusion</p>	N

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	school – wanting to get understanding of why they had withdrawn from school and what could be done to help reintegrate			<p>Group – good for them to be working / thinking together on this</p> <p>Clear methodology and measures etc</p> <p>Interesting and positive suggestions for intervention – interesting around hope and intensity and perseverance etc</p> <p>Most of the limitations I found the researchers also identified – v reflective.</p> <p><b>Limitations</b></p> <p>Allows professionals to speak on behalf of CYP – understand that CYP v socially withdrawn but would be good to hear from them.</p> <p>Group interviews can mean everyone starts agreeing with each other – good for time, but could there be richer more granular stuff if interviewed individually?</p> <p>Findings presented as fact – potentially troubling when professionals already have more power than families that first finding is families are the problem??</p>	
Lauchlan, F. (2003). Responding to Chronic Non-attendance: a review of intervention approaches. Educational Psychology in Practice, 19(2), 133.	<p>Focus on return; no child voice</p> <p>Review of others' interventions</p>	An overview of research and interventions on the topic	<p>distinction between school refusal and truancy has been used to identify pupils' reasons for not attending school.</p> <p>But chronic non-attendance is heterogeneous</p> <p>there is a continuum of non-attendance behaviour. CYP may demonstrate characteristics of truancy and refusal</p> <p>Functional analysis, looking at <b>reasons</b> for non attendance may be better focus.</p> <p>There are currently too few systematic evaluations of the interventions</p> <p>individualised intervention programmes seem best at the moment.</p> <p>And importance of multi-systems approach</p>	<p><b>Strengths</b></p> <p>V interesting. Useful around role of EP</p> <p>So much information on all the different sorts of interventions and approaches around, and the reasons behind them</p> <p>Challenges long-held distinctions</p> <p>Promotes idea there is a reason to CYP behaviour – and this should be explored</p> <p>Systemic in its view of interventions</p> <p><b>Limitations</b></p> <p>It's not new research, and there is not a clear systematic review of the literature – so sort of a very</p>	N

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				impressive and detailed opinion piece. But fascinating nonetheless Challenges distinction between truant and refuser then continues to use them....	
Maynard, B. R., Heyne, D., Brendel, K. E., Bulanda, J. J., Thompson, A. M., & Pigott, T. D. (2018). Treatment for School Refusal Among Children and Adolescents. <i>Research on Social Work Practice</i> , 28(1), 56–67.	Focus on return; no child voice	Systematic review of literature and quantitative meta analysis of RCTs and “quasi-experimental studies” That looked at effect of psychosocial treatments on anxiety or attendance  Led to 8 studies and 435 CYP	More effects in attendance than anxiety with such treatments  Asks whether increased attendance might however lead to decreased anxiety longer term.	<b>Strengths</b> Good background and clear justification Clear methodology Rigorous and v transparent Global and broad cultural inclusion – included China and Kuwait as well as euro/Us centric countries Strengths based – what is working  <b>Limitations</b> Very within child Were different education systems of different papers considered enough? Was it too medical model? Although did include talking therapies and counselling Strange to lump altogether? Assumed anxiety and attendance almost identical issues? Lots of CBT (not a bad thing per se but not v systemic)	N
McDermott, E. R., Donlan, A. E., Zaff, J. F., & Prescott, J. E. (2016). A psychometric analysis of hope, persistence, and engagement among reengaged youth. <i>Journal of Psychoeducational Assessment</i> , 34(2), 136–152	Focus on return; no child voice  Looking at ‘dropouts’ Examining motivation and testing validity of two scales that it says contribute to this – measures of hope (Snyder et al 1991) and persistence (Wrosch et al 2000).	Online survey administered at an academic reengagement program  More than a thousand youth across two surveys. 12-22 years age group. Average 17 years.	Found a positive relation between the AHS, PGS, and measures of cognitive and emotional engagement. Implications and future directions are discussed	Dropouts – no longer on a mainstream roll – but they have reengaged and so it is worth listening to their voices in this context. But they are not returning to a mainstream setting so some of the barriers / issues will be significantly different.  <b>Strengths</b> Points out positives to society made by youths reengaging – (Catterall 2022) It values and marks uniqueness of young people who have managed to reengage with education. Acknowledges	N

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	And also To what extent are these measures of hope and persistence related to academic engagement among reengaged youth, including relations among first- and secondorder latent factors?			<p>“How youth think about their goals and their strategies for pursuing these goals is shaped by their <b>lived experiences</b>.” [my emphasis]</p> <p><b>Limitations</b> The article’s purpose is in large part about validating (or not) scales of hope (Snyder et al 1991) and persistence (Wrosch et al 2000) for re-engaged youth – more perhaps than actually looking at the youth – ie they have already decided that hope and persistence are the issues to focus on in reengaged youth, before talking to them. Does article look enough at outside factors that influence hope and persistence – or is it quite within-cyp? Much talk of “internal strengths” – without defining what exactly they mean by this.</p>	
Mortimer, E. (2018) Going back to school following a period of extended school non-attendance: What do secondary-aged young people and their parents find supportive? An Appreciative Inquiry Professional Doctorate Thesis, University of Bristol	Child voice and focus on return.	Four semi-structured interviews were conducted with two YP and three parents. Thematic analysis was used to identify five themes from interview data.	<p>The findings of the current study offer an in-depth understanding of the importance of trusting relationships in situations of ESNA and suggest that these underpin other aspects of support perceived to be helpful.</p> <p>Findings also suggest that notions of ‘success’ in cases of ESNA should encompass the emotional well-being of YP.</p> <p>Discover phase What kids said was useful:</p> <p>1.Supportive relationships (peers, qualities of key adults, understanding emotional and potential legal impact of their ESNA, availability of key adults, others taking a holistic view of YP)</p> <p>2.Practical support and a sense of control and agency (gradual and a flexible return to school, having a space in school, managing worries relating to the practicalities of a return).</p>	<p><b>Strengths</b></p> <p>Spoke to CYP themselves, as well as parents</p> <p>Strengths-based.</p> <p>Expressly looking at what others might find helpful in the future</p> <p>Develops an appreciative model of support – showing how those in this study were supported (success assumed because back in school) p134</p> <p>Offers recommendations for ed psychs, local authorities and other researchers</p> <p>V good clear rationale for recruitment of participants</p>	Y

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			<p>Parents also said Supportive relationships, and practical support, but with slight differences.</p> <p>Dream phase What kids said they wanted for others in future: 1.Supportive relationships (more peer ones and, greater availability of others) 2.Support to make sense of experiences of ESNA 3.Practical Support (flexible return and managing worries)</p> <p>Parents: Supportive relationships with other parents Further understanding of parental experiences Practical support</p> <p>Other perceptions that came up from the data / interviews: Professionals seeing ESNA as easily fixed – if they could just unearth what subject it was, or friend etc causing the problem. A focus on the physical return – but this may not feel successful to the child. The ongoing nature of difficulties.</p>	<p>Clear definition of terms – eg success and trust</p> <p>Limitations So tantalising to go through first two stages and then not have last two – really want it delivered!!!!</p>	
Nuttall, C., & Woods, K. (2013). Effective intervention for school refusal behaviour. Educational Psychology in Practice, 29(4), 347–366	Child voice and focus on return.	<p>Two explanatory case studies design – to explore / inquire about a phenomenon within its real life context. Specifically looking for ‘critical success factors’</p> <p>Age Yr 8 &amp; 9 Both female</p> <p>One returned to mainstream, one to AP</p> <p>One parent families</p> <p>Looking at interventions – one CBT but other systemic. Lots of other agencies involved inc CAMHS</p>	<p>Key findings / points Fourteen themes (!) common to both cases. Eight more just Case 1 and Four just case 2. Also both cases acknowledged that interaction of factors was a theme – no one thing was successful in isolation. Intervention not a quick fix. Significant (how much?) time and money / resources spent on various strategies implemented at various levels.</p> <p>Themes in four clusters.</p> <p>Cluster one – Psychological factors “Developing feelings of safety, security and belonging” (seemed to be mainly feeling safe from unkind or difficult peers). Small safe spaces, with no pressure to talk. Eg lunchtime clubs or smaller classes etc. “Confidence, self esteem and value”, Making young people feel special. Unique – with own identity that is admired by others too. Personalised Rewards, responsibility.</p>	<p>Strengths Case-study approach gives depth and multi-perspective outcomes. Eight interviews per case including CYP themselves and also parents and professionals and some case records etc etc. Successful cases – can explore ‘critical success factors’ retrospectively. In local authority where issue is highlighted as a priority – so real world relevance and importance Long term success – ie more than a term Thematic analysis of semi structured interviews. Bottom up / inductive approach – allowing themes to emerge from data (with caveat that researchers understood their active role in identifying and reporting themes).</p>	Y

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			<p>"Aspiration and motivation". Common to both. [Being able to visualise and conceive of a future that follows from school perhaps?] Both talked of it. Case 2 responded to learning that was meaningful and relevant. [nb link to hope and perseverance]</p> <p>Cluster two – Support for psychological factors. Seems to be biggest (most populated) cluster!</p> <p>"Positive nurturing approach" – the ethos of the school. Person centred. Positive and solution focused approach of school. Staff welcoming and positive on return and accepting of current educational levels.</p> <p>"Positive experiences" at home and school.</p> <p>Friendships. Common interest with peers. Leah says developing friendships impr confidence. Building on strengths and interests. Leah allowed more of this because in a provision with high adult: student ratio [but could this nor be replicated in mainstream?].</p> <p>Positive experiences w family – not just routine / tasks to get through day.</p> <p>"Believing in Leah" (L says her mum never gave up on her) / "encouragement and positive attention" – peers making contact to show missed and still thought of.</p> <p>"Taking interest in the young person as a whole".</p> <p>Positive individualised personal feedback. Contact even when not in. Personalised rewards based on interests. Remembering things CYP has said. Being "personally noticed" for positive reasons.</p> <p>"Making a positive contribution" Scored v highly!</p> <p>increased participation at school, giving the young person an opportunity to express their views and feel listened to, promoting independence and autonomy through giving them choice and control, and involving them in decision-making through collaboratively developing realistic targets. [not clear if any of this is felt by kids or just profs and parents]</p> <p>"A flexible and individualised approach to ensure preparation for, and access to, learning". Highly prominent but no evidence from the CYP perspective!</p> <p>Included things like flexible /reduced timetable, individualised around need, partic in subjects they found hard etc. Not doing too much too soon. Variety of activities etc. Catching up missed work without pressure. Understanding barriers to learning.</p> <p>"Supporting social interaction and communication".</p> <p>Calm, relaxing environment and support for problem</p>	<p>Data indep coded by another EP and reviewed with other EP.</p> <p>Limitations</p> <p>Only two cases. Not many to base a model on. And one not actually returned to mainstream. In alternative provision. But def successful – is there 100% and had been 0 % before intervention.</p> <p>Return / attendance only had to be above 80%</p> <p>All the indep coding and reviewing was not with the children – I don't think they were asked if it accurately represented the stories they thought they'd told. EPs have v specific position. Paradigm.</p> <p>Researchers admit that gathering the data during the intervention period as opposed to after would have ensured no other narratives would have had time to be constructed by those involved.</p> <p>Confused approach – partly constructionist and partly critical realist – went so far as to probe interviewees to link their perceptions and explanations with facts and events observed by others.</p> <p>No quotes from CYP themselves.</p> <p>Not clear what is their opinion and what someone else's – or at least shared by them and an other. Is coding rating only highly prevalent if child has also said it? le often said things like "xx was important for both girls" and not clear if this was because they had said so or someone else had.</p>	
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			<p>solving w peers. Leah said she didn't like big groups and AP was not "overpowering". Support for journeys to and from school. Not wanting to be "alone on the bus" (Amy) or being taken to door of school to avoid confrontation w peers (Leah).</p> <p>"Developing Amy's understandings of thoughts, feelings and behaviour".</p> <p>Cluster three – Factors supporting the family</p> <p>"Meeting needs of family" highly prominent. But no clear CYP voice.</p> <p>"Positive working relationships w family" highly prominent. But no clear CYP voice. Nb interesting that Leah mum disengaged when prosecuted for L non attendance, and then reengaged with new attendance officer and devd more positive view of education. Attendance officer nurturing and supportive approach – taking to meetings, talking after. Family said having someone they could contact that they trusted. Making parent part of decision-making process.</p> <p>Support with parenting - around boundaries / firmness (Leah) but also consistency and not putting parenting onto kids (Amy). Identifying range of needs within family and supporting whole fam. Further developing parenting skills. (not clear parents said this themselves...)</p> <p>Cluster four – role of professionals and systems</p> <p>Most of these themes seemed to have emerged from the interviews with the professionals themselves. But they are pertinent and enlightening all the same as they promote holistic and flexible approaches and trusting relationships and perseverance and commitment on the part of professionals. Also collaborative working between professionals.</p> <p>[Relationships and Systems – networks. My stuff here from group processes]</p> <p>Using a Family Support Model to support effective multiagency approach.</p> <p>Avoiding harsh consequences and avoiding prosecution felt to be imp by some professionals, equally others felt that threat of fines had kept Leah's mum on track and realising she had to engage. (...)</p> <p>Regular monitoring, reviewing and celebrating progress – keeping progress transparent and</p>		
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			<p>motivational through rewards and feedback and praise etc</p> <p>A key adult who was available and constant in school was important for both girls. An area to access learning mentor and the flexibility and autonomy of that person (clearly not CYP view) to respond to need made "huge difference".</p> <p>A whole school approach. Support from SLT and office staff.</p> <p>Discussion – highlights how successful intervention extends beyond child factors to interacting contextual and family variables. Positive Relationships. Responding to need of families. Signif role for professionals and systems.</p> <p>Complexity relates to Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory which looks at behaviour as a system embedded within a specific context (Ayers, Clarke and Murray, 2000). [nb One family revealed to be a traveller family half way through the results. This was the family who had experienced more harsh / punitive treatment from previous attendance officers and been prosecuted twice. Does this context need to be brought out more fully in the study? Hard as a researcher you want to be neutral but you also need to be aware of all bias there might be by those in your research. On both sides. The discussion did not mention this at all.]</p> <p>They propose a model – influenced by Bronf eco's – which incorporates as systems the four main areas identified by the research: psych factors, support for psych factors, factors supporting the fam, and the role of professionals and systems (See Fig 1, pg xx in Introduction). They also incorporate Maslow's (1943) thinking around hierarchy of need, and present psych factors at the level of the child at the core and as being a basic need that must be met before learning or further actualisation can occur.</p> <p>Researchers talk of how various other themes from other levels of the model are related to the development of the psych factors at the core. This they call the Ecological Model of Successful Reintegration.</p> <p>Implications for evidence-based practice and research – they says the model illustrates different potential areas / levels where intervention can be used. They</p>		
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## U1825071 NARRATIVE EXPLORATION OF PERSISTENT ABSENCE AND RETURN

			<p>explain and explore (caveat?) that what works in one context may not work in another. But say that understanding this through this model could help in identifying early intervention opportunities and help to explore more non mental health based interventions.</p> <p>Claims it was explanatory case study – showing mechanisms and context for effective practice. Providing detail on how solutions can be implemented – more perhaps than ‘what.’ Adds to body of info collated by research practitioners (Miller and Frederckson 2006) for comparing and contrasting across diff complex settings to build knowledge on potential successes. [so are we now just waiting for a lit review to tell us all what to do??? Who is doing the collating? Fair enough].</p> <p>“Further evidence from similar cases of intervention for school refusal would consolidate understanding of the analytic generalisability of the ecological model proposed from the present research (Yin, 2009).”</p>		
<p>Place, M., Hulsmeier, J., Davis, S., Taylor, E., &amp; Maurice Place, J. H. S. D. and E. T. (2002). The coping mechanisms of children with school refusal . Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs, 2(2).</p>	<p>Child voice; no focus on return</p>	<p>17 families of YP aged 12-15 Six were girls Participants defined as school refusers with referral to LA No signif conduct probs</p> <p>Semi structured interviews with families</p> <p>Adolescent Coping Scale (ACS) (<a href="#">Frydenberg &amp; Lewis, 1993</a>),</p> <p>Parents mental health assessed w 30-item General Health Questionnaire (GHQ).</p> <p>Family relationships explored with the Family Adaptability and Cohesion Evaluation Scales (FACES II) (<a href="#">Olson, Portner &amp; Bell, 1982</a>),</p>	<p>Suggests that bullied youth with less well-developed problem-solving skills are at greater risk for developing SR.</p> <p>“The findings raise the question as to whether there is a connection between social isolation and poor socialisation in the aetiology of school refusal, and suggest a possible mechanism by which such problems are compounded by enmeshed family relationships. This work also indicates that some protection against the need to refuse school can be gained by establishing good social relationships, focusing upon improving coping strategies and increasing the young person's sense of belonging.”</p>	<p><b>Strengths</b> Included CYP themselves and their families and looked at relationships and mental health etc A lot of information and detailed results Interviews bring out powerfully non family issues such as isolation and bullying Interesting suggestions around interventions – both creative and detailed and rooted in research and literature Interesting around poor self image and self esteem.</p> <p><b>Limitations</b> It felt a little like it was trying too hard to be positivist and quantitative – with all the questionnaires – I felt it lost a bit of the human in doing so and was a bit confusing. But may just be me. Participants identified by LA / school – already seen as</p>	N

## U1825071 NARRATIVE EXPLORATION OF PERSISTENT ABSENCE AND RETURN

				problematic and much reasoning deductive – eg looking at mental health	
Shillock, G. G . (2010) Investigating the factors associated with emotionally-based non-attendance at school from young people's perspective. Professional Doctorate Thesis, University of Birmingham	Child voice; no focus on return	Semi structured Interviews - with Personal Construct Psych lens Three girls experiencing EBSA who it was thought – by others – might get more entrenched	Highlights what she terms 'the dominance of clinical and adult discourses', which pathologises this behavior, and the need to explore young people's subjective accounts of their school refusal experiences, as opposed to only depending on professional and/or adult-based discourses.	<b>Strengths</b> Spoke to CYP themselves Rich data Good justification of research Good reflexivity Actively trying to give access to 'hidden cohort' Constructivist and interpretivist  <b>Limitations</b> Small sample size, all female Unclear about this EBSA now but might be more entrenched EBSA later.	N
Smith, M. L. (2014) Exploring narratives of young people's experiences of excessive school absenteeism. Professional Doctorate Thesis, University of Sheffield	Child voice and focus on return.	Explores the narratives of four young people who have experienced excessive school absenteeism. Applied Labov's approach of identifying sequences and structural parts within the story, adapted from the work of Patterson (2008) and Riessman (2008). She said she was looking to identify key experiences that stood out for young people themselves. Then interpreted significant themes with hope of being able to explore ways in which professionals can use these accounts The young people within this study all attended a unit specifically established for young people with severe anxiety related to attending school	<b>Key points</b>  Smith mentions Riessman (2008) who says that people can start to create some sort of order in their life through telling stories about difficult times, and that this can help them begin to explore meaning.  Smith highlights importance of first-person narrative for helping professionals - in pinpointing areas ripe for intervention, and also for pinpointing areas that are going well and therefore might be good to build on.  Amelia's narrative also showed that she made positive meaning from narrative itself – she reported that her counselling sessions were positive for her mood and anxiety. Smith suggests professionals look at narrative as a form of talk within school context for those who display excessive school absenteeism – (although if excessive would they be in??).  For professionals, narrative as a form of talk could be used within the school context with young people displaying excessive school absenteeism. For the person hearing that young person's story, it is o.k. for them to be non-directive, non-instructive and non-advice giving. Amelia's narrative has highlighted that simply having someone who she was able to talk to	<b>Strengths</b>  Gives so much space to the young people's narratives. Direct speech about all areas – not just summarised with quotes around pre-decided themes (prob a bit harsh to others). I'm not sure she states this explicitly but I would say a powerful thing is that all the research seems to agree that school absenteeism is a heterogenous issue, and therefore we can't just have huge broad programmes of one size fits all, but without the young people's stories themselves you don't really understand what this means – its just data on socio demographics or causes or labels, so you revert to large one size programmes. Smith's narratives bring to life the heterogeneity so it cannot be ignored.	Y

			<p>about her problems, who showed an interest and listened to her, was helpful in itself.</p> <p>Amelia's constructed / stated / narrated experience highlight Purcell and Tseverik (2008)'s 'interplay' of factors that contributes to excessive school absenteeism.</p> <p>"complex series of interconnected experiences within her home and school life... Throughout her narrative she found it difficult to differentiate between the two social situations. There appeared to be a complicated relationship between what was going on in her home life and the amount of discontinuity and change there was in her school life... Within her narrative she positions herself as someone who was not in control or powerless about what was happening to her. Her emotional state of mind was an ongoing response to a continuous set of difficult social circumstances."</p> <p>Smith highlights how although DSM would have diagnosed anxiety and a GP could have responded with medication for the physical symptoms – that would not have got underneath the surface without Amelia's narrative. A's difficulties were also connected to wider social issues – brother in prison, having to move school because family breakdown, school belonging – when it was good she could stay, when not she couldn't. importance of friendships etc . Parental stress / inability to listen. Disruption.</p> <p>Smith highlights importance of first person narrative in pinpointing areas ripe for intervention, and also for pinpointing areas that are going well and therefore might be good to build on.</p> <p>Key themes around <i>Beyond within child factors</i> Specifically anxiety – looking at the resulting anxiety felt by the YP as coming from external situations, rather than a problem w child per se.</p> <p><i>Difficulties managing change</i> Home, transition between schools, friendships /social groups. Disrupted education</p>	<p>"Research states that social isolation, poor peer relationships and breakdowns within the family can all lead to excessive school absenteeism however, there is little detail given as to <i>how</i> this leads to excessive school absenteeism." [my emphasis]</p> <p>This is important for the practitioner, because when you get a sense of what that means for the young person, then you begin to appreciate that there are some clues about how to move their situation forward.</p> <p>Beautiful:</p> <p>Winnicott (1971) wrote:</p> <p>My claim is that if there is a need for this double statement, there is also a need for a triple one: the third part of the life of a human being, a part that we cannot ignore, is an intermediate area of experiencing, to which inner reality and external life both contribute. It is an area that is not challenged, because no claim is made on its behalf except that it shall exist as a resting-place for the individual engaged in the perpetual human task of keeping inner and outer reality separated yet interrelated. (p.2)</p> <p>The boundary between the 'internal' and the 'external' is porous when looking at excessive school absenteeism.</p>	
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# U1825071 NARRATIVE EXPLORATION OF PERSISTENT ABSENCE AND RETURN

			<p>Managing change helped by string group of friends, if that broke down v difficult. Secure friendships acted as protective factor.</p> <p><i>Behaviour as communication</i> Each YP found it hard to articulate and talk about difficulties. Came through in behaviours. Misunderstood by the adults around them as physical sinus problems, attention-seeking, anger issues etc. Or just dismissed. Professionals need to listen, to stay curious. All said having person to talk to was important and helped.</p>	<p><b>Limitations</b> Only four kids. So hard to say generalisable. All girls. All w high levels of anxiety – in a specific setting for not being able to attend school. But at least in a setting. Obviously as with all narrative work there is element of interpretation. She highlights this herself “Bruner (2004) cautions us to be careful about defacing stories through our own intentions as the narrator. Through using a reflexive approach, I am very much mindful of interpretive issues. My very presence, the way in which I listen and the questions I ask, helps to shape the stories that are told. I am very aware of my influence and the influences of others in the co-construction of these stories, as all narratives have the potential for multiple readings.”</p>	
Southwell, N. (2006). Truants on truancy - a badness or a valuable indicator of unmet special educational needs? British Journal of Special Education, 33(2), 91–97.	Child voice; no focus on return	<p>Literature review</p> <p>Drawing on his own experience and his research into the perspectives of truants,</p>	<p>“Reveals a complex and contradictory picture. Policy and practice to date have, however, tended to be united in locating responsibility for truancy with truants and their families.”</p> <p>Says we need a radically different approach.</p> <p>Truancy can be seen as a key indicator of unmet educational needs and that the issue of truancy will not be addressed effectively until policy makers, practitioners and researchers learn to listen to the voices of truants themselves.</p>	<p><b>Strengths</b> Southwell experienced truancy himself so an authentic approach with huge validity Powerfully written Can juxtapose statements of others with his own reality – crucial for forcing professionals out of assumptions and positions</p> <p><b>Limitations</b> V ‘truant’ focused Researcher bias – enough reflexivity? At times v emotional and personal – powerful – but bias Eg:</p>	N

## U1825071 NARRATIVE EXPLORATION OF PERSISTENT ABSENCE AND RETURN

				<p>“Reid (2002) fears that truants are attracted to mate with each other and then bring up their children in anti-school homes to form truant families. He may be right. I have no children yet, but my partner and I both truant regularly from school and we are certainly very critical of many aspects of our schools, in conversation. For us, truancy is the resistance of an oppression, a criticism of certain aspects of our schools and is connected to our powerlessness to effect change. As truants we have a very different understanding of truancy than that which policymakers try to impose upon us.”</p>	
<p>Wilkins, J. (2008). School characteristics that influence student attendance: Experiences of students in a school avoidance program. <i>The High School Journal</i>, 12-24.</p>	<p>Child voice and focus on return. YP who had previously ‘refused’ school but were now ‘willingly’ attending an alternative provision.</p>	<p>One female and three male students grades 8-11 at AP in SAP (school avoidance programme for CYP with school-related anxiety or fearfulness) Had transferred after significant periods of absence from previous schools. Not classified as having a disability.</p>	<p>YP in her study reported that aspects of the academic environment, school climate, relationships with teachers and discipline had related to their improved attendance.</p>	<p><b>Strengths</b></p> <p>Spoke to CYP themselves Checked back her analysis with the young people Did interviews inductively (after initial one) and over a period of time so that narratives could be checked Focused on a positive situation and what to learn from it Clear suggestions for practitioners (although maybe not v realistic!)</p> <p><b>Limitations</b> Not clear what analytical method used for interviews Not clear what epistemological or ontological position researcher came from Researcher teacher in school where children were attending – had preconceived ideas about what made it successful but also maybe impacted CYP ability to tell truth / be honest?</p>	Y

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				<p>Unclear whether CYP had SEN or not – I think not although there is a reference at one point to them being allowed to be admitted because of an SEN. Not clear what eleven of SEND other CYP in the school have,</p> <p>No indepth consideration (except for positives around inclusion and tolerance and smaller class sizes) of what it may mean for CYP with no SEN to be sent to a school for CYP with SEN. Does this affect the meaning they make of their experiences of persistent absenteeism.</p> <p>Not clear on terminology. Uses phobia and refusal interchangeably and says not looking at truancy but talks a lot about and makes a case for it not being seen differently. Overall unclear and no replicable in any way.</p>	
<p>Yoneyama, S. (2000). Student Discourse on Tokokyohi (School Phobia/Refusal) in Japan: burnout or empowerment? British Journal of Sociology of Education, 21(1), 77–94.</p>	<p>Child voice; no focus on return</p> <p>Looks in great detail at the subjective accounts of the experiences of 'tôkôkyohi' (which is translated as school refusal and / or phobia) in Japan.</p>	<p>Analyses four types of adult discourses around the issue in the literature:</p> <p>: the psychiatric (t6k6kyohi as mental illness); the behavioural (ttk kyohi as laziness); citizens' (ttk6kyohi as resistance to school); and socio-medical (t6k kyohi as physical and psychological burnout).</p> <p>Then compares them with student discourse drawn from autobiographical accounts of t6tkkyohi.</p>	<p>This paper argues that t6tkkyohi is a process in which students who burn out in the extremely demanding and alienating school system try to empower themselves in their search for subjectivity.</p> <p>Yoneyama points out that the causes of school non-attendance are likely to be different in different cultures and references work by Lansdown (1990) and Young et al. (1990) who talk of the fact that children 'reject' (Young et al., 1990a, p. 4) school in a context, and that context includes the schools themselves and the approach to education and schooling in their society. It is this that needs analysis. Yoneyama goes on to describe Japanese society as valuing education to the point that young people feel academic grades directly predict future family happiness.</p> <p>Yoneyama then details the discourses (from adults / others) in Japanese society around Tôkôkyohi as a way of explaining why the young people themselves need to be able to contribute to this discourse and be heard.</p>	<p><b>Strengths</b></p> <p>Spoke to CYP themselves</p> <p>So powerfully and beautifully written</p> <p>Culturally important – and fascinating – to understand issue from other cultural perspectives.</p> <p>Could be relevant – we are all human</p> <p><b>Limitations</b></p> <p>Not really replicable</p> <p>Not really looking at interventions or return or reengagement</p> <p>Enough reflexivity and awareness of opinion / bias?</p>	N



			There is a 'within-child' camp (Pellegrini, 2007) that uses a psychiatric discourse, that sees Tôkôkyohi as a mental illness, where the child has failed to adjust and adapt to society, or a behavioural discourse, that sees Tôkôkyohi as laziness, a fault of the student and a sign of underlying socially-deviant behavior, which can be remedied within behavior training and increased discipline. Then there is a 'systemic construction' (Pellegrini, 2007), which includes a "Citizens' discourse", viewing Tôkôkyohi as resistance to school, where the school system is the problem and the society of which school is a part, and a socio-medical discourse, viewing Tôkôkyohi as school burnout with genuine physical medical impact. Again, cause is attributed, Yonehama says, to the social structure of schools, not the individual student.		

#### B.4 Which papers were included in the final critical literature review

<b>INCLUDED</b> Paper has a strengths-based focus on return and listens to and includes the voice of the child or young person	<b>NOT INCLUDED</b> Paper has a strengths-based focus on return but does NOT adequately include the voice of the child or young person	<b>NOT INCLUDED</b> Paper listens to and includes the voice of the child or young person, but does not have a strengths-based approach and does not focus on return.
<b>Beckles (2014)</b>	Brouwer-Bourghuis et al (2019)	Attwood and Croll (2006)
<b>Davies and Lee (2006)</b>	Browne (2019)	Baker and Bishop (2015)
<b>Grandison (2011)</b>	Childs and Grooms (2018)	Billington (2016)

<b>Head and Jamieson (2006)</b>	Ekstrand (2015)	Donat et al (2018)
<b>Mortimer (2018)</b>	Kljakovic and Kelly (2019)	Gregory and Purcell (2014)
<b>Nuttall and Woods (2013)</b>	Lauchlan (2003)	Hancock et al (2018)
<b>Smith (2014)</b>	Heyne et al (2015)	Havik et al (2015, 2015b)
<b>Wilkins (2008)</b>	McDermott et al (2015)	How (2015)
		Keppens and Spruyt (2017)
		Place et al (2004)
		Shivlock (2010)
		Southwell (2006)
		Yoneyama (2000)

**Final Eight:**

Beckles, C. (2014.) An exploration of the perceptions and experiences of non-attenders and school staff within a secondary school context. Professional Doctorate Thesis, Institute of Education, University of London.

Davies, J. D., & Lee, J. (2006). To Attend or Not to Attend? Why Some Students Chose School and Others Reject It. *Support for Learning*, 21(4), 204–209.

Grandison, K. J. (2011). School refusal and reintegration from short stay school to mainstream. EdD Special Educational Needs Thesis, University of Birmingham.

Head, G., & Jamieson, S. (2006). Taking a Line for a Walk: Including School Refusers. *Pastoral Care in Education*, 24(3), 32–40.  
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0122.2006.00377.x>

Mortimer, E. (2018). Going back to school following a period of extended school non-attendance: What do secondary-aged young people and their parents find supportive? An Appreciative Inquiry Professional Doctorate Thesis, University of Bristol.

Nuttall, C., & Woods, K. (2013). Effective intervention for school refusal behaviour. *Educational Psychology in Practice*, 29(4), 347–366.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/02667363.2013.846848>

Smith, M. L. (2014). Exploring narratives of young people's experiences of excessive school absenteeism. Professional Doctorate Thesis, University of Sheffield.

Wilkins, J. (2008). School characteristics that influence student attendance: Experiences of students in a school avoidance program. *The High School Journal*, 91 (3), 12-24



## Appendix C

### University Ethics Approval: Original and amendments

#### C.1 Original 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:** Hebba Haddad

**SUPERVISOR:** Helena Bunn

**STUDENT:** Helen Barron Williams

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

**Title of proposed study:** A narrative inquiry into the lived experience of persistent absenteeism among children who have since returned to mainstream school

#### 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)*

2

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

2.4 - UEL assignment submission date has not been included.

6.4 - you say the research is taking place off campus (in a school), you will need to complete a risk assessment for and include it in the ethics submission.

9.4 - you say that your research involved local authorities and schools: and you will be collecting data at the school. The form states that written permission from the organisation is needed in the Appendix.

**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 *Helen Barron Williams:*

Student number: u1825071

Date: 4.3.20

*(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~~/ NO

**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):* Hebba Haddad

**Date:** 26.02.2020

*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 UEL's Personal Accident & Travel Insurance Policy, please see the Ethics Folder in the Psychology Noticeboard

**C.2 Request for amendment**

**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](mailto: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: Helen Barron Williams

Programme of study: Professional Doctorate in Child and Educational Psychology

Title of research: *A narrative inquiry into the lived experience of persistent absenteeism among children who have since returned to mainstream school, and the meaning they make of their own stories.*

Name of supervisor: Dr Helena Bunn

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

<b>Proposed amendment</b>	<b>Rationale</b>
I will now be collecting data across multiple local authorities as opposed to one.	The restrictions of Covid-19 have made it very hard to recruit in schools in my local authority so I need to broaden my search to get enough participants (up to four).
I will now be recruiting via Social Media and through personal contacts, in schools and special interest groups, as opposed to just specific school SENCOs and attendance	See above.

U1825071 NARRATIVE EXPLORATION OF PERSISTENT ABSENCE AND RETURN

officers.	
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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): Helen Barron Williams

Date: 19 February 2021

TO BE COMPLETED BY REVIEWER		
Amendment(s) approved		
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Comments</b></p>		

Reviewer:

Date:

### C.3 Confirmation of approval for amendments

Firefox

https://outlook.office.com/mail/id/AAQkADE0MTaxYTg5LTZjYWU...

**Fw: ethics etc amendments**

Helena Bunn <H.Bunn@uel.ac.uk>

Thu 04/03/2021 18:01

To: Helen BARRON WILLIAMS <u1825071@uel.ac.uk>

3 attachments (588 KB)

u1825071 ethics amendment form february 2021.docx; u1825071 Ethics Application amended February 2021.docx;  
u1825071 DMP-ANarrativeInquiry-amended 19 February.docx;

Hi Helen

Lovely to see you today.

I can now come with an answer - as these are minor amendments, I can approve them.

I therefore had a look, following our discussion in the previous tutorial, and I approve of your changes.

Can you please make a note in ResearchManager, related to your request and my approval, maybe also upload the attach, and you are ready to go with recruiting.

Good luck!

Helena

Dr Helena Bunn, BA(hons) PGD Res(OU) DEdChPsy CPsychol FHEA

Academic & Professional Tutor  
Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology  
The University of East London  
Stratford Campus  
Water Lane  
London, E15 4LZ  
02082234457

**Working for UEL for 21.6 hours a week**

Latest publications:

BPS (2020). Back to school: re-engagement and recovery, <https://www.bps.org.uk/coronavirus-resources/public/back-to-school>

Wagner, K., Bunn, H. (2020). Academic Progress through the lenses of children with SEN. *EPIP* 36(1), 52-68.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/02667363.2019.1674250>

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**From:** Helen BARRON WILLIAMS <u1825071@uel.ac.uk>

**Sent:** 20 February 2021 10:38

**To:** Helena Bunn <H.Bunn@uel.ac.uk>

**Subject:** ethics etc amendments

Hi Helena,

Thanks so much for talking yesterday.

I don't think there is anything in the RDMP that needs amending, but I have done so anyway.

Please find all docs attached.

## **Appendix D**

### **Alternative Qualitative Approaches Considered**

#### **D.1 Action Research**

Reason and Bradbury (2008, p. 2) assert that *“the primary purpose of action research is to produce practical knowledge that is useful to people”, a desire for transformation that resonates with this study’s aims. The attempt of this research to gain a sense of experience (in this case of returning to mainstream school after a period of persistent absence), and intention to explore the meaning participants make of their experiences would also be compatible with action research.*

Action research also has an interventionist aspect to it, however, which is not wholly compatible with the current research aims. While it is hoped the study will contribute to transformation within systems, it is not looking to transform the specific situations it is studying.

Action research is a method of research inquiry meant to be undertaken *by* and *for* those taking the action, with the primary aim of assisting the “actor” improve and/or refine their actions. It has been described as a form of ‘systematic self-reflective inquiry’ conducted by practitioners in order to improve and understand the situations they work in (Cohen et al, 2007). As such, it may not be appropriate for young people who do not have so much agency over the environments they operate in, and nor am I a practitioner in the environment I am researching. Robson (2002) sees ‘improvement’ and ‘involvement’ as central elements.

#### **D.2 Grounded Theory**

Grounded Theory has three key assumptions that ally with the aims of this study: that qualitative methods can be systematic and rigorous, that one does not need to separate data collection from analysis, and that qualitative research does not

need to be supplemented by quantitative methods to generate theory (Charmaz, 2003). It extracts meaning from data relating to experiential phenomena, in particular social processes, such as interactions, discourses and constructions, which makes it particularly relevant. The ultimate aim is to create a theory to explain the phenomenon being studied (Willig, 2001).

With Grounded Theory, the researcher identifies categories of meaning from qualitative data and makes links between the categories. It takes an inductive approach, with categories of meaning becoming increasingly abstract during the process of analysis. The data is analysed as it is collected, and more is collected in response to this analysis until no new categories of meaning can be identified. This means the duration and number of participants cannot be predicted in advance.

This latter was a key reason why I did not pursue Grounded Theory. I knew I would struggle to recruit sufficient numbers and to complete the study in a useful timeframe if I used this methodology. Some have also pointed out that in small-scale qualitative studies it is problematic to claim that any 'theory' generated was generalisable beyond the research context (Grandison, 2011).

### **D.3 Appreciative Inquiry (AI)**

AI, underpinned by social constructivism (Gergen, 2009), is a strengths-based approach to research and sits happily within the positive psychology framework (Boyd & Bright, 2007). AI wants to explore what people believe to be valuable, and then build on that (Reed, 2007). It was developed during the 1980s by David Cooperrider, in response to “deficit centred thinking” (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987). It is a type of action research (Lewin, 1946) in that it aims to bring about positive change and improve practice through a collaborative inquiry into human potential.

The process of AI, where participants work together to appreciate and build on what is best and what is possible, generates new knowledge about a shared desired future – or dream – with the hope of translating this into practice (Cooperrider, Whitney & Stavros 2008).

It is valued for its positivity, its collaborative approach and its applicability, but a number of criticisms of AI as an approach also exist. It has a perhaps simplistic assumption that social systems are basically harmonious or want to be and genuinely allow space for diverse thoughts and voices (Aldred, 2011), whereas Individuals may have different, complex and contradictory dreams. Some are also not convinced it can prove it lives up to its claims that it empowers participants as this is a concept interpreted differently by different individuals and groups (Isreal, Schulz, Parker, & Becker, 1998). Coghlan, Preskill & Tzavaras (2003) talk of other researchers who also believe it can leave participants feeling their problems have not been acknowledged or listened to, but they deny this and say that it merely reframes.

#### **D.4 Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)**

IPA is concerned with accessing underlying cognitions, beliefs and attitudes which impact on participants' understanding of their experiences Willig (2001). It involves extracting categories of information from qualitative data and making links between these categories across data from a number of participants, the aim being to generate a broader understanding of a phenomenon than could be gained from a single participant. Like Grounded Theory (see above) it adopts a cyclical approach to data analysis and interpretation whereby data are continuously compared, assigned and reassigned to categories which evolve and change as analysis progresses.

IPA is underpinned by a social constructivist paradigm (Moustakas, 1994), and allows researchers to find common meaning amongst the lived experiences of several individuals who experience the same phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). In this study, it would have put the focus on Persistent Absence as a phenomenon, rather than, perhaps, the positive experiences of participants, their return to school, and their meaning making.

### **D.5 Case Study Approach**

Case study approaches focus on a “*telling case’ from which theory, concepts and hypotheses can be extracted.*” (Roberts et al., 2004, p. 11) and they were initially considered for the richness of their data and for the possibility perhaps of applying findings to other similar situations. In the end, however, after reviewing the literature, I felt that it was the young people’s voices, experiences and stories, and not those of all the people around them, that needed to be heard. I did not want to be ‘fact checking’ and comparing their stories with other versions of ‘truth’.

## Appendix E

### Invitation Consent and Debrief for Young Person and Parent

#### E.1 Invitation letter for CYP



#### Participant Letter and Information

Research Project Title:

**A narrative inquiry into the lived experience of persistent absenteeism among children who have since returned to mainstream school; and the meaning they make of their stories**



Hello – my name is Helen and I am a student at the University of East London.

I am studying for a Doctorate in Education and Child Psychology. This means I am learning how to help schools, families and young people make sure people can get the best out of school.

I would like to invite you to be part of a research project about students who have spent a lot of time not attending school. It doesn't matter why you didn't attend school, or what you were doing instead. I am just interested in how you felt about it, and what made it possible for you to return.

Before you agree, or not, it is important you understand why this research is being done and what it will involve. So please take some time to read the following information carefully. An adult can read this through with you to make sure you have understood it all if you want.

If anything is unclear, or if you would like more information, please do not hesitate to contact me.



Many thanks,

Helen

Helen Barron Williams

### **1. What is the point of the project?**

This project aims to give young people like you an opportunity to talk about **your** experiences of not attending school and what helped you to return.

I am hoping that through exploring and sharing these experiences, you might be able to offer suggestions for how to make schools a more engaging place for other young people like you, and how the adults around young people can better support people like you in the future.

I also hope that you might enjoy the experience of telling your own story in your own words, and that the process might help you make even more sense of your own experience.

I will be looking at the following questions:

#### **Q 1**

**What does the research tell us about YPs' experiences of persistent absenteeism?**

#### **Q2**

**What does the research tell us about positive and sustainable returns?**

#### **Q3**

**What does the research tell us about the meaning YP themselves make of their experiences?**

### **2. Why have I been chosen?**

I am looking for four participants, and you been chosen because your school feels you have made a successful return to school and your story would be valuable to others.

### **3. Do I have to take part?**

Taking part in this research is entirely up to you, if you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and you will be given a consent form for your parents to sign. You can withdraw from this research at any time and you do not have to give a reason.

You will not be judged in any way and you will be treated with respect.

#### **4. What will I have to do and when?**

Interviews and conversations will take place between February and April 2021. There will be up to three sessions. The first session we will get to know each other; you can share any concerns you have, or we can just chat and play a game. If you are comfortable with it, we will begin to explore some of your past experiences through various drawing techniques, or we will just chat.

The second session will carry on from there, helping you think more deeply about your life as a story you can share in more detail – looking at people and events that are important to you, what you were doing at different ages, how you felt about that, where you lived etc. Together we will check I have understood what you were saying in our first session, and there will be a ‘semi structured interview’ – where I ask you some more specific questions – to help you talk more about your specific experiences of returning to school, and of your experiences while you were struggling to attend.

Then I will go away and look at what you have said and try to draw some conclusions and come up with ideas of big themes. In your third session you will have a chance to add to or change this story so it best reflects your idea of your life. I will explain how I came up with these ideas and you can decide with me if I have understood things properly, or what else I need to include.

Ideally the first two sessions will happen a week apart, and then the third one a couple of weeks later.

You can decide you do not want to be part of the research any more at any point during this period. The whole process is totally down to you.

#### **5. What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?**

There is a possibility that talking about your experiences of school and not attending may make you feel uncomfortable. Before we begin our sessions, your school and I will make sure that we have identified a key adult who will be available that day to support you if you get upset or find the session difficult.

#### **6. What are the possible benefits of taking part?**

I hope that this will be an interesting and valuable experience for you; I will try to make sure it is. I also hope that the work we do together will develop some suggestions for other schools to help their students who may be struggling to attend.

#### **7. Will my involvement be kept confidential?**

The interviews will be conducted during school hours but in a private room that cannot be overheard. It is up to you who you tell about being part of this research. I will not tell anyone I am working with you except for your parents, and some key members of your school staff as agreed by you.

All interviews will be recorded with your consent and transcribed. But I will remove your name from the transcript and destroy the recordings after I have typed them up. I may talk to my university tutor about your story to get advice, but I will not use your name or identify you in anyway.

#### **8. What will happen to the results of the research project?**

Once I have interviewed everyone, transcribed and checked all the data with all participants and asked you all individually how you want your information shared, I will write everything up in the form as a Doctoral thesis – which looks like a short book. I will also make a presentation to my university and to my colleagues in the local authority. If you want we can also make a presentation for your school teachers. That is up to you.

Participants taking part in the research project will not be able to be identified in any report or publication.

#### **Extra information and more detail:**

##### **What will happen to the information that I provide?**

After I have recorded our interviews and typed up a transcript, I will store both of these securely in encrypted places with pseudonyms and all identifying information removed. If I take photos of any other work we do together – such as drawings – I will store that securely and anonymously as well where no one but me can access it.

Anything shared with tutors or in the final research write up (thesis) will be full anonymised – with all names removed.

After publication, data no longer needed for the thesis will be destroyed, except for the transcripts which will be kept for five years. I have to do this to make sure that I can check it if anyone asks me questions.

##### **What if I change mind?**

You are free to withdraw from the research study at any time without explanation. Separately, you may also request to withdraw your stories even after you have participated, provided that this request is made within three weeks of the final interview (any later and I will already have started writing it all up).

#### **Contact Details**

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

Helen Barron Williams

U1825071@uel.ac.uk

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

**or**

Chair of the School of Psychology Research Ethics Sub-committee: Dr Tim Lomas, School of Psychology, University of East London, Water Lane, London E15 4LZ.  
Email: t.lomas@uel.ac.uk

## E.2 Consent form for CYP



### **UNIVERSITY OF EAST LONDON**

#### **Consent to participate in a research study**

A narrative inquiry into the lived experience of persistent absenteeism among children who have since returned to mainstream school, and the meaning they make of their own stories

I have read the information sheet relating to this research study and have been given a copy to keep.

The research has been explained to me, and I have had the opportunity to ask questions. I understand what is being suggested and what is expected of me.

I understand that my involvement in this study, and particular data from this research, will remain strictly confidential. Only the researcher involved in the study will have access to my name or anything else that identifies me. It has been explained to me what will happen once the research study has been completed.

I give full consent to participate in the study. I understand I have the right to withdraw from the study at any time, but that if I do so after two weeks after the last interview, the researcher reserves the right to use my anonymous data if analysis of the data has begun.

Participant's Name (BLOCK CAPITALS)

.....

Participant's Signature

.....

Researcher's Name (BLOCK CAPITALS) HELEN BARRON WILLIAMS

Researcher's Signature

.....

Date: .....

### E.3 Participant debrief letter



#### **PARTICIPANT DEBRIEF LETTER**

Thank you for participating in my research study on what it feels like not to attend school and what makes it possible to return. This letter offers information that may be relevant in light of you having now taken part.

#### **What will happen to the information that you have provided?**

Before you agreed to take part, I explained how we will use your information, but it is important you understand this again now. I will take the following steps to ensure the confidentiality and integrity of the data you have provided:

- After I have recorded our interviews and typed up a transcript, I will store both of these securely in encrypted places with pseudonyms and all identifying information removed. If I take photos of any other work we do together – such as drawings – I will store that securely and anonymously as well where no one but me can access it.
- Anything shared with tutors or in the final research write up (thesis) will be full anonymised – with all names removed.
- At the end of the research period the finalised and anonymised thesis based on the data will be shared with the local authority, the schools concerned, the families of the participants and UEL colleagues and students.
- The final thesis will of course be made as available as possible.
- After publication, data no longer needed for the thesis will be destroyed, except for the transcripts which will be kept for five years. I have to do this to make sure that I can check it if anyone asks me questions.

**What if I change mind?**

You are free to withdraw from the research study at any time without explanation. Separately, you may also request to withdraw your stories even after you have participated, provided that this request is made within two weeks of the final interview (any later and I will already have started writing it all up).

**What if you have been adversely affected by taking part?**

It is not anticipated that you will have been adversely affected by taking part in the research, and all reasonable steps have been taken to minimise potential harm. Nevertheless, it is still possible that your participation – or its after-effects – may have been challenging, distressing or uncomfortable in some way. If you have been affected in any of those ways you may find the following people/services helpful in relation to obtaining information and support:

Your school SENCO [insert name here]

Your school counsellor [insert name here]

Your local branch of MIND – the mental health support charity – [insert name and all contact details here]

You are also very welcome to contact me or my supervisor if you have specific questions or concerns.

**Contact Details**

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

Helen Barron Williams  
U1825071@uel.ac.uk

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

**or**

Chair of the School of Psychology Research Ethics Sub-committee: Dr Tim Lomas, School of Psychology, University of East London, Water Lane, London E15 4LZ. (Email: t.lomas@uel.ac.uk)

#### E.4 Parent / carer invitation



Research Project Title:

**A narrative inquiry into the lived experience of persistent absenteeism among children who have since returned to mainstream school**



Hello – my name is Helen and I am a student at the University of East London.

I am studying for a Doctorate in Education and Child Psychology. This means I am learning how to help schools, families and young people make sure people can get the best out of school.

I would like to invite your child to be part of a research project about students who have spent a lot of time not attending school. It doesn't matter why they didn't attend school, or what they were doing instead. I am just interested in how they felt about it, and what made it possible for them to return.

Before you agree, or not, for your child to be involved, it is important you understand why this research is being done and what it will involve. So please take some time to read the following information carefully.

If anything is unclear, or if you would like more information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Many thanks,

Helen

Helen Barron Williams



## **1. What is the project's purpose?**

This project aims to give young people an opportunity to talk about their experiences of not attending school and what helped them to return.

I am hoping that through exploring and sharing these experiences, they might be able to offer suggestions for how to make schools a more engaging place for other young people like themselves, and show how the adults around them supported them effectively.

I also hope that they might enjoy the experience of telling their own story in their own words, and that perhaps the process might help them make even more sense of their experiences.

I will be looking at the following questions:

### **Q 1**

**What does the research tell us about YPs' experiences of persistent absenteeism?**

### **Q2**

**What does the research tell us about positive and sustainable returns?**

### **Q3**

**What does the research tell us about the meaning YP themselves make of their experiences?**

## **2. Why has my child been chosen?**

I am looking for four participants, and your child has been chosen because their school feels they have made a successful return to school and that their story would be valuable to others.

## **3. Do I have to agree for my child to take part?**

Taking part in this research is entirely up to you, if you do decide to let your child take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and you will be given a consent form to sign. You can withdraw your child from this research at any time and you do not have to give a reason.

You will not be judged in any way and you will be treated with respect.

## **4. What will my child have to do and when?**

Interviews and conversations will take place over Microsoft Teams (like zoom or google meet but more secure) between February and April 2021. There will be up to three sessions.

The first session will be getting to know each other and doing an activity to help your child think about their life as a story they can share. Then in the second there will be a semi structured interview around their specific experiences of returning to school.

I will write this all up and then in the third session your child will have a chance to amend anything I have not understood or add anything they think is missing.

**5. What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?**

There is a possibility that talking about their experiences of school and not attending may make them feel uncomfortable. Before we begin our sessions, the school and I will make sure that we have identified a key adult who will be available that day to support your child if they get upset or find the session difficult.

**6. What are the possible benefits of taking part?**

I hope that this will be an interesting and valuable experience for your child; I will try to make sure it is. I also hope that the work we do together will develop some suggestions for other schools to help their students who may be struggling to attend.

**7. Will my child's involvement be kept confidential?**

Yes. Only you and key staff members will know they are taking part.

All interviews will be recorded with your child's consent and transcribed. But I will remove your child's name from the transcript and destroy the recordings after I have typed them up. I may talk to my university tutor about their story to get advice, but I will not use names or identify you or your child in anyway.

**8. What will happen to the results of the research project?**

Once I have interviewed everyone, transcribed and checked all the data with all participants and asked everyone individually how you want your information shared, I will write everything up in the form as a Doctoral thesis. I will also make a presentation to my university and to my colleagues in the local authority. If your child wants we can also make a presentation for their school teachers. That is up to them.

Participants taking part in the research project will not be able to be identified in any report or publication.

**Extra information and more detail:**

**What will happen to the information that my child provides?**

After I have recorded our interviews and typed up a transcript, I will store both of these securely in encrypted places with pseudonyms and all identifying information removed. If I take photos of any other work we do together – such as drawings – I will store that securely and anonymously as well where no one but me can access it.

Anything shared with tutors or in the final research write up (thesis) will be fully anonymised – with all names removed.

After publication, data no longer needed for the thesis will be destroyed, except for the transcripts which will be kept for five years. I have to do this to make sure that I can check it if anyone asks me questions.

**What if I change my mind?**

You are free to withdraw your child from the research study at any time without explanation. Separately, you may also request to withdraw your child's stories even after you have participated, provided that this request is made within 3 weeks of the final interview (any later and I will already have started writing it all up).

**Contact Details**

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

Helen Barron Williams  
U1825071@uel.ac.uk

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

**or**

Chair of the School of Psychology Research Ethics Sub-committee: Dr Tim Lomas, School of Psychology, University of East London, Water Lane, London E15 4LZ.  
Email: [t.lomas@uel.ac.uk](mailto:t.lomas@uel.ac.uk)

## E.5 Parent / carer consent form



### **UNIVERSITY OF EAST LONDON**

#### **Consent to participate in a research study**

A narrative inquiry into the lived experience of persistent absenteeism among children who have since returned to mainstream school, and the meaning they make of their own stories

I have read the information sheet relating to this research study and have been given a copy to keep.

The research has been explained to me, and I have had the opportunity to ask questions. I understand what is being suggested and what is expected of my child.

I understand that my child's involvement in this study, and particular data from this research, will remain strictly confidential. Only the researcher involved in the study will have access to their name or anything else that identifies them. It has been explained to me what will happen once the research study has been completed.

I give full consent for my child to participate in the study. I understand I have the right to withdraw from the study at any time, but that if I do so after three weeks after the last interview, the researcher reserves the right to use my anonymous data after analysis of the data has begun.

Participant's Name (BLOCK CAPITALS)

.....

Participant's Signature

.....

Researcher's Name

HELEN BARRON WILLIAMS

Researcher's Signature

..... Date: .....

## Appendix E

### Social Media Advert

**Do you know a young person who has found it  
hard to go to school?**



I am researching the experience of returning to school after a period of persistent absence. It doesn't matter what the reason for absence was.

I am talking with young people (aged 11-16) in mainstream secondary schools about what helped them return and how they felt about their experiences.

I am a year-three trainee at the University of East London. I care deeply about inclusion and school belonging, and am looking for positive, strengths-based approaches to the difficulties some young people have with school.

I am looking to recruit people to my online research study.  
For more information, please contact Helen Barron Williams  
Principal Researcher  
[U1825071@uel.ac.uk](mailto:U1825071@uel.ac.uk)

## **Appendix G**

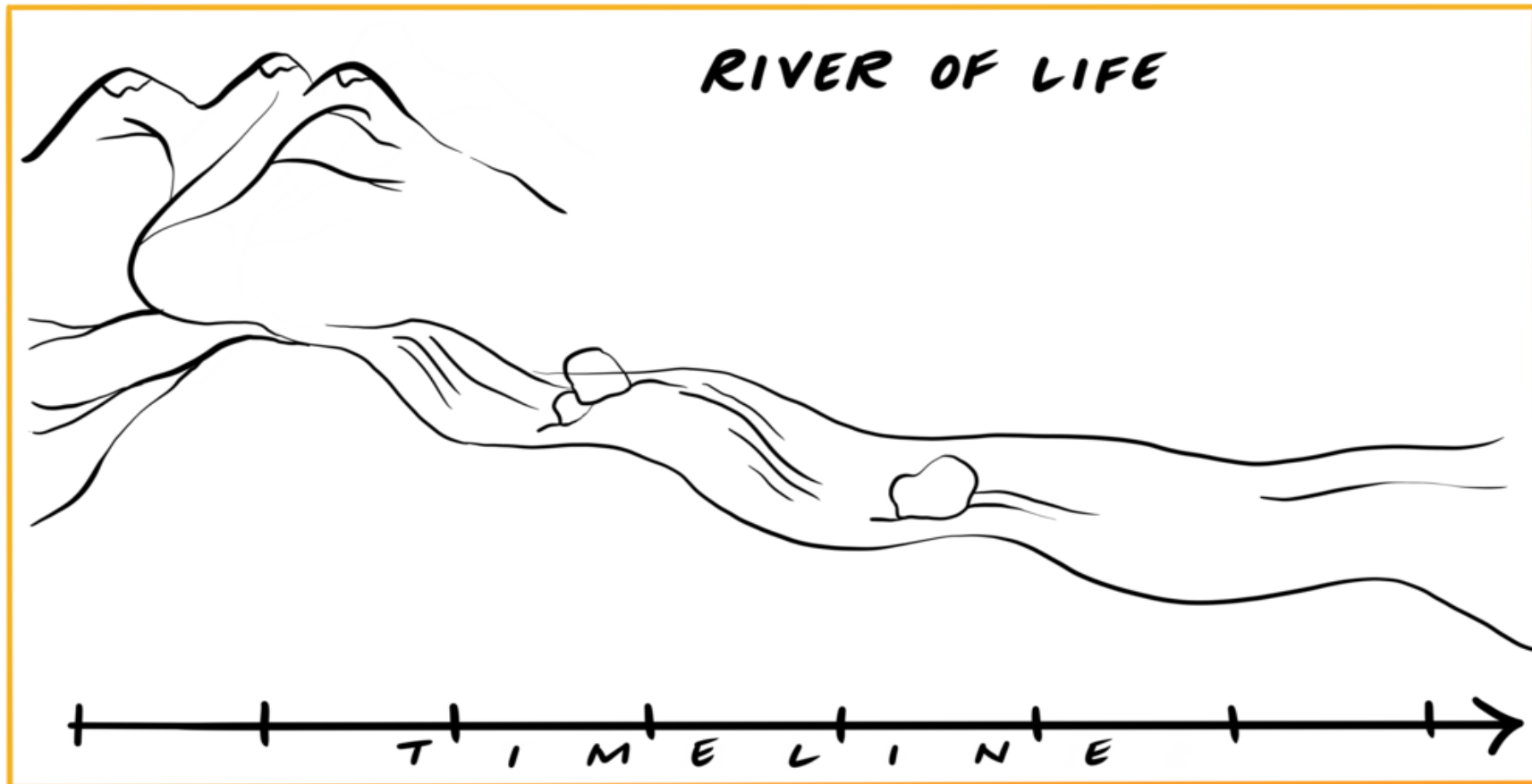
### **Narrative Tools**

#### **1. Potential prompt questions for Narrative Interview Guide:**

- When did you first start to feel uncomfortable in school?
- How have things improved now?
- Tell me a little bit about how things are now? What sort of things are you able to do that you were not able to do?
- When did you first start to notice things were improving?
- What things have helped you?
- If you could talk to the person you were when things were hard, what would you say?
- If you could say anything to the people who helped you, what would you say?
- If you could say anything to the people who were unhelpful, what would you say?
- If you could talk to the person you will be in 2 years' time? What would you tell yourself?
- If you could talk to the person you will be in 15 years' time? What would you tell yourself?

2. River of life prompt:

Birth or specified start point									Specified future point
--------------------------------	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	------------------------



— ILLUSTRATION BY WWW.PHOTOALDAY.COM —

<b>Attending school? What sort? What is it like?</b>	<b>Big transition? Eg moving house, change in family?</b>	<b>Important individual people in your life?</b>	<b>Important groups of people in your life (friends, society, wider family etc)?</b>	<b>Important activities?</b>	<b>Pain or suffering? Yours or others?</b>	<b>Any external / political events that affected you or you were aware of?</b>	<b>What else was important to you at this time?</b>	<b>What would you like to say to anyone who helped or didn't help?</b>	<b>What would you like to say to yourself I the past, in the future?</b>
--	---	--	--	------------------------------	--	--	---	--	--

I had a few alternative simple guided suggestions and prompts adapted to be suitable for the age of the YP I was talking with, eg:

- Can you think briefly about the course of your whole life
- If you were able to compare your life with a river, what would the river look like?
- Are there any particularly smooth, flowing areas? What was positive about those times?
- Were there any sharp bends
- Any rocky patches?
- Where is it flowing towards?



## Appendix H

### Full Stories for Participants with Email

#### G.1 Shadow's story and email



16 July 2021

Dear [Shadow],

Thank you so much for talking with me and sharing your story of attending school and how you managed to return.

I was really looking forward to meeting you again yesterday and talking through your story again with you and checking I had understood it all.

I was going to read you what I had written up and talk about it and then make any changes you wanted.

Unfortunately, because Miss [C] has to isolate we can't do that. But I've pasted below the story I wrote up after I had transcribed all your words from when we met. It's called "Shadow's story" because that's the pseudonym you chose – remember?! The bits [in square brackets] are where I have summarised or added a word. Everything else is your own exact words.

You talked a lot about how you worked hard to change your mindset and to motivate yourself to attend school so you could get the grades you need to become a doctor. Although you wouldn't mind being a cricketer either!

You also talked about your family helping you, and how some teachers were friendly. I also remember you saying that school got easier when you got more friends in Year Eight – I think that move from primary to secondary can be very difficult for a lot of us.

Please do tell me if I have missed something crucial, or you don't like it, or it doesn't sound like you. You can email me if you want any changes on [u1825071@uel.ac.uk](mailto:u1825071@uel.ac.uk)



OR just let me know it's ok and you are happy with it or you want to add something!

And remember you can also tell me if you don't want to be part of the research anymore – up to the end of next week.

Thank you again so much for agreeing to take part in my research, and for being such great company and talking so openly about your experiences.

I hope to hear back from you but if that isn't possible, then Good Luck!

Warmest wishes,

Helen

Helen Barron Williams  
University of East London  
U1825071@uel.ac.uk



### **Shadow's story**

[I live with my father, my mother, and my younger brother]. He's funny, he's good. It's a pleasure to have him!

...

[at the moment, my attendance has] been going good.

[I first started having problems with attendance] when I was in primary school. [Before year five, primary school] was in the middle [nothing particularly good or bad]. [straightforward]. I think around year five. I had to go abroad. You know, just for family business. For maybe a month, I don't really remember, it was a long time ago.

That's what caused my attendance [to] drop. Furthermore, I had, illnesses, you know, had just a general illness, like a cold, for instance.

Those are the main reasons why I just couldn't come to school.

Then there was a transition where I was attending school [in year six]. Because then that's when my SATs were coming up.

[then it started again] I think, again, in year Seven, eight, as I previously said, it was just about general illnesses, you know, I had a cold, I had some headaches. Hay fever. Essentially, those kind of things that, you know, restricted me from attending school.

[my parents looked after me and I tried] just to get some rest to be honest.

I mean, my illness was not that serious. In a sense, it was just like some mild headaches. And the cold. Because Yeah. Like, it was not serious, serious, it was just mild one.

[in year seven, school was] mostly like, a new thing. Right? Because you're so used to primary school. Right. And it's just anything, some people, you know, they feel like it's, how do you say, unadaptable I guess you could say, because the new people there, you don't know who they are.

And your previous friends, you know, they move to other schools. So you kind of lose a connection. So I guess some people will not really, how do you say, are not really motivated to come to school.

You know, they're not really comfortable with the surroundings?

C was very different [from my previous school]. Because, you know, my previous friends, they went to different schools. The whole education system, it just changed as I was going in. I wasn't really comfortable at the beginning, but I guess, after, you know, some getting used to, I guess, I felt comfortable.

[It began to feel a bit more comfortable] in the beginning of your eight cos, because all the for example in year seven, I felt the work challenging. So... ,as we know, since I'm in high school now, everything has become so serious, you know. We're approaching GCSEs.

Once a year six was over, after the summer holidays, I knew there was gonna be a challenge because of adapting to new [situation]

In year seven, I didn't really have you know that much friends. So also, that was also a bit demotivating to come to school, because you know you're not going to be able to socialise with many people. And it's just going to make the day even more boring.

I had good friends actually [at primary school]. But then I had to move to new school.

### **The return**

Well, I think the reason I ah came to school was just, oh, I have GCSEs these years, I must take it very seriously. So I must come. I guess it was a natural instinct you know to just like, er, now education's, education is getting serious. So I need to attend as much lessons as I can, you know, to strive to become to my best potential.

Also in year eight, the reason I also felt more confident because I got new friends. I felt a bit more comfortable, because now I can socialise? I can tell them how my day when it's just not work.

Year seven was mostly affecting my attendance. You know, I had headaches, cold. It was just generally just the illness that was just restricting me from coming to school. [there was less motivation maybe to get past some of the illnesses] In year eight, I think, friends to be honest, [and], I think and also my family back home, they really helped me, they motivated me. . As they say, in a sense when you come to school, there's new opportunities, you know. I guess my family was a big factor in me trying to get my attendance up. They increased my motivation to come into school.

I've carried [on] that mindset, which I think that's what my attendance has been rising.

[I realised I] wanted to [work harder].

[Also] the staff were friendly. In a sense, when I needed help with my work.. they [were there].

### **Lockdown**

[In March in year eight there was lockdown]. It was quite okay. You know. Not that bad. Because I had all the instruments at home and it was quite easy to for me to try and [connect with] the online school.

They're not necessarily easy but just fun to come like maths, science. you know, plenty more subjects? I think those were the main two.

It was just the same [learning online. It wasn't harder to concentrate]. [but I missed my friends]. Online school was just more convenient because you know, you just stay at home. You wake up and you go to your computer and just attend the first lesson. So I guess online school was just a bit more convenient, but all in all, I think they were both similar, I didn't really mind both.

I [also] used to do some physical activities. I played football. Played cricket, just general things, that helped me keep concentrated.

### **Return post lockdown**

[I've been back at school since] I think just in the beginning of March [and] It's felt like, everything's going back to normal. Yeah, I got to meet my friends again. Yeah, I felt more productive as well [with work]. Because when you're on online school you have a lot of free time on your hands.

[Year nine] has been quite difficult. English [is difficult], because I'm not really good at analysing. [Maths and science are] just, I guess you could say straightforward. In a sense, you don't need to analyse and evaluate on that point, you just get straight to the point.

### **Future**

[I hope to] get excellent grades [in my GCSEs, then I'm hoping to go on do A levels, go to university to do] medical studies. [I want to be] a paediatrician. I'm not really sure [why] to be honest, I just like helping everyone to get better.

[If I didn't have to earn money, I'd like to] become a sports player. Cricket.

[If I could say one thing to the boy I was in year five, I'd want to say to him] things will get better one day. I hope he would [believe me]. [I'd tell him to] work hard, have a good mindset. And everything, every opportunity will just come to you.

[If I could say something to the person I'll be when I'm 18, it would be] I guess, Keep going in the right direction.

[I don't really feel sick these days] I guess I have now a positive mentality than before. In a sense that, you know, I'm wanting to go to school, rather than I was back then. I try to make an effort to attend to school.

Mindset is key. Because if you don't have the right mindset, then automatically your motivation will go down. That's what I've learned throughout the years. From my family, They have a strong mindset

**[Shadow's story ends]**

If you have any questions or concerns about how the research has been conducted please contact the research supervisor [Dr Helena Bunn]. School of Psychology, University of East London, Water Lane, London E15 4LZ,  
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## G.2 Michael's story and email

16 July 2021

Dear [Michael],

I really enjoyed meeting you and getting to speak to you twice over the last few months.

I thought you were honest and brave when we spoke and I admired you a lot. You were also polite, and good company, and made a real effort to answer all my questions even though you couldn't see me – thank you!



I was looking forward to meeting you again yesterday and going through the story I wrote up from our conversations; and also maybe doing some drawing together. I'm so sorry that it wasn't possible because Miss [C] was isolating, and I know she was sorry as well.

I hope you manage to enjoy your summer, and come back next term happy and refreshed. There were some things you obviously were not happy about at school and I hope you can resolve these eventually.

I got the impression when we spoke that school felt hard work, like you had to be constantly on alert, looking out for potential problems with other kids, or struggling quite hard in lessons. You talked about primary school being “normal” as if life didn't feel very normal at the moment. And you talked about liking the “peace” and “calm” of life at home during lockdown, or at primary, and how you wished school was less “violent”.



I really hope you find that calm and peace. And you talked of wanting “fun” – I hope you get more fun!

Perhaps it might be good asking those teachers you told me about who you can speak to and who support you, for help here?

I also understood that you felt some things at school were not fair sometimes? That you got in trouble and that teachers did not support you when other kids were annoying you and trying to fight you. This must be really frustrating. I got a sense that you felt things happened **to** you, rather than **you** were always in control?

From our conversations, however, I understood that you had a lot of strengths and resources you could draw on to have more control. You have a clear idea of a future you would like – a job, such as plumbing, that earns you money. And you are willing to work hard to try to get there. You are also naturally kind, and would like to help people, which is why you considered being a doctor. You are willing to keep trying when things are difficult. You keep coming to school even when you find it hard. You are good company and can make connections with people. You are friendly and personable.

You have brothers and family members who are willing to help you, you have teachers at school who you enjoy talking with and want to support you. You have friends.

One last thing – you talked about enjoying going to the park, and also about liking being outside, and how you used to find it hard to stay in your seat at primary. I just wondered if it might be worth mentioning to a teacher – perhaps the ones you like who are supportive – that you really benefit from movement breaks and being able to get up every so often and stretch your legs. Just a thought.



I've pasted below the story I wrote up after I had transcribed all your words from when we met. It's called "Michael's story" because that's the pseudonym you chose – remember?! The bits [in square brackets] are where I have summarised or added a word. Everything else is your own exact words.

Please do tell me if I have missed something crucial, or you don't like it, or it doesn't sound like you. You can email me if you want any changes on [u1825071@uel.ac.uk](mailto:u1825071@uel.ac.uk)

OR just let me know it's ok and you are happy with it or you want to add something!

And remember you can also tell me if you don't want to be part of the research anymore – up to the end of next week.

Thank you again so much for agreeing to take part in my research, and for being such great company and talking so openly about your experiences.

I hope to hear back from you but if that isn't possible, then Good Luck!

Warmest wishes,

Helen

Helen Barron Williams  
University of East London  
[U1825071@uel.ac.uk](mailto:U1825071@uel.ac.uk)



### **"Michael's" story**

I live with my mum and dad] and four of my brothers. That's it. [My brothers are all older. [It's] annoying [being the youngest] because you can't really do anything without them. They tell you off and they always have the right to do anything first. It's normal. [But] you can [also] have fun with them. They can take you somewhere, and [you can] enjoy that.

My mum [and] my brothers help [me] with school. My mum wakes me up [and then] I go myself. It takes 10 minutes to walk to school, it's easy.

[I had some problems with school] in Year Six, at primary school, when I was kind of naughty, [according to my teachers]. I'd talk non-stop and get up, talking over a teacher or something; or ... just sometimes ignoring the rules. [But] I improved later on.

I was ok in maths but I just wasn't used to the work [and also] the new people. A lot of my friends left, I don't know why. [I had a good friend up to year five and then he left], then there were a lot of new people. I was getting in lots of trouble.

[But] I was trying to improve, and [I found it easier to attend school in Year Six than now] because of the pandemic. Then I would [be] absent three times or four times a year. [Now] I get physically sick sometimes and I get a lot of headaches.

[My primary was] quite a big school but [my secondary] is bigger. A lot of people came from [my primary] school to this school. [...] many are still my friends [and] they're in my class.

[When I first joined secondary school] I wasn't used to the school I used to get lost. And the teachers were always stricter and you had to behave. If [you are] talking and shouting out three times you just get one-hour detention. [It feels like they] give out C1s non-stop.

I liked primary school better. It was just calm and fun. But, now you have to get serious. [And] here there are always those kids that are annoying but in primary it [was] just like a normal school. In primary it was just normal. You go to lessons and no one [was] annoying. That's it.

[Here, there are these kids who] think they're so bad and they try to scare you. They try to fight me but I just don't care. [They] just think they're so like the biggest kids. I just walk away.

And sometimes I argue back.

Because that's the thing: They keep on telling me to ignore it, my teachers, and they keep on telling me to tell them [when it happens] but the thing is, if that was true [if it helped], then I would have done it.

In my house I didn't get told like fight back I just got told to just not care, ignore them. But I don't think that's the right thing.

If I ignore them, they'll keep coming for me cos they'll think I'm scared.

[And] if I tell the teachers they'll call me a snitch. And [some teachers] won't even do anything, ... [others will] just tell them to stop, [but] they just don't care, they'll still carry on doing it... They keep on piling on. They don't get scared.

Unless it's the head teacher. They'll deal with it.

[The teachers should] give them a big sanction so it stops it.



## **Lockdown**

[When lockdown happened in Year 7] I didn't know there was online classes so I didn't attend one online class. I didn't know. My brothers asked me [if I had online classes] and they researched it and then I got on to it. Someone from school [also] called me [but] then my password [didn't] work, and I had to get that sorted out. It took a week, and then I started doing it. [During] the second [lockdown], I attended every single one.

I wish I'd known my login, and I wish I knew there were online classes. Now, I wish I had hurried it up.

My attendance was low because of the lockdown. [It went from] 99% to 43[%], I figured out a month ago it was lockdown [that made it so low]. if lockdown wasn't the case, and it was actually like that, they would already send my parents to court.

I don't know why they counted it, but [it's the] school's idea. I didn't even really learn anything [during lockdown]f. There's no one else there [and] there's nobody to tell you off. I just didn't like learning from it.

I literally nearly forgot everything. The screen [made it hard]. You're just sitting in one place. You can't learn anything because you're really tired. And you just don't concentrate on the screen. You just look around. You don't really learn anything. So why do you have to count it? [It's unfair] I should have had like 90% right now.

I wouldn't drop off, but like I would get tired I would keep on looking at the screen and not learning anything, I just couldn't learn it. It was like I just couldn't learn it. I just couldn't concentrate. And art was like a waste of time; they just told you to 'look at this and that' and you couldn't draw it. [I like drawing].

[I enjoyed getting more] sleep [in lockdown]. [And] it was just calm. We used to go to the park every day, and play games. [But] sometimes you couldn't get out of your house.

## **Return to school**

Now it's fine [back at school]. I've got a bit back into my old days. Like the normal days. Now I find it easy, to learn. The school should know that it was the online thing and I'll not miss days again.

[At school there is a particular teacher who supports me.] They always say to never give up and keep on carrying on with the work and I enjoy spending time with them. There's two of them and [I see them] like once a week or three times [sometimes].

They're always there. [But] there's not really that much things that's been hard for me, but... the work is [harder than friendships].

Spanish is just annoying. It is just hard, and we had the end of year test and it was annoying me, frustrating me. [I feel frustrated a lot at] school. [There are a lot more subjects at secondary school], like languages.

I like PE and maths, but I don't really enjoy lunch times and break times at all. You just walk around, you can't really go anywhere. Sometimes I enjoy breaktime.

[The last five years, from year four to now, feels] crazy. In the primary I was just a kid like who didn't like, talk back and that [to other kids]. But now like, I don't know how to explain it [tuts]. I'm not scared of them. So I just like talk back and like act like I don't care. No, I'm not scared of them. I used to be, but now I'm not.

I knew in high school there will be like kids that act tough and I would look like their pillow so I had to improve because they'll literally go for me, all the time. And I'd be like the underdog. So....

My friends were there for me.

[When I do fight back] I get in trouble, myself. I have a report [and] I have to show my behaviour, [which is] annoying. There's this one kid that gets in my business for no reason. Like I'm talking to someone else. He just gets in my business and just says bad words.

He tries to fight me, and then I fight back. He's calling me names all the time. Like, I don't know, why.

[He doesn't get in as much trouble] as I did because... I just don't care and I push him.

And my teacher keeps on telling me to ignore them. Like this, this teacher in PE. And like there's this kid that, like, hit me and that. And he's like, he just told him to not do it. How is that gonna do anything? He lets him do anything.

I just always wish to go home.

### **The future**

[In general I'd prefer to just be at home. If I didn't have to learn, I wouldn't want to be at school. There's nothing fun.] You just learn. But school gets at the top of your life, because it will get you money, then you can enjoy life. Nobody will take you in jobs if you don't know nothing. You'll just ruin it, so, you have to be qualified.

I'd like to be a footballer, but that's sports .... I want to become a plumber. Or a doctor or something. But I don't think I'll become a doctor. [It would be too hard]. And I'll get upset if I don't save anybody.

[If I was a plumber, I'd] get money. Easy money. [You have to train for] two years. My brother does it. [You need] English, science, and math. My brother said he needed like a grade four.

Right now I'm struggling. But I'll make sure to pass.

[If I could chat to the person I was in year six] I would say come to this school. So we can hang out.

[If you could wave a magic wand and change one thing at school, I'd like you to make it] peaceful, like no violence.

[I care about my attendance and want to have a good attendance record] and I know I've not gone sick lately.

**[Michael's story ends]**

If you have any questions or concerns about how the research has been conducted please contact the research supervisor [Dr Helena Bunn]. School of Psychology, University of East London, Water Lane, London E15 4LZ,  
Email: [h.bunn@uel.ac.uk](mailto:h.bunn@uel.ac.uk)

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### G.3 Clara's story and email

16 July 2021

Dear [Clara],

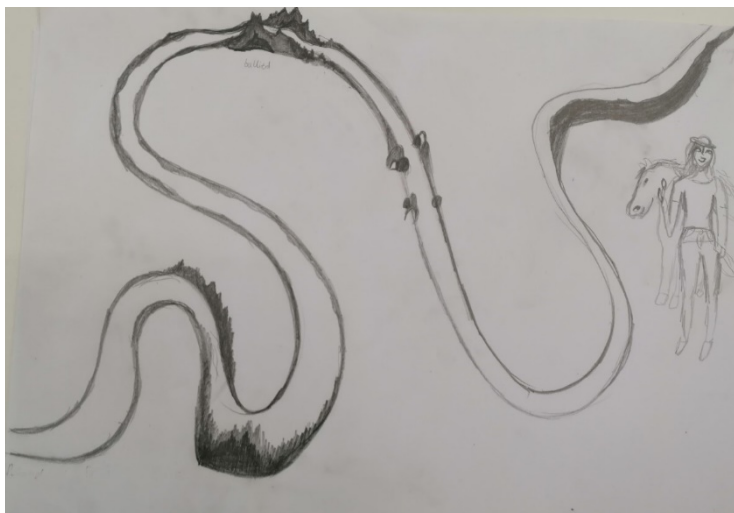
Thank you SO much for being part of my research and for giving me so much time over the last few months. I understand now you have to self-isolate – wretched Covid! – so it is harder for us to meet. Mrs [S] and I thought I could email you instead and give you a chance to read through your story and see if you want to make any changes to it – or if you want to add anything.



I really got a sense reading over your transcript and our work together, that you have worked phenomenally hard and done an amazing job at refocusing yourself and learning to grab what is good from a situation and use it to your advantage. There is an idea in psychology that sometimes we need the bad to help us understand the good and vice versa, and from this we can grow and be stronger. It feels, talking to you, that you have grown stronger from the dark and difficult times when you first arrived in the UK.

I also felt that there were a few key adults who really noticed you and recognised you and listened to you and that those people have been important in your journey – such as your mother, your therapist and your drama teacher?

There are some themes that seemed to stand out as well – that you felt alone when you first arrived in the UK, that you needed someone to help you with friendships but you didn't get that help straight away, that you didn't feel you had control over your own life, and that sometimes adults at school didn't believe you or listen to you properly. Partly because you also didn't speak English when you first got here – it seems like you felt very much on the outside – like you didn't really have a voice. Do you think that is right? Reading your words again I get a real sense that some things felt very unfair. Do tell me if I have not understood that properly.



A couple of questions – do you remember the beautiful river you drew?? Can I just check a few things? Were you drawing your life from left to right – as in your early life and Poland is on the bottom left, and then your future – the woman with the horse – is in the right? When you spoke about leaving Poland it seemed to me that that was a huge disruption and a huge loss – and I wonder exactly where that is on your river?

Also, was year six and the bullying – when you first arrived – the first lot of shadow or the rocks up at the top? Is there any of the river that is still Poland?

And when you joined Year 7 you mention you initially still struggled in English – did I get that right?

I also wondered if you could tell me a little bit more about the Duke of Edinburgh award you mentioned and how you got involved in doing that? You mentioned you were meant to be volunteering at the stables for that.

So – please read through “Clara’s story” (below) and tell me if it still sounds like you. It is all your own words [except for where I have put things in square brackets like this to clarify]. I also decided to delete a few “ums” and “ers” which we all use a lot when we speak, and most of the “likes” that you use in your speech. I thought these disrupted the flow of your story when you read it. When you talk it flows naturally, but when it is written it seems odd. Is that ok? I can put them back in if you would prefer. I left in some that seemed important – where you are trying to remember or where you are finding it hard perhaps. Let me know?

Please do tell me if I have missed something crucial, or you don’t like it, or it doesn’t sound like you. You can email me if you want any changes on [u1825071@uel.ac.uk](mailto:u1825071@uel.ac.uk)

OR just let me know it’s ok and you are happy with it or you want to add something!

And remember you can also tell me if you don’t want to be part of the research anymore – up to the end of next week.

Thank you again so much for agreeing to take part in my research, and for being such great company and talking so openly about your experiences.

I hope to hear back from you but if that isn’t possible, then Good Luck! It has been such a pleasure getting to know you.

Warmest wishes,

Helen

Helen Barron Williams  
University of East London  
[U1825071@uel.ac.uk](mailto:U1825071@uel.ac.uk)



**“Clara’s” story**

I love animals and horses, and they make me really calm, and I feel ... really relaxed when I'm with horses and stuff. Back in Poland, I used to go [horse riding] almost every day ... because the stable was 15 minutes away from our house.

For school, we were supposed to find like a job for ourselves for a week, and then for the Duke of Edinburgh Award ... I was supposed to also do volunteering, so I wanted to go to the horse to the stable, to work there with horses. It's like... whenever I feel upset, sad, I just want to be with a ... animal. Like a horse.

I used to want to work with animals. My whole life, I wanted to be a vet. And then I think in Year six, I already knew I kind of wanted to be architect. Oh! I was just always really creative. Even as a child; I would build stuff. And make big sculptures, like houses or like different stuff. And even in the nursery, when I was building something, even the teacher, she was like, 'Oh, she's gonna be an architect when she grows up'!

[I came to the UK in Year 6]

Um.. I... I had a few friends [in Poland], I had my close, best friend. And then just after I came [to the UK], we don't even talk to each other anymore. It just... like .... everything just cut off. Just, just left it behind.

Yes. It's like a different life. But yeah. Everything just kind of restarted.

[I still feel connected to the person I was when I was in Poland, But everything else around me changed]

When I came I didn't speak English at all. No-one would like understand me, what I'm trying to say. And I couldn't really, like do anything about it. ...Anyways, so I felt, kind of, alone.

In Year seven, when I [moved to secondary school] I [still] couldn't really speak English and I was like really bullied by girls in the school. I [didn't] really have any friends... for almost a year. I [had to] learn English really fast when [I] came to year seven, I just learned it like in a few months. I remember at the end of Year seven I was reading, writing a test, and I actually did it good and I moved up to Set 2 in Year 8.

It was extra hard [for] me too, because I have dyslexia. So yeah, quite hard for me to learn the language. But ... it wasn't even *that* hard. It was easier than I expected to be.

[The bullies], literally would just make up stuff, and [others] would believe them because they speak English so they know what's going on. They wouldn't believe me. There was no one that spoke my language in the school.

I really wanted to leave the school. [It] was really hard to get over 'cause I just wanted to give up.

They took my stuff and they wrote my name on the wall saying I'm a virgin... and an idiot.

I didn't feel confident at all. Like, If the girls were bullying me, I couldn't even like speak back to them. I would just leave it. And now I would. I would speak back or something.

### **Period of low attendance**

Even after school, sometimes, or on the weekends I wanted to just stay home because I can't be a\*sed to do anything; 'cause I was like, really depressed and sad. My mum almost always make me go out like we just walk around. She said "why don't you go outside?" That also really helped.

Oh, really, I was really I was crying. I was doing nothing and that actually helped ... going outside.

I didn't really think about life at all. I was just overthinking everything. I was just concentrating on the bad things that were happening to me. I didn't look at the positives. I was just concentrating on the negatives.

### **The return**

And then I came back.

Yeah, I was like, I had this therapist and I told her everything. She was just talking to me. She understood, because, like, most people just don't understand how it feels. She was just there for me.

Everyone says that you should always tell [your] parents and that's true, you should tell them but they can't really help you that much. Because you have the kind of relationship with them, that you don't want them to worry about your damage. And like even my friends, some of them are depressed or something... Even they told me that they don't want [their] parents to worry about them. And they know they should tell them but they don't want them to worry that much. So they just don't do it.

I talk to my mum about everything. But ... like... she could even say the same thing the therapist would tell me, but it's just different [laughs] ... from what the therapist does.

[There was a supportive drama teacher and] he would involve me in stuff. He didn't really knew about that stuff that happened to me. But he was just there. And he ... he always was happy and positive. And like.. just ... nice.

[I like to keep different problems in different areas] I don't really want to mix them. If I have a problem somewhere, then it is just there, and if I go somewhere else, I don't have the problem at all. So I can like.. be free.... And then I can solve the problem like there, then I don't have any problems, and I don't want to, like, spread them everywhere, I guess?

You want to have a good relationship with the teacher, because you've got to spend, almost every day with them. And you just want to concentrate on your work. You don't want to think about the stuff or like you don't want the teacher to remind you of the bad stuff. So you just want to keep [it separate]. You don't want to tell them.

In Year 8 [things got better. I made a good friend in music class.] Yeah, just we just had to do like one project together so we just started talking, and became friends. And that really

helped. The friends, and the drama class, was like the reason I wanted to go to school like every day.

And then in the middle of Year 8 - One boy asked me out [and we were together] almost two years.

### **Difficulties again, but different**

Later, when we broke off, my boyfriend [...] our group kind of separated, because some people went with him and some with me. That was like the hard time [because people were unkind again and he was unkind and said things that weren't true]. I felt kind of alone.

It feels horrible. You're like, really surprised. How did they even come up with that stuff? Cos it's so untrue? Like, how do people even believe that? So it feels like you can't do anything, and it makes you feel like really small, that just feel, you can't do anything about it?

[But I had] this one best friend, so it was fine. I would talk to [my boyfriend] all the time. And then over time, I just needed to wait for it, he just needed time ... Over time, people just forget it. Or like, just everyone just moves on. So you just have to be strong.

At first I didn't understand, I was really angry. I was like, why do you have to be rude to me? And then it kind of ... went better over time. And now we're friends so it's fine.

You can't control it. If you feel like you're strong enough, you can just talk to them for ... just take them for a talk, and, just talk to them for a long time. Try to explain stuff with them, and just why they do it. Like me and my ex, we were talking for hours.

[I just had] to wait. Like, we talked a lot after it. I just had to understand him. And like, I understood that he was depressed. And he was hurt. [You] just need to give them time.

### **The future**

I want to do like, [something] artistic? Because when someone tells me to do something, I don't really want to do it, because I need to feel like, I want to do it, to have the motivation. I just like, doing it. Because I'm really creative, and I think I am, like, it calms me down too, when I draw, I concentrate on it. Because I don't have to think about anything else. I'm just, in my own world, painting [and] stuff.

[I want to build] houses and.. er... mansions. And I want to be [an] interior designer. So I want to do inside the houses. [To be an architect] they basically told me I need to do art, I mean, maths and English and some, like creative subjects.

After university, I really want to travel, like, everywhere, and I want to get a job. And I want to buy old houses, that no one wants, and recreate them and make them, and sell them. And then after, when I have like a massive house, and everything I wanted, then I can have a child and have like, a normal life.

I'm very ambitious. Yeah. If I have a target, if I want something, I do anything to achieve it.

### **Now; perspective**

Now it is kind of karma time, because now I got moved up to the top set, everywhere, and [the bully] is in the bottom sets.



I'm confident, and I believe in myself.

I think [the hard time] was quite important for my life because after I learned how to, how to defend myself, I gained self-esteem, and confidence. And it just pushed me forward.

The parts where I was depressed [were not positive], but it helped, afterwards, [it] changed everything.

I think everything happens for a reason in life. It happened so I could get out of my comfort zone.

[Schools should] maybe just talk about it more and speak about how to get help more. Because mostly kids don't even know what to do in a situation. And they're getting bullied or something. They don't want to tell the teachers, because they think they, like, they're not gonna do anything about it. Like even when I was getting bullied, I told the teacher, that girl that was actually bullying, she didn't even say sorry. And I was the one that had to say, sorry to her for... nothing.

And some other random people just got involved for no reason. And it was just all hectic and confusing.

So I think [there] should be more people, like, therapists, to speak to, that kids could speak to, because there is like, one therapist in my school or something, I don't really know, but it was really hard to get it; some people have to wait a few months to get it. I think there should be more of that. And it should be easier to get.

It's also friends; you could talk to them about stuff. In Year 7, I didn't really have friends at all.

[If there was someone in Year Seven now who was having a tough time, someone like me could talk to them]. I think that's a good idea. Yeah. Cos, I've already been through that, so I understand. So I can like talk to them and help them.

I just want to say one other thing. I'm the kind of person that trusts everyone, and I also don't think it's good, because, there's lots of fake people that will literally use it against you. You shouldn't trust everyone, cos ... it might be bad for you... so you need to have just a few people that you really can trust and you know it and then you can tell them because I just kind of trust too many people and I shouldn't trust that much.

I still kind of over think [things]! Cos that's just how I am, but ... I try to solve it... and I talk to people about [problems] ... like I just tell everyone I trust, so I don't have to keep it for myself... I open up to people, but I have the control.

**[Clara's story ends]**

If you have any questions or concerns about how the research has been conducted please contact the research supervisor [Dr Helena Bunn]. School of Psychology, University of East London, Water Lane, London E15 4LZ,

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**Appendix I**

**A Sample Full Transcript divided into Discourse Units or 'Moves' (Clara)**

[starts next page for formatting reasons]

## Working transcript for analysis

<p>Clara  You can use my second name Clara.</p> <p>1:24  HBW  Clara, lovely. Like the nutcracker. That's an easy one to remember. How have you been since we last spoke how's life at school; lockdown?</p> <p>Clara:  I'm doing fine. It's just a bit depressing sometimes. Because you get to see home all the time. But I'm doing fine.</p> <p>HBW:  Good. You seem well. Is there a lot of work at the moment?</p> <p>Clara:  Yeah, there's quite a bit.</p> <p>...</p> <p>2:21  HBW  And so what I wanted to talk to you about today is that I wanted to make sure... I would have come back anyway, to check in with you and make sure that you were sort of happy with the way that I was looking at your words, and what you told me; but particularly last time, if you remember, the connection, the internet connection kept dropping off and stalling and then your video stopped and my videos, it was completely disastrous. So I was reading the transcript. And some of it is, is just completely chaotic, and some of it is there. And your words are very there. And they're powerful. But for example, it also it transcribes things incorrectly, sometimes. So it kept talking about the, the trauma group that you're attending, when obviously, that was meant to be the drama group. And you know, things like that, or whatever.</p> <p>So I've been tidying it up to make sure it makes sense in English. But also because a lot of it kept</p>	
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blocking, or we kept losing connection, I just wanted to sort of come back and make sure that I've really got your, your words and your story. Because the research I'm doing is using it sort of uses what's called narrative psychology, which means it's all about 'narrative', and narratives are stories, storytelling, and storytelling is the way that we all it's the way we talk to each other the way we talk to ourselves the way we make sense of the world around us. So even if I was just telling you, you know what I got up to this morning, or even when I was telling you about reading the transcript, that was me telling you a story, in a way wasn't it?

And then it's about sort of what we choose to put in our stories and what we choose to leave out. And so it's very important that it's your story and that I'm not, you know, making up stuff and writing down things that just aren't true and aren't valid and aren't real. So I wanted to check through just a few things with you, if I can?

Okay. So, there were if I'm right, the key bit, first of all, I was looking again at your river and how beautiful it was, oh my goodness, it was such a beautiful river. So I'd like us to have a little bit of a look at that as well if we can. But the key things that I picked up from your story were your move from Poland, and away from family at about the year six. not speaking English when you got here. The issues with a particular friend in your new school who sort of turned against Because she was jealous of you. And then the bullying began, and particularly as you moved into year seven.

And then there was a period that was very, very difficult for you. And then you moved into a period where you decided that you shouldn't care what people thought anymore, and that you needed to be strong. You met some friends, more friends through music, and through drama. And you had a boyfriend as well, who originally was very good and supportive. But during lockdown, it got a bit complicated and he was less kind. And across all of these areas, I've got a sense from you at the end that this sense of your own need to be strong and your own strength, and that you shouldn't take on other people's opinions too much, you need to protect yourself, and that you need to fix your own problems. And you shouldn't run away from

*[Nodding]*

*[Nodding – small]*

*[Looks down [but I think maybe at phone]*

*[Nods slight smile]*

*[A lot of nodding  
Totally still, until...]*

*[Smile, look up to left  
Look down – phone again I think]*

*[Looks up to side]*

*[Soft / shy smile]*

<p>problems. You said that to me a lot, that you didn't want to run away and not to overthink things sometimes as well. And that to sort of get on with life in a way. Are those is that the right key things that I've picked up from what you were telling me?</p> <p>Clara: [inaudible, soft sound like agreement]</p> <p>HBW Did I miss anything?</p> <p>Clara: 6:25 Um... not really. [Long pause]</p> <p>Also later when we broke off, my boyfriend, when we came back to school, that was like the hard time when our group kind of separated, because some people went with him and some with me. And it was a quite hard time too because they were all like boys, and he was one of them, so I felt kind of alone. This one best friend. So it was fine. I would talk to him all the time. And then over time, I just needed to wait for it, he just needed time ... at first I didn't understand, I was really angry. I was like, why do you have to be rude to me? And then it kind of get, it went better over time. And now we're friends .. so it's fine.</p> <p>HBW: 7:20 Didn't.. and he said some things that weren't true, didn't he? Didn't he say things about you that weren't true? He wasn't being kind was he?</p> <p>Clara: just have to wait. Like, we talked a lot after it. Like... [shrug] .. I [inaudible]</p> <p>HBW: do you think he was hurt that the relationship had ended? And that's why he was being?</p> <p>Clara: Yeah.</p> <p>HBW: People can be very hurtful when they're hurt, can't they? If you're in pain, people can lash</p>	<p><b>Second episode</b> <b>Hard alone wait time</b> <b>time</b></p> <p><b>Third episode ...</b> <b>Understand</b> <b>wait</b></p> <p><i>[nodding lots... smile lots]</i></p> <p><b>... Third episode cont</b></p> <p><i>[Looks down at phone]</i></p>
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<p>Clara: I just had to like understand him. And like, I understood that he was like depressed. And he was hurt. Just need to give them time.</p> <p>HBW 8:06 That was very kind of you're very patient.</p> <p>Clara: [laughs] Yeah.</p> <p>HBW: And one thing also, I thought you didn't talk much about adults as much around you, as you did about people who your own age, which is completely normal. You know, you are hanging out more with teenagers. And I was wondering if that was because you didn't sort of want to rely on the adults around</p> <p>Clara: 8:34</p> <p>Yeah, I was like, I had this therapist and I told her like everything</p> <p>And she knows, like... because everyone says that you should always tell our parents and that's true, you should tell them but they can't really help you that much. Because you have the kind of relationship with them. That you don't want them to worry about your damage. And like even my friends. Some of them are like depressed or something... Even they told me that they don't want the parents to worry about them. And they know they should tell them but they don't want them to worry that much. So they just don't do it. Yes,</p> <p>HBW 9:13 yeah. I think that is we don't want the people we love to worry, do we?</p> <p>Clara: Yeah, that's why it's better to have like a therapist.</p> <p>And like my, my ex, he he really didn't want a therapist. I would tell him like all the time, that it really helps and you should get one. But he was like so against it. Like I don't know why [laughs]</p> <p>HBW:</p>	<p><b>Fourth episode</b> <b>Therapist</b> <b>Told / tell</b> <b>parents</b> <b>Should</b> <b>relationship</b> <b>worry</b> <b>damage</b> <b>depressed</b> <b>don't worry parents</b> <i>[Beep from phone]</i>.</p> <p><b>therapist</b></p> <p><b>Fifth episode – moving on</b> <b>understanding</b> <b>Being there for me</b> <b>How it feels</b> <i>[Looks down to phone again]</i></p> <p><i>[Looking up from phone, and then back down again]</i></p>
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<p>What was it that the therapist did that made it made her helpful.</p> <p>Clara:  She was just talking to me. She understood, because, like, most people just don't understand. How it feels. She was just there for me. [inaudible].</p> <p>HBW:  And you saw her every week, didn't you? Quite... quite a lot.</p> <p>Clara:  Um yeah</p> <p>HBW:  Yeah. Yeah. And, and then you talked about your mum, and you talked about the therapist a bit. There was also, is it a drama teacher?</p> <p>Clara: 10:06  Oh, yeah. He didn't really knew about that stuff that happened to me. But he was just there. And he ... he always was happy and positive. And he would involve me in stuff. And like,.. just ... nice [shrugs, smiles]. Huh?</p> <p>[looks to left. Pause]</p> <p>HBW: So always being there, and I guess the therapist was always there as well?</p> <p>Clara:  Yeah. [looking at phone]</p> <p>HBW:  That if you could rely on them, you knew they would be there?</p> <p>Clara:  Yeah. [looking at phone]</p> <p>HBW  Yeah. And was that important to be able to feel that people would be there regularly?</p> <p>Clara  Yeah, it's quite important to know that there is someone there for you to talk to</p>	<p><i>[Looks up, focuses].</i></p> <p><b>Again being there for her – but doesn't spell it out.  Happy and positive  Involve me  Nb she didn't tell him what was going on</b></p> <p><i>[Clara nods slowly a few times and then looks down again]</i></p> <p><i>[Swings a little in chair – side to] side</i></p> <p><i>[smiling]</i></p>
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<p>[Pause]</p> <p>HBW Are you or getting lots of messages from your mates at school?</p> <p>Do you all talk all day on sort of social media, as well as doing your online lessons? Or how does it ... How does it work?</p> <p>Clara: 11:04 Like... um.. what was the question?</p> <p>HBW: So do you get to see your friends at school, during lesson time? Or...</p> <p>Clara: ... Oh, yeah. Like if they have to come on, and stuff. Like, we call like, we have the break time. So like after school, we call and talk to each other a lot.</p> <p>HBW And have you been able to go out and see anybody outside? Sort of because we're allowed out one to one or something aren't we?</p> <p>Clara: Yeah, only like, my bestie. Yeah. ... we go to the park sometimes [smiles].</p> <p>HBW 11:39 Yeah, so.... also, I was thinking about.... Er.... how you said that you quite wanted to keep different problems in different areas as well</p> <p>Clara: Yeah. I don't really want to mix them. If I have a problem somewhere, then is just there, and if I go somewhere else, I don't have the problem at all. So I can like.. be free.... And then I can solve the problem like there, then I don't have any problems, and I don't want to, like, spread them everywhere, I guess?.</p>	<p><b>Sixth move / episode</b> <i>[Smiling. Swinging a little side to side – swivel chair. Seems much more relaxed. No longer texting either. issue resolved?]</i></p> <p><b>Problem as something outside her, containable and controllable. Sounds a bit like a bug or a virus – spread.</b></p> <p><b>Not mixing things</b></p> <p><b>Solve free</b></p> <p><i>[Quick glance to phone, then back at HBW.]</i></p> <p><b>Seventh move / episode</b></p>
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<p>HBW: Mm hmm. So you want to be able to sort of leave them where they live and go and do something that isn't.. that is problem free?</p> <p>Clara Yeah, [laughs]</p> <p>HBW: Yes, no, I understand that. And so you said that that was why sometimes, and that was another reason that you didn't talk to teachers or your mum so much, because you, you know, if you had good relationships with them, or if they were to do something else, you wanted to keep those worlds separate,</p> <p>Clara: 12:45 I talk to my mom about everything. But ... like... ,[pauses, brings arms together in front] .. she could even say the same thing the therapist would tell me, but it's just different. [laughs] .. from what the therapist does.</p> <p>HBW: I know. Yeah. Yeah, that's true. Families. Well, we view them differently, don't we?</p> <p>Clara: Yeah</p> <p>HBW: And our relationship is different with them. Yeah. ... And one time, so there was ... when you were talking about leaving Poland, and when you were younger, as well, that was when the connection was particularly bad. And it kept just completely disappearing. So I was worried if I'd missed some things that were important to you about that. You talked about how you use them, you're quite shy, but you did have friends and activities, and lots of after school clubs and things and you there was a lot of family there. But it kept dropping off. So I was just wondering if there's sort of anything else about... about your life in Poland that you wanted to tell me about? And what it was like when you had to leave</p> <p>Clara:</p>	<p><b>I bring up mum she adds therapist. Say same thing but perceived differently.</b></p> <p><i>[Clara looking at HBW and also a little to left and right, as if concentrating / remembering / thinking]</i></p> <p><b>Eighth episode</b> <i>[Looks down, left, right. Away from HBW]. Grieving?</i> This feels so sad. It felt sad during the moment Just, just, just, just just ☹ Left it behind Close, best, don't even talk Anymore</p>
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Um.. I... I had a few friends, like I had my close, best friend. And then just after I came here, we don't even talk to each other anymore. It just... like .... everything just cut off. Just just left it behind.

HBW:

So if you were on that river, and I might share a Can I share my screen so you can see your lovely River.

[pause]

Do you mind if I do that?

Clara:

Oh, yeah.

HBW:

Tell me what can you see? Can you see the river?

Clara:

Yeah.

HBW:

Okay. So do you remember drawing this?

Clara:

Yeah, I had to really concentrate, Because When I just talk to someone, I need to concentrate on it, and when I draw I concentrate on the drawing, so it's just really... [little laugh]

HBW: 15:10

Oh, I see. So you found it hard to sort of talk and draw at the same time?

Clara:

Yeah.

HBW:

That's interesting. Well, you did a beautiful drawing and you did manage to do some talking. So .. I'm sorry. It must have been... I'm sorry it was hard for you. I didn't... Are you okay now? If you're not drawing, but just have a look at it to talk about it a bit?

Clara:

Yeah.

HBW:

**... Eighth episode continued  
Different life  
restarted  
connected  
changed**

<p>So I was just wondering, you said that it's sort of like everything stopped when you left Poland?</p> <p>Clara: Speaker 15:36 Yeah. [inaudible...]</p> <p>HBW: Where ... sorry - Carry on</p> <p>Clara: Yes. It's like a different life. But yeah. Everything just kind of restarted.</p> <p>HBW: Mmmm. Do you still feel connected to the person you were when you were in Poland?</p> <p>Clara Yeah.</p> <p>HBW Yeah, But everything else around you changed?</p> <p>Clara: Yeah.</p> <p>HBW: Yeah, So whereabouts on this river would be leaving Poland? Would it be the big shaded bit at the bottom of the first bend? Or is it up near the..... Or is it before that? Where .... is sort of where would we put that big? I don't know, dam or lock or block in the water?</p> <p>Clara: pretty late, before the first mountain starting</p> <p>HBW: before the first mountain. Okay. So then leaving was this sort of dark, slightly scary. Is this meant? dark and scary? Is that right?</p> <p>Clara 16:37 Yeah, quite.</p> <p>HBW: 16:40 And then, do you remember what the different bits sort of meant to you as you drew it?</p> <p>Clara: 16:47</p>	<p><b>Ninth move / episode ... I moved it on – she wouldn't continue – long pause.</b></p> <p><b>... Ninth move continued</b></p> <p><b>Tenth move</b></p> <p><b>[I AM TALKING TOO MUCH HERE!!!]</b></p> <p><b>Eleventh move Yeah Yeah Yeah Yeah etc – am I trying too hard not leaving enough space or does she not want to talk or its uncomfortable?</b></p>
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<p>So at the top this mountains... is meant like, I was getting bullied in Year seven... and eight, then the low mountains, were like after the breakup, and then the rest?</p> <p>[pause]</p> <p>HBW 17:08 There's a big good, sweep here, isn't there? And then I love this lady with her horse.</p> <p>umm we didn't talk much about where you wanted to be in the future. Did we really?</p> <p>[pause]</p> <p>We talked about how strong you were being now.</p> <p>Clara: yeah</p> <p>HBW: And how you were working hard, and you said you enjoyed studying much more now.</p> <p>Cara: Yeah I do.</p> <p>HBW: Whereabouts on the river do you think you are now?</p> <p>Clara: 17:36 Like.... [pause] [pointing]</p> <p>HBW: In the clear bit?</p> <p>Clara: Yeah</p> <p>HBW: So things are sort of smooth?</p> <p>Clara: Yeah.</p> <p>HBW:</p>	<p><i>[seems uncomfortable]</i></p> <p><i>[shifts in seat, seems uncomfortable]</i></p> <p><i>[Clara turns to talk to someone]</i></p> <p><i>[big smile]</i></p>
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<p>Okay. And would you say there's no... can you see any obstacles coming up? Or you think.... it's clear all the way now?</p> <p>Clara: I think.... [pause] It's I don't know... [pause] I'm sorry</p> <p>HBW: That's a tough question, isn't it? Actually sorry. You've got to get through school and things, haven't you? And can you tell me about ... I'm going to stop sharing my screen now... And can you tell me about</p> <p>[pause] Clara: Sorry, it's my mum [big smile]</p> <p>HBW: Ah, your mum is there? Oh, great. Okay. So.. could you tell me about the woman with the horse?</p> <p>Unknown Speaker 18:31 So, like, I love animals and horses, and they make me like, really calm, and I feel like... really relaxed when I'm with, like horses and stuff. And basically, so for school, we were supposed to find like a job for ourselves for like a week and then for the [cough] Duke of Edinburgh Award ... I was supposed to also do like volunteering, so I wanted to go to like the horse to the stable, to work there with horses. And it's like... whenever like, I feel upset, like sad, I just want to be with like a ... animal. Like a horse. Because I also love like horse riding and stuff.</p> <p>HBW: So you you go horse riding?</p> <p>Clara: And yes, sometimes. Like back in Poland, I used to go like every, almost every, day.</p> <p>HBW: Oh, wow. Okay, So when you were younger, you had access to horses all the time.</p>	<p><b>Twelfth move – she's back! ...</b> <b>Not sure if it is mum – fed in some support – or if it is she has found a way to talk that is not uncomfortable for her.</b> <i>[swivelling on chair throughout this bit</i> <i>... smiling, laughing a little]</i></p> <p><b>... 12<sup>th</sup> move continued...</b> <i>[laughs – ruefully]</i></p> <p><b>... 12 cont ...</b></p> <p><b>... 12 cont ...</b></p> <p><b>[big smile]</b></p> <p><b>12 drifting off but not an intentional shift necessarily</b></p>
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<p>Clara: Yeah, because the stable was like 15 minutes away from our house</p> <p>HBW: Yeah. Wow. And where's the nearest stable now where you are and must be stables in West London.</p> <p>Clara: Yes, there's one in Broadway say 20 minutes away from here to like.. walk.</p> <p>HBW: And, can you just sort of go and pay to have an hour with a horse, or do you have to do lessons or how does it work?</p> <p>Clara: I want to work there.</p> <p>HBW: Yeah.</p> <p>Clara: For now it's closed.</p> <p>HBW: Ach, yeah, of course.</p> <p>Clara: But Well, I'm supposed to go to like, in like, next week or something.</p> <p>Mm mm</p> <p>Clara: [inaudible] going there.. more often....</p> <p>HBW: So you're going to do ... so.... that's to do sort of work experience in this year. Is it? You do that?</p> <p>Clara: Yeah</p> <p>HBW: And then... but did you want to work with horses? as a career when you're older?</p>	<p><b>13<sup>th</sup> episode</b></p> <p><i>[Goes v quiet, looks down at feet.</i></p> <p><b>14<sup>th</sup> move</b> <i>Then smile and look up again]</i></p>
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<p>Clara: No, I want to be an architect.</p> <p>HBW: Oh yeah, I remember that!</p> <p>Clara: Yeah.</p> <p>HBW: And what would you What would you create? What would you design?</p> <p>Clara: 20:47 Like houses and.. er... mansions.</p> <p>And I want to be like, interior designer. So I want to do like inside the houses.</p> <p>HBW Mm hmm. And would you... Would you like to be able to sort of do anything you want at all in a sort of artistic way?</p> <p>Clara: Yeah</p> <p>HBW: Or do you want to have to respond to what people are asking for?</p> <p>Clara: I want to do like, artistic? Like, because when someone tells me to do something, I don't really want to do it, because I need to feel like, I [inaudible] to want to do it, to have the motivation.</p> <p>HBW: Do you know any architects?</p> <p>Clara: Um, [Pause] kinda</p> <p>HBW: 21:40</p>	<p><b>15<sup>th</sup> move</b> <b>Bringing in idea of being rebel</b> <i>[Smiling / laughing softly]</i> <b>Or is it not being able to work without motivation? But she seems to be doing v well at school...</b></p> <p><b>16th episode</b> <b>Have I burst her bubble?</b> <i>[Looks away. Uncomfortable]</i></p>
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<p>Yep. [pause] So at school, ... you do, you study art, don't you?</p> <p>Clara: Yeah, I study art.</p> <p>HBW: Yeah. And is it possible to sort of do architecture, sort of within that?</p> <p>Clara: Yeah. I Basically, just do like architecture, in art? because you choose your own topic.</p> <p>HBW: Do you think you'll apply to university to do architecture?</p> <p>Clara: Yeah.</p> <p>HBW: That's a good goal, isn't it? And what do you need to do at A level? to do that?</p> <p>Clara: I need to do art, Maths, Physics.</p> <p>HBW: That's quite a quite a lot, isn't</p> <p>Clara: Yeah. They basically told me I need to do art, I mean, maths and English and some, like creative subjects. Mm hmm.</p> <p>HBW: A lot of different subjects. And um.. so what do you think? So the little [Clara] in year six, did she imagine that she'd be heading towards A levels hoping to study architecture? And working with horses?</p> <p>Clara: I used to want to work with like animals. My whole life. I wanted to be like a vet. And then I think in Year six, I already knew I kind of wanted to be architect.</p> <p>HBW:</p>	<p>[looks up to the left, considers]</p> <p><b>17<sup>th</sup> episode</b></p> <p><b>18<sup>th</sup> episode</b>  <b>Creative</b>  <b>Even as a child (no longer?!?!)</b>  <b>Nursery</b>  <b>She's gonna be... ! [laughing]</b></p> <p>[she starts to say something here but HBW talks over here a little... ☺]</p> <p>[smiles]</p> <p><b>Creative again</b></p>
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Really? Wow.	<i>[looks away, laughs]</i>
Clara: Yeah. But I wasn't really like doing anything.	
HBW: 23:17 What do you think made you want to be an architect when you were when you were Year six? What was it that you ...?	
Clara: Oh! I was just always like, really creative. Even as a child. I would like build stuff. And make, like, big sculptures, like houses or like different stuff. And even in the nursery, when I was like, building something, like even the teacher, or like, the person [inaudible], she was like, Oh, she's gonna be an architect when she grows up.	
HBW: Yeah, oh, yes! They put the idea in your head? [pause] Or Maybe they could see it in you?	
[pause]	
Yeah.	
Clara: And then, I would like, I just like, doing it. Because I'm really creative, and I think I am, like, it calms me down too, when I like draw, I concentrate on it. Because I don't have to think about anything else. I just, in my own world, painting... stuff.	
HBW: So we really, at the end of your beautiful picture of the river, there ought to be some sort of amazing thing that you've created some architectural dream home or beautiful buildings shouldn't there as well.	<i>[nods, smiles]</i>
Clara: Yeah,	
HBW: maybe you could design stables, and bring the two together. So you could have beautiful place for horses Or a ranch.	<i>[Nods]</i> <i>[Nods, smiles]</i>

<p>Pause</p> <p>And when you were feeling depressed, and people were not treating you well at school, and you were fighting it harder to come in to school and you would you'd come in later, you'd miss some days because it was a horrible place to be. Did you then think that you would be able to be an architect one day? Or did you not manage to think that far?</p> <p>Clara:</p> <p>I didn't really think about life at all. I was just overthinking everything. I was just concentrating on the bad things that were happening to me. I didn't look at the positives. I was just like, concentrating on the negatives. So I don't really think [inaudible]</p> <p>Unknown Speaker 25:37 so you couldn't see a future because you were so focused.</p> <p>Unknown Speaker 25:41 Yeah.</p> <p>HBW: Okay. [pause]</p> <p>But now you feel, do you feel now you can see a future?</p> <p>Clara: Yeah.</p> <p>HBW: That's good. And Do you think...um... Can you see beyond university? Or do you just go that far?</p> <p>Clara: 26:00 Yeah, I can see. Like, after university, I really want to travel. Like, everywhere, and I want to get a job. And I want to like, buy old houses, that no one wants, and recreate them and make them, and sell them.</p> <p>HBW: Wow, lovely. [pause] Yeah</p>	<p><i>[Compressing lips Looks away to left Lips still compressed]</i></p> <p><b>19<sup>th</sup> episode</b></p> <p><b>Smiles</b></p>
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<p>Clara: And then after, like, when I have like a massive house, and everything I wanted, then I can have a child and have like, a normal life</p> <p>Unknown Speaker 26:39 so you can't have a child until you have a huge house?.</p> <p>Unknown Speaker 26:43 I mean, I can, but I wouldn't like, First, I want to do like that [inaudible]</p> <p>Unknown Speaker 26:51 get yourself sorted.</p> <p>Unknown Speaker 26:52 Yeah.</p> <p>Clara: Yeah.</p> <p>HBW: Well, I think it sounds like a great dream. Sounds like a good future. And I imagine you probably... I can absolutely imagine you getting there. x. I think you're very determined.</p> <p>What do you think are your best qualities, the bits of you that will help you get there?</p> <p>Clara: I'm very ambitious. Yeah. If I have a target, if I want something, I do anything to achieve it.</p> <p>Mmm . That's a good thing. And what other things will help?</p> <p>Clara: Oh. Um. [Pause] So I'm, like, ambitious. And... [pause] it's hard</p> <p>HBW: Is it hard to think of good things about yourself and say them out loud?</p> <p>Clara: I, like, I'm confident, and I believe in myself.</p>	<p><b>20<sup>th</sup> episode</b> <b>Massive house</b> <b>Everything I wanted (travel, job house?)</b> <b>Kids come after!</b> <i>[Laughing a little]</i></p> <p><b>Smiling / laughing</b> <b>Shrugs shoulder</b></p> <p><b>I feel this is still 20<sup>th</sup>!! But will make it 21<sup>st</sup>.</b> <i>[Answers this immediately. Doesn't have to stop to think.]</i></p> <p><i>[Struggles here more to answer]</i> <b>Repeats AMBITIOUS. What is HARD? What does she mean?</b></p> <p><i>[Chewing her little finger, smiling, embarrassed...]</i></p>
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<p>HBW: And you think you keep saying you're creative as well, aren't you? You're talented.</p> <p>Clara: <b>Yeah.</b></p> <p>HBW That's good. And, and yet, you've been through this really tough time. And you didn't feel... Did you feel confident then... But just upset? Or did you not feel confident, then?</p> <p>Clara 28:11 I didn't feel confident at all. Like, If the girls were bullying me, I couldn't even like speak back to them. I would just leave it. And now I would [inaudible]. I would speak back or something.</p> <p>HBW: Mmmm</p> <p>Do you think language made a big difference? Do you think the fact that you were still learning English was very hard?</p> <p>Unknown Speaker 28:36 Oh, Yeah. Because they're also bullying me for like my English.</p> <p>HBW: Right.</p> <p>Clara: <b>Now. I'm like, [inaudible]</b></p> <p>HBW: Sorry, I couldn't quite hear that. What was the last bit?</p> <p>Clara: [Laugh], now, Like, now it's kind of the karma time, because now I got moved up to the top set, everywhere, and she's in the bottom sets.</p> <p>HBW [laughs] yes. these things do sometimes come around, don't they?</p>	<p><i>These feel like things she has learned to be. Not innate. Although... she would have to have it innate to some degree to be able to learn / grow / develop it.]</i></p> <p><b>Not voicing it.</b></p> <p><b>OK – definitely learnt as well. Maybe she had it but didn't know it?</b></p> <p><b>22<sup>nd</sup> segment Bullying</b></p> <p><i>[not sure she should be saying it?]</i></p> <p><i>[Looking side to side and swivelling, smiling, a little awkward, like maybe she's saying something naughty].</i> <b>Karma!</b> <i>Love this! Seems real.</i></p>
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<p>And er,</p> <p>Clara: Yeah,</p> <p>HBW: And.. it makes us feel... well, how does that make you feel?</p> <p>Clara: <b>Proud.</b></p> <p>HBW: Yeah. [nodding].</p> <p>[Pause]</p> <p>And so it was that it was the language and the being far away from home and being far away from things that you knew?</p> <p>Clara: Yeah. I think it was quite important for my life because after I learned how to, how to like defend myself, I gained like self-esteem, and confidence. And it just pushed me forward.</p> <p>Unknown Speaker 29:52 So in some ways, do you view it as a positive experience?</p> <p>Unknown Speaker 29:56 Well, not the parts where i was like depressed, but it helped, after, [inaudible] changed everything.</p> <p>HBW: Mnnn. So you sort of it's not that it itself was positive. Obviously, it was horrible, but good things could come out of it.</p> <p>Unknown Speaker 30:15 Yeah. I think everything happens for a reason in life. It happened so I could like get out of my comfort zone.</p> <p>Unknown Speaker 30:28 That's interesting. So in a way you broadened, you think?</p> <p>Clara:</p>	<p><b>23<sup>rd</sup> Segment / move</b> <b>From bullying to karma to pride</b></p> <p><b>24<sup>th</sup> Segment.</b> <b>Answers my earlier question –</b> <b>she developed the confidence</b> <b>from this experience. PTG!!!!</b> <b>Self esteem</b> <b>Self confidence</b> <b>Push forward</b></p> <p><b>Depressed</b> <b>Changed everything</b></p> <p><b>Everything happens for a reason</b> <b>In life – is extrapolating /</b> <b>generalising / transferring</b></p>
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<p>Yeah.</p> <p>HBW: That's very interesting X. Yeah. Although it would have been nicer if you didn't have to go through that to get out of your comfort zone wouldn't it?</p> <p>Clara: Yeah [laughs]</p> <p>HBW: But you, you've dealt with it amazingly well.</p> <p>Um, I was wondering if there's anything else that is important to your story that we haven't talked about?</p> <p>there was something Yeah.</p> <p>Is there anything that you think sort of makes up the person that you are? Or is important about the school that you go to? Or the person you want to be? Or your? Is there anything sort of in that in your perception of yourself and your experience that we haven't touched on? You don't have if it's private, you don't have to tell me? You?</p> <p>Clara: I can't really think of anything.</p> <p>HBW: Good. Okay, that's good that we've talked a lot. And I was wondering, there was one thing that both you know, you were saying that both your ex boyfriend, and this girl in year six, who still I know around, they both sort of said things about you that weren't true. Do you remember you were saying that they would sort of say nasty things? And I was wondering sort of what that feels like, when it's not just that...</p> <p>Clara: It feels horrible. You're like, really surprised? How did they even came up with that stuff? Cuz it's so untrue? Like, how do people even believe that? So it feels like you can't do anything, and it makes you feel like really small, that just feel, you can't do anything about it?</p> <p>HBW: You have no power, no control?</p>	<p><b>Broadened</b></p> <p><i>[She seems to be about to say something else, I interrupt without noticing... ]</i></p> <p><i>[Looking up to left, biting lips. Says hmmm. Then looks to right.]</i></p> <p><i>[Still looking uncomfortable]</i></p> <p><b>25<sup>th</sup> move</b> <i>[Still looking uncomfortable]</i></p> <p><i>[Still looking uncomfortable]</i></p> <p><b>26<sup>th</sup> move</b> <b>C interrupts HBW. Hooray! How? How? Believe. Untrue. Can't do anything. Powerless.</b></p>
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<p>Clara: Yeah. But over time, people just forget it. Or like, just everyone just moves on. So You just have to be strong.</p> <p>HBW: 32:37 And there are ... Did you feel that there were things you could control?</p> <p>Clara: Um... Yeah? there was some... you can't control it. If you feel like you're strong enough, you can just talk to them for ... just take them for a talk, and, just talk to them for a long time. Try to explain stuff with them, and just why they do it. Like Me and my ex, we were talking for hours.</p> <p>HBW: How is he now? Is he friendly with you?</p> <p>Clara: Yeah, we are friends.</p> <p>HBW: Good. That's impressive. Um, so there's... I think... So I sort of get when I look at your River, And I think about you and I sort of think about this time in Poland, where you had one life that was sort of quite full, and then that ended, and you came to England. And things seemed probably a bit. I don't know, tell me if I've got this wrong, but I feel from the way you're talking that things seemed a bit empty? and a bit lonely? like everything had stopped.</p> <p>And then people became rather ... then there were these horrible girl and difficulties and you had to change schools and everything was maybe a bit chaotic. Did it all feel a bit out of control?</p> <p>Clara: 34:10 Yeah, because when I came I didn't speak English at all, and I couldn't really, like do anything about it. No-one would like understand me what I'm trying to say. Anyways, so I felt, kind of, alone.</p> <p>HBW:</p>	<p><i>[Shy / wry laugh]</i></p> <p><b>Control Strong</b></p> <p><b>Talk. Talk Take them for a talk Talk to them</b></p> <p><i>[She's sitting still, quite quiet, not swivelling on chair so much. Not nodding, not looking away. Just still.]</i></p> <p><b>27<sup>th</sup> move Not speaking English Not being understood</b></p>
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<p>So even if you'd wanted to try and sort of explain or defend yourself or ... or attack... or answer back, you couldn't...</p> <p>Clara Yes, literally would just make up stuff, and they would believe them because they speak English so they they know what's going on. So they wouldn't not like Believe me?</p> <p>HBW: So the importance of language and being able to talk and being able to express yourself</p> <p>Clara: Yeah</p> <p>HBW: and it's really hard, isn't it?</p> <p>Clara: [pause] I've learned English like really fast when they came to year seven, I just learned it like in a few months, because I remember at the end of Year seven I was reading, writing a test, and I actually did it good and I moved up to Set 2 in Year 8.</p> <p>HBW: So ... you're proud of yourself?</p> <p>Clara: Yeah,</p> <p>HBW: You should be. Did you have to work very, very hard? Or did you find English? Did you find languages? Quite easy.</p> <p>Clara 35:34 It was like extra hard to me too, because I have dyslexia. So yeah, quite hard for me to learn the language. But this was, it wasn't even that hard. It was easier than I expected to be. Because there was no one that spoke my language in the school.</p> <p>HBW:</p>	<p><b>Alone (nb she does not pick up my word control)</b> <b>Loneliness</b></p> <p><b>28<sup>th</sup> move Again C jumps in – hooray!</b> <b>Speaking English again. Others knowing what was going on. Me not. (Sounds horrendous!!!!)</b></p> <p><b>If she says ‘yeah’ – can I put it in her story? Maybe after third reading if it rings true and chimes with her themes?</b></p> <p><b>29<sup>th</sup> move – on to success</b> <i>[Swivelling on chair again. Q a lot. Not looking at me.]</i></p> <p><b>She has used word before</b></p> <p><i>[Shy smile, looking to left].</i></p> <p><b>29<sup>th</sup> move – proud but also revisit being alone</b> <b>Gosh she felt alone.</b> <b>Extra hard</b> <b>Quite hard</b></p>
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<p>No Polish-speaking people in the whole of C School. Wow.</p> <p>Clara: I mean, I think there was that, they just wouldn't speak to me, like</p> <p>HBW: You didn't know.</p> <p>Clara: If there was someone I didn't know.</p> <p>HBW: 36:07 Mm mm. Wow. And then, then you manage to come through this period. So your language, you worked hard, and you got better at language and you met more people, you were doing different activities, music and drama, and you met this boy? And because you had sort of, what is this, right, I'm interpreting this right, tell me if I got it wrong. But the things that you learned in that period, perhaps about being strong, being yourself that you can't change, you can't control other people. So there's no point trying in a way. And not run away from your problems as you put it, though, your words, but to sort of keep going forwards. And then you found the boyfriend and the music and the drama. And that broadened you out even more, and gave you more experiences.</p> <p>And now you're heading towards this great career, this travel and this great career in architecture, with a good future ahead of you. Would that be right?</p> <p>Clara: Yeah.</p> <p>HBW: Or, you look a bit uncomfortable. Like maybe I've completely got it wrong or summarized it badly?</p> <p>Unknown Speaker 37:15 No. You've got it right. That's true.</p> <p>Unknown Speaker 37:20 Is it difficult sometimes thinking back on it again.</p> <p>Unknown Speaker 37:24</p>	<p><b>dyslexia</b> <b>no one that spoke my language</b></p> <p><b>they wouldn't speak to me</b></p> <p><b>If there was... I didn't know</b></p> <p><i>[Looking down a lot, swivelling, not really responding. ... She may be looking at phone – not clear]</i> ... ... ... <i>[Looking down into lap until "music and drama"]</i> ... ... <i>[Looks up and nods.]</i></p> <p><b>30<sup>th</sup> move</b> <i>[Small smile.]</i></p>
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Not really, cos I'm over it. So I don't mind talking about it. Because it won't affect me.

HBW:

Yeah. Thank you. All right. And is there anything that you think schools, or people like me who work with children in schools should know about how we can help people like you going through a tough time.

Clara: 37:51

Maybe just talk about it more and speak about how to get help more. Because mostly kids don't even know what to do in a situation. And they're getting bullied or something. They don't want to tell the teachers, because they think they like they're not gonna do anything about it. Like even when I was getting bullied, I told the teacher, that girl that was actually bullying, she didn't even say sorry. And I was the one that had to say, Sorry to her for.. nothing.

And some other random people just got involved for no reason. And it was just all hectic and confusing.

So I think this should be like more people, like, therapists, to speak to, that kids could speak to, because there is like, one therapist in my school or something, I don't really know, but it was like really hard to get it, like some people have to wait few months to get it. I think there should be more of that. And it should be easier to get.

HBW:

That's a really good point.

Clara:

Yeah.

HBW:

Because Also, if you were talking about how you wanted to keep different worlds different, so you maybe didn't want teachers to know exactly how you were feeling about your bullying... and ... situation...

Clara:

Yeah, ... because you want to have like a good relationship with the teacher, because you got to spend like, almost every day with them. And you just want to concentrate on your work. You don't want to

**31<sup>st</sup> move**

**Wow. I'm over it. It won't affect me.**

*[Little laugh]*

**32<sup>nd</sup> move**

**Talk. Speak.**

**Bullying**

**Not being listened to or believed.**

*[Gets animated*

*Talking faster than before]*

**Bullying again. Sense of injustice.**

**I said sorry she didn't. Had to say sorry.**

**Got involved for no reason**

**Random people**

*[Flicking hair, Leans into camera]*

More... Therapists.

Speak. Speak.

Really hard

waiting

More ... easier.

*[Nodding]*

**33<sup>rd</sup> segment**

<p>think about the stuff or like you don't want the teacher to remind you of the bad stuff. So you just want to keep .... You don't want to tell them...</p> <p>HBW: And do you think it's always adults who are available to talk that would be helpful like ....?</p> <p>Clara: 39:36 No, it's also friends, you could talk to them about stuff. [inaudible] In Year 7, I didn't really have friends at all.</p> <p>HBW: But other young people may be?</p> <p>Clara: [pause] Yeah. Like, yeah. I don't know.</p> <p>HBW: If there was someone in Year Seven now who was having a tough time, And someone like you could talk to them? Do you think that...?</p> <p>Clara: Yeah, I think that's a good idea. Yeah. Cos, I've already been through that, so I understand. So I can like talk to them and help them.</p> <p>HBW: Mmm. [Pause] I think you'd be great. I think you'd be very supportive, and encouraging. And very positive. You have a very um, positive, solution-focused, forward-thinking attitude. [smile] Is that the way you see yourself? Or is that something I've made up?</p> <p>Clara: I'm positive. I don't focus on the negative things .. at all...</p> <p>HBW: And, um, so if something happens now that upsets you, how do you handle it?</p> <p>Clara:</p>	<p>Again this keeping worlds separate Keep... Don't want to tell them... [getting quieter as sentence finishes]</p> <p><b>34<sup>th</sup> segment</b> FRIENDS Sense of loneliness <i>[Fiddling with hair a lot].</i></p> <p><b>35<sup>th</sup> segment</b> C smiles, nods a little. Looks pleased!</p> <p><b>36<sup>th</sup> segment</b> Smiling – laugh</p>
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<p>I, I[Pause] er [laughing] I still kind of over think it! Cos that's just how I am, but ... I try to solve it.. and like I talk to people about ... like I just tell everyone I trust. [laughing] so I don't have to keep it for myself.</p> <p>HBW: Yeah, yeah So you're still the same person, who thinks a lot, and is sort of curious probably, uses your brain a lot, and you think about these things</p> <p>Clara: Yeah, im an over thinker, so</p> <p>HBW: But you find a way to more forwards as well and to solve it</p> <p>Clara: Yeah</p> <p>HBW: Mmmm, well, I think., it's been absolutely lovely talking to you, X, and I've learned a huge amount. And you, you know, you seem, you've been through quite a bit and you've come out the other end and you seem to have learned quite a bit from it as well.</p> <p>Do you feel that you've learned? From your experience? Things?</p> <p>Clara: Yeah. Definitely</p> <p>HBW: So is there anything else you think of I should know.</p> <p>That's ok! [Laughs]</p> <p>[HBW starts explain what next step of process is and how she will pull out themes and share them with Clara. She mentions Trust and Clara interrupts:]</p> <p>Clara: Oh yeah, and also, I just want to say one other thing ... because when you said trust, I'm the kind of person that trusts everyone, and I also don't think it's good, because, there's lots of fake people that will</p>	<p>37<sup>th</sup> segment</p> <p><b>Third time at least (and last time we met she said it loads) that she's used this term 'over thinker' about herself.</b></p> <p><i>[Biting lip]</i></p> <p><i>[Looking down – shy or at phone? Looks up briefly Looks up properly, tosses hair, smiles Nods at idea she has learnt from it.]</i></p> <p>Looks to left, chews mouth. Long pause, slowly shaking head</p> <p>[laughs]</p> <p>38<sup>th</sup> segment <b>TRUST. SIX TIMES!</b></p>
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<p>literally use it against you, or like.... You shouldn't trust everyone, cos ... it might be bad for you... so you need to have like just a few people that you really can trust and you know it and then you can tell them because I just kind of trust too many people and I shouldn't.... trust .. that much</p> <p>HBW: And do you still trust a lot of people or have you sort of narrowed it?</p> <p>Clara: Yeah, I ... kinda like, I narrowed it...</p> <p>HBW: So that's interesting as well, isn't it? That you sort of.. we throw ourselves out open, and then we sort of have to come back in again, and then we can slowly come out a little bit, but... more controlled.</p> <p>Clara: Yeah. Usually I open up to people but I have the control and like</p>	<p><b>FAKE.</b> <i>[Rueful laugh]</i></p> <p><i>[Hair fiddle. Smile – small laugh. Shrugs one shoulder]</i></p> <p><i>[Fiddles with and smooths hair Flicks. Little laugh].</i></p> <p><i>[Nodding. Smiling].</i></p> <p><i>[Fiddling with hair still].</i></p> <p><b>39<sup>th</sup> segment</b> <b>I have the control</b></p>
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## Appendix J

## A Sample Working Transcript Divided into Szujet and Fabula (Michael)

## Michael

## Szujet and Fabula (from NOI, Hiles &amp; Cermák, 2008)

**Nb I have ordered these by chronology of event, not by conversation flow. Not every section has both fabula and szujet. And some episodes from the main transcript have been merged.**

Nb Michael was wearing a mask and hood up. I don't realise at the time that his camera was not working and he could. not see me. I also can't tell when he is smiling or not except through his eyes – but he was looking down a lot or away.

<p><b>Szujet - can be thought of as overarching plot</b></p> <p><b>Michael's words</b></p>	<p><b>Fabula - can be thought of as events within the plot</b></p> <p><b>Michael's words</b></p>	<p><b>My words and thoughts</b> And any potential tensions identified between F and S</p>
<p><b>(unbounded, Herman &amp; Vervaeck, 2001)</b> This can be changed to some degree, without effecting the basic story. It is the action of the telling of the story, and the “way” in which the story is being told. This is crucial to understanding the way in which Michael creates an identity position, by actively engaging in his own meaning-making (Hiles, 2007). Nb Evaluative (Labov &amp; Waletzky, 1967)</p>	<p><b>(bounded, (Herman &amp; Vervaeck, 2001)</b> the outline of the actual (or perceived) events as they occurred (or might have). Changes here change the story itself. Can usually be broken down into a sequence of events or episodes being related. Nb Referential (Labov &amp; Waletzky, 1967)</p>	<p><b>Potential themes highlighted</b></p> <p>And how defining one as one and one as other led to interpretation... (Hiles et al 2009)</p>
<p>[being the youngest is] annoying. Because like, you can't really do anything without them?</p> <p>Like they tell you off and like, they always have the right to do anything first apart from me. Like, I'm just like, I don't know, this is normal, but</p>	<p>[Lives with mother, father], and then four of my brothers. That's it. All older.</p>	<p><b>Annoying...</b> we will come across this word a lot more!</p> <p>But it's a good one – you can sort of sense his <b>physical irritation</b> – like a bee is buzzing at him all the time – and he is always moving in his seat as he talks,</p>

## U1825071 NARRATIVE EXPLORATION OF PERSISTENT ABSENCE AND RETURN

Yeah, they take... . Oh, yeah. Like you can have fun with them. They can take you somewhere, and um, yeah, just enjoy.		squirming. Its not rocking or jiggling or winging, it's a real squirm. A sort of figure of eight move.
Year six ... I was I wasn't like, I was kind of naughty [according to] Um er um.. Other... my teacher I improved later on. I just wasn't used to it. Like um the work. And er like the new people A lot of my friends left, I don't know why.	A lot of my friends left, I wasn't used to ... the work  I was getting in lost, lots of troubles, so... Because I'd talk non-stop and like, do those things. Talking, and like ... like getting up or I was just sometimes ignoring the rules.  Like talking over a teacher or something	He chooses to start his story in Year 6.  <b>Friends – and work</b> – both flagged early on  <b>Trying to improve</b> . Says he did. Lots of <b>movement</b> in this – he sounds very active, maybe restless  Is this about year 7 rather than year 6? Maybe most (if not all) of this section? Unclear boundaries – story / narrative not yet formed.
[I was] just ... trying to improve		
	I would [be absent] like, once a year, like three times or four times	I think he wants to make the point that it was v low – <b>but also wants to be accurate.</b> <b>Not dishonest</b> . He sort of edits as he speaks – I notice this too later with sentence structure around when he refers to “them” see below He changes his story as he thinks it through? <b>Telling (and retelling) the story gives him insight</b> and changes it?



<p>[I liked primary better] It was just calm and like it wasn't that serious? But, now you have to get serious... it was a fun school.</p> <p>Yeah, because like here there are always like those kids that are annoying but in primary it is just like a normal school.</p>	<p>I liked primary</p>	<p><b>SERIOUS</b> <b>V</b> <b>FUN</b></p> <p>Here – and later in story – he sounds very little. Also year 6 – ignoring the rules – assumed to be “fun”?</p> <p><b>ANNOYING</b> <b>NORMAL</b></p> <p>Distinction between normal school and the one he is in</p>
	<p>[Moves to Secondary – Year 7]</p>	
<p>Er, No, I wasn't used to the school I used to get lost in the ways.</p>	<p>Um like, like half I don't know, it was quite big so like, C is bigger but it was big as well, so... if you know [PP primary]</p>	<p>His primary was about half the size of his secondary</p>
<p>and you had to like behave.</p> <p>you just get like one-hour detention. Like if you do it like three times or something</p> <p>... they're not stop giving you the C1s and the ...</p>	<p>And the teachers were always stricter If I'm talking and shouting out ... you ... get ... one-hour detention.</p>	<p>“had to” – pressure – <b>things happening to you</b></p> <p>Unclear exactly what the standard is and how often he is allowed to shout out – wants to make it clear its v strict. And doesn't seem to make clear logical sense to him – presented slightly disorderedly. <b>Beginning sense of UNFAIR – use of word ‘just’</b> <b>NOT STOP – relentless</b> – sense its not poss to catch up / pause and they're giving</p>

		to you – not that you are doing something to prompt them
<p>[the kids that are annoying] like they think they're so bad and like they try to scare you but they try to fight me but I just don't care. No, they don't do don't do anything but this kids are just think they're so like the biggest kids. In primary it was just normal. You go to lessons and no one annoying. That's it.</p>	<p>they try to fight me Um... er... I just walk away. And sometimes argue back</p>	
<p>Mmm Because that's the thing about, they keep on telling me to ignore it, my teachers, and they tell, they keep on telling me to tell them but the thing is, if that was true, then I would have done it. But if I ignore them, they'll keep coming for me cos they'll think I'm scared. But if I tell the teachers they'll call me a snitch, and they won't even do anything, the teachers, ... they'll just tell them to stop, and then they'll still carry on doing it..</p>	<p>Teachers tell me to ignore it</p>	<p>I love this sentence structure here. He's on such a roll and so lucid and fluent – even though grammar a bit off</p> <p><b>They keep on... relentless...</b></p> <p><b>But... but</b></p> <p><b>If ...if</b></p> <p>If that was true then I would have done it – beautifully simple</p> <p>But – this sense that he can't really win – if he tells the teacher he's a snitch, if he does nothing they keep coming.</p> <p>Another <b>out of control – on the outside feeling. Lost.</b> I can't quite find the right word but its definitely not peace.</p>

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	[Year 7 Lockdown.]	
<p>Yeah. I didn't know there was online classes I didn't know.</p> <p>Yeah. my, erm my brothers did. They told me that... er They told me that "do you have it online?". And at that time, I didn't know.</p>	<p>So I didn't attend one. online course.</p> <p>my brothers told me that "do you have it online?"</p> <p>Then they researched about it. And then I got on to it.</p> <p>Someone from school called me. And then er my password couldn't, never worked, and had to get that sorted out? And then I started doing it.</p>	<p>I hadn't asked if he had attended online learning yet – he brings it up. But then we are talking about attendance.</p> <p><b>Didn't know.</b> Sense of not quite getting it / understanding / fitting in? Feeling a little on the outside. It's the way he kept repeating it. Whether he knew or not, <b>he wasn't connected.</b></p>
<p>Yeah, it was just calm.</p> <p>And like, it was just like normal,..</p> <p>sometimes you couldn't get out of your house...</p>	<p>We used to like, go to the park every day. Sleep Um, revise and Play Games. [pause] sometimes you couldn't get out of your house...</p>	<p>He says he enjoyed lockdown.</p> <p><b>CALM</b></p> <p>And nb <b>outdoors</b> – the park. Not being able to get <b>OUT</b> the house. <b>COULDN'T GET OUT</b> But – this idea of <b>normal</b> as being different to his current life ☹ Nb remember primary was 'normal' – not like secondary.</p>
	[Year 8 Lockdown.]	
<p>Yeah. But now,</p>	<p>after the second one, I attended every single one.</p>	<p>He's had brother and school support and knows his password. And I guess been back to school in between time and</p>

		<p>realised everyone else – or some others – had been doing online classes.</p> <p><b>BUT</b> – doesn't want to be judged – <b>wants me to understand</b> why... and also that he did log on second time.</p> <p>A few times in transcript I get sense it is <b>important to him I understand and I haven't quite got something</b> – with the bullying issue as well (he does not use that word)</p>
<p>You don't even really learn anything. Um the screen, like you're just sitting in one place? You can't learn anything because you're really tired. And like, like, you just don't concentrate on on the er screen. You just look around?</p> <p>Like there's no one else. There's nobody to tell you off. Like I just didn't like learning from it.</p>	<p>Sitting in one place</p> <p>Look around</p> <p>No one else there</p> <p>Don't learn anything.</p>	<p>no point in accessing learning! Because....</p> <p>So many extra words - Just, really, anything, literally, nearly, like, everything Lots and lots of 'likes' and 'justs' in this section.</p> <p><b>Crucial – without adult support he can't focus. He thinks its about people telling him off – but it could be about support / motivation? And also attention issues.</b></p> <p>Views as teachers or class staff as people who “tell off”... he used this before with his older brothers too.</p>
<p>Oh. I'm, like, why, Like, why? How did they go to 99%? From 99% to 43. Like this... I figured out like, I</p>	<p>[attendance went] from 99% to 43.</p>	<p>He'd been trying to work out why / how. Had been <b>worrying</b> about it?</p>

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<p>don't know, one month ago, because I just if you skip like four days of school, that's not going to take off 40% or something. So I just figured out. It was lockdown,</p> <p>So I don't know. I don't know why they counted it.. but ... school's idea.</p>		<p>Realised it was lockdown. [nb although it's still only just above 90%]</p> <p>Clearly thinks <b>its not fair</b> / sensible. It shouldn't count.</p>
<p>In art they just told you to like to look at this and that, and like you couldn't draw it.</p>	<p>Yeah. And art was like a waste of time.</p>	<p><b>Pointlessness</b></p> <p>But there may have been a point – he just didn't get it – shame. NB he likes drawing and says next time he can ask teacher to give him pen and paper and so we can draw river together.</p>
	<p>[Return to school after lockdown]</p>	
<p>I've got a bit, back back into my old days. Like the normal days.</p> <p>Now I find it easy, to learn.</p> <p>Spanish is just annoying, the test we had today was actually making, annoying me because like I don't know Spanish much. I don't even know how to say 'is' not, like I do,</p>	<p>Spanish is just hard and we had the end of year test and it was annoying me, frustrating me</p> <p>[a lot more subjects at secondary school] like languages!</p> <p>[happiest doing] maths and PE</p>	<p>He finds it easier to focus and attend I guess, but does not find the subjects themselves particularly easy.</p> <p><b>ANNOYING – self corrects to FRUSTRATING</b></p> <p>Also self corrects / edits – tries to make the point he knows nothing, then doesn't want me to think he actually knows nothing -</p>
<p>and that's annoying so...</p>		

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<p>Yeah, um, I don't know. um</p>	<p>I have a report, I have to like, show my behaviour</p>	<p>He said this in response to when I said is there anything fun at school. He also said he quite liked PE (although later he explains that the PE teacher didn't support him when a kid hit him)</p> <p>Doesn't sound like there is much fun at school at all ☹</p> <p>He's <b>ANNOYED</b> by his report (I think this is like being on report?). He will often use annoyed to mean frustrated / angry / scary / upsetting</p> <p>Not quite connecting again? – or a leap too far?</p>
<p>I don't really enjoy lunch and break times</p>	<p>Well you just walk around, you can't really go anywhere. [cos of Covid]</p>	<p>Again sense of being locked in / restricted / caged – too strong I think, but at least <b>restricted – and he wants to be out / freer</b></p> <p>Also – if he's not enjoying free time or lesson time, that's his whole day spent not enjoying life...</p>
<p>They like they never like they like they always try to say to never give up and keep on carrying on with the work and they're like um, I enjoy spending time with them.</p>	<p>[there is a supportive teacher he can talk to]</p> <p>[Michael sees them] like once a week or three times a week? And there's two or something...</p>	<p><b>Never give up</b></p> <p><b>Keep on</b></p> <p>The fabula is less clear than the sjuzet here – why? He wont be specific / or isn't sure?</p>

		<p>But he enjoys it. He has a feeling of positivity about it but can't define the experience?</p> <p>Not quite sure why this is not more specific. Check.</p>
<p>Yeah. [pause] Like in the primary I was just a kid like who didn't like, talk back and that.</p> <p>who didn't answer back and that? Because I don't really care. But now like, I don't know how to explain it [tuts]. I'm not scared of them. So I just like talk back and like act like I don't care. No, I'm not scared of them.</p> <p>Yeah, like the Yeah, but now, I don't care. I'm not scared of them, I used to be but now I'm not.</p>	<p>My fear [has changed]</p> <p>I knew in, like, high school, in high school there will be like kids that act tough and I would look like their pillow so I had to like improve because they'll literally go for me, all the time. And I'd be like the underdog. So....</p>	<p>Is this why he can now attend more regularly as well? He has taught himself to not be scared?</p> <p>DETERMINED – see this again later re schoolwork and how it's a struggle but he'll pass.</p> <p>Is he convincing himself or convincing me? Both?</p> <p>Very emphatic here – because I am asking qns or because he wants to be?</p>
<p>Not like, not like that. I'm telling I'm trying to say that my .....</p> <p>But I don't think that's the right thing.</p>	<p>my friends keep on telling them to like stop doing it ... and but in my house I didn't get told like fight back um I just got told to just to not care, ignore them.</p> <p>[when he does fight back] I get in trouble, myself.</p> <p>there's this one kid that ...</p>	<p>Very powerful segment – when you separate out the facts from the feelings as it were – on one – the facts he sounds so straightforward and sure. On the other – the sjuzet – he sounds lost and confused – it all sounds hard work:</p> <p>for no reason, I don't know why, I don't think, I'm trying to say,</p>

<p>gets in my business for no reason. Like I'm talking to someone else. He just</p> <p>Like, I don't know, why.</p> <p>How is that gonna do anything?</p> <p>Like, it's just like, like, don't tell nobody but like, that teacher is just like his son. Like, that kid is just like his son. Like he lets him do whatever he wants.</p>	<p>gets in my business and just says bad words.</p> <p>Like, he tries to fight me, and then I fight back.</p> <p>Yeah. He's calling me names all the time.</p> <p>And my teacher keeps on telling me to ignore them. Like this, this teacher in PE. And like there's this kid that, like, hit me and that. And he's like, he just told him to not do it.</p>	<p>Also – the teacher – he sees himself as victim and it is <b>unfair / unjust</b> and he cant do anything.</p> <p>Interesting re ‘son’ – an emotional connection? Something re distinction between home / family and school for him – the way <b>he is treated or experiences home and family v diff from school – safer?</b></p>
	<p>Yeah, I just always wish to go home.</p>	<p>☹</p> <p>Feels so young.</p> <p>And <b>helpless</b> – he is somewhere he doesn't want to be every day</p>
<p>you just learn, but it gets more... school takes... it ... gets at the top of your life, because er it will get you money, then you can enjoy life. Jobs.</p> <p>Nobody will take you in if you don't know nothing. So....</p> <p>Nobody will take you in jobs if you don't know nothing.</p>		<p>Very interesting expression / language – <b>culturally influenced?</b></p> <p>There's not much fabula here – it's future looking.</p> <p>I'd asked if there was anything fun about school – I guess he read that as any reason to choose to come.</p> <p>Again – <b>ruin it</b> – a <b>cultural</b> term? Quite emphatic. <b>Big language.</b></p>



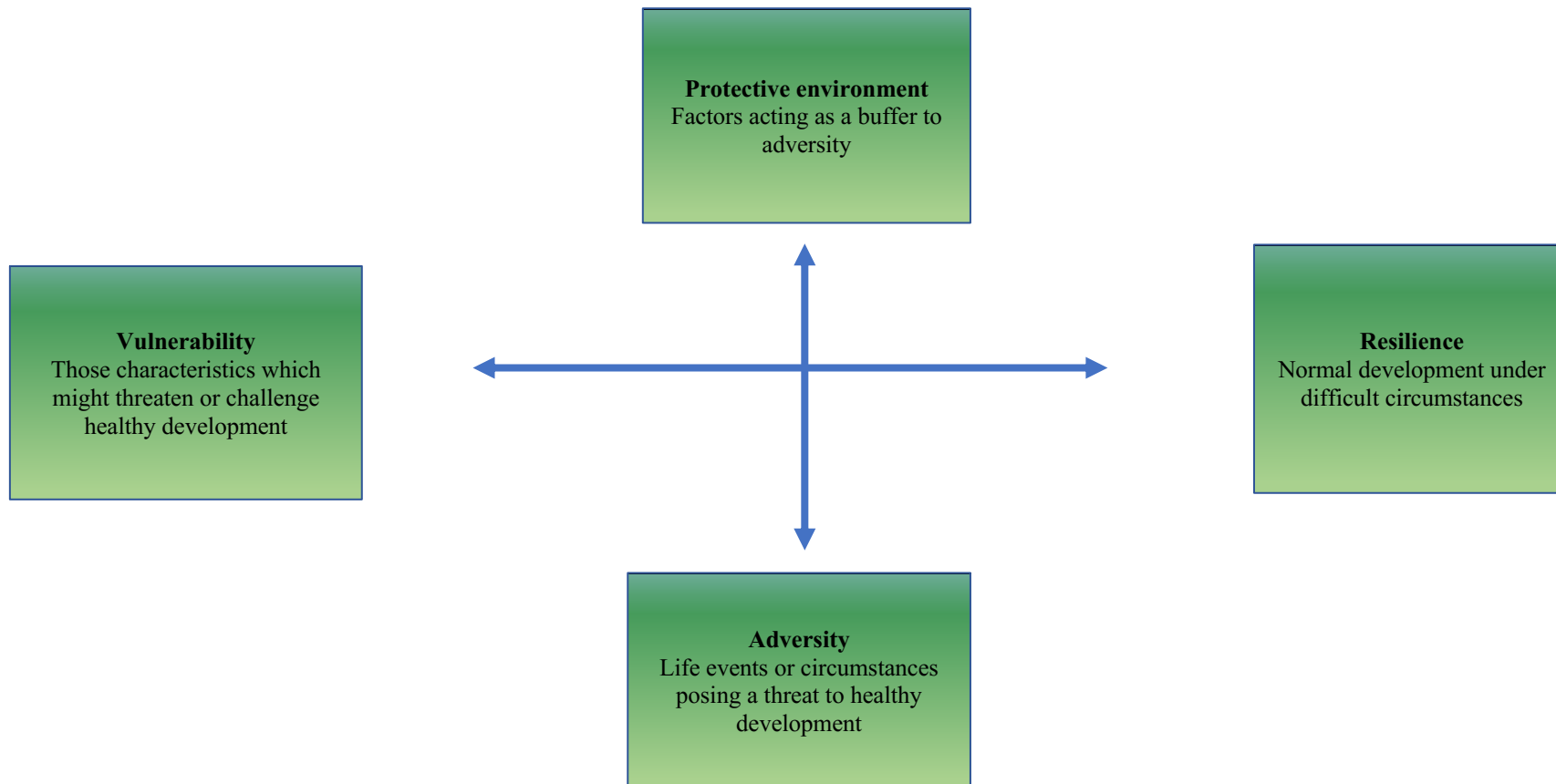
You'll just ruin it, so, you have to be qualified.		
<p>I'd like to be a footballer, but that's sports but.... I want to become a plumber. Or like a doctor or something. But I don't think I'll become a doctor.</p> <p>HBW Why not?</p> <p>Michael Like, oh, be too hard. And I'll get upset if I don't save anybody.</p> <p>[being a plumber] You just get money. Easy money.</p> <p>[you need to train] Like two years. My brother does.</p>	<p>I want to become a plumber.</p> <p>[you need to train] Like two years. My brother does</p> <p>[at school you need to study] like English science, and math. And er, My brother said he needed like a grade four.</p>	<p>this is <b>brave – UPSET</b> –is an emotional word to use. He hasn't used it about anything he has already or is currently experiencing. <b>But can use it about the future.</b></p> <p>Focus on money – easy money – <b>something at last easy for him</b>? He doesn't come across as lazy – but as someone who wants some peace</p> <p><b>Influence of brothers</b> – the adult relationship in his life?</p>
<p>Yeah. Right now I'm struggling. But I'll make sure to pass.</p>		<p>LOVE THIS. And it is said in total control – <b>he</b> will make sure – not someone else will have to help him.</p> <p><b>He is much more confident talking about his future than his present.</b></p> <p>And whether he totally believes it or not – he says he does – and that is half way there. I totally believe him during this segment.</p>
<p>[If I could chat to the person I was in year six] I would say come to this school. So we can hang out.</p>		<p>Lovely. Friendship? <b>Looking out for / taking care of himself. Interested in getting to know him? Self-esteem?</b> Bless....</p>

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		Or <b>lonely</b> ...? Wants someone who won't be violent, who maybe calm??? Wish id followed it up more.
I wish I knew my login? I mean, I wish I knew, like to heard there were online classes. Now, I wish I hurried it up		I wish, I wish, I wish  <b>Regret</b>
[If you could wave a magic wand and change one thing at school, I'd like you to make it] <b>peaceful, like no violence.</b>		<b>PEACE</b>  <b>Violence</b> – a big word for what is previously described as “getting in my face”. Feels visceral.
[I care about my attendance and want to have a good attendance record] <b>and I know I've not gone sick lately.</b>		<b>Determined.</b> <b>CARE</b>

## Appendix K

### Developing the PEARLS Model

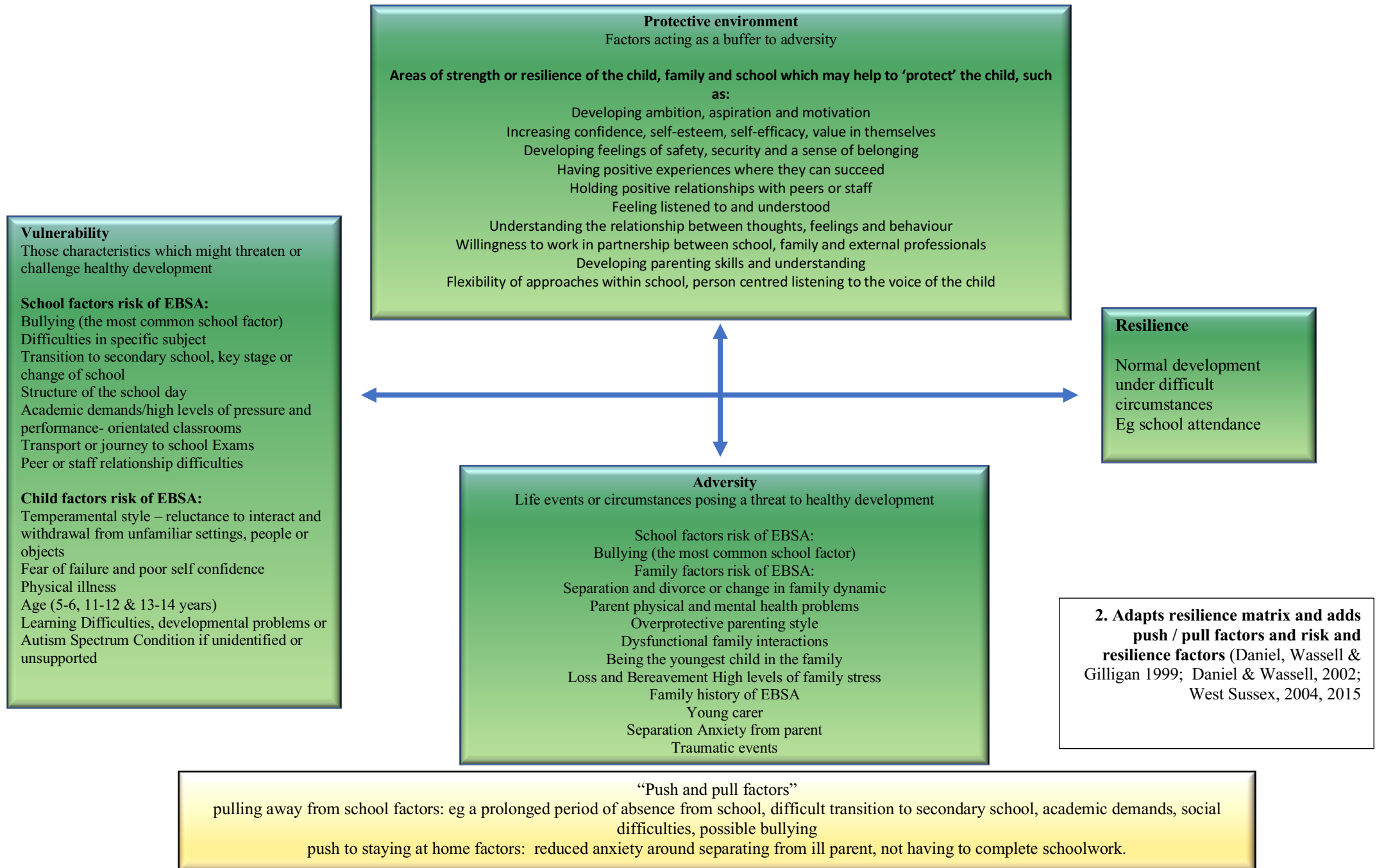


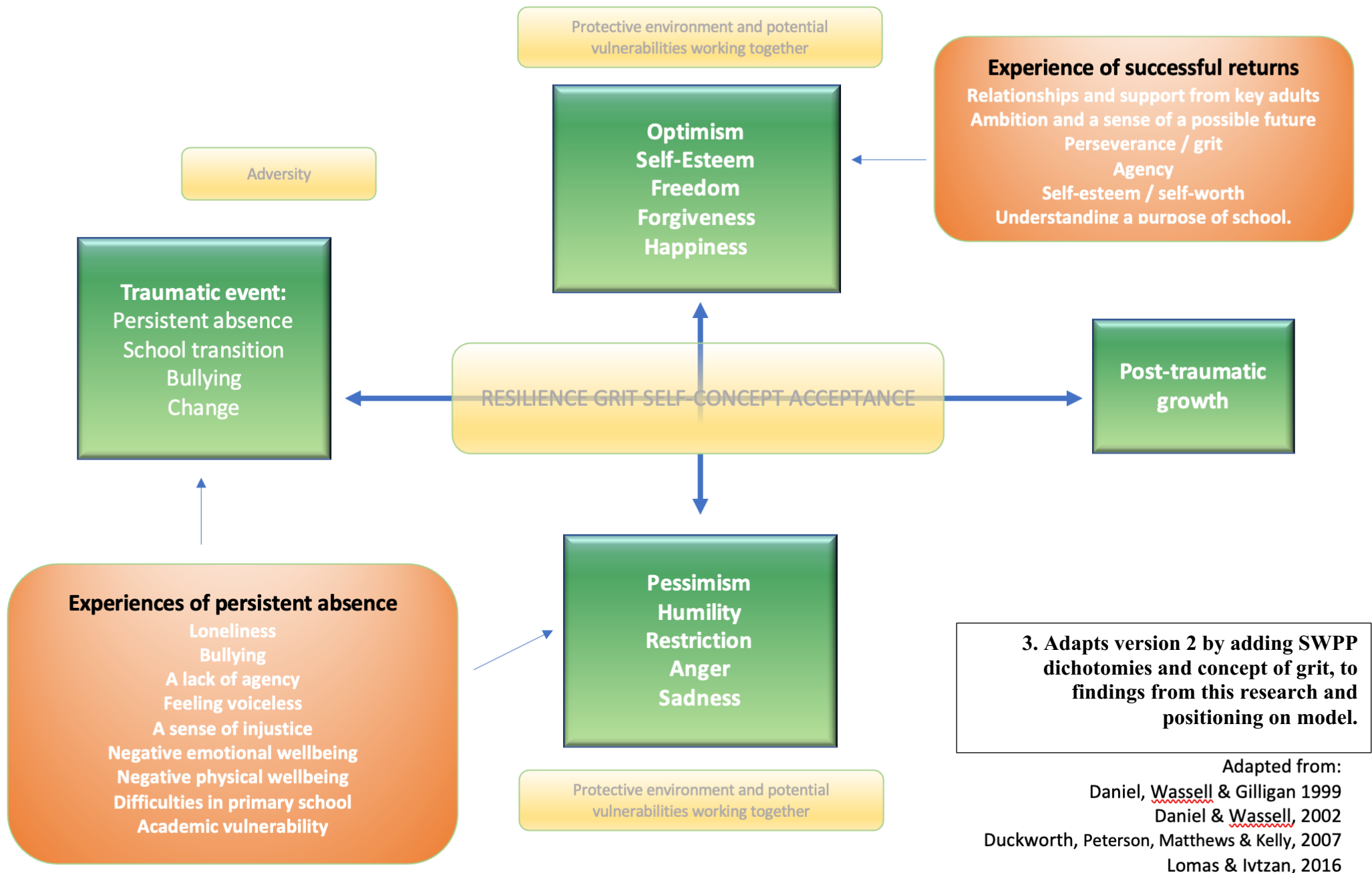
1. Starts with the Resilience matrix (Daniel, Wassell & Gilligan, 1999; Daniel & Wassell, 2002).

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**“Push and pull factors”**

Push to school factors: eg being academically bright and forming friendships (push towards attending),  
pulling away from home factors: eg change in family dynamics, parental illness





## Appendix L

### Sample Reflections: On being the second author

#### K.1 Michael's story

Michael's language was compelling and physically drew me into his struggles, so that I felt I was with him in the hard times and it made me 'on his side'. He clearly had a sense of sides, of him being on one and other forces ranged against him and I engaged with that (colluded even maybe?) and I found myself liking him and warming to him greatly. In the transcript, he seemed to find it physically hard to get his words out, with a lot of "um"s and "er"s and sentences trailing off or finishing with "So..." as if there were things left unsaid he could not articulate. Because I was engaged, I perhaps chose to believe it was not that he could not be bothered, but that he was unable: *"Um, nothing, just um I don't know. Just ... trying to improve, but I was getting in lost, lots of troubles, so..."* (8<sup>th</sup> move). Sometimes he was barely coherent, for example when I asked him about whether he managed to attend regularly in Year Six: *"I would have like, once a year, like three times or four times absent now I've got it like once..."* (9<sup>th</sup> move). On a third reading, I reflected that he was in fact perhaps correcting himself as he spoke; it seemed he was making meaning from his story as he edited it / presented it to me, which kept me right there in his narrative.

I also thought that when something seemed particularly important, or perhaps as he trusted me more, he would try harder to give clarity, for me and perhaps for himself. He broke in, for example, to explain: *"No, they don't do, don't do anything, but this kids are just, think they're so like the biggest kids"*. (34<sup>th</sup> move). At one point, he managed great fluency, without any "um"s or "er"s or "like"s, when he was explaining the confusion he finds himself in when the adults tell him one thing, but

his reality is telling him something different. Within this section he tries also to clarify the different “theys” he is talking about to ease my understanding: *“Because that’s the thing about, they keep on telling me to ignore it, my teachers, and they tell, they keep on telling me to tell them, but the thing is, if that was true, then I would have done it. But if I ignore them, they’ll keep coming for me cos they’ll think I’m scared. But if I tell the teachers they’ll call me a snitch, and they won’t even do anything, the teachers, ... they’ll just tell them to stop, and then they’ll still carry on doing it.”* (35<sup>th</sup> move).

There are moments in Michael’s narrative when he seems so young to me, and in need of support, for example: “I just always wish to go home”; “I’ll get upset if I don’t save anybody”; “Right now I’m struggling”; “I would say come to this school. So we can hang out”; and “[I’d like you to make it] peaceful, like no violence.”. The selection of these moments, however, may be more about my own maternal instinct, that I am projecting on to him, and that colour my reading of his narrative as someone lost, alone and needing help.

## **K.2 Shadow’s story**

When writing up Shadow’s narrative into a story for him to approve, searching for themes and dividing his words into fabula and sjuzet, I was affected by his language as much as I was by Michael’s, but with a different outcome. I felt distanced by his academic and grown-up language, rather than drawn into his narrative. When talking about his younger brother for example, he said: *“He’s funny. ... he’s good, it’s a pleasure to have him”* (13<sup>th</sup> move). I am a younger sibling so perhaps am not used to thinking of siblings in this way, or maybe subconsciously resent an elder sibling taking on a paternalistic role; or perhaps in my work I tend to meet young people

who speak more hesitantly and less confidently, and the language struck me as very controlled, almost false, or acted.

I found his desire to tell the story of his past as if it was over and finished slightly alienating, as if he did not want me to linger: "I don't know how to expand on that".

When I wanted to drill down a little into the support his family have provided, I thought that he gave very short replies (eg his 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> moves), as if he perhaps did not want to dwell on the past: HBW: And were there any particular members of your family that helped in a particular way? Shadow: *"Er.. Just generally, just the motivation, you know, they increased my motivation to come into school."* HBW: So who's in your family, who do you live with at home? Shadow: *"My father, my mother, and my brother."* HBW: You've got one brother? Shadow: *"Yeah."* HBW: And is he older than you or younger than you? Shadow: *"Er younger."* HBW: Younger. What's he like? Shadow: *"He's funny."*

But then as soon as we got back to the specifics of Year Eight and lockdown, something more concrete, that worked well for him, he seemed to me to become more verbose, but still with a tendency to describe an experience from a bystander perspective: *"Actually, it was quite okay. You know. Not that bad. Because I had all the instruments at home and it was quite easy to for me to try ... the online schools. I also do understand, you know, some people they had to come to school, which, again, may have affected their attendance in in that way, in the sense they have to school just to try and attend the online lessons."* (14<sup>th</sup> move). I found my role as researcher difficult; being in a personal narrative setting when my participant did not want to get personal. Perhaps I felt rejected. Both Clara and Michael had provided more intimacy. In my discomfort, I may perhaps have blocked him or failed to tune in to his truths. I felt closest to 'understanding' him when he talked about difficulties he



had with English, or when he did not have any friends in Year Seven. And yet this research comes from a Positive Psychology and Strengths-based position, so I don't know why him presenting his strengths proved difficult for me.

### **K.3 Clara's story**

Clara was the first participant I met, and she gave me a lot of her time and really wanted to share her story. My relief at finding a participant and her ability to shape the story she wanted and find a resolution within it, a moment of growth and positivity, were music to my ears and I may have over interpreted the 'positive psychology' elements from it and not probed as much as I might otherwise have done. Clara talked a lot about feelings and the power of therapy and the power of talking; it all made sense to me so again I may not have investigated further – she says for example that she had to try to find some volunteering for her Duke of Edinburgh award scheme and I did not follow that up – a scheme such as that, with peer and adult support and engagement – could well have provided a safe and protective space to grow confidence. Or it could be that she gained confidence first and then enrolled on the scheme.

Because our first meeting was often inaudible and interrupted by network issues and poor connectivity, we revisited many of the topics a second time in later recorded conversation that I transcribed for the thesis. This means that sometimes I reminded her of things she told me first time round, which I did not get the opportunity to do with the other participants. At times I wondered if I was putting words in Clara's mouth, albeit words that were based on our first conversation, and if so was I only reminding her of the parts of her narrative that fitted with my research aim and assumptions?

## Appendix M

### CASP Qualitative Checklist



**CASP Checklist:** 10 questions to help you make sense of a **Qualitative** research

**How to use this appraisal tool:** Three broad issues need to be considered when appraising a qualitative study:

- ▶ Are the results of the study valid? (Section A)
- ▶ What are the results? (Section B)
- ▶ Will the results help locally? (Section C)

The 10 questions on the following pages are designed to help you think about these issues systematically. The first two questions are screening questions and can be answered quickly. If the answer to both is "yes", it is worth proceeding with the remaining questions. There is some degree of overlap between the questions, you are asked to record a "yes", "no" or "can't tell" to most of the questions. A number of italicised prompts are given after each question. These are designed to remind you *why* the question is important. Record your reasons for your answers in the spaces provided.

**About:** These checklists were designed to be used as educational pedagogic tools, as part of a workshop setting, therefore we do not suggest a scoring system. The core CASP checklists (randomised controlled trial & systematic review) were based on JAMA 'Users' guides to the medical literature 1994 (adapted from Guyatt GH, Sackett DL, and Cook DJ), and piloted with health care practitioners.

For each new checklist, a group of experts were assembled to develop and pilot the checklist and the workshop format with which it would be used. Over the years overall adjustments have been made to the format, but a recent survey of checklist users reiterated that the basic format continues to be useful and appropriate.

**Referencing:** we recommend using the Harvard style citation, i.e.: *Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (2018). CASP (insert name of checklist i.e. Qualitative) Checklist. [online] Available at: URL. Accessed: Date Accessed.*

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Section A: Are the results valid?

1. Was there a clear statement of the aims of the research?

Yes Can't Tell No

HINT: Consider • what was the goal of the research • why it was thought important • its relevance

2. Is a qualitative methodology appropriate?

Yes Can't Tell No

HINT: Consider

- If the research seeks to interpret or illuminate the actions and/or subjective experiences of research participants
- Is qualitative research the right methodology for addressing the research goal

Is it worth continuing?

3. Was the research design appropriate to address the aims of the research?

Yes Can't Tell No

HINT: Consider

- if the researcher has justified the research design (e.g. have they discussed how they decided which method to use)

4. Was the recruitment strategy appropriate to the aims of the research?

Yes Can't Tell No

HINT: Consider

- If the researcher has explained how the participants were selected If they explained why the participants they selected were the most appropriate to provide access to the type of knowledge sought by the study
- If there are any discussions around recruitment (e.g. why some people chose not to take part)

5. Was the data collected in a way that addressed the research issue?

Yes Can't Tell No

HINT: Consider

- If the setting for the data collection was justified
- If it is clear how data were collected (e.g. focus group, semi-structured interview etc.)
- If the researcher has justified the methods chosen
- If the researcher has made the methods explicit (e.g. for interview method, is there an indication of how interviews are conducted, or did they use a topic guide)
- If methods were modified during the study. If so, has the researcher explained how and why
- If the form of data is clear (e.g. tape recordings, video material, notes etc.)
- If the researcher has discussed saturation of data

6. Has the relationship between researcher and participants been adequately considered?

Yes Can't Tell No

HINT: Consider

- If the researcher critically examined their own role, potential bias and influence during (a) formulation of the research questions (b) data collection, including sample recruitment and choice of location How the researcher responded to events during the study and whether they considered the implications of any changes in the research design

## Section B: What are the results?

7. Have ethical issues been taken into consideration?

Yes Can't Tell No

HINT: Consider

- If there are sufficient details of how the research was explained to participants for the reader to assess whether ethical standards were maintained If the researcher has discussed issues raised by the study (e.g. issues around informed consent or confidentiality or how they have handled the effects of the study on the participants during and after the study)
- If approval has been sought from the ethics committee

8. Was the data analysis sufficiently rigorous?

Yes Can't Tell No

HINT: Consider

- If there is an in-depth description of the analysis process If thematic analysis is used. If so, is it clear how the categories/themes were derived from the data Whether the researcher explains how the data presented were selected from the original sample to demonstrate the analysis process If sufficient data are presented to support the findings
- To what extent contradictory data are taken into account Whether the researcher critically examined their own role, potential bias and influence during analysis and selection of data for presentation

9. Is there a clear statement of findings?

Yes Can't Tell No

HINT: Consider

- If the findings are explicit If there is adequate discussion of the evidence both for and against the researcher's arguments
- If the researcher has discussed the credibility of their findings (e.g. triangulation, respondent validation, more than one analyst) If the findings are discussed in relation to the original research question

Section C: Will the results help locally?

10. How valuable is the research?

HINT: Consider

- If the researcher discusses the contribution the study makes to existing knowledge or understanding (e.g. do they consider the findings in relation to current practice or policy, or relevant research- based literature If they identify new areas where research is necessary If the researchers have discussed whether or how the findings can be transferred to other populations or considered other ways the research may be used

## Appendix N

### University Ethics Approval for Change of Title



# University of East London Psychology

## REQUEST FOR TITLE CHANGE TO AN ETHICS APPLICATION

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

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

By applying for a change of title request you confirm that in doing so the process by which you have collected your data/conducted your research has not changed or deviated from your original ethics approval. If either of these have changed then you are required to complete an Ethics Amendments Form.

### HOW TO COMPLETE & SUBMIT THE REQUEST

7. Complete the request form electronically and accurately.
8. Type your name in the 'student's signature' section (page 2).
9. Using your UEL email address, email the completed request form along with associated documents to: [Psychology.Ethics@uel.ac.uk](mailto:Psychology.Ethics@uel.ac.uk)
10. 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.

### REQUIRED DOCUMENTS

4. A copy of the approval of your initial ethics application.

Name of applicant:	Helen Barron Williams
Programme of study:	Professional Doctorate in Education and Child Psychology

Name of supervisor: Dr Helena Bunn

Briefly outline the nature of your proposed title change in the boxes below

Proposed amendment	Rationale
<b>Old Title:</b>  A narrative inquiry into the lived experience of persistent absenteeism among children who have since returned to mainstream school	I have always wanted to ensure that the young people involved in the research are helped to make meaning through the process of the narrative methodology employed. This is clear throughout my thesis, and my title should reflect this more.
<b>New Title:</b> A narrative inquiry into the lived experience of persistent absenteeism among children who have since returned to mainstream school, and the meaning they make of their experiences	

Please tick	YES	NO
Is your supervisor aware of your proposed amendment(s) and agree to them?	x	
Does your change of title impact the process of how you collected your data/conducted your research?		x

Student's signature (please type your name): Helen Barron Williams

Date: 31/08/2021

TO BE COMPLETED BY REVIEWER		
Title changes approved	YES	

U1825071 NARRATIVE EXPLORATION OF PERSISTENT ABSENCE AND RETURN

<b>Comments</b>		

Reviewer: Glen Rooney

Date: 07/09/2021