



“Their behaviours are displaying what their needs are”: Exploring mainstream primary school staff’s experiences of relational approaches with children who display social, emotional and mental health needs.

Rebecca Soproniuk

Student number: 1425027

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Abstract

The concept of relational rupture and repair applied to Educational Psychology Practice is in its infancy (Raider-Roth *et al.*, 2012). As there is limited research in this area, the current qualitative study aimed to explore mainstream primary school staff's experiences of relational approaches with a focus on relational rupture and repair (RR&R) with children who exhibit social, emotional and mental health needs (SEMH).

Five participants engaged in virtual, semi-structured interviews. Two overarching themes and 6 subthemes were generated from the data set, using Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022). The research highlighted a perceived shift in society, influenced in part by the growing interaction of children with technology, the lasting impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and a change in Welsh educational reform (2018). School staff experience the impact of the accumulation of a child's life at home within the school environment. An increase in the complex presentation of needs of children starting school in the early years also impacts relationships in schools. Furthermore, school staff have observed notable differences in speech, language and communication skills which can present challenges in effectively meeting needs. Due to the impact of time and perceived lack of resources in a busy environment, there is a need to restore situations rather than restore relationships with school staff and children. Effective collaboration between school and families is essential to support positive relationships within schools. It was suggested that effective relational repair require both staff and children to be emotionally regulated. In addition, children with social, emotional and mental health needs benefit most from support delivered by adults who engage with them regularly and have established a strong, trusting relationship. Furthermore, whole school approaches implemented by Senior Leadership Teams enable positive relationships within schools. Findings are discussed in relation to previous research and the wider context, including implications for EP practice. Strengths and limitations are discussed and recommendation for future research proposed.

Summary

This thesis consists of three parts: a literature review, an empirical paper and a critical appraisal. It aims to explore mainstream primary school staff's experiences of relational approaches with children who display social and emotional and mental health needs (SEMH).

Part one: Major Research Literature Review

Part one provides a review of the literature. It provides the context of the research including explanations of terms and definitions. Secondly, a narrative literature review will be included to explore the literature in this area and how it applies to the current research. A rationale for the current study is provided and research question (RQ) is outlined.

Part two: Major Research Empirical Study

Part two presents an empirical study. It begins with an overview of relevant literature, the rationale for the research and subsequently developed RQ. A detailed methodology is presented, including research design and ethical considerations of the current study. The results section outlines findings from the Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA; Braun & Clarke, 2022), which are considered in relation to the wider context and previous research in the discussion section. Implications for Educational Psychology practice and future research are explored, in addition to strengths and limitations of the research.

Part three: Major Research Reflective Account

Part three details a critical review of the study's contribution to knowledge and understanding in its field and to the wider context of Educational Psychology Practice (EPP). It offers a reflective and reflexive account of the researcher's journey, including appraising the decisions made and considering alternative avenues and lenses, which could have been adopted.

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List of abbreviations

| | |
|-------|---|
| ACES | Adverse Childhood Experiences |
| ALN | Additional Learning Needs |
| ALNCo | Additional Learning Needs Coordinator |
| APA | American Psychological Association |
| ASSIA | Applied Social Sciences Index and Abstracts |
| CASP | Critical Appraisal Skills Programme |
| CYP | Children and young people |
| ELSA | Emotional Literacy Support Assistant |
| EP | Educational Psychologist |
| EPP | Educational Psychology Practice |
| LA | Local Authority |
| OT | Occupational Therapist |
| RQ | Research Question |
| RR &R | Relational rupture and repair |
| RTA | Reflexive Thematic Analysis |
| SALT | Speech and Language Therapist |
| SEMH | Social emotional and mental health needs |
| SLT | Senior Leadership Team |
| TA | Teaching Assistant |
| TEP | Trainee Educational Psychologist |

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“Their behaviours are displaying what their needs are” : Exploring mainstream primary school staff’s experiences of relational approaches with children who display social, emotional and mental health needs.

Part one: Major Research Literature Review

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Rebecca Soproniuk

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1. Context of the literature:

Within school environments, relationships increase a sense of belonging and provide a nurturing and inclusive environment for children and young people to learn and grow (Roffey, 2012). Additionally, these relationships support teacher's overall wellbeing (Vasilic, 2022). The term 'relational rupture' was originally used within therapeutic settings and is now commonly used within Educational Psychology (Raider-Roth *et al.*, 2012). It explains a break in connection between two people, often caused by hurt or anger and is common in human relationships (Raider-Roth *et al.*, 2012). This could refer to children and young people who are at potential risk of exclusion, children and young people with social, emotional and mental health needs (SEMH) or have very little relationships with key members of school staff within a school environment. Some research suggests that relationships are the most important part of behaviour management (Moir & MacLeod, 2018; Roffey, 2012). In order for relationships to be fostered with children and young people, a process of repair after relational ruptures is needed. Repair relates to a process of reconciliation through apology, forgiveness and understanding which in turns strengthens the relationship and reconnects the individuals after the event which increases the level of knowledge and understanding of each other (Gilligan, 2003). For the purposes of this research, there is a focus on the relationships between mainstream primary school staff and children, with particular attention to ruptures and the repair process. The aim and intention of the research findings is to inform future practice within schools.

1.1 Definitions:

Relational rupture:

A break in the connection between two people, often caused by hurt or anger and is common in human relationships (Raider-Roth *et al.*, 2012). Relational ruptures are often inevitable due to misunderstandings or misinterpretations of meeting other's needs (Raider-Roth *et al.*, 2012).

Ruptures are common in school environments with friendships between peers and between school staff and children and young people (Raider-Roth *et al.*, 2012). Ruptures within classroom relationships can be seen as teaching moments for both school staff and students in the learning environment (Raider-Roth, 2005).

Repair:

A process of reconciliation through apology, forgiveness and understanding. The act of strengthening the relationship and reconnecting after the event as an increase in knowledge and understanding of each other has occurred (Gilligan, 2003). The rupture or conflict is common within human relationships, but it is the repair that is the most important aspect to address for progression (Gilligan, 2003). This can be applied within a school environment. When there has been repeated rupture and repair within school staff-student relationships, it is the reconciliation and shared understanding of responding to the needs of one another which progresses the relationship. Ruptures that are not repaired can have destructive consequences such as the loss of trust in school staff and peers (Raider-Roth, 2005).

Restorative approach:

The term 'restorative approach' emphasises the importance of interconnectedness through building relationships and repairing existing relationships when there has been conflict or harm (Drewery, 2004). The practice includes five guiding principles: relationships, respect, responsibility, restoration and reintegration (Swain-Bradway *et al.*, 2015). Restorative approaches are often used in schools and can support on an individual and systems level with repairing relationships within schools (McCluskey, 2018).

Relational approach:

Roffey (2012) suggests that the promotion of positive relationships should be the central objective of school behaviour policies. The process relies on developing relationships, responding calmly and repairing and restoring relationships within the learning environment. This approach also fosters a sense of belonging and psychological safety in order to promote engagement in academic work and the community which in turn enables children to fulfil their potential with regards to their social and academic ability (Baker *et al.*, 1997).

Social emotional and mental health needs (SEMH):

The terms: social emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs, behavioural, emotional and social (BESD) difficulties and social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD) are often used interchangeably within the literature and Government policies. The Additional Learning Needs Code for Wales (2021, pp. 35) defines BESD as, *“some children and young people will demonstrate features of emotional and behavioural difficulties. They may be withdrawn or isolate, disruptive and disturbing, hyperactive or lacking concentration; they may have underdeveloped social skills or present challenging behaviours.”* However, Estyn (2022) the Education and Training Inspectorate for Wales define this particular set of needs as ‘SEMH’. According to a Welsh Government (2024) census conducted in January 2024, it was suggested that SEMH needs were the second most common type of additional learning needs (ALN) in 2024 which is around 16,590 pupils, reported in Wales to have SEMH as an ALN, which represents 35% of pupils with ALN overall. Pupils with SEMH are often at particular risk of being excluded (Estyn, 2022). A SEMH pupil is nearly six times more likely to be permanently excluded than other pupils (Estyn, 2022). For the purposes of this current research, social, emotional and mental health needs (SEMH) will be used hereafter for consistency purposes.

Introduction

Big Q qualitative research is the notion that a researcher is providing a richer understanding to current knowledge of a topic that is already known (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Traditionally, a 'finding the gap' argument is established to find key gaps in the literature to provide a rationale for current or future research (Braun & Clarke, 2022, pp. 120). Big Q qualitative research uses qualitative tools and techniques, and the research is guided by the researcher's values and assumptions within a qualitative paradigm (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Big Q qualitative research also embodies an interest in process and meaning rather than a positivist cause and effect (Braun & Clarke, 2022). The research also establishes a critical and questioning approach to life and knowledge (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Therefore, the researcher aimed to provide a theoretically informed and located rationale for the research rather than a 'finding the gap' approach to the research (Braun & Clarke, 2022, pp.120). This is in line with the Big Q and reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) nature of the research which is later used to analyse the data collected from participants (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

The literature review for the present study was informed by a narrative approach wherein the researcher was able to explore and summarise existing research without following a strict step-by-step process (Snyder, 2019). This review aims to provide an overview of the current literature in the field, alongside relevant psychological theories and literature around the topic (Siddaway *et al.*, 2019). This could be argued to be a semi-systematic approach to a literature review as the researcher's intention was to include research from both quantitative and qualitative research articles which is a deviation from a systematic approach to a literature review which is more comprehensive and methodical (Siddaway *et al.*, 2019). The literature yielded is not exhaustive in nature due to the limited research that currently exists of relational rupture and repair therefore, the review offers contextualised literature that currently exists in order to 'make the argument', adding

to existing literature to gain a better understanding regarding the topic (Braun & Clarke, 2022, pp.120).

When analysing the current literature in the area, I identified key patterns across the selected studies. These themes were then critically examined in relation to psychological theories that emerged as particularly relevant, allowing for an integrated approach to understanding how the current literature aligns with and supports theoretical perspectives.

In the first instance, a literature question was generated in order to give clear and answerable results (See 1.3 literature questions). This question was used to allow the researcher the opportunity to explore a breadth of literature (Siddaway *et al.*, 2019). The researcher then clarified relevant search terms, outlined in Table. 1. Alternatives of the search terms were also given such as the use of truncation and different synonyms to explain the same meaning such as 'BESD' or 'SEMH'. The use of inclusion and exclusion criteria was also established before the review was conducted and a clear record of databases and searches is provided (Siddaway *et al.*, 2019) (See 1.2 and Table 1. for further information). This literature review was deemed appropriate to fit with the 'Big Q' assumptions and examining qualitative research in Psychology. In the interest of transparency and for the purposes of this doctoral thesis, a Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-analyses (PRISMA) (Tricco *et al.*, 2021) was used to share the process of collating literature that explored the topic of relational rupture and repair in a semi-systematic way (See Figure 1.). This offered a blended approach to the literature review.

1.2 Literature review question

The narrative literature review sought to explore the following question:

- What is known of relational approaches supporting children and young people experiencing social, emotional and mental health needs within educational provisions in the current literature?

1.3 Search terms and sources

The research literature included in this review was obtained from SCOPUS, Psych Info, ERIC (Education Resources Information Centre), APA (American Psychological Association) and ASSIA (Applied Social Sciences Index and Abstracts) online databases. These databases were selected due to their coverage of social sciences, education and psychology disciplines. An additional search for wider literature took place via backward chaining of references within relevant articles. Searches of relevant grey literature (e.g. unpublished doctoral theses and Government documents) were completed using the search engine, Google Scholar.

The search strategy included subject mapping terms of ‘relational approaches,’ ‘educational context’ and ‘behaviour difficulties.’ (see Table 1). Key word search terms were based on synonyms of these overarching subject terms. Initially, the search began as a broad overview of the literature which involved subject mapping terms of relational approaches and educational context however, this was then opened to a specific literature search with the inclusion of ‘behaviour difficulties’ as a mapping term. The subject mapping terms were combined with ‘AND’ and key word search terms combined with ‘OR’. This search strategy was used in each database (see Table 1) between January 2024 to November 2024.

Table 1: Terms used for searching and subject mapping for literature review

| Subject mapping terms | Key word search terms |
|----------------------------------|--|
| 1. Relational approaches | “Relational approach*”, “relationship*”, “restorative practice”, “rupture and repair”. |
| 2. Educational context | “school*”, “secondary”, “primary”, “children”, “young people” |
| 3. Behaviour difficulties | “Social, emotional mental health needs”, “SEMH”, “social, emotional behavioural difficulties”, “SEBD”. |

Key: The asterisk (*) acts as the truncation character used to search for additional letters after the word (e.g. approach and approaches).

1.4 Transparency and reporting

The screening process is outlined using Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-analyses (PRISMA) (Tricco *et al.*, 2021) and can be found in Figure 1. The searches initially produced 2,127 records which were filtered by removing duplicates, assessing them against the exclusion and inclusion criteria and screening titles and abstracts for relevance to the research focus. This yielded 14 research articles that are included in the literature review (see. Appendix 1. for further information regarding the papers included).

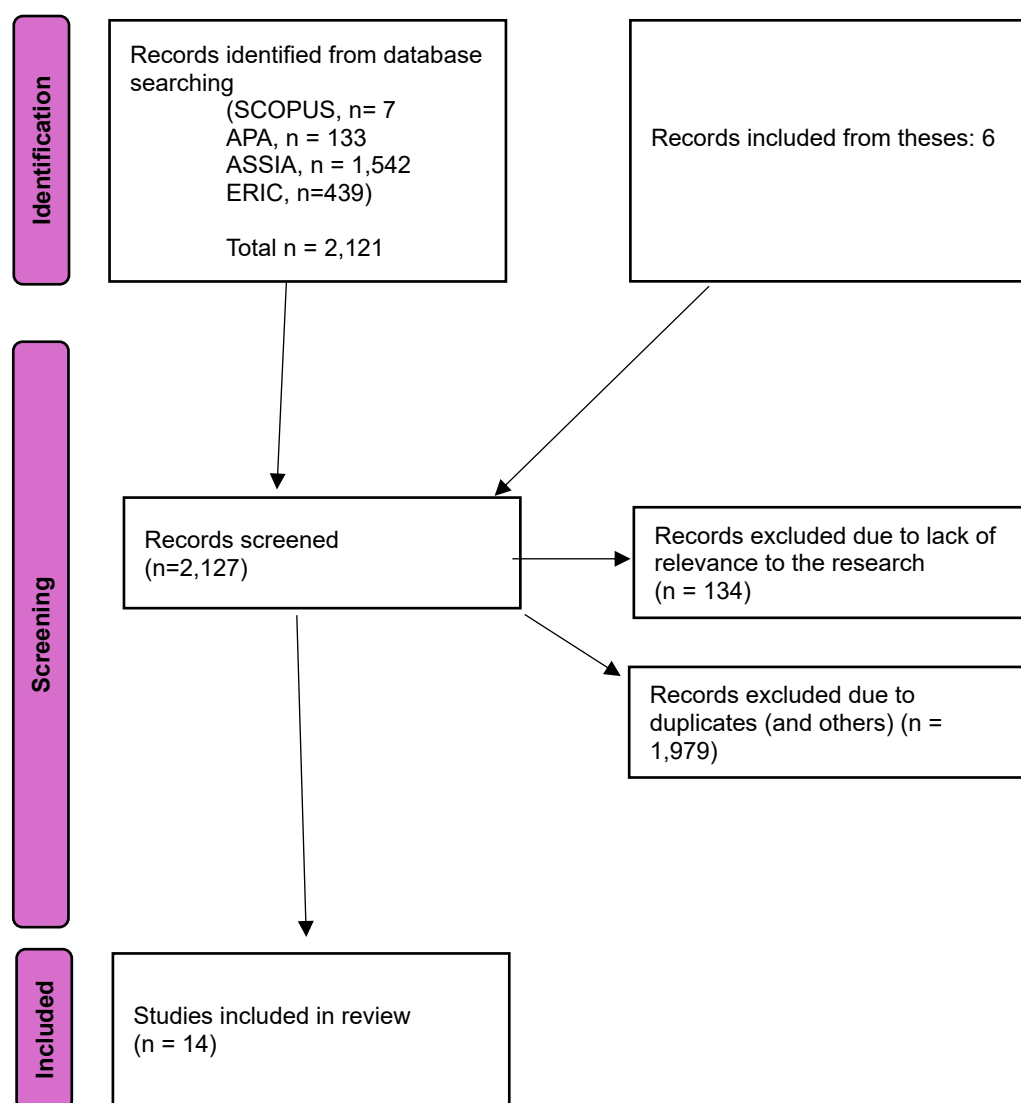


Figure 1: Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-analyses (PRISMA) flow diagram detailing papers for major literature review

1. 5 Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Empirical research was included if the papers:

- were within the last ten years as this is deemed as ‘up to date’ research. To add to this, within the research the term ‘Social Emotional and Mental Health (‘SEMH’) or Behavioural Emotional and Social Difficulties (‘BESD’) is more commonly understood and explained. Under the most up to date SEND code of practice in England (Department for Education, 2015), ‘BESD’ was newly categorised as ‘SEMH’ needs in order to incorporate behavioural needs as potentially linked to mental health needs. This enabled a more holistic approach to understanding CYP’s wellbeing (Department for Education, 2015). However, it is acknowledged that the current study will be investigating a Welsh context.
- included relational approaches with children and young people.
- included children and young people experiencing social, emotional and mental health needs (SEMH) in educational provisions.
- Research needed to be peer-reviewed, this also included theses which had undergone a VIVA process.

2. Major literature review

The following section includes literature yielded from the narrative review in addition to relevant psychological theories to inform the topic of relational approaches, with an emphasis on relational rupture and repair. Due to the literature review's narrative nature and for ease of reading and analysis, the researcher identified key patterns which were then grouped and discussed by themes (Braun & Clarke, 2022). The researcher also identified psychological theories that emerged as particularly relevant to the topic and have been included in the review. This allows for a more integrated approach to the analysis.

The Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) checklist was used to evaluate qualitative research and systematic reviews (CASP; Singh, 2013). This offered the researcher opportunities to critically appraise research yielded from the literature review. The current literature presented in this section is in line with the inclusion and exclusion criteria of the review, in addition to attempting to answer the literature questions to explore relational approaches and exploring children and young people who experience social, emotional and mental health needs and their relationships with adults in schools. Within this literature review, the terms, 'teacher-pupil', 'support staff-pupils', 'adults that support students' and 'teacher-student' are used interchangeably. The researcher is referring to any adults that support children and young people with SEMH needs in schools such as teachers, teaching assistants, support staff and senior leadership team. However, in certain instances, explicit reference may be made to 'teacher-student' or 'support staff-student' relationships within the literature review.

2.1 Teacher-pupil relationships:

Schools are positioned as central to fostering positive relationships and developing supportive environments (Hattersley, 2023; Midgen *et al.*, 2019). Research suggests that strong teacher-pupil

relationships within Education support academic attainment and well-being for children and young people but specifically for those who exhibit SEMH needs (Dolton *et al.*, 2020). This paper explored the views of 6–11-year-olds within one mainstream primary school in England. Dolton *et al.*, (2020) research suggests that children with SEMH difficulties need to feel safe and supported by adults in order to flourish within their school. School staff can be regarded as ‘ad hoc’ attachment figures providing a secure base in school (Dolton *et al.*, 2020). This links to psychological theories such as attachment and nurture (Bowlby, 1958; Ainsworth *et al.*, 1978). School can offer a safe space for CYP with SEMH needs if this is not provided in the home environment (Bowlby, 1958; Ainsworth *et al.*, 1978). However, the research also suggests that in teacher-pupil relationships, children may feel misunderstood by the adults who support them, which was reported as a hinderance to their learning (Dolton *et al.*, 2020). Despite this, it is worth noting that this research did not explore the notion of ‘rupture and repair’ within mainstream schools or restorative practices (Dolton *et al.*, 2020). The researchers reported that the CYP participants in the research were able to effectively articulate their thoughts and feelings about school and their support from adults however, it could be suggested that this may not always be the case with some CYP experiencing SEMH needs. SEMH needs encompasses a variety of needs which may be difficult to explain to adults supporting them (Welsh Government, 2021). However, this is acknowledged in the research that adults can misunderstand the behaviours expressed by the CYP (Dolton *et al.*, 2020). A strength of the research is that the researchers intended for the research to be child-centred including the voices of the CYP rather than those that support them. This could be suggested to be an effective way of exploring the experiences of CYP experiencing SEMH and how best to support them directly to inform policies and practices within schools.

To add to this, it has been suggested that CYP who display SEMH needs often experience a lack of school belonging compared to their peers (Lovell, 2021). School belonging can be a predictor of a

range of broad academic, psychological and physical health benefits in both children and young people (Roffey *et al.*, 2019). Lovell (2021) explored the views of mainstream primary school teachers and teaching assistants on supporting SEMH needs, revealing that they often felt unsure and inexperienced in doing so. In addition, the staff reported that they felt unsupported within the school and unable to share their concerns regarding CYP who display SEMH needs (Lovell, 2021). Participants did not view SEMH to be a clear area to understand (Lovell, 2021). It was suggested that the term 'SEMH' is often broad and encompassed many different aspects of development (Lovell, 2021). It is also important to note that the research focused on school belonging which links to rupture and repair but did not focus on this solely however, this research is important to consider in light of school belonging and teacher-pupil relationships as important factors of behaviour management (Moir & MacLeod, 2018; Roffey, 2012). Another limitation of the research would be the lack of exploration around the term, 'SEMH'. Some participants may have had different ideas and understandings of the term 'SEMH', depending on the level of experience with regards to working with CYP experiencing these needs. This suggests that the term 'SEMH' needs is open to interpretation, subject to individual perspectives and experience. This is worth acknowledging in the context of exploring this term using research methods. Some of the participants worked on a one-to-one basis with CYP experiencing SEMH needs whereas others did not. Additionally, the inclusion of pupil voice might have been interesting to add to this research as the focus was on 'school belonging' which is personal to the CYP who is experiencing it.

Corradi (2019) explored primary school staff's perception of their role and the school's role in meeting the needs of CYP with SEMH needs. Six primary school staff across three mainstream schools in one Local Authority were included in the research. The staff ranged from a headteacher to learning support assistants (Corradi, 2019). The research suggests that whole school culture, ethos and values provide a critical role in promoting positive outcomes for CYP with SEMH needs (Corradi,

2019). This is also in line with research suggested by Dodds (2023) who suggested that ethos and culture of a school enables a whole school relational approach. However, this research focuses on mental health needs for example, recognising the lack of CAMHs input for CYP experiencing SEMH needs. Whilst this should be acknowledged, there might be lots of school factors that influence CYP with SEMH needs such as situational contexts and behaviour policies for example. The research also focussed on an English context with perhaps different codes of practice and expectations outlined for schools to follow compared to a UK wide context.

Alternatively, Hibbott (2024) explored senior leadership staff's constructions of SEMH needs through discourse and how these constructions shape their perceptions and actions supporting CYP with SEMH needs. The research suggested that 'SEMH' needs are diverse, the needs challenge traditional disciplinary practices, SEMH support is marginalised in favour of academic priorities and SEMH demands a shift towards greater systemic understanding (Hibbott, 2024). Despite the research offering a deep understanding of the participants' constructions, the research involved a volunteer sample of three senior leaders within education. There is an assumption that those that volunteered to be a part of the research have a vested interest in discussing the topic compared to members of staff that support CYP with SEMH needs daily. Whilst providing an insight into senior leadership's understanding of CYP and SEMH needs, the research does not capture staff's experiences of SEMH compared to previous research (Lovell, 2021). There is perhaps a 'top down' approach to supporting CYP with SEMH needs within this research from senior leaders in school settings. Many senior leaders are in charge of policies within schools and senior leaders have a particular set of skills such as management and leadership skills which differ from support and teaching staff (Bush, 2011). However, the research encompassed some overarching themes of supporting SEMH needs in schools, including an understanding of a shift to a more systemic view of SEMH needs. The research emphasises the importance of a shift from traditional disciplinary practices such as exclusions,

detentions, isolation rooms to a more compassionate view of SEMH needs (Hibbott, 2024).

Approaches such as relational and restorative practices have been found to be a more effective way of supporting CYP with SEMH needs in a school context (Weber & Vereenoooghe, 2020).

One thesis explored the notion of ‘rupture and repair’ within teacher-student relationships, highlighting the importance of a whole school supportive environment to embed relational approaches including empathic repair between teachers and students with SEMH following rupture (Fitzsimmons, 2021). The research explored five teacher’s lived experiences of rupture and repair in their relationships with CYP who exhibit SEMH needs. Ruptures were perceived as a relational breakdown which impacted on student’s learning (Fitzsimmons, 2021). This was categorised as ranging from small to major incidents. The research suggests that teachers found ruptures difficult to recover from when the student had crossed a personal or emotional boundary or when they could not make sense of the rupture (Fitzsimmons, 2021). The research highlights the importance of clarity of understanding the rupture in order to establish an empathic repair. Additionally, the research explores the impact of the personal nature of the rupture to affect professional practice and raises the question of whether the repair could be effectively supported in these cases. The research suggests a need for reflective supervision for staff working with CYP with SEMH needs to provide a space for building resilience and self-efficacy to reduce staff burnout (Fitzsimmons, 2021; Camacho *et al.*, 2021). This study was conducted within a specialist academy that forms part of a large multi-academy trust in England, catering to pupils aged five to sixteen years of age (Fitzsimmons, 2021). Therefore, the research findings may not be applicable to a Welsh setting or indeed, a mainstream setting. Further research could explore the notion of relational rupture and repair within a mainstream school setting in order to further understand how school staff-pupil relationships are restored following a rupture.

2.2 The label of SEMH:

Language plays a part in how behaviours are perceived particularly in the case of working with CYP with SEMH needs, perhaps viewing the needs of the CYP as ‘within child’ rather than situational (Stanbridge & Mercer, 2022). Sheffield and Morgan (2017) found that teacher-pupil relationships were found to contribute to both strengths and struggles at school depending on their perceived quality. CYP labelled with the term Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) or Behavioural Emotional Social Difficulties (BESD) term were participants of the research. It was found that eight out of the nine participants evaluated this label negatively (Sheffield & Morgan, 2017). The participants were nine young people, aged 13-16 years old with a statement of Special Educational Needs (SEN) where BESD was the ‘primary need’ within a London Local Authority (Sheffield & Morgan, 2017). This further supports Dolton et al. (2020)’s research that suggests that teacher-pupil relationships are important to supporting children and young people with social, emotional and mental health needs. It is worth noting that the term ‘SEMH’ and ‘BESD’ are used interchangeably to categorise a group of pupils with a specific set of difficulties with their social, emotional and wellbeing needs. Within this research, the pupils identified as having other potential additional learning needs such as dyslexia and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) were not discussed in the research as having an impact on outcomes relating to the young person’s (YP) experiences of school (Sheffield & Morgan, 2017). A strength of the research was exploring how Educational Psychologists (EPs) can best support CYP experiencing SEMH/BESD. The research suggests that EPs are best placed to provide person-centred practice alongside gathering children and young people’s (CYP) views of how their needs are described rather than the CYP being provided with labels which may be viewed negatively by the CYP or others around them (Sheffield & Morgan, 2017). It is also acknowledged that as EPs, we may actively avoid using terms such as ‘SEMH’ or ‘BESD’ but however they are used within educational contexts to describe ‘behavioural difficulties’ (Sheffield & Morgan, 2017). Under the new Additional Learning Needs Education Tribunal (Wales) Act (ALNET) (2018), there is a need for person-centred practice and the views of the CYP to be central to

the support offered, perhaps EPs could be best placed to ensure that the CYP's voice is heard so that needs are met effectively.

To add to this, research suggests the importance of working systemically with schools to raise awareness of the implications of language and explore the impact of wider contextual factors on pupil's difficulties (Hickinbotham & Soni, 2021). This research supports the notion that there can be a negative impact of the labels associated with SEMH and there should be importance placed on promoting the voice of the CYP experiencing these difficulties (Hickinbotham & Soni, 2021). A strength of this research included a systematic review of qualitative research exploring the views of children and young people identified as having SEMH needs. However, the researchers acknowledge that the review only included published peer-reviewed work and did not choose to include unpublished work such as theses (Hickinbotham & Soni, 2021). This perhaps limited the number of papers that were included which limits the overall picture of CYP's experiences of their 'SEMH' label. Additionally, the review specifically focuses on the impact of the label 'SEMH' rather than experiences within educational settings such as mainstream schools. Furthermore, the research focuses on an English context which operates under a separate educational system compared to Wales.

2.3 Nurture and SEMH:

Nurture approaches have been suggested as an effective way of supporting children and young people experiencing SEMH needs (Syrnyk, 2018). The nurture approach is rooted in attachment theory (Bowlby, 1958) and hierarchy of needs theory (Maslow, 1943) which suggests that children and young people with SEMH must have their basic, physical and emotional needs met first before accessing their potential for learning (Syrnyk, 2018). The research highlights the vital role teaching

assistants play in supporting children and young people (CYP) with social, emotional and mental health needs as children have stronger relationships with members of staff such as teaching assistants due to smaller classroom sizes within a specialist school (Syrnyk, 2018). The research was conducted within a specialist primary school for pupils with SEMH in England who have smaller classroom sizes with more teaching assistants and teachers to support the children within the setting (Syrnyk, 2018). Despite the research exhibiting good practice of the use of a nurture approach in a specialist provision, there are questions around whether this approach could be adopted within a mainstream school in order to see the positive effects of nurture approaches with CYP with SEMH.

Furthermore, the use of nurture groups is found to be an effective way of supporting CYP with SEMH needs with improvements found in emotional regulation skills and reduction of disruptive behaviours within classrooms (MacPherson & Phillips, 2021). However, nurture groups were found to have little or no significant impact on pupils' educational attainment within schools (MacPherson & Phillips, 2021). The research suggests that nurture groups provide CYP with various early nurturing experiences which they may have missed during their early experiences. This offers them effective social and emotional skills in order to build and maintain meaningful friendships and relationships with others (MacPherson & Phillips, 2021). It is important to note that the research consisted of self-reports from teachers that had previously worked with CYP with SEMH and was not a longitudinal study, the findings may not be accurate in measuring the long-term effects of nurture groups on academic attainment and emotional wellbeing of these CYP with SEMH needs.

2.4 Relational and Restorative practices in schools:

A facilitator of improving relationships within schools and reducing conflict has been the use of restorative practice (Weber & Vereenoghe, 2020). A systematic literature review was conducted to

explore the outcomes of restorative practice in schools. Several studies found that there was a decrease in student suspensions and behaviour referrals (Weber & Vereenoghe, 2020). The use of restorative practice might decrease incidents of bullying and improve student-teacher relationships however, the researchers proposed that this would need to be further evidenced and researched due to Weber and Vereenoghe (2020) solely exploring quantitative outcome data from the papers included in the review. The research suggests that the studies included were correlational as they included outcome data and did not include qualitative information on the effectiveness of restorative practice. This affects the generalisability and applicability of the study to a real-life context (Weber & Vereenoghe, 2020). However, this systematic literature review further supports the notion that 'repair' of relationships improves teacher-student relationships.

To add to this, research has suggested that the use of restorative practice can promote positive childhood experiences (PCEs) and protective factors (PFs) for students who have experienced ACEs (Adverse Childhood Experiences) within schools (Breedlove *et al.*, 2021). The research posits the idea that the school environment and how it is experienced can be a protective factor (Breedlove *et al.*, 2021). This relates to the idea of the importance of school belonging and relationships providing a nurturing and inclusive environment for CYP (Roffey, 2012). Breedlove *et al.*, (2021) identified that incorporating restorative practice within schools requires all staff members to be open and invested to adopting a different approach to behaviour management using Restorative Practice (RP). This in turn, provides consistency across the school context (Breedlove *et al.*, 2021). This research was based in an American context, the school system within America is vastly different to that of a British system so may not be applicable to a British system. However, it could be suggested that this approach could be implemented in many different contexts which supports its flexibility as an approach (Breedlove *et al.*, 2021).

As previously mentioned, relational approaches within schools foster a sense of belonging and psychological safety which promotes engagement in the community and enables children to fulfil their potential (Baker *et al.*, 1997). Additionally, the use of restorative practice (RP) within schools has been found to be an effective way of restoring relationships following conflict whilst acknowledging the complexities of implementing RP within a school context (Bevington, 2015). The research focussed on a case study of one school in England which aimed to broaden the evidence base of the implementation and impact of restorative practice (Bevington, 2015). This research offers many positives of adopting restorative practice in response to conflict, such as an increase in life skills, emotional literacy and a positive impact on relationships and behaviour (Bevington, 2015).

Restorative practice enables staff more constructive ways of dealing with conflict and emotions (Bevington, 2015). A key limitation of this research is the use of a case study in one primary school in London which raises the question of applicability to other mainstream schools across the UK, including a Welsh context. However, the research adopted an appreciative inquiry approach which emphasises a deep understanding of individual experiences. It could be argued that establishing a whole-school ethos is necessary to align shared values, practices and outcomes within the school environment.

Dodds (2023) found that school staff embedding an ethos and culture within a school is a key enabler to a whole school relational approach. This research explored mainstream secondary school senior leadership staff's experiences of implementing a whole school relational approach however, this research focussed on one secondary school to provide an *"in depth understanding of contextual factors within that secondary school"*, (Dodds, 2023, pp.67). The research emphasises the 'collective trauma' experienced by society as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and suggests the need for more relational approaches to behaviour management with an emphasis on wellbeing within schools (Dodds, 2023; Brown, 2021). It is noted that the mainstream secondary school included in this research was based in a Multi-Academy Trust (MAT) school which is not only specific to the school context but indeed, an English context. Despite exploring the enablers and barriers of implementing

whole school approaches in a mainstream setting, perhaps a generalised view across many mainstream schools would be needed.

2.5 Narrative Review Summary

Several research studies suggest that teacher-student relationships are a strong protective factor for the inclusion of children and young people with SEMH needs in schools (Dolton *et al.*, 2020; Roorda *et al.*, 2011; Sheffield & Morgan, 2017). Further to this a sense of perceived safety is felt through trusting and secure relationships within schools as school staff are sometimes regarded as ‘ad hoc’ attachment figures to CYP experiencing SEMH needs (Dolton *et al.*, 2020). Nurture groups provide crucial interventions for CYP experiencing SEMH needs to gain social and emotional skills (Macpherson & Phillips, 2021; Syrnyk, 2018). However, there has been little evidence to suggest that nurture groups support academic attainment in schools and may not be a priority for school leaders to implement this approach (Hibbott, 2024; Syrnyk, 2018).

Some research suggests that if CYP experiencing SEMH needs can describe how they are feeling, they can be supported effectively by adults in school (Dolton *et al.*, 2020). However, school staff feel unsure or inexperienced to support SEMH needs as the need is often complex and not clear to understand (Hibbott, 2024; Lovell, 2021). In addition to this, CYP experiencing SEMH needs may not have the language to express how they are feeling effectively (Stanbridge & Mercer, 2022). Further to this, the impact of the label of ‘SEMH’ can often have positive and negative associations for the child or young person experiencing it (Hickinbotham & Soni, 2021). Describing SEMH needs requires language that is neutral, descriptive and non-judgemental (Stanbridge & Mercer, 2022). From a behaviour policy perspective, SEMH needs can challenge traditional disciplinary practices (Hibbott, 2024; Stanbridge & Mercer, 2022). This calls for a more relational approach to support SEMH needs. Research suggests that conflict presents an opportunity for a constructive way forward, utilising approaches such as restorative practice (Bevington, 2015; Breedlove *et al.*, 2021; Weber &

Vereenoghe, 2020). This approach might improve student-teacher relationships (Weber & Vereenoghe, 2020). However, relational approaches require systemic changes within a school system with emphasis on the ethos and culture of the school to be a key facilitator for this approach (Corradi, 2019; Dodds, 2023; Hibbott, 2024; Hickinbotham & Soni, 2021). However, lack of time and resources are said to be the biggest barrier to implementing a relational approach in schools (Dodds, 2023). In addition, 'ruptures' in teacher-student relationships can range from a 'blip' to major incident and school staff can feel that repairing relationships using relational and restorative practice approaches can be difficult if the ruptures cross a personal or emotional boundary between the two individuals (Fitzsimmons, 2021). This suggests that relational approaches require time, emotional capacity and resources within the school environment (Fitzsimmons, 2021).

Psychological theories and research underpinning this can be used to further understand children and young people with SEMH needs and their experiences of mainstream school. As previously mentioned, current literature is rooted in themes of trauma-informed practice, ACEs, neuroscience, relational approaches to behaviour policies, attachment theory and restorative justice (Drewery, 2004). The following section focuses on the psychological theories that may underpin understanding of children and young people experiencing social, emotional and mental health needs.

2.6 Psychological theories

2.7 Attachment theory (Bowlby, 1958; Ainsworth *et al.*, 1978).

Attachment theory initially developed by Bowlby (1958) focuses on relationships and bonds between people. Attachment is defined as a deep and enduring emotional bond between two people, initially primary caregiver and baby (Bowlby, 1969). The theory suggests that babies are born with a need to forge bonds with caregivers. These early bonds may continue to have an influence on attachment throughout life. Positive and secure early attachment provides an internal working model about

oneself and others (Bowlby 1988). This can be considered a 'blueprint' for future relationships in later life for example friendships, relationships with adults within schools and romantic relationships. If needs are not met over an extended amount of time, the baby develops a lack of trust towards their primary care giver, the internal working model is then thus disrupted (Ainsworth *et al.*, 1978). This disruption can influence patterns of attachment into adolescence and adulthood.

If needs are not met within childhood and children are not operating from a secure base, there might be signs within a classroom setting such as a deep sense of being unlovable or undervalued, stress and arousal levels may be heightened and unregulated exhibiting as rage and volatile behaviours and CYP could be maximising attachment behaviours to gain security (Bombèr, 2007). Additional signs could be hypervigilance, an overwhelming sense of shame, an inability to trust, a perceived lack of empathy and impulsivity or destructive behaviours (Bombèr, 2007). Some of these characteristics can be seen in the profile of children and young people with social emotional and mental health needs. It should be acknowledged that there is a wealth of information on the topic of attachment theory and its subsequent informed iterations applied to Education and school such as the work of Bombèr (2007). Therefore, the researcher aimed to summarise key findings from the psychological theory in order to apply to CYP exhibiting SEMH needs. This psychological theory could be considered appropriate to the current literature due to perhaps the assumption that CYP experiencing SEMH needs may have experienced adverse childhood experiences (ACES) (Breedlove *et al.*, 2021) or a perceived lack of nurture in their early years (Dolton *et al.*, 2020). Research suggests that this need for nurture is expressed in schools and nurture groups are appropriate interventions in which basic needs are met before accessing learning (Syrnyk, 2018; Macpherson & Phillips, 2021).

However, it could be argued that Bowlby's attachment theory (1958) may have cultural bias perhaps due to its origins in Western, middle-class contexts (Keller, 2013). It has been suggested that attachment behaviours may not be universally applicable across different cultures, which raises concerns about ethnocentrism and imposing Western standards on diverse cultural practices (Keller,

2013). In addition to this, the attachment theory (1958) posits the idea that attachment is rigidly established in early development and shapes a child's future emotional and relational outcomes (Harris, 1998). This could be said to be reductionist and deterministic. However, contemporary critics of attachment theory (1958) suggests there could be 'plasticity' with regards to attachment styles, indicating that children and young people (CYP) can develop more secure attachment behaviours through positive relationships and interventions later in life (Harris, 1998). This research has implications for school staff that support CYP with social, emotional and mental health needs (SEMH) in schools.

2.8 Bronfenbrenner ecological model (2006)

Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006) suggest that school environments can shape children's experiences. The individual is situated in the centre, and their development is influenced by many systems around them. The 'microsystem' which relates to their environment such as school, friends and family is also affected by the 'mesosystem' and 'macrosystem' of indirect and broad societal structures such as behaviour and relational policies, systemic issues in society and wider politics (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). In this case, the child or young person with SEMH needs is influenced by not only their immediate environment such as the way families communicate with each other and school policies but can also be impacted by wider societal issues. The relationships in the 'microsystem' are bi-directional which means that other people can influence the child in their environment and change other people's beliefs and actions (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). The interactions the child has with these people and environments can directly impact development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). This is also important to note in the current context within schools' post-COVID and post-ALNET Act implementation (2018) as this would have an impact on children's development and social, emotional wellbeing (Brown, 2021). Additionally, CYP with SEMH needs are influenced by behaviour policies, ethos and cultures enforced in the learning environment (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Adults supporting CYP with SEMH needs require a systemic

understanding of their needs in order to support (Hibbott, 2024; Corradi, 2019; Dodds, 2023).

Bronfenbrenner & Morris (2006) theory is appropriate when applied to the narrative review of the literature to specifically explore relational approaches and the relationships between school staff and CYP experiencing SEMH needs in the school context. Teacher-student relationships could be said to be bi-directional as they impact each other in a school context alongside school policies (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006).

Alternatively, whilst the theory identifies a holistic perspective of relational approaches in school between school staff and pupils, it could be suggested that the model lacks clarity about how interactions between systems explicitly affect development for the CYP (Tudge, 2009). Tudge (2009) posits the idea that the model could be perceived as more descriptive than predictive which poses challenges with generating specific testable hypotheses within the environment. This means that the model can help describe the interactions between the systems within a school environment and how these directly affect relational approaches but may not give depth to how the interactions affect the CYP's development.

2.9 Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1943)

When considering relationships within the school environment, it is important to note the application of Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory (1943). Our physiological needs or basic needs such as air, water, food, shelter, sleep and clothing must be satisfied in the first instance. Children and young people must have their basic needs met in order to accomplish anything else in the learning environment. Once physiological needs are satisfied, the next priority is perceived safety. This need is usually environmental such as within the school environment and home environment (Maslow, 1943). If the child or young person is raised with issues in the home such as arguing, lack of parental structure, lack of boundaries or they live in a dangerous area, Maslow (1943) states that there will be difficulties in learning because CYP's basic safety needs have not been met. This is often observed in

CYP with SEMH needs in school environments (Breedlove *et al.*, 2021; Dolton *et al.*, 2020). Children and young people strive for predictability, structure and routine which is associated with safety (Maslow, 1943). When these elements have been met, the CYP can then develop a sense of belonging (Maslow, 1943). This can be applied to family and friend relationships or belonging to their school environment (Roffey, 2012; Maslow, 1943). This sense of belonging is also supported by relationships within the school environment such as with school staff that support them (Roffey, 2012; Maslow, 1943). Once this is established, self-esteem is the next need that must be met which involves a need for individuality, respect for others, accomplishment and confidence (Maslow, 1943). It is suggested that when all these needs are met, CYP will feel adequate, capable, strong and worthy (Maslow, 1943). When applied to education, it is important to note that school staff may not be able to meet all of the physiological needs of CYP however, schools can offer support to CYP that are struggling to get their needs met in the home environment (Maslow, 1943). Providing routines and predictability in the learning environment contributes to perceived safety for CYP (Roffey, 2012). In addition to psychological and emotional safety which would need to be enabled in the learning environment (Maslow, 1943). School staff are also responsible for creating a learning environment in which the child feels accepted and belonged, this is encouraged by positive relationships between teachers and CYP (Dolton *et al.*, 2020; Macpherson & Phillips, 2021). Current research suggests that a sense of safety is felt through secure and trusting relationships within the school environment (Dolton *et al.*, 2020; Syrnyk, 2018; Sheffield & Morgan, 2017). School staff are perceived as 'ad hoc' attachment figures that provide a 'secure base' in schools (Dolton *et al.*, 2020). This links to the current research's narrative review questions which aim to explore relational approaches alongside exploring relationships between school staff and CYP experiencing SEMH needs in a learning context.

Whilst Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory (1943) is useful when exploring relationships within a school context, it could be argued that the theory may have cultural bias (Hofstede, 2001). Within Western cultures, there may be individualistic values emphasising self-actualisation and personal achievement whereas within a collectivist culture, social and community needs can take precedence

over individual self-actualisation (Hofstede, 2001). The theory may be applicable to a Western society but however, may not be applicable within different cultures. In addition, Maslow's theory (1943) posits the idea of personal growth and self-fulfilment but underplays the impact of social and structural factors that influence behaviour (Neher, 1991). For example, personal growth and self-fulfilment may be impacted by the school environment such as relational policies and practices. Relationships or lack thereof within a school setting may influence behaviour positively or negatively, affecting personal growth and self-fulfilment.

2.10 Systems Theory

Children and young people who experience SEMH needs often find systems such as schools to be difficult to navigate (Sheffield & Morgan, 2017). In addition to this, school staff may feel unsure or inexperienced to support children and young people with SEMH as the needs may not be clear to understand as they are heterogenous (Lovell, 2021; Hibbott, 2024). A systemic thinking lens could be used to explain phenomena recognised in school systems (Dowling & Osbourne, 1994). It could be suggested that some schools may hold traditional disciplinary methods or a 'zero tolerance' approach to behaviour, reinforced by staff which enable children and young people to conform in an interactional cycle (Dowling & Osbourne, 1994). It could be suggested that children and young people with SEMH needs challenge the status quo or 'equilibrium' of the school system and its existing behaviour strategies or approaches (Dowling & Osbourne, 1994). Systems theory suggests that CYP's needs could be considered in the dual context of both home and school (Dowling & Osbourne, 1994). Within a school system, there is a hierarchical subsystem which posits specific rules, beliefs and culture (Dowling & Osbourne, 1994). When the specific rules are perhaps inflexible or rigid, this is associated with issues such as 'zero tolerance' approaches to behaviours of concern and punitive approaches which may or may not lead to school exclusions (Dowling & Osbourne, 1994; Stanbridge & Mercer, 2022). CYP with SEMH needs could be said to 'disrupt' the status quo of

rules, regulations, policies and practices that the school systems hold whereby the approaches used for the majority of children and young people in a large system such as a secondary school or indeed, a primary school setting may not be appropriate to CYP experiencing SEMH needs (Dowling & Osbourne, 1994). If expressions of emotions and behaviours of concern are considered to be 'within child', this disrupts the culture, beliefs and rules initially set out within the system (Stanbridge & Mercer, 2022). When considering a school system, it is important to consider rules, beliefs and cultures which govern it (Dowling & Osbourne, 1994). Schools may have a particular culture based on their beliefs about the expression of emotion within a school environment or an expectation of how CYP should operate within the school environment. In this instance, schools with more relational and whole school approaches have shared beliefs of how to support CYP with SEMH needs (Hibbott, 2024; Dodds, 2023; Corradi, 2019). This perhaps lends itself to a more 'open' school system in which children and young people's needs can be reframed holistically as opposed to labelling behaviour or viewing the behaviour as 'within child'. This takes into account the family context as well as the intersection within school (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Dowling & Osbourne, 1994). Working collaboratively with home, school and the CYP provides support for the SEMH needs expressed which is a move away from 'within child' needs (Stanbridge & Mercer, 2022). Neutrality is required from professionals like Educational Psychologists to view the collective school and home system as entities that interact (Pellegrini, 2009; Dowling & Osbourne, 1994). This enables curiosity for what behaviours within the school environment are communicating (Pellegrini, 2009). This also relates to Stanbridge and Mercer (2022) findings that suggest supporting CYP with SEMH needs requires neutral, descriptive and non-judgemental language to describe needs and acknowledges the tensions that arise between individual accountability and a more equality based social model of ALN.

From a systemic thinking perspective, schools need to acknowledge feedback loops when supporting CYP with SEMH needs. Feedback loops are how systems self-regulate (Dowling & Osbourne, 1994). In

this instance, if a child or young person experiencing SEMH needs is reinforced that their behaviour is 'unacceptable' in the school environment, the school system reinforces or amplifies this behaviour negatively. This creates difficulties with establishing and maintaining relationships with school staff (Dolton *et al.*, 2020; Lovell, 2021). Children and young people with SEMH experience a lack of perceived belonging and self-worth (Moir & MacLeod, 2018; Roffey, 2012). Perhaps the system may require adaptation to better meet the needs of the children and young people it supports. This could involve whole-school staff training and the inclusion of pupil voice and parental feedback, ensuring that the school's relational approaches reflect inclusive practice and the overall system remains responsive to the needs within the school (Dowling & Osbourne, 1994; Hickenbotham & Soni, 2021; Dolton *et al.*, 2020). Acknowledging these feedback loops could provide school staff an awareness of early signs of problems in the environment in order to adapt (Dowling & Osbourne, 1994). This is relevant to the current literature as a systemic thinking lens could be explored by professionals such as Educational Psychologists to understand relationships between school staff and CYP experiencing SEMH needs within a school context. Systemic thinking also requires professionals to explore the use of relational approaches and how some systems are 'open' to this kind of approach and others may not.

Whilst systemic thinking provides a holistic perspective of a school system rather than focusing on isolated parts of the system, it could be argued that systemic thinking does not always provide concrete solutions to problems within the system or clear decision-making guidance (Smallman, 2017). The theory is utilised as a resource to understand a system but however, professionals supporting a system may feel that they can identify problems but struggle to take action to support them. For example, EPs may acknowledge that a school is not using an effective relational policy but may not know an appropriate next step to create change within the system. In addition to this, EPs and other professionals utilising this model may misinterpret the system's relationships which can lead to flawed conclusions or interventions if systems are not understood properly (Smallman, 2017)

This process would need to be established over time in order to fully support a school system with implementing effective relational approaches and policies within their school.

2.11 Major literature review summary

The narrative review of the current literature aimed to explore relational approaches and relationships between children and young people experiencing social, emotional and mental health needs (SEMH) and adults in educational provisions. The research highlighted the difficulties of supporting CYP with SEMH needs in a school environment due to the diverse and complex needs expressed (Lovell, 2021). Positive school staff-student relationships are considered a strong protective factor for the inclusion of children and young people with SEMH needs in school (Roorda *et al.*, 2011; Sheffield & Morgan, 2017) as there is a sense of perceived safety through secure and trusting relationships (Dolton *et al.*, 2020). School staff are regarded as ‘ad hoc’ attachment figures providing a secure base (Dolton *et al.*, 2020). This is further supported by attachment psychological theory to explain this phenomena (Bowlby, 1958; Ainsworth *et al.*, 1978). There is a need for acknowledging CYP’s voices in their support in school and the potential negative and positive impact of labels of ‘SEMH’ (Hickenbotham & Soni, 2021; Dolton *et al.*, 2020). Research collated from the narrative review found that nurture groups provide positive and supportive adult-student relationships and provide crucial interventions for CYP experiencing SEMH (Syrnyk, 2018; Macpherson & Phillips, 2021; Hibbott, 2024). However, there is little evidence to suggest that the interventions support positive academic outcomes and priorities so perhaps may not be highly regarded by senior leaders to support CYP on a holistic level (Syrnyk, 2018; Macpherson & Phillips, 2021; Hibbott, 2024). Nurture groups are informed by Maslow’s hierarchy of needs theory (1943), focusing on meeting children’s basic needs as a foundation. Over time, this approach supports CYP with SEMH needs by helping them develop routine, predictability and structure. Within this, positive relationships are initiated and developed to support overall mental health and wellbeing (Syrnyk,

2018; Macpherson & Phillips, 2021). Research suggests that when needs are viewed as ‘within child’, there is a rise in ‘zero tolerance’ behaviour policies which can lead to an increase in school exclusions (Stanbridge & Mercer, 2022; Hibbott, 2024). SEMH needs can challenge traditional disciplinary practices within a school (Hibbott, 2024). There is a tension between individual accountability and a more equality-based social model of ALN (Stanbridge & Mercer, 2022). When supporting SEMH needs, language should be neutral, descriptive and non-judgemental (Stanbridge & Mercer, 2022). Furthermore, relational approaches such as restorative practice provide opportunities for improving student-teacher relationships and enable a more constructive way to support conflict and emotions (Weber & Vereenoghe, 2020; Bevington, 2015). Restorative practice is an appropriate and useful tool to support CYP with SEMH needs who may also exhibit Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES). To support children and young people’s social, emotional and mental health, there is a need for senior leaders to implement a whole school approach (Dodds, 2023; Corradi, 2019). Ethos and cultures of schools are key enablers to whole-school relational approaches (Dodds, 2023). In turn, a systemic lens is required for understanding SEMH needs both in the community and within schools (Dodds, 2023; Corradi, 2019). This can be considered under Bronfenbrenner and Morris’ ecological model (2006) and systems theory (Dowling & Osbourne, 1994; Pellegrini, 2009) whereby CYP experiencing SEMH needs are impacted and are influenced by adults supporting them. Additionally, the current literature review suggests that policies and practices implemented in the school environment can both negatively and positively impact children and young people experiencing social, emotional and mental health needs (Dodds, 2023; Corradi, 2019).

2.12 Rationale for current research and research question

The narrative review raised a research question to explore the notion of ‘repair’ following relational ruptures in schools using qualitative methods. The researcher aims to explore mainstream school staff’s experiences of relational rupture and repair with children and young people who exhibit

social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs in Wales. This will provide more understanding to the literature, particularly within a Welsh context under new educational reform, the ALNET Act (2018) and code (2021). The current research is relevant to Educational Psychology (EP) practice as EPs work with schools collaboratively in order to provide a nurturing environment in which children and young people can thrive (Ruttledge, 2022). EPs support schools with best practice with the use of psychological theories and research (Ruttledge, 2022). EPs could be regarded as appropriately placed to support schools on the importance of teacher-student relationships alongside relational approaches on a whole school system level. When considering Bronfenbrenner and Morris' ecological systems model (2006), EPs can also support schools on individual and microsystem (group) level to support behaviour (Roffey, 2012). The current research aims to gather school staff's experiences of relational approaches with an emphasis on relational ruptures in schools and how they are repaired with CYP with SEMH needs. The current research aims to provide more understanding to the current literature and perhaps provide suggestions for practice within school systems.

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“Their behaviours are displaying what their needs are” : Exploring mainstream primary school staff’s experiences of relational approaches with children who display social, emotional and mental health needs.

Part two: Major Research Empirical study

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Rebecca Soproniuk

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1 Abstract

The concept of relational rupture and repair applied to Educational Psychology Practice is in its infancy (Raider-Roth *et al.*, 2012). As there is limited research in this area, the current qualitative study aimed to explore mainstream primary school staff's experiences of relational approaches with a focus on relational rupture and repair (RR&R) with children who exhibit social, emotional and mental health needs (SEMH).

Five participants engaged in virtual, semi-structured interviews. Two overarching themes and six subthemes were generated from the data set, using Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022). The research highlighted a perceived shift in society, influenced in part by the growing interaction of children with technology, the lasting impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and a change in Welsh educational reform (2018). School staff experience the impact of the accumulation of a child's life at home within the school environment. An increase in the complex presentation of needs of children starting school in the early years also impacts relationships in schools. Furthermore, school staff have observed notable differences in speech, language and communication skills which can present challenges in effectively meeting needs. Due to the impact of time and perceived lack of resources in a busy environment, there is a need to restore situations rather than restore relationships with school staff and children. Effective collaboration between school and families is essential to support positive relationships within schools. It was suggested that effective relational repair require both staff and children to be emotionally regulated. In addition, children with social, emotional and mental health needs benefit most from support delivered by adults who engage with them regularly and have established a strong, trusting relationship. Furthermore, whole school approaches implemented by Senior Leadership Teams enable positive relationships within schools. Findings are discussed in relation to previous research and the wider context, including implications for EP practice. Strengths and limitations are discussed and recommendation for future research proposed.

2 Summary of the current literature

Relational ruptures relate to a break in connection between two people, often caused by hurt or anger and is common in human relationships (Raider-Roth *et al.*, 2012). Repair relates to a process of reconciliation through apology, forgiveness and understanding (Gilligan, 2003). The act of strengthening the relationship and reconnecting after an event as an increase in knowledge and understanding of each other has occurred (Gilligan, 2003). The rupture or conflict is common within human relationships, but it is the repair that is the most important aspect to address for progression of the relationship (Gilligan, 2003). This can be applied to a school environment if there has been repeated rupture and repair within teacher-student relationships, the reconciliation and shared understanding of responding to the needs of one another progresses the relationships (Gilligan, 2003; Roffey, 2012). Ruptures that are not successfully repaired can have destructive consequences such as the loss of trust in teachers (Raider-Roth, 2005). Research suggests that teacher-student relationships are a strong protective factor for the inclusion of children and young people (CYP) who exhibit social, emotional and mental health needs (SEMH) (Roorda *et al.*, 2011; Sheffield & Morgan, 2017). There is a sense of perceived safety through secure and trusting relationships (Dolton *et al.*, 2020).

According to a Welsh Government (2024) census conducted in January 2024, it was suggested that SEMH needs were the second most common type of additional learning need (ALN) in 2024 which represents 35% of pupils with ALN. Pupils with SEMH are often at particular risk of being excluded (Estyn, 2022). Research suggests that school staff cited difficulties with supporting CYP with SEMH needs due to the diverse and complex needs expressed (Lovell, 2021). The label of 'SEMH' has both negative and positive impacts of CYP's self-perception and research suggests a need for acknowledging the views of CYP in their support in school (Hickenbotham & Soni, 2021; Dolton *et al.*, 2020). When needs are viewed as 'within child', there is a rise in 'zero tolerance' behaviour policies in schools which can result in an increase in school exclusions (Hibbott, 2024; Stanbridge & Mercer,

2022). SEMH needs can challenge traditional disciplinary practices within a school (Hibbott, 2024).

There is a tension between individual accountability and a more equality-based social model of additional learning needs (Stanbridge & Mercer, 2022). Due to this, there is a need for language to describe SEMH needs to be neutral, descriptive and non-judgemental (Stanbridge & Mercer, 2022).

Relational approaches such as restorative practice and nurture groups have been found to improve student-teacher relationships (Bevington, 2015; Syrnyk, 2018; Weber & Vereenoghe, 2020).

Restorative practice enables a more constructive way to support conflict and has been described as an appropriate and useful tool to support CYP with SEMH needs (Bevington, 2015; Weber & Vereenoghe, 2020;). Research also posits a need for implementing a whole-school relational approach to supporting CYP with SEMH needs (Corradi, 2019; Dodds, 2023). Ethos and culture are key enablers to a whole school relational approach (Dodds, 2023). Alongside, a systemic understanding of SEMH needs both in their community and within schools is important (Corradi, 2019; Dodds, 2023).

Whilst exploring this topic, the term ‘relational rupture and repair’ could be suggested to be in its infancy with applicability to an educational context (Raider-Roth *et al.*, 2012). The narrative review found one study that explored relational rupture and repair with school staff and children and young people with SEMH needs within a specialist educational setting (Fitzsimmons, 2021). Whilst this research provided further understanding of relational rupture and repair with school staff and SEMH students, further research could be suggested to be needed in a mainstream setting and indeed, a Welsh context.

2.1 Rationale for current study and research question

The current study is relevant to Educational Psychology Practice (EPP) as EPs work with schools collaboratively in order to provide a nurturing environment in which children and young people can

thrive (Ruttledge, 2022). EPs support schools with best practice with the use of psychological theories and research (Ruttledge, 2022). EPs could be regarded as appropriately placed to support schools on the importance of teacher-student relationships alongside relational approaches on a whole school system level (Roffey, 2012). EPs could also support CYP experiencing SEMH needs on an individual and group level to support behaviour within schools (Roffey, 2012).

2.2 Research Questions

The current study aims to explore the following two research questions (RQ):

- RQ1: What are mainstream primary school staff's experiences of relational rupture and repair with children who display social, emotional and mental health needs?
- RQ2: What are the key barriers and facilitators supporting relational approaches within mainstream schools?

The research aims to use qualitative methods to gather mainstream primary school staff's experiences of working with children who display social, emotional and mental health needs, within a Welsh context. The research also aims to explore relational approaches with an emphasis on the concept of relational rupture and repair. In addition to exploring barriers and facilitators to support relational approaches in mainstream schools. The current study aims to provide more understanding to the current literature and perhaps provide suggestions for practice within school systems.

Part Two: Major Research Empirical study

3 Methodology

3.1 Research paradigm

The current research is grounded in a critical realist ontology which refers to an assumption that a material reality exists independent of our ideas about it, but we will only ever partially know it, our knowledge is subjective as it is based on experience which is mediated by language and culture (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

The researcher identified the epistemology to be that of a constructivist approach, which suggests that meaning arises from a singular view or own perspective (Fryer, 2022). All knowledge is constructed from human perception and social experience (Burr, 2015). The research design includes the use of individual interviews, an exploration of lived experiences and perspectives of working with CYP which is subjective. Due to this, the ontology and epistemology stances chosen were deemed appropriate (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

3.2 Research design

In congruence with the research paradigm, a qualitative research design was adopted. Data was collected via semi-structured interviews and interview transcripts were analysed using Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA: Braun & Clarke, 2022). The questions were in line with current literature exploring school staff's experiences of working with CYP with SEMH needs (Fitzsimmons, 2021; Lovell, 2021; Macpherson & Phillips, 2021; Hibbott, 2024) and in line with the exploratory and constructivist nature of the research (see Appendix. 2). Individual interviews were used to create a sense of psychological safety due to the potentially emotive nature of the topic, discussing relational ruptures within the school environment.

3.3 Participants and Demographic information

Five participants took part in the present research study. All participants were female, worked in a mainstream setting and were from South Wales. Table 2 provides an insight into the participant's demographics.

Table 2: Demographic information of the participants

| Participants | Education setting | Role within the school | Location |
|----------------------|---------------------------|--|-------------|
| Participant 1 | Mainstream primary school | Additional Learning Needs Coordinator/Deputy head teacher/Reception class teacher/Trauma informed Schools (TIS) practitioner trained | South Wales |
| Participant 2 | Mainstream primary school | Additional Learning Needs Coordinator/ALN class teacher | South Wales |
| Participant 3 | Mainstream primary school | Nursery teaching assistant | South Wales |
| Participant 4 | Mainstream primary school | Additional Learning Needs Coordinator/Year 2 class teacher | South Wales |
| Participant 5 | Mainstream primary school | Higher Level Teaching Assistant/Emotional Literacy Support Assistant (ELSA) | South Wales |

3.3.1 Sampling procedure

A purposive sample (Campbell *et al.*, 2020) was adopted to select participants based on characteristics of working within a mainstream school setting and working with children and young people who experience social, emotional and mental health needs (SEMH). The participants previously worked with a child or young person in which there was a perception of 'relational rupture'. The participants also explained how this rupture was repaired within the school system. The

current research explored mainstream primary school staff's experiences of relational rupture and repair (see Table. 2 for more details of participants' demographics).

3.3.2 Inclusion criteria

The researcher included the following inclusion criteria in order to recruit potential participants. The inclusion criteria involved access to Teachers, Teaching Assistants (TAs), Pastoral/Nurture teachers or Additional Learning Needs Coordinators (ALNCos). Previous literature explored SEMH specialist provisions and how they best support SEMH needs (Fitzsimmons, 2021; Syrnyk, 2018; Hibbott, 2024; Stanbridge & Mercer, 2022) so there could be an opportunity to explore mainstream school staff's experiences of relational rupture and repair. Furthermore, the researcher required participants to work in a mainstream school setting within Wales and participants needed to be over the age of 21 to take part in the research. Participants could be of any age or gender.

3.3.3 Exclusion criteria

The exclusion criteria were specialist provisions such as SEMH, Pupil Referral Units and specialist schools. The current research aimed to explore mainstream experiences due to limited research in this area (Fitzsimmons, 2021; Syrnyk, 2018; Hibbott, 2024; Stanbridge & Mercer, 2022).

3.3.4 Recruitment method

In the first instance, a gatekeeper letter (see Appendix. 3) was sent to ALNCos in Local Authorities in Wales in order to enable access to participants. This facilitated the research to be widely spread across schools. The researcher contacted ALNCos directly via their emails. In the second instance, a recruitment poster (see Appendix. 4) was circulated via social media (namely Educational Psychology forums on X, formally known as Twitter and Facebook) and via a personal Facebook account. The Educational Psychology forums on X and Facebook were used as a way to recruit participants to the research due to the number of members who had a wealth of experience in mainstream schools (See

Appendix. 10 for further information regarding a re-submission to Cardiff University School of Psychology Research Ethics Committee). Many members within these forums were former and current teachers, teaching assistants, pastoral and nurture staff and ALNCoS seeking applications to further study within the Educational Psychology role. The recruitment poster included information of the research study. Participants requesting to take part in the research were encouraged to respond directly to the University email attached to the poster to request information and consent forms. On receipt of the information sheet (see Appendix. 5) and consent form (see Appendix. 6), it was noted that allocation was on a 'first come first serve' basis, with a decline with gratitude email if the research reached its maximum number of participants (see Appendix. 7). Participant's data were anonymised and were not able to be identified from the transcription process onwards. The current study recruited five participants to interview for the research and analysed using reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022). This method of participant recruitment provided a rich data set which included many different experiences of 'relational rupture and repair.'

3.4 Data gathering

Semi-structured questions were administered within individual interviews with participants via Microsoft Teams. This gave some structure to the interviews but also gave participants an opportunity to expand further on topics mentioned within the research in order to gain a better understanding of the experiences of school staff (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021). Participants consented for their interviews to be audio recorded, both verbally and written, in order to provide transcripts of the conversations for data analysis purposes. A script (see Appendix. 2) was used to introduce the topic and aims of the interview. The following six questions were used to gather rich contextual data within the interview:

Table 3: Interview questions and rationale.

| Interview question | Prompt/probe | Rationale |
|--|--|--|
| 1. What is your role within the school? | What year do you work with as a teacher/teaching assistant? | Warm up question, provided context to the participant's experience. |
| 2. What is your understanding of the term 'relational rupture' within a school context? | The definition of relational rupture; a break in the connection between two people, often caused by hurt or anger and is common in human relationships (Raider-Roth <i>et al.</i> 2012). Further prompt: school staff-student relationships | This question provided the researcher insight into the participant's understanding of the term 'relational rupture' and its repair. |
| 3. Could you tell me about a time where there has been a 'relational rupture' with a pupil and how this was repaired? | What was helpful? What was not helpful? – both prompts were used for further expansion of responses. | Open ended question to elicit a narrative around ruptures within the school environment, this could be a personal experience that they had within the school context. |
| 4. What do you think are the potential barriers for supporting relationships between school staff and students within schools? | Could you tell me more about that? | Open ended question which provided participants an opportunity to explain their ideas of what potential barriers there could be in the school environment to supporting and restoring relationships. |
| 5. What do you think the potential facilitators are for supporting relationships between school staff and students within schools? | Could you tell me more about that? | A balance to the previous questions. An open-ended question which provided participants an opportunity to explain their ideas of potential aids/promoters of supporting and restoring relationships within a school context. |
| 6. Are there any further points that you would like to mention that you have not yet discussed in relation to your experience? | n.a. | This question provided participants opportunities to mention anything else that they deemed relevant to the topic. This question provided broader insight into the experiences of the participants. |

3.5 Data analysis

The data is qualitative in nature, which is in line with the research question and research paradigms.

An exploratory analysis using Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA: Braun & Clarke, 2022) was adopted to consider the data collected from interviews. The reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022) process involved; data familiarisation, generating initial codes then initial themes, developing and reviewing of the themes, defining and redefining themes generated, and the final stage is reporting the themes found from the data set. The researcher adopted an inductive approach to the data sets whereby coding and theme development were grounded in the data rather than shaped by pre-existing explanatory theories (Braun & Clarke, 2022). The researcher used a combination of semantic and latent codes as some codes provided surface or obvious meaning in the data, and some codes captured implicit meaning in the dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2022). As the research included multiple participants via individual interviews, RTA was chosen to explore common themes or similarities between each data set in order to provide meaning and explore the research question (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Transcription of the data was within the “*orthographic transcription*” style (Braun & Clarke, 2019, pp161-162).

According to Big Q qualitative research, the researcher is guided by qualitative research tools and researcher’s values and assumptions (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Big Q qualitative research posits the idea that human beings all have a subjective understanding of the world which is meaningful and important (Braun & Clarke, 2022). It is the researcher’s responsibility to remain curious of why a participant is telling their story in the way that they do (Braun & Clarke, 2022). The researcher is active in the process of data generation and analysis. As all qualitative research is biased, the researcher also acknowledges that subjectivity is a resource for research not a problem to be managed (Braun & Clarke, 2022). The researcher took an experiential or empathic perspective towards participant’s views and experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2022). This is referred to as, “*treating the human subject as an expert on their experience which provides a transparent window into their*

world through interview-based accounts." (Gough & Madill, 2012, pp.375). The researcher also acknowledges that reflexivity is important within Big Q qualitative research wherein, the researcher utilised a research journal and research supervision to support the process (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

3.6 Ethical considerations

Ethical approval (see Appendix. 9 and Appendix. 10) for the current research was sought through Cardiff University's School of Psychology Research Ethics Committee which outlined detailed considerations that the researcher took to ensure that they were working in a professional and ethical manner (for further information please see Appendix 11). Due to the nature of the topic which may be emotive to some participants to discuss relational ruptures within a school environment, the researcher decided to use individual interviews. This was due to the researcher's intention to create a sense of psychological safety compared to other data gathering methods such as observations or focus groups.

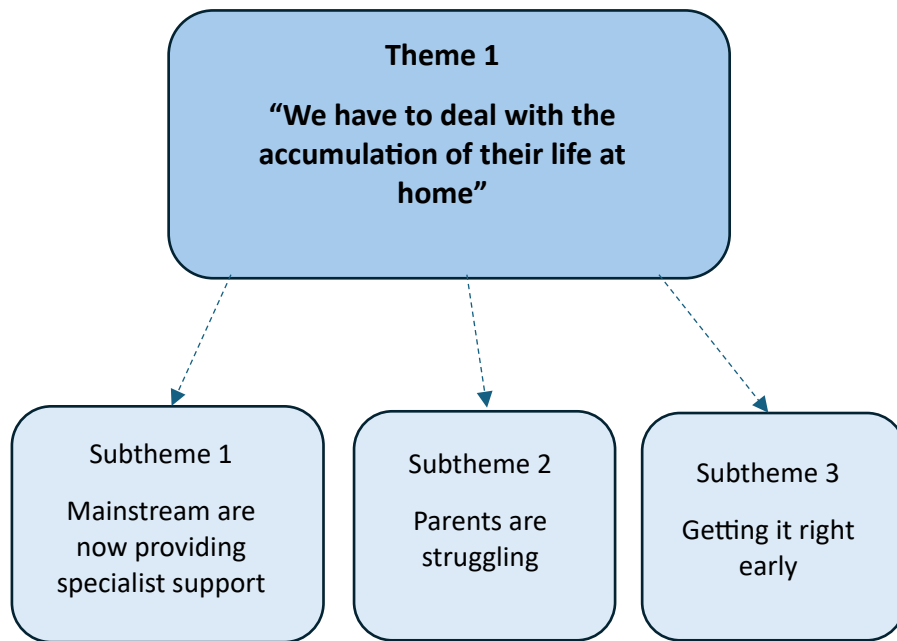
4 Findings

4.1 Reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) and interpretation

The six-stage process of RTA (Braun & Clarke, 2022) was completed separately for each data set. Whilst the six stages of the process are distinct and systematic, the reflexive element of RTA provided the researcher the opportunity to flexibly oscillate between the different stages in order to account for the researcher's perspectives, assumptions and interactions with the data and this created the subsequent themes from the data set (Braun & Clarke, 2022). This process resulted in the development of two overarching themes with three subsequent sub-themes for each. This is presented in a thematic map (See Figure. 2).

A discussion of the main themes is presented following the thematic map, the themes presented are in order and discussion of the subthemes are included. Participant quotations are presented as part of the analysis and where appropriate for ease of reading, ellipses (...) have been used to show that text has been omitted from the original transcripts (see Appendix. 12-21 for RTA process).

RQ1: What are mainstream primary school staff's experiences of relational rupture and repair?



RQ2: What are the key barriers and facilitators supporting relational approaches?

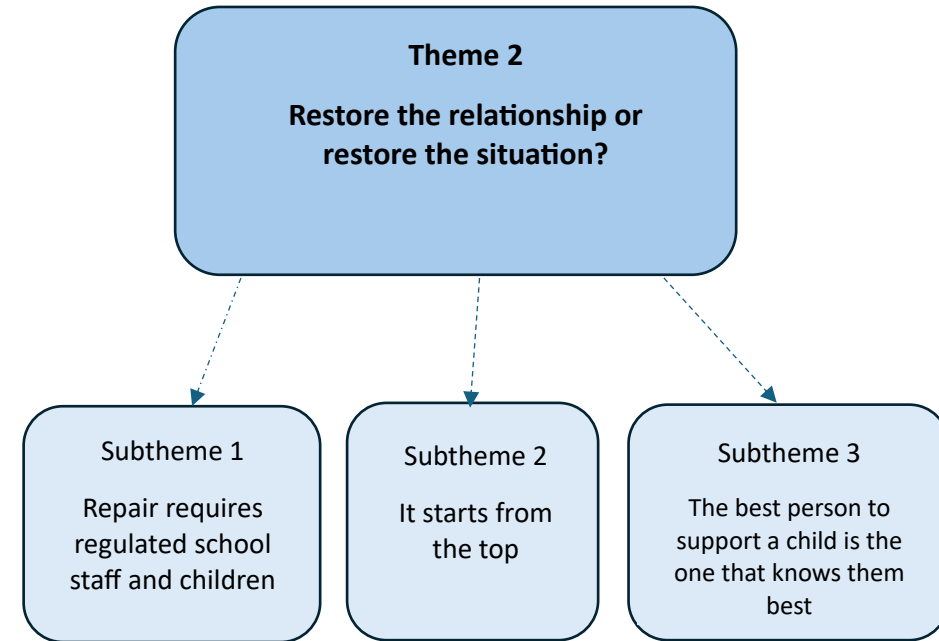


Figure 2: Thematic map exploring mainstream primary school staff's experiences of relational approaches, with emphasis on relational rupture and repair.

4.2 Exploration of themes

The themes and sub themes identified were:

- Theme 1: “we have to deal with the accumulation of their life at home”
 - Sub theme 1: Mainstream are providing specialist support
 - Sub theme 2: Parents are struggling
 - Sub theme 3: Getting it right early
- Theme 2: Restore the relationship or restore the situation?
 - Sub theme 1: Repair requires regulated school staff and children
 - Sub theme 2: It starts from the top
 - Sub theme 3: The best person to support a child is the one that knows them best.

4.2.1 Overarching theme – “we have to deal with the accumulation of their life at home”.

Theme definition:

This theme reflects the participants’ views of external factors that impact on both ruptures and the ability to repair. The participants reflected on perceived changes in societal values, norms and attitudes which impact on both ruptures and the ability to repair. All of the research participants had extensive experience working in schools, there was a perception that behavioural needs are significantly on the rise. They also reported that times are significantly different now. Some participants reported that today’s society has impacted on the lack of nurture for children and young people in mainstream schools which participants reported to be perhaps due to the ongoing impact of COVID-19 on some cohorts and a lack of social connection and interaction in the early years which impacts CYP’s SEMH needs. The increase in the use of technology was also suggested to negatively impact on social interaction and a perceived lack of boundaries at home. The theme raises questions of whether parents and carers feel that they can adequately support their children’s emotional

regulation. Additionally, the researcher observed themes of children and young people internalising adult concerns, which may be connected to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on certain cohorts, as well as the growing use of technology. This poses the idea that perhaps schools need to be more flexible and responsive to external barriers to further support relational approaches and whether schools can support this.

Illustrative quotes:

P5: “oh most definitely yes most definitely ((laughs))....I think you do [see differences in the children coming into nursery]...it comes in waves. So, 20 years ago, the children that were coming through the door... but I think across the board there wasn’t as many behavioural needs that there is today, and I think attitudes of um children only mirror what they hear and see...and so attitudes of society is impacting...on how children are then displaying those needs.”

P4: “when I first started teaching it was very different...to have a child with significant needs...was quite a rare thing....whereas now I mean that year one class...definitely a COVID year group, that class is like nothing we’ve ever had before... I’ve spoken to other ALNCos, [and] they all say the same you know, it’s that particular year group.”

4.2.2 Sub theme 1 – Mainstream are providing specialist support.

Sub theme definition:

This sub theme reflects the participant’s experiences of adapting to the needs and changes over time due to the potential change in society and thus, presenting needs in schools. Participants reported that, due to the rising number of pupils with significant SEMH needs, available resources are evolving. Some participants noted a mix of generalised and bespoke or specialist strategies being introduced into mainstream settings by external professionals. However, staff often find it challenging to implement these strategies while also supporting the rest of the class, which can

strain relationships within the classroom. It was suggested that there may not be enough staff to implement bespoke programmes and therefore, staff are working with limited resources. Parents sometimes want specialist provisions in mainstream and there is an impact of labelling behaviour to further understand the behaviours. Despite school staff adapting to the needs over time, the increase in SEMH needs within mainstream schools can create more difficulties with effectively implementing a curriculum to meet all the needs in a classroom. This raises the question around the impact that specialist needs are having on relational approaches to behaviour management, in particular relational repair following ruptures within the school environment.

Illustrative quotes:

P4: “[the strategies]...it has to be more generalised... I suppose a lot of the strategies that are being given to us by the specialist teachers when I attend all the different forums, they are quite bespoke and in an ideal world, they would be done, you know, on a one-to-one basis but we don’t really have the resources to do that....”

P3: “once upon a time, you’d say you know how you treat them all the same, they’re all the same and then you think they’re not all the same they’re not the same you know, this child needs a different approach.”

P2: “obviously he is on the pathway for you know assessment [for autism spectrum condition and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder] but since we’ve taken him out [his class to be put into a specialist teaching facility in mainstream]....he’s much more regulated. There are twelve children in there. There are four adults, you know there’s lots of space to move around compared to 75 children we’ve got in reception and mum said the difference [it has made] not just for the child but for the whole family because she’s not having to be told, “oh this has happened.”

4.2.3 Sub theme 2: Parents are struggling

Sub theme definition:

This sub theme reflects the participant's understanding that parents are struggling at home with their children with SEMH needs. Due to parent's struggling to know how to support but also where to ask for support, this can cause ruptures in relationships between parents and school staff. This can create perceptions of lack of parenting skills and lack of support from schools to parents. School staff perceive children with significant SEMH needs to internalise home issues and acquire perceived blame for situations that children can't control at home. Some children are not able to regulate themselves due to not having the support. There is a need for effective parent-school staff relationships to provide consistent approaches to supporting children with SEMH needs which in turn supports both the school system and family system and ultimately, supports the child. To add to this, this sub theme raises questions around whether relational approaches to behaviour management and indeed, repair following ruptures can be supported within schools due to these external factors.

Illustrative quotes:

P1: "there is not enough understanding about it [relational rupture and repair] and how much we as adults have to soak up and prepare and repair and enable children to reflect and to give them time and so on and there are too many things that are pulling in the opposite direction."

P3: "[mum] didn't know what to do with him and this is the thing sometimes you say to the parents, we've observed this about your child today and they sort of think, "well what can you do about it?" ...you know they are only with us for two and a half hours in nursery and even if it's a full day in school....we can only do so much, it's got to be (pause) but I suppose parents don't know where to go for help either."

4.2.4 Sub theme 3: Getting it right early

Subtheme definition:

This sub theme reflects participant's experiences of a lack of early intervention in the early years for key skills or additional learning needs. Participants have noticed a significant change in children's speech and language skills upon entering school in nursery within mainstream schools. It was suggested that there may be delays or missed opportunities in acquiring speech and language skills which impact on the children's needs being met effectively. It has been suggested that there are children with obvious needs coming into school compared to the past. This is perhaps suggested by the participants to be due to the impact of technology and perhaps parents not understanding the importance of talking and listening to their children which impacts speech and language acquisition and may lead to SEMH needs. This in turn, impacts relationships between school staff and children with SEMH needs, creating opportunities for relational rupture in schools. These external factors require school staff to be more flexible and responsive to the needs of SEMH children. This also raises the question of whether school staff feel equipped to effectively meet the needs of the children in their school due to these early developmental need factors. Speech, language and communication needs impact the ability for communication and attunement within relationships in schools.

Illustrative quotes:

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|---|
| P1: "but parents don't understand the importance of talking and listening anymore [to their children]." |
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| P3: "I find there's a lot more recently there's a lot more coming in with speech and language difficulties...some children do not have enough language so there wasn't a lot of sounds, expressions and things....there's about four this year that aren't clearly speaking and obviously |
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they are having a go....so that's what we've noticed really and I don't think you can blame all of this on COVID."

4.2.5 Overarching theme 2: Restore the relationship or the situation?

Theme definition:

This theme reflects the participant's experiences of the challenges that are faced with organisational school factors which impact on relational approaches and in particular, ruptures that happen within the school environment and the ability to repair. This can generate questions such as: are school staff restoring the relationship with the child following a relational rupture or is there a need to restore the situation to meet the needs of school staff due to time pressures in the environment? This in turn can impact on the repair process of relationships. Some participants remarked that some behaviours or expressions of emotions are viewed as non-conforming to the school environment and that not all staff members may understand the importance of repair following rupture. The participants in the research reported experiencing frustrations due to the lack of time, money and resources within schools that do not support a 'repair' process following ruptures. Opportunities to repair relationships are often missed due to school staff's need to implement a curriculum in school, participants reported that some school staff want 'quick fixes' to behaviours. Some participants reported that children and young people can experiencing feelings of rejection and isolation in the learning environment when big emotions are expressed, and constant ruptures within relationships are happening on a daily basis. This raises the question of whether school staff are adapting to the social and emotional and mental health needs of the children within their school and enabling relational practice when there are other external pressures or needs from senior management within the school to implement a school curriculum. Relational practice requires effective repair following ruptures in order for children to access their potential.

Illustrative quotes:

P1: “there are certain children that with that repair, it can happen an hour later....when needs are really high like they were today, you know it’s going to need a lot more time to reflect and to repair what has happened....he trusts me. We have that long standing relationship...it’s not helpful when other people try to get involved that don’t know the situation, that don’t know the child....sometimes people want to just have a quick fix right? Sort this out because it’s lunchtime....make another plan you know that’s what I find the most difficult...other people not having a really secure understanding of what you’re trying to do.”

P4: “there are some children that possibly it happens on a daily basis where they are, you know dysregulated...we find that some strategies might work for a short time...then they don’t work so back to square one.”

4.2.6 Sub theme 1: Repair requires regulated staff and children

Sub theme definition:

This sub theme reflects the participant’s experiences of needing school staff to be emotionally available to support children in school. Participants reported that strained relationships between school staff and children are often the result of a lack of repair through restorative practice. It was suggested that repair does not happen when situations are heightened. There is a need for reflection for both staff and children to provide a space for effective repair. Participants also reported that being a non-confrontational adult is important in order to support the child with SEMH needs to express their emotions. Some participants reported that a “clash of personalities” with some school staff and children are not helpful for effective repair following ruptures. There is a need for school staff to be calm and regulated in order to support CYP they are working with but especially with CYP

experiencing SEMH needs, emphasising the idea of co-regulation to be important with relational ruptures. These key elements are crucial facilitators for effective relational practice work.

Illustrative quotes:

P4: “not helpful is trying to talk to her and trying to calm her down when she is in that state, it’s just completely pointless if anything that would make her worse....she’d probably be more angry if you sort of suggested that she calmed down....so trying to intervene at that point is just probably the worst thing to do really, she just needs to calm....”

P1: “when needs are really high like they were today, then you know it’s going to need a lot more time to reflect and to repair what has happened.”

4.2.7 Sub theme 2: It starts from the top

Sub theme definition:

This sub theme reflects the participant’s experiences of needing a whole-school approach to support relationships with mainstream schools. It was suggested that working as a team and having good communication throughout the school is required so that information can be passed through the school. Ethos and values of the school start from the top and disseminated throughout the school. It is important for senior leadership to reinforce this and to also have an awareness of SEMH in order to effectively meet the needs coming into school. To support this, whole school staff training and sharing proactive strategies before escalation, is required. Relational approaches and relational behaviour policies are disseminated from senior leadership teams to establish a whole-school approach.

Illustrative quotes:

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| P4: “you know in our assemblies, the headteacher talks about our values.....so yeah it is reinforcing all these positive behaviours with them [the children], I think it does make a difference.” |
| P5: “repairing relationships...you know, you got to work collectively as a team, so you’re working with whoever’s invested in that child.” |
| P1: “ensuring that staff have regular <u>regular</u> opportunities to discuss children that you know to share the load....so if there is a rupture, if there are difficulties and things, that you have a team where you feel listened to and enabled to do something about it.” |

4.2.8 Sub theme 3: The best person to support a child is the one that knows them best

Sub theme definition:

This theme reflects the participant’s experiences of knowing the child well in order to support them. It was suggested that co-regulation, building rapport and trust is essential for supporting children with SEMH needs in a mainstream school environment. The participants reflected that Teaching Assistants are seen to be facilitators for supporting relationships in school as often, trust is built with TAs more so than teachers in schools. Effective and open communication is a key facilitator for attunement to the child’s needs. TAs are often flexible and responsive to a child’s SEMH needs.

Illustrative quotes:

P2: “100% here, it’s our TAs....they have the time to build a better, stronger relationship with the children than the class teacher....we’ve got some very, very experienced TAs and they are so good and they tend to step in even before the class teacher is aware that there is a problem....so they are our facilitators, 100%”

P1: “making sure that you have enough staff, making sure that you have the right staff, making sure that you have staff who are educated and aware.”

P5: “you start to build up that relationship with them, then they start to open up about, to know how they’re feeling.”

5 Discussion

5.1 Overview

The current research aimed to explore mainstream school staff’s experiences of relational approaches with an emphasis on relational rupture and repair with children who exhibit SEMH needs. Five participants from South Wales took part in the research. Two over-arching themes were generated with three subsequent sub-themes, respectively. From the themes generated, it could be suggested that school staff are adapting to the needs in their schools. There were experiences of changes to society which impact on relationships within the school and the ability to implement relational approaches and policies. This was suggested to be in line with the current research that has explored the impact of the ‘collective trauma’ experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic (Brown, 2021) and perhaps the impact of the ALNET Act in Wales (2018). The current research has suggested that due to societal changes such as the increase of technology and perhaps parents finding it difficult to support children at home, mainstream schools are providing bespoke or specialist interventions for the needs demonstrated in their schools. The participants shared experiences around the impact of low speech, language and communication skills on children’s needs being met in the school environment. Speech, language and communication needs impacts the ability for communication and attunement within mainstream schools, which are key elements of relational practice. Recent research suggests that speech delays in children aged three-four are influenced by environmental factors such as not interacting with peers or other people in their home

environment, use of digital devices more often enabled by parents and a lack of parental attention on their child's development (Lestari & Fauziyah, 2023). Furthermore, extended exposure to electronic devices for children was negatively associated with expressive vocabulary and language skills, in addition to decreased language scores and speech delays (Alamri *et al.*, 2023). It was suggested that this impacts on relationships between school staff and CYP within the school environment due to the lack of ability for effective communication and attunement. This has links to Bowlby's attachment theory (1958) wherein effective attunement refers to an adult's ability to accurately perceive, understand and respond to a child's emotional and physical needs to be 'in sync' with the child's cues. The participants reflected that schools can often 'bear the brunt' of an accumulation of the child's outside life in school. These findings can be said to be unique contributions found within the present study. It is important to consider the wider systems surrounding the CYP and the intersection between home-school-wider society and how this can impact on supporting relationships within schools (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Schools require flexibility in order to effectively meet the needs of the children they are working with. In addition, they need EPs' support to facilitate flexibility. The needs that school staff are responding to are changing and therefore, they need to support to adapt. There is a recognition that schools are adapting and doing the best they can with the resources that they have within school. However, this may not be the best practice with regards to effective relational practice. EPs can support schools to reflect on this and develop their relational policies and practice, providing open and honest reflective spaces and communication. This requires an 'open' school system with a shared belief and culture about relational approaches and behaviour policies which are disseminated throughout the school (Dowling & Osbourne, 1994). Needs are reframed holistically rather than 'within' child (Dowling & Osbourne, 1994)

Despite suggesting that repair is needed after relational ruptures within the school environment, participants shared experiences of the lack of time and resources in a busy school which does not support or promote effective relationship repair between school staff and students or indeed, other students in the classroom. It was suggested that perhaps schools are restoring the situation following a rupture rather than restoring the relationship with the student. This is in line with current research that emphasised the complexities of implementing relational approaches such as restorative practice in a school environment with competing pressures (Bevington, 2015). The present research suggests that successful repair requires regulated staff members and students and there was an emphasis on being non-confrontational or not repairing the situation straight away when situations are heightened. This is in line with previous research that suggested that positive teacher-pupil relationships are vital when supporting CYP with SEMH needs (Dolton et al., 2020; Lovell, 2021; Sheffield & Morgan, 2017).

Within the current research, there was a suggestion that relationship policies, training and approaches arise from senior leadership teams. These would need to be disseminated via a whole-school approach in order to support effective and positive relationships between school staff and students. This is in line with previous research that suggested that ethos and culture within a school are key enablers for a whole school relational approach (Dodds, 2023). It was also found that the best person to support a child in the school environment is the person that knows them best. This relates to the trust, rapport and emotional availability that some school staff provide for the child with SEMH needs to feel supported in the school environment. This supports previous research that suggested that TAs are imperative when supporting CYP with SEMH needs (Syrnyk, 2018). The current research aimed to explore mainstream primary school staff's experiences of relational rupture and repair with CYP experiencing SEMH needs. The following section includes further implications for EP practice.

5.2 Implications for EP practice

As previously mentioned, EPs are best placed to provide person-centred practice gathering CYP's views of how their needs are described rather than adults working with them to provide labels (Sheffield & Morgan, 2017). This is in line with the new ALNET Act (2018) in Wales which positions person centred practice at the heart of the work conducted by all professionals including EPs, alongside collaborative working with CYP, their families and schools. According to Sheffield and Morgan (2017), EPs should actively avoid using terms such as 'SEMH' or 'BESD' to describe needs and aim to address needs holistically and on an individual basis. This could also be applied to the present research study. Throughout the research process, the participants viewed SEMH needs differently depending on their school context. For example, some perceived SEMH needs as purely 'behavioural', some viewed as more mental health needs and some viewed it as lacking social awareness, understanding, language and communication. Perhaps there is a requirement for needs to be examined on a case-by-case basis (Sheffield & Morgan, 2017). Additionally, early intervention and partnership working would enable those supporting CYP with SEMH needs to fully understand the extent of their provision moving forward. It is worth considering whether there have been historic delayed opportunities for interventions with regards to speech and language, communication and interaction or missed opportunities with regards to psychoeducation and learning of key emotions and self-regulation skills within the early years, which may be factored under 'universal' or 'targeted' provision in schools (Welsh Government, 2018). Alternatively, the research raises consideration of whether the CYP is exhibiting additional learning needs which calls for additional learning provision over and above what is offered within mainstream schools or can be met within mainstream with support from outside agencies (Welsh Government, 2018). Perhaps, some of the needs presented within this current research could have been prevented or met earlier before the child reaches statutory school age such as access to early support from Health visitors, Speech and Language Therapists and early help support for parents and caregivers which may eradicate the need for specialist/ bespoke resources later in the child's development within school. Blanco-Bayo and

Reraki (2025) posit the idea that professionals often overlook that SEMH needs may have links to social, and emotional development needs rather than difficulties linked to ALN. This may be linked to misidentification of needs and calls for a holistic view of the child's needs in order to support their development and a clearer differentiation between difficulties within policies and practices (Blanco-Bayo & Reraki, 2025). The current research highlights difficulties in the current landscape of schools in Wales where it is perhaps difficult to ascertain whether needs are preventable with adequate early support or whether needs are over and above universal provision. To add to this, schools are currently in the state of transition with regards to the change of ALNET Act (2018) in Wales and the potential ongoing impact of COVID-19 pandemic (Brown, 2021), coupled with the demands and restraints placed on school staff to meet Estyn requirements (2022). The current research suggests that it is important for EPs to acknowledge this when supporting schools to make recommendations manageable and achievable. Additionally, it may be beneficial for EPs to support school staff with their own mental health and wellbeing so that school staff can support CYP with SEMH needs in their school. EPs can 'hold space' for school staff to discuss pupils of concern in planning meetings and provide strategies and recommendations within meetings. This enhances school staff's professional skills to directly implement strategies and recommendations offered by the EP to children and young people experiencing SEMH needs. Furthermore, EPs can create safe spaces for conversations with school staff within supervision. A school link EP can build relationships between school and supporting services who may sit externally from the school system. This provides open and honest communication within the school as well as across multiple systems such as outside agencies. This relates to not only the 'microsystem' that the child or young person is in but the interactions between the 'meso' and 'exosystem' which indirectly affect the child but is still affected (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). This highlights the impact of the immediate family, school and wider systems that support the child or young person. The researcher acknowledges that within the current research, differing needs were grouped together to explore the notion of the label, 'SEMH' but however this may not encapsulate the complexity within school environments.

The present research study found that training is effective at early intervention and to meet the needs of the CYP in the school environment. It was suggested that training implemented by EPs would need to be applicable and specific to real world case examples. For example, participants reflected that the use of Emotional Literacy Support Assistant (ELSA) (2025) and Trauma Informed Schools (UK) training (2025) are preferable to school staff as they provide specific resources and case examples to implement into practice, which are informed by psychological theory and research. Resources can also be implemented on a whole school basis to enable strategies, resources and recommendations to be a universal provision to all. This also fosters a sense of belonging and safety and prioritises positive relationships (Hackett-Evans, 2023). Additionally, informing school systems on the importance of relationships and relational approaches and its positive impact to wellbeing and behaviour management would be beneficial (Moir & MacLeod, 2018; Roffey, 2012). The current research suggests a need for understanding that relationships are ongoing processes and that there is not a 'quick fix' to relational behaviour management. Whole school approaches to behaviour management and policies require school staff to get curious of what needs are communicating rather than perceiving the needs as 'within' child (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Dowling & Osbourne, 1994). Furthermore, EPs have an opportunity to raise awareness of the concept of relational rupture and repair. The participants within the current research often had wonderings about the concept of 'relational rupture' but would understand the repair element using restorative practice was necessary following breakdowns in communication or relationships. EPs are best placed to utilise psychological theory and research to emphasise the importance of repair following relational ruptures and the importance of developing relational approaches to support behaviour management. Repair strengthens trust and attachment and repairing ruptures demonstrates reliability, which is essential for not only secure relationships with school staff and children but also for the child to develop this skill to apply to other relationships they have in their life. Timely and sensitive repair helps children to maintain secure attachment to adults (Bowlby, 1958). Additionally, repair teaches that mistakes and conflicts are normal and manageable (Condly, 2006) Children learn

emotional resilience and problem-solving through witnessing and experiencing repair in relationships (Condly, 2006).

As part of the new ALNET Act (2018), EPs have an opportunity to work with CYP from 0-25. This offers early intervention opportunities in the early years and working in collaboration with Health Visitors, SALTs, OTs, parents and pre-school provisions to support ALN needs and indeed, SEMH needs. EPs could work in partnership with professionals to address social and communication needs, early speech and language and behavioural needs. EPs could provide psychoeducation for pre-school and health visitors supporting early emotional regulation skills and providing parents with support to address needs that may arise in early child development, alongside relevant stakeholders. This could be supported with specific training about attachment theory (Bowlby, 1958; Ainsworth *et al.*, 1978) and Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory (1943) and new psychological research to apply psychological theory to practice ensuring that school staff have awareness of the psychology that underpins SEMH needs.

To add to this, the current research demonstrates an awareness of parent and guardian's struggles and difficulties with supporting SEMH needs. EPs are well placed to work collaboratively with families and the child during the consultation process, offering a holistic and multi-faceted approach. This supports the promotion of early help, where appropriate and facilitates involvement from other professionals when needed. From the current research, participants perceived families to find it difficult to ask or know where to ask for support with their CYP. EPs and school staff could work in collaboration with families to ensure open and honest communication to discuss needs and signpost to relevant charities, support groups and additional provisions that may be appropriate for their CYP to attend. This provides more clarity of their child's needs as well as working collaboratively with professionals to support every facet of development.

5.3 Strengths and limitations of the research

The current research explored mainstream school staff's experiences of relational rupture and repair with children who exhibit social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs. Despite addressing the aims of the research to explore mainstream school staff's experiences, it should be noted that this research included five participants which may not be applicable to the wider population in Wales and indeed, the UK. However, it is acknowledged that under Big Q positionality, the contribution to research is transferable but not generalisable (Braun & Clarke, 2022). This research could be perhaps viewed as a cross section of mainstream primary school staff's experience in South Wales. Further research would be needed to understand secondary school's experiences of relational rupture and repair as perhaps this system may be more complex than a primary school environment as there are multiple relationships within a school from Senior leadership, Heads of Year and the multitude of teachers and support staff that CYP connect with in a day (Eccles & Roeser, 2011). Additionally, research suggests the transition for CYP with SEMH needs from primary to secondary school can be difficult due to structural changes in support offered in secondary school (Bagnall *et al.*, 2021).

It should be acknowledged that some of the participants of the research were solely support staff and others had a variety of different roles within the school such as ALNCo and teaching responsibilities. It could be suggested that the participants with multiple responsibilities within the school may have more of a wider view of the school system and indeed the notion of rupture and repair due to perhaps being a part of the senior leadership team in conjunction with viewing issues within their classroom directly. This provided different perspectives and experiences to the research which is important under Big Q positionality and the ontological and epistemological stances of the research that knowledge is subjective and based on experience (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Some of the participants were trained in trauma informed practice, emotion coaching, restorative practice, ELSA and other psychological informed approaches so may have had more knowledge around terms such as 'relational rupture and repair'. Whilst this provides valuable insights into their experiences from

this angle, it needs to be acknowledged that perhaps other participants may not have this particular knowledge so may regard the term, 'rupture' differently (please see Part Three for further details on this topic).

6 Conclusion

The current research offers an exploration of school staff's experiences of the term 'relational rupture and repair' within the school environment, specifically with children and young people who exhibit SEMH needs. The research highlights the need for effective collaboration with school staff, home and professionals to support SEMH needs. The research arguably highlights a unique contribution to the literature by acknowledging the impact of differing and more complex needs arriving at a mainstream school environment and acknowledges the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic (Brown, 2021) and the impact of the ALNET Act (2018) on CYP, parents and school staff.

The research highlights another unique contribution to the literature by acknowledging the importance of repair within a relational rupture as there might be a need within schools to repair the situation rather than the relationship itself. This is due to conflicting times pressures, a lack of resources and a fast-paced environment which does not always support effective relationship repair. The research also demonstrates real-world effective case examples of school staff using relational and restorative approaches to repair relationships and highlights the importance of regulated staff and children to support repair and a need for whole school approaches to implement relational approaches.

The current research generates opportunities for future research alongside opportunities for EPs in practice to support schools, home and CYP with SEMH needs. EPs are best placed to support on an individual, group and systemic level within schools. The research reflects the importance of person-centred practice, viewing needs on an individual basis and providing systemic opportunities for change.

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“Their behaviours are displaying what their needs are” : Exploring mainstream primary school staff’s experiences of relational approaches with children who display social, emotional and mental health needs.

Part Three: Major Research Reflective Account

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Rebecca Soproniuk

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1 Introduction

This major research reflective account consists of two parts. Part One provides a critical account of the development of the research practitioner. Part Two provides reflections on contribution to knowledge and dissemination. This major research reflective account aims to provide a reflexive and reflective perspective of the research experience from the inception of the thesis idea to the completion of the write up process to future dissemination and contribution to further research.

For the purposes of this account, I will continue to write in the first person. Within qualitative research, it is encouraged for researchers to write in the first person in order to be reflective and reflexive of the research experience (Creswell & Poth, 2018). It posits the researcher in a position of self-awareness of their research process to ensure transparency and rigour (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009; Finlay, 2002). I will also provide extracts from my research diary that provide reflexive and reflective elements of the research process to ensure transparency.

Part One: Critical account of research practitioner

2.4 Inception/rationale

I have always been interested in the concept of relational rupture and repair (RR&R). Prior to commencing the DEdPsy course, I gained some experience as a teaching assistant within a mainstream primary school supporting an Autistic child. Whilst working at this school, I noticed there was another boy within the classroom that repeatedly had sanctions and penalisations due to his challenging behaviour with school staff and peers. I built a rapport with the young boy and noticed that this relationship was the catalyst for change for his behaviour. I did not use sanctions and penalisations when working with him, instead I used restorative practice and natural consequences. I noticed that this approach required an emotionally available adult and open and honest dialogue

following ruptures that happened between the young boy and his peers and at times, class teachers. I noticed there were reductions in these ruptures when I was able to provide him co-regulation, psychoeducation and the ability to emotion coach his feelings and emotions which were important for his understanding but also important for the 'repair' element. I was aware that perhaps within my position as a teaching assistant, I had the time to build up this rapport and with my background in psychology, I was able to view the situation differently. At the time, I did not know it, but I came to realise throughout my DEdPsy training that not only was I using restorative practice and trauma informed approaches to support the young boy, but I was also inadvertently, aware of relational rupture and repair.

Within my first placement of the DEdPsy course, I observed a secondary school's English lesson where my role was to observe a Year Seven young girl who was struggling to adapt to secondary school, often involved with the police outside of school. I was told before the observation that this young girl did not have a good relationship with her English teacher. The young girl would often show up late to class and the relationship with the teacher had broken down. During my observation, I noticed there was an unhelpful back and forth between the young girl and the teacher. The teacher was young and newly qualified, and she perceived the language that the young girl used as an "attack" on both her teaching methods and personally. I noticed the language used to describe this young girl such as calling her a "liar" when she did not understand the work. This made me uncomfortable and was difficult to observe. Following this observation, I gently challenged the teacher that perhaps the young girl was struggling to access the learning and perhaps due to the relationship breakdown there is a lack of open and honest dialogue between the two individuals in addition to perhaps a lack of trust. This was also later reported to the school's ALNCo. This experience enabled me to reflect on how important relationships are between school staff and pupils, especially with children and young people who display social, emotional and mental health needs and perhaps, additional learning needs. I felt that EPs are best placed to support with these ruptures and emphasise the importance of repair to support relationships. I also reflected on the

importance of co-regulation, self-awareness and for holding space for the CYP we work with.

However, I also acknowledged the difficulties that school staff face when supporting the breadth of needs associated with SEMH.

As a Trainee Educational Psychologist (TEP) and future Educational Psychologist (EP), it is my role to advocate for CYP and their families within school environments in order to best support progress and development. I am aware that these experiences were the catalyst for my curiosity and drive to explore this area further. I also acknowledge that these experiences brought up many emotions such as anger and frustration to witness language and behaviours toward CYP with ALN, especially as an advocate. I was curious to understand the perceived pressures and restraints with regards to implementing relational approaches, restorative practice and trauma informed approaches in schools rather than viewing behaviour as 'within' child. Within consultations with schools, I often felt in positions that I did not have enough research or theories to emphasise the importance of relationships in schools and repairing relationships following relational ruptures. These experiences both personal and professional contributed to the generation of this research topic.

1.2 Literature review

For the purposes of this research, I positioned my thinking around the idea of Big Q qualitative research (Braun & Clarke, 2022). I believe that this positionality was appropriate as I am aware that human beings have a subjective understanding of the world based on their own experiences, locations and perspectives which is in line with reflexive thematic analysis which I chose to analyse my research findings and my ontological and epistemological positionings (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Big Q qualitative thinking posits research as adding to the bigger picture of the research to provide a richer understanding (Braun & Clarke, 2022). This is a move away from 'finding the gap' in the literature to justify the new research (Braun & Clarke, 2022, pp. 120). In this case, I believed that

there could be lots of iterations to perhaps mean similar approaches such as relational approaches, restorative practice and trauma informed practice. Big Q qualitative research establishes a need for a theoretically informed and located rationale for the research rather than 'finding the gap' (Braun & Clarke, 2022, pp. 120). Due to this, I used a narrative approach to the review to provide an overview of the current literature alongside relevant psychological theories and literature around the topic (Siddaway *et al.*, 2019). From the review, it appeared that lots of theses were related to the topic. I reflected that perhaps this was due to a new and emerging topic within EP practice. As part of my review, I thought it was important to add psychological theories that underpin the notion of RR&R and SEMH needs. This provided clarity and context to the current picture by using psychology to explain phenomena. Literature questions were used to guide the review based on specific information I wanted to find out about RR&R in schools and participant's experiences of working with CYP with SEMH needs.

In hindsight, I could have chosen a scoping review to explore the literature. A scoping review is used to examine emerging evidence in relatively new fields to scope a body of literature, clarify concepts or to identify knowledge gaps (Munn *et al.*, 2018). Both approaches would have provided an overview and a richer picture to the current literature in the field. However, this was perhaps a difficult decision to make as there is an abundance of literature exploring SEMH experiences of school however, the concept of RR&R is relatively new.

From past experiences of research, I reflected that I needed to be transparent with how I used databases to explore the current research and my search terms. For the purposes of the Doctoral theses, I used a semi-systematic approach to the literature review providing the use of PRISMA to demonstrate the process of the narrative review and a detailed table of my search terms (Tricco *et al.*, 2021). This provided a transparent account of the process and improved this element of conducting the research.

I used 'behavioural difficulties' as a subject mapping term to encapsulate all forms of communication with regards to behaviour such as social and emotional mental health needs and behavioural difficulties as well as acronyms. I acknowledge that the 'behavioural difficulties' term could be perceived differently from others. I found this a difficult aspect of the process to encapsulate this subject mapping term in a succinct way. Whilst exploring the current research within this area, I recognised patterns of psychological theories that were emerging. I chose to further explore the research using attachment theory (Bowlby, 1958; Ainsworth *et al.*, 1978), Bronfenbrenner's ecological model (2006), Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1943) and through a systemic lens (Dowling & Osbourne, 1994; Pellegrini, 2009). I believe these psychological theories are in line with my own values with regards to my stance on the research. Attachment (Bowlby, 1958; Ainsworth *et al.*, 1978) and Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory (1943) were key elements to explore relationships between primary school staff and children alongside exploring the phenomena of relational rupture and repair in particular. I chose to explore relational approaches, with focus on RR&R using a systemic lens to explore the school context and its impact on relationships with schools.

1.3 Language used

For the purposes of the research, I chose to use the term 'SEMH' to describe a group set of CYP within schools. I thought the language used in this research was an important aspect to me. I am aware in practice and in the literature, there are many terms to describe SEMH needs. Some describe SEMH as behavioural and abbreviated to 'BESD' or 'SEBD'. Lots of specialist provisions use the terms SEBD and BESD which include 'behaviour' as a category, but I would argue that all behaviour is communication. I noticed in practice, that school staff supporting CYP in schools would label a multiple of complex needs as 'behaviours' or 'behaviours that challenge'. Whilst this is important to recognise, when you unpick this, my interpretation of 'behaviour' is very different to school staff. For example, when a CYP puts their head down onto the desk in the classroom when they perceive the

work as too difficult, this can be described by school staff as 'defiant'. In these instances, there is nuance and complexity to what is experienced for the CYP and what is perceived by school staff.

In addition to this, there are contradictions in the grey literature. In the ALNET Act (2018) SEMH needs are defined as 'BESD' whilst Estyn (2022) the Welsh inspectorate, describes this set of needs as 'SEMH'. I chose to use the term SEMH as I believe this describes the multiple facets of this need which encompasses mental health and wellbeing too. In addition to this, I am aware that grouping these needs together under 'SEMH' is also reductive as it boxes lots of needs together, but however, in order to explore the phenomena of rupture and repair, I chose to position the needs as 'SEMH' to describe this particular set of needs. However, I am aware from my research findings that SEMH needs can be viewed differently, and perhaps different terminology may have elicited different results. I acknowledged that the participant's experiences of SEMH needs and indeed, relational rupture and repair is relative to their experiences of the world, which is in line with the critical realist ontology and constructivist epistemology of the research. From the current research, I believe that I have developed as a researcher but also as an EP practitioner. I reflected around the use of labels for better or worse to describe particular needs and whilst at times this is helpful to have a shared understanding of these needs, I'm also aware that the root cause of these 'behaviours' is actually more important to understand in order to be person-centred.

The term 'relational rupture and repair' is a relatively new term within the literature. It posits relationships to be the most important part of school belonging, behaviour management, wellbeing and psychological safety within schools (Roffey, 2012; Baker *et al.*, 1997). Under most approaches such as relational, restorative and trauma informed approaches is the idea of repairing relationships following ruptures. I reflected that during the course of data gathering, I became aware that most of the participants did not understand the meaning of 'relational rupture and repair'. I chose to provide

a prompt with the term for further clarity if the topic of conversation veered too far. I think most participants struggled with the term, 'relational rupture'. However, one participant of the research was able to fully understand this term, this participant had previously acquired Trauma Informed Schools (TIS) training. Perhaps, training supports the everyday use of this type of psychological language and how it can apply within a school setting. I also reflected on the importance of the 'repair' element within schools. Often due to the complexities and demands of school environments, perhaps this repair takes longer or indeed, doesn't take place at all. I reflected on how this could impact CYP's sense of school belonging, wellbeing and psychological safety. I hypothesised that perhaps due to school demands; school staff do not have capacity or time to do this important part of relationship repair which ultimately, strengthens the relationship between CYP and school staff in order for the CYP to feel happy and safe in school and be able to access the learning.

1.4 Methodology

1.4.1 Ontology and epistemology

A critical realist ontology was adopted for this research. I recognised that there is a material reality that exists which is independent of the ideas about it as knowledge is subjective and based on own experience (Braun & Clarke, 2022). In this case, mainstream school staff's experiences were subjective based on their own experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2022). It was important to note that the concept of relational rupture and repair would also be subjective based on human experience of this concept (Braun & Clarke, 2022). On reflection, a relativist ontology could have been adopted as this suggests that there is not one singular reality independent of human practices and that one reality is not more real or true than the other (Braun & Clarke, 2022). In this case, each participant's experiences are relative to them and there is no singular reality. However, I believe my decision to include a critical realist approach covered both aspects of realist and relativist ontologies and

incorporated the element of own experience into the research. I also believe that this was an appropriate choice to be in line with my decision to use reflexive thematic analysis for data analysis, under Big Q qualitative thinking (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

A constructivist epistemology was adopted for this research. A constructivist approach relates to knowledge and meaning constructed from own views or perspectives (Fryer, 2022). It posits that knowledge is constructed from human perception and social experience (Burr, 2015). Constructivism in psychology has a more individual and psychological orientation compared to other epistemologies such as constructionism (Braun & Clarke, 2022). As I chose individual interviews, I believe the constructivist epistemology partnered well with this data gathering approach. I was able to gather the most appropriate data using these approaches. However, at points during the inception of this research thesis idea, I had wonderings of whether a focus group approach could be appropriate to adopt to gather many different individual's views and experiences in one particular group. However, I decided against this data gathering method as I believed that it was important to build rapport with participants to encourage open and honest dialogue when discussing perhaps a difficult or emotive topic such as relational rupture and repair. If I chose to use focus groups, the epistemology would have perhaps focussed more on a social constructionist approach as meaning may have been collective and co-constructed within the group (Acocella, 2012). I wondered about the influence of group dialogues on shared experiences and instead, I chose individual interviews to gather rich data. I provide more detail on this data gathering method in subsequent parts of this reflective account.

1.4.2 Data gathering

I chose individual interviews with semi-structured questions to gather my data for this research. I used Goodenough and Waite (2012) guide for developing questions within my research (see Table 4.) This was helpful and useful to ensure that my questions were fit for purpose and enabled

participants' to openly talk about their experiences. The questions were also informed by the current research in this area (Fitzsimmons, 2021; Lovell, 2021; Macpherson & Phillips, 2021; Hibbott, 2024).

Table 4: Considerations in designing interview guides, adapted from Goodenough and Waite (2012)

| | |
|--|---|
| 1. What am I trying to find out with this question? | Will this question generate this information? |
| 2. Is this question likely to be meaningful to my participants? | Is this question likely to generate meaningful information? |
| 3. Are there any problematic assumptions embedded in this question? | Do I need to re-word this question to enhance the likelihood of it being interpreted 'correctly'? |
| 4. How might participants feel if they were asked this question? | Are participants likely to provide meaningful information in response to this question? |

I believe that interviews were a viable and appropriate means of data gathering in this instance, as semi-structured interviews are important for better understanding a participant's unique perspective rather than a generalised understanding of the relational rupture and repair phenomenon (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021). I had awareness that some experiences of relational rupture and repair were unique to the participant. In addition to this, individual interviews provided a sense of psychological safety to discuss ruptures which may have been emotive for participants taking part in the research, whereas perhaps, other data gathering methods such as observations or focus groups may not have provided the amount of depth I was looking for, for this research project. Interviews provided focus but also flexibility with exploring phenomena that perhaps I was not aware of before conducting the research (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021). I had used this data gathering method for previous research on the DEdPsy course and from experience, this was a helpful and useful tool to use. However, I did reflect after a previous research project that the semi-structured interviews did lead to different avenues and routes from the questions asked (Smith, 1995). This provided me

ample opportunity to follow up interesting routes that emerged from the interviews and the participant was able to give a richer picture with context (Smith, 1995). However, I was aware that some avenues were due to a lack of understanding of the research topic, the use of the interview script was useful as I used the probes to mitigate this. At times, I included the definition of relational rupture and repair which provided clarity to the research participants. The definition was also included in my introduction within the interview script and within the information and consent forms which were completed prior to data gathering. At times during the interviews, it was difficult to know whether some of the data was relevant to my research question however, I did feel that the different routes that the conversations took provided context to a situation which provided more clarity as a researcher but also these different routes were clearly important to the participants taking part in the research (Smith, 1995). I thought this was important to consider after my first individual interview and reflected that perhaps a balance could be struck between following the diversion whilst also acknowledging the other questions which needed to be addressed in the research (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021). In addition, Big Q qualitative research posits the idea that participant's sense making reflects their particular context and all human beings have a subjective understanding (Braun & Clarke, 2022). This was important to consider with regards to participant's understanding of relational rupture and repair. I endeavoured to strike a balance between acknowledging the participant's experience as well as acknowledging if the participant did not understand the question and needed further clarity with prompts. This was a tension within the research using Big Q qualitative positioning and semi-structured interviews. I believe that semi-structured interviews as a means of data gathering sits alongside qualitative research (Smith, 1995). I did not want to use too much structure in the conversations as this would have felt unnatural for myself as a qualitative researcher and inappropriate within the psychology field when exploring participant's experiences.

Alternatively, on reflection, I could have used focus groups to gather views and experiences of RR&R. Research suggests that focus groups can provide sufficiently detailed information on a little-known phenomenon compared to other data gathering methods (Bertrand *et al.*, 1992). Within this, a discussion could take place with the participants of the focus group using semi-structured questions and the responses would be generated from collective meaning making within the group (Acocella, 2011). Despite the meaning making generated from these discussions, my aim for the research was to explore individual experiences of relational rupture and repair. I acknowledged that perhaps not everyone within a focus group may feel that their voice is heard and may not feel psychologically safe enough to contribute to the conversation (Acocella, 2011). I believe interviews were appropriate for the current research as participants were given permission to speak openly and honestly about their experiences without potential input, skew or disruption from others.

1.4.3 Participants and sampling

Within my research proposal, I aimed to recruit up to eight participants as this was proposed to be an appropriate sample size for individual interviews, which is line with qualitative research (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Despite employing an early recruitment strategy, this was not possible, I recruited five participants for the research. On reflection, the use of 'up to' provided me flexibility for recruitment but I had hoped to have recruited more participants in order to gain a richer picture of school staff's experiences of relational approaches with emphasis on relational rupture and repair with CYP with SEMH needs. However, in recent literature by Braun and Clarke (2022), the sample size of research requires the researcher to reflect on the richness of the dataset rather than the amount within a sample. In addition to this, Braun & Clarke (2022) offers the idea that the notion of 'sample size' may be considered more positivist-empiricist research rather than Big Q qualitative research so therefore there is a need for richness of the data rather than the number of participants in a sample.

Additionally, I wanted to be able to factor in sufficient time to have the space to conduct, transcribe

and analyse my data so due to these time constraints, I thought it was best to cease recruitment in October 2024. In hindsight, I considered this to be the best decision for me to make for my research however, I had hoped for more in-depth interviews with more teaching assistants, teachers or pastoral support staff. At times, I contemplated whether the data gathered was 'good enough' to constitute a doctoral thesis research study as a researcher. I did seek supervision on this and due to the constraints of completing a research piece for the thesis and balancing placements on the DEdPsy course, I did think the analysis process was the important part of the research. I did reflect my frustrations within a research diary entry on 03.10.24:

"I am still waiting on one participant to come back to me. They signed the consent form and read through the information sheet, but I am waiting on them to come back to me after I've offered two dates. I feel like I have exhausted all my avenues of recruitment. How many times can be classified as following up with participants? Perhaps I need to stop now and start analysing. I don't want to miss out on an effective and thorough data analysis process. I know that the process took longer than anticipated during the SSRP."

Purposive sampling was used as this was based on the participants characteristics of being mainstream school staff. I also aimed to speak to many different staff members to gain a richer understanding of the phenomena, RR&R. I specifically wanted to explore mainstream school staff's experiences as research was perhaps lacking in this area (Fitzsimmons, 2021). Ideally, I wanted secondary school staff to take part in the research in the first instance, as a secondary school system is very different to a mainstream primary school. Some of the research included in the literature review explored school staff's experiences in primary schools and found that there were more relational approaches implemented (Dolton et al., 2020; Lovell, 2021). I hypothesised that this perhaps could be due to smaller systems compared to secondary schools. The current research also highlighted the difficulties for senior leaders in secondary schools to implement whole school

relational approaches (Dodds, 2023). Furthermore, one thesis paper explored the notion of relational rupture and repair with CYP experiencing SEMH needs in a specialist provision however, this small provision was specifically set up to support SEMH needs (Fitzsimmons, 2021). I wanted to understand the secondary school context because I hypothesised that it could be perhaps difficult to implement a relational approach to behaviour in a larger school system. However, access to this group was difficult. I reflected that perhaps there is limited research in this area due to the hard-to-reach nature of some secondary schools. This limits understanding of the school system and may, in turn, hinder the effectiveness of EP support in secondary schools. As a researcher, I was aiming for secondary school staff for my participants of the research, but I was aware that perhaps this could be out of my control. Despite this, I was researching the phenomena of RR&R when supporting CYP with SEMH needs so mainstream school staff members that had experience of this in primary as well as secondary would have been an ample participant sample.

Giving the inherently dyadic nature of the process of relational rupture and repair, I had hopes that pupil voice could have been incorporated into this research study. When conducting my literature review, some paper utilised pupil voice to explore the experiences of CYP experiencing SEMH needs within school environments (Dolton *et al.*, 2020; Hickenbotham & Soni, 2021). I thought this would have been appropriate to add to this research however, on reflection, due to time constraints of this doctoral thesis and perhaps the ethical considerations that might have impacted on this, I decided to utilise school staff members as participants of the research. For further research, dyadic work may be helpful to explore different perspectives of relational approaches and indeed, relational rupture and repair. Ruptures are personal to the two people it effects and indeed, the rupture can impact each individual person differently. This would have been interesting to explore within the context of children who display SEMH needs and mainstream school staff that support them. For this research I chose to explore mainstream school staff to gain an understanding of relational approaches implemented within the school and the initial concept of relational rupture and repair.

1.4.4 Recruitment

Recruitment began in July 2024. This in hindsight was perhaps a difficult time to start recruitment, some participants responded that they would be in touch in September when schools were back open after the August summer holidays. However, when this was followed up, many participants did not deem the research a priority understandably, due to the multitude of demands placed on schools in September. In hindsight, perhaps recruitment could have started sooner than July 2024 to mitigate this. However, at the time the initial July recruitment was administered to try to recruit earlier than later. My recruitment strategy was twofold. I wanted to be able to have an opportunity to contact schools directly via an ALNCo gatekeeper letter and share my research on social media. The research information was circulated within the school and the ALNCo had the responsibility of choosing the most appropriate person to speak to regarding their experiences of relational rupture and repair. Some ALNCos chose to take part in the research as they had a wealth of experience and usually had dual or triple roles within the school. They provided a holistic view of the school system. One of my participants was an ALNCo in a large primary school but was also the teacher of the specialist teaching facility. I did have some thoughts and queries around this as I was unsure of whether an STF within a mainstream setting would go against my exclusion criteria of no specialist provisions or special schools. These are extracts from my research diary:

"One of my participants is both an ALNCo, STF teacher and on the senior leadership team. This participant has a wealth of knowledge and is interested in taking part in my research. Does this go against my exclusion criteria? She is in a mainstream primary school."

"After supervision, I feel like I have more clarity around the participant. As I am exploring the concept of relational rupture and repair and using Big Q research, it is suitable to accept the participant within the research. They may provide valuable insights of whole school approaches to

RR&R and perhaps have knowledge of individual experiences of RR&R with CYP with SEMH needs in their school.”

The participant’s interview was included within the research as she had many roles within the school and was not just a STF teacher (see Table. 2 for more information). This ALNCo worked in a mainstream primary school, and I felt that this did not breach my exclusion criteria (see 3.3.3). Many mainstream primary schools have ATFs or STFs within their schools and this was a tension for me as a researcher when recruiting. In hindsight, I perhaps was not prepared for idiosyncrasies in mainstream that might impact the research. However, in this instance, the STF teacher was also the ALNCo and on the senior leadership team within the school so could provide a ‘bird’s eye view’ of the school system with regards to relational policies and approaches. Additionally, it was at times, difficult to recruit within some schools as the ALNCo acted as a ‘gatekeeper’. Sometimes, the research would be lost in some ALNCos email inboxes. I acknowledged that the work of the ALNCo would be exceptionally difficult with multiple competing demands, so I was grateful for the participants I had for my research to continue.

Another route I used to gather participants was via a recruitment poster (see Appendix. 4) which was circulated on social media and within Educational Psychology forums. These forums were used due to the plethora of experienced mainstream school staff that currently work in these provisions. From the recruitment poster, lots of interest was generated however, it was clear that a lot of the participants within this group were from England, Scotland and Northern Ireland. For my inclusion criteria, I wanted to explore the Welsh context (see 3.3.2). I was not able to recruit participants from this forum due to this. To have the opportunity to recruit on social media, I made the decision to edit and amend my ethics research proposal to circulate my recruitment poster on my personal Facebook and X page (formerly known as Twitter) (see Appendix. 10). This provided me an opportunity to

perhaps share my research with professionals I knew. This was an important aspect of recruitment as this was also widely shared by friends and family which provided more opportunities to speak to mainstream school staff. This generated two of the participants of the research. I acknowledge that due to knowing the participants this provided perhaps a richer picture within the data set however, I do not think this hindered the research process.

1.4.5 Data analysis and interpretation

RTA was chosen as an effective data analysis tool due to its reflective and reflexive nature (Braun & Clarke, 2022). This analysis was also appropriate for my ontological and epistemological positions within the research. From feedback from my previous research projects, I was aware that I needed to be more transparent with the RTA process, providing evidence of coding and theme development for this project. During the RTA process, I familiarised myself with the data set. I read and re-read all elements of the data. I was eager to code the data quickly as I was finding that common themes were coming up in the data whilst interviewing but I also thought the process of reading and re-reading was useful to not make assumptions about the data. I reflected throughout the coding process that I felt that my codes were either too long or not pithy enough. Some codes seemed more semantic and surface level, summarising rather than more profound, latent codes. I sought supervision due to this and was reminded that some of the coding may just be semantic codes as you summarise as you're understanding the data. From previous feedback, I reflected that my themes did not need to be long and could be shorter and pithy. This was also further supported during a Q&A session with Braun and Clarke as part of our University sessions, it was suggested that semantic or latent coding is not better than the other and that some of the data will be both. I found the theme developing part of the process difficult as I tried to capture the meaning of the theme succinctly, but I was aware of the complexities of trying to minimise understanding to shorter sentences. I felt this could diminish my understanding but also the participant's point of view in the research.

During the process, I did oscillate between the various phases of RTA however, I was aware I reached a 'saturation' point at times with coding, redefining and defining themes. To aid my understanding of the themes generated, I attempted to define my theme with a sentence or two as a definition or summary of the theme, this is suggested to be an effective way to understand your generated themes (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

Part Two: Contribution to knowledge and dissemination

2.1 Contribution to the literature

Whilst researching this topic, I was struck by how limited the research was with understanding relational rupture and repair despite a shared understanding that relationships play a central role within schools for behaviour management, sense of wellbeing and provide a nurturing and inclusive environment for children and young people to learn and grow (Roffey, 2012; Moir & Macleod, 2018). I am aware that through the course of researching this topic, there are many iterations of this concept without the use of the term 'relational rupture and repair'. This concept is central to relational approaches (Roffey, 2012), restorative practice (Weber & Vereenoghe, 2020) and trauma informed practice (Drewery, 2004). I found very little positive real-world application of this concept within the literature. One such paper was a thesis which explored the notion of 'rupture and repair' within teacher-student relationships within one SEMH specialist provision as a case study (Fitzsimmons, 2021). This research intrigued me, and I was aware that the concept was in its infancy as doctoral theses were conducted around the topic. I also reflected that an SEMH specialist provision is set up to support those who display SEMH needs whereas I wanted to further explore this concept in a mainstream context within Wales. I thought it was particularly interesting to explore children and young people with SEMH needs in mainstream schools as the research suggested that CYP who display SEMH needs in mainstream often experience a lack of school belonging compared

to their peers (Lovell, 2021). I was intrigued as to why this was the case. It was suggested that CYP who display SEMH needs are often complex and nuanced (Lovell, 2021). This research focused on school belonging and SEMH needs, and I wanted to find out the nature of rupture and repair to foster a sense of school belonging.

The current exploratory research I undertook was able to contribute to understanding the complexities within the current landscape in our culture and society. The current research explored the complexities of roles as ALNCoS, teachers and teaching assistants now with the new Welsh reform (2018). It also explored the impact that lack of funding can have and the differences in the roles seen in mainstream now. To add to this, the current research found that there are differences in the complex presentations of CYP arriving to schools in the early years, which was otherwise not acknowledged or seen as much as in previous years. Participants reported that it was often difficult to differentiate between ALN and the impact of nurture or lack thereof with CYP with SEMH needs. Before conducting this research, I did not think this would have been a big part of the research. The current research also suggested the importance of whole school approaches and the importance of adults who know the CYP well in order to effectively support them. As previously mentioned, the research suggests a protective factor for CYP who experience SEMH needs is the relationships with adults in the school environment (Sheffield & Morgan, 2017; Roorda *et al.*, 2011). The current research also explored the concept that perhaps due to the difficulties with time and resources constraints, school staff were perhaps restoring a situation rather than the relationship with the CYP with SEMH needs. To my knowledge, this exploratory research is the first of its kind to explore mainstream school staff's experiences of the concept of 'relational rupture and repair' when applied to CYP with SEMH needs.

2.1.1 Dissemination

I hope to publish my research findings to disseminate to a wider audience in educational psychology peer-reviewed journals, following the VIVA process. The doctoral thesis report will be accessible via ORCA, a digital repository on the Cardiff University website. In addition to this, I hope to disseminate my research findings to my patch of schools when I qualify as an EP. I believe I can disseminate the findings in a tangible and applicable way in order to promote positive change for CYP with SEMH needs. I also envision to share my research findings with the participants of the research for the purposes of transparency.

2.2 Contribution to further research

As previously mentioned in part two, there are opportunities for further research within this topic. Due to the time constraints within this Doctoral thesis research, there were limited opportunities to collate a variety of mainstream school staffs' experiences, in particular the experiences of secondary school staff. Further research could explore the concept of relational rupture and repair with regards to CYP with SEMH needs within mainstream secondary schools to gain more of a holistic understanding of this concept and its benefits of working with CYP with SEMH needs. It should also be acknowledged that further research could explore just support staff's experiences or just teacher's experiences of relational rupture and repair. Within the research, it was suggested that teaching assistants can be the facilitators for supportive relationships for CYP with SEMH needs. It was suggested that support staff have more capacity to emotion coach, use restorative practice and work directly with CYP with SEMH needs. Further research could compare and contrast teachers/senior leadership team experiences with support staff experiences in order to gain a better understanding of RR&R. Children and young people's voice could also be incorporated into further

research to explore relational rupture and repair, in addition to the inclusion of parent/carer views to the research in order to gain a holistic understanding between school and home.

2.3 Contribution to Educational Psychology Practice

This current research has applicability to EP professional practice by highlighting the concept and importance of relational rupture and repair within mainstream contexts and enabling opportunities to work on an individual, group and systemic level within schools. The current research provides EPs an opportunity for reflection around the complexities of working within mainstream contexts and how as EPs we can acknowledge this but also provide effective psychologically informed strategies and recommendations to schools. EPs can work with individual pupils who experience SEMH needs as well as working in consultation with parents and school to provide psychologically informed support, providing a space for open and honest dialogue between home and school to support the CYP holistically. EPs work proactively and preventively within consultations with families and schools. EPs can also support teacher's mental wellbeing by using ALNCo planning meetings to hold space for school staff to discuss pupils of concern. EPs can also support schools on a systemic level providing training on trauma informed and relational approaches to behaviour management to equip school staff with psychological theory and up-to-date research. Furthermore, EPs can provide senior leadership teams with the knowledge and experience gained from working as a psychologically informed practitioner to reflect on relationship and behaviour policies and work collaboratively to amend these accordingly. As the current research suggests, it does 'start from the top' with regards to disseminating proactive strategies, effective open and honest communication and training. The research emphasises a need for relationships and relational approaches within schools to be ongoing processes, rather than immediate, traditional 'quick fixes' to behaviour management.

2.4 Final Reflections

Throughout the process of this research, I reflected on the importance of person-centred practice including the use of terms or labels we ascribe to CYP within our schools. For the purposes of clarity and transparency, I did reflect that grouping potential needs as 'SEMH' was perhaps reductive and lacks nuance to the complexities faced with specific needs. I also acknowledged the difficulties school staff face on a daily basis to support the complexities of needs that are presented within their schools. I believe each situation should be viewed on a case-by-case basis and viewed holistically to the current context in society as well as within a school system. An awareness around the concept of relational rupture and repair provides schools with psychologically informed information regarding the importance of relationships in schools, especially children and young people experiencing a high level of support, nurture and need (Fitzsimmons, 2021; Dolton et al., 2020; Lovell, 2021). EPs could be regarded as best placed to support CYP, schools and families on an individual, group and systemic basis as one of our unique contributions is disseminating psychological theories and research in an accessible way to promote positive change within our schools.

This reflective research account provided me with opportunities to explore the process of holding dual responsibilities as both a psychology researcher and Trainee Educational Psychologist. This experience has provided me with reflections of how I can improve my own practice and how I aspire to work post-qualification as an ethical, proactive, reflective and person-centred practitioner.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 - Table providing an overview of key papers identified in narrative review

| Researchers | Title | Year | Publication type/journal | Vol | Page | Outline | Design/methodology | Participant information | Findings | Critique/limitations |
|---|--|------|--|--------|---------|---|---|--|--|--|
| Alice Dolton, Sarah Adams, Michelle O'Reilly | In the child's voice: The experiences of primary school children with social, emotional and mental health difficulties | 2020 | Clinical Child Psychology and Psychiatry | 25 (2) | 419-434 | To explore children with SEMH needs views. The research question is 'How do children with SEMH difficulties conceptualise their needs and the support they receive in school?' Tensions school staff face between providing pastoral support and academic attainment. | A child-centred, qualitative design. Using semi-structured interviews and participatory tools such as 'How I feel about my school' questionnaire and use of pictorial games and resources. Thematic Analysis used. | 11 children, aged 6-11 with SEMH needs. Recruited from a mainstream primary school in the East Midlands | Two key findings – Children expressed difficulties with 'social relationship and interactions in the learning environment' and 'emotional and behavioural reactions in the learning environment'. Sense of safety is felt through secure and trusting relationships. School staff are regarded | The researchers reported that the participants were able to verbally articulate their thoughts and feelings well however, this may not always be the case with CYP with SEMH needs. The research provides an important offer to the research as it includes the voice of children experiencing SEMH needs. The researchers argue that further research, policies and practices would need to include the voice of the child to benefit the CYP |

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| | | | | | | | | | as 'ad hoc' attachment figures providing a secure base. | experiencing these difficulties. |
| Corinne Syrnyk | Knowing nurture: experiences of teaching assistants for children with SEBD | 2018 | British Journal of Special Education | 45 (3) | 329-348 | <p>A case study of a SEMH needs school exploring the views of staff and the use of the nurture approach.</p> <p>Research question not explicit – exploring the role of TAs in special schools.</p> | A triangulated approach using mixed methods (semi-structured interviews, questionnaires and surveys). | <p>A case study of TAs and teachers at a special, nurturing primary school for children with SEMH in the Midlands of England.</p> <p>Nineteen TAs, six classroom teachers, two managing teachers and one headteacher</p> | Nurture TAs and teachers reported 'healthy' staff relationships and team work to be integral to their role. Nurture teaching assistants feel empowered with their role and teachers and nurture TAs feel a sense of shared aims and teamwork, compared to mainstream TAs. | The research focuses on one special school in England. The school is equipped to support CYP with SEMH needs on a whole-school level. The research could perhaps have applicability to mainstream settings. The research is informed by Canadian researchers. The need for further exploration of TAs who work with SEMH level. In addition, understanding the nature of TAs supporting SEMH in a secondary school environment. |
| Emma Sheffield, Gavin Morgan | The perceptions and experiences of young people with a | 2017 | Educational Psychology in Practice | 33(1) | 50-64 | Two research questions: 1. Are young | Constructionist Grounded Theory | Purposive sampling – nine students aged 13-16 with a | Positive teacher/pupil relationships | EPs and others supporting CYP with SEMH needs have a |

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| | BESD/SEMH classification | | | | | people with a label of BESD/SEMH aware of this and other labels and how do they evaluate these labels? 2. How do young people with a label of BESD/SEMH describe themselves and their experiences at school? | methodology – semi-structured interviews | statement of SEN where BESD was the ‘primary need’ within a London Local Authority. All participants attended a mainstream secondary school. | are considered protective factors as they support CYP in class with SEMH needs. YP with a statement of BESD were unaware of this label. | responsibility to provide information about their needs to the CYP. Despite EPs actively avoiding labels, it is acknowledged that they are used by other professionals and in schools. Inclusion of CYP in the process provides awareness of their needs. The research was conducted in England and references the latest SEN code of practice (2014). However, under the new ALNET Act (2018), the process is child-centred, and EPs should be already utilising this in their practice. |
| Georgia Lovell | Supporting sense of school belonging for primary school children with social, emotional and mental health needs: The views and | 2021 | Unpublished Doctoral Thesis | - | - | Aim to explore mainstream school staff’s perceptions about supporting children with | Semi-structured interviews A pilot study was conducted prior to the | Fifteen teachers and TAs participated (14 female, 1 male) from 13 primary and infant schools, working with | School staff felt unsure or inexperienced to support SEMH and SEMH needs | Lack of pupil voice with regards to school belonging. Participants found understanding SEMH needs as difficult and complex. Many |

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| | perspectives of Teaching Staff | | | | | <p>SEMH needs in the classroom. Research questions – how do mainstream primary school teaching staff describe their experiences of supporting children with SEMH needs in the classroom? 2. What do mainstream primary school teaching staff understand by the term ‘school belonging’ and 3. What do mainstream primary school teaching staff think contributes to children’s experiences of school belonging?</p> | main research study. | children from across the primary school age range (Age 4-11) in England. | are not clear to understand. | <p>teachers and TAs feel unsupported within their school and unable to share their concerns. Participants also described not knowing how to support children with SEMH needs.</p> <p>Perception of the term ‘SEMH’, participants might have different understandings of the term ‘SEMH’ if participants have had significant experience of SEMH. This would impact the research findings. Some participants worked 1:1 with children with SEMH (1:1 TAs) whereas others did not.</p> |
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| Wendy Fitsimmons | An exploration of teacher's experiences of relational rupture and repair with students described as having social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs in a specialist SEMH provision | 2021 | Unpublished Doctoral thesis | - | - | <p>Research has suggested that successful repair following ruptures lead to stronger teacher and student relationships.</p> <p>The aim of the research was to explore teacher's lived experiences of rupture and repair in their teacher-student relationships with SEMH students.</p> | <p>Interpretative Phenomenology Analysis (IPA) methodology and semi-structured interviews.</p> <p>A pilot study was conducted prior to the main research study.</p> | Five teachers employed at a specialist school for SEMH students (2 class teachers and 3 subject specific teachers). | <p>Ruptures were perceived as a relational breakdown which impacted on student's learning. This could be a 'blip' to a major incident. The research suggests that teachers found ruptures difficult to recover from when the student had crossed a personal or emotional boundary or when they could not make sense of the rupture.</p> | <p>The research focusses on staff members from one specialist academy in the North of England. This may not be applicable to a Welsh context.</p> <p>The notion of ruptures could elicit different responses depending on the severity of the rupture.</p> |
| Joanna Stanbridge and Emma Mercer | Mind your language: Why the language used to describe children's SEMH needs matter | 2022 | International Journal of Inclusive Education | 26 (3) | 263-283 | Exploring language used to describe SEMH needs on referral | Exploratory research design, pragmatic approach. | 1 LA – 33 schools (primary, secondary and special schools) completed by | 'Within child' accounts of behaviour causing concern have | Peer reliability checks with analysis from other EPs not involved in the research – perhaps |

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| | | | | | | forms to the EPS | Deductive thematic analysis | SENDCos. Also, by class teachers, head teachers, deputy head teachers and designated teachers for Looked After Children. 97 CYP. | been linked to approaches such as 'zero tolerance' behaviour policies which is linked to the rise of school exclusions. There is a tension between individual accountability and a more equality-based social model of ALN which inclusive schools must be built on. Language to be neutral, descriptive and non-judgemental (Stanbridge & Campbell, 2016). | may be influenced by others. Despite anonymising data, did schools consent to their referral forms being analysed? |
| Laura Hickinbotham and Anita Soni | A Systematic literature review exploring the views and experiences of children and young | 2021 | Emotional & Behavioural Difficulties | 26 (2) | 135-150 | A systematic review of qualitative research | Thematic synthesis | Seven papers identified and reviewed using the | Key themes: negative and positive impact of | Only included published peer-reviewed work, the researchers |

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| | people of the label Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) | | | | | exploring the views of CYP identified as having SEMH needs. Research questions: 1. How do children and young people described as SEMH perceive this label? 2. What is the impact of the SEMH label as experienced by CYP assigned this label? | | CASP checklist – 61 participants | labels associated with SEMH and the impact on CYP's identity. Promoting the voice of the CYP in describing needs and working systemically with schools to raise awareness of the implications of language | acknowledge that unpublished work was not included. When the papers are combined in a review, does it lose rigour or reliability of each study and encapsulate each studies' findings effectively? |
| Eilidh Macpherson and Rita Phillips | Primary Teacher's experiences of the effectiveness of nurture groups on children's social and emotional skills, academic attainment and behaviour | 2021 | International Journal of Nurture in Education | 7 | 15-26 | Exploring teacher's perceptions of the nurture groups' effectiveness on social, emotional skills, behaviour and attainment. | Thematic analysis – semi- structured interviews. Ontological and epistemological stances not stated. | Opportunity sampling – qualified primary school teacher based in UK and worked with children who had previously attended nurture groups. 16 were invited to interview and 12 were interviewed. | 7 themes and 10 sub themes were identified. Nurture groups are an encouraging addition to a school and a crucial intervention for CYP with a high level of | Open questions were asked, and some questions were leading such as, "could you describe how the pupil is any more or less disruptive following intervention?" Ontological and epistemological |

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| | | | | | | | | | need. Nurture groups provide little or no change in educational outcomes. | stances not stated in the research. Opportunity sampling – purposefully chose certain participants not just based on their characteristics for the study. |
| Constanze Weber and Leen Vereenoghe | Reducing conflicts in school environments using restorative practices: A systematic review | 2020 | International Journal of Educational Research Open | 1 | 100009 | Examining the effectiveness of restorative practice in reducing conflicts. | Systematic review – use of PRISMA. | Participants could be students or teachers from primary, middle or secondary schools, study designs delivered quantitative outcome data and peer reviewed publication. No limitations on publication date, language or study design. | 17 papers met the inclusion criteria – several studies demonstrated a decrease in student suspensions and behaviour referrals. Use of RP might improve bullying and student-teacher relationships. | Included quantitative outcome data, did not include qualitative data on the effectiveness of RP. Quantitative data – only correlational and non-experimental designs. No limitations on publication date and language – was RP used previously in schools? What was the language used in the papers included? |
| Meghan Breedlove, Jihyeon Choi | Mitigating the effects of adverse childhood experiences: How | 2021 | The New Educator: | 17 (3) | 223-241 | Positive childhood experiences | Article review exploring restorative | n.a. | Use of restorative practice in | More of a positive article exploring RPs in school and its |

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| & Brett Zyromski | restorative practices in schools support positive experiences and protective factors | | Mental Health Issue | | | (PCES) and protective factors (PFs) can mitigate the negative effects of ACEs (Adverse Childhood Experiences). The paper suggests that restorative practice in schools may be an integral component in promoting PCEs and PFs. | practice in school – an American Context | | school can better meet the needs of their students experiencing ACEs. | implementations. Very few negatives of its implication. |
| Terrence J Bevington | Appreciative Evaluation of restorative approaches in schools | 2015 | Pastoral care in education: An international journal of personal, social and emotional development | 33 (2) | 105-115 | A case study aimed to broaden the evidence base of the implementation and impact of restorative approaches. | Appreciative inquiry | 6 volunteer participants at one inner-London primary school | Conflict presents an opportunity for a constructive way forward. Restorative practice enables staff more constructive ways of dealing with emotions and conflict. | Case study of restorative practice in one school – transferable to other schools however, the appreciative inquiry element of the research requires exploration of in-depth experiences. |

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| Jessica Dodds | The views and experiences of school leaders implementing whole school relational approaches in a single secondary school: A Reflexive Thematic Analysis | 2023 | Unpublished doctoral thesis | - | - | Exploring the views and experiences of school leaders implementing whole school relational approaches. | Reflexive thematic analysis | 6 Senior Leaders working in a mainstream secondary school, within a Multi-Academy Trust (MAT). | Four themes were developed – enablers were underlying ethos and culture, and key barriers include lack of time and resources. | MAT in England, may not be generalisable to the Welsh population. However, it did look at implementations in a mainstream school. |
| Danielle Hibbott | Educators' constructions of SEMH. A Foucaudian Discourse Analysis. | 2024 | Unpublished Doctoral theses | - | - | Investigates how educators construct SEMH needs through discourse and how the constructions shape their perceptions and actions supporting CYP with SEMH | Foucaudian Discourse Analysis. Flexible qualitative design using semi-structured interviews | Voluntary sampling – 3 Senior leadership participants – mainstream and specialist. | Educators construct SEMH needs through four discursive themes: SEMH as heterogeneous, SEMH needs challenge traditional disciplinary practices, SEMH support is marginalised in favour of academic priorities and SEMH demands a shift towards greater | Offers deeper understanding of constructions held by educators however, it does not perhaps encapsulate the nuances of educators. There is an assumption that those that want to contribute to the research have a vested interest in talking about the topic. Senior members of staff may not capture the staff's experiences of SEMH – more of a 'top-down approach' |

| | | | | | | | | | systemic understanding | |
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| Olivia Corradi | Primary school staff's understanding and perceptions of their own and the school role in meeting the social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs of all pupils: A grounded theory exploration | 2019 | Unpublished doctoral theses | - | - | RQ – how do primary school staff understand their own and the school's role in relation to all pupil's social, emotional and mental health needs. | <p>Social constructionist epistemology and relativist ontology.</p> <p>Grounded theory methodology.</p> <p>Semi structured interviews.</p> | 6 Primary school staff across three mainstream primary schools in the LA – 1 headteacher, 1 SENDCo, 1 teacher, 1 cover teacher, 1 assistant head teacher and 1 Learning Support Assistant. | Whole school approaches, communication and facing external challenges such as time, meeting curriculum demand, adapting to societal change | <p>Lots of stakeholders in the research – LA EPS, the LA, Head of SEND department in LA.</p> <p>English context – use of perhaps different codes of practice and expectations</p> <p>Focus on mental health needs e.g. lack of CAMHs input etc</p> |

Appendix 2 - Script used within individual interviews including interview questions

For the purposes of the interview, I will be audio recording on Microsoft Teams for my transcript analysis, but it will not be a video record, is that okay?

Thank you so much for helping me with my research. This research is part of my doctoral thesis for my third year of the Educational Psychology doctorate at Cardiff University.

I have a few questions to discuss with you today which will just give us some structure to our conversation. The research is to gain a better understanding of school staff's experiences of 'relational rupture and repair' between school staff and students experiencing social, emotional and mental health needs. Please feel free to share as much or as little as you want within this conversation.

- What is your role within the school?
- What is your understanding of the term 'relational rupture' within a school context?
 - Prompt – definition of relational rupture (Relational rupture relates to a break in the connection between two people, often caused by hurt or anger and is common in human relationships. Repair relates to a process of reconciliation through apology, forgiveness and understanding. The act of strengthening the relationship and reconnecting after the event as an increase in knowledge and understanding of each other has occurred), school staff-student relationships
- Could you tell me about a time where there has been a 'relational rupture' with a pupil and how was this repaired?
 - Prompt – what was helpful? What was not helpful?

- What do you think are the potential barriers for supporting relationships between school staff and students within schools?
- What do you think the potential facilitators are for supporting relationships between school staff and students within schools?
- Are there any further points that you would like to mention that you have not yet discussed, in relation to your experience?

Appendix 3 – Gatekeeper letter

FAO: Additional Learning Needs Coordinator

Address:

Date:

Dear Sir/Madam (ALNCo),

I am a Trainee Educational Psychologist studying within the School of Psychology at Cardiff University. I am seeking to conduct research into the views and experiences of school staff working with a child or young person with social emotional and mental health needs within your school. I wanted to explore the nature of relationships within the school environment and the notion of 'rupture and repair' within relationships.

Rupture relates to a break in connection between two people, often caused by hurt or anger and is common in human relationships. Repair is a process of reconciliation through apology, forgiveness and understanding. The act of strengthening the relationship and reconnecting after the event as an increase in knowledge and understanding of each other has occurred.

I am writing to enquire whether you would be willing to give permission for me to recruit school staff participants within your school, and if so, whether you please could share the attached information (participant information sheet and consent form) with them on my behalf. This would mean acting as my gatekeeper for this research project. If possible, could this be shared with your school please? There is an assurance that the completion of this research will not impact on service delivery.

All participants will need to meet the inclusion criteria to take part in this research. For the purposes of this research, participants could be teachers, teaching assistants, pastoral or nurture teachers or Additional Learning Needs Coordinators. They also have to work with children or young people who have social, emotional, and mental health needs and participants can be over the age of 21. They must meet all elements of the criteria to take part in the research.

Participation will take part in an individual interview via Microsoft Teams, answering questions related to their experiences of rupture and repair within relationships. The individual interview can take place at a time convenient for the individual and will last for approximately 60-90 minutes. All information will be kept confidential and anonymised, and participants will not be able to be identified within the research.

To indicate your consent for acting as a gatekeeper for my research project, or for further information, please reply to this email contacting Rebecca Soproniuk who is principal researcher, soproniukrk@cardiff.ac.uk or to speak with my research supervisor, Dr Dale Bartle.

Thank you for taking the time to consider my request, I would be very grateful for your support.

Kind Regards,

Rebecca Soproniuk

Trainee Educational Psychologist of Psychology, Cardiff University Tower Building, 30 Park Place, Cardiff, CF10 3EU.

Appendix 4 – Recruitment poster circulated on social media

CARDIFF UNIVERSITY
PRIFYSGOL CAERDYDD

Doctoral Thesis Research Recruitment

Do you work in a mainstream school?

Do you support young people with their social, emotional and mental health needs?

I'm looking for school staff that support young people with their social, emotional and mental health needs to take part in a research study.

The research will explore the notion of 'relational rupture and repair' within schools and how Educational Psychologists can support schools with this.

Participation will involve a 60-90 minute interview via Microsoft Teams.

Your participation is voluntary, confidential and greatly appreciated.

For more information contact
Rebecca Soproniuk

soproniukrk@cardiff.ac.uk
@RebeccaS_TEP

Trainee Educational Psychologist

Appendix 5 – Participant Information sheet



School of Psychology
Participant Information Sheet
Version: XX Date: XX/XX/XX



Exploring mainstream school staff's experiences working with children or young person with Social Emotional and Mental Health needs in which there has been a relational rupture and how it was repaired.

You are being invited to take part in a research project. Before you decide whether to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being undertaken and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others, if you wish.

1. What is the purpose of this research project?

The purpose of this research project is to collect views and experiences of school staff working with a child or young person with Social Emotional and Mental Health needs. I intend to explore the nature of relationships within the school environment and the notion of 'rupture and repair' within relationships.

Rupture relates to a break in connection between two people, often caused by hurt or anger and is common in human relationships. Repair is a process of reconciliation through apology, forgiveness and understanding. The act of strengthening the relationship and reconnecting after the event as an increase in knowledge and understanding of each other has occurred.

The research will add to existing knowledge around the topic of the importance of relationships and inform Educational Psychologists how best they can support schools with this.

2. Why have I been invited to take part?

You have been invited because you have been identified as a member of school staff that is either a Teacher, Teaching Assistant, Pastoral or Nurture teacher or Additional Learning Needs Coordinator who work with children or young people who have social emotional and mental health needs and

are over the age of 21 to participate. You must meet criteria for all of these elements to take part in the research.

3. Do I have to take part?

No, your participation in this research is entirely voluntary and it is up to you to decide whether to take part. If you decide to take part, I will discuss the research project with you and ask you to sign the consent form that is attached with this information sheet. If you decide not to take part, you do not have to explain your reasons and it will not affect your legal rights. You will have a maximum of 10 days to respond with your consent.

Whilst the research may not necessarily directly affect the service users of the Local Authority placement, there is an assurance that the completion of the research will not impact on service delivery.

You are free to withdraw your consent to participate in the research project at any time, without giving a reason, even after signing the consent form.

4. What will taking part involve?

You will be asked to take part in an interview in which questions will be asked around your experiences of rupture and repair within your relationships with the children or young people you work with. This is a one-off individual interview, and participation will not be needed after this occasion. The individual interview will take approximately 60-90 minutes of your time. The individual interview will take place via Microsoft Teams and will be audio recorded for research purposes. Participants will be anonymised for confidentiality purposes in the write up of this research.

5. Will I be paid for taking part?

No, you will not be paid or offered any incentives for taking part.

6. What are the possible benefits of taking part?

There will be no direct benefits to you from taking part, but your contribution may help others and may benefit understanding and knowledge to this area and potential future research. You may indirectly benefit from discussing experiences.

7. What are the possible risks of taking part?

There are no possible risks of taking part in this research.

8. Will my taking part in this research project be kept confidential?

Yes, all information collected from and about you during the research project will be kept confidential and any personal information you provide will be managed in accordance with data protection legislation. Please see 'What will happen to my Personal Data?' (below) for further information.

9. What will happen to my Personal Data?

Cardiff University is the Data Controller and is committed to respecting and protecting your personal data in accordance with your expectations and Data Protection legislation. Further information about Data Protection, including:

- your rights
- the legal basis under which Cardiff University processes your personal data for research.
- Cardiff University's Data Protection Policy
- how to contact the Cardiff University Data Protection Officer
- how to contact the Information Commissioner's Office

Cardiff University (the researcher) will need to share names, email addresses and school contact details for the purposes of this research project. After data collection, the researcher will anonymise all the personal data that has been collected from and about you in connection with this research project. This is except for your consent form which includes personal data which must be retained. Your consent form, which includes personally identifiable information, will be retained until July 2025, and may be accessed by members of the research team and, where necessary, by members of the University's governance and audit teams or by regulatory authorities. Anonymised information will be kept for a minimum of 6 months but may be published in support of the research project and/or retained indefinitely, where it is likely to have continuing value for research purposes.

Data collected will be anonymised and confidential, participants and schools will not be identified or identifiable. Data from the transcripts will be stored on a password encrypted and protected computer. It will not be possible to withdraw any anonymised data that has already been published or in some cases, where identifiers are irreversibly removed during a research project, from the point at which it has been anonymised.

10. What happens to the data at the end of the research project?

Anonymised Data from the research could be made publicly available (anonymised).

11. What will happen to the results of the research project?

It is my intention to publish the results of this research project in academic journals and present findings at conferences. Participants will not be identified in any report, publication, or presentation.

Your anonymised data will not be shared in any way including an OSF or another open science repository. The report will be able to be accessed via ORCA on the Cardiff University website. This is a digital repository for Cardiff University's research outputs.

12. What if there is a problem?

If you wish to complain or have grounds for concerns about any aspect of the way you have been approached or treated during this research, please contact Dr Dale Bartle (bartled@cardiff.ac.uk), or the School of Psychology Research Ethics Committee, Cardiff University at the address below. If your complaint is not managed to your satisfaction, please contact the Information Commissioner's Office should you wish to complain, can be found at the following: <https://www.cardiff.ac.uk/public-information/policies-and-procedures/data-protection>.

If you are harmed by taking part in this research project, there are no special compensation arrangements. If you are harmed due to someone's negligence, you may have grounds for legal action, but you may have to pay for it.

13. Who is organising and funding this research project?

The research is organised by Rebecca Soproniuk and Dr Dale Bartle. There is no funding being received for this research project.

14. Who has reviewed this research project?

This research project has been reviewed and given a favourable opinion by the School of Psychology Research Ethics Committee, Cardiff University. Secretary of the Ethics Committee, School of Psychology, Cardiff University, Park Place, Cardiff, CF10 3AT. Tel: 029 2087 0707

Email: psychethics@cardiff.ac.uk.

15. Further information and contact details

Should you have any questions relating to this research project, you may contact us during normal working hours:

Rebecca Soproniuk (soproniukrk@cardiff.ac.uk) - Principal Researcher

Dr Dale Bartle (bartled@cardiff.ac.uk) – Supervisor

Thank you for considering taking part in this research project. If you decide to participate, you will be given a copy of the Participant Information Sheet and a signed consent form to keep for your records.

Appendix 6 – Participant Consent form



School of Psychology

Consent Form



Exploring mainstream school staff's experiences working with a child or young person with SEMH in which there has been a relational rupture and how it was repaired.

Name of Chief/Principal Investigator: Rebecca Soproniuk

Please initial
box

| | |
|---|--|
| I confirm that I have read the information sheet for the above research project. | |
| I confirm that I have understood the information sheet for the above research project and that I have had the opportunity to ask questions and that these have been answered satisfactorily. | |
| I understand that my participation is voluntary, and I am free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason and without any adverse consequences I understand that if I withdraw, information about me that has already been obtained may be kept by Cardiff University. | |
| I understand that data collected during the research project may be looked at by individuals from Cardiff University or from regulatory authorities, where it is relevant to my taking part in the research project. I give permission for these individuals to have access to my data. | |
| I consent to the processing of my personal information (name, email address and name of school) for the purposes explained to me. I understand that such information will be held in accordance with all applicable data protection legislation and in strict confidence unless disclosure is required by law or professional obligation. | |
| I understand who access to my personal information will have, how the data will be stored and what will happen to the data at the end of the research project. | |
| I understand that after the research project, anonymised data may be made publicly available via a data repository and may be used for purposes not related to this research project. I understand that it will not be possible to identify me from this data that is seen and used by other researchers, for ethically approved research projects, on the understanding that confidentiality will be maintained. | |
| I consent to being audio recorded for the purposes of the research project, and I understand how it will be used in the research. | |

| | |
|---|--|
| I understand that anonymised excerpts and/or verbatim quotes from my interview may be used as part of the research publication. | |
| I understand how the findings and results of the research project will be written up and published. | |
| I agree to take part in this research project. | |

Name of participant (print):

Date:

Signature:

Name of person taking consent (print): R Soproniuk

Date:

Signature:

Role of person taking consent (print): Researcher

THANK YOU FOR PARTICIPATING IN OUR RESEARCH

YOU WILL BE GIVEN A COPY OF THIS CONSENT FORM TO KEEP

Appendix 7 – Decline with gratitude letter

Dear Sir/Madam,

Thank you for expressing an interest in my doctoral thesis research, “Exploring mainstream school staff’s experiences working with a child or young person with SEMH in which there has been a relational rupture and how it was repaired.”

Unfortunately, the research has now reached its maximum number of participants and therefore, recruitment has now ceased.

Thank you again for expressing an interest in my research.

Kind Regards,

Rebecca Soproniuk,

Trainee Educational Psychologist of Psychology, Cardiff University Tower Building, 30 Park Place, Cardiff, CF10 3EU.

Appendix 8: Participant Debriefing Information

Participant Debriefing Information

Thank you for taking part in this study, your participation is appreciated. The aim of the study is to explore views and experiences of school staff working with children or young people with social, emotional, and mental health needs. In addition to examining relationships, the research also explores the concept of rupture and repair within the school environment. The information gained from the individual interviews will be used to inform the researcher's doctoral thesis research project, as part of the Doctorate in Educational Psychology.

The anonymised results may be published and used in presentations. This will inform and contribute to existing literature on the importance of positive relationships within schools. This is a reminder that the individual interview's audio recording, and subsequent transcripts will be kept confidentially in a secure location only accessible to the researcher. The individual interview recording will be kept confidentially up to the point of transcription, at which point it will be deleted, and all transcribed information will be anonymised.

You have the right to withdraw your data up to two weeks after the interview, as beyond this point there will be no identifiable link between yourself and your responses. If the conversation within the individual interview has brought up any worries or if you are concerned about your wellbeing, you may wish to contact:

- www.mind.org.uk
- <https://www.educationsupport.org.uk/helping-you>

If you have any further questions or comments about the research, please contact:

The researcher: Rebecca Soproniuk soproniukrk@cardiff.ac.uk

The research supervisors:

Dr Dale Bartlett bartled@cardiff.ac.uk

Thank you for again for participating in my research.

Cardiff University's Research Ethics Committee:

School of Psychology, Cardiff University, Tower Building, 30 Park Place, Cardiff, CF10 3EU;

email: psychethics@cardiff.ac.uk

Privacy Notice: Cardiff University is the Data Controller and is committed to respecting and protecting your personal data in accordance with your expectations and Data Protection legislation. The University has a Data Protection Officer who can be contacted at inforequest@cardiff.ac.uk. Further information about Data Protection, including your rights and details about how to contact the Information Commissioner's Office should you wish to complain, can be found

Appendix 9 – Ethical approval sought from Cardiff University Ethics committee

March 2024

The Ethics Committee has considered your PG project proposal: Exploring mainstream school staff's experiences working with a child or young person with Social and Emotional Mental Health needs in which there has been a relational rupture and how it was repaired (EC.24.03.12.6983).

Your project proposal has received a **Favourable Opinion** based on the condition that:

1. Please can the researcher confirm that data will not be shared in any way including on OSF or another open science repository?
2. Please can "You have no more than 10 days to respond with your consent" be reworded slightly to be clear for participants. For example "You have a maximum of 10 days..." or "You have 10 days...".

Additional approvals

This letter provides an ethical opinion only. You must not start your research project until all appropriate approvals are in place.

Conditions of the favourable opinion

The favourable opinion is subject to the following conditions being met:

May 2024

The Ethics Committee has considered the amendment to your PG project proposal: Exploring mainstream school staff's experiences working with a child or young person with Social and Emotional Mental Health needs in which there has been a relational rupture and how it was repaired (EC.24.03.12.6983A).

Your amended project proposal has received a **Favourable Opinion** based on the information described in the proforma and supporting documentation.

Additional approvals

This letter provides an ethical opinion only. You must not start your research project until all appropriate approvals are in place.

Conditions of the favourable opinion

The favourable opinion is subject to the following conditions being met:

- You must retain a copy of this decision letter with your Research records.
- Please note that if any changes are made to the above project then you must notify the Ethics Committee.
- Please use the EC reference number on all future correspondence.
- The Committee must be informed of any unexpected ethical issues or unexpected adverse events that arise during the research project.
- The Committee must be informed when your research project has ended. This notification should be made to psychethics@cardiff.ac.uk within three months of research project completion.
- All data will be retained/processed/destroyed in line with University policy.

Appendix 10 – Amendment form for ethical approval (submitted 14.05.24).

School of Psychology Ethics Amendment Form

For amendments to all SREC approved proposals, please use this proforma. **Section 1** records details of your current SREC submission and **Section 2** are for recording each amendment required (create a new table [copy and paste] for each amendment that is required).

Once completed, please send to psychethics@cardiff.ac.uk with all the appropriately amended supporting documents, including the amended proforma. Identify amended text in these by highlighting in yellow.

Please note that if any information is missing, the application may be returned to you. and will delay the processing of your amendment(s). Amendments may not be approved straight away and may require revision which could delay their implementation in your research.

Remember that the project must not proceed until SREC approval been received.

| Section 1 | | | | | | |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| EC code of current proposal | EC.24.03.12.6983 | | | | | |
| Submission type | Box A | Box B | Generic | Staff | UG | PG |
| (select all that apply) | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Lead applicant name | Rebeca Soproniuk | | | | | |
| Amendment submission date | 14.05.24 | | | | | |

| | |
|--|--|
| Number of amendments to current application proposed | 4 |
| Number and name of any supporting document(s) | Thesis Ethics Proforma, Thesis information sheet and Thesis gatekeeper letter. |

Section 2

Please list the amendment(s) required: duplicate the Table below for each amendment required.

| Amendment 1 | To identify the amendment, please highlight in yellow in the current proforma and other supporting document(s) |
|---|--|
| Amendment to be made, with justification/reason | <p>The researcher will have dual roles whilst completing this research alongside completing daily practice as a Trainee Educational Psychologist within a Local Authority. Whilst the research may not necessarily directly affect the service users of the Local Authority placement, there is an assurance that the completion of the research will not impact on service delivery. This will be achieved by effective time management of the researcher.</p> <p>– Amendment for clarity and assurance to local authorities that the research will not impact on service delivery.</p> |

| | |
|---|--|
| Document name, page numbers, sections of the ethics application where amendment has been made | <p>Ethics proforma – pages 8 (section 4.9) and 10-11 (section 5.5), section 12 (supporting documents) appendix 1: Research proposal (page 29), appendix 2 recruitment/gatekeeper letter (page 33), appendix 4 information sheet (page 37).</p> <p>Participant information sheet – page 2</p> <p>Gatekeeper letter – page 1</p> |
|---|--|

| | |
|---|---|
| Amendment 2 | To identify the amendment, please highlight in yellow in the current proforma and other supporting document(s) |
| Amendment to be made, with justification/reason | Addition of “Facebook” to be added to social media for recruitment. |
| Document name, page numbers, sections of the ethics application where amendment has been made | <p>Ethics proforma – section 5: participation and recruitment (page 9), Section 12: Supporting Documents Appendix 1: Research proposal (page 27).</p> |

| | |
|---|--|
| Amendment 3 | To identify the amendment, please highlight in yellow in the current proforma and other supporting document(s) |
| Amendment to be made, with justification/reason | <p>Participants will have a maximum of 10 days to respond with their consent – rewording from a previous suggestion from the ethics committee.</p> |

| | |
|---|--|
| | |
| Document name, page numbers, sections of the ethics application where amendment has been made | <p>Ethics proforma – Section 6.2 and section 6.5 (page 12), Section 12 Supporting documents Appendix 4 Participant information sheet (page 36)</p> <p>Information sheet – page 1</p> |

| | |
|---|--|
| Amendment 4 | To identify the amendment, please highlight in yellow in the current proforma and other supporting document(s) |
| Amendment to be made, with justification/reason | <p>Data will not be shared in any way including an OSF or another open science repository and your anonymised data will not be shared in any way including an OSF or another open science repository. – rewording from a previous suggestion from the ethics committee.</p> |
| Document name, page numbers, sections of the ethics application where amendment has been made | <p>Ethics proforma – section 8.9, section 12 supporting documents, appendix 4 information sheet (page 38).</p> <p>Information sheet – page 3</p> |

Appendix 11 – Ethical considerations

| Ethical consideration | How this was addressed |
|-------------------------------|---|
| Informed consent | Participation in the study was voluntary. Informed consent was taken via digital consent forms (see Appendix.6) and information sheets (see Appendix. 5) which were administered prior to data collection which outlined the aims and purpose of the research. Within the consent form, it outlined consent to be audio recorded for transcription purposes. This was sent via email directly to the participants. Participants were given a maximum of ten days to respond with their consent to the research. |
| Confidentiality and anonymity | Participants were reminded that interviews were confidential, and transcripts were anonymised so that no identifiable information such as name, age, school, names of employer, fellow employees or children could not be deciphered within the research. Participants were also numbered for each transcript for example, 'participant 1', 'participant 2', so that only the researcher was able to identify the participant. All participant's audio recordings were stored on the researchers' password protected computer, accessible only to the researcher. All audio recordings were used to transcription purposes only and then deleted. |
| Right to withdraw | Participants were reminded within the information sheet, consent form, debrief form and at the beginning and end of the interview that they had the right to withdraw from the study at |

| | |
|--|---|
| | <p>any point for any reason. Within the debrief form, participants were reminded that they had the right to withdraw their data up to two weeks after the interview.</p> |
| Risk of harm and safeguarding | <p>No physical, emotional or psychological harm or risk was identified within the ethical approval decision however, useful wellbeing links were given as signposts for the participants within the debrief information.</p> <p>Individual interviews were used to create a sense of psychological safety for participants to discuss perhaps an emotive topic such as relational rupture and repair.</p> |
| Debriefing | <p>A debrief form (see Appendix. 9) was given on completion of the interviews in order to explain the research aims and participation was voluntary.</p> |
| General Data Protection and Regulations (GDPR) | <p>Personal data collection in connection with the research was stored and processed according to the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). As per Cardiff University's Research Records and Retention schedule, data will be retained for a minimum period of five years after the end of the project or after publication of any findings based upon the data (whichever is later). Once data is anonymised after transcription purposes, it would not be possible for participants to withdraw their data from the research. The researcher is also aware of data protection and storing information on a password encrypted computer, anonymised and with no identifiable information within the data.</p> |

Appendix 12 – Snapshot of data familiarisation with Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Participant 1)

INTERVIEWER: yeah

PARTICIPANT 1: and my understanding of it is that, you know, when an issue like that happens then that there's a rupture in that relationship, and these adults need to be the regulated ones to support them in order to, you know, the Perry and the 3Rs and and to regulate and reflect then later, yeah.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah, lovely. So I was just going to say then so what could you tell me about that? That time, you know, with that pupil, how how was it repaired?

PARTICIPANT 1: how was it what sorry? Repaired?

INTERVIEWER: repaired yeah.

PARTICIPANT 1: OK um well, initially you know it's all about that example today being in attunement with the child making sure that the child isn't rushed, recognising the child's needs right right in that moment, you know, when they're dysregulated, when they flip their lid that you know, there's there's no point in you trying to reflect or or or any of that language, you know, be very present, making sure that um you allow them to express their needs, try to meet those needs make sure you are mirroring and trying to support them in that that reflection later on, but today's example today's example took a very, very, very long time where you know he he didn't want to you know, all I did was make sure he was safe, make you know, meeting those Maslowian needs and and making sure that he was safe in the environment. Yes, he was trying to escape the school premises but reassuring him making sure that he knew that that I was there to support him um but if I'm honest, on occasions it takes a long, long time to repair that

INTERVIEWER: hmmm

PARTICIPANT 1: ((overlaps)) because today's example he'd really, really flipped his lid and lost it completely well, you know you can't within 20 minutes repair it like that ((clicks fingers))

INTERVIEWER: no no

PARTICIPANT 1: You know, it has to be. Yes, we have to take the role of leading it and be the ones to take control of the situation to make sure that they're safe but that but but that repair takes a long, long time. So tomorrow morning I already know that when he arrives to school at half past 8, he and I will check in with one another and later on in the day, we'll have an opportunity to talk about today's events. Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: yeah, you restore that relationship when on a different day then or when he is a bit calmer.

PARTICIPANT 1: Yeah and, you know, there are certain children that with that repair, it can happen an hour later.

INTERVIEWER: yeah

PARTICIPANT 1: um but when needs are really high like they were today, then you know it's going to

Rebecca Soproniuk

...
edit
share

Rupture in relationship due to dysregulation

Reply

Rebecca Soproniuk

...
edit
share

Adults to be emotionally regulated to support

Reply

Rebecca Soproniuk

...
edit
share

Trauma informed approaches

Reply

Rebecca Soproniuk

...
edit
share

Understanding a child's stress response

Reply

Rebecca Soproniuk

...
edit
share

Neurobiology of ruptures

Reply

Rebecca Soproniuk

...
edit
share

Adults supporting CYP to express themselves

Reply

Rebecca Soproniuk

...
edit
share

Importance of safety in ruptures

Reply

Appendix 13 - Snapshot of data familiarisation with Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Participant 2)

Participant 2: But you know to sort of avoid that with the child and an adult then we might introduce the programme and reduce their time with us to see if that time then can be gradually built up so that we can build on the relationship and and foster a better sort of understanding and between the two people involved um you know, as a school our ethos, really, I suppose is that relationship first, that trust between the adults and the child because if you don't have that, then the child's not going to settle and the child's not going to learn so we do really work on those those relationships when the children come in, you know and like I said earlier, we do have that opportunity here to change the dynamics if needs be, to try and avoid ever getting to a point where we might be considering exclusion so you know it's all about we do a lot of emotion coaching in school um we do a lot of mindfulness trying to build strategies for the children to help support them and we we like to say, I suppose that we're giving them a voice so should they feel that relationships are breaking down or, you know, things are not going as as smoothly as they should be, then they feel they've got the confidence to come and speak to us or to speak to an adult

INTERVIEWER: yeah

Participant 2: So that you know someone else could become involved and sort of mediate, if you like, between the child, the family and the school, the adults involved in school so that we can try and, you know, prevent any sort of huge breakdown in the relationship

INTERVIEWER: yeah

Participant 2: We have had some along the way, you know, some children with significant challenges, to be honest you know from home background um the last child we had was a looked after child who'd been in so many different placements and then his current placement when he was with us was breaking down as well so his behaviour became extremely challenging in school, you know, to the point that one of our teachers, I think, suffered concussion

INTERVIEWER: oh gosh yeah

Participant 2: Because, you know, he ended up head butting her so that was an extreme for us and that was not a, you know, not an exclusion I suppose we call it a suspension, I suppose so we just said, right we need time out now so he had two days at home and then all the agencies became involved and we all met up again and thought, right, how can we rebuild this for this child? You know, he's got to learn to conform when he's in school and he's got to understand that that behaviour is not acceptable, but you know equally, we wanted him to understand that we knew how he was feeling and that's how he behaved and that's how he expressed how he was feeling at that time, you know? So we did do a PSP for him and put him on a reduced timetable and then gradually that that over that was over quite a significant time I think it was about 3 months before we actually got him back to school, yeah

INTERVIEWER: school yeah so what did you find was helpful in that scenario then with that, with that particular child, what was the, what was the most helpful do you think?

Participant 2: I think what it had to we have to have the adults at home supporting us as a school you know. so understanding because we do have parents. you know. that we would talk about

Rebecca Soproniuk
Less time in school to foster a relationship between school staff and child slowly

Rebecca Soproniuk
Trust built to form relationships which positively impact on learning

Rebecca Soproniuk
Impact of strategies to support emotional regulation

Rebecca Soproniuk
Providing a child a voice

Rebecca Soproniuk
Working in collaboration with home and school to prevent breakdowns in relationships

Rebecca Soproniuk
CLA children and challenging behaviours

Rebecca Soproniuk
Use of exclusion as a 'cool off' period

sibility: Investigate

Appendix 14 - Snapshot of data familiarisation with Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Participant 3)

would say to the girls I'm going to have to take him outside

INTERVIEWER: yeah

Participant 3: he needs to go outside and then we would be outside I would hold his hand walking around the yard and perhaps sing to him or talk to him and he would be happy to do that but the minute we got into the classroom I would say it's like as if someone has put fireworks off in his head because there's so much going on

INTERVIEWER: yeah too much

Participant 3: yeah and overwhelming for him so that was just one child and um the next year, last year we had 10 children that were on our radar then not just behaviour problems and speech and language problems two to one, some did not have enough language so there wasn't a lot of sounds but expressions for things um and the second year there was quite a few not enough language to communicate her needs in her own little bubble and struggling with speech and speech impediments, speech delay so last year that was the biggest one and there's about four this year that aren't clearly speaking and obviously they are having a go and you're very patient and you try to understand and there's one girl in her own little bubble making noises and sounds so she's not non-verbal as she is making an attempt to communicate so that's what we've noticed really and I don't think you can blame all this on covid

INTERVIEWER: no, yeah I agree and if you can't verbalise how you're feeling that's difficult isn't it because you've got those communication difficulties then to explain



Participant 3: yeah yeah

INTERVIEWER: and all you can do I guess is have this emotional outburst to show I'm angry or I'm upset or, you know

Participant 3: yeah exactly



INTERVIEWER: so I know you mentioned the little boy but could you tell me another time there was a relational rupture with a pupil and how it was repaired? It may not be in nursery it could be across the school in your experience?

Participant 3: hmm let me think now and no it was nursery again, it was last year there was a child who um yeah he hit me he did go for me and you know we had to sit and not everyone I sat down

Rebecca Soproniuk ...  



Extreme behaviours in the classroom, having to be removed outside

Reply

Rebecca Soproniuk ...  



Calm in nature, co-regulating with an adult

Reply

Rebecca Soproniuk ...  



Delayed speech and language impacting on needs being met

Reply

Rebecca Soproniuk ...  



Lots of needs coming through the door in nursery, behavioural and speech and language difficulties

Reply

Rebecca Soproniuk ...  

Some children in their own bubble

Reply

Rebecca Soproniuk ...  

Don't think you can blame all of this on Covid.

Reply

ibility: Good to go

Appendix 15 - Snapshot of data familiarisation with Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Participant 4)

Participant 4: You know, it's not what you expect when you come to work to be sort of hit and kicked by by a child

Interviewer: No yeah

Participant 4: So yes, I mean she was. Her parents were asked to come and collect her that day because she was yeah, very dysregulated and you know, as I said, she'd lashed out at the member of staff and was kept off school. She wasn't. She wasn't actually excluded, but it was suggested that, you know, she didn't come in the following day and that, you know, she had some time to sort of calm and think things through and calm not that you can do that when you're 5 terribly well ((laughs))

Interviewer: Yeah.

Participant 4: But just to be sort of, you know, removed from the situation, I think that was what Headteacher* was thinking um so when she did come in the following day, her mum had sort of sat down with her and then, you know, she'd written a letter then for the member of staff and she did apologise to her how how much of that she, you know, took on board.

Interviewer: yeah understood

Participant 4: Yes. You know, I'm not sure but um you know as far as the child was concerned she came back to school and it was all forgotten and she had completely forgotten about it and she just sort of then carried on as as normal as if nothing had happened um so I mean, yes, you know the member of staff you know, knows the difficulties there anyway, so wouldn't hold a grudge.

Interviewer: No.

Participant 4: But yes, it is. You know, it is tricky when when they when they don't really think uh how hurtful you know that they are really being really. So yes, this that's an ongoing one that's just going to, yeah, carry on. I think for a good while, I don't think anything is good in a sort of miraculously happen where her behaviour is going to change, it's but I think that probably there has been recent events in her life that have

Interviewer: Yeah

Participant 4: that have caused an escalation in her behaviours so um

Interviewer: Yeah.

Participant 4: But then we we get to deal with with all of that, yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah, you get to deal with the end of it, don't you? You deal with all of accumulation of it all, isn't it? When you when they're in school. So what was it? So this member of staff, do they work with them all the time? Is that like, they're almost like a one to one? Or is it a, you know, in the class TA.

Rebecca Soproniuk
...

Expectation to not be hit and kicked in work

Reply

Rebecca Soproniuk
...

Not an exclusion but not attending school the next day

Reply

Rebecca Soproniuk
...

Relying on young children to regulate and understand on their own

Reply

Rebecca Soproniuk
...

Removed from the situation to help the situation

Reply

Rebecca Soproniuk
...

Repairing the relationship with an apology

Reply

Rebecca Soproniuk
...

Perhaps lack of understanding for young children about repair

Reply

Rebecca Soproniuk
...

Child completely forgot about the event

Reply

Appendix 16 - Snapshot of data familiarisation with Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Participant 5)

Interviewer: Yeah.

Participant 5: You know, and and because you're not only working with a child and helping them to understand their emotions and their feelings and their physical connections and build up their strategies and it isn't one strategy fits all you know what? What strategy they tried today may not work tomorrow so you're building at the back of those all the time, but then it's looking at the bigger picture. What

Interviewer: Yeah. Yeah

Participant 5: Support what modelling is that child having in a different context, from other members of staff

Interviewer: yes, yeah, yeah, definitely. It comes from that, doesn't it? Mod the modelling of the behaviour expected. So I know you mentioned about this particular pupil, but did you have, could you tell me about a time where there has been a relational rupture and how it was repaired from your experience? So if there's any child that you've had, that's like that?

Participant 5: um so no, I've had children referred to me via ELSA because they've experienced changes within their family setting and how I've worked um with the child, so we've we've had a child who, there was a breakdown, their parents relationship broke down and the child um, in in class teacher noticed the self esteem of the child so referred him on that um when I did the child, did the child's targets, self-esteem was a big part, but it was also um ((pause)) loss now loss as in not losing, not losing through the end of life, but it was change

Interviewer: Yeah.

Participant 5: change to relationships and when I rung the family home uh the and with the school wasn't aware of this, what the child you know, when you said no, I want to stay home to look after my mum because we don't see our dad anymore so the school wasn't aware that there had been a breakdown in relationship so when I rang mum and said, you know, the targets you know, and I didn't go into great detail because that's just your initial assessment only that these targets you know was set by myself and the pupil then the parent opened up and said, you know my, me and my partner, husband has the relationship has ended. It's not been, you know very uh you know very amicable, and you know, I there's a lot of anger displays, now there was angry at home, in school was quite quiet, you know, so there were two elements so things that I used we looked at the self-affirmation first with this child, you know, you know what's good about them, what talents do they have, what makes them feel good? What are their interests? Um we look, we worked on emotions as well, you know, because, this particular child was year 3 and you know, they some, you know, some children only know the basic emotions

Interviewer: Yeah.

Participant 5: They certainly don't know what the physical uh some will certainly not know some of the physical connections until you you point it out. So, we did a lot of work on emotions. We did a lot

Rebecca Soproniuk
Adapting to needs and changes over time
Reply

Rebecca Soproniuk
Considering the bigger picture
Reply

Rebecca Soproniuk
Modelling the behaviour you want to see
Reply

Rebecca Soproniuk
Lack of self esteem with relationship breakdowns
Reply

Rebecca Soproniuk
Coping with loss and change
Reply

Rebecca Soproniuk
Children internalising home issues and displaying in school
Reply

Rebecca Soproniuk
Different expressions of emotion at home and in school
Reply

ibility: Investigate

Appendix 17 – Reflexive Thematic Analysis process: Initial codes generated from data

| | | | |
|--|--|---|--|
| P1 – many roles many hats to wear | P1 – dysregulated children | P1 – rupture in relationship due to dysregulation | P1 – Adults need to be emotionally regulated to support children |
| P1 – understanding of trauma informed approaches | P1 – Understanding a child's stress response | P1 – use of neurobiology to explain ruptures | P1 -adults supporting CYP to express themselves |
| P1 – importance of safety in ruptures | P1 – Maslow's hierarchy of needs | P1 – keeping a child physically safe during angry moments | P1 – emotionally available adult |
| P1 – some relational repairs take longer | P1 – Adults in charge of safety | P1 – Restoring relationships after events | P1 – restore the relationship or restore the situation? |
| P1 – period of reflection before restoration | P1 – whole school approach to support | P1 – best person to support a child is the one that knows them best | P1 – change of staff, change of face |
| P1 – may not be the same person supporting the child | P1 – quality of the relationship between support staff and students | P1 – developed relationships over time | P1 – non-confrontational adult and not having all the answers. |
| P1 – being present with the child | P1 – listening, listening, listening | P1 – validating needs | P1 – not shaming the child |
| P1 – not enough understanding amongst school staff | P1 – school staff's needs impact on the repair process | P1 – lack of training is detrimental to understanding relational rupture and repair | P1 – impact of parental views on solving relationships between school staff and students |
| P1 – parents struggle to cope with dysregulated children | P1 -lack of understanding from parents of brain development and how to support | P1 – lack of parent and school staff supporting each other | P1 – school staff's perception of lack of parenting skills |
| P1 – time is the biggest barrier | P1 – Welsh Government and LAs lack of understanding of the importance of repairing relationships | P1 – school staff offering a safe space for children to express their emotions | P1 – impact of society on the lack of nurture of children |

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| P1 – parents not understanding the importance of talking and listening anymore | P1 – children find it difficult to talk to adults in schools | P1 – lack of boundaries at home filter into school | P1 – even nurturing schools are struggling to support CYP |
| P1 – impact of support staff having up to date knowledge and understanding | P1 – supporting the supporters | P1 – teamwork | P1 – sharing the load amongst school staff |
| P1 – sometimes not the right person is not the right person | P1 – physical space needed in schools | P1 – daily incidental check ins and repair | P1 – is it equitable and equal in all schools supporting relationships with CYP? |
| P1 – whole school approaches start from the top | P1 – need school inspectors to understand relationship policies | P1 – ESTYN need to see the importance of relationships | P1 – Senior leadership pushing relationship policies |
| P1 – not all staff understand relational rupture and repair | P2 – some staff have many roles within the school | P2 – working with outside agencies to support behavioural needs | P2 – wellbeing team make a difference in schools |
| P2 – children requesting a calmer room when dysregulated | P2 – opportunities to talk to emotionally available adults | P2 – allocated emotionally available adults to talk to | P2 – significant number of children diagnosed with ASC/ADHD |
| P2 – lack of early intervention of ALN | P2 – impact of new legislation on the ALNCo role | P2 – working with parents to support the child in school | P2 – impact of wellbeing teams to reduce school exclusions |
| P2 – relationship breakdowns between school staff-pupils | P2 – avoiding school exclusions at all costs | P2 – less time in school to foster a relationship between school staff and child over time when excluded | P2 – trust built to form relationships which positively impacts on learning |
| P2 – impact of strategies to support emotional regulation | P2 – providing the child a voice | P2 – working in collaboration with home and school to prevent breakdowns in relationships | P2 – CLA children and challenging behaviours |
| P2 – use of exclusions as ‘cool off’ period | P2 – school and home support to rebuild connections for the child | P2 – behaviour is viewed as non-conforming to the school | P2 – disparity between emotion underneath and behaviour expressed |

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| P2 – gradual increase back to school following a PSP and reduced timetable | P2 – home support as well as school | P2 – difficulty for parents picking children up on a reduced timetable | P2 – emphasis on effective parent-teacher relationships |
| P2 – parents wanting the children to go back to full time school following a PSP | P2 – effective multi-agency working | P2 – expecting families to support school's decisions | P2 – foster family placement breakdown |
| P2 – children having good relationships in school with wellbeing team | P2 – more trauma from relationship breakdowns | P2 – trusted adult in school | P2 – holding space for the child to express themselves |
| P2 – psychoeducation of how they are feeling | P2 – not labelling behaviours as 'naughty' | P2 – it's okay to feel like that but what you did wasn't okay | P2 – feelings of rejection and isolation in the learning environment when expressing big emotions |
| P2 – co-regulation between school staff-pupil | P2 – self-regulation before accessing classroom | P2 – outsourcing wellbeing support to a team in the school | P2 – transitioned from mainstream to PRU due to level of need |
| P2 – different child with diagnosis and medication | P2 – highly trained staff to support neurodiversity in children to prevent exclusions | P2 – hypervigilance in the classroom | P2 – some members of staff accessing trauma informed training |
| P2 – disseminate trauma informed training to the rest of the school | P2 – use of restorative practice and emotion coaching | P2 – understanding their emotions at an early age from nursery | P2 – exclusions used instead of restorative practice? |
| P2 – well staffed to meet the needs to avoid exclusions | P2 – physically moved from the space to prevent escalation | P2 – lack of time in schools, not having the ability to understand a situation effectively | P2 – giving parents too much choice creates a barrier to support relationships |
| P2 – giving the child too much choice in moving classes | P2 – logistics of parent's expectations vs. what is feasible in a school | P2 – parents as forceful and forward with expectations | P2 – taking children in nursery out to be in an enhanced learning provision |
| P2 – parents dreading to talk to teachers about their child's behaviour | P2 – constant rupture and repair for teacher-students-parents | P2 – child is more regulated in enhanced learning provision | P2 – less children and more adults in enhanced learning provision |

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| P2 – understanding of how to communicate ruptures to parents | P2 – more sensitivity around communication between parents and staff | P2 -telephone both parents when a child has bitten the other | P2 – use of safeguarding avenues to support rupture incidents |
| P2 – parents hearing negative feedback about their child daily | P2 – celebrating little wins and successes to parents | P2 – effective communication is key | P2 – TAs as facilitators for supporting relationships |
| P2 – TAs able to build better relationships with the children | P2 – Experienced TAs aware of issues before the teacher | P2 – TAs pick up on things quickly | P2 – school staff in the community to understand the issues |
| P2 – TAs are a precious resource within schools | P2 – regulation before learning | P2 – relationships first before learning | P2 – child has to be happy and bonded with staff before learning |
| P2 – positive praise from a trusted adult supports wellbeing and self-esteem | P2 – relationships are so important, so important | P2 – reliance on TAs if teacher is not aware of emotional wellbeing | P2 – newly qualified male teachers not picking up on children’s feelings |
| P2 – perceived lack of experience from male teachers | P2 – TAs supporting CYP over male teachers | P2 – impact of male teachers on CYP’s emotional wellbeing | P2 – males not opening up about their feelings |
| P3 – Early identification of needs in nursery | P3 – on the radar of staff in nursery | P3- communication with members of staff to share understanding of a child’s needs | P3 – passing on information within school |
| P3 – logging events or concerns so that the school can see | P3 – child not reacting or acting like other children in nursery | P3 – some children not being able to regulate themselves | P3 – parents struggling with supporting a dysregulated child |
| P3 – when a young baby is upset, you comfort | P3 – child not always aware of how to be comforted by an adult if they haven’t received comfort from a caregiver | P3 – difficulties with controlling children that are dysregulated | P3 – when you know a child well, you know how to support them |
| P3 – talking or distraction supports regulation | P3 – communicating with the child to understand their behaviour | P3 – co-regulation between support school staff and child | P3 – observing the classroom provides more perspective |

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| P3 – intervene straight away before it escalates | P3 – eyes and ears over the room | P3 – a lot more children coming to school with speech and language difficulties | P3 – extreme behaviours in the classroom, having to be removed outside |
| P3 – children are calm in nature, co-regulating with an adult | P3 – delayed speech and language impacting on needs being met | P3 – lots of needs coming through the door in nursery, behavioural and speech and language difficulties | P3 – some children are in their own bubble |
| P3 – Don't think you can blame all of this on COVID | P3 – need for age-appropriate resources to support rupture and repair | P3 – helpful to restore the relationship | P3 – constant rupture and repair of relationships |
| P3 – parents struggling to know how to support | P3 – parents putting pressure on schools to 'fix' the problem | P3 – parents struggling where to access support | P3 – we can only do so much as school support staff |
| P3 – need for consistent approach at home and school | P3 – lack of parental support is a barrier to supporting relationships with child-school staff | P3 – ELSA is a great support for relationships with school staff | P3 – Helpful for school staff to have experience in psychology and ELSA |
| P3 – use of ELSAs to support behaviour management | P3 – repairing straight away rather than leaving it | P3 – child can't remember what happened during a restorative conversation | P3 – early intervention in school before CAMHS involvement |
| P3 – using age-appropriate language to support emotional literacy | P3 – parents overuse of the word 'anxiety' | P3 – naming emotions rather than grouping together under anxiety | P3 – teaching age-appropriate language in nursery but children can't explain their feelings further |
| P3 – school staff don't know what happens to the children before school | P3 – age-appropriate teaching of emotions | P3 – providing nurture to the children | P3 – knowing and understanding the child's emotions and how to support |
| P3 – you get an instinct to how a child is feeling | P3 – good communication with school staff | P3 – difficulties when children do not share their feelings | P3 – differences of parenting in each household impacts on supporting relationships |
| P3 – different boundaries and routines in different parent's houses | P3 – best interests of the child, not the parents | P3 – parents struggling at home which interferes with supporting the child | P3 – some things are instinctive after working with children for a long time |

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| P3 – different approaches to meet the needs for different children | P3 – blank canvas starting in nursery | P3 – drawn to difficult children to help | P3 – use of speech and language screener in nursery |
| P3 – keen to support a child that is experiencing SALT difficulties | P4 – Managing teaching and ALNCo role | P4 – lots of children in the school with SEMH needs | P4 – consultation-based forums to support SEMH rather than individual basis |
| P4 – experienced staff finding it difficult to remain calm and not be triggered | P4 – headteacher intervenes with difficulties in the classroom | P4 – Some children are dysregulated on a daily basis and removed from class | P4 – strategies work for a short time then back to square one |
| P4 – trial and error supporting CYP with SEMH needs | P4 – more tolerance of dysregulation in primary school | P4 – preparing year 6 pupils for secondary school | P4 – without preparation before secondary school, it could be detrimental to the CYP |
| P4 – secondary school system is different than primary | P4 – they have one teacher in primary school that knows them well | P4 – Secondary school teachers do not have the time to nurture | P4 – higher risk of exclusion or other provision in secondary school |
| P4 - strategies from professionals don't always work | P4 – praising the positive behaviour | P4 – school staff feel that it's difficult to make a difference for some children | P4 – oppositional difficulties impacting on SEMH |
| P4 – some children with SEMH are sometimes praised for not following the rules | P4 – difficult to support the rest of the class | P4 – a child with SEMH needs physically hurt a member of staff when dysregulated | P4 – adopted children have trauma and attachment issues |
| P4 – an emotional outburst led to hitting a member of staff for the first time | P4 – school staff are sometimes shocked at physical outbursts | P4 – you don't expect to come to work to be hit and kicked | P4 – Not an exclusion, just not attending school the next day |
| P4 – relying on young children to regulate and understand on their own | P4 – removed from the situation to help the situation | P4 – repairing the relationship with an apology | P4 – perhaps lack of understanding for young children about repair |
| P4 – child had completely forgot about the event after the time at home | P4 – school staff's understanding of the child's | P4 – not understanding the impact on others when dysregulated | P4 – escalation in behaviour due to recent events in the child's life |

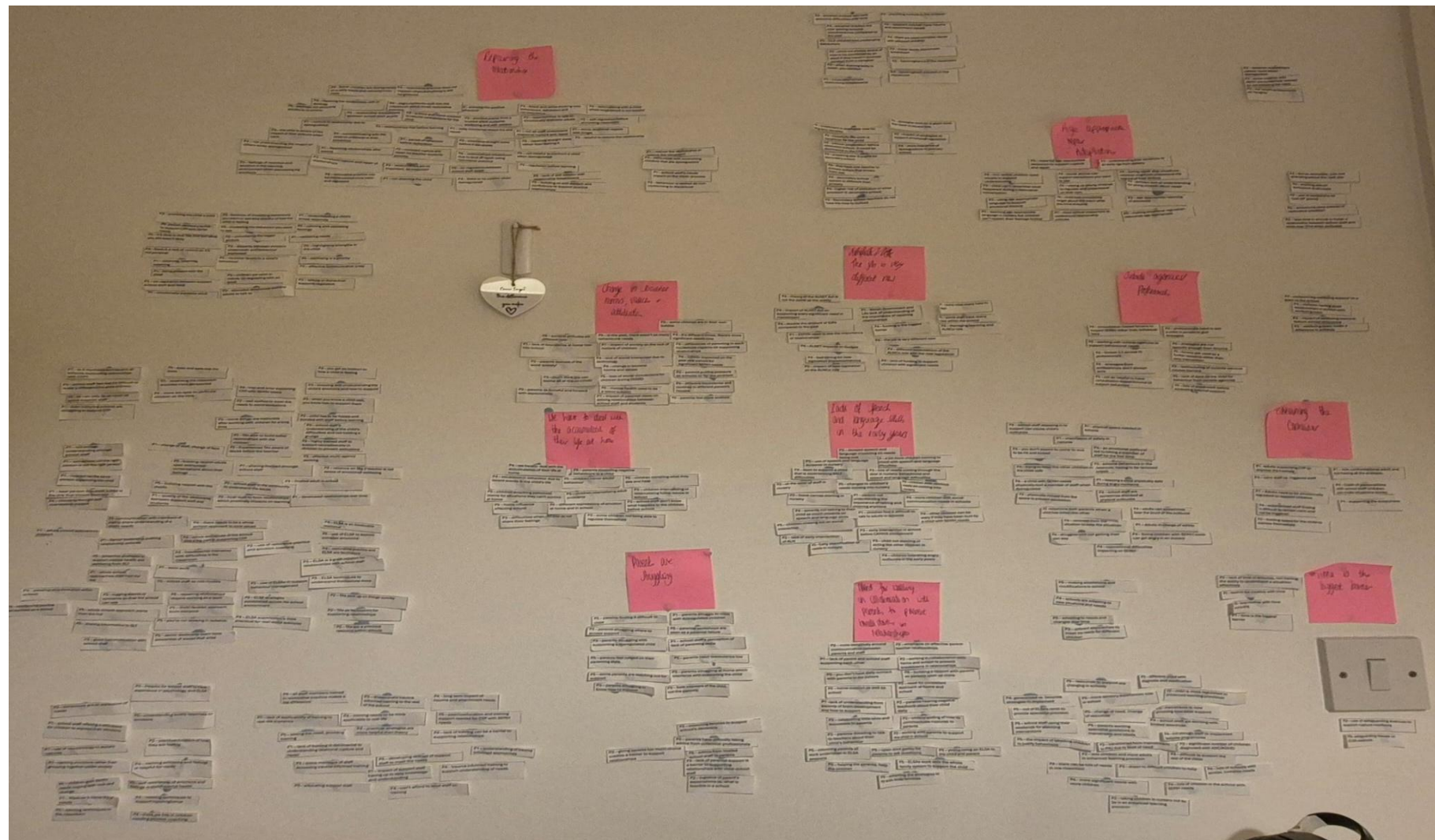
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| | difficulties and not holding a grudge | | |
| P4 – we have to deal with the accumulation of their life at home | P4 – there can be lots of needs in one classroom | P4 – there are eyes on particular children all the time | P4 – struggles with not getting their own way |
| P4 – adults can sometimes bear the brunt of the outburst | P4 – school staff stepping in to support can cause child's outbursts | P4 – trying to keep the other children in the class safe | P4 – there is a lack of control so it's not personal |
| P4 – restorative practice can be implemented once calm and regulated | P4 – the child is aware of the impact of their actions when calm | P4 – there is no control when dysregulated | P4 – naming emotions and feelings is helpful for repair |
| P4 – restorative practice and ELSA are facilitators | P4 – there are lots of children needing emotion coaching | P4 – investment in strategies now for long term benefits | P4 – it's different times, there's more significant needs now |
| P4 – COVID impacted on the year one cohort for significant SEMH needs | P4 – lots of schools with similar, complex needs | P4 – double the amount of IDPs compared to the past | P4 – more significant needs with more children |
| P4 – change in societal norms and values | P4 – parents not talking to their child as much impacts on speech and language skills | P4 – lack of social interaction due to technology | P4 – more children with social communication needs in schools |
| P4 – children with obvious needs are coming into nursery | P4 – rationalising with a child when heightened is not helpful | P4 – Some children with SEMH needs can get angry in an instant | P4 – during repair after situations, children might not understand the impact of their actions |
| P4 – children tolerating angry outbursts in the early years | P4 – other children can be wary if they have been hurt by a child with SEMH needs | P4 – lack of training can be a barrier to supporting relationships | P4 – calm staff vs. triggered staff |
| P4 – Clash of personalities with school staff-children can make situations worse | P4 – choosing the right staff members to support | P4 – black and white thinking with behaviours, behaviour and consequence | P4 – lack of funding to support children with significant needs |

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| P4 – funding is the biggest barrier | P4 – mainstream is now providing specialist support | P4 – impact of ALNET Act on supporting every significant need in mainstream | P4 – can't afford to send staff on training |
| P4 – ELSA is an invaluable resource | P4- generalised vs. bespoke strategies to implement | P4 – not enough staff to implement bespoke programmes | P4 – school staff are working with limited resources |
| P4 – bad timing for new legislation implementations | P4 – theory of the ALNET Act is not the same as the reality | P4 – ALNET impacts on budget | P4 – different expectations of the ALNCo role with the new legislation |
| P4 – limited 1:1 access to professionals | P4 – professionals need to see a child in person to give strategies | P4 – training needs to be more applicable to real life | P4 – ELSA supervision is more practical for real-world examples |
| P4 – practical strategies are more helpful than theory | P4 – wellbeing is a priority | P4 – ethos and values of the school play a big part in supporting CYP | P4 – there needs to be a whole school approach to core values |
| P4 – reinforcing positive behaviours as a school | P4 – all staff members trained in restorative practice makes a big difference | P4 – angry moments spill into the classroom which limits restorative practice | P4 – restorative practice does not happen when everything is still heightened |
| P4 – social stories can support behaviours you want to see | P4 – non-verbal children need visuals to support understanding | P4 – there are more complex needs with adopted children | P4 – adopted children will have extensive difficulties over time |
| P4 – adopted children are now leaving extreme circumstances compared to the past | P4 – long term impact of trauma and attachment needs | P4 – trauma informed training to support understanding of needs | P4 – hypervigilant children in the classroom |
| P4 – relaxing techniques to support hypervigilance | P4 – schools are adapting to new situations and needs | P4 – the job is very different now | P5 – ELSAs work with the whole family system to support the child |
| P5 – helping the parents, help the children | P5 – open door policy for parents to ask questions | P5 – some parents are reaching out for support | P5 – parents finding it difficult to cope |
| P5 – parents wanting specialist provisions in mainstream and labels | P5 – out of ELSA's remit to provide specialist provision | P5 – senior leadership team have awareness of issues that arise | P5 – sharing information to SLT |
| P5- safeguarding issues in ELSA sessions | P5 – relationships breakdown due to lack of repair using restorative practice | P5 – psychoeducation and training support needed for CYP with SEMH needs | P5 – not helpful to confront a child when dysregulated |
| P5 – calming and validating feelings | P5 – seeing the need, providing training | P5 – developing skill set of support staff to meet the needs | P5 – educating support staff |

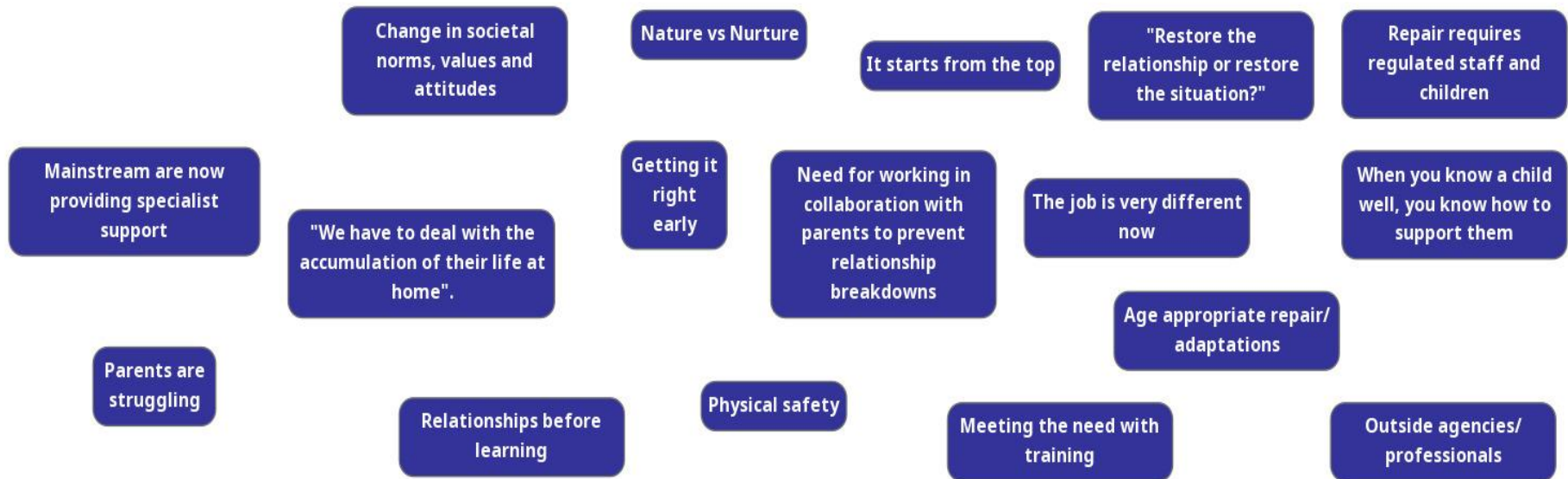
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| P5 – adapting to needs and changes over time | P5 – considering the bigger picture | P5 – modelling the behaviour you want to see | P5 – lack of self-esteem with relationship breakdowns |
| P5 – children with SEMH needs coping with loss and change | P5 – children internalising or externalising home issues in school | P5 – different expressions of emotion at home and in school | P5 – building on self-esteem to support SEMH |
| P5 – use of ELSA to explore complex emotions | P5 – ELSA techniques to understand themselves more | P5 – children acquiring perceived blame for situations they can't control at home | P5 – children internalising adult problems |
| P5 – building rapport elicits open and honest conversations about their feelings | P5 – perhaps not attributing emotions to actions | P5 – understanding bodily responses to emotions | P5 – multiple facets to a child's behaviour |
| P5 – home influence affecting school | P5 – being creative with time and funding | P5 – lack of applicability of training to real-life scenarios | P5 – not as helpful to have consultation-based forums to support behaviour |
| P5 – strategies are not specific enough from forums | P5 – lots of paperwork before accessing external support | P5 – restructuring of outside services causes barriers | P5 – lack of eyes on the child for behaviour from outside agencies |
| P5 – forums are used as a further resource rather than early intervention | P5 – repairing relationships require working as a team | P5 – whole school approach starts from the top | P5 – loss of social connections for children during COVID |
| P5 – proactive strategies to support mental health and wellbeing from SLT | P5 – multi-faceted approach from everyone | P5 – children missing out on social interaction | P5 – behaviours are an expression of needs |
| P5- person centred practice to support CYP with SEMH needs | P5 – changes to children's needs coming into nursery | P5 – in the past, there wasn't as many behavioural needs | P5 – children mirroring what they see and hear |
| P5 – societal attitudes are different now | P5 – parents feel more entitled | P5 – parents modelling negative behaviours to a child | P5 – the impact of labelling children to justify behaviours |
| P5 – children mirror adults' behaviour | P5 – resources to support are changing in schools | P5 – balance of modelling behaviours you want to see and mindful of how the child is feeling | P5 – more sensory experiences now in school |
| P5 – change of need, change of resources | P5 – ELSA strategies established across the school environment | P5 – making adaptations and modifications to school | P5 – making emotional regulation resources age appropriate |

| | | | |
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| P5 – calming techniques in the classroom | P5 – highlighting strengths in the child | P5 – building on self-esteem and confidence to support positive relationships | P5 – you’re not working in isolation |
| P5 – parental workshops are seen as a parental failure | P5 – advice from trusted school staff to parents | P5 – parents have difficulty taking advice from unfamiliar professionals | P5 – parents need reassurance too |
| P5 – informing parents of work undertaken in ELSA sessions | P5 – adapting the strategies to fit with busy families | P5 – parents feel judged on their parenting style | P5 – building a rapport with parents so parents open up more |
| P5 – you’re being an ELSA to the child and parent | P5 – mental health used to be a taboo subject | P5 – self-awareness of emotions and feelings support mental health | P5 – need to be creative with time |
| P5 – school staff using their weekends for planning interventions | P5 – building rapport with the pupils | P5 – school staff as role models | P5 – you don’t have daily contact with parents in the juniors |
| P5 - Hopefully the work is beneficial for the child | | | |

Appendix 18 – Reflexive Thematic Analysis Process: Generating initial themes

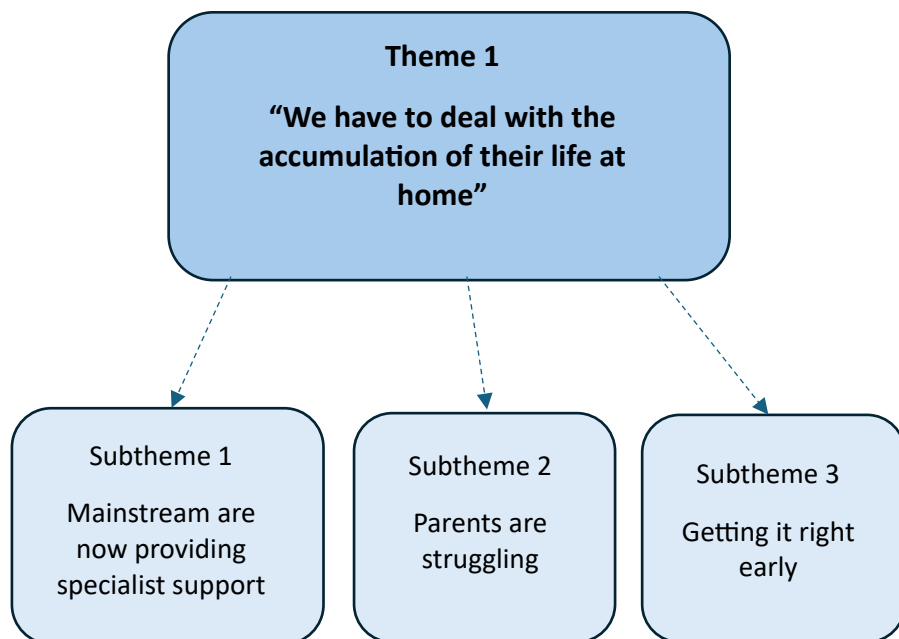


Appendix 19 – Reflexive Thematic Analysis process: Defining and redefining themes

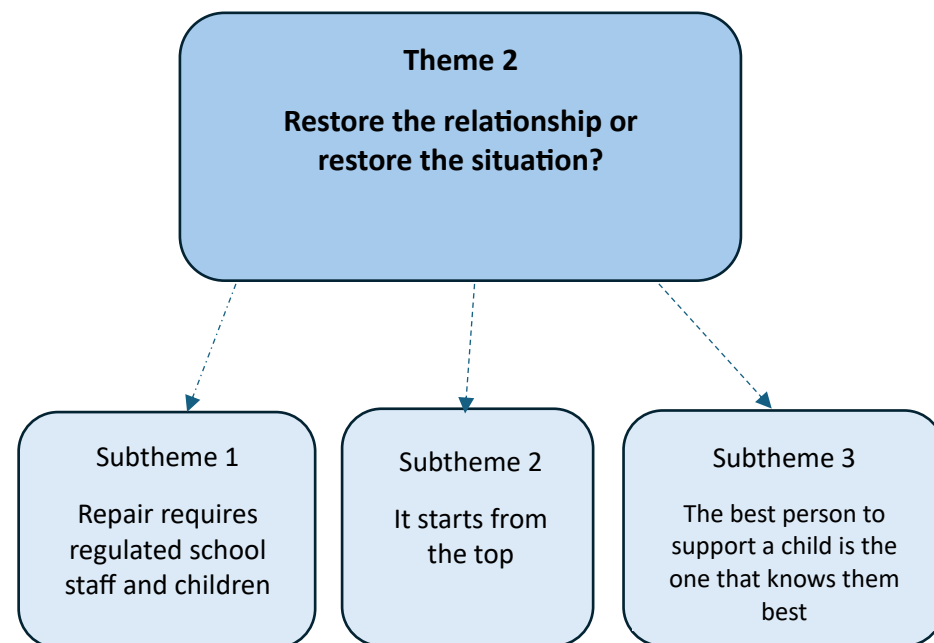


Appendix 20: Reflexive Thematic Analysis process: Thematic Map

RQ1: What are mainstream primary school staff's experiences of relational rupture and repair?



RQ2: What are the key barriers and facilitators supporting relational approaches?



Appendix 21: Corresponding quotes for each theme generated

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| Theme 1: “We have to deal with the accumulation of their life at home” | <p>P5: “oh most definitely yes most definitely ((laughs))....I think you do [see differences in the children coming into nursery]...it comes in waves. So, 20 years ago, the children that were coming through the door... but I think across the board there wasn't as many behavioural needs that there is today, and I think attitudes of um children only mirror what they hear and see...and so attitudes of society is impacting...on how children are then displaying those needs.”</p> <p>P1: “....I've been teaching for 22 years and...as society currently is, it is undoubtedly having an impact on the level of nurture that our children are coming into school with...just really really lacking, it's really lacking...”</p> <p>P3: “....what happens in dad's house might be different in mum's house you know...some have different boundaries and routines, and it could be completely different in different houses and if the parents don't get on and they don't communicate properly about their child then it's really difficult...”</p> <p>P4: “when I first started teaching it was very different...to have a child with significant needs...was quite a rare thing....whereas now I mean that year one class...definitely a COVID year group, that class is like nothing we've ever had before... I've spoken to other ALNCos, [and] they all say the same you know, it's that particular year group.”</p> |
| Subtheme 1: Mainstream providing specialist support | <p>P5: “but for a proportion of parents...you will have parents who want their child to have a label because that would then justify to them, why their child is behaving in such a way.”</p> <p>P2: “obviously he is on the pathway for you know assessment [for autism spectrum condition and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder] but since we've taken him out [his class to be put into a specialist teaching facility in mainstream]....he's much more regulated. There are twelve children in there. There are four adults, you know there's lots of space to move around compared to 75 children we've got in reception and mum said the difference [it has made] not just for the child but for the whole family because she's not having to be told, “oh this has happened.”</p> <p>P4: “when I first started teaching, it was very different you know, to have a child with significant needs like that was quite a rare thing.”</p> |

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| | <p>P4: “you know children in reception, children in nursery now coming in and yes, the needs are more significant than they generally have been in the past”.</p> |
| Subtheme 2: Parents are struggling | <p>P1: “there is not enough understanding about it [relational rupture and repair] and how much we as adults have to soak up and prepare and repair and enable children to reflect and to give them time and so on and there are too many things that are pulling in the opposite direction.”</p> <p>P3: “[mum] didn’t know what to do with him and this is the thing sometimes you say to the parents, we’ve observed this about your child today and they sort of think, “well what can you do about it?”...you know they are only with us for two and a half hours in nursery and even if it’s a full day in school....we can only do so much, it’s got to be (pause) but I suppose parents don’t know where to go for help either.”</p> <p>P3: “.....they can’t regulate themselves, for example we had a little boy and we don’t know what all the issues were, and mum wasn’t coping and he would just go into this rage and he um he could not regulate himself...the thing is with a baby you would comfort them...but if the child hasn’t learnt to be used to those comforts, well, he was just beyond control really.”</p> <p>P5: “when the child is comfortable, they start to open up about their feelings, what’s gone on and sometimes the children think it’s their fault....or sometimes the child may feel, take on the worries of the parent. It could be, you know, money, financial worries and then you know....you’re working in the home setting as well to give them strategies so they can use.”</p> <p>P1: “parental views are undoubtedly not always conducive and supportive to enabling that because um parents sometimes also feel that it needs to be sorted straight away.....again their lack of understanding about dysregulated behaviours, they can’t cope with that....so rather than as a parent, being empathic and being aware and listening to their child, they go straight into right what was that about today? So that for me is a barrier because it takes us away from the process.”</p> <p>P5: “I have noticed a big change in society and then that’s mirroring you know how the children behave themselves when they come in.”</p> <p>P2: “having those relationships with the parents....we work together to support the children as best as we possibly can, you know.”</p> |

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| | <p>P5: “....another service the school provide is early help, parental workshops....now I do find that some parents feel a bit threatened to go and engage in those because they feel it’s a failing on their behalf.”</p> <p>P2: “when incidents happen, it’s how we communicate those to the parents...I think that’s something we need to be a little bit more sensitive with the way we do it.”</p> |
| Sub theme 3: Getting it right early | <p>P1: “but parents don’t understand the importance of talking and listening anymore.”</p> <p>P3: “I find there’s a lot more recently there’s a lot more coming in with speech and language difficulties...some children do not have enough language so there wasn’t a lot of sounds, expressions and things....there’s about four this year that aren’t clearly speaking and obviously they are having a go....so that’s what we’ve noticed really and I don’t think you can blame all of this on COVID.”</p> <p>P4: “I would probably say the last 10 years, we’ve noticed a decline with children’s speech and language skills, you know when they come in so I don’t think parents necessarily sort of talk to their children in the same way and they don’t do nursery rhymes and songs because children coming in are just at such a low level compared to where they used to be so I don’t know if it’s technology where children are stuck in front of a screen these days and there’s not the interaction, I don’t know.”</p> <p>P2: “he needed to know that there was an adult within the school who he trusted, who would always be there, who would listen to him....let him say how he felt about things...they wouldn’t say what he did was wrong you know, they would give him a reason as to why he behaved like that.”</p> <p>P5: “after COVID, for example, we had a high amount of pupils that had missed out on social connections so our school picked up you know a need there where you’ve got behaviour types, challenging circumstances and you know children displaying lots of different elements...the child comes through the door, the needs of the school are identified through the needs of the child....we are witnessing and we’re not unique there’s lots of schools that are witnessing it now, there’s an influx of children that missed out on social interaction...their behaviours are displaying what their needs are.”</p> |
| Theme 2: Restore the relationship or the situation? | <p>P1: “there are certain children that with that repair, it can happen an hour later....when needs are really high like they were today, you know it’s going to need a lot more time to reflect and to repair what has happened....he trusts me. We have that long standing relationships...it’s not helpful when other people try</p> |

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| | <p>to get involved that don't know the situation, that don't know the child....sometimes people want to just have a quick fix right? Sort this out because it's lunchtime....make another plan you know that's what I find the most difficult...other people not having a really secure understanding of what you're trying to do."</p> <p>P4: "there are some children that possibly it happens on a daily basis where they are, you know dysregulated...we find that some strategies might work for a short time...then they don't work so back to square one."</p> <p>P1: "their needs [school staff] sometimes impact on what you're trying to achieve."</p> |
| Subtheme 1: Repair requires regulated staff and children | <p>P4: "when they're having an angry moment....that's happening outside so I mean, we do find that it does sometimes spill over into the classroom...it does spill over. And you do have to sort of deal with that when you, when they come back into class...you can be spending half of the lesson just sorting an issue and I suppose if they are not calm by the end of playtime and you can't really do that [use restorative practice]....that might not necessarily happen then unless the class teacher is aware of that that restorative approach might not actually happen."</p> <p>P3: "on a daily basis....it needs a pair of eyes around the room...you can see things differently and you can intervene straight away so it doesn't escalate and we are all busy and it's lovely doing one to one with a child but someone has got to be the eyes and ears in the room, situations usually arise on a daily basis and I have to step in."</p> <p>P4: "not helpful is trying to talk to her and trying to calm her down when she is in that state, it's just completely pointless if anything that would make her worse....she'd probably be more angry if you sort of suggested that she calmed down....so trying to intervene at that point is just probably the worst thing to do really, she just needs to calm...."</p> <p>P3: "I would say to the girls, I'm going to take him outside....I would hold his hand walking around the yard and perhaps sing to him or talk to him and he would be happy to do that but the minute we got into the classroom, I would say it's like as if someone has put fireworks off in his head because there's so much going on."</p> <p>P1: "when needs are really high like they were today, then you know it's going to need a lot more time to reflect and to repair what has happened."</p> |

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| | <p>P2: “everything seems to be, you know, you’ve got to do this you’ve got to do that there doesn’t seem to be that time to take a step back and look at the situations closely.”</p> <p>P1: “giving time, not being confrontational, not trying to answer all of the questions, not trying to solve it, not being a fixer, listening, listening intuitively, listening with empathy, making sure that the child felt their needs were validated and their views were validated, making sure that I didn’t charge into [it], you’re not shaming the child.”</p> <p>P5: “....and the member of staff would sort of confront that child...instead of giving him the space to calm down and then validating that child’s feelings...I delivered training....to help support that child where that child and the relationship with the TA in class had broken down.”</p> <p>P4: “last year, there was definitely a clash of personalities with staff members in his [the child] class....there have always been sort of underlying behaviours, but they’ve always been manageable. It’s been really low level, but then it was last year that there was an increase in behaviours, and it didn’t help that there was a clash of personalities, it made him worse.”</p> <p>P2: “we call all our wellbeing team, emotionally available adults.”</p> <p>P4: “her mum had sort of sat down with her and then, you know, she’d written a letter then for the member of staff and she did apologise to her, how much of that she, you know, took on board....I’m not sure but you know as far as the child was concerned she came back to school and it was all forgotten and she had completely forgotten about it and she just sort of carried on as normal as if nothing had happened....you know the member of staff you know, knows the difficulties there anyway, so wouldn’t hold a grudge.”</p> |
| Subtheme 2: It starts from the top | <p>P1: “definitely, absolutely, it [wellbeing and relationship policies] has to come from your Head and Deputy.”</p> <p>P5: It’s all about working in partnership and you’ve got to build those relationships. You can have a relationship with the child in the school setting, as you are their role model.”</p> <p>P4: “you know in our assemblies, the headteacher talks about our values.....so yeah it is reinforcing all these positive behaviours with them [the children], I think it does make a difference.”</p> |

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| | <p>P5: “repairing relationships...you know, you got to work collectively as a team, so you’re working with whoever’s invested in that child.”</p> <p>P1: “ensuring that staff have regular, <u>regular</u> opportunities to discuss children that you know to share the load”.</p> <p>P3: “everything is logged in a secure system and the headmaster is made aware of anything we’re not happy with or concerns.”</p> <p>P1: “ensuring that staff have regular opportunities to discuss children that you know to share the load....so if there is a rupture, if there are difficulties and things that you have a team where you feel listened to and enabled to do something about it.”</p> |
| Subtheme 3: The best person to support a child is the one that knows them best | <p>P3: “the thing is, you get an instinct to how a child is feeling really.”</p> <p>P2: “100% here, it’s our TAs....they have the time to build a better, stronger relationship with the children than the class teacher....we’ve got some very, very experienced TAs and they are so good and they tend to step in even before the class teacher is aware that there is a problem....so they are our facilitators, 100%”</p> <p>P1: “making sure that you have enough staff, making sure that you have the right staff, making sure that you have staff who are educated and aware.”</p> <p>P5: “you start to build up that relationship with them, then they start to open up about, you know how they’re feeling.”</p> |