



**“What’s it like here?” Exploring young peoples’ perceptions of the
Alternative Provision sector in Wales**

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Lauren Charles-Nelson

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Firstly, I would like to thank the nine young people, who gave up their time to share their experiences of the AP sector. Without them, this research would simply not have been possible. I would also like to thank the AP and Local Authority staff, who supported the recruitment process whole heartedly and welcomed me into their settings.

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ABSTRACT

Interviews were carried out with nine young people placed in the Alternative Provision (AP) sector in one Local Authority (LA) in South Wales, UK. The interviews focused on exploring participants' lived experiences of the AP sector. Interview questions were purposely broad to reflect the exploratory nature of the research and encourage participants to speak freely about ideas that were relevant to them when thinking about their education.

In keeping with the focus on holding central the voices of participants, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis was used to analyse the interview transcripts. Interpreted by the researcher through an inductive lens, three superordinate themes are presented. These relate to social identity, self-agency and change. The themes are discussed in relation to wider literature and also considered through the lens of social identity theory and social constructionism.

The findings highlight that AP is a place where young people can be supported to grow and develop as individuals, but moving into AP can bring about questions and challenges for some learners. How individuals make sense of their journey in AP arguably can be influenced by the dominant deficit discourses they describe hearing about the sector from other people. Arguably, these deficit discourses may have implications for many areas of their development including: social identity, self-esteem, engagement and motivation. It is suggested that changing the dominant discourses about AP and those who attend may lead to changes in young peoples' experiences.

Practice implications are offered for the wider education systems when thinking about the future of AP in Wales and for Educational Psychologists, who play a role in supporting young people and education systems. Implications include a need to provide further information to young people about what AP is and why some learners are placed there. This should give more consideration to the situational and systemic factors and challenge the dominant deficit discourses about learners in AP. Implications for policy makers and LAs include a need to facilitate greater involvement of young people in decision making. Also, to review how local/national policies may be challenging or contributing to the deficit discourses related to AP and young people, who experience

SEBD. Consideration is given to how EPs may be able to support these complex and challenging changes.

SUMMARY

This thesis will be split into three parts. A literature review, an empirical paper and a critical appraisal. Each part will also be divided into chapters to aid clarity and provide a structure for the reader.

Part 1

The literature review is split into two sections. Part 1A provides a context and exploration of wider literature for the reader in order to enhance their understanding of the phenomenon of study. Consideration is then given to the value of ‘student voice’ and the relevance of the current research to Educational Psychologists. Following on from this, part 1B offers a critical review of the available literature pertaining to what young people have been asked and what they have shared about their experiences within the AP sector.

Part 2

Part 2, the empirical paper, provides an overview of the qualitative study that aimed to explore the lived experiences of young people attending AP in Wales. Attention is given to the Welsh context of AP and extant relevant literature in order to provide a rationale for the research. An outline of the methodological choices including ontological and epistemological stances are stated. Qualitative findings are offered and discussed in relation to extant literature and psychological theory. Limitations of the study and possible implications for Educational Psychologists and the wider education sector are tentatively discussed.

Part 3

Part 3, the critical appraisal, presents a reflective and reflexive account of the research journey that has been undertaken. It aims to critically analyse the possible implications of the decisions made in shaping and conducting the research and what the research may be able to contribute to existing literature and thinking regarding the current and future AP sector. It is split into four sections: rationale for the thesis; research design;

contribution to knowledge and dissemination and a critical account of the development of the research practitioner.

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List of Abbreviations

AP	Alternative Provision
EOTAS	Education other than at school or education otherwise than at school
EP	Educational Psychologist
HCPC	Health and Care Professions Council
LA	Local Authority
PRU	Pupil Referral Unit
SEBD	Social, emotional and behavioural difficulties
WG	Welsh Government



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PART 1: LITERATURE REVIEW

Word count: 12,000 approximately

PART 1A

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Terminology

‘Alternative’ is an adjective which can be defined as *“something that is different from something else, especially from what is usual, and offering the possibility of choice”* (Cambridge Dictionary, 2018, para. 1).

The current study is focused on exploring the Alternative Provision (AP) sector of education in South Wales. AP can be defined as:

“Education for children of compulsory school age, who do not attend mainstream or special schools and who would not otherwise receive suitable education, for any reason”
(Department for Education, 2018, p.5).

The term ‘Education Other Than at School’ or ‘EOTAS’ is often used in Wales to describe AP (Welsh Government (WG), 2017a). However, to promote cohesion and clarity this research will use the more commonly cited term in the wider literature ‘Alternative Provision’ throughout when referring to EOTAS or AP.

It is important to note that this research is not referring to learners who are electively home educated, though they are sometimes included within the AP sector.

1.2 Introduction to AP sector

Alternative Provision (AP) is said to be a wide-ranging and disparate sector (Trotman, Enow & Tucker, 2019). It was formalised in the UK in 1994, after widespread concerns about the outcomes for learners, who were excluded from mainstream schools (Solomon & Rogers, 2001; Timpson, 2019). It has since been recognised that there is no single route or reason why young people transition from mainstream education into the AP sector. Their reasons for moving are often complex and can include pregnancy, mental health difficulties, challenging behaviour and substance misuse (Cook, 2005).

However, the decision to leave mainstream education is rarely made by young people or their parents/carers (Gazeley, 2010).

Since its introduction, the numbers of learners and range of AP education providers in the UK has been steadily growing (Taylor, 2012; WG, 2019a). Research has primarily sought to understand what makes AP effective (Cullen & Monroe, 2010; Ewen & Topping, 2012; Nicholson & Putwain, 2015; Nicholson & Putwain, 2016; Michael & Frederickson, 2013; Hamilton & Morgan, 2018; Jalali & Morgan, 2018) and disseminate examples of good practice (Thomson, 2014). Some argue vehemently that the sector can and is making a valuable difference for some of the most vulnerable learners, whose needs have not or cannot be met in the mainstream sector (Polat & Farrell, 2002; Cajic-Seigneur & Hodgson, 2016; Malcolm, 2019).

At the same time, it has been highlighted that young people in AP may not always make the same educational progress as their peers or meet their potential (Taylor, 2012; Estyn, 2015 & 2016). Others have also cast a more critical eye on the sector arguing that the alternative to mainstream education should not be inferior (Menzies & Baars, 2015). Concerns have related to limited (Estyn, 2016; Thomson & Pennacchia, 2016b) and sometimes gendered curriculum (Thompson & Russell, 2009 & 2011); lack of equal access to high quality settings (Taylor, 2012; McCluskey, Gwynedd, Riddell, Weedon, & Fordyce, 2013); inappropriate behaviour regimes (Thomson & Pennacchia, 2016b) and safeguarding concerns (McCluskey et al., 2013). More broadly, it has been argued that AP may feed societal inequality and life-long exclusion from opportunities (Gazeley, 2010; Estyn, 2016).

It has also been said that the existing statistics related to the AP sector are unable to tell the full story of young peoples' experiences (Children's Commissioner, 2017). A lack of robust scrutiny (Thomson & Russell, 2009; Malcolm, 2018a) perhaps means this group of vulnerable learners are at risk of becoming forgotten (House of Commons Education Committee, 2018; Taylor, 2012; WG, 2017a). These concerns were most recently

highlighted in Timpson's review of exclusions in which AP was described as "the underbelly" of the UK education system (2019, p.74).

Furthermore in terms of policy development and development of provisions, some have claimed that AP has historically had a neglect of action (Taylor, 2012). Yet on the other hand in recent years, the political focus on AP seems to have been growing. For example, the topic of AP featured in the political manifestos for both the Labour (2019) and Conservative (2019) parties. This perhaps suggests a national intention to make changes in the sector.

When considering what changes could be made, listening to the perspectives of those young people, who attend AP arguably has a central part to play (Hamilton and Morgan, 2018). When given the opportunity to speak out, young people have often compared AP positively to the alternative of mainstream education. However, their views sometimes can seem at odds with the concerns expressed by other stakeholders. In line with this, McCluskey, Riddell and Weedon (2015) put forward the notion that young peoples' positive regard for AP may simply highlight a distinct lack of their rights being met in mainstream education meaning AP is viewed more favourably.

In summary, AP could be seen as a sector of education that continues to divide opinion. In spite of increased attention and debate, the outcomes for learners arguably remain poor (Pirrie & Macleod, 2009) with some going so far as to suggest that attending AP can be detrimental to an individual's well-being (Children's Commissioner for Wales, 2014; Jalali & Morgan, 2018). It is clear that there is still a need for society to think deeply about the AP sector in the UK.

1.3 Research intentions

The purpose of this research is not to evaluate or pass judgement on individual AP settings or to argue the value of AP as a model of education. This research aims to centralise the voices of young people, who are attending AP in South Wales. Specifically,

to give psychological consideration to how they may be making sense of their places within AP and their lived experiences in the sector.

1.4 Structure of part 1A

The sections that follow in part 1A will consider the wider UK education context including school exclusion and the label of Social, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties (SEBD) before examining the AP context in Wales. This will include the political agenda and landscape of provisions. It will end with discussion of the potential value of harnessing student voice and consideration of why this research is relevant to the field of Educational Psychology.

2. THE WIDER CONTEXT OF UK EDUCATION

2.1 Challenges in the mainstream sector

Though the focus of this research is on young peoples' experiences in the AP sector, it is helpful to begin by considering the wider education context. It is generally the case that learners who find themselves in AP were once a part of the mainstream education sector.

2.2. A note on performativity

In recent years, concerns have been raised about the English education system becoming increasingly performance driven (Trotman et al., 2019). Performativity has been described as society's obsession with statistics, testing, grades and achieving goals (Ball, 2007). Arguably, in such a classroom climate learners, who find it difficult to meet the academic demands (Hayden, 1997), can find themselves "*pushed out*" (Menzies & Baar, 2015, p.7). This has been described as a societal act that can lead to the wider marginalisation of the most vulnerable young people (Gazeley, 2010). It could also be viewed as the difficulties schools experience balancing inclusive approaches with demonstrating ongoing improvement and meeting inspection standards (Gill, Quilter-Pinner & Swift, 2017).

Indeed, an increasing emphasis placed by governments on school improvement and shrinking school budgets to use to upskill staff and meet individual learners' needs (Gill et al., 2017; National Education Union, 2019) are just a few of the possible factors that have likely impacted on the inclusion of vulnerable learners in mainstream schools in England. These challenges may be unique to the English education system. In support of this, the devolved Welsh education sector is said to have less of a testing regime (Power & Taylor, 2018). It also has a renewed focus on developing an engaging curriculum for all learners (WG, 2017b). However, the number of young people attending AP in Wales has been rising over the last 6 years and is now thought to be the highest since 2009/2010 (WG, 2019a). Therefore, it could be said that Wales faces similar challenges to England in terms of successfully meeting the needs of some learners in the mainstream sector (McCluskey et al., 2013). The following section will consider the construction of school exclusion.

2.3 Exclusion

It is commonplace for those learners, who struggle to meet the demands of mainstream school, to face threats of exclusion. The long and short-term detrimental effects of school exclusion for an individual in terms of factors including health, wellbeing and socio-economic contribution have been highlighted (Macrae, Maguire & Milbourne, 2003; Munn & Lloyd, 2005; Gill et al., 2017; Samaritans Cymru, 2019). Once excluded, young people may be placed into the AP sector.

Notably, many young people in AP have not been officially excluded from their mainstream school (Children's Commissioner, 2017; Gill et al., 2017). However, they have often experienced significant adversities in their lives that could be viewed as or contribute towards feelings of exclusion (Samaritans Cymru, 2019). When considering the range of exclusion faced by young people, Osler, Street, Lall and Vincent (2002) offer that:

Exclusion can be the result of disciplinary procedures, but it can also occur through feelings of isolation, disaffection, unresolved personal, family or emotional problems, bullying,

withdrawal or truancy. These experiences may be as significant as formal disciplinary exclusion procedures if they deny or restrict an individual's access to education and lead to a more general social exclusion (p.3).

In addition, it is widely acknowledged that unofficial and hidden forms of exclusion occur in schools (Hayden, 2003; Butler, 2011; McCluskey, Riddell, Weedon & Fordyce, 2016; Estyn, 2018 & 2019). These may also be equally detrimental to young people. Estyn (2019) highlighted that schools in Wales may be motivated to move young people into AP as a way of removing them from their data records. This appears to have links to the previously discussed concept of performativity, whereby school actions are driven by a need to meet data expectations rather than the needs of learners. With this in mind, the official WG exclusion data may only represent the 'tip of the iceberg' of young peoples' experiences (Power & Taylor, 2018).

When examining exclusion and AP processes in Wales, McCluskey et al., asserted that *"exclusion and AP are inextricably linked in policy and practice and both should be seen as part of the landscape of social exclusion in Wales"* (2013, p.4). The Samaritans (2019) have also urged that there is a need to try harder to understand the experiences of young people, who are excluded or at risk of exclusion. They propose that educators should be focusing on *"hearing the pupil voice focusing on their own experience, its impact on them and what could have been done differently"* (p.15). Given the poor outcomes young people who are excluded from school commonly achieve, there is arguably a need to continue to examine what happens to young people once they are excluded from their mainstream school and enter the AP sector.

Young people, who are viewed as having social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD), can experience higher levels of school exclusion than their peers (Cole, 2015). Research has highlighted that some teachers and peers hold negative attitudes towards this group of learners (Mowat, 2015; Stanforth & Rose, 2018). This may be due to their externalising challenging behaviours (Goodman & Burton, 2010; Thomas, 2015). These behaviours can not only impact on the education of the individual, but also on other learners in the class. WG guidance states that schools may consider forms of exclusionary

action if a young person is “*seriously and consistently disruptive*” (2019b, p. 67), whilst also highlighting the need for schools to make reasonable adjustments in line with the Equality Act 2010 (WG, 2019b). Nevertheless, it is this group of vulnerable learners, who are said to make up a significant proportion of young people attending AP (Bowman-Perrott et al., 2013; Estyn, 2015 & 2016).

3. SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL AND BEHAVIOURAL DIFFICULTIES

3.1 Social, emotional and behavioural difficulties as a label

Learners attending AP commonly, but not always, display what is known interchangeably as ‘challenging behaviour’ (Stanforth & Rose, 2018); ‘emotional and behavioural difficulties’ (Cole, Daniels & Visser, 2003); ‘social, emotional and behavioural difficulties’ (Cefai & Cooper, 2009; Tellis-James & Fox, 2016) or ‘social, emotional and mental health needs’ (Carroll & Hurry, 2018). Therefore, a brief consideration of these terms is arguably helpful in understanding the current research context.

The terms listed previously are used interchangeably in research, policy and legislation to describe young people, who display challenging behaviour in school. The literature appears to lack a clear agreement regarding the terminology. Scanlon and Barnes-Holmes (2013) suggested that the difficulties forming an agreed definition stems from differing attributions of where challenging behaviour comes from. This is a debate which spans from the early nineteenth century to present day (Cooper, 2001). Stanforth and Rose (2018) suggested that difficulties defining this group of learners also highlights the confusion in policy and research relating to meeting their educational needs.

For clarity, this research has chosen to use the term SEBD and where necessary, young people will be described as young people who experience SEBD. This acknowledges that the term is socially constructed and young people may not present as experiencing SEBD in all contexts (Cajic-Seigneur, 2014). It also recognises that behavioural difficulties are broader than can be conceptualised by mental health (Tellis-James & Fox, 2016).

3.2 A consideration of the history of SEBD

When considering the label SEBD, it is important to hold in mind that the construct has evolved over time (Sheffield & Morgan, 2017). In early education, learners were commonly thought of as being ‘maladjusted’ (Department for Education, 1944). Thinking and theory has now somewhat moved away from constructions of SEBD difficulties as being ‘within child’. The ‘within child’ construction of difficulties arguably led to schools and society viewing young people as having deficits in them or there being deficits in parenting. This meant a lack of consideration of the impact of the wider social environments (Mowat, 2010) and how situational factors impact on development as highlighted in bio-ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006).

The bio psycho-social theoretical model of understanding SEBD is thought to be most commonly supported in recent literature (Carroll & Hurry, 2018). This is the framework which the current research was conducted within. The bio psycho-social model asserts that it is the ongoing interactions between the individual’s biological make-up and the environments in which they live their life that determines behaviour and emotional wellbeing. A far cry from the label of maladjusted, the bio psycho-social model supports the important role that school environments can have in bringing about meaningful change for young people (Poulou, 2014). This highlights the importance of thinking about how young people are experiencing the AP sector.

The educational experiences of young people, who experience SEBD, have been discussed in wider literature (Wise, 2000; Sheffield & Morgan, 2017), alongside good practice about how they can be supported in mainstream (Carroll & Hurry, 2018) and the potential impacts of labelling a learner as having SEBD (Mowat, 2010; Sheffield & Morgan, 2017). It is beyond the scope of the current research to explore these topics in great detail as the focus of study is on the lived experiences of learners within AP. The remaining sections of Part 1A will now move on to considering the education context in Wales.

4. EDUCATION IN WALES

4.1 Welsh education context

To facilitate an understanding of where the current research sits within the wider Welsh education sector, the next section will briefly consider some of the education reforms in Wales over the past decade.

4.2 Welsh education reform

In 2009, the Welsh results in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) were lower than expected (OECD, 2017). This raised questions about the quality of Welsh education for all learners. Following this, the WG embarked on a mission to reform the education sector. They expressed a commitment to raising standards, reducing the attainment gap, and delivering an improved education system (WG, 2017c). Wider changes included a curriculum review (Donaldson, 2015); development of a new curriculum for 2022 (WG, 2017d) and a new Additional Learning Needs Act (WG, 2018). Wales is striving to create *“An education system in which all learners have an equal opportunity to reach their potential... can strengthen individuals’ and societies’ capacity to contribute to economic growth and social cohesion”* (OECD, 2017, p.3). Arguably, the AP sector is a key part of the system in need of consideration given the previously discussed suggestions that learners in AP may not be reaching their potential (Taylor, 2012; Estyn, 2015 & 2016).

4.3 Times of change in the Welsh AP sector

Creating an education system of equal opportunity requires the government to examine the AP sector because young people in AP arguably do not achieve the same outcomes as their peers (Taylor, 2012). AP is also more often associated with education failure (McCluskey et al., 2013).

Since 2009, several reviews of AP and exclusion have been conducted in Wales. These have raised a plethora of concerns, offered recommendations for changes and reported on good practice (Reid, 2009; Butler, 2011; McCluskey et al., 2013; Estyn, 2015 & 2016). In

2014, the Children’s Commissioner for Wales (2014) concluded that while many young people spoke positively about AP, for a few learners attending a PRU has a detrimental impact on wellbeing. Overall, despite reports of some positive changes and revised AP guidance (WG, 2016), a long-term plan is important to improve AP for young people in Wales (WG, 2017a).

In the UK, scholars have suggested that there ought to be national policies laying out requirements of LAs and AP providers (Thomson & Russell, 2009; Malcolm, 2018a). However, WG maintains that the organisation of AP is “*a local matter*” (2017a, p.5). There is a recognised “*need to develop a strategic approach to address failings, and to promote and disseminate the positives in the sector*” (2017a, p.2). In response to this need, an AP Task and Finish Group was set up in Wales and 6 key areas for improvement were identified: “*Leadership; accountability; resources; structures; learner wellbeing; outcomes*” (WG, 2017a, p.2). It was hoped that a phased approach to understanding and improving the sector would enable evidence to be collected to support changes being in line with the wider education reforms.

Most recently, on the 27th June 2019, the National Welsh Assembly Children, Young People and Education Committee began an inquiry into AP in Wales (National Welsh Assembly for Wales, 2019). The findings of this inquiry have not yet been published.

4.4 Summary

The current position from WG appears to be that there is a need to further expand the evidence base and develop a range of policy options before implementing statutory guidance to LAs (2017a). Arguably, at this juncture in policy development, returning to the perspectives of the young people, who attend AP is important.

5. The LANDSCAPE OF AP IN WALES

5.1 Introduction

This section will explore the layout and characteristics of the AP sector in Wales, in order to be as clear as is possible about what the phenomenon of study is.

5.2 Welsh AP census

Each academic year, the WG commissions an AP Census to gather a more accurate picture of young people who are attending AP. In January 2019, the government estimated that there were 2,286 young people receiving their education in AP (WG, 2019a). These numbers are said to be an underestimate of the true figure (Malcolm, 2018a) and are increasing year on year (see figure 1). 88.1% of young people attending AP in Wales are known to have additional learning needs (WG, 2019a). This suggests that they are a vulnerable group.

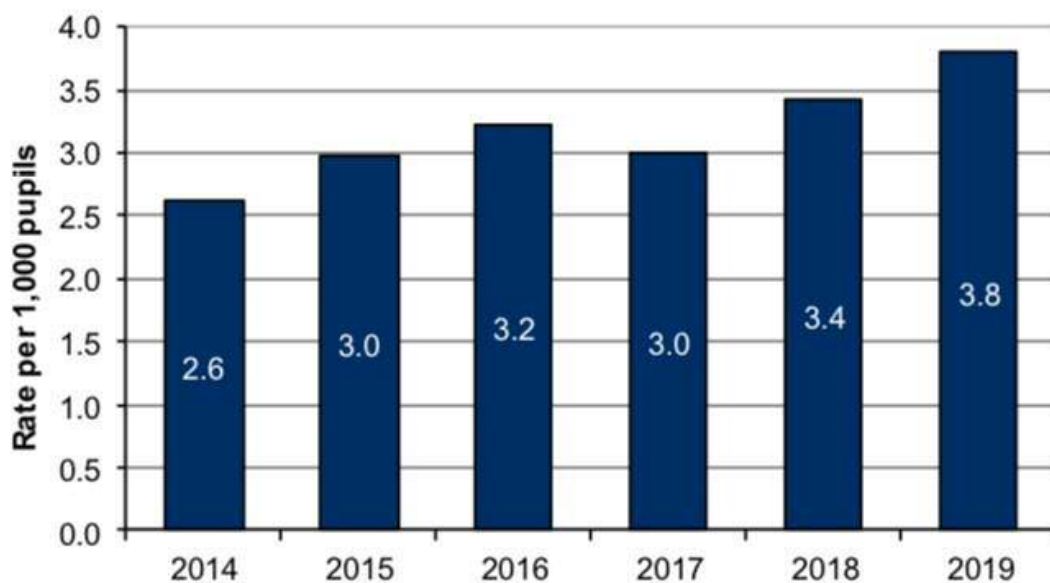


Figure 1: Illustrating approximate numbers of young people attending AP in Wales each year

5.3 A mixed AP market

The AP sector in Wales currently operates as a mixed market. This means young people have access to a mix of local, regional and national education providers, who may be privately and/or publicly funded (Thomson & Russell, 2009). It is the responsibility of

each Local Authority (LA) to strategically plan and source a range of appropriate provision that meets the needs of its learners (WG, 2016). As a result, the AP available varies depending on where each young person lives. The sector has been criticised for its diversity in terms of the quality of available provisions (McCluskey et al., 2013).

Ball (2007) highlighted the potential impacts of private companies participating in what has historically been a largely public funded education system. He described the often complex and changing nature of a mixed market. AP providers are often funded on fixed term contracts, meaning that the AP that is available within any LA can be unstable. This can impact on young peoples' placements if they have to end abruptly when funding ends (Malcolm, 2019).

5.4 Types of provision

Regardless of where a young person lives, arguably they are entitled to access high quality AP. Taylor (2012) asserted that the best commissioning should aim to provide individual children with a bespoke well-planned intervention that meets their educational and social and emotional needs. Common characteristics of AP include smaller class sizes, increased one-one interactions between teachers and students and a student centred curriculum (Thomson, 2014). WG asserts that in AP, learners have opportunities to work towards level 1 and 2 credit-based qualifications that have equivalency of up to four GCSEs. However, this will likely be reduced to two GCSEs due to changes in the qualification framework (WG, 2017a).

There is an increasing range of AP available in Wales, including:

- “PRUs
- *Further Education colleges*
- *Individual tuition and tuition at pupils' homes or at hospital*
- *Youth Gateway*
- *Work - related education*
- *Training providers*
- *Third sector organisations*
- *Tailor - made packages”* (WG, 2016, p.156)

Some AP providers offer full time provision, whilst others may run alongside a mainstream placement (Pennacchia & Thomson, 2016a). A commonly used form of AP is Pupil Referral Units (PRUs). PRUs have sometimes been separated from other forms of AP in the discourse (Kinsella, Putwain & Kaye, 2019) by suggestions that their main objective is to deliver short-term provision with a view to young people returning to mainstream school (Meo & Parker, 2004). However, others acknowledge that young people are remaining in PRUs for increasing lengths of time (Estyn, 2015).

Thomson and Russell (2009 & 2011) offered a helpful framework from which the landscape of AP can be considered. The authors described two categories: Core Providers and Specialist Providers. Core Providers included settings where young people were on roll though observed that they were not attending the setting on a full-time basis. It was however the responsibility of the Core Provider to arrange and oversee a full-time package of education. Full-time packages were observed to be negotiated between the Core Provider and Specialist Providers.

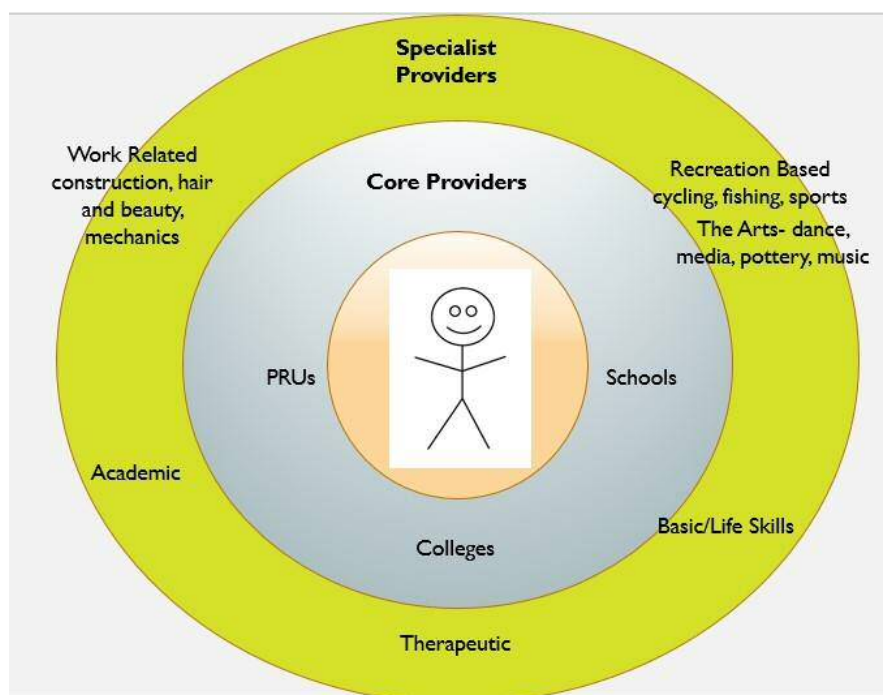


Figure 2: A mixed AP market
Adapted from Thomson & Russell, 2009

5.5 Summary

The AP sector in Wales is arguably in a time of review and development (WG, 2017a). It could be said that now more than ever is the time to return to the voices of those young people, who are experiencing the AP sector. The following section will consider the value of listening to the perspectives of young people.

6. HEARING THE VOICES OF YOUNG PEOPLE

6.1 A rights perspective

Since the adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989), WG policy has increasingly sought to centralise the voices of young people (WG, 2011b; Donaldson, 2015; WG, 2018). Article 12 of the Act asserts that young people have the right to express their views on all matters that affect them and should be involved in any decision making about their lives (United Nations, 1989). In line with this, there has been increased emphasis on ensuring professionals centralise the views and perspectives of young people when working with them, including EPs. Most recently, the Welsh Draft Additional Learning Needs Bill has emphasised the importance of adopting person-centred approaches and ensuring student voice is central to decisions (Corrigan, 2014).

6.2 Defining student voice

Student voice *“includes every way in which pupils are allowed or encouraged to offer their views or perspectives”* (Whitty & Wisby, 2007, p.306). Cooper (1993) urged that it is a moral obligation to enable young people to articulate their views on issues that concern them as effectively as possible. However, Lundy (2007) warned of the challenges of ensuring meaningful and effective use of pupil voice even within a rights focused policy framework.

6.3 Listening to young people in AP

Young people, who experience SEBD and/or who have been excluded from school, are thought to represent the least empowered (Cefai & Cooper, 2010) and often

marginalised (Gazeley, 2010) learners in society. Their voices are infrequently heard (Munn & Lloyd, 2005) and only a relatively small number of studies have explored their perspectives and views (Cosma & Soni, 2019). This may be because researchers are unsure how to engage effectively with them (Davies, 2005); find what they have to say hard to hear (Munn & Lloyd, 2005) or are concerned that giving young people more control may undermine and destabilise the education system (Lundy, 2007).

Nevertheless, this group of learners have shown that when given opportunities to participate in research, they have valuable information to share (Wise, 2000; Sellman, 2009; Cosma & Soni, 2019). Holding central the views of young people as reliable witnesses to their own experiences (France, 2004) has been argued to be key to understanding their experiences and developing ways to better support them. Listening to their often unique perspectives (O’Gorman, Salmon & Murphy, 2016) can help others to understand the impact and effectiveness of provision (Cooper, 1993). Hearing these voices also seems particularly important given that they are often highly complex and vulnerable individuals (Pennacchia & Thomson, 2016b) and that referrals to AP because of well-being are increasing (Gill et al., 2017). Taking time to consider young peoples’ experiences in AP is arguably relevant to a wide range of professionals, who seek to promote positive outcomes for young people (Malcolm, 2018b). This includes EPs.

7. RELEVANCE TO EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGISTS

7.1 Role of EP

The role of EP involves working to support the “*development, wellbeing, resilience, learning and achievement*” for all young people (AEP/WG, 2016, p.2). Young people in AP are said to be some of the most complex and vulnerable learners in terms of their additional learning needs and wider life histories and contexts (Taylor, 2012, WG, 2019a). Overall, it could be said that this relatively small group of learners, have needs in the areas which EPs can support that are disproportionately high (WG, 2011a). This highlights the need to take time to further understand their lived educational experiences and develop ways of supporting them.

7.2 Roles in wider systems

Some EPs, employed by LAs, have a part to play in decision making about the placement of young people in AP (WG, 2017a). As ethical and reflective practitioners, it is recognised that EPs “*may need to make decisions in difficult, changing and unclear situations*” (British Psychological Society, 2018, p 2) and must act in the best interests of service users (Health and Care Professions Council, 2016). Given the possible impacts of placing a young person in AP that have been previously discussed these decisions are arguably challenging for individuals. In line with this, Mowat (2010) suggested that it can be difficult for adults to predict how young people will respond to interventions because of the complex interactionist nature through which young people are influenced and in turn influence their environments. This further highlights the challenges that professionals may face when considering whether to place a young person in AP.

Taking time to consider how young people are experiencing the current AP sector could support ethical and child-centred decision making regarding tailored, holistic provision (Oxley, 2016). Finally, EPs are also well-positioned to advocate for those young people, who it could be argued are not well-positioned to influence policy or practice themselves (McCluskey et al., 2015).

PART 1B

1. INTRODUCTION

Having set the context of AP in part 1A, part 1B aims to critically evaluate the key literature that is felt to be relevant to the current study. The aim of this thesis is to, wherever possible, focus on the voices of young people. This is in line with the notion that young people are able to articulate their views about their experiences and often have clear messages (Hamil & Boyd, 2002).

A systematic review of the available literature has been conducted focused on the following questions:

- What have young people been asked about their lived experiences in AP?

- What common themes can be found in what they have said?

The systematic review stages of scoping, planning, identification, screening, eligibility and research synthesis proposed by Siddaway (2014) guided the review process. The initial stage of scoping the wider literature established that there were no extant reviews focused on exploring young peoples' experiences in AP. Literature was explored initially using scoping searches on Google and Google Scholar to identify project evaluations; reports and government documents relating to the overarching area of AP. This was also used to inform what might be relevant search terms.

1.1 Databases, search engines and other sources used

An initial search of the literature was carried out in December 2018 and a second search was completed between October and November 2019. During the initial search it was felt that there was a wide range of language being used to describe the phenomenon of AP. This meant that the list of possible search terms was lengthy. Once the search terms had been decided, more in depth and specific searches were conducted using electronic databases including PsychInfo and Educational Resources Information Centre (ERIC). Siddaway (2014) asserts that at least two relevant databases should be utilised when conducting a systematic review. These databases were felt to offer the most complete searches of articles in the fields of psychology and education. Combinations of variations of the following search terms were used: 'alternative provision' and 'pupil views'. Government policies and reports were also sourced from government websites. Appendix A offers further details of the search process.

1.2 Inclusion and exclusion criteria

The searches identified literature relating to the topic of AP from a range of different countries, but primarily the UK; America (Farrelly & Daniels, 2014; Cable, Plucker & Spradlin, 2009) and Australia (Reimer & Pangrazio, 2018; Mills, Renshaw, and Zipin, 2013). Given the challenges of defining AP even within the UK education systems (McCluskey et al., 2015), it was felt that confining the review to the UK would enable the most relevant studies to be focused upon.

The inclusion and exclusion criteria were developed across the search (Siddaway, 2014) until the following criteria was settled upon:

Chosen studies:

- Included topics related to AP in the UK
- Were published in the English or Welsh language
- Were published in the period 2010-2019
- Included voices of young people, who had been or were attending AP as participants. Student voice has been defined in part 1A.

Studies were not included if they:

- Included topics related to AP outside of the UK
- Included topics related to home schooling
- Were published in any language other than English or Welsh
- Included only young people who were attending AP part-time rather than fulltime. This was felt to be a different educational experience to the focus of the current thesis.

Throughout the process of searching, literature was filtered to ensure that studies most relevant were included. Titles and abstracts for studies were read and those deemed to be most relevant to the current research question were read in full (Siddaway, 2014). A process of 'pearl growing' or 'snowballing' (Creswell, 2009) then followed meaning reference lists were searched to identify further relevant studies. This was found to be particularly effective in identifying relevant papers in which different language had been used to define the education provision meaning the studies had not appeared in previous searches.

1.3 Summary

The review of literature that follows is intended to be a systematic overview of relevant literature relating to young peoples' experiences of AP. It intends to survey the state of knowledge on the topic (Baumeister & Leary, 1997) of young peoples' perceptions of AP

and in doing so will critically evaluate and synthesise the findings of relevant studies (Siddaway, 2014). Given the lack of clarity and range of language used to describe AP in academic and wider societal settings (Thomson, 2014), further relevant evidence may be found outside this review.

The review will initially critically examine the questions young people have been asked by researchers and researchers' methodological choices. Following this, discussion will turn to considering key themes that seem to be important to young people in their lived experiences as evidenced across the body of literature. Many of the studies included in this review also explored the perspectives of other stakeholders in AP (teachers, parents, staff and LA staff). As this research aims to focus on the perspectives of young people, the findings relating to their reported experiences will be the focus of this review.

2. CRITIQUE OF LITERATURE PERTAINING TO REVIEW

2.1 How have researchers sought to explore the perceptions of young people in AP?

The following sections propose four key aims found within extant relevant research. These will be briefly expanded in turn to offer a context for their findings and conclusions.

2.1.1 Aims of previous research

When considering the body of literature that has included young people's self-reported experiences in AP, it is apparent that their views have been sought to inform several research aims. These have primarily focused on:

- Evaluation of AP (McCluskey et al., 2015; Cajic-Seigneur & Hodgson, 2016; Trotman et al., 2019; Nind, Boorman & Clarke, 2012; Thomson & Pennacchia, 2016b)
- Identifying factors that influence re-engagement and progress (Cullen & Monroe, 2010; Ewen & Topping, 2012; Nicholson & Putwain, 2015; Nicholson & Putwain, 2016; Michael & Frederickson, 2013; Hamilton & Morgan, 2018; Jalali & Morgan, 2018)

- Exploring motivation and future aspirations (Mainwaring & Hallam, 2010; TellisJames & Fox, 2016).
- Exploring whether AP has the potential to marginalise or include young people (Johnston & Bradford, 2019).

2.1.2 Evaluating provisions

Taylor (2012) asserted that there is no one size fits all model of good practice in AP. There is also no clear consensus of what are considered to be appropriate outcomes for learners (Gutherson et al., 2011; Thomson, 2014). Nevertheless, with many young people remaining in AP for considerable lengths of time, there is arguably a need to ensure that they receive a high standard of provision (Menzies & Baars, 2015).

Evaluations can inform the commissioning of provision (Trotman et al., 2019) or inform changes to the future delivery of current provision (Cullen & Monroe, 2010; Ewen & Topping, 2012). Generally, evaluations of AP are commissioned by LA or creators of the specific provisions. This may bring into question the systemic drivers and motivations for evaluating settings and what possible influence the researcher's positions may have on the findings (Yardley, 2000).

2.1.3 Factors influencing re-engagement

The links between lack of school engagement and long-term societal impacts are clear (Pirrie, Macleod, Cullen, & McCluskey, 2011; Samaritans Cymru, 2019). Engagement with education is however malleable meaning that young people can and sometimes do reengage with learning (Nicholson & Putwain, 2015). Though it could be said that reengagement is ultimately evidenced by a return to mainstream education, the first steps involve re-engaging with learning in AP (Michael & Frederickson, 2013; Nicholson & Putwain, 2015).

The process of re-engagement is arguably embedded in the interactions between the young person and the education and family contexts they find themselves in (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Therefore, understanding the factors that learners in AP feel

help them re-engage can inform a more person-centred approach to supporting them. In the wider education sector, research has largely tended to focus on engagement in mainstream schools (Nicholson & Putwain, 2015), but more recently young people in AP have been asked ‘what has helped you to make progress?’ and what may be perceived by them as barriers to success.

2.1.4 Hopes and aspirations

The majority of research examined in this review asked young people to reflect on their past selves or current education experiences to inform ‘what works’ or ‘has not worked’ for them. However, a small body of research has shifted the focus to consider the future lives that they may lead. Young peoples’ futures will arguably be influenced by the goals that they set for themselves and subsequently work to achieve. Working towards goals can lead to increased feelings of purpose and fulfilment (Seligman, 2011).

Goals and aspirations are intrinsically linked to motivation (Deci, Ryan & Williams, 1996). Some learners, who are placed in AP, are disengaged from education perhaps suggesting they lack motivation and goals. They do make up a large proportion of school leavers who are not in education, employment or training (Department for Education, 2017). Thus, researchers have asked young people attending AP what their aspirations are (Mainwaring & Hallam, 2010) and what resources they feel they have to help them achieve their futures (Tellis-James & Fox, 2016).

2.1.5 Exploring marginalisation

How young, disabled people may be marginalised in AP has received little research attention to date. However, one study (Johnston & Bradford, 2019) has considered how young disabled males may be experiencing stigmatisation relating to their disabilities and placement in the AP sector.

2.2 Critique of methodological choices

In order to adopt a critical approach to exploring the knowledge that previous research has created, it is important to consider the methodological choices that researchers have

made. Appendix B provides an overview of the key studies. Appendix C provides an overview of how Yardley's (2000) evaluation principles were used to ensure the included studies were adequately robust.

2.2.1 Samples

Eight studies sought to centralise the views of young people, who had lived experiences of AP as their only data source (Mainwaring & Hallam, 2010; Nind et al., 2012; Michael & Frederickson, 2013; Nicholson & Putwain, 2015; Tellis-James & Fox, 2016; Hamilton & Morgan, 2018; Jalali & Morgan, 2018; Malcolm, 2019). Commonly, studies included young people as participants alongside a wider range of participants including learners in mainstream; parents, LA officers and AP staff.

In some studies, the number of other participants was higher than the number of young people (Nicholson & Putwain, 2015; McCuskey et al., 2015) meaning their views could be considered to be the minority. Though using a broader range of information sources may create richer data from which to draw from and triangulate results, it also means that the experiences of young people may not be central to the conclusions that are made. The researchers also pay little attention to how conscious or unconscious constructions of power regarding whose perceptions are perceived as most important, reliable or valuable influence the data collection or analysis. Furthermore, studies with multiple sources of information use limited data exerts to support their findings. This means it can be difficult to see where the views of young people have informed the conclusions and to determine where similarities and differences lie within the data sets.

Most of the studies recruited participants aged between 12 and 18 years attending secondary AP or AP colleges. Three exceptions to this were Jalali and Morgan (2018) and Hart (2013), who recruited primary and secondary ages and Malcolm (2019), who recruited young adults.

One study sought to explore the views of young people, who had already reintegrated back into mainstream (Hamilton & Morgan, 2018). Arguably, their views may not be

representative of those learners whose needs are highly complex sometimes meaning that reintegration is not appropriate.

It could be said that literature has tended to focus on the experiences of boys, which may be because they have historically made up a larger proportion of the AP population (House of Commons Education Committee, 2018). Two studies have explored the perspectives of only females (Thomson & Russell, 2011; Nind et al., 2012). In addition to there being a lack of female perspectives, it is also possible that the recruitment processes used have led to the voices of some groups of young people in AP not being heard. For example, there may be less representation in the findings from young people who are not motivated to participate in research; are less able to engage with research processes or who are not invited to participate by researchers. A possible reason that researchers select participants could be that some perspectives can be harder to hear (Munn & Lloyd, 2005). Arguably, such recruitment processes could alter the conclusions that past research has made in terms of exploring young peoples' lived experiences in AP.

2.2.2 Data collection

No relevant studies that utilised solely quantitative data were found, however several studies contained mixed methods. Attendance, exclusion and attainment data formed the quantitative data. Arguably, this data did not seem to offer first-hand information about the young peoples' perspectives, so has not been a central focus in this review. Also, it is not always clear how this data was analysed or informed the research conclusions.

Evaluative studies often used case study designs (Ewen & Topping, 2012; Michael & Frederickson, 2013; Cajic-Seigneur & Hodgson, 2016; Thomson and Pennacchia, 2016b; Trotman et al., 2019). In-depth exploration of specific provisions was undertaken, but generalisability may be limited (Lewis & Lindsay, 2000). Trotman et al., (2019) reported on four case study evaluations of AP settings that had taken place over a six-year period in three LAs. These evaluations were predicated on the principles of children's rights and

appear to differ from previous evaluative studies because they were designed based on the principles of “*participatory collaborative evaluation*” (p.221). The authors’ intentions were focused on “*maximising the participation of those most affected by the existing practices and potential outcomes of the evaluation findings*” (p.221). However, this commitment is perhaps not taken into the findings because the data from all four evaluations and all participants are combined making it difficult to draw out the voices of young people.

Individual interviews were most often used to explore young peoples’ lived experiences. This is recognised as a strength as it demonstrates sensitivity to the potentially sensitive topics, which young people may wish to discuss and a commitment to hearing their idiographic experiences. Interviews also provide direct, first-hand accounts of their experiences (Lewis & Lindsay, 2000). Semi-structured interviews sometimes made use of visual discussion prompts including scaling activities (Hart, 2013), life stories (Tellis-James & Fox, 2016) and timelines of educational journeys (Jalali & Morgan, 2018) to support the flow of conversation. Jalali and Morgan (2018) reported that “*rather than directly question the participants, life grids support the exploration of critical moments*” (p.58).

Studies also made use of focus groups (Ewen & Topping, 2012). Focus groups can promote participant led discussion, however group dynamics can influence the extent which each participant contributes to the data (Robson, 2002).

A strength of Nind et al’s (2012) research was their use of novel digital technologies as data collection tools. They asserted that offering mediums that reflect youth culture can support free self-expression and social inclusion. Photo narration, digital comic strips and video diaries were used to explore girls’ perceptions of their educational journeys.

Russell and Thomson (2011) and Johnston and Bradford (2019) adopted ethnographic approaches and used a range of data collection methods (observation field notes; surveys, AP document analysis and semi-structured interviews). Such studies demonstrate a commitment to observing, participating in and understanding group experiences, but in doing so may lose the individual perspectives (Jones & Smith, 2017).

Nevertheless, a recognised strength of ethnographic research relates to the trust and rapport that researchers can build with young people as they spend extended time in their company. This may mean that they feel able to be more open with researchers leading to richer data, however it could also mean that young people feel a requirement to say what they perceive the researchers wish to hear.

An observed strength of Cullen and Monroe's (2010) study is their commitment to using soft systems methodology and rich pictures to explore a wide range of different perspectives in the AP studied. However, this leads to a lack of clarity as to how much influence the views of young people have had in the final conclusions compared to the views of other adult participants.

2.2.3 Data analysis

The ways in which data is analysed can influence how closely the findings relate to the young peoples' lived experiences. Commonly, qualitative data was analysed to create themes. Not all studies were transparent about the processes underpinning their analyses to enable a clear understanding of what drivers may have influenced the results.

Overall, it could be said that studies in this review have tended to adopt a deductive research approach with the aim of exploring specific hypotheses or theoretical positions (Hart, 2013; Thomson & Pennacchia, 2016b). This means that interview questions and analyses were often constructed within a pre-determined lens or key area under examination by the researcher.

This can be seen in the work of Johnston and Bradford (2019), who organised themes around a theoretical interest in social capital and stigma. Hamilton and Morgan (2018) take the position that their analysis is both inductive and deductive, however it appears that the coding of data was led by their interest in self-determination theory. Tellis-James and Fox (2016) used a deductive categorical content analysis based on positive psychology to highlight parts of each young peoples' future stories. Michael and Frederickson (2013) also adopted a largely deductive approach using thematic analysis to

offer findings that would support the “*design of optimally engaging learning environments*” (p.409).

Also, Hart’s (2013) analysis was based on pre-existing themes within resilience research. Thomson and Pennacchia (2016b) state that they intend to mobilise insights from Foucaudian theory to support their argument that AP education is experiencing similar drivers in terms of inspections, league table and exam results. A strength of the study is their offering of some explanation as to how the theory relates to their conclusions enabling readers to make connections.

It could be said that a more inductive approach was taken by the studies using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). IPA suggests a desire to explore the idiographic, lived experiences of participants (Smith et al., 2009). Jalali and Morgan (2018) asserted that their use of IPA enabled young people to “*talk flexibly, which is particularly relevant for the research population where there may be controversial adult misconceptions about the function of student behaviour*” (p.57). They reported that the data was analysed using Moustakas phenomenological framework and created themes, which reflected the experiences of young people in mainstream and AP. Perhaps some information shared by these participants may have been lost in the process of exploring differences between the two group perspectives.

Putwain, Nicholson and Edwards (2016) also used IPA to consider young peoples’ lived experiences. However, the research was rooted in the belief that young people in AP lack the skills to self-regulate their learning. Consequently, their analysis seemed to be deductive focusing on examining the instructional practices used in class. It could be said that, Nicholson and Putwain’s (2015) earlier use of IPA to explore re-engagement with learning shows more in depth consideration of the concept of re-engagement from the young peoples’ perspectives.

Overall, analyses tended to be based on researchers’ pre-existing knowledge of literature or theory. This could limit the opportunities that young people have to speak about topics that are meaningful and important to them and also valuable data may be lost in

the analysis. Conversely, an inductive approach means the data analysis is less influenced by researcher preconceptions, topic knowledge or past literature (Braun & Clark, 2006). Such findings may more closely represent young peoples' lived experiences.

2.2.4 Theoretical perspectives

Few studies seem to adopt clear ontological and/or epistemological positions. Cullen and Monroe (2010) and Tellis-James and Fox (2016) state that their approaches are consistent with a social constructionist approach. Arguably these studies, offer more clarification of the ways in which their data had been analysed than others.

Overall, it appears that where researchers have adopted a theoretical analysis approach their choices may lean towards optimistic interpretations of the data. For example, Cullen and Monroe stated that they made use of solution focused interview questions. Tellis-James and Fox (2016) utilised positive psychology, whilst Thomson and Pennacchia (2016b) describe their case studies as “*appreciative*” (p.625). Hamilton and Morgan (2018) also adopted an appreciative enquiry approach. A strength of these studies are their abilities to showcase positive stories of young people in AP and foster a sense of hope. This could be particularly powerful for this group of marginalised young people. However, it could be argued that such an approach offers overly optimistic conclusions. This could lead to the loss of the experiences of young people who may wish to offer different views of AP that may be harder for researchers and policy makers to hear.

2.2.5 Summary of critique

Overall, it could be argued that research in this area is commonly driven by adult constructions or political agendas. They seem to relate to what adults perceive to be most important for learners in AP e.g. progress, reintegration and re-engagement. There is also strong focus on trying to find and share good practice across AP and mainstream to support provisions to be more proactive and inclusive in supporting learners (Thomson, 2014). Though such research has a key part to play in improving educational experiences, it perhaps does not allow for wider exploration of how young people are making sense of their experiences in the current AP sector.

In addition, considering the data through pre-determined lenses may be limiting researchers' abilities to hear the voices of young people speaking about the aspects of AP that are most significant and meaningful to them. There is arguably still progress to be made in ensuring that young people are always seen as "reliable witnesses to their own experiences" (France, 2004, p.177) and placed as principal informants about the experiences that they are central to (Trotman et al., 2019).

3. What have young people said about the AP sector?

The process of reading and understanding young peoples' experiences as found in the literature was guided by reading key papers and noting down themes. The themes described what each study reported that young people had said. Themes were then organised into groups of similar ideas and a title was given to conceptualise each group. It is acknowledged that this was a largely subjective process to create a structure in which to consider the body of research. Appendix D illustrates where the themes were found within the studies.

3.1 Importance of relationships

Regardless of what young people are asked, it is clear that the relationships that they build and experience in AP are important to them. They are a foundation from which they can feel safe, build and achieve (Cullen & Monroe, 2010; Nind et al., 2012; Hart, 2013; McCluskey et al., 2015; Cajic-Seigneur & Hodgson, 2016; Malcolm, 2019). Some young people may also view their relationships with others as a resource they can use to help them achieve their desired futures (Tellis-James & Fox, 2016).

The positive relationships young people establish have been compared to the difficult relationships they experienced in mainstream (Hart, 2013). Ewen and Topping (2012) reported that staff relationships with young people was an important factor in their motivation to attend school. This is important because many young people who move into AP had low attendance in mainstream (Taylor, 2012). An exception to these conclusions about relationships can be found in Johnston and Bradford's (2019)

ethnographic study. They reported that young people experienced a lack of support, low trust and disregard from some staff and peers in AP.

3.1.1 Relationships with staff

McCluskey et al's., (2013) evaluation of the Welsh AP sector, concluded that young people value being listened to by staff and having opportunities to achieve. Furthermore, young people, who have transitioned into AP college provision, have described teachers in school treating them like children and as not listening to them about issues related to learning (Cajic-Seigneur & Hodgson, 2016).

It seems that many young people in AP value being in a more adult environment and feeling that they are being treated more like an adult (Michael & Frederickson, 2013). Being treated like an adult could mean that their views are listened to and valued leading to increased feelings of self-responsibility (Cajic-Seigneur & Hodgson, 2016). Some young people have described feeling trusted by adults in AP (Hart, 2013) and enjoying being treated with respect (Nicholson & Putwain, 2015). Conversely, others have expressed frustration that teachers do not listen to their opinions (Michael & Frederickson, 2013). Overall, it appears that how young people feel they are treated by adults, impacts on their perceptions of AP and the relationships they are able to build in AP.

Young people have described key factors which they feel promote the building of relationships with staff. These include: staff being supportive and trying to understand their problems (McCluskey et al., 2015; Cajic-Seigneur & Hodgson, 2016). Being available to provide emotional support is also valued by some young people (Michael & Frederickson, 2013). Accordingly, Hamilton and Morgan (2018) described staff as having dual teaching and pastoral roles with learners. Some young people also value staff taking time to get to know them on a personal level (Nind et al., 2012; Nicholson & Putwain, 2015). This can be facilitated by ensuring that staff have detailed knowledge about individuals' histories (Hamilton & Morgan, 2018).

3.1.2 Relationships with peers

Relationships with peers seems to be less often mentioned in the literature, but nevertheless is important to some young peoples' experiences in AP (Michael & Frederickson, 2013; Hart, 2013). Nicholson and Putwain (2015) suggested that positive relationships with peers may be due to the shared experiences that have brought them to AP, while Michael and Frederickson (2013) highlighted that positive relationships can relate to feelings of safety. One young person said *"I felt safe coz I knew nearly all of the people here from before so I felt that it was alright that I was coming here"* (p.412). In line with this, Hart (2013) highlighted that friendships can buffer against adversity, but raised the challenge that young people in AP may have limited social skills meaning that clashes between young people frequently occur. Notably, it is not clear if this was a concern voiced by young people or AP staff in the study.

Drawing on humanistic psychology, Cullen and Monroe (2010) found that increasing young peoples' opportunities to experience and build positive relationships supported more constructive social interactions and less conflict. Boys reported that the introduction of football coaching sessions into their PRU had given them opportunities to work together and get to know each other, learn to ignore irritations and focus on playing football. However, for three of the young people the introduction of the initiative seemed to exacerbate their social and emotional difficulties as measured by time outs and exclusions. The views of these young people were not further explored in the findings, however it could be that some young people find the increase in opportunities to interact with others difficult in AP.

3.1.3 Relationships with family

Young people have reported that as their attendance has improved in AP their family relationships have improved (Ewen & Topping, 2012; McCluskey et al., 2015; CajicSeigneur & Hodgson, 2016). Some felt this was due to them receiving more privileges at home for good behaviour, whilst others felt that an improvement in their own mood led to them getting on better with others (Ewen & Topping, 2012). Young people have said that regular communication with their homes to monitor behaviour (McCluskey et al., 2015)

and recognising their efforts led to their parents feeling happier (Cajic-Seigneur & Hodgson, 2016). This may also improve relationships.

3.2 A sense of belonging

A sense of belonging being important to young people is also observable in the literature (Nicholson & Putwain, 2015; Tellis-James & Fox, 2016). Feeling connected to a school setting can arguably lead to increased engagement and success (Nind et al., 2012). Jalali and Morgan (2018) reported that the majority of young people felt a sense of belonging and connectedness to their PRU. Some young people have also described AP as being like a family or homely (Nicholson & Putwain, 2015).

Jalali and Morgan (2018) made a connection between feelings of belonging in AP and young peoples' willingness to reintegrate into mainstream. They found that secondary aged young people reported a reluctance to return to mainstream. This could be explained by their lack of connectedness to it based on "*feelings of inadequacy and perceived failure in not fitting in*" (Jalali & Morgan, 2018, p.63).

3.3 Staff managing behaviour

How staff manage behaviour seems to be important to the lived experiences of young people in AP. Young people have reported feeling that staff in AP are able to better manage behaviour than in mainstream (Cajic-Seigneur & Hodgson, 2016). However, receiving unfair sanctions and being blamed by teachers for things they have not done were described as barriers to young peoples' engagement in AP (Frederickson & Michael, 2013). It is plausible that young people in AP experience ongoing struggles with their behaviour, but the response of those around them is different.

Young people also report valuing staff, who have an understanding of SEBD (Nicholson & Putwain, 2015; Hamilton & Morgan, 2018) and appropriate behaviour management strategies (Jalali & Morgan, 2018). One young person said "*just someone who's just able to teach from different points and be able to calm*" (Jalali & Morgan, 2018, p.86). Nind et al., (2012) also reported the value of "*positive alternatives to restraint and exclusion*"

(p.646). Accordingly, Hamilton and Morgan (2018) reported that a high level of safeguarding and pastoral support alongside adult abilities to manage behaviour contributed to young people reporting that they felt safe in AP. One young person said “everyone had their own support manager so like say you had a problem you were safeguarded” (p.86).

Conversely, Thomson and Pennacchia (2016b) offer an alternative construction of the high levels of adult support describing it as “surveillance” (p.627). They described AP as a place where it was difficult for young people to get away from staff observation. However, it is not clear whether this was a perception of young people or AP staff.

Some young people describe the importance of consistent rules and expectations from staff (Michael & Frederickson, 2013), whilst others value that AP is less strict meaning they feel more responsibility and maturity (Cajic-Seigneur & Hodgson, 2016). In support of this, Hart (2013) described young people being aware of reward systems and knowing their targets. This suggests a level of ownership being on the young people themselves to manage their behaviour, however the finding was based on observations in one PRU setting only.

3.4 A personalised curriculum

For young people attending AP in Wales, there is no expectation that provisions teach the full national curriculum (WG, 2017a). Nevertheless, young peoples’ perceptions about whether they are receiving a curriculum that is personalised for them seems to relate to their levels of engagement and enjoyment of AP (Michaels & Frederickson, 2013). Hamilton and Morgan (2018) described one global theme in their research as “*Supportive and personalised learning experience*” (p.85) and reported that young people valued a positive and holistic learning environment. They noted that these factors can increase young peoples’ autonomy and competence as work that suits their needs can be completed independently.

Ewen and Topping's (2012) evaluation of one AP setting also found that personalised learning had a positive impact on engagement. In line with this, Frederickson and Michael (2013) reported that failure to individualise learning is perceived by young people as being a barrier to their engagement. Young people commonly report that they value opportunities to choose (Nicholson & Putwain, 2015; Thomson & Pennacchia, 2016b) and make decisions (Cajic-Seigneur & Hodgson, 2016). Having a say, means that they are more often able to pursue learning that interests them (Ewen & Topping, 2012; Malcolm, 2019). In addition to having choice, the work should be paced to suit individuals (Ewen & Topping, 2012).

While some young people have reported that they find AP intellectually challenging (Nicholson & Putwain, 2016), others have described doing little formal work (Taylor, 2012; McCluskey et al., 2013). There seems to be a range of views concerning what young people value in their curriculum. Commonly, the relevance of the work that is set in AP to young peoples' future work aspirations seems to influence how valuable they perceive it to be and consequently their level of engagement (Tellis-James & Fox, 2016). It seems that young people also value time that staff spend supporting them to consider their future employability (Nicholson & Putwain, 2015).

A common perception seems to be that academic subjects in school have little relevance to future work (Cajic-Seigneur & Hodgson, 2016). For some young people, the mix of vocational and academic work in AP supports their re-engagement (Cajic-Seigneur & Hodgson, 2016). Young people have reported enjoying lessons that are fun and interactive (Nicholson & Putwain, 2015) and valuing the extra-curricular activities that AP can offer (Frederickson & Michael, 2013).

It seems that many young people in AP prefer practical activities (Ewen & Topping, 2012; Cajic-Seigneur & Hodgson, 2016), which may be because they view themselves as being in practical jobs in the future (Johnston & Bradford, 2019). Practical activities e.g. day trips have been identified as helping young people to re-engage (Michael & Frederickson, 2013) and as motivators (Cullen & Monroe, 2010). However, other young people have

described wanting to access more academic options. These learners experience frustration that they are not able to access the same opportunities as their mainstream peers (Michael & Frederickson, 2013; Cajic-Seigneur & Hodgson, 2016).

Where discussion has turned to how girls may be experiencing AP, potential issues have been raised relating to the stereotypical curriculum that is on offer (Russell & Thomson, 2011; Trotman et al., 2019). Trotman et al. (2019), for example, suggested that girls may be having unique experiences in AP, but did not provide further speculation as to what these experiences might be. Arguably, hearing the perspectives of girls regarding their experiences is an important area for future research.

3.5 School environment

The smaller class sizes and environments in AP are observably a key factor that young people perceive can support them to re-engage with learning (Nicholson & Putwain, 2015; Putwain, Nicholson & Edwards, 2016; Cajic-Seigneur & Hodgson, 2016; Trotman et al., 2019). Smaller class sizes have been said to enable young people to feel more seen; understood and cared for by staff and lead to greater concentration because staff are more easily able to manage behaviour (Nicholson & Putwain, 2015).

Other young people have said that having more help from staff supports them to be able to complete their learning on time (Cajic-Seigneur & Hodgson, 2016). Jalali and Morgan (2018) reported that young people valued high levels of adult support in order to access the curriculum, suggesting the young people can feel that they struggle with learning. Smaller classes can also provide more opportunities for one-one interactions, which supports the building of relationships (Hart, 2013; Nicholson & Putwain, 2015).

When describing their experiences in mainstream education, many young people cite the size of mainstream schools as being difficult to cope with in terms of the number of people and noise (Trotman et al., 2019). Less learners in each AP setting may also give individuals a sense of having more space (Jalali & Morgan, 2018). In line with this, Hart (2013) described the value of a small environment in being able to create “a sense of

safety and security” and a *“small family atmosphere”* (p.205). Contrary to this though, other young people have reported valuing a multi-locational nature to their education and having increased freedom (Ewen & Topping, 2012).

3.6 Motivation and engagement

There is a strong focus on trying to understand what works to support young people in AP. Some research reports that young people re-engage with education and experience an increase in self-motivation and determination (Frederickson & Michael, 2013; Nicholson & Putwain, 2015; Tellis-James & Fox, 2016). AP is said to have supported improvements in attendance, behaviour and academic gains (Cajic-Seigneur & Hodgson, 2016) leading to increased confidence (Ewen & Topping, 2012; Nicholson & Putwain, 2015).

Accordingly, some young people report viewing AP as a fresh start (Cajic-Seigneur & Hodgson, 2016) and a place where they realise the value of learning (Nicholson & Putwain, 2015) perhaps after a significant life event e.g. exclusion (Hamilton & Morgan, 2018). Similarly, AP is viewed by some young people as a place where they have a *“chance to become someone different”* (Thomson & Pennacchia, 2016b, p.627).

Trotman et al., (2019) reported that some young people perceive year 10 as a pivotal point in their education when they *“knuckle down or step up”* (p.229) and look to focus on gaining qualifications in readiness for employment. It was also observed that positive changes can lead to young people feeling pride about their academic achievements (McCluskey et al., 2015).

Putwain, Nicholson and Edwards (2016) reported that young people often find reengaging difficult, but can experience a shift in their attitudes about learning if they are supported by understanding staff, who do not adopt a mainstream teaching style. They asserted that teachers using specific instructional practice to support young people to self-regulate their learning led to re-engagement. Hamilton and Morgan (2018) proposed that having goals and receiving positive encouragement from staff increased young

peoples' motivation. One young person said *“there’s nothing better than someone seeing something good in you and like praising you and that and like you feel good”* (p.87).

Though these findings are encouraging in suggesting that with appropriate support young people feel they can re-engage, there is a lack of agreement relating to young peoples' capacity to make such lasting changes. One observation put forward by Johnston and Bradford's (2019) was that some boys preferred *“avin a laff, chilling and skiving, wearing hoodie tops and trackie bottoms, as well as pushing each other off classroom chairs and into doors, rather than engaging with set work”* (p.9). It may be that some young people have different motivations and areas for change that are outside of education.

Also Jalali and Morgan (2018) suggested that although young people viewed AP as a time of change, they were not actually experiencing long- term changes. They reported that secondary age young people expressed an external locus of control and lack of responsibility and awareness for their behaviour resulting in a sense of learned helplessness in relation to their capacity to change. They went on to suggest that young peoples' emphasis on the environmental factors that help them in AP showed that they also attributed improved behaviour as being externally attributed rather than a change in the young peoples' thought patterns. This finding offers some explanation as to why young people may re-engage in AP, but then struggle to reintegrate back into mainstream. However, this is not in line with Cajic-Seigneur and Hodgson's (2016) proposal that young people are generally aware of the factors that have caused their disengagement with education.

Jalali and Morgan (2018) further propose that young peoples' thinking patterns can become a barrier to change. Also, that over time they can negatively affect their education attitudes and views of themselves leading to exclusion and mental health difficulties. Arguably, more longitudinal research would be necessary to examine the reliability of these conclusions. Thomson and Pennacchia (2016b) observed that APs used more externalised discipline approaches than therapeutic approaches. This could be

viewed as a lack of opportunity for young people to reflect on their behaviour and underlying thoughts to support long term change.

3.7 Hopes and aspirations

Some young people, who attend AP, have spoken about valuing the support and opportunities available to help them progress towards future employment e.g. through attendance at college (Trotman et al., 2019). Others have highlighted the qualifications they are supported to achieve in AP helping them to enrol onto post 16 courses of their choosing (Cajic-Seigneur & Hodgson, 2016).

Mainwaring and Hallam (2010), utilised the psychological construct of ‘possible selves’ to ask learners in mainstream and learners in AP where they see themselves in the future. Possible selves are “*conceptions of the self in a future state*” (p.154) and influence motivation and behaviour as “*the individual moves towards long-term goals or avoids feared outcomes through small planned steps day by day*” (p.155). The authors concluded that young people in AP had fragile future selves and were less often able to construct positive future selves. One young person said “*I don’t see myself going anywhere. I’d like to but I can’t see myself going anywhere*” (p.158). In addition, those young people in AP, who were able to construct a positive future self, were less often able to articulate how they would achieve their goals and less aware of how to overcome possible adversities. A possible weakness of this study is that it does not consider how speech and language or learning difficulties may have influenced participants’ abilities to articulate their possible selves in a 1:1 interview without scaffolds or visual stimulus.

Tellis-James and Fox’s (2016) research offered an alternative conclusion to Mainwaring and Hallam (2010). They proposed that young people in AP are able to tell positive stories about their futures, when they are asked the right questions. Utilising a narrative approach, young people took part in life path activities to stimulate the telling of stories about their futures, pasts and identify strengths. The findings suggested that rather than negative past experiences leading them to a pre-occupation with negative selves

(Mainwaring & Hallam, 2010), young people can identify the resources that helped them to get through difficult past experiences and relate these to how they can achieve in their futures. Arguably, the adoption of a positive psychology approach may have led to a more favourable analysis.

3.8 Marginalisation and judgement

Although the least observed theme across the body of literature, young peoples' perceptions relating to feeling judged or marginalised are worthy of consideration. Young people have highlighted a desire to move away from the negative labels and identities given to them in mainstream (Nind et al, 2012; Thomson & Pennacchi, 2016b), valuing an opportunity for a fresh start. However, for some young people AP presents further challenges. Young people have expressed concerns about negative perceptions from future employers because they have attended AP. One young person said "*I might not get a job when I'm older because of this school*" (Michael & Frederickson, 2013, p.416).

Furthermore, it was highlighted by Johnston and Bradford (2019) that some young people in AP are aware of negative views they receive from other learners in mainstream school. Young people have described experiencing "*being pushed, punched and bullied*" (p.11) by learners on the same site, but in mainstream provision. The authors propose that this brings to light the potential loss of social capital and stigma that young people can experience when they are placed in AP. Ultimately, it appears that for some young people moving into AP leads to a change in how others perceive and interact with them. This study was conducted in one AP, thus its generalisability may be limited. Nevertheless, its year long duration shows a commitment to understanding the lived experiences of those particular learners.

3.9 Summary

Considering the body of literature that has been reviewed, there are some consistent messages about the factors that are important to young peoples' lived experiences, but their views can differ (Tellis-James & Fox, 2016; Jalali & Morgan, 2018). This highlights the need to listen to and hear individuals' stories. Many of the perceptions that young people

have shared could be seen to represent basic human psychological needs to feel safe, relate to others, achieve and belong (Maslow, 1943) and what is generally viewed to be good teaching and learning environments for all young people.

4. RATIONALE FOR CURRENT STUDY

Having reviewed key literature, it can be seen that there is a growing commitment to hearing young peoples' perspectives about their experiences in AP. However, as has previously been highlighted, research has been largely led by adult agendas. The first perhaps relates to a wider societal need to understand 'what works' to support young people in AP to succeed. The second, to researchers' pre-determined theoretical interests or perspectives.

Furthermore, most studies have taken place in provisions identified as examples of 'good practice'. This perhaps limits how relevant they are to understanding the range of young peoples' experiences, given how variable the quality of provision is said to be (McCluskey et al., 2015). Hearing the voices of young people, who have re-engaged with learning or reintegrated into mainstream is valuable in informing change. But, arguably there is a moral imperative to also listen to those young people who are not experiencing those levels of success in AP. Overall, it is recognised that a focus on 'what works' is logical and important in order to continue to develop AP in meaningful ways. However, there is arguably a place for more inductive research that enables the voices of young people to steer the direction of the study.

The current research intends to explore how young people experience the AP sector in Wales with a commitment to inductive data analysis and application of psychology to inform findings. Through further consideration of what it may be like to walk in the shoes of young people placed in AP, it may be that something new and unexpected about the phenomenon emerges (Reid, Flowers & Larkin, 2005; Finlay, 2008).

5. RESEARCH QUESTION

This research was therefore guided by the following research question:

- How might young people be making sense of their experiences in the Welsh AP sector?

It is purposely broad to reflect the desire to enable the direction of focus to be led by the voices of the participants.

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**“What’s it like here?” Exploring young peoples’ perceptions of the
Alternative Provision sector in Wales**

PART 2: EMPIRICAL STUDY

Word count: 9,000 approximately

ABSTRACT

Interviews were carried out with nine young people placed in the Alternative Provision (AP) sector in one Local Authority (LA) in South Wales, UK. The interviews focused on exploring participants' lived experiences of the AP sector. Interview questions were purposely broad to reflect the exploratory nature of the research and encourage participants to speak freely about ideas that were relevant to them when thinking about their education.

In keeping with the focus on holding central the voices of participants, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis was used to analyse the interview transcripts. Interpreted by the researcher through an inductive lens, three superordinate themes are presented. These relate to social identity, self-agency and change. The themes are discussed in relation to wider literature and also considered through the lens of social identity theory and social constructionism.

The findings highlight that AP is a place where young people can be supported to grow and develop as individuals, but moving into AP can bring about questions and challenges for some learners. How individuals make sense of their journey in AP arguably can be influenced by the dominant deficit discourses they describe hearing about the sector from other people. Arguably, these deficit discourses may have implications for many areas of their development including: social identity, self-esteem, engagement and motivation. It is suggested that changing the dominant discourses about AP and those who attend may lead to changes in young peoples' experiences.

Practice implications are offered for the wider education systems when thinking about the future of AP in Wales and for Educational Psychologists, who play a role in supporting young people and education systems. Implications include a need to provide further information to young people about what AP is and why some learners are placed there. This should give more consideration to the situational and systemic factors and challenge the dominant deficit discourses about learners in AP. Implications for policy makers and LAs include a need to facilitate greater involvement of young people in decision making. Also, to review how local/national policies may be challenging or contributing to the deficit discourses related to AP and young people, who experience

SEBD. Consideration is given to how EPs may be able to support these complex and challenging changes.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Terminology

‘Alternative’ is an adjective which can be defined as *“something that is different from something else, especially from what is usual, and offering the possibility of choice”*

(Cambridge Dictionary, 2018, para. 1). The current study is focused on exploring the Alternative Provision (AP) sector of education in South Wales. AP can be defined as:

“Education for children of compulsory school age, who do not attend mainstream or special schools and who would not otherwise receive suitable education, for any reason”

(Department for Education, 2018, p.5).

The term ‘Education Other Than at School’ or ‘EOTAS’ is used in Wales to describe AP (Welsh Government/WG, 2017a). However, to promote cohesion and clarity this research will use the more commonly cited term in the wider literature ‘Alternative Provision’ throughout when referring to EOTAS or AP.

It is important to note that this research is not referring to learners who are electively home educated, though they are sometimes included within the AP education sector.

1.2 Introduction to AP sector

Alternative Provision (AP) is said to be a wide-ranging and disparate sector (Trotman, Enow & Tucker, 2019). Since its introduction in the UK in 1994, the numbers of learners and range of AP education providers has been steadily growing (Taylor, 2012; WG, 2019). Some argue vehemently that the sector can and is making a valuable difference for some of the most vulnerable learners (Polat & Farrell, 2002; Cajic-Seigneur & Hodgson, 2016; Malcolm, 2019).

However, young people in AP may not always make the same progress as their peers (Taylor, 2012; Estyn, 2015 & 2016). Other concerns about AP have related to limited (Estyn, 2016; Thomson & Pennacchia, 2016b) and sometimes gendered curriculums

(Russell and Thompson, 2009 & 2011); lack of equal access to high quality settings (Taylor, 2012; McCluskey, Gwynedd, Riddell, Weedon, & Fordyce, 2013); inappropriate behaviour regimes (Thomson & Pennacchia, 2016b) and safeguarding concerns (McCluskey et al., 2013). More broadly, it has been argued that exclusion from mainstream education and entering AP may feed societal inequality and life-long exclusion from opportunities (Gazeley, 2010; Estyn, 2016; Samaritans Cymru, 2019).

1.3 Exclusion

When examining AP processes in Wales, McCluskey et al., asserted that “*exclusion and AP are inextricably linked in policy and practice and both should be seen as part of the landscape of social exclusion in Wales*” (2013, p.4). Given the long and short-term detrimental effects of school exclusion for an individual in terms of factors including health, wellbeing and socio-economic contribution (Macrae, Maguire & Milbourne, 2003; Munn & Lloyd, 2005; Gill et al., 2017; Samaritans Cymru, 2019), there is a need to continue to examine what happens to young people once they are excluded from their mainstream school and enter the AP sector.

Young people, who are viewed as having social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD), can experience higher levels of school exclusion than their peers (Cole, 2015). Arguably, they are one of the most difficult groups to include in mainstream education (Mowat, 2015; Stanforth & Rose, 2018). It is this group of vulnerable learners, who make up a significant proportion of young people attending AP (Bowman-Perrott et al., 2013; Estyn, 2015 & 2016).

1.4 Social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD)

For clarity, this research has chosen to use the term SEBD and where necessary, young people will be described as young people who experience SEBD. This study fits within the bio psycho-social model of SEBD (Carroll & Hurry, 2018). It supports that it is the ongoing interactions between the individual’s biological make-up and the environments in which they live their life that determines behaviour and emotional wellbeing. This is in contrast

to earlier deficit models of SEBD because it acknowledges the positive effects that the school environment can have on a learner (Poulou, 2014).

1.5 Times of change in the Welsh education sector

In 2009, the Welsh results in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) were lower than expected (OECD, 2017). This raised questions about the quality of Welsh education for all learners including those young people attending AP. Wales is undertaking an education reform and striving to create “*An education system in which all learners have an equal opportunity to reach their potential... can strengthen individuals’ and societies’ capacity to contribute to economic growth and social cohesion*” (OECD, 2017, p.3).

Creating an education system of equal opportunity requires the government to examine the AP sector because young people in AP may not achieve the same outcomes as their peers (Taylor, 2012). AP is also said to be more often associated with education failure (McCluskey et al., 2013). In Wales, there are approximately 2,286 young people receiving their education in AP (WG, 2019). These numbers are said to be increasing year on year. Increasing public attention on AP has led to several reviews highlighting a plethora of concerns about exclusions and AP in Wales and making recommendations for changes to practice (Reid, 2009; Butler, 2011; McCluskey et al., 2013; Estyn, 2015 & 2016, WG, 2017a). Though some progress has been made in improving the quality of AP in Wales since 2009, there remains a lack of consistency in quality of provisions (The Children’s Commissioner for Wales, 2014; McCluskey et al., 2015). Arguably, at this juncture in policy development, returning to the perspectives of the young people, who attend AP is important.

2. HEARING THE VOICES OF YOUNG PEOPLE

2.1 Student voice

Student voice “*includes every way in which pupils are allowed or encouraged to offer their views or perspectives*” (Whitty & Wisby, 2007, p.306). Since the adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989), WG policy has

increasingly sought to centralise the voices of young people (WG, 2011b, Donaldson, 2015; WG, 2018). Holding them as reliable witnesses to their own experiences (France, 2004) has been argued to be key to understanding their experiences and developing ways to better support them.

When given the opportunity to speak out, young people have often compared AP positively to the alternative of mainstream education. However, their views can seem at odds with the concerns expressed by other stakeholders. McCluskey, Riddell and Weedon (2015) put forward the notion that their positive regard for AP may simply highlight a distinct lack of children's rights being met in mainstream education meaning AP is viewed more favourably.

2.2 What have young people been asked about their experiences in AP?

When considering the body of literature that has included young peoples' self-reported experiences in AP, it is apparent that their views have been sought to inform several key research aims. These have been primarily focused on:

- Evaluating provisions and processes (McCluskey et al., 2015; Cajic-Seigneur & Hodgson, 2016; Trotman et al., 2019; Nind, Boorman & Clarke, 2012; Thomson & Pennacchia, 2016b)
- Identifying factors that young people perceive help and hinder their reengagement and progress (Cullen & Monroe, 2010; Ewen & Topping, 2012; Nicholson & Putwain, 2015; Nicholson & Putwain, 2016; Michael & Frederickson, 2013; Hamilton & Morgan, 2018; Jalali & Morgan, 2018)
- Exploring their motivation and future aspirations (Mainwaring & Hallam, 2010; Tellis-James & Fox, 2016).
- Exploring whether AP has the potential to marginalise or include young people (Johnston & Bradford, 2019).

3. WHAT HAVE YOUNG PEOPLE SAID ABOUT THE AP SECTOR?

3.1 Introduction

In order to examine what views young people have expressed about their time in AP, relevant studies were identified that had endeavoured to capture their perspectives. Many of the studies included in this review also explored the perspectives of other stakeholders (teachers, parents, staff, and LA staff). As this research aims to focus on the perspectives of young people, the findings relating to their experiences are the focus of this review.

The process of reading and understanding young peoples' experiences as found in the literature was guided by reading key papers and noting down themes. The themes described what each study reported that young people had said. Themes were then organised into groups of similar ideas and a title was given to conceptualise each group. It is acknowledged that this was a largely subjective process to create a structure in which to consider the body of research. Appendix D illustrates where the themes were found within the body of research. The three most commonly cited themes will now be discussed briefly in turn.

3.2 Importance of relationships

Regardless of what young people are asked, it is clear that the relationships that they build and experience in AP are of central importance to them. These are a foundation from which they can feel safe, build and achieve (Cullen & Monroe, 2010; Nind et al., 2012; Hart, 2013; McCluskey et al., 2015; Cajic-Seigneur & Hodgson, 2016; Malcolm, 2019). Young people have spoken of the importance of relationships with staff; peers (Michael & Frederickson, 2013; Hart, 2013; Nicholson & Putwain, 2015) and their family (Ewen & Topping, 2012; McCluskey et al., 2015; Cajic-Seigneur & Hodgson, 2016).

The positive relationships young people establish in AP with staff have been compared to the difficult relationships they experienced in mainstream (Hart, 2013). However, the relationships they form in AP are not always positive (Bradford & Johnston, 2019) and they do not always feel heard by adults (Michael & Frederickson, 2013). Overall, it

appears that how young people feel they are treated by adults' impacts on their perceptions of AP and the relationships they are able to make in AP.

Young people value being trusted (Hart, 2013) and respected by adults (Nicholson & Putwain, 2015). They have described factors which they feel promote the building of relationships with staff. This includes staff listening (McCluskey et al., 2013); being supportive and trying to understand their problems (McCluskey et al., 2015; CajicSeigneur & Hodgson, 2016). Being available to provide emotional support is also valued by some young people (Michael & Frederickson, 2013).

3.3 A personalised curriculum

For young people attending AP in Wales, there is no expectation that provisions teach the full national curriculum (WG, 2017a). Nevertheless, young peoples' perceptions about whether they are receiving a curriculum that is personalised and individualised for them seems to relate to their levels of engagement and enjoyment of AP (Michaels & Frederickson, 2013).

While some young people have reported that they find AP intellectually challenging (Nicholson & Putwain, 2016), others have described doing little formal work (Taylor, 2012; McCluskey et al., 2013). There seems to be a range of views concerning what young people value in their curriculum. The relevance of the work to young peoples' future work aspirations seems to influence how valuable they perceive it to be and consequently their level of engagement (Tellis-James & Fox, 2016).

Research suggests that many young people in AP prefer practical activities (Ewen & Topping, 2012; Cajic-Seigneur & Hodgson, 2016), which may be because they view themselves as being in practical jobs in the future (Johnston & Bradford, 2019). Practical activities e.g. day trips have been identified as helping young people to re-engage (Michael & Frederickson, 2013) and as motivators (Cullen & Monroe, 2010). However, other young people have described wanting to access more academic options. These learners described frustration that they were not able to access the same opportunities

as their mainstream peers (Michael & Frederickson, 2013; Cajic-Seigneur & Hodgson, 2016).

3.4 Motivation and engagement

The links between lack of school engagement and long-term social and societal impacts are evident (Pirrie, Macleod, Cullen, & McCluskey, 2011; Samaritans Cymru, 2019). This may offer explanation as to why a common focus in the research is on trying to understand what works to support young people in AP. Some research reports that young people re-engage with education and experience an increase in self-motivation and determination (Frederickson & Michael, 2013; Nicholson & Putwain, 2015; TellisJames & Fox, 2016). AP is said to have supported improvements in attendance, behaviour and academic (Cajic-Seigneur & Hodgson, 2016) gains leading to increased confidence (Ewen & Topping, 2012; Nicholson & Putwain, 2015).

Accordingly, some young people report viewing AP as a fresh start (Cajic-Seigneur & Hodgson, 2016) and a place where they realise the value of learning (Nicholson & Putwain, 2015; Hamilton & Morgan, 2018). Similarly, AP is viewed by others as a place where they have a “*chance to become someone different*” (Thomson & Pennacchia, 2016b, p.627). Though these findings are encouraging in suggesting that with appropriate support young people feel they can re-engage, there is a lack of agreement relating to young peoples’ engagement (Bradford & Johnston, 2019) and capacity to make lasting changes to their behaviour and thinking styles (Jalali & Morgan, 2018).

3.5 Summary

Considering the body of literature that has been reviewed, there are some consistent messages about the factors that are important to young peoples’ lived experiences in AP, but their voices can differ (Tellis-James & Fox, 2016; Jalali & Morgan, 2018). This highlights the need to listen to and hear individuals’ stories. Many of the perceptions that young people have shared could be seen to represent basic human psychological needs to feel safe, relate to others and belong (Maslow, 1943) and what is generally viewed to

be good teaching and learning environments for all young people. Table 1 illustrates where the identified themes were found within the body of research.

Key themes	Relevant studies
Importance of relationships	Thomson & Pennacchia, 2016; Nind, Boorman & Clarke, 2012; Hart, 2013; Michael & Frederickson, 2013; McCluskey et al., 2015; Cajic-Seigneur & Hodgson, 2016; Nicholson & Putwain, 2016; Putwain et al., 2016; Ewen & Topping, 2012; Jalali & Morgan, 2018; Hamilton & Morgan, 2018; Cullen & Monroe, 2010; TellisJames & Fox, 2016; Johnston & Bradford, 2019; Malcolm, 2019
A sense of belonging	Nind, Boorman & Clarke, 2012; Nicholson & Putwain, 2016; Jalali & Morgan, 2018; TellisJames & Fox, 2016
Staff managing behaviour	Nind, Boorman & Clarke, 2012; Thomson & Pennacchia, 2016; McCluskey et al., 2015; CajicSeigneur & Hodgson, 2016; Hamilton & Morgan, 2018
A personalised curriculum	Thomson & Pennacchia, 2016; Hart, 2013; Russell & Thomson, 2011; Michael & Frederickson, 2013; McCluskey et al., 2015; Cajic-Seigneur & Hodgson, 2016; Trotman et al., 2019; Nicholson & Putwain, 2016; Putwain et al., 2016; Ewen &Topping, 2012; Jalali & Morgan, 2018; Hamilton & Morgan, 2018; Cullen & Monroe, 2010; Tellis-James & Fox, 2016; Malcolm, 2019
School environment	Nind, Boorman & Clarke, 2012; Thomson & Pennacchia, 2016; Hart, 2013; Michael &Frederickson, 2013; Cajic-Seigneur &Hodgson, 2016; Trotman et al., 2019; Nicholson & Putwain, 2016; Putwain et al., 2016; Hamilton & Morgan, 2018;
Motivation/engagement	Nind, Boorman & Clarke, 2012; Hart, 2013; McCluskey et al., 2015; Cajic-Seigneur & Hodgson, 2016; Trotman et al., 2019; Nicholson & Putwain, 2016; Putwain et al., 2016; Ewen & Topping, 2012; Jalali & Morgan, 2018; Hamilton & Morgan, 2018; Cullen & Monroe, 2010; Tellis-James & Fox, 2016

Hopes and aspirations	Nind, Boorman & Clarke, 2012; Jalali & Morgan, 2018; Hamilton & Morgan, 2018; Mainwaring & Hallam, 2010; Tellis-James & Fox, 2016
Marginalisation	Nind, Boorman & Clarke, 2012; Thomson & Pennacchia, 2016

Table 1: key themes in the literature

4. RATIONALE FOR CURRENT STUDY

Overall, there is a growing commitment to hearing young peoples' perspectives about their experiences in AP. However, it could be argued that research aims in this area are commonly deductive in nature and driven by adult constructions or political agendas. These seem to relate to a wider societal need to understand 'what works' to support young people in AP to succeed (Thomson, 2014) and to researchers' pre-determined theoretical interests or perspectives. It is argued that there is a gap for more inductive research that enables the voices of young people to steer the direction of the study, in order to further consider what it is like to walk in the shoes of young people placed in AP.

While it is recognised that a focus on 'what works' is logical and important in order to continue to develop AP in meaningful ways, it may not allow deeper consideration of experiences. Also, in the search for good practice, many studies have taken place in provisions identified as examples of 'good practice'. This perhaps limits how relevant they are to understanding the range of young peoples' experiences, given how variable the quality of provision is said to be (McCluskey et al., 2015). Also, hearing the voices of young people, who have re-engaged with learning or reintegrated into mainstream is valuable in informing change. But, arguably there is a moral imperative to also listen to those young people who are not experiencing those levels of success in AP.

In summary, AP could be seen as a sector of education that continues to divide opinion of stakeholders. In spite of increased attention and debate, the outcomes for learners remain poor (Pirrie & Macleod, 2009) with some going so far as to suggest that attending AP can be detrimental to an individual's well-being (Children's Commissioner for Wales,

2014; Jalali & Morgan, 2018). It is clear that there is still a need for society to think deeply about the AP sector in the UK.

4.1 Research intentions

The purpose of this research is not to evaluate or pass judgement on individual AP settings or to argue the value of AP as a model of education. This research aims to centralise the voices of young people, who are attending AP in South Wales. Specifically, to consider how they may be making sense of their places within AP and their experiences in the sector. It has a commitment to inductive data analysis and application of psychology to inform findings.

4.2 Research question

This research was guided by the following research question:

- How might young people be making sense of their experiences in the Welsh AP sector?

The question is purposely broad to reflect the desire to enable the direction of focus to be led by the voices of the participants.

5. RELEVANCE TO EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGISTS

The role of EP involves working to support the “*development, wellbeing, resilience, learning and achievement*” for all young people across Wales (AEP/WG, 2016, p.2). Young people in AP are arguably some of the most complex and vulnerable learners in terms of their additional learning needs and wider life histories and contexts (Taylor, 2012, Gill et al., 2017; WG, 2019). Overall, it could be argued that this relatively small group of learners has needs in the areas which EPs can support that are disproportionately high (WG, 2011a). This highlights the need for the profession to take time to further understand their experiences.

Also, some EPs, employed by LAs, now have a part to play in decision making about the placement of young people in AP (WG, 2017a). Taking time to consider how young people

are experiencing the current AP sector could support ethical and child-centred decision making regarding tailored, holistic provision (Oxley, 2016). Finally, EPs are also well-positioned to advocate for those young people, who it could be argued are not well positioned to influence policy or practice themselves (McCluskey et al., 2015).

6. RESEARCH PARADIGM

To ensure that the research paradigm enabled consideration of the individual, lived experiences of AP, the following stance was taken:

Ontology: A relativist ontological position meaning that reality is considered multiple rather than claiming there is a single knowable reality. Individuals' realities differ from person to person and are rooted in their unique social experiences and interpretation of those experiences (Braun and Clarke, 2013).

Epistemology: A desire to use the idiographic analysis of IPA to explore how young people are constructing their own perceptions of the AP sector led to a choice of epistemological stance that acknowledged the unique and individual realities that each participant would construct. However, the participants exist in a social system meaning that their realities are experienced with and influenced by interactions with others. The researcher wanted to adopt a cautious and reflective view to assumed truths. With these factors in mind, a social constructionist stance was adopted (Burr, 2015).

Figure 3: Ontological and epistemological positioning

7. METHOD

7.1 Context

The research took place in a LA that has a relatively high number of pupils receiving AP and not on roll of a mainstream school, when compared to the rest of Wales (WG, 2019).

7.2 Data collection

Interviews
Semi-structured, 1:1 interviews were used to explore the participants' experiences of AP.
An interview schedule (see appendix E) was designed in line with the guidance offered by Smith et al., (2009). Questions were broad to promote a narrative that was not constrained by the researcher's prior constructions of AP.
Questions were purposely broad to encourage participants to speak freely and flexibly (Jalali & Morgan, 2018) about ideas that they felt to be pertinent to their experiences and inform the direction of the research.
The interview process was iterative (Smith et al., 2009) and interview questions were used flexibly with participants.

Table 2. Details of data collection method

7.3 Participants

With previous research having raised questions about the gender divide in AP with there being little on offer for girls in terms of provision (Russell and Thomson, 2011), it was important to have a diverse participant group. In total, nine young people took part in the research. Four girls and five boys. All participants were recruited from one LA in South Wales, but were attending a range of different AP settings. All participant and provision names have been anonymised.

In line with IPA theory, the participant group can be described as “fairly homogenous” (Smith et al., 2009, p.49) because they had all been attending AP settings for a minimum of two months. Though the different provisions varied, they all were classified as AP in the LA. They all accepted young people who were at risk of exclusion or had been excluded from the mainstream sector. The participants were all on roll of one AP, but received a programme of individualised education meaning their time was split across two settings each week.

Name (Pseudonym)	Year Group	Gender	Provisions	Other characteristics
Charlie	8	Male	Blakely Education Centre (3 days) Outdoor Adventures Ltd (2 days)	Looked After child
Rocky	8	Male	Blakely Education Centre (4 days) Outdoor Adventures Ltd (1 day)	Statement of SEN
Zak	9	Male	Blakely Education Centre (4 days) Sports Ltd (1 day)	Statement of SEN

Alice	10	Female	Judes Learning Pathway Centre (4 days) College (1 day)
Leah	10	Female	Judes Learning Pathway Centre (4 days) College (1 day)
Vicky	10	Female	Judes Learning Pathway Centre (4 days) College (1 day)
Lucan	7	Male	Highdown Learning Pathway Centre (4 days) Outdoor Adventures Ltd (1 day)
Gabe	11	Male	Highdown Learning Pathway Centre (4 days) Sports Ltd (1 day)
Elle	8	Female	Highdown Learning Pathway Centre (4 days) Outdoor Adventures Ltd (1 day)

Table 3. Participant characteristics

7.4 Procedure

Permission was sought from the Head of Learning and Inclusion in the LA (appendix K)
To try to reduce selection bias (Collier & Mahoney, 1996), possible participants were not recruited by individual provisions. Instead the LA AP Coordinator supported the recruitment process. His managerial role within the LA involved coordinating the procurement process and planning the ongoing development of AP across the borough. Purposive sampling (Smith, 2003) was used to identify young people attending AP, who were relevant to the research from LA attendance data. All young people attending AP for a minimum of two months were deemed appropriate to participate. Personal circumstances of individual young people were also considered during the sampling e.g. bereavements that may have impacted on their ability to participate at that time.
The LA AP Coordinator then reached out via telephone and subsequent letter to the parents and/or carers of 10 selected young people to share information about the research. This ensured that families were protected and confidential information was not shared with the researcher prior to obtaining consent.
Once parent and/or carer consent was obtained, the researcher shared information about the research with AP settings the consenting young people attended and arranged initial visits.
In order to try and build rapport, the researcher spent some time in the settings prior to the interviews taking place. The researcher did not want to be viewed as part of the staff systems in the AP settings, so took on the role of visitor. This often included a tour of the setting and introductions to participants.
Prior to the individual interviews, the researcher shared information about the project with the young people and sought informed consent (appendix H). At this point, one participant did not agree to take part; it was understood that this was due to the length of time the interview would take.
Each participant was given the opportunity to choose a pseudonym to ensure all data was anonymised.

The interviews were carried out in a quiet room within each of the settings. During the interviews, participants were allowed to move around the room and could leave at any time. They also had access to sensory toys and colouring activities though many chose not to use them.
The interviews were recorded using a digital recorder and transcribed verbatim before being analysed. Verbatim accounts reflect the views and language of the participants as opposed those of the researcher.

Table 4. Details of the research procedure

7.5 Analysis

Chosen Analysis	Rationale
Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis	In keeping with the exploratory nature of the research and emphasis on hearing the young peoples’ voices, a phenomenological and qualitative design was used. IPA is concerned with exploring perspectives. It can lead to a deepening of understanding and reflective practice (Oxley, 2016). Through the analysis, the researcher has attempted to make sense of the participants’ meaning making about their experiences. Trying to understand what it is like to step into the shoes of young people, whilst recognising that this is never truly possible (Smith, 2003). Further discussion of the methodological rationale and considerations can be found in part 3, section 3.5.

Table 5. Details of data analysis

In line with IPA analysis for a larger sample, the transcripts were analysed individually and then recurrent themes across the group were drawn out. Themes were only deemed to be recurrent when they appeared in at least a third of the transcripts (Smith et al., 2009). It is acknowledged that elements of the idiographic experiences have been lost in order to compose an overview that focuses on recurring themes. To try and counteract this, attention has been paid to the range of participants’ experiences therefore contrasting differences are addressed within themes as they arise. It is noteworthy that the process of analysis required the interpretation of the researcher thus the final themes represent how the individual researcher made sense of the accounts (see appendix L for steps of analysis).

7.6 The position of the researcher

The process of interpretation during IPA can be viewed as a dual interpretation process or ‘double hermeneutic’ (Peat, Rodriguez & Smith, 2019). It is therefore necessary that the researcher remains aware of the personal interpretation that they have brought to

the analysis process. Finlay (2008) described “*the need to rein in the influence of preunderstandings in order to see phenomenon in fresh, new ways*” (p.5), whilst asserting that a complete bracketing off from pre-existing ideas is neither possible nor perhaps necessary.

The researcher notes that she was educated in the mainstream sector and has no personal experience of attending AP. She also acknowledges her previous roles as Class Teacher and as Special Educational Needs Statementing Officer during which she engaged with the AP sector. Increasing ones awareness of the personal views and assumptions held about the phenomenon of AP became particularly relevant after the researcher had spent time in the AP settings. A research diary was used to capture reflections and insight into the possible influences these experiences may have had on her developing view of the topic and subsequent data analysis (Smith et al., 2009).

7.7 Ethical considerations

To ensure the research was carried out in accordance to the British Psychological Society Code of Ethics and Conduct (2018) and Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) code of practice (2016), several ethical considerations were taken into account. This was of particular importance given the potential vulnerabilities of recruiting young people. The research was scrutinised by and met the ethical requirements of the Cardiff University Ethics Committee. Appendix Q outlines the key, relevant ethical considerations.

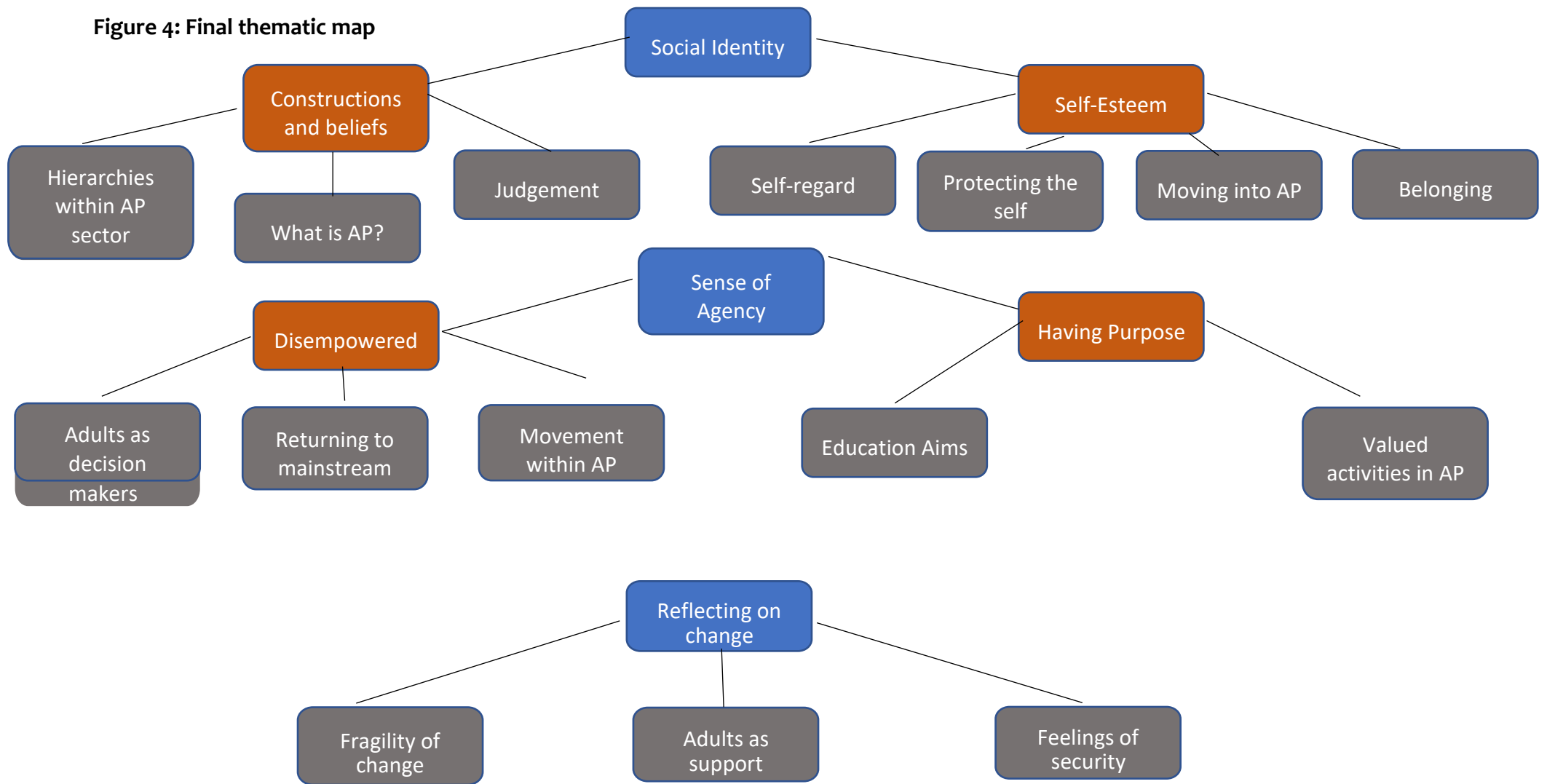
8. RESULTS

8.1 Introduction

The results highlight three recurrent super-ordinate themes ‘Social Identity’; ‘Self-Agency’ and ‘Change’. Each super-ordinate theme will be explored in turn in the following section with data extracts presented to support each of the sub-ordinate themes. Yardley (2000) asserts that verbatim quotes can give participants a voice in research. The quotes reflect the views and language used by the participants. A breakdown of which themes were present in each transcript can be found in appendix O

and P. The themes have been presented in a thematic map for ease of understanding (figure 4 and see appendix L for steps of analysis).

Figure 4: Final thematic map



8.2 SUPERORDINATE THEME 1- SOCIAL IDENTITY

During the analysis, a collection of themes emerged that it is argued seem to link to the concept of 'social identity'. Tajfel defined social identity as "*the individual's knowledge that he belongs to certain social groups together with some emotional and value significance to him of this group membership*" (1972, p.292). When participants leave the mainstream sector, it may be that they leave behind the social identity of mainstream and an alternative social identity forms.

8.2.1 Sub-ordinate theme: constructions and beliefs about the AP sector

The first sub-ordinate theme addresses the times when participants talked about their perceptions of what AP is and what they perceived other people thought of the sector.

8.2.2 Emergent theme- What is AP?

Strikingly, from the majority of participants there was a sense of hesitation when describing where they are being educated. It seems that most are unsure of what it is they are attending. Several described the setting as a "*youth club*" (Leah, line 116), "*centre*" (Rocky, line 104) or said they simply did not know what it was or it was hard to say what it was. Participants also wondered whether they were attending proper schools and had "*proper teachers*" (Charlie, line 86).

It seems that some participants were actively trying to make sense of this dilemma during the interview. For example, Vicky used a rhetorical question "*Is it even a school?*" (line 90), before responding with "*I duno*" (line 96). It is also noteworthy that some participants laughed at this point in the interviews, which gives the sense that participants perhaps thought it was unusual that they did not know where they were going to school.

When describing different provisions, participants seemed to focus on whether or not they felt the provisions were schools. There was a perception that provision for sports or outdoor activities was a "*fun day*" (Rocky, line 76) or "*day off*" (Charlie, line 12), with participants not always knowing why they were attending. Those attending college

generally felt they were going because they had been chosen and as a means of preparing for their later transition.

Participants’ constructions of what AP is also seem to focus on reasons why learners would attend. They commonly described deficits within individuals, which meant they could not attend mainstream. For example, Gabe felt that AP was for young people with problems and disabilities, who cannot learn in mainstream. Contrary to the other accounts, Elle described AP as a place where it is safe to be and express yourself. Her description focused more on what the AP environment offers learners instead of describing the reasons why they attend.

Participant	Data Extract	Line
Alice	it’s just for people who can’t concentrate in mainstream school	400
Zak	it's not a school	108
Leah	I dunno it’s just it’s hard to explain like we have education here... I duno is it a youth centre I duno... yeah it is this school it ain’t a behaviour school it’s for people that struggle in mainstream	242 342
Gabe	it’s a place for people who have got problems disabilities people that can’t cope with mainstream people that can’t learn people who’ve got trouble with learning and writing and that they can’t they don’t like big crowds and that and it’s for people who don’t like too big crowds and crowds	131
Vicky	is it even a school I duno... well I assume naughty or people who’s always down all the time and it didn’t work out for the people who was in school so and for people that didn’t like school so they came here yeh	90 96
Lucan	I dunno really	28
Elle	I think it is one of those schools that you can chill that you can speak to any teacher about what you’re feeling and it’s like a really good school like it’s a school where you don’t have to be scared to ask anyone anything like you don’t have to be scared to cry or scream or be scared like it’s one of those schools that you can talk to anyone who’s about and they’ll support you through it it’s not a school it’s this man that does it and he’s a really good help err he’s not a teacher he’s just one of those people that like do adventures and with kids and all that	131 175

Table 6: Supporting quotes from the data for ‘What is AP?’ theme

8.2.3 Emergent theme- A hierarchy in the education sector/making comparisons

Although many participants were unsure of what the provision they were attending actually was, some seemed to be aware of the wider education sector which enabled them to make comparisons between provisions. At times, this created a sense of hierarchy in the accounts as participants described some provisions as being better or worse than others.

Leah, for example, spoke of “going to one of these schools” (line 64) and her dislike of the behaviour unit that she felt she had been made to attend. She described how there had been “no education” (line 122) and that the provisions were for people who “kicked off” (line 350) and played up for teachers. She seemed to be making a distinction between her current provision and those she had previously attended in that the current provision is not a school for behaviour difficulties. There also seemed to be a distinction made between herself and the other young people in such provisions.

Also reflecting on his journey in the AP sector, Charlie shared his perceptions of the different provisions he has attended. His comparisons seem to be based on how naughty he feels the learners are in each provision. He described his current provision as being worse than his previous provisions, but he did not feel it was the worst provision available.

Comparisons between mainstream and AP are also found in some accounts. For example, Elle spoke of her journey of positive change since transitioning into AP, but seems to also sense that she needs to return to the mainstream. Describing wanting to get her “normal education back” (line 217), there is perhaps tension between feeling settled in AP, yet thinking that a return to mainstream is needed in order to achieve academically.

Gabe described his initial reservations about attending AP because he did not realise it was a place where young people go to learn. This implies that he views schools for young people, who experience SEBD, as being distinctly different to a place for learning. He also seems to perceive things differently to the other participants and put forward a view

that AP has offered him a better education in terms of supporting him to access more qualifications. However, this is later perhaps contradicted when he described needing to “earn” a place back in mainstream (line 292).

Participant	Data Extract	Line
Charlie	this one’s worse though this is for naughtier people... it’s not for the worst but I wouldn’t say it’s for the worst it’s just worse than the PRU	264
Leah	well it’s full of naughty kids when this school is just for people who can’t like who struggle with being in mainstream... this school is better than the behaviour school	342
Vikki	well most of my friends are in like normal school	192
Gabe	I just thought it was like a behaviour school and I was a bit like umming about it but I didn’t know it was like a learning place... err	131
	and up there you won’t because there’s not that thing they’d rather you just do your GCSEs and leave when down here they want you to do they would rather you have more qualifications more GCSEs coming out than not having enough	136
	you’d have to earn you’d have to like change your way of learning if you wanna come back into mainstream	292
Elle	I wana get my normal education back... I wanna stay here for the whole day but then at one point I would have to go back up and do my education like	217
		219

Table 7: Supporting quotes from the data for ‘Hierarchy in Education Sector’ theme

8.2.4 Emergent theme- Perceived judgement

Another recurrent theme emerged, concerning how participants thought other people viewed AP negatively and judged those who attend. The recurrent use of the phrase “mongo¹ school” (Charlie, line 214) to describe AP suggests that this language is perhaps used across the provisions in the LA. It seemed that some participants felt that others may view them as “mongos [sic]” (Leah, line 326) because they attended a “mongo [sic] school” (Leah, line 326). Participants described the word “mongo [sic]” (Charlie, line 214) as meaning learners were “like dull like you’re dull and you just I dunno you just don’t know nothing” (Alice, line 388). In line with this, Leah described her mother’s concerns

¹ It is recognised that ‘mongo’ is not a politically correct/acceptable term and has been included as a direct quote to ensure participant voices are heard. It is not the views of the researcher.

that attending AP would mean low prospects for the future because of who she would be going to school with.

Interestingly it seemed that those participants, who had developed an alternative construction of what AP might be, were able to separate the constructions of others from their own. This was seen where Gabe and Alice concluded that other people were simply wrong in their negative perceptions about AP.

While Zak could not make any sense of why people who attend AP would also call it a school for idiots, Charlie’s account suggests that the label “*mongo [sic]*” (line 214) was actually used by the young people who attend the AP. This feels different to the other participants who gave the impression that the outsiders have perhaps got different perceptions about what AP is. For Charlie, it seems to be an identity that suggests a sense of belonging and way of behaving in AP rather than a label assigned by outsiders.

Elle and Vicky also present an alternative perspective from the dominant discourse in the accounts about negative judgement from others. They both perceive that their mainstream friends like their AP and Vicky perceives that her friends wish to join her there. For them, moving to AP seems to have perhaps enhanced how they are perceived by friends in terms of social status.

Participant	Data Extract	Line
Alice	a mongo [<i>sic</i>] school... yeah they think every Learning Pathway Centre or AP is a mongo [<i>sic</i>] school	386 390
Lucan	yeah he said it’s an autistic school	144
Zak	it’s for idiots... people told me it is... like just calling you an idiot or retard ²	222 224
Charlie	everyone calls this the mongo [<i>sic</i>] school... the adults as well they’re dopey not everyone I’m just saying I think everyone calls it the mongo [<i>sic</i>] school it’s just what everyone calls it the mongo [<i>sic</i>] school	214 232

² It is recognised that ‘retard’ is not a politically correct/acceptable term and has been included as a direct quote to ensure participant voices are heard. It is not the views of the researcher.

Leah	my mum went to view it she just didn't like it she just didn't think I'd get anywhere in life going to that school... they probably think I'm a mungo [sic] because I go to one of these schools and not an actual high school... I dunno like a retard [sic] or something someone that don't know nothing like who's not guna leave school with anything	100 326 330
Vicky	They're like ah I wanna come to your school and that (laughs)... coz it's a good school	332 334
Gabe	they think it's like full of like a naughty place like people are like stupid don't know how to learn but they are all wrong it's for people who have disabilities who can't hold their concentration	100
Elle	they think it's a better school than mainstream comp like this is like a chilled area which it is	125

Table 8: Supporting quotes from the data for 'Judgement from Others' theme

8.2.5 Summary

This subordinate theme 'Constructions and Beliefs about AP' has outlined how participants may be trying to make sense of what AP is by making comparisons between different groups e.g. AP and mainstream. With the exception of Gabe, there seems to be a common view that AP education is inferior to mainstream, though most participants also described enjoying their placement. A contributor to this view may be the negative judgement and views about AP and young people who attend AP that participants report hearing from others.

8.2.6 Sub-ordinate-theme: Self-esteem

This subordinate theme explores what the participants shared about their beliefs and opinions about themselves.

8.2.7 Emergent theme- Views of self

Participants' accounts included possible insights into how they may be viewing themselves. Vicky, for example, described wanting to return to a past version of herself when she was better behaved in school. For several participants, 'I'm naughty' was a recurrent phrase used to describe themselves and for those young people in particular it seemed difficult for them to identify what their strengths and talents were.

Rocky seemed to express a sense of regret when he described a shift in self because he had been good for a period of time in AP, but had recently been excluded once again for physical aggression. It is possible that he felt that adults were disappointed in him. His use of “*I was being good*” (line 192) when compared to “*I’m naughty*” (line 196) suggests that he views himself as being a naughty person and being good is something he does sometimes rather than it being a stable part of his identity.

Conversely, some participants who felt that they had settled into AP and were making positive changes, seemed to view themselves with more positive regard. Elle and Gabe, in particular, described feeling proud of what they had achieved since moving into the AP sector and a new found love for themselves that was also expressed to them by their parents.

Participant	Data Extract	Line
Alice	nothing really erm I’m not good at nothing really	120
Leah	I’ve settled down really well	120
Rocky	yeah what's it called like they didn't know cause I was being good for that long and they didn't know what happened to me like... they didn't know what happened to me... gone back up and I’m naughty again	192 194 196
Charlie	this one’s worse though this is for naughtier people... I’m naughty	258 280
Zak	I’m the best behaved there believe it or not... I don’t care I don’t believe it... it’s not true yeah I’m naughty	150
Elle	my mam has seen me as the girl that goes home goes straight out but I’m that girl since I’ve been coming in the Highdown Learning Pathway Centre and I’m that girl that would stay in pretty much every day I’m that girl that don’t really go out I’m that girl that like has a bond with their mam a really good friendship bond like... I’m feeling happy about it I never used to love myself and now I’m just thinking I love myself I’ve kinda loved how I’ve come so far like	245 251
Vicky	and go back like to the other days when I was like good in school	216
Gabe	I go home I go home and my mother’s like really proud of me all the time coz I’m always doing well in this school... it’s just I’m doing so well and it’s just so pleasant to be here	156 158

Table 9: Supporting quotes from the data for ‘Views of Self’ theme

8.2.8 Emergent theme- Making sense of moving into the AP sector

This theme considers how the participants have made sense of their move into the AP sector and how this may be interacting with their views of themselves. Overall, the participants use the words “kicked-out” (Charlie, line 260; Rocky, line 20; Zak, like 35, Leah, line 350; Gabe, line 92) to describe leaving mainstream school. Though many describe a sense of relief or feeling happy to escape difficult situations, the use of ‘kicked out’ suggests an underlying sense of no longer being welcome in mainstream or failing to fit in. Elle and Vicky go on to also describe a sense of loss in terms of friendships and wider opportunities that they feel.

Not all participants described being officially excluded from school, but participants tended to attribute their moves into AP as being because of problems or weaknesses in themselves e.g. not coping or being naughty. An exception to this was Zak’s account, which suggests that he has not been able to make any sense of why he is not in mainstream. This perhaps links to his feeling that his current AP is not the right place for him.

Rocky’s account suggests a different ongoing struggle because he feels blamed by teachers. He seems to feel that his behaviour in mainstream should not have resulted in him being moved into AP. Research suggests that it is not uncommon for young people, who experience SEBD to feel blamed and unfairly treated by teachers (Jalali and Morgan, 2018).

Participant	Data Extract	Line
Alice	I was playing up... like just running round the school and that not listening... coz I got excluded for a week and then I went back up and played up and then they chucked me out	18 20 38
Charlie	I moved here coz I was naughty and having fights and that... coz I’m naughty and I can’t deal with big crowds and that	10 24
Rocky	Primary I got kicked out just coz I went to stab a teacher with the scissors and she like she didn’t listen to my side of the story and she just picked whenever I kicked off she just blaming it on me and no one else	20
Zak	yeah I dunno why I’m there	66

Vicky	because I was being naughty... I was too naughty... adults told me	8 72 75
Gabe	I just couldn't cope I did I just had so much trouble I was in trouble all the time with teachers... It's coz the teachers were like always on to me always over my shoulder having a go at me and they just I couldn't take it anymore and I knew I was guna do one bad thing and I did and I'm down here	16 58

Table 10: Supporting quotes from the data for 'Making Sense of Moving into AP Sector' theme

8.2.9 Emergent theme- Finding a sense of belonging

A common theme for some participants was feeling that AP was a place where they could get along with others and fit in. These feelings were contrasted with a sense of struggling in mainstream. This is not to say that participants reported having no friends in their mainstream schools as many spoke of good friends they had left behind. Several participants described seeing less of their friends since moving into AP. Some had lost touch with mainstream friends entirely and were socialising solely with others in AP.

Finding a sense of belonging could be linked to increased self-esteem, positive self-image and engagement in education and may be a factor in why most participants reported that their attendance had increased since moving into AP. However, what did stand out was how Zak described his provision. His account suggests that he does not feel that he belongs there and does not seem to relate to the other learners. This could be linked his constructions that the school "*is for idiots*" (line 222) and he does not seem to view himself as being part of that group. Zak's account suggests that he has found a sense of belonging outside of school with his online friends, whom he speaks enthusiastically about.

Participant	Data Extract	Line
Rocky	I don't care like I don't wanna be in this school	126
Lucan	They're my friends	90
Vicky	I duno I think I just like like I like the people here my friends maybe I like to I don't get to see them as often so I just make the most of it on the days that I get to see them	270

Zak	I don't want to be there to be honest... it ain't a place for me... I dunno I don't like going there it ain't a place for me	60 64
Leah	I duno erm like I get on with everyone here I never used to get on with anyone in the other places that I was in...	300
Gabe	I thought err is it guna work for me like when I first come down here everyone was so nice to me and I was like it's guna work for me down here and it has	26
Elle	like I never felt a welcome up in that school I felt that I was just one of those kids that walked in and go home like walk in do work break lunch do work then go home like but here I feel like I can come in I can talk about my feelings I can talk about stuff and erm they would be alright with it	195

Table 11: Supporting quotes from the data for 'Finding a Sense of Belonging in AP' theme

8.2.10 Emergent theme- Protecting the self

This theme concerns the various ways that participants may be acting to protect their self-esteem and self-image. Despite most participants describing negative judgement from others as a consequence of attending AP, most participants reported that they did not care or were not bothered by these things. This could be because they have a strong sense that other people are misinformed about what AP is. Alternatively, it may be because the participants have experienced adversity throughout their education which has led to them caring less about what happens to them in order to protect themselves. This may also link to them feeling disempowered and being accepting of the decisions adults make for them.

Gabe also described needing to distance himself from his friends in mainstream because he felt they nagged him to return and he did not want to. His repetition of “nagging” (line 92) implies that this is something he perhaps finds draining and bothersome. Lucan described punching a friend when they said that he attended an autistic school perhaps to avoid this accusation happening again.

Participant	Data Extract	Line
Rocky	I don't care	126
Alice	Nah I'm not bothered	414
Charlie	Uhm I'm alright I'm not really bothered	244
Zak	I don't care I just get on with it	244
Leah	It don't really bother me about other peoples' opinions	334

Gabe	most of my friends they think you should just move back to mainstream and I've told them I don't wanna because I'll just be like I was again I'd just get kicked out a lot and that and they'll be nagging me and nagging me and then I just like don't talk to them because they're just nagging me come back up and I'm just like I don't wanna	92
Lucan	Well one of them said you go to an autistic school so I punched their nose	142

Table 12: Supporting quotes from the data for 'Protecting the Self' theme

8.2.11 Summary

This subordinate theme has explored how participants' experiences of leaving mainstream and being in the AP sector may have influenced their self-regard and self-esteem. For some, it seems that despite the negative judgement from other people, AP has provided a place to belong and opportunities to achieve which may foster a more positive self-esteem. For others, AP may reinforce their perception that they are naughty and have limited strengths.

8.3 SUPERORDINATE THEME 2- SENSE OF AGENCY

Through the analysis of each transcript, differences and similarities relating to participants' perceptions and feelings of self-agency emerged. Bandura (2003; 2008) defined agency as the ability to intentionally influence one's functioning and the course of environmental events. It is necessary to believe one can facilitate change to be able to assert influence. Recurrent themes concerned variabilities in participants' sense of empowerment and purpose.

8.3.1 Sub-ordinate theme- Feeling disempowered

Though the United Nations conventions on the rights of the child (1989) and Welsh education policy (WG, 2018) suggest that young people should participate in decision making, recurrent themes relate to times when participants' seem to describe having a lack of power and influence over their education journeys.

8.3.2 Emergent theme- Adults as decision makers

Participants commonly viewed the adults around them as being the ones who made decisions. Some perceived that it was teachers from their mainstream school that had decided they should move into AP, whilst others felt that it was a decision made by their parents or the council. The accounts gave a sense that often participants did not know the rationale for decisions and did not speak up when they disagreed with them. Vicky described feeling like she was rubbish when the decision was made that she could not return to her mainstream school.

What also stood out was Rocky’s sense of powerlessness and vulnerability as he waited for adults to decide whether or not he would be excluded from his AP. This felt poignant because he described knowing that it was the last AP he could go to and that no other schools would have him.

Elle’s account suggested that she was making sense of her lack of influence in a different way to the other participants. She described it feeling weird that decisions were not made by her, but that she felt the adults were making decisions that were best for her.

This perspective suggests a degree of trust in the adults around her.

Participant	Data Extract	Line
Alice	I just had to come here	56
Charlie	he’s the one that wanted me to come to this school	158
Rocky	I don't know what’s going on coz they said if I get any more trouble I’m going I’m getting kicked out coz like I got excluded all week last week ... if I do anymore they’ll get me I’m getting kicked out... hmmm I dunno what’s happening	112 124 142
Leah	no I duno what’s going on innit I just went to that behaviour school and that I didn’t like it at all my mother was crying and that because she didn’t like the look of the place she hated the look of it	96
Vicky	well I didn’t wanno because like all my friends was there but I didn’t have a choice... like I was rubbish	32 34
Lucan	nothing really they just said I’m going...	26
Gabe	they just said come down here then they moved me down here	17
Elle	it feels weird but I know it’s for my best interest and I know it’s for my best	193

Table 13: Supporting quotes from the data for ‘Adults as Decision Makers’ theme

8.3.3 Emergent theme- Not feeling heard

Linked to the general sense that adults make decisions, was a sense of frustration described by several participants that they were not being listened to by the adults around them when they spoke up about their provision arrangements.

Participant	Data Extract	Line
Rocky	like I asked can I go on a Thursday or Friday and Wednesday and they asked and they ain't got back to me yet	50
Lucan	I said I wanted to go to a different school to this one	60
Zak	I want to do Sports Ltd twice a week... I've said it and they just say education don't turn up to the meetings so no one can ask	96

Table 14: Supporting quotes from the data for 'Not Feeling Heard' theme

8.3.4 Emergent theme- Movement within the AP sector

Over half of the participants described moving to several AP settings after being “kicked out” (Charlie, line 260; Rocky, line 20; Zak, like 35, Leah, line 350; Gabe, line 92) of mainstream school. Their descriptions give the sense that they did not always know why they were moving to a different provision nor did they always feel that the new setting was right for them. They moved because that is what they were told to do. Charlie’s use of “they just send you there” (line 260) implies that he is an object that can be sent to wherever the adults decide rather than him being able to have a say in where he is placed. Being a Looked After child, this could also link to wider feelings of disempowerment he may have.

Participant	Data Extract	Line
Leah	so after mainstream I went to a behaviour unit then I did home tuition then I did the unit then I did home tutoring I think I did home tutoring before the Unit actually I really dunno... after mainstream I went to behaviour school then I think I was on home tuition then I went to the unit... it was alright I just did it	62 84 86
Charlie	The PRU is like when you've have a few fights and got kicked out it's nothing it's fine they just send you there but say now you doing other stuff I dunno like put someone else harm or something like proper or like you've done something really naughty then you just come here unless you just get kicked out of your school then you just come here that's what I did	260
Zak	I've been home schooled coz I went into like a home so I went, I went, I done home school for 11 months but no wait there seven months... I dunno I just got moved	26 30

Vicky	and I was getting bullied and I was always like crying and feeling down so then they just moved me up here	86
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Table 15: Supporting quotes from the data for ‘Movement within AP Sector’ theme

8.3.5 Emergent theme- Returning to Mainstream

Though policy suggests that returning to mainstream should always be an option for young people in AP, a recurrent theme arose relating to participants’ perceptions about whether or not they would be able to return to mainstream. For Charlie and Rocky in particular, perceptions that they would never be allowed to return to mainstream seemed to exacerbate their negative views of themselves; sense of disempowerment and lack of purpose. Similarly, Zak expressed uncertainty about whether he would be allowed back into mainstream, but did not feel he belonged in AP.

Elle described her lack of control in all areas of her life and feeling that AP was not a place where young people could remain for their schooling as there were other young people waiting to enter the provision. For other participants, this was a time where they described being involved in a decision. They described how they had chosen not to return to mainstream often because of feeling settled in AP.

Participant	Data Extract	Line
Alice	well I can go back if I wanna... I don't wanna go	312
Charlie	Not bothered easier to just stay where I am I can't go back they won't have me	316
Rocky	I won't be allowed into other schools yeah I can't go to mainstream	254
Leah	yeah I think I can go back to another comp I just don't wanna I've settled really well in this school now	186
Vicky	they said I can't go back... I don't have that opportunity in my old school like they told me that I couldn't go back coz it just wasn't working out because I was like naughty so every time I went back there I was naughty but then I was good up here	44 78
Elle	it's like one leaves another comes in that one leaves another comes in like it's like that ... I've never had control over anything but I don't think I would have control over this	223 233
Gabe	you'd have to like change your way of learning if you wanna come back into mainstream... they give you a choice you do well in here you get to go back to mainstream if you wanna or you can just stay here and I just wanted to stay down here	104 292
Zak	I dunno I dunno if I'm allowed	158

Table 16: Supporting quotes from the data for ‘Returning to Mainstream’ theme

8.3.6 Summary

This main theme 'Disempowered' has outlined several ways that participants seem to feel that they have little influence or power. This may also relate to the participants' reports that they do not always care about what happens to them as they are often 'done to' rather than 'done with'.

8.3.7 Sub-ordinate theme- Purpose

Two recurrent themes emerged which seem to relate to participants' sense of purpose, however it is important to hold in mind that participants' may view their purpose as being in areas that they chose not to discuss during the interviews. This theme therefore only tentatively considers the participants' sense of purpose in education. Purpose can be defined as "*a stable and generalized intention to accomplish something that is at once meaningful to the self and of consequence to the world beyond the self.*" (Damon, Menon and Bronk, 2003, p. 121). Having a sense of purpose can lead to an increased sense of happiness and fulfilment in life (Seligman, 2011).

8.3.8 Emergent theme- Aims of education

Some participants descriptions of their time in AP, suggest they feel a sense of purpose in terms of the qualifications they are working towards and their plans for the future. In particular, Gabe spoke enthusiastically about the different qualifications he expects to achieve within AP to help him get a job. Those who attended college also described it as being useful to prepare them for the future.

Interestingly, Elle's account implied a contradiction between her general lack of control in her life, but feeling that it was her choice whether she engages with learning to then achieve her ambitions. This might suggest a high sense of personal agency in this aspect of her life. More commonly though, participants seemed unsure about what exactly they were working towards during their time in AP and described having very few plans for the future. This created a general sense of them lacking purpose and was communicated through phrases such as "*dunno*" (Leah, line 194) or "*I haven't thought about it*" (Charlie, line 134).

Participant	Data Extract	Line
Alice	we get like a level one she said or something for hairdressing... dunno	358 360
Zak	ermmm work erm sometimes	16
Leah	I can do my exams and that... coz I wanna leave school with lots of exams grades or something	120 150
Gabe	I've got GCSEs to do and they're helping me with BTEC Ann is helping me with Princes Trust erm Luke is helping me with (indecipherable) which I start doing and I've got college every Friday	36
Elle	my future is to leave to have my grades leave here and be an actress... erm no it all depends on me I think because it's up to me if I wanna learn it's up to me if I wanna get my grades and it's up to me if I wanna do actressing so I reckon it is all on me it's my choice if I wanna do work and get my grades	153 269

Table 17: Supporting quotes from the data for 'Aims of Education' theme

8.3.9 Emergent theme- Valued activities in AP

Participants commonly described enjoying the recreational activities that they accessed in AP including surfing, mountain bikes, sport, art and crafts and opportunities to integrate with the local community. Rocky, in particular, reported that his time in Sports Ltd was better because he got to do “*fun activities*” (line 36). The rest of his account seemed to lack a sense of purpose in terms of formal education.

Participants' accounts generally implied that they felt that they attended one provision for 'learning' and another for 'activities'. They tended to favour the provision they thought they attended for 'activities' or 'a day off'. Gabe was the only participant who perceived that the activity day he attended also had an educational purpose.

Participant	Data Extract	Line
Alice	because this schools better and they I duno they do things with you and that... we do go down the nursing home and colour with the old people	250 256
Charlie	it's alright but I know it's a mongo [<i>sic</i>] school it's just like what you've done and that why you're in here but it's alright it's class in here	238
Rocky	like we can do fun activities and do all that shit	36

Leah	I like doing it coz we go every Tuesday we go down er the care home with people with dementia	198
Lucan	riding bikes on Friday if we're good mountain bikes	72
Gabe	they take you out for a bit of fun then they bring you back and by the time they bring you back you go home then so it's just a day out from working a bit but you're still working you still do educational things	326
Zak	Erm sports and activities	12

Table 18: Supporting quotes from the data for 'Valued Activities in AP' theme

8.3.10 Summary

Within this sub-ordinate theme 'Purpose', there is a sense that participants' may experience varying degrees of purpose related to their education and future goals. Though participants report enjoying the recreational activities it is not clear whether they feel a sense of purpose or simply prefer doing them when compared to academic work. For some, there seems to be a lack of information provided to them about their targets and qualifications which seems to create a lack of purpose and ownership over their learning.

8.3.11 SUPERORDINATE THEME 3- CHANGE

The third superordinate theme relates to participants reflections about change. This includes a possible shift in their perceptions of adults; finding new feelings of security in AP and the fragility of changes in themselves.

8.3.12 Sub-ordinate theme- Perceiving adults as sources of support

Participants commonly seemed to be describing changes in their relationships with adults in AP. With many having experienced fractious relationships with adults in mainstream; feeling that teachers were on their backs and not feeling supported, noticed, trusted or understood. Participants described viewing adults in AP as sources of support. The accounts describe adults helping the participants to regulate the AP environment and their own emotions, which perhaps links to increased feelings of security. Some, in particular Gabe and Elle, attribute the positive changes they have made as being due to the support available from the adults.

Rocky and Zak’s accounts appear to differ from the other participants because they suggest that they are experiencing some difficulties with the adults in AP. It is possible that their lack of trust in the adults around them links with their difficulties identifying how and if they have made any changes since moving into the AP sector.

Participant	Data Extract	Line
Alice	just get on with them better	46
Rocky	hmmm like a couple of days ago Mon no Tuesday this boy left school these two boys and they went to (centre manager name) said when they walk out of school we had to ring the police they didn't bring the police nothing then they come back to school like at the end of the day and they was allowed to go in their taxies and they wasn't excluded if you're out of school you're excluded and you're not allowed back in your taxi... and that makes me annoyed	294 296
Zak	hard a little bit... some people some teachers in there (inaudible) the teachers... not hard as such but I'd say they don't make it easy... like they just swear and stuff like that.. I think it's just well you can't say nothing because they just tell you to shut up	72 74 76 78 82
Vicky	probably coz when I was in a different school I wasn't doing as much work coz I couldn't' do like my work in my other school I have to have like I have to have like someone sit by me and explain it to me	172
Leah	they just didn't understand they just they don't understand you they just shout at you and that they don't listen to you they just and in these schools they do ... we have a teacher here that we can speak to where if we like come in struggling and that	74 132
Lucan	calms everyone down first and then makes everyone sit down around the tables and everything it's different here	126
Gabe	you've got the support here if you need it there and that's what helps everyone really	326
Elle	it is with my emotions they've been a really good help... well like if I'm upset or if I'm crying or something I go to Mr Jenkins and Mr Jenkins is like helps me calm down and to breathe and all that and It's really one of the most helpful things that I've had so far	133 135

Table 19: Supporting quotes from the data for ‘Adults as Sources of Support’ theme

8.3.13 Sub-ordinate theme- Feelings of security

This theme links to the participants’ perceptions of adults in AP, but also extends to their more general descriptions of feeling safe and secure in AP. Again, this seems to be in contrast to how they felt in mainstream. There is a sense that adults can be trusted and

are there to promote calm, safe environments. It is possible that participants perceive the AP settings as safer because they are often smaller than mainstream settings. The size of mainstream schools was identified by most participants as contributing to their difficulties.

Rocky’s account seems to differ in this regard also, as he describes the setting as having rats and bait boxes and uses a rhetorical question to express his concerns about the safety of the provision. It is possible that Rocky is describing the physical defects in the provision as a means of expressing his overall dissatisfaction with the provision and his desire to leave there.

Participant	Data Extract	Line
Vicky	would be able to trust them in a way yeah like I couldn’t in my other school	290
Elle	I feel safe	145
Lucan	it’s just nicer the teachers are calmer	46
Rocky	yeah it's not really that good what’s it called we have rats running around the school and that... it's not very safe is it	318 324
Gabe	and that’s what make it like that’s what makes this place better coz they’ll sort it and like the thing is if you treat people with respect they’ll respect you back and that’s what we all do we treat people with respect	272

Table 20: Supporting quotes from the data for ‘Feelings of Security’ theme

8.3.14 Subordinate theme- The fragility of change

Most participants described changes in themselves that they had noticed, whilst being educated in the AP sector; the most common being a change in their behaviour or their attendance. Elle speaks emphatically about her journey of change and summarises it as being “*a change in me a change in school a change in life*” (line 249). However, the accounts suggest that participants do not know what it is that works for them or has brought about the changes. This seems to create a sense of low self-efficacy as the participants do not describe having influence over making or maintaining changes. This may also link to the previously explored ‘Self-Agency’ superordinate theme.

The fragility of the changes may also raise the question of whether the changes are felt by the participants to be specific to their AP contexts. These uncertainties about change

may link to why some participants wish to remain in AP rather than return to mainstream. Alternatively, participants may be making an observation that the mainstream environment is unlikely to have changed since they had been told to leave it. Also, perhaps temporarily being a different version of themselves is easier than becoming changed. This is demonstrated by Vicky, who describes knowing she would return to her past behaviours if she were to return to mainstream because “*it’s just a thing*” (line 222).

Participant	Data Extract	Line
Charlie	it’s just my behaviour so sometimes ... I’m just more just being good ain’t I it’s not like I’m good not like perfect but just being good	34 198
Vicky	it’s just a thing like if I went back to school I know I’d like be naughty it’s just a thing	222
Elle	I don’t wanna go back because it just makes that bad feeling come back and <u>I’m not having that again</u>	231
Gabe	yeah they’ve said to me oh do you wanna go up mainstream and I just I said no I’d just rather stay down here coz I’d be like I was again	106

Table 21: Supporting quotes from the data for ‘Fragility of Change’ theme

8.3.15 Summary

The final superordinate theme has explored reflections of change. These themes were recurrent in the transcripts, however made up a relatively small amount of the data. Nevertheless, descriptions of shifting relationships with adults, increased feelings of safety and security were viewed as being important to some participants. A sense of fragility of changes that participants have made was perhaps created through their lack of understanding of how the changes were brought about and could therefore be maintained. This also seems to link to the previously discussed superordinate theme ‘Sense of Agency’.

9. DISCUSSION

9.1 Returning to the research question

In contrast with much of the extant literature, this study adopted an exploratory approach. This meant that the analysis and interpretation were as much as possible directed by the voices of the participants rather than seeking to answer pre-designed specific questions about AP. Despite these intentions the findings are subjective and

open to biases, motivations, interests or perspectives of the researcher (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). The position of the researcher has been discussed previously.

The research set out to consider the following research question:

- How might learners be making sense of their experiences in the Welsh AP sector?

The findings in relation to this question are considered below and in keeping with the social constructionist epistemology there are multiple possible representations of knowledge.

First, consideration will be given to how the findings may link to the wider body of literature, before considering what social constructionism (Burr, 2015) and social identity theory (Tajfel, 1972) may offer in terms of interpreting the findings. It is beyond the scope of this paper to return to every emergent and sub-ordinate theme, but they will be weaved into the discussion where relevant. Table 22 illustrates how the themes identified in the current study may fit with the key themes identified in the extant literature.

9.2 Links to existing research about young peoples' perceptions of AP

Key themes in extant literature	Themes in current research that may link
Importance of relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adults in AP as sources of support • Increased feelings of security • Protecting the self
A sense of belonging	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased feelings of belonging (for some participants) • Returning to mainstream
Staff managing behaviour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adults in AP as sources of support
A personalised curriculum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Valued activities in AP
School environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased feelings of security
Motivation/engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adults as the decision makers • The fragility of change • Education aims • Self-regard • Disempowered • Sense of agency • Movement within AP sector

Hopes and aspirations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education aims • Returning to mainstream • The fragility of change
Marginalisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Judgement from others • What is AP? • Hierarchies within the AP sector • Returning to mainstream

Table 22: Links to extant research

9.3 Possible links to social identity theory and social constructionism

The discussion will now look to the field of social psychology to offer some tentative connections between the findings and both social constructionism and social identity theory. Social Identity Theory proposes that an individual's sense of who they are, in part, depends on the groups they perceive that they are part of (Cooper, Smith & Russell, 2017, p.4). Social constructionism, in line with social identity theory, supports that identity is an implicitly social concept that is shaped by an individuals' interactions with the environment and that language is key (Burr, 2015). While there are distinct differences in how the theories can position the construction of 'the self', it is hoped that the links cautiously made hereafter are relevant to the research question.

9.3.1 Reflections on a deficit discourse

Many participants described being 'kicked out' of the mainstream sector suggesting that they no longer identify as being part of that social group. Perhaps the language of 'kicked out' also suggests a feeling of rejection from mainstream. Attending AP may therefore bring about a process of shifting social identities as participants try to make sense of their situations based on the discourses that are available to them about AP and the reasons for their transition. Burr (2015) asserts that *"our identity is constructed out of the discourses culturally available to us and which we draw upon in our conversations with other people"* (p.123). This highlights the micro and macro levels at which language can shape how individuals may perceive and experience the AP sector. This research suggests that the conversations that young people have with others about their move into AP and AP itself can carve out differences between those who attend AP and others in mainstream. This seems to be in terms of the attributes of learners who attend AP, its purpose and the outcomes for learners.

Some participants seem to have taken on discourses and identities, which position AP as being for those who have deficits; disabilities or who are unable to cope with the mainstream sector. Several describe AP as being for “mongos [sic]” (Charlie, line 338), with a range of negative connotations relating to intellectual ability and what young people who attend AP can hope to achieve. In wider research, Thomson (2014) also highlighted concerns relating to the language of ‘disaffected’, ‘disadvantaged’, ‘at risk’ and ‘vulnerable’ that dominates wider discourse about whom AP is designed for.

Furthermore, the construction that mainstream school is ‘normal’ and therefore that AP is something ‘abnormal’ could also be viewed as a dominant discourse in the participants’ accounts that they are trying to make sense of. It could be said that taking on identities in which young people are positioned as having a deficit or as being abnormal has implications for their self-esteem, self-efficacy (Bandura, 2008) and subsequent behaviour. Also, some participants did not seem to have enough information to make sense of the type of provision they were attending and why, which seems to lead to a lack of understanding, self-agency and empowerment.

In addition, change may be difficult for young people in AP because of the dominant, deficit discourses that they hear. Arguably, deficit discourses about those who attend AP and their life trajectories are embedded in wider social and systemic practices e.g. disciplinary exclusion. Participants spoke of discourses which seemed to relate to constructions of them being ‘naughty people’. Theory suggests that once an individual takes up a social identity or position then they may come to view the world and themselves from that perspective. This could explain why Charlie describes adults and young people in AP as being a “bunch of dumpties numpties” (line 230) who are “doing dopey stuff” (line 232) because of a dominant discourse in the LA that APs are “mongo [sic] schools” (Alice, line 232). Perhaps he is fulfilling the role that he has taken up within the AP system based on his known constructions of AP and of himself.

A further interesting point is that some participants seem to be actively constructing a social identity that separates them from being the kind of person who attends a school for learners, who experience SEBD. It may be useful to consider why this might be. Social constructionism supports that individuals are able to exercise some level of choice in the discourses and positions that they take up in society (Burr & Dick, 2017). It may be the case that the young peoples' lived experiences of AP alongside dominant wider discourses about SEBD provisions make them an undesirable identity to adopt. Young people are motivated to protect their self-esteem, thus some reject that identity. This is evident in the account of Zak, who seems to actively resist the social identity that his AP offers him.

Alongside the influence of wider dominant societal discourses about AP and young people who experience SEBD, participants varying experiences seem to have also been influenced by the day to day social interactions that they have with others in school. Gabe and Elle, for example, seem to describe a social identity through which they feel that AP is a positive place to be and as helping them to change. However, Elle also eludes to an alternative identity when she describes needing to return to mainstream in order to get her qualifications. Elle's sense of what is possible and not possible is perhaps influenced by the identity and constructions that she chooses to take up at that time.

Overall when thinking about how social constructionism and social identity theory possibly link to the findings, it could be argued that how young people feel about who they are and their education is influenced by the discourses they hear about where they are being educated. Young people in AP seem to be trying to make sense of multiple, competing discourses about AP and possible identities that they may choose to take on with varying implications. Some of these may be contradictory or identities that they wish to resist to protect their self-view. For example: participants who reported enjoying their time in AP may be struggling to make sense of how to align this view with the dominant discourse that AP is a place for less able people, who achieve less than learners in mainstream.

Arguably, when such dilemmas are considered alongside a lack of social interactions aimed at helping young people to understand where they are going to school and why, being placed in AP may be a confusing time. In line with this sense of confusion, McCluskey et al., (2015) described the lack of consistent terminology used at both local and national levels making it difficult to make sense of patterns and trends in the sector. These difficulties likely also exist for young people, who are trying to understand the sector and their place in it.

If perceptions of the self and lived experiences are created and made sense of through discourse then arguably there is a need to be more attentive to how society speaks about the AP sector. Actions are said to be intertwined with discourse (Gergen, 2000), so there perhaps needs to be a change in the discourse about AP to support wider changes to the sector.

9.3.2 Concepts from social identity theory

Social categorisation (a concept from social identity theory) refers to *“the cognitive segmentation of the social environment into different social categories. This operation both systematises the social world and provides a system of orientation for the self, by creating and defining the individual’s place in society”* (Bennett & Sani, 2004, p.9). Categorisation seems to be present in the participants’ accounts as they categorise provisions as being better or worse than others. This may perhaps be to try to make sense of and understand the AP sector. Participants also seem to categorise themselves in terms of the provisions that they think they belong in and those they do not feel they fit into based on social constructions. It could be said that the LA has also categorised each participant through the actions of placing them in specific APs. The discourses regarding each provision perhaps contributes to how the individuals compare themselves to others in mainstream and other APs.

Also according to social identity theory (Tajfel, 1972), in order to maintain positive self-esteem individuals can use social categorisation to enhance the status of their social group. This could offer some explanation as to why the wider discourse around AP

suggests a ‘them and us’ mentality between young people in mainstream and those in AP. The theory also suggests that groups look to homogenise their characteristics and behaviours to promote group cohesion (Tajfel, 1972). Arguably, this could lead to young people in AP feeling increasingly different from their peers in mainstream if they choose to take up this group identity. This has possible implications for reintegrating young people into mainstream.

9.3.3 Summary

The discussion thus far has highlighted possible links between the results and extant literature and also tentatively considered the findings through the lenses of social constructionism and social identity theory. Arguably, the socially constructed discourses young people hear about AP may influence their social identities and how they make sense of their education experiences. It is hoped that the complexities of how young people in AP may be making sense of their experiences in AP has been highlighted. The level of complexity is also reflected in the implications, which largely intend to offer points for reflection and future action research (Alderson & Morrow, 2011).

9.4 Implications for EP practice

Possible implications for practice are described in table 23. Specific focus is upon the implications for EPs, however arguably there is a need to consider how wider societal discourses and practices relating to AP and SEBD may be influencing young peoples’ identities, experiences and subsequent behaviours.

Area of consideration	Possible implications for practice
<i>Identity of AP settings</i>	<p>Whilst acknowledging that some APs may already have strong ethos' and identities, EPs are well placed to engage with education systems to explore such constructions. Working with settings to further support the development and promotion of alternative constructions and ethos' of AP with a focus on purpose and listening to views of staff and learners could be relevant. Whilst it is important to hold in mind that specific approaches e.g. appreciative inquiry (Norum, 2001) can privilege certain types of discourse, EPs are arguably well placed to utilise a range of tools to engage systems in dialogue. Soft systems methodology (Checkland & Poulter, 2006) offers one approach to explore school systems and constructions.</p>
<i>Awareness of cultural discourses about the AP sector and/or young people who attend AP</i>	<p>The findings suggest that young people hear constructions of AP that can be deficit based. This highlights how young people are aware of the constructions of others and use these to inform their own sense making. EPs could take up a role in supporting young people to make sense of and consider alternative constructions of AP and of themselves.</p> <p>Billington (2006) highlighted that how we speak to children, how we speak of children and how we write about children informs a narrative. In the field of SEBD, narratives can favour dispositional within child factors which allow for less consideration of situational and systemic explanations (Stanbridge & Mercer, 2019). Personal reflection and peer supervision as to how EP reports may be challenging or contributing to the discourses related to AP and young people, who experience SEBD could be relevant.</p> <p>EPs could encourage the generation of dialogue at local and national levels to further explore the language used to describe the AP sector. Questioning common assumptions could open up new possibilities within the sector. EPs could also play a part in reviewing policy at local and national levels related to AP.</p>
<i>Developing young peoples' self-agency and self-efficacy</i>	<p>The study has highlighted that young people can feel that they do not have control over their education or what happens to them. Involving young people more in decision making about their education could increase feelings of agency and efficacy. EPs could have a role in</p>

	<p>sensitively promoting person centred practice. This could include supporting young people, parents and staff to explore the following questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Why does the school feel the young person would be best placed in AP? - How long are they likely to remain in AP? - What is the purpose of the particular AP setting? - How might AP help the young person for now and the future? - What are the young person’s long and short term goals/aspirations? How can AP help them to achieve these? - What are the first steps that need to be taken in the process of change? - What qualifications are relevant and meaningful to the individual? <p>Personal construct psychology (Butler & Green, 2007) is one approach that EPs could use when meeting with young people to explore their perspectives. Their views could be fed back to adults in the education system to inform decisions.</p> <p>Once a young person is attending AP, EPs might also have a role in supporting staff and young people to explore the process of change. This could include reviewing progress, exploring what maintains desired changes and normalising regressions. Highlighting to young people the factors that help them to make their desired changes and exploring thinking patterns could support increased internal attribution.</p> <p>The study has highlighted that some young people feel they have been told that they are unable to return to mainstream education. Arguably, all young people should have the option to return to mainstream and be supported to plan the necessary steps. If young people think that returning to mainstream is not an option for them then this could lead to increased feelings of hopelessness and difference. All education professionals perhaps have a part to play in reducing feelings of exclusion from mainstream opportunities.</p>
<i>Purposeful placement decisions</i>	<p>EPs could use holistic assessment to support the LA to identify individuals’ strengths and needs and contribute to transition planning and reviews. This may lead to young people experiencing less placement breakdowns and movement within the AP sector.</p> <p>At a strategic level, EPs could support the LA in developing and planning a range of provision that meets the holistic needs of young people.</p>
<i>Improving links between AP and mainstream</i>	<p>Strengthening the links between AP and mainstream schools may reduce the sense of ‘them and us’ and perceived judgement from mainstream peers about the AP sector. Arguably, EPs have a range of skills that could promote the building of these relationships and inform</p>

	systemic changes to create opportunities for integration between AP and mainstream schools.
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Table 23: Possible implications for EPs

9.5 Implications for wider systems

Possible implications for practice within wider systems will now considered.

Area of consideration	Possible implications
Awareness of cultural discourses about the AP sector and/or young people who attend AP	<p><i>For educational policy makers/LAs</i></p> <p>The research suggests there is a need to consider how local/national policies may be challenging or contributing to the deficit discourses related to AP and young people, who experience SEBD. This includes exploring how the language used to describe the AP sector and its learners e.g. ‘alternative’, ‘vulnerable’, ‘troubled’ may be contributing to the current status quo.</p> <p>A need for LAs to offer clarity about the types of provisions learners could attend in AP e.g. are they schools? Are teaching staff qualified? Clearer information and language to describe settings could then be used to construct alternative discourses that are based on hope, strengths and purpose within each AP. This could be undertaken collaboratively with young people who attend AP.</p> <p>A need to ensure AP settings are routinely scrutinised and encourage settings to apply for school status to dispel some of the confusion young people may feel about where they are being educated.</p> <p>A need to consider how LA referral and transition processes contribute to the deficit discourse related to AP and those who attend e.g. do young people feel they can return to mainstream and what language is used on AP referral forms to describe learners needs.</p>
	<p><i>For schools and teachers</i></p> <p>If schools feel that a learner may be best placed in AP, there is arguably a need to further explore the situational and systemic explanations (Stanbridge & Mercer, 2019) that may be contributing to their challenges in mainstream. Opening up these dialogues with families and young people may help them to make sense of leaving mainstream in such a way that is not focused on individuals being naughty or not being able to cope in mainstream.</p> <p>A need for teaching staff in AP and mainstream settings to observe, reflect and challenge how day to day discourses may be challenging or contributing to the deficit discourses related to AP. This also relates to how young people who move into AP are spoken about with</p>

	<p>mainstream learners and how young people talk about each other in AP and the settings themselves.</p> <p><i>For young people</i> There is an implication for increased dialogue with and amongst young people in mainstream and AP settings to support them to become more informed about what AP is and what it can offer learners.</p>
<i>Developing young peoples' self-agency and self-efficacy</i>	<p><i>For educational policy makers/LAs</i> There is a need to review local and national policies to consider how young people can be more involved in decision making about their education e.g. offering learners and parents a choice of AP settings with clear information about what each AP can offer to support their desired change/profile of strengths.</p>
	<p><i>For schools and teachers/young people</i> There is an implication for transitions into AP to include a meeting with the young person, mainstream school and AP in which the following points are considered:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Why does the school feel the young person would be best placed in AP? - How long are they likely to remain in AP? - What is the purpose of each particular AP setting? - How might AP help the young person for now and the future? - What are the young person's long and short term goals/aspirations? How can AP help them to achieve these? - What are the first steps that need to be taken in the process of change? - What qualifications are relevant and meaningful to the individual? <p>The research suggests a need for regular reviews with learners in AP including opportunities for them to feedback about individual settings and offer their views about possible changes to their provision. This would need to include a plan for their return to mainstream education.</p> <p>A need to encourage young people to work with teaching staff in AP to explore their future goals, aspirations and collaboratively plan purposeful learning opportunities with these in mind.</p> <p>A need for AP settings to offer young people information about the qualifications that they can achieve in AP and ensure they understand how they might go about achieving these. Regularly review progress to help young people to understand what is supporting their change.</p>
<i>Purposeful placement decisions</i>	<p><i>For educational policy makers/ LAs</i> There is a need to review the available APs within each LA in order to plan for a range of provision that meets the holistic needs of young people supporting them to succeed in AP.</p>

	To reduce multiple moves within the AP sector, there is a need to ensure LA decisions are based on clear, up to date information about the strengths and needs of each young person including their aspirations and views about a possible move to AP. Decisions should include young people and families.
	<i>For schools/ teachers</i> There is a need for adults in school, who know individuals, to provide information to support an appropriate placement decision. They could also work with the young person to gather their views and explain reasons for decisions.
	<i>For young people and parents</i> Involving young people in decisions about placements may promote a greater sense of engagement following transition and feeling heard by adults.

Table 24: Possible implications within wider systems

9.6 Limitations of research

The final section of the discussion will consider the limitations of the study.

Limitation	Amplification
Generalisability of findings	As is the case when IPA is used to pay close attention to the idiographic experiences of individuals, the aim was not to create findings that could be generalised to the wider AP sector. In line with the relativist ontology that has been adopted, consideration must be given to the subjective nature of IPA, meaning that the results and discussion have invariably been influenced by the pre-conceptions and lived experiences of the researcher. This means that they represent one possible interpretation and are offered to readers to aid their personal thinking and reflection on the AP sector. In addition, the findings presented here represent the experiences of this particular group of young people, who are attending AP in one LA. Smith et al., (2009) highlighted the contribution that IPA research can offer in terms of theoretical generalisability “ <i>where the reader of the report is able to assess the evidence in relation to their existing professional and experiential knowledge</i> ” (p.4)

Idiographic analysis	This study has drawn a relatively large sample for IPA analysis. It could be said that this brings about strengths and weaknesses in terms of the reliability of the findings. When working with larger IPA samples, it becomes harder to represent the idiographic journeys of each participant and the experiences of individuals must be considered within the experiences of the whole group to identify recurrent themes (Smith et al., 2009). Had the research been carried out with a smaller participant group then the analysis would perhaps have allowed more interpretation and consideration of each participant's lived experiences and perhaps a richer idiographic collection of findings.
Interviews	The interviews in the current study were between 20 and 45 minutes in length. It could therefore be said that the interviews lacked sufficient detail to enable the researcher to make sense of the participants' experiences. However, Nicholson and Putwain (2015) reported their interviews were between 5 and 36 minutes duration. It could be that this is in line with young peoples' ability to reflect on and articulate their personal experiences. While this could be seen as a limitation, it is arguable that there was an ethical integrity to stick with shorter interviews with the most relevant participants instead of recruiting adult participants.

Table 25: Limitations of research

9.7 Closing comments

This research has offered exploration of the lived experiences of young people attending AP in Wales. Through interpretation of their responses, possible new ideas have emerged about how young people may be experiencing the AP sector. These relate to how social identities may be being constructed and taken up by learners in AP; learners experiencing a decreased sense of agency in AP and the fragility of change.

It highlights that AP is a place where young people can be supported to grow and develop as individuals, but moving into AP can bring about questions and challenges for some learners. How individuals make sense of their journey in AP arguably is influenced by the discourses they hear about the AP sector. This suggests that changing the discourses may lead to changes in young peoples' experiences.

This research supports previous findings by demonstrating that young people have valuable contributions to make to research. It is hoped that this could encourage more involvement of young people in the ongoing development of the AP sector in Wales.

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**“What’s it like here?” Exploring young peoples’ perceptions of the
Alternative Provision sector in Wales**

PART 3: CRITICAL APPRAISAL

Word count: 6,500 approximately

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper intends to present a reflective and reflexive account of the journey that has been undertaken. It will critically analyse the possible implications of the decisions taken in shaping and conducting the research and what the research may be able to contribute to existing literature and thinking regarding the current and future alternative provision (AP) sector in Wales.

2. RATIONALE FOR THE THESIS

The first section of the appraisal explores the reasons why I chose to conduct research in the area of AP and critiques some of my key research design decisions.

2.1 Topic selection

Throughout my career in education, I have strived to attend to and give a voice to vulnerable young people, who I have observed can be marginalised in society. In line with this, the decision to focus my research on the phenomenon of AP came from a longstanding interest in the educational experiences of young people, who experience social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD). Whilst teaching in primary schools, I observed how this group of learners can occupy the periphery of the mainstream education system. I hold the position that working to include such learners should be a moral imperative for all educators. However, I also acknowledge from my own personal teaching experiences that the challenges in doing this can be great. This can relate to the attitudes of and potential disruption to the learning experiences of others in the system around the individual (Mowat, 2015; Stanforth & Rose, 2018).

Furthermore as a Local Authority (LA) Statementing Officer, I observed placements in mainstream schools breaking down as schools struggled to educate the most challenging learners. Those young people often then found themselves placed in the AP sector. I observed that young people in that LA generally remained in the AP sector for the remainder of their time in education. Reintegration is not always successful (Thomas, 2015). At the time, I wondered what sense learners made of their departure from mainstream and what/if any impact it had on their perceptions of the world, themselves

or their futures. In the roles that I had taken up within those systems, I did not have a means of exploring these questions beyond my personal reflections. However as a Trainee EP, my interest in AP was reignited and I perceived there was an opportunity for research.

During my second year as a Trainee EP, I observed a LA multi-agency AP placement meeting. The aim of the meeting was to consider new referrals from schools for young people whom schools felt their needs could not be met in the mainstream sector. I was struck by how de-personalised the LA decision making processes appeared to be. I perceived that placement decisions were based on available spaces in AP and constructions of tolerance levels of individual mainstream head teachers rather than the individual needs of learners. I acknowledge that as system's theory (Watzwalick, Bavelas & Jackson, 1967) suggests I was constructing those views based on a snapshot of the possible and likely complex ongoing interactions between education stakeholders. However, this meeting sparked my curiosity once again to consider the experiences of young people, who are placed in the AP sector. Following this, I began to consider the available literature in this area to inform my thinking and the direction of this research.

2.2 Consulting the literature

2.2.1 Challenges defining AP

During the initial wider searches for literature relating to AP, I experienced significant difficulties understanding the organisation of the AP sector. I found that a plethora of vocabulary has been used to describe provisions that fall outside the mainstream. The use of language/labels to describe AP also differed between Wales and England. There seemed to be a lack of agreement about which provisions were categorised as AP and which were special schools and whether these were mutually exclusive categories. A further challenge was that some scholars constructed pupil referral units (PRUs) as being separate to the AP sector, whilst others included them under the AP umbrella. These difficulties were mirrored in my conversations with LA colleagues, whereby some described a PRU as AP, while others vehemently stated it was a qualitatively different form of short stay education. The AP sector felt distinctly vague and difficult to define.

Taking a social constructionist perspective, I wondered if the labels given to different provisions were perhaps historically and culturally specific (Burr, 1995). This lack of clarity arguably seems to share similarities to the debate which spans from the early nineteenth century to present day (Cooper, 2001) about the labels that society uses to describe learners who display challenging behaviour in school. Stanforth and Rose (2018) suggested that difficulties defining this group also highlighted the confusion in policy and research relating to meeting their educational needs. I wondered if the vagueness that is apparent across the sector is somehow representative of the struggle society has in meeting the educational needs of this cohort and the complexity of the current situation. I also wondered whether the vagueness of the sector maybe served a purpose systemically. Making it harder to monitor and compare provisions and learners arguably reduces opportunities for robust scrutiny and accountability upon individuals.

These experiences and reflections led me to hold the view that there is perhaps no right way of defining and understanding the AP sector. Also, I should not assume that one way of defining it is any nearer to the truth than other ways as language seems to be shifting over time and location. Nevertheless, I felt it was important to enable readers to understand what the phenomenon of study was and this required a clear definition of AP in my mind. Through the process of supervision, reading and reflection, I explored my own constructions of what AP can be and used this to inform the definition. I decided not to include literature relating to home education as I perceive this to be outside my own personal constructions of AP. The definition adopted in the current research is as follows:

“Education for children of compulsory school age, who do not attend mainstream or special schools and who would not otherwise receive suitable education, for any reason”

(Department for Education, 2018, p.5).

2.2.2 Construction of the literature review

Given the aforementioned challenges of defining the phenomenon of AP even within the UK education systems (McCluskey et al., 2015), it was felt that confining the review to the UK would enable the most relevant studies to be focused upon. I feel that this has

created a focused, critical examination of key UK studies enabling common themes to be drawn out and discussed. I also acknowledge that literature may be available outside the UK that offers a different light in which to consider the current research findings. Consideration of this literature was felt to be beyond the scope of this study.

In a further effort to try and ensure literature related to the phenomenon of AP experienced by young people in present day, the review focused only on studies that had been conducted between 2010 and 2020. This decision was made to reflect the influence that government policy and legislation may have had on the changing landscape of the AP sector. The Conservative Government has been in power since 2010; before then the Labour party were in power thus steering the direction of AP. Research conducted prior to this, arguably may be examining a slightly different phenomenon governed by different legislation and policy though there may also be some overlaps.

Throughout the research process, I was always most interested in exploring the perspectives of young people attending AP. In order to centralise the voices of young people in the literature review, only studies that had sought to hear their voices first hand were included. Student voice *“includes every way in which pupils are allowed or encouraged to offer their views or perspectives”* (Whitty & Wisby, p.306). Arguably, using a broader range of information sources may have offered more opportunities to triangulate results e.g. between different stakeholders. However, I perceived that it may also have meant that the experiences of young people were not central to the conclusions that researchers had made. Some of the studies reviewed did include the perspectives of other stakeholders in their findings, but I focused on the findings that had been informed by the voices of young people. This was evidenced by the inclusion of data quotes from young people in the results sections of papers.

Overall, the literature review highlighted that research aims in this area are commonly deductive in nature and driven by adult constructions or political agendas. These seem to relate to a wider societal need to understand ‘what works’ to support young people in AP to succeed (Thomson, 2014) and to researchers’ pre-determined theoretical interests or perspectives. I felt that there was arguably a gap for more inductive research that enabled the voices of young people to steer the direction of the study, in order to further

consider what it is like to walk in the shoes of young people placed in AP. This is what the current study set out to achieve.

3. RESEARCH DESIGN

3.1 Data collection method

I was primarily focused on exploring the voices of young people rather than other stakeholders from the outset of the research design, however the range of possible data collection methods, at times, felt overwhelming. I held in mind the views of O'Connor et al., (2011) that “*the researcher’s central aim is not only to listen, but more importantly to ‘hear’ the voice of the pupil*” (p.291) and that the methods used by researchers should move away from treating young people as objects and “*focus on empowerment and facilitations*” (p291). In line with this, I wanted to get alongside young people and start the research from their stories. In order to do this, I decided to meet with young people on an individual basis to optimise my opportunities to hear their voices without interruption (O’Reilly & Dogra, 2017). Interviews were felt to be most appropriate for this purpose, although focus groups were also briefly considered.

A key concern I had about the data collection was that without a highly structured interview schedule or scaffolding activity, the participants would not have anything to say. An alternative way of viewing this, is that I feared that they may lack the ability to respond to the demands of the task (Dockrell, Lewis & Lindsay, 2000). I was also conscious that young people, who have Statements of Special Educational Needs, make up a significant proportion of learners in AP (Welsh Government, 2019) meaning that participants may have had a range of individual learning needs. I did not want the interviews to be confusing or overwhelming for participants. On reflection, these fears were perhaps indicative of the overwhelming pressures I felt about constructing the thesis as opposed to potential participants’ abilities. Contrary to these concerns, previous studies have found that young people often have important messages for adults, when given appropriate opportunities to express themselves (Wise, 2000; Sellman, 2009).

Consideration was also given to providing participants with a Q-Sort activity meaning that participants would rank and sort a set of statements relating to their experiences in AP (Coogan & Herrington, 2011). However, Q-sort uses the judgement of the researcher to decide on the nature of the relevant statements given to participants to sort thereby limiting their choice of responses. I wanted to give young people the opportunity to speak freely about their lived experiences, so decided to use a semi-structured interview format, without additional activities or visual prompts. On reflection, perhaps the use of a visual aid such as a timeline may have supported participants to share more of their perceptions. Nevertheless, I feel that each participant shared the views and experiences that they felt were relevant to them at the time of being interviewed. Part of IPA, to me, seems to be accepting the process of each participant actively making sense of their lived experiences during the interview.

3.2 Doing no harm

Rosenblatt (1999) emphasised the importance of considering ethics- particularly when research explores sensitive topics and aims to reach a deeper understanding of individuals' thoughts and feelings. For me, ethics was an ongoing process of reflection as I navigated through each stage of the research. It played a particularly central role during the interviews and analysis. While Hutchinson et al., (2013) supported that interviews can be a cathartic and reflective process for participants, others have expressed concerns that they can be psychologically harmful (Lieblich as cited in Sabar & Sabar BenYehoshua, 2017). Furthermore, interviews can impact on participants in ways that researchers have not anticipated (Butterfield et al., 2009; Bahn & Weatherill, 2013). I was mindful that the participants in the current research were young people. This meant that I was working with a vulnerable group and needed to ensure my actions were wellconsidered with the best interests of participants centralised.

Adams (2008) describes how concerns of causing harm can sometimes feel paralysing to researchers. On reflection, I perhaps experienced feelings such as this. I was conscious that during some of the interviews I was tentative to ask participants to tell me more about the aspects of their accounts that I felt may have been sensitive for them. I observed that participants spoke in detail about ideas that they were comfortable talking

about and used short responses at other times. These included details of why they were excluded from mainstream education. It felt important to observe their responses, tone and body language and respond accordingly to avoid being insensitive. I acknowledge that it could be argued that a level of detail is lacking in some of the accounts, however I felt that prioritising the wellbeing of the participants was key.

3.3 Building a therapeutic alliance

Throughout the data collection, I was also conscious of the ethical need to build a therapeutic alliance with the young people (Rogers, 1951) based on respect. I did not wish for participants to feel that they were vessels from which I was looking to extract information nor to feel a power imbalance during interviews. To try and address this, I aimed to meet each participant before they took part in the research. This introductory session involved me using empathy, humour, interest in them as individuals and unconditional positive regard (Rogers, 1980). Unfortunately, it was not possible to meet all the participants prior to the interviews and it is acknowledged that the circumstances participants were interviewed in may have altered their accounts (Cooper, 1993).

Hart (1992) offers a model describing different levels of participation that can be used to reflect on the participation of young people in this study. Arguably, a limitation of the research is that young people did not have involvement or ownership over the design of the research or the findings. They will, however, be informed of the findings (see appendix S).

3.4 Participants as reliable witnesses

The research included nine participants' whose interview accounts ranged from 20 to 45 minutes in duration. Smith et al., (2009) suggests that interviews for IPA analysis should be at least an hour to create a rich data set. With this in mind, I was aware that the interviews were relatively short. I later drew comparisons between the current study and the work of Nicholson & Putwain (2015) who also interviewed young people attending AP and used IPA. They described their interviews as lasting between 5 and 36 minutes. This suggests that my interview lengths, although short, are in line with previous research with this particular participant group.

At various points in the data collection process, I reflected on the quality of the data in terms of the length of the interviews and how this may impact on the reliability and robustness of the findings. I wanted to ensure transparency (Yardley, 2000) in my findings and therefore wanted the findings to be supported by quotes. I hoped that this would help readers to be able to see how my interpretations had stemmed from the transcripts. I had initially intended on interviewing six participants, but extended the participant group to nine in order to collect a richer body of data.

Overall, I feel that nine participants provided a body of data that enabled an adequately robust analysis given the context of the research. I was also asked to consider widening the range of participants to include the perspectives of adults. However, I felt that this would have led to the loss of my central focus and aim of the research- examining the voices and experiences of young people. I was also conscious of how this may have been perceived by the young people who had given up their time to offer their contributions.

3.5 Data analysis

Smith et al., (2009) highlights that when choosing a method of analysis, one needs to think about what the analysis seeks to achieve. First and foremost, I wanted to use psychology and offer in depth interpretation of the data. I felt that Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) provided a useful means of achieving this (Smith et al., 2009) and was in line with my epistemological positioning. Consideration was also given to using other qualitative approaches. In particular, thematic analysis, but also case studies; discourse analysis; grounded theory and narrative analysis. These will be briefly discussed in turn next.

I considered using thematic analysis as an alternative method, however felt that IPA afforded more consideration of the idiographic experiences of participants. Thematic analysis primarily creates themes across whole data sets and therefore tends not to attend to contradictions or continuity within each interview (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Whereas the steps of IPA analysis suggested by Smith et al., (2009) involve in depth analysis and generation of themes within each transcript before considering the data set as a whole. I felt that this enabled me to engage with the voice of each participant in

detail, hearing any contradictions or continuity about what sense they may have been making about their time in AP. I feel this process deepened my awareness and understanding of the phenomenon of AP.

Arguably, IPA and thematic analysis have some shared attributes and are both pattern based analytic methods (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Both are appropriate for the research question's focus on exploring lived thoughts, feelings and actions. During the data collection process in particular, I held in mind that thematic analysis may be more appropriate if the data were to lack the richness that suits IPA (Smith et al., 2009). However, I feel that the final body of data (9 interviews) did provide a richness and description of lived experiences that was appropriate for IPA.

Possible limitations of using thematic analysis are that it can have limited interpretative power and lacks clear guidance for how to reach higher level interpretative analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Whereas I feel that the principles for IPA set out by Smith et al., (2009) support deeper interpretation of data and linking participants' sense making to more abstract psychological theory. Notably, IPA does not specify a prescribed methodology. As this was my second time using the approach, I tried to be more innovative and free in my interpretations. I also ensured that the key principles (Smith et al., 2009) guided the analysis. A summary of the process is evident in appendix L.

Also, IPA is phenomenological and influenced by the double hermeneutic (Peat, Rodriguez & Smith, 2019). It acknowledges that humans are innately sense making beings (Smith & Osborne, 2015). The process of interpretation during IPA can be viewed as a dual interpretation process or 'double hermeneutic' (Peat, Rodriguez & Smith, 2019). Therefore the analysis is the process of myself as the researcher trying to make sense of the participants' accounts of them trying to make sense of their experiences. IPA considers the impact this can have on analysis and findings (Smith et al., 2009).

Smith (2004) proposed that case studies can also fit within IPA analysis, whilst recognising that IPA studies more often have an idiographic focus but more than one participant (Smith et al., 2009). Arguably, adopting a case study approach may also have

provided in depth consideration of the phenomenon. However, when considering the extant literature, I felt that there had already been extensive use of this design (Ewen & Topping, 2012; Michael & Frederickson, 2013; Cajic-Seigneur & Hodgson, 2016; Thomson and Pennacchia, 2016b; Trotman et al., 2019).

Arguably, using discourse analysis to explore "*what is said, in what way, by whom and for what purpose*" (Hogg & Vaughan, 1995, p.509), is relevant and interesting to the research. I feel that IPA has also enabled some consideration of the participants' use of language. I did not feel that grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) was appropriate because working towards a theoretical level explanation of the findings was not in line with my personal research intentions.

Narrative analysis also offers a means of making sense of qualitative data, in particular stories, with a focus on lived experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2013). It could be said that the interviews represent stories that the participants have told about their experiences in AP. Narrative approaches support that the stories people tell do different things (Frank, 2010) and analysis explores what is said and how (Braun & Clarke, 2013). I did not consider using this approach until I began re-reading the transcripts in the early stages of analysis. I was struck by the stories that young people seemed to be telling. However, I felt that IPA was still an appropriate means of analysing the data.

3.6 Refinement of the research design

Smith et al., (2009) described how IPA research may deviate from the original research questions as inductive analysis emerges from the data that is collected and subsequently examined. In this study, the research paradigm and research questions have been refined since the first research proposal. This was in line with an ongoing commitment to stay close to the lived experiences of participants and also my own shifting understanding of different research paradigms and the phenomenon of AP. The changes to the research design will now be discussed in order to offer clarity to the reader about why and when changes were made.

At the outset of the proposal, the research was focused on exploring the lived experiences of young people, who were attending multiple APs across their school week.

I was most interested in the experiences of this particular group of young people in AP because settings, who are not educating young people full time, are not required to be registered as schools (Estyn, 2016). I wondered what type of school experience these settings were offering to learners and how they experienced moving between different provisions perhaps in terms of a sense of belonging. When constructing the research questions, I was guided by the writing of Agee (2009) who emphasises the importance that initial questions can have on the quality and direction of research. To reflect my lines of interest in the experience of young people attending multiple APs, the original research questions were as follows:

- What are young peoples' lived experiences of attending multiple AP?
- How are young people making sense of what they experience whilst attending multiple AP?

The first alteration to the research design occurred early in the data collection phase. Through conducting interviews and reading transcripts, it became apparent that participants' did not seem to place a great deal of importance on their attendance at multiple provisions. By this, I mean that they were not talking about any impacts of attending multiple AP. Instead, their accounts explored a range of other concepts and ideas that they felt to be relevant to their lived experiences in AP (these are discussed in the findings). Arguably, on reflection the initial research questions may have been too closed and imposed "*a priori theoretical constructs upon the phenomena*" (Smith et al., 2009, p.47) based on my personal interests. Maxwell (2005) also warned that starting with questions that are too narrow can lead to tunnel vision in terms of the findings. This was something I became conscious of during the data collection process.

Through supervision, it was agreed that the research questions be changed to allow for the analysis to pay closer attention to what the participants were reporting as being relevant to them rather than looking at the data through a narrow lens. Yardley's (2000) principles for assessing the quality of qualitative research includes the importance of demonstrating 'commitment and rigour' and 'sensitivity to context' during the research process. On reflection, I perceive that if I had analysed the data based on the original research questions then the findings would not have reflected participants' lived

experiences. Much of the experiences that they described in the transcripts would have been lost.

Around this time, I also began to question the research paradigm I had chosen of critical realism. I reflected that it suggested that there was a 'truth' to be found and a reality of AP that exists. This paradigm does not seem to reflect the complexities of the AP sector that participants were describing, nor that I experienced engaging with the extant literature. Through supervision, it was decided that a relativist ontological position better reflected the nature of the phenomenon being explored. Relativism holds the view that reality is multiple rather than claiming there is a single knowable reality. It was not my intention to uncover a single truth about what it is like to be placed in the AP sector. I felt that individuals' realities differed from person to person and were rooted in their unique social experiences and interpretation of those experiences (Braun and Clarke, 2013).

The research question was therefore amended to reflect my commitment to staying curious and open. The final research question was:

- How might young people be making sense of their experiences in the Welsh AP sector?

3.7 Identifying the research settings

Prior to recruiting participants, I met with the LA AP Coordinator to learn about the AP available in the area. Due to the initial research questions focusing on exploring the experiences of learners attending multiple provisions, it was important that potential participants were attending more than one AP. The participants were recruited using purposive sampling (Smith, 2003), largely due to the time restraints of the project.

3.8 Accessing participants

A key challenge faced in the research was gaining access to young people in the AP sector. On a practical level, being an outsider made it harder to access participants. Macnab, Visser and Daniels (2007) spoke of the difficulties that can be faced when looking to engage hard to reach participants, particularly if provisions perceive that the research involves any form of analysing individual settings. It was never the research aim to evaluate individual settings and the researcher endeavoured to get this message out

into the AP sector at the earliest opportunity. This was done through word of mouth via Educational Psychologists (EPs) in the LA service and through being clear in the initial contact with stakeholders. As the research unfolded, it became important to focus on building relationships with staff in each setting and work collaboratively with them to recruit participants and schedule interviews.

3.9 Gaining consent

A further potential barrier to successful recruitment was obtaining parent/carer consent for young people to take part. This could have been because parents were also disengaged from education; the young person's attendance was highly sporadic or communication between AP settings and parents had broken down meaning communication was limited. Fortunately, this challenge had been anticipated and considered in the design of the research meaning that the first point of contact with parents was from the LA AP Coordinator. They had already established trusting relationships with the parents. All but one of the initial parents, who were contacted, gave consent for their child to take part if they wished.

It was also important for the young people themselves to have the opportunity to give their consent and that this consent was based on a sound understanding of the research and their role in it (Sabar & Sabar Ben-Yehoshua, 2017). This was ensured by taking time before each interview to explain the purpose of the project and obtain consent from the young people that they were happy to take part. Taking this approach resulted in one young person deciding that they did not want to participate because they did not want to be out of class for long.

Sabar and Sabar Ben-Yehoshua (2017) highlighted the potential challenges of obtaining informed consent when qualitative research can change focus and course during the analysis and write up. As discussed earlier in this paper, the research questions and research paradigm were amended in this research. The changes were made after participants had consented to take part. I considered the possible implications of these changes for participants during supervision and felt that because the changes were nuances to questions it was ethical to continue on with the research.

4. CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE AND DISSEMINATION

This section offers some consideration to the potential usefulness and applications of the research findings. The research has cautiously offered findings and interpretations that highlight that how young people make sense of their AP experiences may be influenced by wider societal discourse about AP. It is hoped that the unique ideas relating to social constructionism and social identity theory provide a new contribution to the ongoing review and development of the AP sector in Wales.

4.1 What is useful research?

It could be said that this research stands apart from previous research as there is a commitment to trying to make sense of how a small group of young people are experiencing AP in its current form. There is an idiographic commitment to looking deeply at and appreciating each young persons' account of their experiences, without a desire to generalise findings. During the construction of my research proposal, it was questioned whether an IPA analysis of learners' experiences would have any impact on professional practice. It was suggested that I ought to be using the views of young people to develop a tool to help other EPs elicit the views of young people in AP- giving them a voice.

Following this critique of the intended research direction, I spent time reflecting on the questions: 'what is useful research?' and 'does all good research have a tangible end product?' Overall, I feel that in-depth, psychological interpretation of each participants' account is important and is in line with the social constructionist paradigm that the research has adopted. The research is not intended to offer any positivist, clear cut, factual findings based on an observed or uncovered reality. Arguably, attempting to stay close to the offerings of the young people shows a commitment to valuing their voices.

The tentative findings are perhaps a reflection of the messiness and lack of clarity found in the AP sector in general. The research set out to enable readers a medium through which they can consider multiple perspectives and reflect on the AP sector and their own future practice. I feel that this has been achieved. Through further consideration of what

it may be like to walk in the shoes of young people placed in AP, I believe that something new and unexpected about the phenomenon has emerged.

4.2 Commitment to inductive analysis

This research has strived to demonstrate a commitment to inductive analysis; as much as possible allowing the participants' voices to steer the direction of the findings. It is hoped that this offers something new to the dominant deductive extant studies. With this in mind, the major literature review was largely written after the data analysis. It is acknowledged that there are elements of inductive and deductive analysis in the final results as I brought my own conscious and sub-conscious pre-conceptions and lived experiences to the research design and process.

Throughout the analysis, I was conscious of the challenges of being able to bracket off my own existing knowledge and experiences in order to remain close to the participants' lived experiences. Pre-assumptions and biases conscious and unconscious are based on positionality (Mullings, 1999) and I took time to reflect on what pre-assumptions or biases I may hold. This reflection was facilitated through regular supervision, use of a research diary and adhering to the stages of IPA offered by Smith et al., (2009).

4.3 Describing AP settings

Detailed descriptions and inspection ratings for the AP settings participants attended have not been provided within the research for several reasons. Firstly, this information was not available to myself as the researcher. This was an intentional decision as the focus of the analysis was how young people experience the AP sector rather than evaluating settings. This separates the research from extant literature, which has tended to focus on AP that is said to be examples of good practice.

Another reason more detailed descriptions were omitted was to protect the identity of participants and individual settings. A possible critique of this stance is that the lack of information about the settings makes it difficult for readers to make links between participants' experiences and the type of AP they attend. I acknowledge that this may well have been an interesting point for readers to be able to consider and may be an avenue for future research.

4.4 Implications for practice

Several implications are cautiously offered for educational professionals to consider in relation to their own existing professional and experiential knowledge. Whilst specific implications are described in part 2 of the thesis. I also cautiously wondered whether future dialogue and reflection in the education sector among professionals could think about why the discourses related to the AP sector seem to relate to deficits in young people. What purpose might a dominant within person deficit discourse serve in terms of maintaining the current status quo in the AP sector? Does this move away from considering the situational and systemic factors in more detail that have perhaps led to young people not being successful in mainstream education? What might the wider implications be for mainstream education if the discourse were to change about the AP sector and those who attend? I feel that these questions are difficult to answer, but arguably worthwhile to consider.

4.5 Dissemination

Dissemination can be defined as “*the spreading of awareness of research findings to those outside the research team*” (Hughes, 2003, p.21). Alderson and Morrow (2011) asked whether researchers have an ethical duty to make their research findings known to others in order to sow seeds for change. Arguably given the Welsh AP sector’s ongoing journey of review, it is pertinent to consider how the findings of this research can support this work. In terms of the findings reaching those who can influence the future direction of AP policy in Wales, it would be particularly useful for the Children’s Commissioner in Wales; the Children and Young People Education Committee and the Cabinet Secretary for Education to have sight of the research.

When thinking about disseminating findings, Hughes (2003) highlighted the ontological and epistemological issues relating to what can be known and how we might know. This research was conducted within a relativist and social constructionist paradigm (see figure 3 and table 24). The findings represent one possible interpretation and implications are offered to readers to aid their personal thinking and reflection on the AP sector. It is also necessary to consider that audiences will interpret the research in unique ways as individuals making sense of the findings.

In relation to sharing the findings with those more directly involved in the research, a written summary of the research (see appendix S) will be sent to young people and parents/carers. This document will also be shared with the LA AP Coordinator; Principle Educational Psychologist and the Head teachers of AP settings participants attended. In addition, a copy of the full thesis document will be offered to these LA professionals to be able to consider the findings and implications in further detail.

Given the implications discussed for EPs, it would be useful for the findings to be discussed within the LA Educational Psychology Teams to enable them to reflect on personal development and professional practice. Part 2 of this thesis could provide a thought provoking catalyst for peer or individual supervision (Dunsmuir & Leadbetter, 2010).

Finally, I also think it is important that any future opportunities to publish or present the research to professional audiences are taken up. Thereby creating further opportunities to reflect on discourses and beliefs about AP amongst professionals. It is through opening dialogues about AP that new ways forward can be considered.

5. CRITICAL ACCOUNT OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE RESEARCH PRACTITIONER

The final section relates to the influence that this research has had on my own development as a researcher and professional practitioner.

5.1 Personal challenges

My commitment to exploring the lived experiences of young people in the AP sector raised a significant personal challenge for me as a researcher. Having spent much of my career, interacting with primary aged learners, I knew that I felt uncomfortable with the thought of interacting with older learners. In particular, discussing potentially sensitive topics with them and visiting provisions where there may be high levels of externalised challenging behaviours. Developing my confidence and skills was something that I wished to focus on to improve my wider professional practice. I therefore saw the research as a great opportunity to challenge myself on both academic and personal levels.

Particularly during the data collection phase, I made use of peer support and de-briefs after each interview to reflect on how I felt the interactions had been and what I may be able to improve upon. Overall, conducting this research has taught me that it is perhaps the socially constructed narratives about learners, who experience SEBD and the nature of AP that led me to feel uncomfortable rather than the actions of young people themselves. This is something that I think will remain with me as I continue my journey as an EP.

5.2 Conducting research as an outsider

In conducting this research, I was aware that I was trying to make sense of a phenomenon and group of young people, which I was not a member of. I did not share an identity, language or experiential base with participants (Asselin, 2003) and felt very much like an outsider in their world. Giorgi and Giorgi (2003) suggested that *“when we encounter familiar objects we tend to see them through familiar eyes and thus often miss seeing novel features of familiar situations”* (p.249). The AP sector was unfamiliar to me and I was hopeful that something new about the phenomenon would emerge.

When conducting interviews with young people, I wondered what sense they made of me trying to understand their experiences and what they may have perceived my motives as being. In order to consider this in more detail, I consulted literature to try and make sense of the potential impacts of conducting research as an outsider vs being an insider (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). Perhaps participants may have felt able to be more open if I was viewed as an insider, but perhaps being an outsider meant that they felt free to talk about the AP sector without fear of potential repercussions.

I also questioned my own capacity to appreciate their experiences as they felt so far removed from anything I had ever experienced in school. I found comfort in the words of Dwyer & Buckle (2009), who suggest that *“the core ingredient is not insider or outsider status but an ability to be open, authentic, honest and deeply interested in the experience of one’s research participants, and committed to accurately and adequately representing their experience”* (p.59). I believe that this is relevant to all areas of EP practice and will endeavour to remain deeply interested in the experiences of service users.

6. CLOSING COMMENTS

On a final note, this research has reinforced my views that giving a voice to young people can be invaluable. Participants demonstrated openness; reflection and an astute awareness of the happenings in the systems around them. This reflection is something I feel is important to take forward as an EP.

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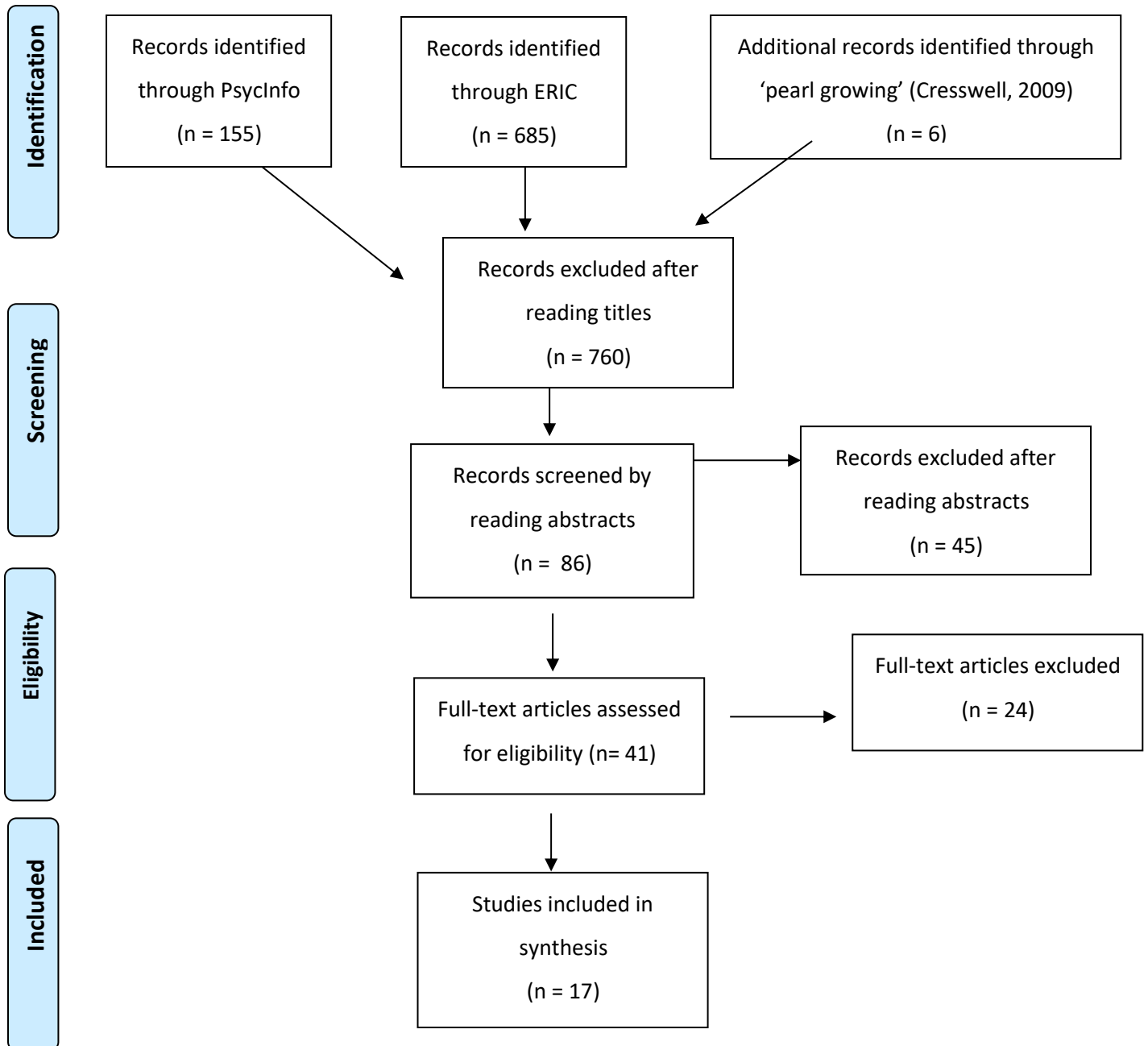
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Appendix A: Search information including PRISMA flow diagram

Database	Boolean Search terms *was used as a truncation symbol	Number of results
PsychINFO	Set A: Alternative provision; alternative education; alternative educational provision; alternative school; bespoke package; personalised curriculum; learner pathway; learning pathway; alternative program; dual placement; alternative curriculum; shared placement; PRU; pupil referral unit; multiple provision;	1,835
	Set B: Pupil view; pupil perspective; pupil voice; learner experience; learner view: learner perspective; student experience; learner voice; educational experience; educational stories; student perception; learner perception; child voice; adolescent experience; young people view: young people perception; young people experience; young people stories	55,478
	Set A 'and' Set B	155
ERIC	Set A 'and' Set B	685

Adaptation of PRISMA Flow Diagram (Liberati et al., 2009)



Appendix B: Overview of key studies

Focus	Author & Title	Year	Aims (What were the YP asked?)	Sample/size	Method (How were they asked?)	Findings (What did the YP say?)
<p>Focused on the way the young people drew on resources and strengths from their past when constructing a story about their future.</p> <p>Findings differ to those in 'possible selves' study and are more positive Authors argue the YP have learnt from past mistakes- different to Jalali who suggests external locus of control</p>	<p>Telis-James, C & Fox, M. "Positive Narratives". The stories young people with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD) tell about their futures. Educational</p>	2016	<p>YP were asked to reflect on their future, their past, what had helped them get through past life events and how those strengths and resources will help them in the future</p>	<p>8 YP 14-16 year olds London borough</p>	<p>Life stories</p> <p>Categorical content analysis</p> <p>Narrative oriented inquiry</p>	<p>YP have and can identify strengths and resources in themselves, schools, family and community</p> <p>Relationships, feelings of agency, learning opportunities relevant for future,</p>
<p>Evaluating the effectiveness of one AP college to improve the programme and support mainstream schools to adopt more inclusive and preventative practices</p> <p>Explored the impact of different ecosystems on YPs' disengagement/re-engagement with mainstream</p>	<p>Cajic-Seigneur, M., & Hodgson, A. Alternative educational provision in an area of deprivation in London.</p>	2016	<p>Questions to explore effectiveness of AP, strengths weaknesses, reasons for disengagement and progression, impact of AP on individuals</p>	<p>10 15-16 year olds in one setting</p> <p>London</p> <p>Staff at AP</p>	<p>Mixed methods</p> <p>Case study over period of 7 years</p> <p>Analysis of AP records</p> <p>Group discussions with staff of AP</p> <p>Semi-structured interviews with managers of AP and 10 YP</p> <p>Student questionnaires</p>	<p>AP curriculum does make difference. Factors across the ecosystems impact engagement:</p> <p>Relationships with teachers, support, being treated like adults, relevant qualifications for post 16 options, positive recognition for hard work, smaller classes, different teaching style, increased freedom, curriculum mix of academic and vocational</p> <p>Staff identified multi-agency working</p>

<p>Explored what instructional practices led to reengagement in learning using theories of self-regulated learning as a lens</p> <p>Drew from a model of student engagement by Reschly and Christenson (2012)</p>	<p>Putwain, D., Nicholson, L., & Edwards, J. Hard to reach and hard to teach: supporting the self-regulation of learning in an alternative provision secondary school.</p>	<p>2016</p>	<p>What instructional practices help YP to learn?</p>	<p>AP free school</p> <p>35 YP 23 male 12 female</p> <p>14-16 years</p> <p>37 staff</p>	<p>IPA</p> <p>3 types of data: classroom observation, semi-structured interviews with YP and interviews with staff</p>	<p>Supportive instructional environment: Small class, individualised learning, YP found it hard to re-engage with learning, increased self-efficacy when teachers do not assume YP can self-regulate learning</p>
<p>Exploring factors that lead to successful progression from AP FE into mainstream colleges.</p> <p>Could be viewed as engagement</p> <p>Offers different thinking about future thinking and motivation than the possible selves study and Jalali which may be linked to age of participants?</p>	<p>Hamilton, P & Morgan, G. An exploration of the factors that lead to the successful progression of students in alternative provision.</p>	<p>2018</p>	<p>Questions to explore what YP feel assisted their progression</p>	<p>8 YP between 16-18 who had successfully progressed from AP FE into mainstream minimum of 3 years ago Greater Manchester, England</p>	<p>semi-structured interviews Thematic analysis. Appreciative enquiry</p> <p>Inductive and deductive- themes were looked for relating to Self-determination theory</p>	<p>Full, accessible and diverse curriculum, positive and holistic learning environment, student motivation; staff understanding of SEBD, more adult environment.</p> <p>Global theme: supportive and personalised learning</p>

<p>Disabled boys social networks in college- their experiences and responses to their presence</p>	<p>Johnson, C., & Bradford, S. Alternative spaces of failure. Disabled 'bad boys' in alternative further education provision</p>	<p>2019</p>	<p>Questions to explore: how YP understood their AP careers, how did they manage day-day life in AP, how was their sense of agency, their capacity to have influences in what was occurring around them?</p>	<p>Group of boys 14-16 years Full time AP within mainstream college</p>	<p>Ethnographic Observations in class, analysis of materials and key documents, spending time in classes, observing day to day life Semi-structured interviews Focus groups- (30 participants) Thematic analysis</p>	<p>YP experienced lack of support, low trust and disregard from mainstream peers and some AP professionals Difficulties maintaining identity in AP, evidence of YP resisting stigmatising practice</p> <p>Author questioned the effectiveness of AP for some YP</p>
<p>Exploring YPs' experiences of exclusion and AP through childrens' rights lens</p>	<p>McCluskey, G., Riddell, S., & Weedon, E. Children's rights, school exclusion and alternative educational provision.</p>	<p>2015</p>	<p>Welsh large scale study seeking to understand YP, families and professionals experiences of exclusion and AP</p>		<p>Survey, interviews, document analysis</p>	<p>Many YP praised AP when comparing to mainstream</p> <p>Relationships, respect, opportunities to achieve, being listened to and supported, alleviating family tensions</p> <p>Issues identified from other participants contrast positive views of YP: problematic variation in terminology, variation in quality of AP, referral processes, management, behaviour management concerns</p>
<p>Evaluation of secondary personalised learning AP What factors made a difference to impact and what part did personalised learning play in outcomes? Designed to inform future intervention/AP Which factors influence success?</p>	<p>Ewen, M., & Topping, K. Personalised learning for young people with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties.</p>	<p>2012</p>		<p>52 participants- YP, parents and AP stakeholders</p>	<p>Mixed methods</p> <p>Exclusion, attendance, attainment data for 30 YP</p> <p>Focus groups- 5 YP semi-structured interviews-6 YP, 5 parents, 13 staff, 3 stakeholders self-report questionnaires- 37 stakeholders</p>	<p>Focus group themes: curriculum and structure, tutorials, staff-young people relationships and family relationships.</p>

Exploring the nature of AP in England and effect of AP	Malcolm, A. Turning points in a qualitatively different social space: young adults' reflections of alternative provision.	2019	Young adult reflections on experiences of exclusion, time in AP and impact of attending AP.	18 participants in early to mid-20s who had previously attended AP	Retrospective life history interviews from which individual case studies were developed and thematic analysis. Data is considered through the lens of Hodkinson's Careership Theory	AP is frequently a turning point for YP. Positive aspects: Relationships, flexibility re: behaviour and learning. Negative aspects: inappropriate learning; transitions. Impact: marginalisation, exclusion, positive changes
Girls' experiences in AP	Russell, L., & Thomson, P. Girls and gender in alternative education provision.	2011	Girls were asked how AP is for them. Most were attending part time.	57 YP interviewed as well as parents, staff, England Analysis of quantitative data	Part 1: used data from Joseph Rowntree Foundation funded research which aimed to map provision (Thomson & Russell, 2007). Part 2: 6 ethnographic case studies.	Sites selected by LA and were examples of 'good practice'
Identifying enablers and barriers to positive PRU outcomes/ engagement What do YP feel are the enablers and barriers to positive academic and social and emotional outcomes in PRUs?	Michael, S., Frederickson, N. Improving pupil referral unit outcomes: pupil perspectives	2013	What had helped them learn successfully, what had not been helpful/had got in the way of learning/what things have been done to support their behaviour/what had got in the way, what had been done to support emotional needs, ways in which is AP and support could be improved	16 YP ages 12-16 from PRUs in two LAs in London	Semi-structured interviews Thematic analysis	Enablers: Relationships; engaging curriculum; discipline; learning environment and personal qualities Barriers: disruptive behaviour; unfair treatment and failure to individualise the learning environment. Ideas for change: learning environment, flexibility, feeling understood and listened to

Comparing primary and secondary PRU pupil perspectives	Jalali, R., & Morgan, G. 'They won't let me back'. Comparing student perceptions across primary and secondary pupil referral units	2018	Questions about their attribution of difficulties, what helps them make progress, views about mainstream education and reintegration	13 YP aged 7-16 years across 3 PRUs in south-East England 5 secondary and 8 primary participants.	Semi-structured interviews and timeline of educational journeys IPA	8 themes: external attribution, need for equality, anger, external locus of control re: change, relationships, challenge, mainstream education and the self
Exploring hopes and aspirations of AP and mainstream YP	Mainwaring, D., & Hallam, S. 'Possible selves' of young people in a mainstream secondary school and a pupil referral unit: a comparison	2010	YP were asked how long they had attended the PRU, why they were attending, how they saw themselves in the future, what would you least like to happen to you in the future? Is anything impossible?	25 YP total (16 in a PRU) in year 11 inner London	Semi-structured interviews Deductive analysis considering existing possible selves concepts	Not all YP in AP were able to offer a positive future self and some who did not have strategic plans to achieve
Re-engagement Factors	Nicholson, L., & Putwain, D. Facilitating re-engagement in learning: A disengaged student perspective.	2015	YP were asked questions to elicit what they felt had facilitated their re-engagement to learning in PRU?	35 YP aged 14-16 years. Mixed male and female.	Semi-structured interviews with IPA	Positive student-staff relationships, low student-staff ratios, freedom, realising the value of education

<p>Evaluating and developing the school and curriculum</p> <p>Exploring digital methods of obtaining pupil voice</p>	<p>Nind, M., Boorman, G., & Clarke, G. Creating spaces to belong: listening to the voice of girls with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties through digital visual and narrative methods</p>	<p>2012</p>	<p>YP were asked to identify the best bits of school and areas of improvement To reflect on their education journey To identify what aims of school should be</p>	<p>3 girls</p>	<p>Digital technologies: video diaries, photo elicitation, comic educational diaries to explore journey through education with thematic analysis</p>	<p>Importance of space, relationships, community and belonging</p> <p>Makes links with identity also</p>
<p>Participatory collaborative evaluations of AP explored through a rights lens</p>	<p>Trotman, D., Enow, L., & Tucker, S. Young people and alternative provision: perspectives from participatory collaborative evaluations in three UK local authorities</p>	<p>2019</p>		<p>4 separate evaluations across 4 Local Authorities 200 YP aged 14-15 years, 30 stakeholders, 8 parents</p>	<p>Documentary analysis Semi-structured interviews</p>	<p>Positive value of multi-agency approaches</p> <p>Concerned about performative school culture</p>

Examined the processes of exclusion and the delivery, planning and commissioning of AP in Wales	McCluskey et al., evaluation	2013	Questions focused on YPs' experiences of exclusion, AP, curriculum, academic aspirations, discipline, support offered, availability of advocacy, opportunities for partaking in decision making	156 total 16 key informants 26 LA representatives 15 parents/carers 48 YP Other stakeholders	Analysis of documents and statistics Telephone interviews Semi-structured interviews 8 case studies of YP Themes identified	
Evaluation project of sports input to a PRU	Cullen, K & Monroe, J. Using positive relationships to engage the disengaged: An educational psychologist initiated project involving professional sports input to a pupil referral unit	2010	Evaluation project considered: implementation of sports input, successes and challenges and what was learnt for future ventures	Semi-structured interviews with 10 boys Phone interviews with parents Interviews with staff Regular consultation with coaches across the project Attendance/exclusion data pre/post sports intervention	Soft systems methodology Rich pictures Solution focused semi-structured interview	Attendance increased for some YP following sports input. Benefits: increased fitness and skills, regular football training, working as a team, contributed to motivations/sanctions Did not benefit all participants.

Appendix C: Consideration of validity of key studies using Yardley’s evaluation principles (2000)

Paper	Sensitivity to context	Transparency and coherence	Commitment and rigour	Impact and importance
McCluskey, G. Evaluation of exclusion and AP in Wales		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Study only conducted research in AP settings that were considered by LAs to be examples of ‘good practice’- likelihood of bias • Unclear how data was analysed and themes identified 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Large scale and included most Welsh LAs in some form but small sample of YP involved • Committed to exploring direct experiences of AP and exclusion • Opportunities to triangulate • Case studies offered deeper information about individuals 	
McCluskey, G., Riddell, S., & Weedon, E. Children’s rights, school exclusion and alternative educational provision.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Literature explores challenges of inclusion and inadequate practical implication of rights’ agenda. • Claims the study offers timely exploration of exclusion, AP and rights that fits within political agendas. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Study only conducted research in AP settings that were considered by LAs to be examples of ‘good practice’- likelihood of bias • Unclear how data was analysed and themes identified 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paper analyses a section of the findings from previous large scale evaluation of AP in Wales • Uses quantitative data to describe context of exclusions and patterns • Analysis looks first at the perspectives of YP before considering other participants/trends in Wales • Use of data exerts to support findings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Draws on previously collected data to offer new findings about childrens’ rights, exclusion and AP in Welsh context • Contributes to very limited body of research about AP in Wales
Malcolm, A. Turning points in a qualitatively different social space: young adults’ reflections of AP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Possible ethical issues of obtaining contact details of YP before they had consented • Sensitivity of topic and importance of building rapport with participants • Author reflects on his position and existing relationships 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of quotations to support findings • Semi-structured interviews with consistent introduction • Analysis conducted using software 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data is considered through the lens of Hodkinson’s Careership Theory • Recency effect of delayed data collection • In depth case studies were drawn up for individual participants • Difficult to identify key themes/findings in the narrative 	

<p>Ewen, M., & Topping, K. Personalised learning for young people with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Literature about personalised learning sets context for study No reference to ethical procedures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Description of sampling method Description of how codes were found Data excerpts included to support findings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No statistical analysis was carried out on the quantitative data Small sample of YP (13) less than half the cohort of learners Main points of focus group were validated with participants Piloted interviews to promote unbiased questions Data was triangulated between groups of participants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Difficult to generalise as evaluation of specific setting Likely to only impact specific provision the study was carried out in
<p>Michael, S., Frederickson, N. Improving pupil referral unit outcomes: pupil perspectives</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Literature provides overview of pupil voice within extant literature Describes how it intends to avoid limitations of other studies in same area Consideration of ethical issues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A more detailed breakdown of provisions attended would enable more links to be made. Deductive approach as researchers were looking for enablers and barriers to progress. Valuable information may have been discounted. Clear procedure Includes appropriate excerpts of YPs' view from data to evidence findings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strong commitment to exploring perceptions of YP Two Local Authorities Themes were validated with 3 participants to check interpretation of themes Interview schedule piloted with 2 YP Potential subjectivity related to what was seen to be an enabler and barrier Stages of analysis stated and described 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Offers practical recommendations for education practitioners about how to engage YP Offers some novel issues in AP from perspective of YP Limited generalisability Did not consider factors outside of the school context that may be barriers or enablers Unclear how the participants' views were used to inform practical changes in provisions
<p>Jalali, R., & Morgan, G. 'They won't let me back'. Comparing student perceptions across primary and secondary pupil referral units</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> IPA analysis demonstrates sensitivity to context and commitment to in depth analysis Gap in literature Uses visual mapping tool Differentiated data collection tools to suit age ranges Participants were chosen by PRU staff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Purposive sampling Clear research aim and research questions to fulfil aim Clear procedure to enable replication Little description of how each theme links to the data Lacks visual aid to understanding themes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Commitment to exploring perceptions of YP across age range Data from 3 PRUs Piloted study before proceeding Framework for analysis discussed Unclear about reoccurrence of themes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Offers new consideration of primary YPs' perspectives in AP Suggests that AP may exacerbate mental health difficulties Raises important questions Limited generalisability

<p>Mainwaring, D., & Hallam, S. ‘Possible selves’ of young people in a mainstream secondary school and a pupil referral unit: a comparison</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Literature defines and explores the psychological concept of ‘possible selves’ Participants were chosen by the Local Authority, unclear what the inclusion criteria was. Informed consent from individual participants at start of interview. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Deductive analysis as it was led by pre-existing concepts relating to ‘possible selves’ Details of analysis Frequent use of data exerts to evidence findings Clear what questions were asked in interview to collect data. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Commitment to exploring YPs’ perspectives Pilot interview was utilised and interview questions revised. Participants had opportunity to review their transcripts increasing validity. Short interviews (20 mins) Small sample Unclear how researchers decided whether the positive and negative selves matched 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Offers new insights regarding links between ‘possible selves’ and motivation in YP in PRU. Highlights importance differences between perceptions of YP in mainstream and PRUs Offers practical approaches to increasing YPs’ aspirations Difficult to generalise from sample
<p>Nicholson, L., & Putwain, D. Facilitating re-engagement in learning: A disengaged student perspective</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> IPA demonstrates sensitivity to context and individual experiences Unclear what the researchers’ relationships are with setting or participants Unclear how ethical issues were managed. Relevant past re-engagement literature described with little critique. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clear research aims. Direct quotes from YP to support findings. Clear, but brief description of analysis steps Unclear how participants were sourced. Unclear what was asked of participants but states questions concerned affective, cognitive and behavioural engagement and academic progress. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Short interviews No detail regarding recurrence of themes across dataset Large sample for IPA perhaps lost idiographic nuances in analysis. Inductive analysis Clear focus on perspectives of YP Used quantitative data to show differences between participant groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All participants felt that they had reengaged with learning in AP- what about those in AP who have not? Adopts a different stance to previous research which has considered mainstream YP. Extended reengagement factors from those found previously. Research aim set in context of importance of re-engagement.

<p>Nind, M., Boorman, G., & Clarke, G. Creating spaces to belong: listening to the voice of girls with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties through digital visual and narrative methods</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data collection methods demonstrate sensitivity to participants. • Aware of potential for professional agenda and selective hearing of participants' voices. • Intends research to be with YP not on them. • Refers to detailed ethics protocol • Shows sensitivity to power dynamics 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unclear what the focus of the research was in terms of analysing the data. • No specific research questions • Unclear how participants were chosen. • Some use of data exerts to evidences findings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commitment to use of alternative technology to empower participants and gain meaningful data. • Clear focus on perspectives of YP • Presents views on use of data collection methods then thematic analysis • Small sample (3) and all female • Rich range of data led by participants • Idiographic analysis but limited exploration of 4 final themes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Goes beyond methods previously use to obtain participant voice using digital technologies. • Meaningful ways YP communicate. • Empowered participants • Unclear how their views informed change in the setting • Adds to the very limited body of research about girls' experiences of AP
<p>Trotman, D., Enow, L., & Tucker, S. Young people and alternative provision: perspectives from participatory-collaborative evaluations in three UK local authorities, <i>British Educational Research Journal</i>, 45(2), 219-237</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluations were commissioned by Local Authorities and impact/influence of this is unclear • Recognises AP as a potentially sensitive topic for YP and need for sensitivity • Lacks clarity about how authors previous study of risk links to current study 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear overall aim of research is evaluation but few details of each of the 4 evaluations beyond saying that designs were based on participatory collaborative evaluation • Criterion sampling and/or random and/or purposive sampling. • LA were involved in choosing provisions. • Unclear what participants were asked in interviews 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data gathered over 6 years. • 3 separate Local Authorities • Evaluations carried out over min. of 6 months • Not always clear which participant group has informed each finding despite stating views of YP are of central importance • Evaluation 1 did not take place in AP provision • Gender balance • Iterative data analysis • Combined data analysis of 4 evaluations makes it difficult to trace how findings came about • Returned to the data analysis to further refine themes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offers original thinking around super complexity as framework for explaining and understanding some of what young people experience in education

<p>Cullen, K & Monroe, J. Using positive relationships to engage the disengaged: An educational psychologist initiated project involving professional sports input to a pupil referral unit</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Researcher was an EP who had worked in the PRU before undertaking the research. • Unclear how this relationship was considered in the research. • Soft systems methodology and rich pictures highlights sensitivity to understanding context/systems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appreciative enquiry approach adopted • Clear design • Opportunity sample of 10 boys selected by staff- possible biases as to their suitability • Example interview questions • Perspectives of YP are explored. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Short interviews with YP (15 mins) • Rich pictures created from interview data gives depth of analysis. Example given. • Initial themes were shared with PRU staff then further themes elicited. • Analysis led by Local Authority needs in terms of evaluation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research conducted in 1 PRU Project carried out for short period • Evaluation of a national AP project 'Positive Futures'
<p>Russell, L., & Thomson, P. Girls and gender in alternative education provision.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positions current study in gap in AP literature • Literature makes interesting links with how girls typically form relationships • AP sites selected by LA as examples of good practice • Data is considered through the theoretical lens of discourse 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unclear how interviews were coded and themes formed states there has been a focus on 'discourse' • Very little direct voice of YP to support findings makes it difficult to see how conclusions were made • Unclear what the participants were asked 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spans across 2 LAs • Wide range of data types • 3 case studies of individual girls • Data seems to be used to evidence researcher's original arguments • 266 hours spent in AP sites • Not many girls participated in the research • Data was checked with participants if possible 	

<p>Johnson, C., & Bradford, S. Alternative spaces of failure. Disabled 'bad boys' in alternative further education provision</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ethnographic study shows sensitivity to context Unclear how the participants had proclaimed they were 'bad boys' Theoretical context of 'social capital theory' which is critically discussed and sociology of youth Ethical considerations are discussed Unclear how participants were selected 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coding was organised around theoretical interest in social capital and stigma Deductive approach 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conducted in one AP Committed to further understanding YPs' experiences in AP and their responses to it Year long study with data collection at start, middle and end of academic year Little exerts of data used Wide range of data collected- commitment to observing participants' everyday experiences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Offers new consideration of how disabled boys may be experiencing AP AP is within main college setting which differs from previous research Argues that the participant group are overrepresented in AP thus worthy of consideration Offers links with wider life experiences of stigma Limited generalisability beyond the one AP Exclusively male participants
<p>Hamilton, P & Morgan, G. An exploration of the factors that lead to the successful progression of students in alternative provision.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Theoretical lens of positive psychology and self-determination theory Appreciative inquiry approach to data collection to minimise potential of distress Recognition of potential impact of researcher's perspective/experiences Unclear how much of the responses related to their current college rather than previous AP experiences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coding was organised using thematic analysis Opportunity sampling- potential bias Clear recruitment/procedure steps Inductive and deductive (Self-determination theory themes were looked for) approaches used to analyse data Only one female participant 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Commitment to hearing voices of YP who have SEBD Triangulation of data with participants Appreciative enquiry Small sample Two colleges Short interviews 19-28 mins Codes were reviewed by a peer Justifies how themes were determined to be 'important' 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Offers interesting thinking about how self-determination theory relates to AP experiences Highlights importance of findings being shared with participants Context specific findings 16-18 year olds

<p>Putwain, D., Nicholson, L., & Edwards, J. Hard to reach and hard to teach: supporting the self-regulation of learning in an alternative provision secondary school.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deductive research through the lens of theories of self-regulated learning theory though researchers say the analysis of bottom up • IPA demonstrates sensitivity to context and participants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Findings are summarised and it is not clear what has been voiced by YP and what has been said by staff. • Very few quotes to support points. • Existing theory regarding student engagement was used to design questions • Description of how classroom observations were designed • Data coding described 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focused on one AP setting only • Data collected over month period at least 1 one of each of the 3 AP sites • Commitment to exploring lived experiences of YP • Range of data sources • Little attention given to idiographic experiences in analysis perhaps due to too large samples for IPA 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficult to generalise beyond one AP free school context • Looks specifically at instructional practices within AP that facilitate engagement • Asks previously disengaged YP about engagement rather than YP who were generally engaged
<p>Telis-James, C & Fox, M. “Positive Narratives”. The stories young people with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD) tell about their futures. Educational</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Future selves are explored through stories YP tell about their lives • Positive psychology and narrative psychology lens that is continued throughout the study • Narrative oriented inquiry • Sensitivity to context- strengths based lens 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 participants stories are shown to evidence findings • Epistemological stance is clear and consistent • Categorical content analysis clearly described 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data collection methods- life stories seem engaging for participants • Commitment to exploring perspectives of YP 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offers suggestion that YP have range of strengths and resources when asked engaging questions • Narrative psychology offers practical implications for education professionals • Findings encourage thinking about possibility of change for YP who have SEBD
<p>Cajic-Seigneur, M., & Hodgson, A. Alternative educational provision in an area of deprivation in London.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory lens • Context for research is positioned within the need to better understand 14-19 provision/curriculum • Borough of London with high level of NEET presents rationale for research • Ethical issues considered 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unclear how AP documents were analysed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commitment to considering the wider system interactions upon YP in AP • 7 year in depth data collection • Case study of the AP also used subject studies from individual YP • Range of data collection methods to explore range of ecosystems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How can causality be proven? • Bronfenbrenner provides a framework to focus thinking about possible interventions at different levels

Appendix D: Key themes found in literature

Key themes	Relevant studies
Importance of relationships	Thomson & Pennacchia, 2016; Nind, Boorman & Clarke, 2012; Hart, 2013; Michael & Frederickson, 2013; McCluskey et al., 2015; Cajic-Seigneur & Hodgson, 2016; Nicholson & Putwain, 2016; Putwain et al., 2016; Ewen & Topping, 2012; Jalali & Morgan, 2018; Hamilton & Morgan, 2018; Cullen & Monroe, 2010; TellisJames & Fox, 2016; Johnston & Bradford, 2019; Malcolm, 2019
A sense of belonging	Nind, Boorman & Clarke, 2012; Nicholson & Putwain, 2016; Jalali & Morgan, 2018; TellisJames & Fox, 2016
Staff managing behaviour	Nind, Boorman & Clarke, 2012; Thomson & Pennacchia, 2016; McCluskey et al., 2015; CajicSeigneur & Hodgson, 2016; Hamilton & Morgan, 2018
A personalised curriculum	Thomson & Pennacchia, 2016; Hart, 2013; Russell & Thomson, 2011; Michael & Frederickson, 2013; McCluskey et al., 2015; Cajic-Seigneur & Hodgson, 2016; Trotman et al., 2019; Nicholson & Putwain, 2016; Putwain et al., 2016; Ewen & Topping, 2012; Jalali & Morgan, 2018; Hamilton & Morgan, 2018; Cullen & Monroe, 2010; Tellis-James & Fox, 2016; Malcolm, 2019
School environment	Nind, Boorman & Clarke, 2012; Thomson & Pennacchia, 2016; Hart, 2013; Michael & Frederickson, 2013; Cajic-Seigneur & Hodgson, 2016; Trotman et al., 2019; Nicholson & Putwain, 2016; Putwain et al., 2016; Hamilton & Morgan, 2018;
Motivation/engagement	Nind, Boorman & Clarke, 2012; Hart, 2013; McCluskey et al., 2015; Cajic-Seigneur & Hodgson, 2016; Trotman et al., 2019; Nicholson & Putwain, 2016; Putwain et al., 2016; Ewen & Topping, 2012; Jalali & Morgan, 2018; Hamilton & Morgan, 2018; Cullen & Monroe, 2010; Tellis-James & Fox, 2016
Hopes and aspirations	Nind, Boorman & Clarke, 2012; Jalali & Morgan, 2018; Hamilton & Morgan, 2018; Mainwaring & Hallam, 2010; Tellis-James & Fox, 2016
Marginalisation	Nind, Boorman & Clarke, 2012; Thomson & Pennacchia, 2016

Appendix E: Interview schedule

Before the interview:

Introduction

Thank you for agreeing to help me with this research project. Today we are going to talk about your experiences of education in (AP name). Lots of adults have spoken about AP before but this research wants to hear from young people themselves who are experiencing being educated in AP. There is nothing right or wrong that you should or should not say. **Go through the young person's consent form.** ☐ I will record the conversation so that I can listen to it again and think about the important points that have been made. The recording will be stored for 2 weeks then I will write it (like an anonymous script) after that it will be destroyed.

- If anything is not clear or you feel uncomfortable, please stop me at any time.
- Last but not least, the interview should take no more than 1 hour. If you need a break at any time please let me know. Are you ok to carry on with the interview now? **Have they signed the consent form?**

Interview:

Demographic questions

1. How old are you?
2. How long have you been coming to (AP name)?
3. What is your weekly timetable of lessons/settings?
4. Have you been to any other places for your education/schooling?

Main questions

5. Can you tell me why you think you are educated here? Did you play a part in the decision making?
6. What is it like for you here?
7. What are your strengths/talents?
8. Can you tell me about your ambitions/hopes for the future?
9. What support might you need to achieve your ambitions/hopes?
10. Do you think that being in AP affects other people's views of you? How?
11. Do you have any thoughts about what you might like to change about your current experiences of education?

Concluding question

12. Is there anything else you would like to tell me?

Possible prompts:

Can you tell me more about that? What happened next?

How did you feel?

What do you mean by?

Can you give me an example of that?

How did that make you feel?

How was that for you?

Appendix F- Gatekeeper letter to Local Authority Lead



Dear Contact,

As part of my doctorate, I am completing a research project exploring young peoples' experiences of attending alternative provisions. This research will be carried out on behalf of Cardiff University.

The project's working title is: 'An interpretive phenomenological analysis of the perspectives of young people who are educated in alternative school provisions'.

I am writing to enquire whether you would be willing to allow young people between the ages of 13 and 16 years who are attending two or more alternative provisions within the Local Authority to volunteer to participate in this research. Should you agree, I would look to send parents a copy of the information letter and consent form for them to consider as soon as possible. I would like to speak to a maximum of 9 young people for up to approximately one hour. During that time, I will ask a series of questions to elicit their perceptions and experiences of the alternative education. The aim of the research is not to evaluate individual education settings as this have been previously explored in the literature, but to gain a deeper, qualitative understanding of how young people experience alternative provision.

Taking part in this research is voluntary and the participants and their parents will be informed that they can withdraw at any time. Everything that is discussed will be recorded via voice recorder and held confidentially by myself for a period of two weeks. During those two weeks the participants will be able to access their data and/or request that the data is destroyed. The information will be transcribed and anonymised so that no one person can be identified directly. Once transcribed, the initial recording will be deleted and it will no longer be possible to access the individual data.

The information obtained from the interviews will be analysed to explore any themes. This data will be written up as part of a report for my doctoral studies.

Many thanks in advance for your consideration of this project. Please let me know if you require further information. This project is being supervised by a professional tutor on the Doctorate of Educational Psychology course at Cardiff University, Dale Bartle.

Kind Regards,

Lauren Charles-Nelson
Researcher
School of Psychology, Cardiff University
Charles-nelsonl@cardiff.ac.uk

Dr Dale Bartle
Research Supervisor (DEdPsy)
School of Psychology, Cardiff University
BartleD@cardiff.ac.uk

School of Psychology Research Ethics Committee
Cardiff University
Tower Building
70 Park Place 029
208 70360

Appendix G: Information for Participants (young people)

My name is Lauren Charles-Nelson and I am a Researcher at Cardiff University. As part of my studies, I am completing a research project to learn about young peoples' experiences of going to alternative education settings rather than mainstream schools.

For my project, I am hoping to be able to speak to young people to hear their stories and views about education. To do this, I have written to the parents/carers of young people like you. Participation in this project is voluntary. This means that do not have to take part and if you do take part then you do not have to answer a question if you do not want to.



Why you might take part? It is important to listen to the views of young people and there is not a lot of research which has asked young people what they think about attending alternative models of school. The findings of this project may be of interest to adults who work in education supporting young people e.g. Educational Psychologists and Local Authorities who have a wider role in organising education settings.

What next? If you decide that you want to take part then we will meet at ACT or your home and have a chat about how things are in school for you. It should not take longer than approximately 1 hour. It will be a time for you to share your views about your current school experience. There are no right or wrong answers.

The discussion that we have will be recorded using a voice recorder and held confidentially by myself for a period of two weeks. During that two weeks, you will be able to access your data and/or request that your data is destroyed. Your information will be transcribed and anonymised so that you and the education setting will not be able to be identified directly. Once transcribed, the initial recording will be deleted and it will no longer be possible to access your individual data.

The information that you provide will be analysed to explore any themes. This will be written up as part of a report for my doctoral studies. It will not be possible to identify individual participants or schools in the report. If you would like to ask any questions about the study or taking part you can contact me directly or my supervisor, Dale Bartle or the Research Ethics Committee using the contact details below. Thank you for taking the time to read this information.

Kind Regards,

Lauren Charles-Nelson
Researcher
School of Psychology, Cardiff University
Charles-nelsonl@cardiff.ac.uk

Dr Dale Bartle
Research Supervisor (DEdPsy)
School of Psychology, Cardiff University
BartleD@cardiff.ac.uk

School of Psychology Research Ethics Committee
Cardiff University
Tower Building
70 Park Place 029 208 70360
<http://psych.cf.ac.uk/aboutus/ethics.htm>
|

Appendix H: Consent Form for Young People



By consenting to take part in this research project, I understand that:

- A small group of young people will be chosen to take part on a first come, first served basis.

If I am chosen to take part, I will:

- Be able to meet Lauren Charles-Nelson (Researcher) during one of my learning sessions before the day of the interview to get to know her.
- I will have an interview with Lauren Charles-Nelson about my experiences of alternative education. This will take up to approximately 1 hour.
- Taking part is voluntary. I do not have to take part if I do not want to. I can leave the interview or not answer a question at any time, without giving a reason.
- Any information that I share during the interview will be recorded via a voice recorder and held confidentially, so that only Lauren Charles-Nelson (researcher) can trace this information back to me
- The Local Authority will not have access to data that can identify me or any of my education settings.
- My interview data will be anonymised within two weeks of the interview taking place and after this point no-one will be able to trace the information back to me. After two weeks, the recording will be deleted/destroyed.
- If I share information suggesting that me or other people are at risk of significant harm that information will be shared with my parents or carers and any relevant agencies.
- I can ask for the information to be deleted/destroyed at any time up until the data has been anonymised (2 weeks after the interview).
- The information I share will form part of an anonymised research paper, which will be submitted to Cardiff University as part of the researcher's training requirements. It may also be presented and offered for publication in research journals.
- A short, anonymised summary of the research project may also be given to the Local Authority and any other interested stake holders including parents and young people.
- If I want to talk to someone about the study or make a complaint, I can contact Lauren Charles-Nelson (Researcher) or Dr Dale Bartle (Research Supervisor) or School of Psychology Research Ethics Committee.
- At the end of the project, I will be provided with additional information and feedback about the purpose of the project.

I _____ agree to take part in this research project with Lauren Charles-Nelson, Researcher at Cardiff University.

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Lauren Charles-Nelson
Researcher
School of Psychology, Cardiff University
Charles-nelsonl@cardiff.ac.uk

Dr Dale Bartle
Research Supervisor (DEdPsy)
School of Psychology, Cardiff University
BartleD@cardiff.ac.uk

School of Psychology Research Ethics Committee
Cardiff University
Tower Building
70 Park Place
Cardiff
029 208 70360
psychethics@cardiff.ac.uk
<http://psych.cf.ac.uk/aboutus/ethics.html>

Appendix I: Information for parents/carers

Dear Parent or carer,

My name is Lauren Charles-Nelson and I am a Trainee Educational Psychologist currently on placement in xxxxx Local Authority Educational Psychology Service.

As part of my doctoral course requirements, I am carrying out a research project exploring the experiences of young people, who are attending alternative education settings including Positive Futures and ACT. I would like to extend an invitation to xxxxx to participate in this short piece of research.



Description of Research

The aim of the research is to listen to the views of young people regarding their real experiences of attending alternative education settings. The information that the young people share during the project will be analysed to explore any themes and the project will be written up as a thesis for my doctoral studies. The project write-up will be anonymised to protect the identity of individual participants, families and education settings.

What participating will involve

If xxxxx decides that they would like to take part in the project, an interview would be arranged at a time to suit them at one of their education settings or their home. The interview would take up to approximately one hour and can take place during the normal hours that they attend education. They would also have an opportunity to informally meet me in the setting before the day of the interview.

During the interview, they will be invited to speak freely about their experiences of attending alternative education settings. There are no wrong or right answers. The important part of the research is that the thoughts and views of the young people are truly heard and they are free to speak as they wish.

Potential Benefits

By analysing the information that the young people share, the researcher will look to gain an in-depth perspective of how some young people may be experiencing this type of schooling. The findings may be of interest to those who work in education supporting young people e.g. Educational Psychologists and Local Authorities who have a wider role in organising education provision.

Potential Risks

Whilst it is not anticipated that there will be any negative effects from participating in this study, I will provide information regarding who participants can contact in the event of needing further support or if they wish to discuss their views further.

Protection of Confidentiality

The research will be undertaken on behalf of Cardiff University for academic purposes and I will not pass on any identifiable details or information to any organisation or Local Authority including xxxxxx.

The interviews will be recorded, using a digital audio recorder. Audio recordings will be stored confidentially on a secure computer. Young peoples' responses will be anonymised within 2 weeks of the interview taking place. The anonymised data may be used at a later date for summary reports and presentations.

As I am sure you are aware, in the event that participants disclose information suggesting that they or others are at risk of significant harm the Local Authority safeguarding processes will be followed.

Voluntary Participation

Participation in this research is completely voluntary and participants can choose to withdraw at any time up until two weeks after the interview has taken place, when the individual recordings will have been destroyed.

Next Steps

I have enclosed an information sheet for xxxxxx to read if they are interested in participating. If you give consent for them to take part in this research, please also read and complete the enclosed consent form and return it to xxxxxx, EOTAS Lead. Alternatively, we can arrange for the forms to be collected from you.

Participants will be chosen on a first come, first served basis. If the interview is to take place in ACT, a letter will be sent to them to request permission for the interview to take place in the setting. A date will be arranged with xxxxxx and you will be kept informed of these arrangements.

This project has been agreed by Cardiff University School of Psychology Research Ethics Committee. If you have any further questions, please contact either myself, Lauren Charles-Nelson; xxxxxx, EOTAS Lead; Dale Bartle, Research Supervisor or the Research Ethics Committee. Details are below:

Lauren Charles-Nelson
Researcher
School of Psychology, Cardiff University
Charles-nelsonl@cardiff.ac.uk

Dr Dale Bartle
Research Supervisor (DEdPsy)
School of Psychology, Cardiff University
BartleD@cardiff.ac.uk

School of Psychology Research Ethics Committee
Cardiff University
Tower Building
70 Park Place
Cardiff
029 208 70360
psychethics@cardiff.ac.uk
<http://psych.cf.ac.uk/aboutus/ethics.html>

Many thanks,

Lauren Charles-Nelson
Researcher at Cardiff University.

Appendix J: Parent or Carer Consent Form



By consenting for _____ to participate in this study, I understand that:

- Participants will be chosen on a first come, first served basis and will be informed as to whether they are required to take part.
- I understand that, if chosen to take part:
 - Participants will have an interview with Lauren Charles-Nelson, Researcher, about their experiences of attending alternative provision. This will take up to approximately 1 hour.
 - They will have the opportunity to informally meet Lauren Charles-Nelson (Researcher) during one of their learning sessions before the day of the interview.
 - Taking part is voluntary. This means that xxxxx does not have to take part if they do not want to or I do not wish them to. They can leave the interview or not answer a question at any time, without giving a reason.
 - Any information shared during the interview will be recorded via voice recorder and held confidentially, such that only Lauren Charles-Nelson (researcher) and her supervisor (Dale Bartle) can trace this information back to the interviewee.
 - The Local Authority will not have access to data that can identify participants as an individual nor any of their education settings.
 - Their interview data will be anonymised within two weeks of the interview taking place and that after this point no-one will be able to trace their information back to them. After two weeks, the recording will be deleted/destroyed.
 - In the event that participants disclose information suggesting that they or others are at risk of significant harm the researcher will follow Local Authority safe guarding processes.
 - xxxxxx and I can ask for the information they provide to be deleted/destroyed at any time up until the data has been anonymised (2 weeks after the interview).
 - The information participants provide will form part of an anonymised research paper, which will be submitted to Cardiff University as part of the researcher's Doctoral course requirements. It may also be presented and offered for publication in research journals.
 - A short, anonymised summary of the research project will be given to the Local Authority and any other interested stake holders including young people and parents.
 - If xxxxx or I want to talk to someone about the study or make a complaint, I can contact Lauren Charles-Nelson (Researcher), her supervisor, Dr Dale Bartle (Research Supervisor) or Cardiff University Research Ethics Committee.
 - At the end of the project, participants will be provided with additional information and feedback about the purpose of the project.

I _____ (print name) give consent for
_____ (print name) to take part in this research project with Lauren Charles-Nelson,
Researcher at Cardiff University.

Signed: _____

Print name: _____

Date: _____

Lauren Charles-Nelson
Researcher
School of Psychology, Cardiff University
Charles-nelsonl@cardiff.ac.uk

Dr Dale Bartle
Research Supervisor (DEdPsy)
School of Psychology, Cardiff University
BartleD@cardiff.ac.uk

School of Psychology Research Ethics Committee
Cardiff University
Tower Building
70 Park Place
Cardiff
029 208 70360
<http://psych.cf.ac.uk/aboutus/ethics.html>

Appendix K: Consent for AP settings

Dear provision lead,

My name is Lauren Charles-Nelson and I am a Trainee Educational Psychologist, who has been on placement in xxxx Local Authority Educational Psychology Service this year.

As part of my doctoral course requirements, I am carrying out a research project exploring the experiences of young people, who are attending alternative education settings. This research will be carried out on behalf of Cardiff University.

The project's working title is: 'An analysis of the perspectives of young people who are educated in multiple alternative school provisions'. The aim of the research is not to evaluate individual education settings as this has been previously explored in the literature, but to gain a deeper, qualitative understanding of how young people experience being educated in alternative provision.

xxxxxxx has contacted xxx parent/carers who are now considering the project information and whether the young people wish to take part in the project. I am writing to ask whether once consent has been obtained it would be possible for me to visit the setting to meet the young people and then carry out a short interview of up to approximately 1 hour with each of them. This would require me using a quiet room without interruptions.

If you are happy for me to visit the setting and are able to provide space for the interview, please could you contact either myself or xxxxxx to arrange a suitable date and time.

If you have any further questions regarding this research or would like to access to a summary of the completed research when it is finished, please contact myself, xxxx, EOTAS Lead, my research supervisor, Dale Bartle, or Cardiff University Research Ethics Committee. Our details are as follows:

Lauren Charles-Nelson
Researcher
School of Psychology, Cardiff University
Charles-nelsonl@cardiff.ac.uk

Dr Dale Bartle
Research Supervisor
School of Psychology, Cardiff University
BartleD@cardiff.ac.uk

School of Psychology Research Ethics Committee
Cardiff University
Tower Building
70 Park Place
Cardiff
029 208 70360
psychethics@cardiff.ac.uk
<http://psych.cf.ac.uk/aboutus/ethics.html>



Appendix L: IPA procedure as outlined in Smith, Flowers & Larkin (2009)

Step 1: Transcription of the data

- The interview data was transcribed verbatim from the audio recording taken during interview.
- Noted initial thoughts and comments about the data.

Step 2: Reading and re-reading the transcripts

- Listened to and read the transcript several times to actively engage with the participants' experiences.
- Initial observations or recalled powerful moments in interview were noted.

Step 3: Initial noting

- As outlined in Smith et al., (2009) a layered approach to this level of analysis was engaged in with the researcher making descriptive, linguistic and conceptual comments regarding the transcript (See appendix M for example)
- The researcher also used free association writing down whatever came to mind during and after the reading of the transcript.

Step 4: Developing emergent themes

- The researcher focused on the body of notes produced in step 3, attempting to reduce the volume of data whilst retaining its complexity by looking for interrelationships, connections and patterns between exploratory notes.
- As outlined in Smith et., (2009) care was taken to ensure such emergent themes linked to the original transcript and the participant's lived experience whilst acknowledging the researcher's role and interpretative nature of this stage of analysis.

Step 5: Making connections across emergent themes

- This stage involved creating a table to organize how emergent themes might fit together.
- Clusters of emergent themes were groups and given an overall superordinate them or subordinate theme. Smith et al's., (2009) processes of abstraction, subsumption, contextualization and polarization were used.

Step 6: Moving onto the next transcript

- Steps 1-5 were completed for each individual transcript so that the researcher had a table of superordinate, subordinate and emergent themes for each interview. This felt important to ensure each idiographic account was considered.

Step 7: Looking for patterns across the transcripts

- Once each transcript had been analysed individually, the researcher created a visual representation of all the superordinate, subordinate and themes for all participants to identify patterns and connections across the whole data set.
- A draft master table of themes for the group was created.

Step 8: Considering the recurrence of themes

- Working with a relatively large dataset for IPA, it was necessary to create a table to explore the frequency of the proposed master themes (appendix P). At this stage, themes that did not occur in at least 1/3 of the data were removed or merged into other themes.

Step 9: A final master table of superordinate, subordinate and themes was created (appendix O and figure 4).

Appendix M: Example transcript and initial notes and emergent themes

File: Transcript 1- Participant 1- Charlie

Date: 11/07/19

Length: 24 mins 11 seconds

Interviewer: Lauren Charles-Nelson

Notation used

[...]

(laughs)

(laughter)

(inaudible)

Brief non-verbal utterances, for example, erm

-

Meaning

redacted passages

Speaker laughing

Participant and research laughing

Word/brief phrase unclear

Non-verbal utterances are spelt as felt best

Cut off speech

Emergent Themes	Transcript	Initial Exploratory Comments
-----------------	------------	------------------------------

The content of this transcript has been removed to ensure that the confidentiality of participants is fully respected.

Appendix N: Subordinate and superordinate themes for participant 1- Charlie

Themes	Line	Key words
<p><i>Living in the here and now</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Valuing free time ➤ Aspirations for future ➤ Seeking family connection 	<p>40</p> <p>134</p> <p>146</p>	<p>but in these schools like you're allowed to have a fun day and then you go out</p> <p>I haven't thought about that</p> <p>haven't got really any plans just go home</p>
<p><i>A Sense of Wider Systems</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Hierarchy of behaviour in AP settings ➤ Movement within the AP sector ➤ Comparing experiences in different provisions ➤ Them and us comparisons 	<p>264</p> <p>254</p> <p>56</p> <p>38</p>	<p>it's not for the worst but I wouldn't say it's for the worst it's just worse than the PRU coz I was cross overed from it</p> <p>On Outdoor Adventure Ltd days like I feel great like not great but and when I come to Blakely Education Centre it's like fuck</p> <p>so when you go to like a PRU you or sumink like that you can get like a fun day in in mainstream you're not allowed because you have to like work and get your education up in the mainstream</p>

<p>Reflections on self-identity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Status 	258	this one's worse though this is for naughtier people
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Use of deficit labels 	280	I'm naughty
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Connection with others in AP 	222	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Internal attribution for events 	12	so say that you do that in mainstream school you get bullied for it
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Perceptions of change 	198	coz I'm naughty and I can't deal with big crowds and that I'm just more just being good ain't I it's not like I'm good not like perfect but just being good
<p>Positive affect</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Positive appraisal of settings 	54	it's class
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Opportunities in AP 	50	biking beach anything really weightlifting shit like that
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Feeling secure 	186	I like it here

Sense of Control		
➤ External locus of control	158	if it aint I'm not gunna be bothered either he's the one that wanted me to come to this school not really but oh well
➤ Disempowered	164	I don't know it's just erm gets you out and that I don't know why they even started it but
➤ Uninformed	42	errr not really it's not the best here but it'll do
➤ Acceptance of current education	266	Not bothered easier to just stay where I am I can't go back they won't have me
➤ Protecting the self from rejection	316	
Questioning school identity		
➤ Use of deficit labels	218	everyone coz it is the mingo [sic] school
➤ Status of staff	84	

➤ Minimising AP education	68	in our class it's just tutors so Jane and Sophie are tutors yeah but she's an actual teacher
➤ Cognitive dissonance	228	nah you only get two lessons here it doesn't matter what you've done or if you're smart or not you're still saying it's a mongo [sic] school and you're in it
➤ Defending school identity	238	it's alright but I know it's a mongo [sic] school it's just like what you've done and that why you're in here but it's alright it's class in here
➤ Shared identity/task	290	one of the reasons they call this the mongo [sic] school is coz you act like mongos [sic] being stupid and that here

Appendix O: Themes across the participant group

Master Table of Themes for All Participants				
Superordinate Theme	Sub-ordinate theme	Emergent theme	Participant and related text	Line number
Sense of Agency	Disempowered	Movement within the AP sector	Charlie: The PRU is like when you've have a few fights and got kicked out it's nothing it's fine they just send you there but say now you doing other stuff I dunno like put someone else harm or something like proper or like you've done something really naughty then you just come here unless you just get kicked out of your school then you just come here that's what I did	260
			Rocky: what's it called there was too many kids in there for like year 8s and that it only goes up to year 9 so they sent me to this school...when we get kicked out of here we have to have home tuition... what's called cause I get kicked out of school and this is the last school and that I'm not allowed in other schools no more	20 131 252
			Zak: I've been home schooled coz I went into like a home so I went, I went, I done home school for 11 months but no wait there seven months... I dunno I just got moved	26 30
			Leah: so after mainstream I went to a behaviour unit then I did home tuition then I did the unit then I did home tutoring I think I did home tutoring before the Unit actually I really dunno... after mainstream I went to behaviour school then I think I was on home tuition then I went to the unit... it was alright I just did it	62 84 86
			Vicky: and I was getting bullied and I was always like crying and feeling down so then they moved me up here	48

Sense of Agency	Disempowered	Adults as decision makers	Alice: I just had to come here	56
			Charlie: he's the one that wanted me to come to this school	158
			Rocky: I don't know what's going on coz they said if I get any more trouble I'm going I'm getting kicked out coz like I got excluded all week last week ...if I do anymore they'll get me I'm getting kicked out... hmmm I dunno what's happening	112 124 142
			Leah: no I duno what's going on innit I just went to that behaviour school and that I didn't like it at all my my mother was crying and that because she didn't like the look of the place she hated the look of it	96
			Vicky: well I didn't wanno because like all my friends was there but I didn't have a choice...like I was rubbish	32 34
			Lucan: nothing really they just said I'm going...	26
			Gabe: I did I just had so much trouble I was I trouble all the time with teachers and the head my mum I had a meeting all the time with my mum then they just said come down here then they moved me down here	17
			Elle: it feels weird but I know it's for my best interest and I know it's for my best	193
Sense of Agency	Disempowered	Not feeling heard	Rocky: like I asked (centre manager) can I go on a thurs or Friday and Wednesday and they asked and they ain't got back to me yet	22 50
			Zak: I want to do Sports Ltd twice a week...I've said it and they just say education don't turn up to the meetings so no one can ask	96
			Lucan: I wanted to go to a different school to this one	60

Sense of Agency	Disempowered	Returning to mainstream	Charlie: Not bothered easier to just stay where I am I can't go back they won't have me	316
			Alice: well I can go back if I wanna...I don't wanna go	312 314
			Rocky: I won't be allowed into other schools yeah I can't go to mainstream	254
			Zak: I dunno I dunno if I'm allowed	158
			Leah: yeah I think I can go back to another comp I just don't wanna I've settled really well in this school now	186
			Vicky: they said I can't go back... : I don't have that opportunity in my old school like they told me that I couldn't go back coz every time I went coz I was in here three days and I was in that school two but it just wasn't working out because I was like naughty so every time I went back there I was naughty but then I was good up here	44 78
			Gabe: you'd have to like change your way of learning if you wanna come back into mainstream... they give you a choice you do well in here you get to go back to mainstream if you wanna or you can just stay here and I just wanted to stay down here	104 292
Sense of Agency	Purpose	Education aims	Alice: we get like a level one she said or something for hairdressing...dunno	358 360
			Zak: erm work erm sometimes Nowhere to be honest...not at school	16 130 132
			Leah: I can do my exams and that... coz I wanna leave school with lots of exams grades or something	120 250
			Gabe: I've got GCSEs to do and they're helping me with BTEC Ann is helping me with Princes Trust erm Luke is helping me with (indecipherable) which I start doing and I've got college every Friday	36

Sense of Agency	Purpose	Valued activities in AP	Alice: because this schools better and they I duno they do things with you and that... we do go down the nursing home and colour with the old people	250 256
			Rocky: like we can do fun activities and do all that shit	36
			Zak: Sports Ltd	
			Leah: I like doing it coz we go every Tuesday we go down er the care home with people with dementia	198
			Vicky: well we do do we do like go down in the van to the other site and do like football and that coz I play football	110
			Lucan: riding bikes on Friday if we're good mountain bikes	72
			Gabe: they take you out for a bit of fun then they bring you back and by the time they bring you back you go home then so it's just a day out from working a bit but you're still working you still do educational things	326
Reflecting on change		Adults as sources of support	Leah: they just didn't understand they just they don't understand you they just shout at you and that they don't listen to you they just and in these schools they do...we have a teacher here that we can speak to where if we like come in struggling and that	74 132
			Vicky: probably coz when I was in a different school I wasn't doing as much work coz I couldn't' do like my work in my other school I have to have like I have to have like someone sit by me and explain it to me	172
			Lucan: calms everyone down first and then makes everyone sit down around the tables and everything it's different here	126
			Gabe: you've got the support here if you need it there and that's what helps everyone really	326
			Elle: it is with my emotions they've been a really good help...well like if I'm upset or if I'm crying or something I go to Mr Jenkins and Mr Jenkins is like helps me calm down and to breathe and all that and It's really one of the most helpful things that I've had so far	133 135

Reflecting on change		Fragility of change	Charlie: it's just my behaviour so sometimes ... I'm just more just being good ain't I it's not like I'm good not like perfect but just being good	34 198
			Vicky: yeah I wouldn't wanna go back though I would to see my friends but I wouldn't because like I'll have teachers following me around because they know what I'm like from when I left so... it's just a thing like if I went back to school I know I'd like be naughty it's just a thing	214 222
			Gabe: yeah they've said to me oh do you wanna go up mainstream and I just I said no I'd just rather stay down here coz I'd be like I was again	106
			Elle: I don't wanna go back because it just makes that bad feeling come back and I'm not having that again	231
		Feelings of security	Rocky: it's not very safe is it	324
			Alice: just get on with them better	46
			Vicky: would be able to trust them in a way yeah like I couldn't in my other school	290
			Lucan: it's just nicer the teachers are calmer	46
			Gabe: and that's what make it like that's what makes this place better coz they'll sort it and like the thing is if you treat people with respect they'll respect you back and that's what we all do we treat people with respect	272
			Elle: I feel safe	145

Social Identities	Constructions and beliefs about the AP sector	Constructions of AP held by participants	Alice: I know it's not a mongo [sic] school...it's just for people who can't concentrate in mainstream school	396 400
			Charlie: it's like an activity day so you get a day off school and you just do activities and that... mixed feelings about this school...it's not the best but I like	12 182
			it... it is the mongo school... it's alright but I know it's a mongo [sic] school it's just like what you've done and that why you're in here but it's alright it's class in here	186 218 238
			Rocky: half of the boys who I bother with they they said they are coming to this school like they're naughty aswell ... yeah like if you like get kicked out of mainstream school you normally come to this school and that	242 244
			Zak: it's not a school ...it's a school for idiots	108 251
			Leah: there was no education like they always used to take us like bowling and all that didn't do nothing with us we didn't do no work... it was better than any other school coz they used to take us out... I dunno it's just it's hard to explain like we have education here... I duno is it a youth centre I duno... yeah it is this school ain't a behaviour school it's for people that struggle in mainstream	14 22 116 242 342
			Vicky: is it even a school I duno... well I assume naughty or people who's always down all the time and it didn't work out for the people who was in school so and for people that didn't like school so they came here yeh	90 96
			Lucan: I duno really	28
			Gabe: I just thought it was like a behaviour school and I was a bit like umming about it but I didn't know it was like a learning place...err it's a place for people who have got problems disabilities people that can't cope with mainstream people that can't learn people -who've got trouble with learning and writing and that they can't they don't like big crowds and that and it's for people who don't like too big crowds and crowds	131

Social Identities	Constructions and beliefs about the AP sector	Constructions of AP held by participants	Elle: I think it is one of those schools that you can chill that you can speak to any teacher about what you're feeling and it's it's like a really good school like it's a school where you don't have to be scared to ask anyone anything like you don't have to be scared to cry or scream or be scared like it's one of those schools that you can talk to anyone who's about and they'll support you through it	131
			it's not a school it's this man that does it and he's a really good help err he's not a teacher he's just one of those people that like do adventures and with kids and all that	175
Social Identities	Constructions and beliefs about the AP sector	Perceived judgement from others	Alice: a mongo [sic] school... yeah they think every Learning Pathway Centre or AP is a mongo [sic] school	386 390
			Charlie: everyone calls this the mongo [sic] school... the adults as well they're dopey not everyone I'm just saying I think everyone calls it the mongo [sic] school it's just what everyone calls it the mongo [sic] school	214 232
			Zak: it's for idiots... people told me it is... like just calling you an idiot or retard [sic]	222 224
			Leah: my mum went to view it she just didn't like it she just didn't think I'd get anywhere in life going to that school... they probably think I'm a mongo [sic] because I go to one of these schools and not an actual high school... I duno like a retard [sic] or something someone that don't know nothing like who's not guna leave school with anything	100 326 330
			Vicky: yeah like I tell em all the time and they're like ah I wanna come to your school and that (laughs)... coz it's a good school	232 234
			Lucan: yeah he said it's an autistic school	144
			Gabe: they think it's like full of like a naughty place like people are like stupid don't know how to learn but they are all wrong it's for people who have disabilities who can't hold their concentration	100

Social Identities	Constructions and beliefs about the AP sector	A sense of hierarchy in the education sector	Charlie: so when you go to like a PRU you or summink like that you can get like a fun day in in mainstream you're not allowed because you have to like work and get your education up in the mainstream... but in these schools like you're allowed to have a fun day and then you go out... in here it's just tutors so Jane and Sophie are tutors yeah but she's a actual teacher... this one's worse though this is for naughtier people... it's not for the worst but I wouldn't say it's for the worst it's just worse than the PRU	38 40 56 84 258 264
			Leah: I got kicked out of mainstream and started going to one of these schools... yeah in the other behaviour schools no education in this place there's proper lessons and that like English Maths so yeah... well it's full of naughty kids when	64 122 342 346
			this school is just for people who can't like who struggle with being in mainstream...this school is better	
			Vicky: well most of my friends are in like normal school	192
			Gabe: and up there you won't because there's not that thing they'd rather you just do your GCSEs and leave when down here they want you to do they would rather you have more qualifications more GCSEs coming out than not having enough Gabe: but if you do that if you like have like a few bad days then they won't you'd have to earn you'd have to like change your way of learning if you wanna come back into mainstream	136 292
			Elle: I wana get my normal education back... I wanna stay here for the whole day but then at one point I would have to go back up and do my education like	217 219

Social Identities	Self-Esteem	Self-Regard	Alice: nothing really erm I'm not good at nothing really	120
			Charlie: this one's worse though this is for naughtier people... I'm naughty	258 280
			Rocky: yeah what's it called like they didn't know cause I was being good for that long and they didn't know what happened to me like...they didn't know what happened to me...gone back up and I'm naughty again	192 194 196
			Zak: I'm the best behaved there believe it or not...I don't care I don't believe it...it's not true yeah I'm naughty	150
			Leah: I've settled down really well in this school	120
			Vicky: and go back like to the other days when I was like good in school	216
			Gabe: it's just I'm doing so well and it's just so pleasant to be here	158
			Elle: I'm feeling happy about it I never used to love myself and now I'm just thinking I love myself I've kinda loved how I've come so far like	251
	Making sense of moving into the AP sector	Consistent use of 'Kicked out' to describe leaving mainstream by participants		
		Alice: I was playing up... like just running round the school and that not listening... coz I got excluded for a week and then I went back up and played up and then they chucked me out	18 20 308	
		Charlie: I moved here coz I was naughty and having fights and that... coz I'm naughty and I can't deal with big crowds and that	10 24	
		Rocky: Primary I got kicked out just coz I went to stab a teacher with the scissors and she like she didn't listen to my side of the story and she just picked whenever I kicked off she just blaming it on me and no one else	20	
		Zak: yeah I dunno why I'm there	66	
		Vicky: because I was being naughty...I was too naughty...adults told me	8 72 75	
		Lucan: I really actually don't know	20	

Social Identities	Self-Esteem	Making sense of moving into the AP sector	Gabe: I just couldn't cope I did I just had so much trouble I was in trouble all the time with teachers and the head my mum I had a meeting all the time with my mum then they just said come down here then they moved me down here... I thought like I'd done something bad but it's just to help us but everyone's got disabilities and I've got one and they help me with it... It's coz the teachers were like always on to me always over my shoulder having a go at me and they just I couldn't take it anymore and I knew I was guna do one bad thing and I did and I'm down here	16 48 58
		Finding a sense of belonging	Zak: I don't want to be there to be honest...it ain't a place for me... I dunno I don't like going there it ain't a place for me Zak: that was because we got sponsored by LG you know that TV you know the TV I got sponsored by LG so then the clan just got massive	60 64 261 184
	Leah: I duno erm like I get on with everyone here I never used to get on with anyone in the other places that I was in... erm I don't really bother with anyone in here I just sit around		300 304	
	Vicky: I duno I think I just like like I like the people here my friends maybe I like to I don't get to see them as often so I just make the most of it on the days that I get to see them		270	
	Lucan: They're my friends		90	
	Gabe: I thought err is it guna work for me like when I first come down here everyone was so nice to me and I was like it's guna work for me down here and it has		26	
	Elle: like I never felt a welcome up in that school I felt that I was just one of those kids that walked in and go home like walk in do work break lunch do work then go home like but here I feel like I can come in I can talk about my feelings I can talk about stuff and erm they would be alright with it		195	

Social identities	Self-Esteem	Protecting the self	Charlie: uhm I'm alright I'm not really bothered	244
			Alice: nah I'm not bothered	414
			Rocky: I don't care like I don't wanna be in this school	126
			Zak: I don't care I just get on with it	244
			Leah: it don't really bother me about other peoples' opinions	334
			Lucan: well one of them said you go to an autistic school so I punched their nose	142
			Gabe: most of my friends they think you should just move back to mainstream and I've told them I don't wanna because I'll just be like I was again I'd just get kicked out a lot and that and they'll be nagging me and nagging me and then I just like don't talk to them because they're just nagging me come back up and I'm just like I don't wanna	92

Appendix P: Identifying recurrent themes in large sample

Superordinate Theme	Sub-ordinate Theme	Theme	Charlie	Rocky	Zak	Alice	Leah	Vicky	Lucan	Gabe	Elle	Present in 1/3 of samples
Sense of Agency	Disempowered	Movement within AP	✓		✓		✓	✓				Yes
		Adults as decision makers	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Yes
		Feeling heard		✓	✓				✓			Yes
		Returning to mainstream	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	Yes
	Purpose	Education Aims			✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	Yes
		Valued activities	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		Yes
Reflecting on change		Adults as sources of support		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Yes
		Feelings of security		✓				✓	✓	✓	✓	Yes
		Fragility of change	✓					✓		✓	✓	Yes

Social Identity	Constructions and beliefs about the AP sector	Constructions held by participants	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	Yes	
		Perceived judgement from others	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Yes	
		A sense of education hierarchy	✓				✓			✓	✓	Yes	
	Self-esteem	Self-regard	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	Yes	
		Making sense of moving into AP	✓	✓	✓				✓			Yes	
		A sense of belonging		✓	✓			✓		✓	✓	✓	Yes
		Protecting the self	✓	✓	✓	✓				✓	✓		Yes

Smith et al., (2009) suggest that when working with larger samples considering the recurrence of themes across the whole data set be used 'as one way to enhance the validity of the findings' (p107). In this research project, it was deemed that for a theme to be classified as recurrent it must be present in at least 1/3 of the interviews.

Appendix Q: Ethical considerations and actions taken by the researcher

Ethical Consideration	Action Taken
Potential to cause harm	Prior consideration was given to the possibility that participant may become distressed. Although none of the participants experienced visible distress during the interview process, the researcher was prepared with signposts to further information and support. These details were also included in the debrief letter (appendix R).
Right to withdraw	Participants and their parents and/or carers were informed of their right to withdraw at any time. Participants were reminded of this immediately before interviews took place.
Confidentiality	All interviews were 1:1 and carried out in a quiet room to respect the potentially sensitive nature of participants' responses. Recorded interviews were transcribed and anonymised within two weeks of the interview and subsequently deleted.
Anonymity	<p>In interview transcripts, pseudonyms have been used for all participants. Individual AP settings and other schools have also been given pseudonyms to protect their identity. All verbatim quotes used were checked to ensure they were non-identifiable.</p> <p>All participants were made aware of the limits of confidentiality prior to consenting to take part.</p>
Reasons to break confidentiality	At the start of the interview, all participants were reminded that the information shared would remain anonymised and confidential unless information was shared that led the researcher to think that the participant or others were at risk of significant harm.
Debrief	After the interview, each participant was given a debrief letter (see appendix R). An adult in the setting was available to read through the letter if the participant wished. Participants and individual AP settings were offered the opportunity to read the research report.

Appendix R: Debrief letter for participants

Dear _____,

Thank you very much for giving up your time to take part in this project. The aim of this research is to explore how young people are finding attending more than one alternative education setting.

All the information that you have provided will be held confidentially, by myself, for two weeks. During that two weeks, you will be able to access your data and/or request that it is destroyed. Your information will be typed up and anonymised, so that you will not be able to be identified directly. Once the interview is typed up, the voice recording will be deleted and it will no longer be possible to access your interview.

If anything that has been discussed today has raised more questions about your education, please feel free to speak to Antony Leach or another trusted adult.

If you or your carers or parents would like independent help and advice about your education, you can contact: SNAP Cymru 0808 801 0606 (this is a helpline for adults and young people).

If there is anything we discussed that has caused you to feel unhappy or you feel you would like some more support with then please speak to Antony Leach; a parent/carers or a tutor. If you would prefer to speak to another adult then there is also a free 24 hour helpline for young people in need of support- Childline telephone: 0800 1111

If you would like any further information about this research or access to a summary of the completed research, please contact me directly, using the contact details below, or my Research Supervisor, Dale Bartle.

Thank you once again for taking part in this project.

Lauren Charles-Nelson
Researcher
School of Psychology, Cardiff University
Charles-nelsonl@cardiff.ac.uk

Dr Dale Bartle
Research Supervisor (DEdPsy)
School of Psychology, Cardiff University
BartleD@cardiff.ac.uk

School of Psychology Research Ethics Committee
Cardiff University
Tower Building
70 Park Place
Cardiff
029 208 70360 psychethics@cardiff.ac.uk
<http://psych.cf.ac.uk/aboutus/ethics.html>



Appendix S: Findings letter to be sent to participants and Local Authority

Dear participant,

My name is Lauren Charles-Nelson and I am a Researcher at Cardiff University. As part of my studies, I have completed a research project to learn about young peoples' experiences of going to alternative education settings rather than mainstream schools.



Do you remember that we met one day last year and chatted about how you were finding school? Since then I have met with 8 other young people and heard how they are finding school too.

I wanted to write to you to share some of the results and to thank you once again for taking part. I thought you were really friendly and did a great job of talking to me.

These are some of the research findings:

- Some young people felt that moving to alternative provision had been really helpful for them. They felt that they had made positive changes. They did not always know what had helped them to change but felt pleased with how things were generally going.
- Some young people said that they had made new friends in alternative provision and felt that they fitted in more. Other young people said that they had lost touch with good friends in mainstream and missed them.
- Some young people said that they really enjoyed the activity days where they got to play sports or go kayaking. Other people preferred working with adults doing Maths and English.
- Some young people said that the adults in alternative provision were more supportive and helped them to feel calmer. The smaller settings can be helpful in making young people feel more secure and relaxed.
- Some young people shared that adults made all the decisions about their education and that they did not have any control over what happened to them. I wondered if it might be useful for young people to be more involved in decision making in the future, so that young people feel more listened to.

- Not everyone was clear about why they had been moved into alternative provision or whether they were going to a proper school and had proper teachers. Also, sometimes other children in mainstream said negative things about alternative provisions. I wondered if it might be helpful for adults to make sure that everyone knows what type of schools alternative provisions are and their strengths. This might also make it easier for young people to explain to friends in mainstream, who may not really know what alternative provision is.
- Some young people felt that they had been kicked out of mainstream and were not allowed back. I wondered if that might be difficult to hear and whether this was something that might need to change in the future. Other young people, said that they had chosen not to return to mainstream because they liked it where they were.
- Some young people were not sure what education goals they were working towards or what their strengths and talents were. I wondered if it might be useful for adults to spend more time with young people talking and thinking about these things.

Finally, I should say that the results are just my own research ideas. I will pass a copy of this letter onto the adults in school and the Local Authority who support you so that they can also read them.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information and for taking part in the project.

Kind Regards,

Lauren Charles-Nelson

Researcher

School of Psychology, Cardiff University

Charles-nelsonl@cardiff.ac.uk