Exploring home-educated children's experiences of pedagogy in a learning community
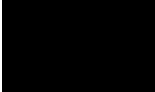
Sapna Sandhu

Institute of Education, University College London

Doctorate in Professional Educational Child and Adolescent Psychology

<u>Declaration</u>

I, Sapna Sandhu, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

Signed: █████

Word count (exclusive of abstract, impact statement, references and appendices): 34,913

Acknowledgements

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the people who made completing this thesis possible. A heartfelt gratitude is extended to all of the people in the learning community from whom I experienced nothing but warmth and inspiration. I am also indebted to the participants who generously dedicated their time for this thesis and shared their perspectives. Thank you for trusting me with your experiences.

A huge thanks go to my supervisors, Dr Chris Bagley and Dr Becky Taylor for your wonderful guidance, insights, and endless encouragement. Thank you to my placement supervisors Dr Katherine Madden and Dr Jason Shonibare, and university tutor Dr Shona MacGregor, for your continued support over the last two years.

I'm so grateful to my amazing cohort of Trainee Educational Psychologists, a group whose friendship and support have made the last three years both rewarding and memorable. It's been a privilege to share this rollercoaster of a journey with you all.

To my wonderful parents, family and friends, thank you for supporting throughout this journey. Last by no means least, a huge thank you to my partner Sunny who cheered me on even when I thought I could no longer go on. I am forever grateful for your patience, love and comfort, and for always believing in me.

Impact statement

This research provides an important contribution as the first study exploring the context of a learning community accessed by home-educated children and young people (CYP) in England. It is also one of few known studies which considers the role of educational psychologists (EPs) in supporting home-educated CYP and families, and sheds lights on the experiences of a population often overlooked in discussions regarding education. The research highlighted that the pedagogy utilised in a self-directed learning community is supportive of the wellbeing of CYP by offering individualised learning experiences, outdoor learning, focus on play, inclusive community interactions, and conflict resolution practices.

Implications for EPs:

- There is a growing need for knowledge and research to be shared among EPs about the home education group who also participate in self-directed learning communities as this number continues to increase in England. It is important for EPs to access research to effectively interact, engage and support this group.

- There is a role for EPs to reflect on their own biases and assumptions when working with home-educating families. It is important for EPs to understand the breadth of home education pedagogy and contexts, and work with this group with curiosity to avoid imposing traditional schooling pedagogy (e.g. when considering educational provision as part of statutory assessments).

- EPs work collaboratively as part of Local Authority (LA) systems, and there is therefore a role for EPs to share awareness, knowledge, research and best practice as part of multidisciplinary teams when supporting home-educated CYP and their families.

- EPs could consider how the pedagogical approaches in self-directed learning community could be utilised within traditional school settings to foster the psychological needs of autonomy, competence and relatedness among CYP in schools.

Wider implications:

- EPs can advocate for greater recognition and provision for home-educated CYP within the context of Local Authorities. This involves ensuring that LAs are providing support and resources to home-educated CYP, such as speech and language therapy and educational psychology. EPs can also advocate for how funding for SEN-related provision and formal examinations are allocated. There is also a role for EPs in supporting transitions between home education and traditional schooling as and when these occur.

- There is a role for EPs as systemic practitioners to critically reflect on the current neoliberal education practices (characterised by high stakes testing, accountability measures and rigid curriculum) and its impact on increasing numbers of CYP at risk of emotionally based school non-attendance, exclusions, and those leaving traditional school for home education. This may include exploring how self-directed learning can be incorporated into traditional schooling pedagogy to meet the diverse needs of CYP. By challenging assumptions and promoting spaces for dialogues about alternative education practices, such as home education and learning communities, EPs can contribute to a more inclusive and child-centred education system which enable CYP to flourish in their learning environments.

Abstract

Home education remains a highly debated topic in the context of education in the UK, particularly with its increased popularity in recent years (Long & Danechi, 2023; Ed Executive, 2024). Amidst this trend, self-directed learning communities have emerged as an alternative educational model for home-educated CYP. However, there is limited research exploring the pedagogical approaches within these spaces. This study addresses this gap by exploring the lived experiences of home-educated children and their parents within a self-directed learning community. Drawing on the self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000), which features autonomy, competence and relatedness as fundamental psychological needs, this research examines how the pedagogy in a self-directed learning community fulfils these needs and its relation to the overall wellbeing of CYP.

Employing a case study methodology, data was generated using a Mosaic approach (Clark & Moss, 2001) including drawings, tours, photography, and semi-structured interviews with three children and semi-structured interviews with their parents. Visual data was categorised using content analysis and combined with the use of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis to identify themes. Four Group Experiential Themes were identified: characteristics of the learning community; building and maintaining community bonds; an individualised approach to learning; and motivations to home educate and attend a learning community.

The findings indicate the pedagogical approaches in one learning community can positively support CYP's wellbeing by fostering their needs for autonomy and relatedness. However, challenges were discussed concerning how CYP's need for competence was being fostered. These insights have implications for EPs seeking to better understand the home education context, and advocate for CYP and families who feel marginalised by traditional schooling. This study contributes to a deeper understanding on how self-directed learning communities can offer meaningful educational alternatives for CYP. It highlights the importance of recognising alternative educational contexts that prioritise CYP's wellbeing and development.

List of Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Term
BPS	British Psychological Society
CYP	Children and Young People
DfE	Department for Education
EBSNA	Emotionally Based School Non-Attendance
EP	Educational Psychologist
GET	Group Experiential Theme
HCPC	Health and Care Professionals Council
HE	Home Education
IPA	Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis
LA	Local Authority
PET	Personal Experiential Theme
SDE	Self-Directed Education
SDT	Self Determination Theory
TEP	Trainee Educational Psychologist
UCL	University College London
UK	United Kingdom

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1.   Background of study

It is currently understood that all children and young people (CYP) have a right to full-time education in the United Kingdom (UK), as stated in Article 28 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989). However, the nuances and practical implementation of this right are further outlined in the Education Act (1996) which states:

The parent of every child of compulsory school age shall cause him to receive efficient full-time education suitable –

(a) to his age, ability, and aptitude, and
*(b) to any special educational needs he may have, either by regular attendance at school **or otherwise.***

(Education Act, 1996, Part 1, Chapter 1, Section 7)

The term 'or otherwise' (emphasis added) acknowledges that education can present in varied forms. These forms include home education (HE) and other alternative education settings. While HE has been well researched internationally, there are a growing number of alternative education settings as the number of home-educated CYP increase, such as learning communities (LCs) that remain less understood (Nelson, 2014; Bowers, 2017). LCs are autonomous, self-funding organisations, which are founded upon the principles of democracy and self-directed education (Progressive Education, 2023). They can take various forms such as HE co-operatives, HE groups, unschooling groups, and democratic schools, with many focusing on personalised learning, holistic development and community engagement (Watkins, 2005). How LCs are run can vary, with some being parent-led, and families sharing responsibilities for teaching and organising activities (e.g. The Outdoor Learning Community, 2023; The Garden, 2023; The Rewild Project, 2023).

There is currently no empirical research exploring the context of LCs. The approaches to learning, and how CYP experience LCs in addition to their HE, remains unknown.

Therefore, the subsequent literature review will start by reviewing the research into the historical and legislative context in HE internationally and in England, before reviewing the available literature into why families choose to home educate, and how they experience HE and/or alternative educational spaces more specifically.

1.2.   Personal motivations for the research

It is important to acknowledge that as a researcher, I contribute my own distinctive analysis to this study (Riessmann, 2008; Flick, 2006). As a member of a minority ethnic community, I have always held a strong belief in empowering individuals and fostering inclusive environments where marginalised voices are heard and valued. In my previous role as a learning support assistant, and throughout my doctoral training as an EP, I noticed an increase in my interactions with CYP and families who shared dissatisfaction with their experiences of traditional schooling. Many of these CYP were caught in the distressing grip of emotionally based school non-attendance (EBSNA) patterns, where their negative emotions, and in some cases school-based trauma around schooling led to disruptions in attendance and engagement. Observing this stirred a sense of concern within me, prompting questions about the broader implications of the education system on the wellbeing of CYP. It became increasingly apparent that addressing the complex interplay between education and wellbeing required a comprehensive approach. I wondered about the extent to which traditional pedagogical approaches might inadvertently be contributing to the distressing experiences shared by CYP and their families, and how the field of educational psychology could contribute to positive change on a systemic level. As professionals, I believe we hold a moral and ethical obligation to explore this domain, given the profound distress we regularly witness in the lives of CYP and their families.

Throughout my training, I have been fortunate to establish valuable connections with individuals and organisations that are pioneering innovative approaches to education. This included attendance of roundtable discussions, such as the *Education Futures in Action* conference, a partnership between University College London and States of Mind, an organisation supporting young people to develop tools and systems to support their psychological wellbeing (States of Mind, 2023). I have also accessed the *Rethinking*

Education online networking space where I am exposed to a community of parents, educators, and researchers, who are challenging traditional pedagogy and exploring alternative models that prioritise individual needs and foster wellbeing. My conversations with founders of alternative education settings fuelled my growing curiosity to explore alternative pedagogy that place the wellbeing of CYP at the centre of their provision. I wondered how these alternative teaching methods influenced the wellbeing of CYP in HE and LCs, and how this could be explored.

While on placement in a Local Authority (LA), I discovered how little they and EP services know about and engaged with CYP who are home-educated and specifically those participating in LCs. Given the lack of research in this area, I felt compelled to explore LCs which deviated from the conventional understanding of education. I aimed to seek insights into how pedagogical approaches could be harnessed to support the wellbeing of CYP within these settings. I also wondered about how EPs could support home-educated CYP and families participating in a LC, as we do for CYP in traditional schooling.

My experiences and connections have driven me to seek spaces where education is considered a powerful instrument for empowering and nurturing the holistic development of every child. This passion fuels my commitment to understand the challenges faced by CYP and families who find themselves on the periphery of traditional schooling. I strongly believe that every child's perspective holds valuable insights. Through this research, I hope to explore examples of different pedagogical approaches and how they exist within the current legislative system.

1.3.   Definition of key terms

1.3.1. *Definition of home education*

Home education can be defined as what happens when parents choose to educate their CYP at home, rather than sending them to school. The term 'home schooling', typically used across the US and wider literature, is unpopular with some UK parents as it suggests that parents are replicating the school environment at home (Thomas & Pattison, 2007).

The term 'home education' (HE) is often preceded by 'elective' in policy documents and government guidance (Ofsted, 2010; Badman, 2009), however it is important to question this simplistic characterisation. The debate here is not merely a semantic one, but rather reflects the nuanced and heterogenous reality of why parents may opt for HE. The preference for 'HE' in the current study, over 'elective HE' or 'EHE' was deliberate as it was recognised that while some parents do indeed 'elect' for HE, many parents feel pushed into this educational path out of necessity (e.g. Morton, 2010; Van Galen, 1988). I recognised that not all potential participants may have felt that HE was 'elective', and that participation and engagement might be restricted by suggesting that it was. The use of the term 'elective' arguably fails to recognise that for many families, HE may not be considered a choice (Badman, 2009). This is particularly true for parents who feel there is no other alternative to provide their children with successful education (Rothermel, 2003). Reasons for choosing to home educate are wide ranging, can be interlinked and subject to change over time (Rothermel, 2015; Smith & Nelson, 2015). A detailed discussion about why parents and CYP leave traditional schooling and choose to home educate will be discussed later in the literature review. Therefore, the term 'home education' (HE) will be used throughout this study given its preference in the English context.

In the context of HE, the term 'parent' is often used in reference to the primary caregivers or guardians responsible for the child's education (Education Act, 1944). However, the HE context also encompasses a broader definition of caregivers, including grandparents, legal guardians, foster parents, and any other individuals who take on responsibility of educating and nurturing the child. Therefore, my use of the term 'parent' recognises the diverse family structures and caregiving arrangements that may be involved in a CYP's HE. It was hoped this language accurately represents the range of caregivers who support with HE.

1.3.2. Definition of learning community

In this study, the term 'learning community' (LC) refers to a group of individuals, often CYP and their parents, who come together with the common goal of providing educational support and resources for one another. This research places an emphasis on exploring the significance of LCs and how they shape the context of HE. It is important to

note that LCs vary in their educational philosophies, curricula, approaches, which reflect the beliefs and values of participating families. Progressive Education (2023) highlight that "terminology and definitions vary from place to place … there is no defining model that they all follow". However, it has been suggested that these communities are typically founded upon the principles of democracy and self-directed education (Agile Learning Centres, 2023). These principles will be explored further in the literature review.

1.3.3. Definition of traditional schooling

In contrast, in this study, the term 'traditional schooling' refers to formal educational institutions such as public or private schools that follow established curricula and educational standards which are set by governing body, such as the National Curriculum (DfE, 2014). These institutions typically operate within a hierarchical structure, and adhere to predetermined learning objectives, standardised testing, and graded assessments as measures of pupil progress (DfE, 2014).

1.3.4. Definition of pedagogy

In the context of this study, 'pedagogy' refers to the underlying principles and methods of instruction associated with HE and LCs. It encompasses the diverse approaches, strategies, and philosophies adopted by parents, caregivers, and LCs to facilitate the educational development of CYP (Thomas & Pattison, 2007). It represents the 'how' of education, exploring the ways CYP experience and engage with learning outside of traditional schooling.

1.4. The role of educational psychologists

Educational psychologists (EPs) are trained to think and work systemically, and to consider the interplay between CYP, stakeholders and the wider systems in which they operate (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). EPs can use their skills and knowledge to work with school leaders, policy makers and researchers to highlight and challenge systemic issues, and use more ecological, systems models of thinking (Bronfenbrenner, 2005).

According to the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC), practitioner psychologists are expected to engage in evidence-informed practice (HCPC, 2015). Evidence-based practice has been described as the "integration of the critically appraised relevant research with reflexive practice, considered conjointly with both practitioner and client characteristics, culture, and preferences, in an exosystemic context" (Arnell, 2018, p.134). However, the systems within EPs work within may not always support this approach. For instance, in light of the growing number of families opting for HE, EPs face a lack of readily available information (both nationally and as part of doctoral training curricula) regarding the diverse educational contexts that exist outside of traditional schooling. This has implications which will be discussed below.

1.4.1. EPs engaging with the HE community

In the context of traditional schooling, EPs often play a crucial role in identifying and supporting the educational needs of CYP (through traded service delivery with maintained schools or through statutory assessments). As the number of CYP being home-educated increase (BBC, 2021), developing EP knowledge in this area is important, especially where CYP and families are less likely to interact with EPs unless their involvement is mandated through statutory assessments. A limited interaction with this community raises important questions about equity and access to EP support. Beaver (2011) and Wareham (2012) highlight the EP role as having two major components, the first in supporting adults within a CYP's context to achieve positive outcomes. The DfE describes one of the EP roles to "improve the opportunities of all children and young people" (DfE, 2011a, p.5). However, the difficulty for this group to access EPs, despite being a growing population, raises significant moral and ethical concerns. Until HE and LCs are better understood by LAs and EPs, these gaps will continue to widen as the number of CYP being home-educated increase.

It is worth considering how the HE community positions EPs. There is some evidence that EPs are positioned as 'outsiders', or 'enforcers' of traditional schooling where CYP are required to fit a one-size-fits-all approach (Nelson, 2014; Lees, 2011). Within the Children and Families Act (2014) and associated SEND Code of Practice (2014) there is an emphasis

on the voice of the child and parents. Yet, if EPs are perceived by HE families as enforcers of traditional schooling, this could hinder EPs ability to build rapport and empower the voices of the families they are trying to support (Nelson, 2014). The challenge of navigating a community who may perceive external involvement distrustfully requires a delicate approach by professionals who respect the autonomy of home educators while ensuring CYP's welfare. This highlights the importance of building rapport, fostering open dialogue and collaborating closely with parents and relevant stakeholders, skills that EPs are well placed with. It is of particular importance to explore this area where CYP may have experienced school-based trauma, which might have influenced the CYP and parents' decision to leave traditional schooling. Therefore, there is a compelling case to advocate for more research into the area of alternative educational contexts within HE to gain further insights for the EP profession and to better serve the diverse needs of this growing cohort. This understanding will help facilitate efforts to ensure EPs have equitable access to educational environments that operate outside of traditional schooling.

1.4.2. Advocating for the voice of the child

The second component of the EP role as suggested by Beaver (2011) refers to offering equal, respectful and liberal ways of engaging with CYP and their families. Both components need to be addressed simultaneously to reduce oppressive professional encounters these CYP and their families may have experienced. EPs have a responsibility to utilise their training and skills in fulfilling the requirements of Article 12 on the UN Convention on the rights of the child (UNICEF, 1990) which posits the right of the child to have their views sought and taken seriously on all matters regarding their welfare. There is currently no published research which elicits and highlights CYP's voices within a LC in England. Therefore, the study aims to utilise participatory methods using the Mosaic approach (Clark & Moss, 2001) through drawings, interviews with the CYP and parents, tours and photography, to offer CYP a space where they can explore and develop ways of thinking about themselves and their context (Billington, 2006). There are likely opportunities for EPs to learn from good practice in LCs. Therefore, EPs should be equipped with an understanding

of CYP's experiences in these contexts to effectively advocate for the rights and recognition of this population.

1.5. Theoretical underpinning (Process-Person-Context-Time model; Bronfenbrenner, 2006)

Understanding the experiences of home-educated CYP in the context of a LC is a complex phenomenon. It is situated within many structures within society, including government, local authorities, schools, parents, CYP and their families. This study utilises an ecological approach to recognise the complexity through Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). This theory aligns with a social constructionism approach in research that acknowledges reality as subjective, culturally specific and develops through social interaction (Burr, 2015). The current research is based on Tudge et al.'s (2009) most 'recent model' of Bronfenbrenner's theory, incorporating the process-person-context-time (PPCT) elements. Interactions between these concepts form the basis for this theory (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). These elements will first be discussed before linking them to the theory and current literature.

1.5.1. Process

Bronfenbrenner and Morris (1998) describe human development as a process through "complex reciprocal interaction between an active, evolving biopsychological human organism and the persons, objects and symbols in its immediate external environment" (p.996). These 'proximal processes' occur over long periods of time and are considered as a 'primary mechanism' for development (Tudge et al., 2009). Examples of proximal processes relevant to the HE and LC context could include interactions between CYP, parents, educators and resources and pedagogical approaches. The current study aims to collect data from various sources to explore how environments, relationships, and dynamics influence human development and learning in these settings. By incorporating the views of adults within the LC, proximal processes around person-context interactions can be further explored, in line with the PPCT framework (Tudge et al., 2011).

1.5.2. Person

In order to acknowledge the individual characteristics within a situation, Bronfenbrenner (1979) highlighted three factors including demand, force and resource. Demand characteristics typically refer to immediate features of the individual, which may affect how they are perceived by others (e.g. age, gender, ethnicity). Force refers to how individual motivations and temperament influence how individuals respond in different contexts. This could include motivations for HE and participation in a LC; what pedagogical approaches are used and what is learned.

Conversely, resource refers to the emotional, psychological, skill or experience that an individual possesses. Bronfenbrenner (1979) suggested that despite having the same demand and resource characteristics, two individuals could have significantly different developmental trajectories due to their force characteristics. Given the potential overlap between HE and LCs, the current study will gather information specific to the LC context, while acknowledging the shared dynamics an individual may have within HE.

1.5.3. Context

Bronfenbrenner's (2005) ecological model of human development consists of five "nested" interrelated systems which posits human development is shaped by complex interactions between an individual and their environment. At the centre of the model, is the developing individual, with each system around them operating bi-directionally (refer to Figure 1; Bronfenbrenner, 2005).

Chronosystem	•Dimension of time
Macrosystem	•Attitudes and ideologies of the culture
Exosystem	•Industry; mass media; local politics; professionals
Mesosystem	•Interactions between microsystem
Microsystem	•Family; peers; community; religious setting
Individual	
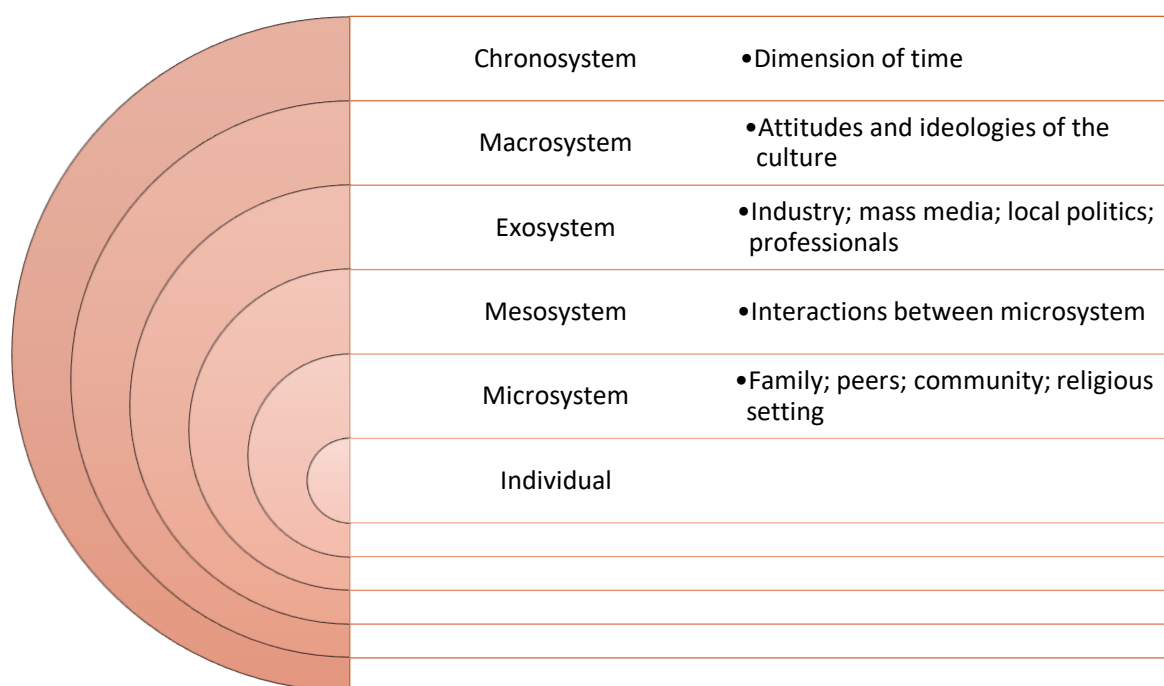
Figure 1. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems model (2005).

The microsystem refers to the environment an individual spends a significant amount of time, such as the home or LC. Individuals may be influenced by family's educational beliefs, teaching methods, and level of parental involvement in CYP's learning (Nelson, 2014; Green et al., 2007). The way in which different microsystems interact occurs within the mesosystem. In a LC, this could include interactions between learners, facilitators, and resources. This may shape the pedagogical approaches used, the social dynamics and goals of the learner.

Individuals are influenced by what occurs within the exosystem, such as the availability and accessibility of LCs in a given geographical area. It can also include the extent to which LA's support families in HE and LCs, in relation to SEN support and resources (Smith, Dickerson & Smith, 2020).

The macrosystem refers to all other systems which influence HE and LCs, such as cultural attitudes towards education (i.e. political attitudes), and educational philosophies which may influence the design and acceptance of alternative educational approaches (Nelson, 2014).

As highlighted, context in this research is important for providing an additional lens in which to analyse the literature and findings. This research aims to carefully explore the various influences on participating in one LC, including cultural, political, religious, and social influences, as well as individual beliefs. The ecological systems model aligns with this aim.

1.5.4. Time

Time is the final component of the PPCT model which has been described as "affect[ing] persons, relationships, settings, exosystem, the macrosystem, and all other aspects of both the person and the ecosystem" (Shelton, 2019, p.103). Time can incorporate both chronological time and events, and can include transitions, changes that occur in the environment, family life, and socio-economic factors (Bronfenbrenner, 1993). In relation to the current study, this can include transitions from traditional schooling to HE, changes in family dynamics and routines, as well as adaptations to learning approaches. It could also include changes which occur following new legislative and policy changes (Nelson, 2014). Indeed, these events may vary in their durations and may have significant long-term, positive or negative, implications on "an individual's future experiences, self-efficacy, and motivation" (Hayes et al., 2017, p.26; Krishnan, 2010).

The application of the PPCT model will provide a lens to examine the intersectional nature within the different systems and interactions between CYP being home-educated and participating in a LC. EPs often explore the systems around a child and how they may directly or indirectly affect the child at the centre (Beaver, 2011). Applying Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory to understanding children's experiences of participating in a LC allows for an exploration of these systems to be examined in such a way that allows EPs to consider how they can leverage their impact to supporting families choosing to HE. Within each layer of the PPCT, psychological theories can offer insights into the emotional and social development of these CYP. This integrated approach highlights the important role EPs can have in supporting families in HE, in order to foster supportive and inclusive educational ecosystems for CYP.

1.6.   Psychological theory (Self-Determination Theory; Ryan & Deci, 2000)

A central theoretical underpinning of this exploration is self-determination theory (SDT), a macro theory of human motivation, emotion and development which considers factors that can foster or hinder the growth-oriented process in people (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009). SDT posits that human beings are born with tendencies towards growing and mastering challenges and integrating new experiences voluntarily.

The basic psychological needs theory within SDT outlines three psychological needs that should be present in an individual to foster intrinsic motivation and overall wellness: competence, autonomy, and relatedness. These three needs have been found to linked to intrinsic motivation and overall healthy functioning and wellbeing (Ryan & Deci, 2000). The application of the basic needs theory in this research provides a lens to explore how pedagogical approaches utilised within LCs influence CYP's experience of these psychological needs, therefore influencing their overall wellbeing (as illustrated in Figure 3). The three basic needs are outlined further.
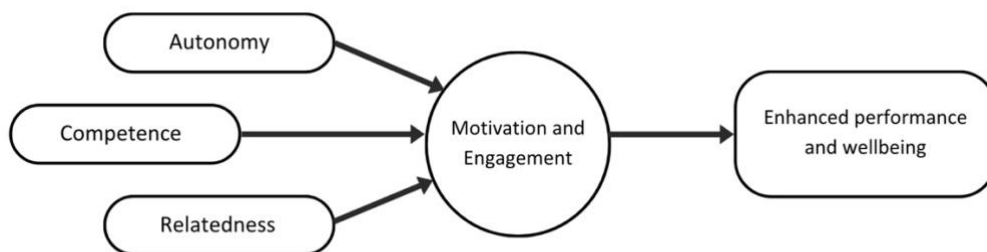
Figure 2. The basic needs theory within the SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2017).

1.6.1. Competence

A sense of competence comes from lived experiences and positive feelings about an activity (Deci & Ryan, 1985). CYP are encouraged to test their knowledge by adapting concepts they have already mastered to new stimuli. A sense of competence derives from the interests of CYP which creates a sense of personal challenge and mastery over a concept. This fosters the development of intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

1.6.2. Autonomy

According to Ryan and Deci (1985), when an individual feels a sense of choice and has opportunity for self-direction, feelings of intrinsic motivation are greater. However, when external rewards are offered as an incentive, learning and autonomy can both suffer, reducing overall feelings of self-motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Autonomy can be achieved in the learning context by supporting CYP's sense of choice and their personal interests.

1.6.3. Relatedness

Early evidence on the impact relatedness can have on intrinsic motivation was observed by Bowlby's (1979) theory of infant attachment. According to Bowlby (1979), an infant's intrinsic motivation to explore their environment is more likely to occur if the infant shows a secure attachment to their parents. By allowing the child to balance their attachment needs, caregivers facilitate the development of the child's self-esteem, self-concept, and competence (Moss & St-Laurent, 2001). This is also observed throughout the lifespan as CYP's are more likely to be intrinsically motivated if they feel a sense of security and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

1.7.   Structure of thesis

In Chapter 2, I will present a review of the literature, exploring the historical and legislative context surrounding HE in England. I will explore motivations for why families choose to home educate, as well as they experience HE and alternative education settings. In Chapter 3, I will outline the methodology utilised in the current study. I will present the findings from this study in Chapter 4 and discuss them with reference to the wider literature in Chapter 5. Lastly, in Chapter 6 I will offer implications for EPs and wider education context, strengths and limitations of the study, as well as opportunities for future research.

Chapter 2 – Literature Review

2.1.   Chapter overview

The literature review starts with the national and historical context of HE, where an examination of policy and legislation is undertaken. This is then followed by a review of the current context, why CYP and families' choose to home educate, and their experiences of HE and alternative education settings, such as LCs. The pedagogical approaches used within these spaces and the impact they may have on the wellbeing of CYP are also considered by referencing the SDT. Following this, the rationale and research questions are presented for the current study.

2.2.   Method for literature search

This initial literature review was conducted following a search focused on research into HE and LCs published within the last thirty years, using British Education Index, Educational Resources Information Centre (ERIC) and Google Scholar. In order to understand the current context of HE, this section will explore the legislative and historical milestones that have shaped the framework for HE. It is important to note that the history of HE in England is intertwined with global HE movements. The literature review will examine the extensive body of research available in the United States (US) and acknowledge its impact upon the context of HE in England. However, Webb (2011) suggests that American and British approaches to HE "may not be similar enough to make comparisons valid". Therefore, the different contexts of HE will be discussed, while keeping a focus on HE in England to understand why it underwent a period of stagnation, and why it gained momentum and popularity in more recent years.

The preliminary findings from the database search did not yield any specific research pertaining into LCs. Therefore, a range of search terms were considered to ensure a wide net was being cast during the initial literature search. As a result, the existing body of literature concerning HE, connections and implications relevant to LCs, will be explored. The search outcomes also indicated similar yet distinct research domains (i.e. home-school interactions,

unschooling, democratic schools, and alternative educational provisions). See Appendix 1 for details of the systematic literature search.

2.3.   The history of home education

Prior to the Elementary Education Act (1870), the provision of education in England were largely monitored by charity organisations, the Church of England, and the British and Foreign School Society, which were offered in parallel to families who educated their CYP at home (Mitch, 2019; Nelson, 2014). HE, therefore, is not a new phenomenon and was often the only education CYP received in England and abroad before the establishment of compulsory schooling in the 17th and 18th century (Knowles et al., 992). During this period, 'schools' in the form of charity and religious organisations were regarded by families as 'complementing' their educational efforts in the HE context (Carper, 2000; Knowles, 1975). This involved local communities sharing educational resources, establishing informal learning environments (to complement HE practices) and sharing of knowledge among families (Knowles, 1975). The relevance of these practices in the current context of HE will be discussed later in this chapter.

2.3.1.   Introduction of Universal Education

By the middle of the 19th century, the home no longer held a powerful influence upon education and was largely overlooked by the state. In England and Wales, the Elementary Act (1870) marked an effort to formalise a former ad-hoc schooling system for CYP aged between 5 and 12. Subsequent acts followed to increase school attendance and make it compulsory for CYP aged between 5 and 16 (Education Act, 1902; 1918; 1936; 1944; 1996; also refer to Figure 1). The role of the state in education was also adopted in other Western countries, such as the US, who had passed compulsory attendance laws by 1918 (Carper, 1992).

The Act identified clear reasons for non-attendance to school citing "the child is under efficient instruction in some other manner" (McCulloch, 2020, p.13). The term

'efficient instruction' was not defined but was thought to acknowledge the existence of alternative forms of education, such as HE which was particularly prevalent among the upper, elite classes who could afford private tutors and governesses (Bellalgue, 2015). Therefore, with these acts, the notion of mass education brought about two key perceptions: first as a means of developing a more equitable education system for the lower classes, and secondly, as a means of control (Reimer, 1971). Knowles et al. (1992) suggests the former perception was prevalent during this period, which may explain why public schools were held in high esteem by families, and HE became a practice adopted by a minority (Bellalgue, 2015). Other scholars argued the content of education and job of teachers were limited, given the country's goal was to address a political need for Britain's status in world trade by creating "a disciplined and functionally literate and numerate workforce" (Grace, 1978, p.20). Consequently, while the Act aimed to promote universal schooling, it also tacitly recognised the privilege of those who could access personalised, home-based education (Bellalgue, 2015). It was during this period that HE went through a period of stagnation in England and the US and public schooling became commonplace (Bellalgue, 2015). However, in the following years, public schools in the US came under scrutiny for their perceived shortcomings with concerns around curriculum quality, teaching methods, and social stratification (Goodman, 1962; Ravitch, 2010). These differing perceptions on public education led to widespread criticism, particularly in the 20th century, which gave rise to the development of alternative educational approaches (Woodley, 2009).

2.3.2. Exploration of alternative educational approaches

These criticisms fuelled international debates about the purpose and effectiveness of mass schooling (Reimer, 1971; Goodman, 1962; Ravitch, 2010). In the US, concerns emerged around the pace and scale of growth of public education, concerning school sizes, uniformity, and also ones that discouraged individuals to pursue their interests (Gainther, 2009). Many liberals and conservative Christians at this time reported feeling disillusioned with the pace of social change (i.e., shifting away from private, family interests to national interests) and led to a host of cultural institutions that allowed families to feel responsibility

for their own lives, by accessing environments that encouraged freedom of thought and expression (Carper, 2000).

Following the introduction of Universal Education, the late 18th and 19th century saw the rise of theorists and philosophers influenced by Rousseau's ideas, a Swiss philosopher, who discussed pedagogies which emphasised child-centred learning and questioned what and how ideas were being taught in schools (Woodley, 2009). Others, such as Pestalozzi, highlighted that holistic education should nurture the child's complete development, and argued against schooling which disregarded the natural wishes, tendencies and motives of children (Brühlmeier, 2010). His approach advocated for active, experiential learning, and encouraging CYP to engage directly with their surroundings to facilitate understanding (Brühlmeier, 2010). This emphasis on experiential learning resonated with other scholars, such as Herbert Spencer, Charlotte Mason, Caroline Southwood Hill, and Susan Sutherland Isaacs, who sought to provide alternatives to conventional classroom-based instruction (Meighan, 2004; Mason, 2013; Isaacs, 1927; Isaacs, 1930). They argued against conventional authoritarian pedagogy, which were perceived to hinder CYP's innate curiosity and argued for the prioritisation of individualised learning, holistic development and empowerment of CYP (Spencer, 1911; Mason, 2013; Isaacs, 1927; Isaacs, 1930).

This emphasis on child-centred practices led to the establishment of notable educational institutions in the 20th century in England, such as Summerhill and Dartington Trust, whose values include for CYP to have autonomy in their education, and to create environments which are deeply connected to artistic, cultural and social experiences (Summerhill School, 2023; Dartington Trust, 2023; Duane, 1995). The establishment of these institutions reflected a growing dissatisfaction with traditional pedagogical models and a desire to explore new ways of supporting the learning of CYP (Shute, 2008).

HE gained further interest in the US during the 1970s and 1980s through scholars such as John Holt (1964), Ivan Illich (1971), and Raymond Moore (Moore & Moore, 1984), who are described as figureheads of the HE movement (Nelson, 2014). They called for the legalisation of HE in the US, advocating for HE as a 'harmless' and 'noble phenomenon' (Holt, 1964; 1967). During this period, and throughout the 1970s, many conservative

Christian charitable organisations emerged to support home educating families win court cases across the US in favour of HE (Lyman, 1998). This trend continued throughout the 1980s with the support of Raymond Moore, a well-known Christian radio personality, who argued for "more creative freedom and less formal lessons" (Carper, 2000). This led to a further increase in the number of families choosing to home educate, with HE officially recognised as legal across all 50 states by 1992 in the US (Henderson, 1992). President Clinton also signed the Religious Freedom Restoration Act one year later (Congress, 1993), which is reported to have increased the number of home-educated CYP to reach between 500,000 and 750,000 in 1995 (Northgate Academy, 2022). During this time, motivations for HE was predominately religious, particularly among conservative Christian groups who aimed to instil their values and beliefs into their children's education (Knowles et al., 2008). However, as the movement evolved, motivations for HE became more diverse. For instance, by 2003, 70% of all home schoolers in the US were educated at home for non-religious reasons (Northgate Academy, 2022). This included dissatisfaction with traditional schooling methods, a desire for personalised learning, and the pursuit of alternative educational philosophies (Holt, 1964). The reasons why families choose HE will be explored further later in this chapter.

2.3.3. Policy and Law in England

In comparison to the US, HE was legally recognised in the Education Act of 1944 (Webb, 2011), and was further revised in the Education Act of 1996, which states:

The parent of every child of compulsory school age shall cause him to receive efficient full-time education suitable –

(a) suitable to his age, ability, and aptitude, and
*(b) to any special educational needs he may have, either by regular attendance at school or **otherwise**.*

(Education Act, 1996, Part 1, Chapter 1, Section 7)

Although HE is not explicitly named, it is through the terms 'or otherwise' (emphasis added) that it is legal educational provision (Monk, 2009). There is no legal requirement to follow the National Curriculum and/or acquire specific qualifications. However, as discussed earlier, the right to home educate is subject to providing a 'suitable' and 'efficient' education. These terms are not explicitly defined in statute law and are open to interpretation. For instance, Davies (2015) debates that 'efficient' can be conceptualised as 'one that achieves what it sets out to achieve'. However, the Education Act (1996) suggests some points for consideration with providing a 'suitable' education, including:

- An education that enables the child to function as an independent citizen in the UK, including beyond the community they grew up in.

- An education that does not directly conflict with the fundamental British values as defined in government guidance (but no requirement to teach these).

- LAs may assess suitability by using minimum expectations for literacy and numeracy.

- Education may not be suitable even it is satisfactory in terms of content but not environment (e.g. noisy buildings).

- Education may not be suitable if it leads to excessive isolation from the child's peers and impacts social development.

When a parent decides to educate their child at home, the parent assumes a more distinct and often direct financial responsibility for their child's education compared to financial obligations that accompany traditional schooling. The nature of traditional schooling responsibilities can vary (i.e., uniforms, materials and resources, school trips, other expenses, taxation). Conversely, parents who home educate may encounter additional expenses related to curriculum materials, resources and child-care provision (e.g. with LCs or other private sector educational services to supplement their child's HE). This financial distinction acknowledges that the decision to HE involves additional unique financial considerations although all parents are, to varying degrees, financially responsible for their child's education (Child Law Advice Service, 2024).

Given the law on HE in England and Wales, and the lack of guidance which outlines how HE is delivered or monitored, the context itself has been described as a liberal one

(Nelson, 2014). This was also observed in the response to the first review into HE which was commissioned by the Labour government in 2009 and was challenged from within and outside of the HE community (Smith, Dickenson & Smith, 2020). Criticisms were directed not only at the review process itself, but also the proposed recommendations, which would influence the HE context considerably.

2.3.3.1. The Badman Review

The proposed aims of the Badman Review (2009) were to provide a comprehensive overview of HE in England and Wales. It was prompted following the death of a seven-year-old girl (Khyra Ishaq) in Birmingham, whose withdrawal from school for HE preceded her death due to abuse and neglected inflicted by her mother and stepfather (BBC News, 2010).

A central theme to the Badman Review highlights the tension between a home educator's legal obligation to provide a suitable education and their right to privacy, juxtaposed with the LA's responsibility to ensure CYP are accessing appropriate education, health and care (Badman, 2009). Therefore, the legislation places a responsibility on LA's such as 'appropriate education' and 'adequate steps' without precisely defining these terms for the LA to ensure these standards are upheld (Jennens, 2011). The House of Commons Children, Schools and Families Committee (2009) noted that whilst some had welcomed the recommendations put forward in the report, many, including home educators had been highly critical, particularly in relation to the registration, monitoring and safeguarding of home-educated CYP. The response from parents to this review was a mix of "pent-up rage, frustration, and a rejection of third-party judgement" (Badman, 2009). The emotional reaction stemmed from a sense of ambiguity regarding the term 'appropriate' as used in the review. Parents felt that what was considered 'appropriate' education was open to interpretation and could lead to HE families being unfairly judged or treated by other professionals. For instance, in Smith et al.'s (2020) research, home educators reported feeling isolated and misunderstood by education and healthcare professionals, and local government agencies in relation to safeguarding CYP from neglect and abuse. Smith et al. (2020) suggested that there are safeguarding issues in and outside of school and that these concerns should be addressed rather than "demonising all home educators" (p. 43).

While instances of neglect and abuse are cited to be rare among home educators (Rothermel, 2010), home educators often lack consistent interaction with professionals capable of identifying and addressing concerns (Jennens, 2011). A lack of understanding and dialogue between home educators and professionals within LAs may promote a climate of fear and distrust (Jennens, 2011). There is no evidence that HE, as an educational choice, precipitates higher risk of negative health or life outcomes for CYP when compared with traditional schooling (Forrester, 2017). Therefore, the significance of the current study lies in its potential to shed light on the role of professionals in the context of HE. With more understanding of HE, there may be opportunities for consistent and informed interactions between home-educating families and professionals (Badman, 2009; Monk, 2009, Jennens, 2011).

It is also important to emphasise that HE is not a recent phenomenon, having historical roots predating the establishment of mass schooling. Before the advent of universal education, local communities played a central role in providing educational opportunities, access to resources, cultural values, and individual preferences (Knowles et al., 1992). This historical context has implications upon how HE is perceived and discussed, and how individuals respond to such discourses, in both public (Ralph Lucas, House of Lords) and private sectors (HE groups; The Guardian, 2010). The Badman Review prompted broader questions about the role of the state in regulating non-traditional educational practices, pointing to debates around parental freedom, rights and autonomy, as well as ensuring of educational standards and children's welfare (Jennens, 2011). This tension seems to reflect deeper ideological divides regarding the balance between individual rights and societal interests in the context of universal education.

2.3.4. The current context

In 2018, the DfE initiated a consultation titled *HE: Call for evidence and revised DfE guidance* (DfE, 2018), seeking feedback on draft versions of guidance for Children Not in School (CNS), and sought the views of parents and LAs. Within this initiative emerged proposals that raised questions about the future of HE. These included the introduction of a

new duty on LAs to maintain a registry of CYP within the compulsory school age, as well as a duty on parents to provide information to their LA if their child should be on the register (Danechi & Long, 2023). Notably, a crucial aspect of this discussion has been the duty of education settings and LAs to monitor and support HE families. This resulted in the publication of the Schools Bill in May 2022 which cited provisions for a HE register, which proved controversial and was subsequently withdrawn (Danechi & Long, 2023; Davies, 2015). A considerable 96% of LAs expressed support for the introduction of a register, however, a substantial majority of 82% of parents and young people expressed opposition to the idea (DfE, 2022). This discrepancy and ongoing discussions related to HE in the Commons in November 2023 reflects the complex nature of HE and the need for a careful and informed process (Long & Danechi, 2023). EPs, who are well placed to work systemically, can support by facilitating communications between home educating families and LAs, and supporting with ongoing consultations and policy changes implemented by the DfE. However, it is essential to recognise how the proposed registry has elicited concerns from parents and CYP regarding issues related to privacy, possible stigmatisation, and the extent of intervention from the LA (DfE, 2022).

The lack of regulation of HE in England means there is no official recognised source (i.e. a register) which therefore produces very little reliable data on which an estimate of the number of CYP being HE can be calculated. The Office of the Schools Adjudicator (OSA) 2018 survey indicated that there were 52,770 home-educated registered CYP with LAs nationally (OSA, 2020). In March 2019, these figures were reported as 60,544 (an increase of around 15% to 2018; OSA, 2020). Other reports report nearly 78,000 CYP being home-educated before the Covid-19 pandemic in 2018-19, which soared to 125,000 across England by the 2021-22 academic year (Association of the Directors of Children's Services, 2021). Most recent data from the DfE Spring 2023 school census indicates there were an estimated 86,200 in January 2023, after adjusting for non-responses (Long & Danechi, 2023; Ed Executive, 2024). The variance in figures across the different sources could be attributed to the data collection methodologies, how HE is defined across the studies and within LAs, the participant group and reporting practices (e.g. how LAs monitor and record HE figures). The implications of these discrepancies are significant as they challenge the ability to accurately monitor trends in HE. These figures may not accurately represent the true number of CYP

being home-educated as families may not choose to report their HE status to LAs. Therefore, the actual number of CYP being home-educated is likely to be higher than those reported in official statistics.

It is also important to note that certain groups and communities are often associated with HE, such as Gypsy Roma and Traveller families in the UK, and families whose children have Special Educational Needs (SEN; Bhopal & Myers, 2016; D'Arcy, 2014; Ivatts, 2006). However, the overall trend of increasing figures across the various reports highlights the importance the motivations and practices associated with HE (Smith et al., 2020). The focus of this study is specifically on practices within the SDE framework to explore the unique experiences, pedagogical approaches, challenges and outcomes associated with HE and alternative education settings, such as LCs, and is discussed below.

2.3.5. Or 'otherwise'

The legality of HE is defined in the Education Act (1996) in its final clause as '**or otherwise**' (emphasis added; Education Act, 1996). Given the growing number of home-educated CYP and families in England, '*Education Otherwise*' was established in 1977, a charitable organisation supporting families and CYP to navigate HE. Similarly, a charitable organisation network named *Freedom to Learn* connects innovators around the country, within and outside of traditional schooling (Phoenix Education, 2023). They aim to "inspire and learn from one another in the pursuit of a freer, fairer education system" (Freedom to Learn, 2023) by offering CYP and their families a space to foster connections, share insights and champion shared principles, while also offering a responsive framework to empower home educators. Various social media communities offer a platform for ongoing dialogue, meetings, and collaborative efforts among home educators (i.e. Progressive Education, 2023; Rethinking Education, 2023). This ongoing practice of community-based learning is reminiscent of historical practices where home educators traditionally relied on local communities, churches and charitable organisations for guidance and support with HE. The continuity of this support throughout the centuries emphasises the vital role of community collaboration in supporting the development and growth of HE practices.

Within the words 'or otherwise', exists a rich array of innovative approaches that are utilised across HE or other alternative education settings, which cater to the individual needs and interests of learners (Monk, 2004). An example of this includes home educating families who are guided by the principles of self-directed education (SDE). SDE operates on pedagogical approaches principles grounded in biology, anthropology, cognitive psychology and child development (Suitable Education, 2023). It posits that humans, and children in particular, are intrinsically motivated to learn through self-chosen activities (Self-Directed Education; ASDE, 2023). Peter Gray highlights the motivation forces for SDE include 'curiosity, playfulness, sociability and the general desire of every person to do well in life' (ASDE, 2023). SDE works with, rather than against, these natural drivers, where 'CYP are supported to do what they interested in, socialise and play with children of different ages, and learn through immersion in their communities and with the tools of their culture' (Suitable Education, 2023). This pedagogy encourages CYP to identify their own learning needs, set goals, plan, organise, and evaluate their own progress (Knowles, 1975; Wheatley, 2009). SDE can take many different forms across HE, education settings, social enterprises, and organisations advocate for SDE, such as Reggio Emilia, Montessori-inspired settings, democratic and anarchist schools, and forest schools, which often operate on similar principles encouraging CYP to explore their interests, needs, and lived experiences (i.e., Fielding & Moss, 2010; Self-Managed Learning College, 2023; Self-Directed, 2023; Agile Learning Centre Network, 2023; States of Mind, 2023; The Green Parent, 2023; Progressive Education, 2023).

2.3.5.1.   Learning communities (LCs)

LCs, are autonomous, self-funding organisations, which are founded upon the principles of democracy and SDE (Progressive Education, 2023). LCs represent a deliberate departure from conventional educational norms by operating outside of the boundaries of national curricula, strict accountability measures, standardised examinations and pre-designated timetables (Self-Directed, 2023; Phoenix Education, 2023; Agile Learning Centre Network, 2023; Progressive Education, 2023). Even within an SDE framework, many settings may be influenced by other approaches and principles (Progressive Education, 2023). They

can take various forms, such as HE co-operatives, HE groups, unschooling groups, and democratic schools, with many focusing on personalised learning, holistic development and community engagement (Watkins, 2005). The way in which LCs are run can vary, with some being parent-led, with families sharing responsibilities for teaching and organising activities (e.g. The Outdoor Learning Community, 2023; The Garden, 2023; The Rewild Project, 2023).

The legal framework surrounding HE primarily assigns parents as holding the sole responsibility for educating their children. However, families often turn to other social enterprises and organisations, such as LCs to complement and support their HE practices, while adhering to the limited guidance outlined in the Education Act (1996) around what is considered a 'suitable' and 'efficient' education. This is usually achieved by LCs registering as childcare providers with Ofsted (Ofsted, 2024). This introduces regulatory oversight into the quality of care and education provided by LCs, which may be perceived as a necessary compromise between being held accountable as a safe education provision and to exist in order to support HE families.

According to data available on Freedom to Learn (2024) website, there are currently approximately 42 LCs across England and Wales. Although a small proportion of CYP nationally access LCs, it is important to recognise *how* the LCs support home-educated CYP. The Freedom to Learn manifesto, which are advocated by the LCs, make a distinction between '*Freedom From'* and '*Freedom To'.* Their aims are outlined in Table 1 below, which are underpinned from moving away from traditional pedagogy towards alternatives that 'contribute to a socially just society' (Freedom to Learn, 2024).

Table 1. '*Freedom from' to 'Freedom to' as outlined by the Freedom to Learn (2024) manifesto*

Freedom From	Freedom To
Emphasis on high stakes testing	**Create**
Balanced assessment should reduce the impact of high stakes testing, involve	*Creativity should be encouraged through responsive curriculums and pedagogy*

meaningful feedback to encourage autonomous learners	
Rigid bureaucratic rules *Participation on deciding on rules and should be offered to everyone involved in and affected by education*	**Be** *Space and architecture are part of the learning environment*
Constant comparison and competition *Collaboration between students, staff, parents and local communities to help everyone work together*	**Think** *Criticality should be nurtured so children, adults, and parents can feel autonomy*
Coercive disciplinary systems *Trust is critical to enabling freedom and autonomy*	**Become** *Caring, compassionate and empathetic environments support the development of meaningful relationships*
Narrow interpretations of success *Success should include holistic measures of collective and individual achievement beyond standardised testing*	**Be accepted** *Diversity needs to be recognised and valued in order to advance social justice and reduce inequalities*

The language used across LCs differ as no two LCs use the same pedagogical approaches (Progressive Education, 2023). Yet, their essence lies in what they opt *out* of, rather than what they opt *for.* Existing empirical research on HE has primarily explored the motivations for HE, pedagogical approaches in HE and the experiences of CYP and their families (e.g. Nelson, 2014; Bowers, 2017). However, there is currently no empirical research exploring the experiences of CYP participating in LCs. Existing research into LCs is limited with existing data collected by Rose Arnold, founder of Suitable Education (2023), who has written blogs, briefings, and research into HE and LCs. However, there is currently limited empirical research exploring LCs. Accessing the field of HE is challenging as funding bodies and research councils in social sciences generally prefer institutionally based research conducted in schools, colleges or universities (Donovan, 2007). However, EPs' understanding of psychological theory and research methodology arguably positions them as key

contributors to exploring the pedagogy, dynamics and experiences within LCs. The current study will address this gap.

The next two sections will explore existing literature to understand the motivations for choosing HE, and the experience of navigating HE and alternative education spaces. This will then lead to the rationale and research questions for the current study.

2.4.   Reasons why parents educate their children at home

Motivations to home educate are wide ranging and complex, with many families reporting several reasons to leave or opt out of traditional schooling in favour of HE (Blacker, 1981; Van Galen & Pitman, 1991; Rothermel, 2003; Smith et al., 2020). Families choosing to home educate may do so for a variety of reasons, and home educating one child may not be the same for another (Smith & Nelson, 2015). Similarly, the decision to home educate may arise following a particular incident (Neuman & Guterman, 2017), while for others, the decision is made over a longer period of time (Arai, 2000). This area of the research has received considerable attention, perhaps because it is more accessible to gather data through questionnaires and is less likely to cause offence to home educators, compared to inquiries into more personal aspects of their practice or pedagogy.

For instance, Fields-Smith and Williams (2009) identified several motivations for HE with 24 African-American parents including negative experiences of school, the desire to facilitate their own child's learning, and to instil their children with their moral, ethical and cultural principles. Of these participants, 19 parents reported motivations to HE linked with experiences of inequalities, prejudice, discrimination and racism. These findings suggest that traditional education settings may not always provide safe, equal or nurturing environments for CYP, particularly for those from marginalised backgrounds.

More specific to the UK context, Rothermel's (2003) research exploring the motivations of families into HE. The study engaged a substantial participant pool, involving 419 families, comprising 1,099 children aged under eleven. Through a survey-based

approach, the research identified a range of motivational factors for HE included 'disappointment with education' (including SEN), 'ideological reasons', 'bullying', 'child feeling unhappy or stressed' with school. These reasons were also cited in recent research by Education Otherwise (2022) that found health needs (including CYP's mental health) and barriers to attendance, such as patterns of emotional based school non-attendance (EBSNA) were cited by 17% of parents as their initial reason for choosing to home educate. Similar findings from Parsons and Lewis's (2010) study with 27 parents of SEN CYP in the UK, found two thirds of participants' motivations for HE derived from negative experiences with formal provision and perceived failure of schools to meet their child's needs. One participant felt they were choosing HE as they were "left with no other acceptable option" (p.14).

Table 2. *Motivations for home education.*

Reasons why people home educate	Author(s)
Academic progress	Ray (2015); Education Otherwise (2022)
Child wanting to be educated at home	Parsons and Lewis (2010)
Child being unhappy or distressed at school Barriers to attendance (e.g. EBSNA)	Neurman and Guterman (2017); Olsen (2008); Gray and Riley (2013); Smith and Nelson (2015); Wray and Thomas (2013); Parsons and Lewis (2010); Arora (2006); Smith, Dickerson & Smith (2020); Education Otherwise (2022)
Concerns for child's safety and wellbeing	Olsen (2008); Arai (2000); D'Arcy (2012); Morton (2010); Parsons and Lewis (2010); Smith, Dickerson & Smith (2020);
Dissatisfaction with the education system	Adamson, 2021; Neurman and Guterman (2017); Ray (2015); Bielick (2008); Olsen (2008); Hopwood et al. (2007); Arora (2006); Smith and Nelson (2015); Parson and Lewis (2010); Gray and Riley (2013); Chistolini (2014); Square Peg and Not Fine in School (2021); Education Otherwise (2022); Smith, Dickerson & Smith (2020)

Access to local schools	Bielick (2008); Smith and Nelson (2015); Olsen (2008)
Health and/or medical issues	Olsen (2008); Smith and Nelson (2015); Hopwood et al. (2007); Smith, Dickerson & Smith (2020); Education Otherwise (2022)
More family time	Education Otherwise (2022)
Parents' experience of school	Olsen (2008); Arai (2000)
Pedagogical, philosophical and/or ideological views	Neuman and Guterman (2017); Ray (2015); Morton (2010); Hopwood et al. (2007)
Pressure by school	Maxwell et al (2018); Ellyatt (2013); Smith, Dickerson & Smith (2020); Gray and Riley (2013);
Racism, bullying and/or discrimination	Ray (2015); Fields-Smith and Williams (2009); Smith and Nelson (2015); Wray and Thomas (2013); Ofsted (2010); Morton (2010); Education Otherwise (2022)
Religious or cultural beliefs	Ray (2015); Fields-Smith and Williams (2009); Olsen (2008); Smith and Nelson (2015); Patterson et al. (2007); Morton (2010); Arora (2006); Education Otherwise (2022)
Special educational needs, additional learning needs and/or disabilities	Ray (2015); Olsen (2008); Maxwell et al. (2018); Morton (2010); Mitchell (2020); Square Peg and Not Fine in School (2021); Education Otherwise (2022)

It is also important to acknowledge the complexity in reasons for choosing HE, as highlighted by the motivations in Table 2. These reasons may vary significantly depending on factors such as country, legal, national and cultural context, legal frameworks, and individual family circumstances. Recent researchers have accessed larger and more diverse groups of the HE community (e.g. Banks, Forlin & Chambers, 2023). This may suggest there has been a shift towards a population that cannot be neatly categorised. This aligns with the concept of

'strength in diversity' as discussed by Rothermel (2003), who suggests despite their shared practice of HE, this community is heterogenous who lack significant commonalities beyond this core aspect. This interplay between the individual and its mesosystems (i.e. family, peers, and wider networks) and broader sociocultural influences, reinforces the importance of recognising the complexity involved in the motivation to home educate. This is particularly important to consider as the HE community continues to evolve, with increasing access to online communities and shared spaces (such as networking spaces, online forums, LCs, and parent groups). These spaces may have influenced initial and ongoing motivations to home-educate to become more complex.

In relation to this, a more recent study was conducted in the borough of Hertfordshire to explore parents' motivations to home-educate, challenges and benefits associated with it and the support utilised (Smith et al., 2020). Utilising a mix of three focus groups (comprising of sixteen parents), interviews with fifteen parents and survey-based methods with 77 responses, the findings cited a range of reasons for HE. This included 'inflexibility of the school system' in relation to the standardised curriculum, high-stakes testing, and approaches to learning, particularly for parents who felt their children "did not fit the system" (p.4). Parents of CYP with SEN highlighted schools did not always follow provision suggested in Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) due to choices or resource limitations. This aligns with a pivotal study with nearly 2000 parents by Square Peg and Not Fine in School (2021) where the findings reported motivations for HE is often deeply rooted in dissatisfaction with traditional schooling, specifically with the lack of individualism, creativity and critical thinking. Their negative experiences of traditional schooling led to feelings of distrust and distress, prompting some parents to explore HE as a means to prioritise their CYP's wellbeing. For instance, one parent explained she felt forced to HE as the "school [were] driving us out with threats re[garding] attendance whilst offering no support or suitable alternative provision" (p.38). This suggests some parents feel compelled to remove their children from school when they see no viable alternatives.

Following the Covid-19 pandemic there have been increasing numbers of CYP continuing to be home-educated nationally, even after the reopening of schools (BBC, 2021). For instance, the Education Otherwise (2021) report found an increasing level of contact

from parents in August 2020 which coincided with the announcement of schools reopening for the new academic year. Whittaker (2024) reports the number of CYP in HE is 80% higher (by the academic year 2022-23) than it was during the pre-pandemic (academic year 2018-19). It is also important to note the highest rate of home-educated CYP were those approaching age five, or those at transition phases (between primary and secondary school) at ages ten to eleven (Education Otherwise, 2021). It was suggested that it was likely a lifestyle choice for parents (instead of dissatisfaction with schooling) who chose HE for their children aged below the age of 5 (Education Otherwise, 2021). However, it may have been that these parents had experienced dissatisfying experiences of school themselves, or with their other children, and opted to also home-educate their younger children (e.g. Olsen, 2008; Neurman & Guterman, 2017; Ray, 2015). It is important to distinguish HE from the terms 'home schooling' which was a term used during the Covid-19 pandemic in England and Wales to describe parents temporarily using school-based resources and activities to teach their children during school closures (Calear et al., 2022; Kouroupa et al., 2022). This differs from HE where CYP are formally withdrawn from school, and educated at home or otherwise, as a deliberate choice made by parents.

In regard to perceived benefits, parents have reported their children as confident self-directed learners at home, with flexibility emerging as a distinct advantage (Smith, Dickerson & Smith, 2020). Participants emphasised the sense of community that HE fostered, nurtured through interactions with fellow home educators, exchange of support and resources, and networking events. This sense of community is said to positively impact the wellbeing of parents and CYP by offering a support network that alleviates feelings of isolation and loneliness in a system that many families have struggled to navigate (de Carvalho & Skipper, 2018). Additionally, families can create a framework around HE that fosters a sense of family identity. This includes participating in social activities with other home educating families and forming or joining self-help groups (Bhopal & Myers, 2018). These observations suggest that parents not only embrace HE practices, but also attempt to establish a social identity within this community, contributing to their overall sense of belonging (de Carvalho & Skipper, 2018).

It is important to discuss the misconception that all families engaging in HE and LCs are financially secure, from middle-class socio-economic backgrounds and are generally well educated (Belfield, 2004; Rothermel, 2003). Apple (2000) discussed the 'politics of recognition' in relation to increasing numbers in HE spaces. He debates that if the prevailing perception holds true and educational markets continue to favour privileged parents while disadvantaging groups from low socioeconomic status, then we must closely examine the effects of the increasing HE participation and motivations for this.

Indeed, scholars note that HE encompasses a diverse array of groups and communities. For example, groups such as Gypsy and Traveller communities, whose reasons for HE is much more complex than narratives shared in the public discourse (Bhopal & Myers, 2016; D'Arcy, 2014). These narratives highlight that motivations shaping motivations for HE can extend beyond financial accessibility. Moreover, families who CYP have SEN may opt for HE where they feel traditional schooling are unable to provide a suitable education (Parsons & Lewis, 2010). As discussed earlier, there are limited sources available which have effectively recorded the number of CYP, particularly those with SEN. However, data according to the DfE (2023) reports 4,256 CYP with educational, health, care plans (EHCPs) are known to be home-educated and does not include a potentially larger pool of CYP with SEN whose parents feel their children's needs are not being met in the school context (Mitchell, 2020; Square Peg & Not Fine in School, 2021; Education Otherwise, 2022). This suggests a considerable number of CYP with complex educational needs are being educated outside of the traditional school system. This indicates parents are experiencing a lack of support or provision which is adequately addressing the needs of these CYP (Square Peg & Not Fine in School, 2021). Moreover, EHCPs are typically designed for implementation within school contexts, meaning that the educational strategies outlined in these plans may not fully align with the context of HE practices. As a result, these CYP may be received education in a context about which little is known. In addition to this, even as CYP and families pursue HE, they may carry significant emotional and psychological experiences of trauma from prior schooling experiences (Bhopal & Myers, 2018) that is important to recognise and consider within the wider context of education.

The literature seems to suggest there is a growing dissatisfaction with traditional schooling among parents and CYP, which has become one of the main reasons for increased motivations for HE (e.g. Square Peg & Not Fine in School, 2021). This dissatisfaction has led to the emergence of alternative educational spaces, such as *Education Otherwise* and *Freedom to Learn* (Education Otherwise, 2024) which advocate for SDE frameworks in the process of 'unschooling' from mainstream education. As a result of the growing interest and numbers of CYP accessing HE and alternative educational spaces, it is important to recognise and explore the specific pedagogical approaches used within these settings. This will add to our understanding of how these spaces foster the wellbeing and learning of CYP in ways traditional schooling may not. This will be discussed further in the next section.

2.5. How do parents and CYP experience home education?

A broad collection of philosophies, styles and approaches have influenced the pedagogy utilised in HE, including unschooling, child-led, self-directed, informal and autonomous inspired approaches that are diverse in scope (Parsons & Lewis, 2010; Thomas & Pattison, 2007). In existing literature, HE has been usually categorised as 'formal' (i.e. structured learning, direct instruction) and 'informal' (child-directed activities) learning (Parsons & Lewis, 2010; Thomas & Pattison, 2007; Eraut, 2010; Lave & Wenger, 1991). But it is important to note that the distinction between formal and informal learning may not as easily distinguished. For instance, formal learning might involve structured lessons following established learning objectives, either in a group or one-to-one settings (Parsons & Lewis, 2010). Informal approaches could also exist within more formalised contexts, where elements of child-directed learning are incorporated into structured lessons, which allow for flexibility and individualised learning (Thomas, 1998). Some of these approaches will be influenced by parental motivations, instructional styles, the curriculum used (if any), and/or intra-familial characteristics (Fensham-Smith, 2021).

For many parents who choose to HE through the support of *Education Otherwise* (2023) and *Freedom to Learn* (Progressive Education, 2024), utilise the SDE framework, which has a focus on inquiry-based learning that enables CYP to feel supported with their

development of creativity, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills (Francis, Mills & Lupton, 2017). According to Knowles (1975) and Manning (2007), being a self-directed learner is an essential component to 'grow in capacity', where the learner's experiences become a rich resource. Research has found that home educators utilise this SDE framework by using a range of pedagogical approaches which accommodate for different age ranges and learning styles (Fortune-Wood, 2005), and are 'embedded and contextualised in real-life situations' (Nelson, 2014, p.77; Thomas & Pattison, 2007; 2019).

To aid how HE approaches are conceptualised, Neuman and Guterman (2017) suggest structure in HE styles should be considered on a broader continuum between *content* (pre-planned curricula and discrete activities) and *process* (the degree of control between adult and child during learning process). Fensham-Smith (2021) debates that the *content* and *processes* used in HE is not always explicit and can indeed overlap. Therefore, there is a need for further exploration into what pedagogy is used by home educators, particularly those using SDE frameworks, and how these are experienced.

For instance, in a study by Nelson (2014) who utilised a multi method approach (using interviews, photography, and stories) to explore the 'lived experiences' of parents and CYP in relation to HE in the UK. The approaches utilised by these participants included structured (such as a planned timetable), semi-structured and autonomous (generally child-centred). Structured approaches were described as 'fluid' with timetables and level of input being adapted to suit personal interests, and often adopted for young people aiming to sit formal examinations (i.e. GCSEs). The findings revealed that participants did not always replicate 'structured' learning styles similar to what is found in traditional schooling, and instead adopted pedagogy to meet the preferences and needs of CYP. For instance, this included a combination of Charlotte Mason, Montessori and classical approaches for one parent and her three children. This also included the use of some structured learning for the younger children (e.g. to cover basic skills such as literacy and numeracy), although this was achieved in a way that was accessible and enjoyable for the CYP (Nelson, 2014).

In the context of HE, the principles of self-determination theory (SDT) are addressed through practices which prioritise autonomy, competence and relatedness in fostering

intrinsic motivation and wellbeing (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Parents and CYP in HE often utilise strategies that promote autonomy by allowing CYP to follow their interests and engage with their environment in meaningful ways (Nelson, 2014). For instance, the practice of unschooling, where CYP learn without a predefined curriculum and instead pursue their interests freely, is an example of an autonomous approach to learning (Gray, 2015). Gray and Riley (2013) reported several benefits of unschooling in their study with home educating parents. Firstly, they found that unschooled CYP exhibited 'learning advantages', with CYP demonstrating increased curiosity and engagement in their learning. These freedom to explore interests and learn at their pace not only fosters a sense of autonomy and competence and confidence but also seems to boost the CYP's motivation to continue learning. Additionally, parents reported that CYP were happier, less stressed, more confident, and more outgoing compared to their experiences in traditional schooling environments. Furthermore, unschooling facilitated more quality time for families to spend time together outside of the constraints of the traditional school schedule. This alleviated pressures associated with school and homework (Gray & Riley, 2013). CYP in this study were able to experience a sense of relatedness with their family, and other peers of different ages, which was reported to enhance the CYP's emotional wellbeing.

Similarly, Riley (2016) compared the measures of the SDT (autonomy, competence and relatedness) using retrospective surveys with over 100 young adults who had been educated in public, private or home-educated. The findings revealed that HE students reported a higher level of competence and autonomy compared to students who attended public or private schools. HE is often based upon CYP's intrinsic motivation, with learning shaped around their interests. This may explain why the home-educated participants reported higher levels of autonomy satisfaction across both studies. These findings are consistent with previous research which suggest CYP can function positively in a variety of ways when their environments nurture their need for autonomy (Black & Deci, 2000; Jang et al, 2009; Roth et al, 2009; Cogan, 2010).

Furthermore, HE pedagogy which may be influenced by factors such as the use of technology and access to social and community groups, suggests that HE is an evolving concept that occurs between the educator and learner over time (Bowers, 2017). An

argument made for this pedagogy is CYP should be equipped with skills going beyond traditional academic skills that better align with the demands of a digital society (The World Economic Forum, 2020). There seems to be complex interactions between individuals, their environments and the broader social contexts of HE, in which learning takes place. Therefore, understanding the pedagogy adopted in both HE and LCs is important, particularly as these practices may be heavily influenced by social dynamics and practices outside of the HE context (Bronfenbrenner, 2005).

Nelson's (2014) study also explored the role of 'elective HE groups' with many participants founding their own groups to increase educational and social opportunities for their CYP. The groups were diverse in size (i.e. number of families), resources (i.e. use of materials and external tutors) and location, as array of activities offered (i.e. ballet, swimming, gymnastics, and writing pen pal letters). The practices embraced by HE families caried in nature, often varying depending on whether learning occurred within the home or within these groups. Similar findings were reported from Hanna (2011) who found that most of the 250 home educating families that were interviewed in the US, knew of other home educating families and worked with them to deliver HE. This was achieved through: a) parents with particular expertise instructing a group; b) parents sharing materials; c) families sharing resources, materials and facilities; d) religious groups sharing materials; e) curriculum specialists visiting families and tailoring specific programmes for CYP, and f) parents joining local facilities (e.g. YMCA) for physical education and socialisation opportunities with other home educating families (Hanna, 2011).

Similarly, Bowers (2017) also explored the experiences of home educating parents and young adults (who had been home-educated). Contrary to the prevailing narrative often depicted in the media around home-educated CYP having limited access to socialise with other children (e.g. Shirkey, 1987; Jackson, 2007; Webb, 1999), participants in Bowers' (2017) study shared positive experiences associated with socialisation in HE groups. This included the value of learning from older CYP and supporting younger peers in collaborative and constructive ways. Similarly, the relationships formed with adults in these settings were characterised by a balanced and healthy dynamic, markedly different from the hierarchical relationships observed in traditional schooling. These findings highlight the importance of

fostering relatedness within the HE community in wider HE groups, as it provides CYP with opportunities to develop meaningful relationships. However, despite these positive experiences, some parents also expressed concerns about challenges in their children forming friendships within the HE community. A crucial insight emerged has emerged from these studies: these groups are considered as a resource that complements HE (Nelson, 2014; Bowers, 2017). However, the extent to which families access and engage with HE groups vary, and little is known in the research about this context.

The research suggests that families in HE can engage in collaborative efforts to enhance the educational and social experiences of their CYP through the use of HE groups and social networks. These networks encompassed a range of established systems (such as online groups, family networks and participation in LCs), as well as the accessing of new networks tailored to the needs of CYP (e.g. peer groups formed by CYP or access to HE groups; Bowers, 2017). This may be due to families not wanting to allow access to outsiders or researchers to their setting, perhaps having concerns about criticism and/or being harshly examined for their pedagogical approaches (Valiente et al., 2022). Research is needed to explore the viability, effectiveness and implications of self-directed frameworks for CYP within the context of HE groups. The studies discussed in this section relied on parental views (Gray & Riley, 2013), the retrospective views of young adults using quantitative methods (Riley, 2015), and were within the context of HE (Nelson, 2014; Bowers, 2017) which arguably do not offer an understanding of the subjective experiences and perspectives of CYP accessing LCs.

2.6. Rationale and aims for the current study

Research must explore the diverse ways in which pedagogical principles are applied and how they influence CYP's wellbeing. Although these settings cannot be compared and generalised, it is important to consider how flexible methodologies can capture the unique nuances in a LC. While this study does not aim to make cross-context comparisons, it aimed to focus on individual narratives and experiences of home educating CYP and their parents in one LC. The current study hoped to capture what and how pedagogical approaches impact

CYP's experiences of feeling autonomy, competence, and relatedness within a LC. This research aimed to consider the varied ways in which CYP can learn outside the boundaries of conventional education, and in ways that foster their wellbeing. It aimed to do this by gathering a range of qualitative data from CYP using the Mosaic approach (Clark & Moss, 2001), from drawing, tours and photography, interviews and field notes to offer a holistic understanding of CYP's and their parents experiences within one LC.

By recognising and being respectful of CYP's diverse learning styles in a LC, the research methodology was designed to be flexible and dynamic, to ensure CYP could meaningfully engage with the research in their unique way. By doing so, the research aimed to not only amplify and acknowledge their insights but also shed light on potential implications for the field of educational psychology, as well as the wider system of traditional schooling. Therefore, the research questions guiding this study were as follows:

1. How do the pedagogical approaches in a learning community impact CYP's experiences of autonomy, competence, and relatedness?
2. What pedagogical approaches within a learning community are perceived by its stakeholders as influencing CYP's psychological well-being?

Chapter 3: Design and Methodology

This chapter is divided into four sections. Part A explores the theoretical and methodological positioning and considers the epistemological, ontological and axiological stance adopted. Part B outlines the research design utilised and the use of data collection methods. Part C describes the analytic process, with Part D exploring my reflexivity.

Part A: Theoretical and methodological framework

3.1. Philosophical stance

Methodological choices are said to be influenced by the values of the researcher which can influence what kinds of information is elicited within the research (Clough & Nutbrown, 2012). The rationale for my ontological, epistemological and axiological stance positioning is discussed in this section.

3.1.1. Ontological stance

Ontology refers to the nature of reality in which knowledge is positioned and can be thought of being on a spectrum divided by realism and relativism. A realist ontological position is concerned with whether there is one objective truth which can be investigated and 'discovered' through research (Durant-Law, 2006). This position is typically adopted through use of quantitative research methods.

The current study aims to elicit the views of CYP participating in a LC. A relativist position is adopted which is rooted in social constructionism and acknowledges the existence of multiple truths that are socially constructed through language, interactions and experiences across social and historical contexts (Gergen, 2001). This stance assumes a reality (a person's 'lived' experience) can be constructed through language and generated through interactions between the researcher and participant, and therefore seemed

suitable for this study.

3.1.2. *Epistemological stance*

As discussed above, social constructionism explains the fundamental nature of reality (ontology) which emphasises individuals derive their understanding of the world through interpersonal interactions (Burr, 2015). In discussing constructivism, Crotty (1998) explored the following three assumptions which I found relevant to the current research:

1. *Meanings are constructed by human beings as they engage with the world they are interpreting.*

   In LCs, learners, educators and families are actively engaged in constructing meanings about learning (Self-Directed, 2023). This study aimed to utilise open-ended questions to facilitate the researcher and participants to co-construct new understandings about how education is conceptualised outside of traditional schooling.

2. *Humans make sense of and engage with their world based on their historical and social perspectives.*

   Home educators and CYP come from diverse backgrounds with unique historical and social experiences. As I immersed myself in the field, I joined online networking HE forums and observed dialogues between parents and educators around traditional schooling and HE, that informed their beliefs and motivations to HE and participate in LCs.

   This assumption also acknowledges that I, as the researcher, made interpretations on what I found based on my own experiences and background. It allowed me to approach this less understood population with humility and openness, recognising my active role in interpreting and co-constructing 'reality'

with the participants as an integral part of the research (Robson, 2011).

3. *The basic generation of meaning is always social, occurring in and out of interactions within human communities.*

This assumption recognises that the process of qualitative research is largely inductive, with the researcher generating meaning from the data collected in the field. This is relevant as I aimed to spend time interacting and build relationships with CYP and adults in the LC, before data generation. The use of qualitative inquiry will facilitate understanding of how interactions within the LC contribute to the creation, negotiation and sharing of knowledge. This assumption also recognises that HE and LCs involve a collaborative and social process, with its dynamics subject to change throughout time and location (Burr, 2015).

Therefore, the epistemological stance of this research embraced the notions of social constructionism by recognising that individuals engage with their environments based on their historical and social understandings. It also highlighted the co-construction of meanings between the researcher and participants through interactions.

3.1.3. Axiological stance

Axiology, the philosophy study of values and ethical considerations issues (Bahm, 1984; Mingers, 2003), encompasses two strands related to the pursuit of knowledge: what value there is in knowing and what values underpin the exploration for knowledge (Durant-Law, 2006). This study adopted an interpretivist approach where the values of the researcher are considered integral to knowledge construction. This is rooted in the researcher's ontology and epistemology through the processes of reflexivity (further discussed in Part D of this chapter).

Aristotelian views regard knowledge to be intrinsically valuable (Heron & Reason, 1998), whereas applied theorists perceive knowledge as having valuable for its capacity to

inform and drive change (Durant-Law, 2006). Both positions felt relevant to this research; little is known about home educated CYP who participate in LCs to those outside of the field.

Axiology also considers *how* knowledge is sought in relation to ethical issues and ensuring human rights are upheld throughout the process of research (Cohen et al., 2017). Smith (2007) suggests researchers who utilise qualitative methods should approach research with open-mindedness, patience, flexibility and empathy. These are qualities I uphold and practice as a trainee EP and was also committed to utilise these throughout the research, as set out by the British Psychological Society (BPS, 2021) and UCL Institute of Education Ethics Committee. Ethical considerations are discussed in Part D of this chapter.

3.2.   Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)

Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) is a framework for qualitative, thorough and reflective exploration of how individuals make sense of their experiences (Smith et al., 2009). It uncovers the stories and views of individuals in depth, rather than attempting to make generalisations. IPA differs from earlier phenomenological approaches (e.g. Husserl, 1997) in that rather than trying to find the *essence* of the phenomenon (pedagogical approaches used in LCs in this case), IPA aims to understand participant's *lived experiences* of the phenomenon. IPA's philosophical roots date back to the early 20th century with its founding concepts linked to three key underpinnings (Smith et al., 2009; Husserl, 1997; Heideggar, 1927; Sartre, 2003), which include:

- Phenomenology – this refers to the study of 'lived experience' (van Manen, 1990). Husserl (1997) argued that research utilised few various lenses in which scientists studied phenomena and introduced a series of 'reductions' (varied investigative 'lenses') to assist researchers to get to the 'essence' of the experience of a particular phenomenon.

- Hermeneutic – this refers to the theory of interpretation (Schleiermacher, 1998). Schleiermacher (1998) highlights the use of the 'hermeneutic circle', which suggests for a researcher to understand any given part, they must look to the whole; to

understand the whole, they must look to the parts (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2022).
While this approach has been critiqued from a logical perception due to its intrinsic
circularity, the interpretative process offers a dynamic, non-linear approach to
thinking (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). As I will discuss later in this chapter, my visits
to the LC shaped my analytic process, as I moved back and forth between thinking
about the data collected as the 'part' in relation to the 'whole' (please refer to Table
3).

Table 3. *The concept of the hermeneutic circle in relation to the current study, adapted from Smith et al. (2022).*

The part	The whole
A single activity in the learning community	A day or week of activities in HE/at the learning community
A specific learning community practice	The overarching philosophy and/or pedagogy of the learning community
An individual's educational experience	The collective experiences of all members of the learning community

IPA accepts the researcher's knowledge, experience and skills, allowing for the
researcher to explicitly use these. Therefore, the researcher must consider their
own assumptions, preconceptions and biases throughout the research process (see
Part D of this chapter for the reflexivity).

- Idiography – refers to understanding an individual's experience, recognising it is
socially constructed and situational (Gergen, 1991, Smith et al., 2022). This
perspective, influenced by Heidegger's (1962) concept of *dasein*, views experience
as an *in-relation-to* phenomena instead of a *property* of the individual per se. This
underpinning appreciates that a given person can provide a unique perspective on a
particular phenomenon. Therefore, IPA prioritises the capturing of detailed
accounts across a smaller number of participants, while attempting to identify
broader emerging themes (Finlay, 2014).

IPA was chosen as the analytic framework for this research due to its suitability in exploring the unique contexts of CYP and their families with a specific LC. Other reasons for choosing IPA included:

- Its flexibility in using creative data tools to explore unanticipated areas
- Its ideographic approach allowing full attention to each participant without assuming commonalities.
- Its capacity to reveal powerful, personal experiences through an in-depth analysis (Warnock, 1987)
- Its alignment with my psychological background and training for interpreting experiences in relation to psychological theory.
- Its focus on exploring single participants' experiences and validating the use of a small sample.

While there are strengths in adopting qualitative inquiry and IPA, particularly for this research, there are also limitations that need to be acknowledged and addressed. These include challenges with generalisability, rigour, validity and reliability (Robson, 2011), which will be explored in Part C of this chapter.

Part B: Research design

3.3.   Case study research

This research utilised a case study design. In case studies, the 'case' refers to the situation, individual, group or organisation (Robson, 2011). In the current research, the 'case' refers to not only the LC in which the study takes place, but also the individual participants themselves.

Yin (2011) outlines 2 rationale for opting for case study design which I found relevant to the current research:

1. *Examining a current phenomenon comprehensively, situated within its real-world context.*

   The phenomenon under investigation in the current study was the pedagogy employed within a LC, which is situated within the real-world context of the LC and HE.

2. *The distinction between the phenomenon and the wider context may not be clearly established.*

   However, the pedagogy may be influenced by the specific characteristics and dynamics of the LC that unknown. Yin (2011) suggests that case studies are a suitable method to employ when there is no control required over behavioural events and when the primary focus is on a current phenomenon (i.e. the pedagogy).

3.3.1.   Embedded single case design

An embedded single case study was chosen to explore the pedagogy in a LC using a social constructivist approach. This method offers a comprehensive understanding of a single case (i.e. one particular LC), which was advantageous due to the lack of research in the area (Bryman, 2012). Additionally, conducting research involving multiple LCs and participants can be resource-intensive, making a single embedded case study with a smaller number of participants a practical choice for a time-sensitive doctoral thesis.

Each participant within the LC was also considered as a separate 'case', allowing for a focused exploration of their experiences (refer to Figure 3). This approach facilitated the collection of diverse data sources (Yin, 2003; 1989), and enabled within-case analysis of individual experiences and between-case analysis within the same context (Baxter & Jack, 2008).
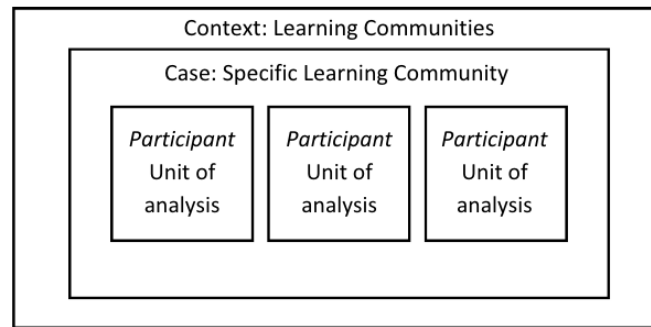
Figure 3. Illustration of embedded single case design for the current study.

3.4.   Sampling and recruitment

The use of a two-tier sampling technique for case study designs was employed for the current study (Merriam, 1998). This included selecting a 'case' (i.e. the LC) before recruiting individual CYP and their families for participation.

3.4.1. Case setting

During the initial stages of the research, an LC representative was consulted via my supervisor. Gatekeeper consent was obtained following an online call via Zoom to discuss the research's initial ideas and rationale. Purposive sampling was utilised which is suitable for case studies when the research aims for an in-depth exploration of a particular phenomenon (Robson & McCartan, 2016). Given the lack of research into LCs, the criteria for selecting one case setting was intentionally inclusive. However, some prerequisite factors were identified and considered when selecting a case to ensure it was the appropriate choice for the study. This included:

1. Diversity of children and stakeholders (i.e. ages, gender, and ethnicity) within the LC to capture a comprehensive picture.
2. The LC to have been established for at least one year to ensure stability and trust has been established among members. Additionally, this duration ensured that members had developed a coherent understanding of their pedagogy, thereby enabling the generation of meaningful data.

3.4.1.1. The learning community – 'Brookside'

Given the objective of case study research is to offer a descriptive portrayal of participants' experiences, it is also important to offer a description of that context. The LC studied in the current research is located in England. Given the small pool of existing LCs in England, the geographical area of the LC was chosen not to be revealed to avoid identification and risk of breaching anonymity. The pseudonym 'Brookside' will be used hereafter for this site.

Brookside provides part-time fee-paying childcare services (Tuesdays to Thursdays, 10am to 2.45pm), and is regulated by Ofsted. They offer six-week blocks for CYP, which typically run in parallel with the academic year. The age range of CYP ranges from a minimum of age five, with no upper age limit (i.e. young people are welcome to continue attending until they decide it is no longer the right place for them). Brookside is composed of approximately 12 CYP, mentors who are qualified teachers and childcare minders (parents can also occasionally support with activities). Activities in the week are organised by the community timetable through discussions at daily 'morning meetings' as well as weekly 'community meetings'. Engaging in activities at Brookside is voluntary and attendance is viewed as optional, with no penalties issued for absences. The timetable itself is intentionally flexible so that CYP can add or change sessions to match their needs and preferences.

3.4.2. Participants

On the first visit to Brookside, I provided the mentors with a brief outline of the study and information sheet, outlining the purpose of my project. The study was also informally shared with the CYP at Brookside throughout my visits, inviting them to approach and/or contact me (the researcher) if they were interested in taking part. Once the CYP had indicated interest, I shared more details about the study, and an information sheet and consent form for the CYP to share with their parents (see Appendix 3, 4, 5 and 6).

Table 4. *Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria for Participants.*

Inclusion criteria for child participants	Inclusion criteria for parent participants
1. The child must have parental consent to take part. 2. The child must have the capacity to meet and talk with the researcher and provide ongoing assent. This capacity to be determined by mentors at Brookside who know the child well at the time of the research taking place (November 2023). 3. Consent provided in anonymising participant information (gender and age) and use of gender-neutral pseudonyms.	1. The parent must be able to provide consent to take part. 2. The parent's child must also participate in the study. 3. Consent provided in anonymising participant information (gender and age) and use of gender-neutral pseudonyms.
Exclusion criteria for child participants	**Exclusion criteria for parent participants**
1. The child will not be included if they do not have parental consent. 2. The child will not be included if they do not wish to take part.	1. Parents will not be included if they do not wish to participate

Participants (including the CYP and their parents) were then purposively selected based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria outlined in Table 4. Three young people and their parents agreed to take part. Given the small pool of CYP attending Brookside, additional consideration was given to anonymising participant information (e.g. gender and age) to avoid identification. Therefore, it was decided that all participants would be referred to using gender-neutral pseudonyms and pronouns ('they/them'), and to provide anonymity for the CYP's ages by describing them in terms of school ages (e.g. lower/upper primary or secondary age). Please refer to participants' anonymised details in Table 5.

Table 5. *Child and Parent Participant Information.*

	Child participant	'School' age	Parent participant
1	Alex	Upper primary age	Charlie
2	Sam	Upper secondary age	Taylor
3	Morgan	Lower secondary age	Jamie

3.5.   Data collection tools

3.5.1.   *The use of ethnographic principles in case study research*

Ethnography refers to how researchers engage in the lived experiences of individuals in order to collect detailed and meaningful descriptions of the behaviours, actions, and contexts in which participants reside (Atkinson, 2016). Although a prolonged time in a LC setting was not possible for a time-sensitive doctoral thesis, ethnographic principles including intervals of unstructured observation over four weeks allowed me to build rapport with members at Brookside. This approach also allowed for the recording of naturally occurring activities and interactions between members within their everyday context.

Research across the social science domains in recent years have utilised ethnography to help position CYP's views at the centre of data generation (i.e. Eder & Cosaro, 1999). Much like the current study's aim to position the 'voice of the child' at the centre of the findings, this phrase suggests that an open process is required to using "many creative ways … [CYP] to express their views and experiences" (Edwards, Gandini & Forman, 1993). These lenses can be applied through methods that are familiar and enjoyable to children (such as interviews, drawing, photography, tours, and stories).

This approach of data generation also resonates with the practice of educational psychologists in triangulating information from various sources. For instance, the British Psychological Society (2015) describe the role of EPs as "[taking] into account the learning environment and the circumstances in which children and young people and their families

are living and functioning" (p. 4). In this regard, it was deemed appropriate to utilise these skills within the research context.

Indeed, conventional approaches such as questionnaires may be perceived as unsuitable due to their lack of context and/or uninteresting for children who feel they are 'no fun' (Barker et al., 2003). However, Barker et al. (2003) also emphasises that questionnaire methods can still be adapted to encourage CYP to participate meaningfully in research. Qualitative methods have been widely recognised as effective in encouraging children to share their views on their terms (Pink, 2001). In particular, I considered 'participatory appraisal', an approach which empowers otherwise silenced communities to use their 'voice' within their own community. Therefore, I opted to utilise a range of data generation methods using the Mosaic approach (Clark & Moss, 2001), given their success and popularity with CYP of all age groups. Participatory appraisal, in parallel with the use of ethnographic principles, embraced the process of dialogue, reflection and action throughout the data generation process (Thomas & O'Kane, 2000). The section below discusses the approaches adopted further.

3.5.2. The Mosaic approach

The Mosaic approach is described as a combination of physical, verbal and visual expressions of children, which are qualitatively analysed (Clark & Moss, 2001). The Mosaic approach is a framework for listening to CYP and is outlined in Table 5 (Clark & Moss, 2001).

Table 6. *A framework for listening to CYP – the Mosaic Approach (Clark & Moss, 2001).*

Multi method	Recognises that CYP are skilful communicators and appreciates the different 'voices' of CYP
Participatory	Views CYP as 'experts in their own lives' and rights holders
Reflexive	Includes children, practitioners and parents in reflecting on their experiences
Adaptable	Can be adapted in a variety of environments

Focused on CYP's lived experiences	Can be used for exploring individual lives and positioning the CYP as 'meaning makers'

The principles from the Mosaic approach were rooted in the Te Whãriki early childhood curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2016), and pedagogical approaches as observed in Reggio Emilia preschools (Rinaldi, 2006) which position children as competent, active citizens who can communicate and facilitate change across multiple contexts (Rinaldi, 2001). The literature review in Chapter 2 suggested pedagogical approaches adopted in HE encourages children to be self-directed in their learning journey (Nelson, 2014; Apostoleris, 2000; Gray & Riley, 2013). Similarly, the Mosaic approach recognises that children bring knowledge and understanding to the contexts in which they participate, and that children are 'experts in their own lives' (Langsted, 1994). Children portray their unconscious and conscious knowledge explicitly (i.e. verbally) and implicitly (i.e. non-verbally) to portray their lived experience (Clark, 2017). The interpretivist approach adopted in the current study also refers to understanding the subjective world of human experience and is reliant on rich data to explore these complexities (Cohen et al., 2017; Clark, 2017). Therefore, it seemed appropriate to utilise an approach that would allow me to generate meaningful data with participants (CYP, parents and mentors).

Given Article 12 of the United Convention which posits the Rights of the Child, I ensured to conduct research *with* children and allow them to participate meaningfully in the research (Hawkes, 2017). By listening deeply to children, "multiple truths can be revealed, and the child's rights can be upheld" (Hawkes, 2017, p.22). Figure 4 illustrates the different 'tiles' associated with the Mosaic model that were utilised in the current study. The combination of several methods to collect data aligned with the process of triangulation and engagement with the process of qualitative cross-validation (James & Prout, 1997). The rationale, design and approach of each tile will be discussed further in this section.
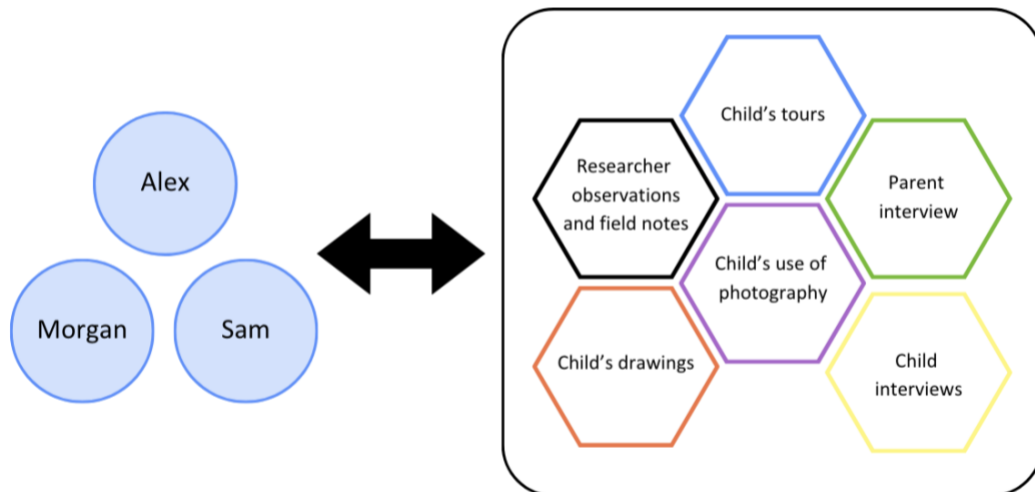
Figure 4. An adapted model of the Mosaic approach for the current study.

3.5.2.1. Researcher observations and field notes

The use of observations can be an invaluable case study method to discover additional information about a phenomena (Morgan et al., 2017). Observations were considered appropriate for exploring *how* the pedagogy in a LC was implemented and impacting CYP, beyond what could be drawn from participant's reported accounts. Approaches to observations can vary depending on context, structure and formality. Formal approaches offer structure and direction while informal approaches are less structured and offer researchers freedom in exploring areas of interest (Robson & McCartan, 2016). Although more informal and unstructured approaches to observation can result in more complex level of interpretation of the data, it aligned well with the study of processes (Fetters & Rubinstein, 2019). For instance, informal observations enabled noting of the ways in which CYP in the Brookside were seen to interact with other CYP and mentors.

Observational approaches which adopt ethnographic principles can also vary depending on the observer's stance (i.e. as a fully 'active' participant who is part of the social group being observed, to a completely 'hidden' observer; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Between this range lies the middle-ground approach (i.e., a 'marginal participant') which was deemed most suitable for the context of the current study. I was able to be clearly establish myself as an observer, but with the opportunity of interacting and building

relationships with the mentors, parents and CYP. This role enabled me to ask questions and participate in activities to develop a richer understanding of the processes and interactions I was observing (Robson & McCartan, 2016).

As a familiarisation period is necessary when carrying out research with children (Barley & Bath, 2014), I observed for approximately 16 hours (across four visits over four weeks, each lasting four hours) before beginning the participatory work. I utilised Fetters and Rubinstein's (2019) three C's approach (Context, Content and Concepts) for the unstructured observation (see Appendix 10 for a completed example). In addition, considering Crompton's (2019) guidance, I reflected on my own experience as a trainee EP and utilised the following strategies during my observation and recording of field notes:

- Record date, times and places of observation.

- Record interpretations, relevant information and details of what happens.

- Recording my own sensory responses (sight, sounds, textures, smells and taste).

- Considering and noting personal reflections to the recording of fieldnotes.

- Noting language, symbols, and shared meanings in relation to 'insider language'.

- Considering what is not said as much as what is said.

- Be approachable and friendly, encouraging CYP, parents and mentors to address me by my first name (to reduce power dynamics as much as possible; Ebrahim, 2010).

- Being conscious through my choice of clothing, behaviour and mannerisms in the setting (Wellington, 2015) in an attempt to avoid being viewed as a 'professional' as much as possible.

- Ask curious questions as a learner, seeking knowledge from the children, parents and educators in the setting (Merewether, 2014).

- Not to influence, coerce or direct children's activities and observe behaviour occurring as naturally as possible.

- Be attuned to subtle signals which indicated individuals were uncomfortable with being observed (e.g., whispering, hiding out of sight, turning away), and to move away and respect the privacy of others if this occurred (Bryman, 2004; DeWalt & DeWalt, 2002).

Field notes were supplemented with a reflexive journal and use of voice notes to log ongoing personal reflections throughout the duration of the study (Spradley, 2016). The intention was to provide a deeper and more nuanced understanding of my positioning within the research and my own evolving perspectives as I immersed myself in the field (Silverman, 2015).

3.5.2.2. Child tours

The use of tours as part of data collection originated from Kanstrup et al.'s (2014) walking methods and transect walks, often referred to as 'walking interviews' (Langsted, 1994) and 'talking whilst walking' (Anderson, 2004). The physical act of walking and encouraging children to take the lead in directing has been reported to reduce power imbalances and explore places of significance to the children (Langsted, 1994; Johnson, Hart & Colwell, 2014).

In the current study, the CYP were invited to lead the tours. I listened while CYP talked about what they did in different areas in Brookside, what places they liked and disliked, and what places were important to them. During the tour, the CYP took photographs of places that were important to them (see *Photography* section below for more information). This approach empowered the CYP to engage with and contribute to the data collection process in a meaningful way. Throughout the tours, I ensured to consciously slow down to the CYP's pace and follow their lead. The tours lasted from 4 minutes 20 seconds to 9 minutes. All discussions were audio-recorded using clip-on microphones to ensure the participant's audio was clear and only their voice was captured during the tours.

3.5.2.3. Child's use of photography

Although this is not a 'new' approach to collecting data, photography has become an increasingly popular research tool with children, offering opportunities to explore their environments in relation to their feelings and sense of place(s) (Tan, 2019; Clark & Moss, 2001). Photo-voice design is an ethnographic technique which involves storytelling through informal conversation to develop rapport and support co-construction of knowledge (Byrne

et al., 2016; Fa'avae, Jones & Manu'atu, 2016). Therefore, I elected to audio record the tour and photography activity using a clip-on microphone to capture these discussions.

During the tour, children were asked to take 'snapshots' of things that they felt were important to them in Brookside using a digital camera (e.g. objects, areas, and locations). The types of questions I asked to guide the discussion included:

- How would you feel taking pictures of things important to you in Brookside?
- What would you like to take pictures of?
- What would you not like to take pictures of?
- Why did you choose to take a picture of X?

Children were asked to use their own words to frame meaning and provide written descriptions for their photographs, which would later also act as cues during the semi-structured interviews (Clark & Moss, 2005). This structure allowed the participants to determine the direction of the storytelling with their perspectives, shaping the data generated. The number of photos taken ranged between 17 and 40.

3.5.2.4. Child's drawing

Children's drawings are considered an effective method for children to explore and communicate their perspectives, especially where researchers consider the narratives which develop around the drawing (Stanczak, 2007; Dockett & Perry, 2008; Søndergaard & Reventlow, 2019; Kress, 1997; Nielsen, 2012).

The framework of personal construct psychology (PCP) aligned with this approach. PCP (Kelly, 1955) is a theory of personality and cognition which suggests people are 'scientists' seeking to understand and interpret their world through their own constructs and beliefs. These constructs are unique to each individual and are formed through interactions and experiences with the environment. This aligns with the philosophical positioning of this research through social constructionism which suggests knowledge is

perceived as a product of social interaction and interpretation (Gergen, 2001). In this regard, children's drawings within HE and LCs can be viewed as a form of knowledge construction. When children create drawings to represent their experiences, they are actively constructing their understanding of the world. These drawings offer a means for children to express and navigate their developing sense of self, which can be shaped by their social and cultural contexts (Cox, Perara & Fan, 1999; Ravenette, 1999). Therefore, the philosophical assumptions underpinning PCP theory and methods align with recognising and appreciating children's subjective experiences (Burr et al., 2014), as well as the epistemological positioning adopted in the current study.

Research also indicates that the combination of a structured drawing technique and talking (between a child and trusted adult) is a powerful way to elicit the perspectives of children (Coates & Coates, 2011; Knighting et al., 2011). In line with this, 'Drawing the Ideal School Technique' was adapted (originating from Moran's (2001) 'Ideal Self') for the current study which enabled the children to become actively involved in discussing important or core constructs about Brookside. The technique explores elements of an 'ideal' and 'not ideal' school setting such as the building, environment, other children, the adults and themselves in each context. However, given the diversity of LCs, adapting this activity from a school context to Brookside was crucial, and was considered in the following ways:

- Avoiding assumptions about prior knowledge or experiences of participants in relation to traditional schooling (e.g. for children who had only been home educated in their education journey).

- Using inclusive terminology and using the name of the learning community or terms such as "learning environment" or "place of learning" to encompass a wider range of experiences.

- Being culturally responsive and respecting the language employed by children to ensure their constructs were not lost in the activity. I did this by engaging with participants using their own vocabulary and expressions and refrained from using my own terminology or interpreting their descriptions during the activity.

- Recognising and encouraging the element of choice for participants to express their preferences, views and unique features of their learning environments.

- Using open-ended questions, for example, "What does your ideal place of learning look like?"

Resources include two sheets of plain A4 paper and a black pen. Two out of three children opted to do the drawing alongside the discussion, while one participant preferred to talk through the activity instead. All drawing activities were audio recorded, with audio recordings lasting between 5 minutes and 30 seconds to 14 minutes and 23 seconds.

3.5.2.5. Child interviews

Isaacs (1927) highlighted that paying attention to the questions children ask can be more revealing than hearing children's answers. As highlighted above, by adopting the positioning of a 'marginal participant' over a period of four weeks, I was able to observe CYP in their own environment and have informal conversations with them. I intended for the semi-structured interviews with the CYP to avoid formality and address the imbalance of power and therefore conducted them in conversational style. Therefore, in line with the Mosaic interview guidance (Clark, 2015), the questions were intentionally kept broad and open-ended (see Appendix 7). This allowed the CYP to lead the discussion and allowed me to explore the themes raised, as well as redirect the discussion where necessary and rephrase questions if CYP were unsure about what they were asked.

Two children expressed interest in engaging in the interview together rather than individually. I needed to respect the autonomy of the children and offer them choice in how they expressed their views through the different activities. I ensured I was flexible in adapting the activities to accommodate the preferences of the CYP to ensure they felt a sense of ownership over their participation in the study. Two participants engaged in a paired interview, and one participant individually. Adaptions were made to the paired interview such as ground rules to establish both participants felt safe and comfortable to share their views. This is discussed more in Part 4, as part of my reflexivity.

Both interviews were audio recorded using clip-on microphones, ranging between 14 minutes and 17 minutes and 43 seconds.

3.5.2.6. Parent interview

In order to add to the views of children's perspectives, semi-structured interviews were sought with parents/carers. The questions were intentionally kept simple and open-ended to offer adults opportunity to share their unique perspectives about their child's day to day experiences of attending Brookside (see Appendix 8). It was hoped this approach would contribute information around Brookside's contextual factors, support systems and challenges, that may influence CYP's experiences (Bronfenbrenner, 2005).

Indeed, with this approach comes the risk of adult perspectives dominating the findings and could inadvertently undermine the autonomy and agency of children (Clark & Moss, 2001). Furthermore, where adult perceptions diverged from the children's experiences that could potentially introduce disparities in the data, I ensure to make efforts to ensure the different perspectives were acknowledged. I also considered the power dynamics (between the children, parents/carers, and mentors within Brookside), as well as how mentors and parents coexist within Brookside, and how that may have influenced the data generation process. Therefore, I ensured I was attuned to these dynamics and engaged in reflective supervision to consider their impact on my interactions with members at Brookside.

Semi-structured interviews were carried out on the telephone and were audio recorded and ranged between 19 minutes and 49 minutes and 12 seconds.

3.6.   Procedure

3.6.1. *Order of data generation*

Some case-study researchers value the importance of gathering and analysing observation field notes prior to gathering participatory data (e.g. Morgan et al., 2016). It is thought that this data can help inform the development of other data sources, and in turn increase the construct validity of the study (Yin, 2018). A linear ordering of the data collection methods was partly possible where all observation data and field notes were

gathered over four once-weekly observations at Brookside. During these visits, I spent time with the CYP and mentors to build rapport and trust. Alongside these visits, the participatory data tools were prepared and developed to ensure the activities were appropriate for the CYP at Brookside. Chronological order of the data collection is shown in Figure 5.
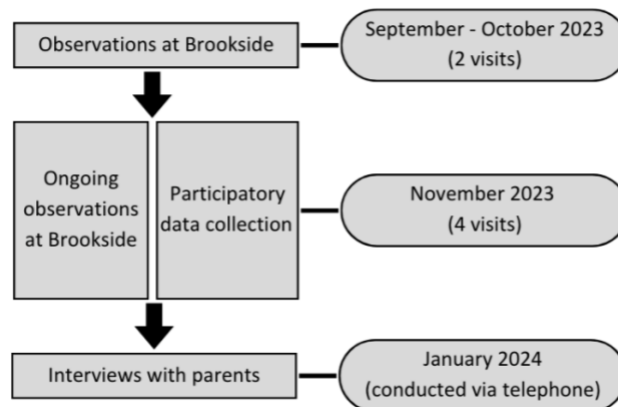
Figure 5. Order of data collection.

Part C: Data analysis

The data gathered and co-constructed in this research comprised of two types:

- Visual data in the form of children's photographs taken during the tours and drawing activity
- Textual data in the form of recorded transcripts (during the drawing and tours activity, interviews with children and parents, observation notes and memos made during fieldwork and data analysis)

Visual data was analysed using content analysis (Kolb, 2008; Rose, 2016) and textual data was analysed using interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA; Smith et al., 2022). Both analyses are discussed further below.

3.7.   Visual data analysis
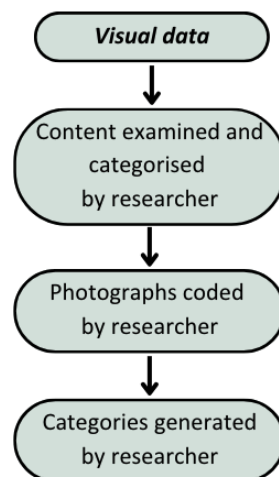
Figure 6. Steps to visual data analysis.

Step 1: The children's photographs and drawings were organised into separate albums on the UCL One Drive, according to the child's pseudonym. During this stage of analysis, children's statements about their photos and drawings from the textual data were also considered to understand the items of importance to them (Agbenyega, 2008). Van Leeuwen and Jewitt (2001) highlight that content analysis is unlikely to provide an "interpreted meaning of a domain" in isolation (p.13). Therefore, the images were analysed together with the children's statements, and researcher's observations and interpretations.

Step 2: The content of the photos was studied, concentrating on recurrent features ('photo motifs'; Rose, 2016, p.59). Photo motifs were descriptive in relation to location (outdoors, indoors), characteristics of the space (trees, nature, heater, warmth), activity (playing, socialising, learning) and resources (books, swing, football, lights). Photo motifs were logged on a table (see Appendix 9).

Step 3: Photo motifs and content were then worked into codes such as outdoor play, trees, the hole, socialising, running, friends, and connecting. For example, a photograph of the trees, in combination with the tour recordings, was coded as 'running, trees'.

Step 4: When generating categories, I ensured to bear in mind these images were considered communication tools from the image producer, the communicator (i.e., the researcher) and the philosophy within the cultural context of the LC (Riffe et al., 2005). The categories identified were discussed in peer review, which were re-examined, before finalising the visual categories outlined in Table 7.

Table 7. *Visual data categories.*

Visual data categories
Outdoor play
Friends
Nature
Calm and comfort
Community social spaces
Privacy and quiet places

3.8.   Textual data analysis

Textual data including observation data, field notes, recordings from the child-led activities (drawings, tours and photos), interviews with CYP, and interviews with parents, were transcribed verbatim. However, in some cases, using gender neutral terms altered the grammar in the original transcript. These quotes were amended during transcription while ensuring the original meaning was preserved.

The textual data was analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), and was inductive as this allowed for the views of the participants to be prioritised in the themes, while also acknowledging the researcher's role is co-creating the participant's meaning-making (Love et al., 2020). The approach to analysis illustrated by Smith et al. (2022) was adapted with guidance from Love et al. (2020) for the multi-method approach and paired interview (see Table 8 below and Appendix 11 for a more detailed account of the analytic process).

Table 8. *IPA analysis stages as adapted from Smith et al. (2022) and Love et al. (2020).*

1.	**Immersion in the data**	This step allowed familiarity with the data during transcription.
2.	**Identifying researcher orientation and potential bias**	A self-reflexive activity was carried out individually and in supervision to question biases, perception and views of the research topic and participant group.
3.	**Exploratory noting**	This step allowed for the noting of semantic content and language.
4.	**Constructing experiential statements**	Exploratory notes were pooled together to form experiential statements which reflected the experiences of participants.
5.	**Searching for connections across experiential statements**	This step involved grouping together the experiential statements that aligned.
6.	**Naming the personal experiential themes (PETs) for each participant**	Each group of statements were named to explicitly describe its features.
7.	**Continuing the individual analysis of other cases**	This step involved repeating the analytic process for the other individual cases (each child and each parent).
8.	**Working with parent PETs and child PETs to develop case PETs**	This step involved looking for patterns across each child's and their parent's data to identify case PETs.
9.	**Working with case PETs to develop group experiential themes (GETs)**	This step involved looking for patterns across case PETs and the paired interview to form group themes that illustrated the shared characteristics of participant's experiences.

Part D: Reflexivity

3.9.   Evaluating research quality

It was crucial to consider how the method and findings could be considered trustworthy and useful (Yardley, 201). Therefore, a criterion was developed to assess the quality and validity of the method and analysis which involved a combination of Yardley's (2000, 2008) flexible principles, as well as Smith et al.'s (2022) criteria for IPA analysis. These are outlined in Table 9.

Table 9. *Criteria used to assess quality of the method and analysis (adapted from Yardley, 2000, 2008; Smith et al., 2022).*

Criteria / comments	Evaluation
Sensitivity to context	
The multi-method methodology was highly attuned to participant's perspectives and the socio-cultural context of the learning community	Good
Researcher was sensitive to ethical issues arising in study (informed consent, avoiding risk and doing no harm)	Good
Use of inductive approach to data to allow for different 'stories' to be captured	Good
Being sensitive of the context and considerate of how the theory, literature review, and analyses provides a novel and new way of understanding a topic that will have a practical impact on a small group, with wider socio-cultural implications for the wider systems	Good
Demonstrating commitment and rigour	
Thorough data collection evidenced in appendices	Good
Breadth and depth of analysis undertaken to ensure justice is given to visual (drawings and photos) and textual data (PETs and GETs)	Good
Use of research knowledge and experience to contribute to methodological competency	Good
Engagement with topic professionally enhanced through personal reflection	Fair

Transparency and coherence	
Inclusion of a reflexivity chapter to explore how the researcher and/or methodology shaped the research	Good
Engaging in a transparent and reflective analytic process (supervision and peer review) to ensure GETs and corresponding PETs reflected the data collected	Good
The research questions align with the social constructionist framework and participatory methodology utilised to generate data	Good
A transparent description provided on how data was generated, analysed, with presentation of data extracts provided in appendices	Good

I ensured that I was sensitive to socio-cultural context of Brookside by ensuring participant's perspectives were respectfully captured and represented. The emphasis on inductive data collection allowed for the exploration of diverse narratives in Brookside. Throughout the research process, there were additional opportunities to deepen this engagement through attendance of conferences and connecting with other alternative educators to learn more about pedagogy in HE and LCs. However, due to limited time available in my final year of doctoral training, I was limited in being able to engage in deeper self-reflection within a field that continues to evolve. However, I ensured I engaged in a transparent and reflective analytical process, which was supported through supervision and peer review. Overall, these reflections highlight the robustness of the methodology utilised and its potential to meaningfully contribute to both theory and practice in psychology and education.

3.10. Ethical considerations

An ethical application was completed and approved by the IOE Research Ethics Committee and the project was registered with the UCL Data Protection team (see Appendix 2, reference number Z6364106/2023/04/39 social research). The main ethical considerations for this study concerned informed consent, ensuring confidentiality and anonymity of participants, which are discussed below.

3.10.1. Informed consent

To gain voluntary and informed consent, I explained to all members of Brookside verbally the aims and purpose of my study, what I hoped to achieve and the likely form of publication following the study. It was important for CYP to be an active part of the research process, and for them to want to take part in the study. Therefore, information sheets and consent forms were shared with CYP and their parents (see Appendix 3, 4, 5 and 6).

3.10.2. Confidentiality and anonymity

All participants were informed that all data would be held confidentially except in the event of safeguarding concerns, where this would be raised with a mentor at Brookside. Additional thought was given to specific activities, such as the paired interview. I ensured ground rules were established and requested both participants to respect each other's privacy. The 'free flow' context of the LC raised some issues around negotiating privacy (Mauthner, 1997) and quiet spaces to engage in the activities which had to be carefully discussed.

In relation to the photo activity, participants were asked to not take photos of other CYP at Brookside. Any photos that included references to other children were destroyed. Identifying features of the LC were pseudonymised, with descriptors about participants and other CYP at Brookside (i.e. name, age, and gender) removed from written transcripts and observation notes.

3.11.   Difficulties encountered

This research did not go without complications. This aligns with Cicourel's (2003) statement, "we often lack clear guidelines for designing and pursuing field research that would indicate the kind of problems associated with gaining access, sustaining it and exiting gracefully" (p. 361). As this was the first study to explore pedagogy in a one LC, I experienced difficulties in gaining trust and accessing participants, which are discussed below.

3.11.1. Gaining trust and accessing participants

Despite not being a 'true' outsider to the field, given my previous involvement with arranging and attending conferences discussing alternative pedagogical approaches to traditional education, I considered how members of the LC might perceive my role as a trainee EP (TEP). Thought was given to how members of the LC would respond to an outsider, particularly a professional who may be perceived as pro-bias for traditional schooling, which conflicts with the philosophy of HE and the LC.

Given my interest in the topic, I ensured to share my motivations and passion with the participants. This allowed for meaningful information to be shared by participants, and my initial apprehensions about my role did not impact the progression of the research. Dwyer and Buckle (2009) discuss the dichotomy of insider versus outsider status, suggesting that holding membership in a group does not imply there is complete sameness within that group. Similarly, not being a member of a group does not imply complete difference. How the researcher is positioned and identified is not only based on the relationships the researcher develops in the field, but also in relation to shared characteristics (age, gender and class).

For instance, I found being a young female was advantageous in the context of researching HE as I was perhaps being perceived as 'unthreatening' to CYP, parents and members. During my first visits at Brookside, I felt there was some resistance in sharing of information from members. However, as my visits continued, I found that members were generally put at ease by my willingness to listen to their experiences, understand the context, and build genuine relationships with them. Although I initially planned to generate participatory data on my second visit, I continued to use my visits as opportunities to build relationships with the members. It was not until my third visit where I was able to ascertain interest, determine potential participants and gather informed consent ready for data collection on the fourth visit. It was important for me to consider my own agenda as a researcher and how this was impacting my engagement and interactions with others at Brookside. Through supervision and personal reflections, I considered the self-directed

nature of Brookside and how to ensure there was continued interest in the study, while being respectful of its members and their daily routines.

Chapter 4: Research Findings

4.1.   Presentation of Group Experiential Themes (GETs)

This chapter offers a phenomenological and interpretative account of the research findings. Four Group Experiential Themes (GETs) emerged from the interpretative analysis and will be explored in relation to the individual cases. Overall, eight Personal Experiential Themes (PETs) were identified from the three individual case studies (including child and parent accounts), the paired interview, and observation notes. The GETs and corresponding PETs are outlined in Appendix 13. An example of how the analytic process was followed (including exploratory notes, quotes, experiential statements and grouping of PETs) is evidenced in Appendix 12.
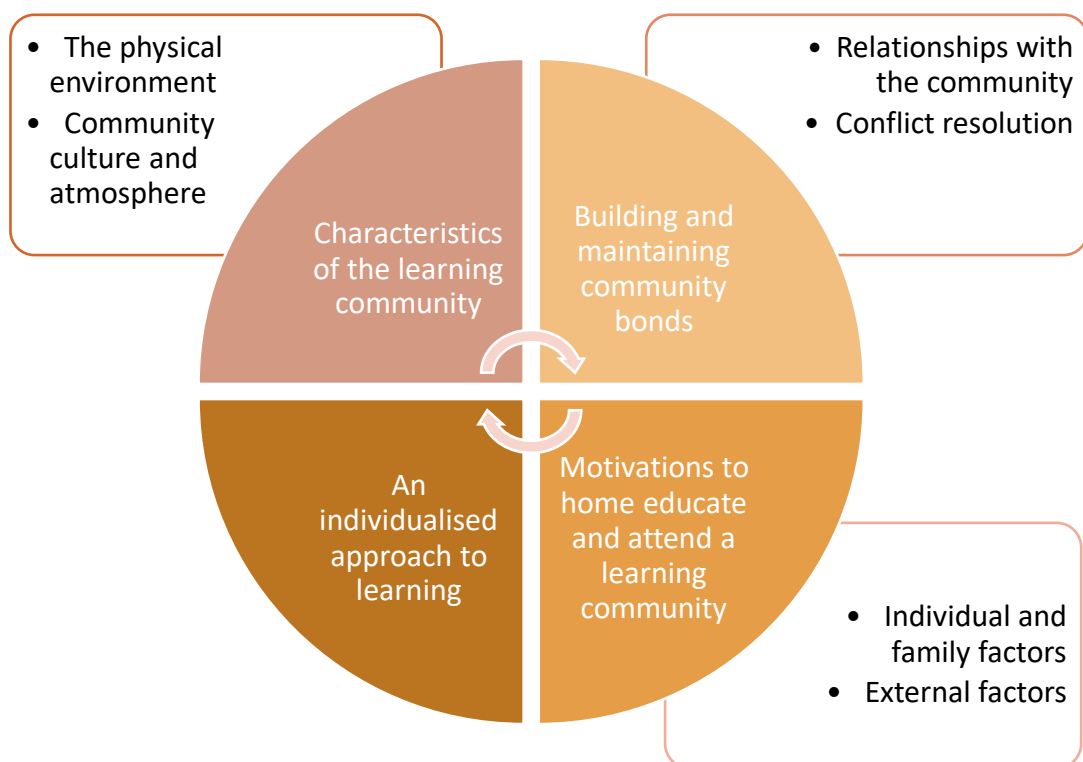
Figure 7. Thematic representation of the Group Experiential Themes

The four GETs and corresponding subthemes will be explored in turn, with reference to the data generated with the individual participants.

4.2. GET 1: Characteristics of the learning community

An important feature of participants' accounts was the physical environment and culture and atmosphere of Brookside, including its location and characteristics and being immersed in nature.

4.2.1. Sub-theme: The physical environment

The physical environment of Brookside emerged as an important area, characterised by activities being strongly connected to the natural environment. For instance, Alex expressed a preference of situating their version of an ideal LC in the woods, with snowballs and outdoor sports such as football and archery. As shown in Figure 8 below, Alex drew themselves smiling throwing snowballs in the woods.

"Maybe in the woods … 'cause I love the woods …" – Alex (p.5)

Figure 8. Alex's drawing of the ideal LC.

However, when asked to describe the environment of the not ideal LC, Alex mentioned a lack of plants and trees, as well as their aversion to grey buildings. For instance:

"There wouldn't be very many plants. And plants won't grow and that's why trees weren't there." – Alex (p.3)

"Grey buildings. I hate them." – Alex (p.2)

Alex's accounts and drawing of the ideal LC indicate that they prefer natural elements. The mention of plants not growing indicate a desire for a vibrant and nurturing environment, while the dislike of grey buildings may suggest a preference for colourful surroundings.

When asked to take photos of what is most meaningful, the theme of nature emerged with all three participants:

Figure 9. Alex's photo of the woodlands.

Figure 10. Morgan's photo of the woodlands.

Figure 11. Sam's photo of the woodlands.

This was also echoed by Morgan who spoke about feeling connected to the natural environment through a large, spacious LC:

> *"A big piece of land that has like buildings in it … and I think there would be lots of rooms and lots of spaces." – Morgan (p.3)*
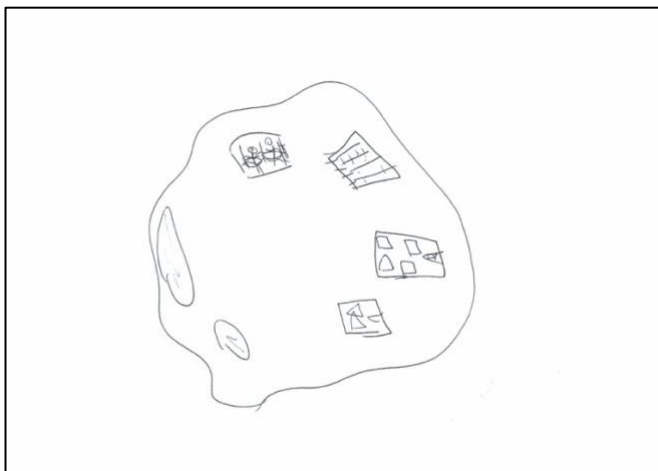
Figure 12. Morgan's drawing of the ideal LC.

Morgan's description of a "big piece of land" suggests a preference for a campus-like environment with natural surroundings. Their emphasis on "lots of rooms and lots of spaces" implies a desire for several areas that accommodate for various activities and interactions. In relation to their own preferences, Sam described indoor 'hut' spaces that offered them safety, warmth and comfort, particularly during the colder weather:

"When it gets colder it's a lot warmer … it's really nice. Really warm." – Sam (p.2)

Sam's preference for these specific places suggests a strong attachment to them, as they feel comfortable and relaxed in these areas. It was important for Sam to access these places as they had developed a sense of emotional safety with these spaces. Sam explained that they prefer to 'hang out' in specific indoor areas with other CYP. Sam also chose to take photos of these community areas to reinforce how important they are to them.

"I mostly just hang out in very specific places, which are those places. Like I don't really like anywhere else that much." – Sam (p.2)

Figure 13. Sam's photo of the sofa bed.

Figure 14. Sam's photo of the heater.

Morgan also said:

"There would be lots of pillows and blankets." – Morgan (p.3)

This further emphasises the preference for a LC integrated within nature, which also offers a warm and comforting environment. It is important to note that both Morgan and Sam chose to engage in the activities in indoor, warm areas, in comparison to Alex who chose to participate in the activities while sitting outside. This reflects the variation in preferences when engaging in the study, as well as the importance of my role as the researcher in being flexible and adaptive to each participant.

In contrast to the preference for a natural environment, Alex expressed discomfort with a more urban environment. For example, Alex described their not ideal LC as being famous, expressing their dislike for overcrowded spaces:

"It would be famous … and I would not like that … then there would be too many people." – Alex (p.3)

This dislike was also communicated in their drawing of the 'not ideal' LC, where they chose to draw several people (representing the high number of children attending the LC) and themselves (on the right side) looking sad. Alex's depiction of themselves as sad in this context indicates a negative emotional response to their not ideal LC. This may imply that Alex is uncomfortable in environments with a high number of individuals, which potentially indicates a preference for less busy social contexts. In addition, the absence of natural elements (such as trees and snow as indicated in their drawing of the ideal LC) further emphasises their preference for a more calming and natural environment.
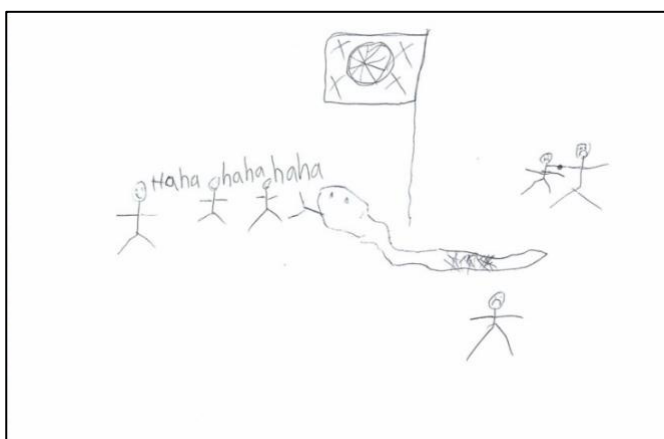
Figure 15. Alex's drawing of the not-ideal learning environment*.*

In addition to this, Morgan's parent, Jamie, who serves as both a mentor and parent at Brookside, highlighted the importance of co-creating the environment with the CYP to ensure its sustainability. Jamie emphasised the importance of caring for the environment which aligns with their view of creating an ideal LC for young people:

> *"How does our culture need to change in order to survive the species? [laughs]. But also coincidentally, and how conveniently, it seems to be very compatible with an ideal environment for young people." – Jamie (p.5)*

This collaborative approach not only reflects a commitment from the mentors and CYP at Brookside, but also reflects the adaptability of the learning environment to meet the needs of its community. Overall, the physical environment of Brookside seems to be characterised by its strong connection to nature, feelings of warmth and safety, its flexible use of spaces, and its commitment to environmental sustainability.

4.2.2. Subtheme: Community culture and atmosphere

The community culture and atmosphere within Brookside emerged as an important feature in shaping the participants experiences. In particular, the use of designated community spaces for relaxation and socialisation was discussed by Sam:

"'cause it's like nice, comfortable and warm ... and then the dragon's nest I like 'cause it's just great, like a nice place to hang out." – Sam (p.2)

Figure 16. Sam's photo of community spaces where they can hang out (1).

Figure 17. Sam's photo of community spaces where they can hang out (2).

There is a sense in Sam's account that they perceived warm and comfortable spaces at Brookside as important to socialising and relaxing with others.

Participants also appreciated the diverse range of enjoyable activities offered at Brookside. For instance, Alex spoke about their experiences of collaborative games at the LC where all the children and mentors created a pirate map and went on a treasure hunt:

"We all got together … made a map … so it looked like a pirate map, and then we walked around Brookside like it was a pirate map. It was really fun." – Alex (p.2)

Taylor also spoke about the difference it has made for Sam to be able to engage in community-led activities:

"I think having the opportunity to do stuff in a group and in a community rather than, uh … sort of individually … they can't access that kind of community at school … being able to be at Brookside and explore stuff with other people … makes all the difference, really." – Taylor (Sam's parent, p.11)

Participants described an ideal LC to be one which offers opportunities for fun, laughter and joy. The open, outdoor space, which is embedded in nature, offers CYP opportunities to engage in imaginary play.

"I just feel like we're here and running around and having fun." – Alex (p.2)

"Imaginary play is just absolutely like the number one thing that young people want to do when they're that age and for quite a long time as well." – Jamie (Morgan's parent, p.3)

Figure 18. Alex's photo of the trees where they like to run.

This emphasis on enjoyment and engagement reinforces the importance of feeling autonomous in a supportive and nurturing environment. Furthermore, participants described a sense of safety upon returning to Brookside following unsuccessful school placements.

"Um, but anyway, after I went there, I decided to come back to Brookside while I do my GCSE's … But my experience with Brookside is very good. I really like it here." – Sam (p.3)

"But then, luckily, the pandemic happened and so, we were able to go back to Brookside." – Morgan (p.3)

Morgan's use of the word 'luckily' emphasises the relief of being able to return to a sense of safety and receive unconditional support at Brookside. For Morgan, this was incredibly important as they navigated several unsuccessful school placements and difficult family dynamics in relation to making decisions around HE. There seemed to be a sense of responsibility among the members at Brookside in supporting CYP who are new to attending a LC. This was reflected in Morgan's sentiments:

"Make sure you're thinking, before you say something to think, 'is this going to useful and productive for them, or is it going to make them feel like they're in school again and in trouble?'" – Morgan (p.4)

Participant's experiences highlighted the significance of contributing to a positive culture at Brookside which are characterised by a sense of commonality and shared experiences. This was also observed by Jamie's use of the word 'we' to indicate Brookside as a collective identity:

"There's no way we could, it could work unless we were able to be in community with each other." – Jamie (Morgan's parent, p.3)

Brookside's use of weekly 'community meetings' allow CYP to bring topics to the attention of all members around awareness (what is being noticed by particular members that needs to be addressed), needs and values (how does this align with the community ethos), practicing (how is this being actioned and when can it be marked as resolved) and mastery (the community have mastered this item). This space encourages members to discuss wider community issues in a more formalised, yet collaborative setting, where everyone was encouraged to share their thoughts and opinions. Despite Brookside being composed of mixed age members, the power dynamic between the two groups (younger and older group) was named and considered in relation to *who* and *how* members were engaging in discussions. In relation to this, Alex reflected on the complexity of adapting to change within Brookside, particularly in the context of weekly community meetings. They acknowledged that changes introduced, although intended to improve the growing LC, did not necessarily align with their own views on improvement:

> *"Well suddenly people want – [mentor] has been bringing in ideas of what they thinks is improving which to me is not, but to them is quite new and everyone else is … from being, just a hands signal, like putting your hand up, now it's – it's so different." – Alex (p.2)*

Alex's account reflects the evolving culture at Brookside. Their perception of new ideas and approaches introduced by mentors are juxtaposed with their own views. For instance, their use of pronouns ("they" and "their" for the mentor, "me" for themselves) seems to reflect their personal sense of identity and ownership in their perspectives on the changes. This emphasises the personal investment Alex feels within Brookside and how the changing culture is impacting them personally.

4.3. GET 2: Building and maintaining community bonds

All participants talked about the role of building and maintaining relationships at Brookside. This was discussed in relation to relationships with mentors, with other CYP and using each other as a resource, as well as the importance placed on navigating conflicts.

4.3.1. Subtheme: Relationships within the community

Participants highlighted that their relationships with mentors are fostered through light-hearted and informal approaches which create feelings of trust and safety:

"Yeah I think that you can just do whatever you want and the mentors will help you with that." – Morgan (p.3)

"The mentor – not the teacher, the mentor – I think that they should help you … they could give you ideas, and support you with anything you needed … I think that they could just be there if you need them for anything." – Morgan (p.4)

"[Alex] knows them really well. And their relationship with [mentor 1] is lovely and [mentor 2] - I think they can speak to all of them and I think they- they are very relaxed with [Alex]." – Charlie (Alex's parent, p.4)

Morgan placed an emphasis using the word 'mentor' rather than 'teacher' within the context of Brookside, emphasising the difference between the two roles. This difference is conceptualised by mentors being "there if you need them for anything" suggests feelings of reliance and trust. There seems to be a form of holistic support offered by mentors which goes beyond academic support to also include emotional support and guidance. This sense of unconditional regard and empathy was also echoed by Sam's parent, Taylor, who feels that Sam is able to trust and rely on the mentors, something they were not able to experience with the adults from their previous education settings:

"[Sam's] kind of talked to me about how [they] relate to them both differently … but [they] likes them both and gets on with them, feels comfortable and trusts them in a way that like I was saying [they] didn't have with any of the adults really at their previous, uh, settings." – Taylor (Sam's parent, p.10)

Jamie also spoke about the differences in how the mentors approach their interactions with CYP by using non-judgemental and empathetic approaches:

"We don't use any manipulative behaviour management … we try to always be non-judgemental and to – our role as adults is not to make a judgement on what happened but it's to support the young people to explore their actions through empathy, rather than judgement … we'll generally ask a lot of questions, um, rather than tell people what we think." – Jamie (Morgan's parent, p.4)

Here, Jamie provides a description on how Brookside empowers and encourages CYP to reflect on their challenges through ongoing dialogue. By prioritising empathy over judgement, Brookside aim to create a safe environment where members feel able to trust each other and seek support, without fear of criticism. This approach seems to promote problem-solving among its members which is reinforced each time a member is supported. This context is perhaps one of the motivators which allows participants to feel that Brookside is a suitable environment for building relationships and socialising with others.

"But the thing Brookside provides is like – I probably wouldn't have met all those people like – how they helped me make friends, since there was already so many people already here." – Alex (p.2)

"Friends are like one of the main reasons I go to Brookside."- Sam (p.8)

"I thought, 'okay I'll go and talk to a new person' since they was quite new I think, first day or so, and I went over to [them] … and I said hi, and around an hour or two hours later, it was home time and we didn't realise because we had been chatting for so long. We were good friends." – Alex (p.2)

Participants also talked about using other CYP in Brookside as a resource and seeking support from each other:

"I think that if they were in a problem, then they would go and ask each other for help." – Morgan (p.4)

This was particularly the case where participants had shared experiences and similar beliefs around schooling. For instance, both Morgan and Sam shared they had difficult school experiences and wanted to reflect on this together in a paired interview (rather than individually). Morgan and Sam described their friendship as forming 'instantly' and very close, indicating a close friendship that feels natural and effortless:

"We've been friends for three and a half years. And [Sam] knows basically everything about me." – Morgan (p.1)

"I made friends with Morgan, and we became best friends like almost instantly." – Sam (p.2)

Morgan and Sam emphasised how close they are and how important the other was to their experience at Brookside. This indicates that they both seemed to find strength in their shared experiences. This collective resilience seems to reinforce their sense of belonging and bonds with others at Brookside.

Further, Alex also spoke about changes in social dynamics as people enter and leave Brookside (including CYP and mentors):

"People decided to stop and then people left … I went through two sets [mentors] of being there the entire time … Sometimes people change people. So like, [child 1] came, that completely changed [child 2]. And then I suddenly didn't want to be their friend cause of that." – Alex (p.3)

These observations highlight the fluid nature of relationships at Brookside and how the entry and exit of individuals can lead to changes in group dynamics and interpersonal relationships. Alex's reflections indicate their ability to navigate evolving structures and relationships over time.

However, the parents of all three participants spoke about the small pool of CYP at Brookside and how this has impacted opportunities for their children developing friendships:

"That was their sort of pot to work from other kids and they was desperate to meet other children." – Charlie (Alex's parent, p.1)

"I think it's hard … not having a large pool of young people not to socialise with." – Jamie (Morgan's parent, p.3)

"I think one of the things they like about Brookside is definitely the social aspect. And I think that that's something that particularly this time around, and kind of over the last maybe six months-ish, has become more important for them and I think it's to do with their age of wanting to … sort of build up their own community." – Taylor (Sam's parent, p.9)

The emphasis on "hard", "definitely" and "more important" highlight the significance of the social aspect of LCs in their children's lives. This seems to reflect the broader concept of parent's roles in supporting their children to foster meaningful social connections and experience a sense of belonging in the HE context.

Both Sam and Morgan discussed the underrepresentation of certain demographic groups at Brookside. Morgan specifically noted the lack of female members at CYP, stating:

"I think there's not actually many girls here." – Morgan (p.8)

This further reflects some of the challenges regarding diversity and inclusion at Brookside. Morgan reflected on the limited number of CYP has impacted their opportunities to form social connections.

4.3.2. Subtheme: Conflict resolution

Conflict resolution in Brookside emerged as a significant aspect of contributing to building and maintaining relationships. For instance, participants illustrated how conflicts

and challenges can arise within the LC. However, they discussed the role of navigating these conflicts in a collaborative and helpful way. They acknowledged that conflicts are an inherent part of life, but still require effective strategies for resolution and mitigation, with mentors facilitating this process:

> *"I think conflict resolution is actually really good and is really useful for lots of people … I think there's lots of learning opportunities with that." – Morgan (p.3)*

> *"There are so many things big things that sort of blow up one day and with- with the conversations and with the meetings, I'm often amazed at how quickly it's just gone, it disappears with the conversation. We're talking about it in a really, um, open, honest way." – Charlie (Alex's parent, p.5)*

> *"I think for a long time, it's just hard to get it out of your head that interactions with adults like that are just about being told off … we'll generally ask a lot of questions, um, rather than tell people what we think. We will talk to people, with a view to, finding a solution to a conflict that everyone is happy with. So we'll – do a lot of asking people how they feel and be able to think about how other people might feel. And um, and not to try to find the solution for them, generally speaking. So it's mostly around asking young people around what they think the solution is." – Jamie (Morgan's parent, p.4)*

These accounts highlight how conflict resolution is seen as an essential skill for navigating relationships. They emphasise the role of communication, empathy and collaboration in addressing conflicts in an environment where members feel heard and respected. Phrases such as "really good and really useful" (Morgan), "open and honest way" (Charlie) and "finding a solution that everyone is happy with" (Jamie) conveys a sense of optimism and collaboration in addressing conflicts. This is reinforced by Charlie who reflected "how quickly it's just gone" indicating the effectiveness and efficiency of the process. The word "gone" implies that conflicts are effectively addressed and resolved, leading to a sense of closure and resolution. This aligns with the use of pronouns ("I" and "we") indicates a personal and collective investment with the topic, reflecting the wider community's role in conflict

resolution. Overall, conflict resolution within Brookside was recognised a collaborative process involving the active participation of mentors and CYP, which is crucial to building and maintaining relationships in the LC.

4.4. GET 3: An individualised approach to learning

The participants reported that they are encouraged to have a say in their learning, and to adapt their learning with their own evolving interests. CYP at Brookside are encouraged to engage in 'Project Labs' where CYP identify areas of interest to them. They are supported to think about connections linked with these areas of interest that could form further areas of exploration, experimentation and study. CYP are supported to break down these ideas into "tangible actions", with CYP encouraged to identify goals and possibilities to support this process. This forms as part of a 'Learning Sprint' for the following four weeks at Brookside, to sustain the young person's HE in and outside of Brookside.

> *"It's very up to you what you want to do, so you can choose whatever you want to do." – Sam (p.3)*

> *"I think you would try – I think you would find out a way that works for you, for your learning." – Morgan (p.4)*

> *"I feel quite good after I've done all those things like ahhh. I've done these things, I want to do these things. I feel like I know everything and I can do anything." – Morgan (p.6)*

The participants expressed a strong sense of autonomy over their learning experience at Brookside, where they are able to make choices and adapt their goals to align with their interests. Sam and Morgan highlighted the freedom they have to select activities and approaches which work best for them, reflecting a self-directed ethos. Both Sam and Morgan's accounts indicate personal agency and satisfaction in the process of feeling autonomous in their learning.

Participants highlighted that Brookside proactively commit to facilitating and supporting activities suggested by the CYP attending. This also included being supported to structure their learning to individual needs and preferences, with topics in and outside of the national curriculum:

> *"A typical day would be like going um, seeing Morgan, playing some games, like boardgames, card games … I like when we do some baking." – Sam (p.2)*

> *"Basically everything I want, I enjoy doing … I would do what people call 'work' like maths, English, and I'd do other things I'd wanted to do like learn about other things, even if they aren't in the curriculum." – Morgan (p.4)*

This was also echoed by Jamie, Morgan and Taylor who explained that CYP are encouraged to share their ideas with the mentors, whose role it is to "facilitate the process" and help bring those ideas "into reality".

> *"It helps Morgan to structure their projects mainly, that's the main thing that's helpful … they have all these ideas that they want to do but actually taking those ideas to reality, that's the tricky bit and that's what Brookside aims to do really – is to help people understand how they can get from that idea to making it a reality." – Jamie (Morgan's parent, p.2)*

> *"They're [mentor] actually pretty good at doing maths with us and I find it really fun and enjoyable. Um, I also do French with another mentor, and then I do writing with the same mentor that I do maths with. And then I do my work outside of the Brookside which is fun." – Morgan (p.4)*

> *"It's a structure that's kind of based around their and what they want to do and helping support their in following their own kind of interest in their own desires and where they want to go with things." – Taylor (Sam's parent, p.7)*

Similarly to the flexible and personalised approach used at Brookside, Charlie also spoke about adopting a similar approach in relation to home educating Alex. They shared there is a choice to engage in structured learning at home, which is balanced with flexibility and responsiveness to Alex's interests and motivation.

"We also do structured learning with them every morning. And we chop and change. Sometimes we do three days a week and then they decide their days off and sometimes we do - we do all days of the week … so it kind of varies with our work and with them and how reluctant or how um, interested they are." – Charlie (Alex's parent, p.2)

Taylor shared their experience of how Brookside were able to work flexibly with their family in supporting Sam's initial transition into Brookside:

"They started off doing just the part time thing … it was quite tricky at the beginning because their anxiety was still quite high and I had to kind of go with them … and then gradually I'd sort of sit a little bit further away … having that flexibility that I could do that was the reason they were able to go really. And gradually they got more comfortable there and they, uh, made friends with Morgan, who they ended up getting on with really well. And so that helped build their confidence as well. And eventually, I think after … sort of a couple of months, they said they wanted to go to Brookside properly and go for three days a week." – Taylor (Sam's parent, p.4)

For Taylor, it was important that Sam's wellbeing and comfort was being prioritised during the transition period. Taylor's use of the words "gradually" and "eventually" emphasised the patience and flexibility demonstrated by Brookside during the transition period. This is in contrast to Sam's account of a 'not ideal' LC, where they described a heavily controlled environment, formal or lacking in opportunities for student agency and decision making:

"They'd not listen to you and like, be like very formal and not very friendly and not like let you make decisions. They'd be rude and things like that." – Sam (p.2)

This was reiterated by Taylor who shared Sam's experiences at their previous specialist setting where adults were not able to support Sam in developing autonomy in their learning:

> *"They didn't seem to understand the idea of autonomy in that … they would give Sam work to do, and if they didn't want to do it, they'd say, 'that's fine, you don't have to do it', but they wouldn't support their to do anything else … I felt quite frustrated in that they didn't seem to understand that there's a difference between saying, 'well you don't have to do something, you can just sit there', or actually actively supporting people to do what they really want to do, what they're interested in and what will work for them ... that didn't seem to be an option." – Taylor (Sam's parent, p.5)*

Sam and Taylor's description highlights how important they feel it is for a learning environment to prioritise student autonomy and respect for individual preferences. This, in conjunction with Taylor's account of how Brookside were able to flexibly support their transition, may contribute to Sam's positive experiences at Brookside.

Similar to this, Morgan reflected feeling a loss in motivation in subjects which are monitored by adults (parents or mentors), as they can act as a barrier to feeling autonomous in their learning:

> *"It's hard for me to get the motivation to do things like maths, English, science, geography, like all the things I want to do." – Morgan (p.5)*

Jamie shared that although Brookside is an under resourced LC, it does not stop the mentors or the space from offering CYP the knowledge or skills they seek. Jamie highlighted the role of promoting self-study, outsourcing skills and knowledge and using the internet as a resource:

> *"If we don't have the particular knowledge or skills, we can either bring them in or find them from elsewhere. Or, and also promote self-study as well, that's another big thing. We don't necessarily – because we have the internet there's no need for us to*

*have all the knowledge in the world because we have this amazing resource that we
can look up anything we need to." – Jamie (Morgan's parent, p.2)*

Interestingly, participants had different views on how Brookside was catering to the
needs of CYP of different ages. For example, Charlie shared that feels Brookside are able to
offer more opportunities than they were previously able to (when their eldest child attended
a few years ago). However, Charlie also shared how they and their partner worry about how
much stimulation Alex experiences in a LC:

*"Brookside now sort of offers more for children as they're a bit older … but I know my
partner worries that sometimes … like there isn't enough stimulation going on. Um,
as they're growing older they sort of feel … worried about these challenges." – Charlie
(Alex's parent, p.2)*

Similarly, Sam reflected that although it shouldn't be the case, it is hard to create a balanced
learning environment that is student-led but also academic:

*"It's very hard to make somewhere very like student-led and very fun and very nice
and also be quite academic." – Sam (p.6)*

Jamie explained that structured environments can be provided by mentors at
Brookside where they fit the interests of young people. However, Sam expressed
reservations about the suitability of structured approaches for older learners in the context
of a LC.

*"Sometimes session can be taught or structured but only when they fit in with the
interests of the young people." – Jamie (Morgan's parent, p.2)*

*"I feel like those communities are very important but not really for when you get
older, a lot of people aren't just gonna wanna do that, they're gonna want a more
structured environment." – Sam (p.1)*

"Well personally I would say that I love Brookside, I think it's a really good place, but no [to feeling clever]." – Sam (p.6)

This observation suggests a potential disconnect between how structured, formalised learning opportunities at Brookside and the desires of older learners for a more traditional academic learning environment are addressed. Both Sam and Morgan expressed feelings of low competence in this environment and that they considered continuing their education elsewhere. This suggests a willingness to explore alternative learning environments despite their positive experiences at Brookside. There seems to be a complex dynamic between the pedagogical approaches adopted by Brookside and preferences of older learners.

For instance, Sam's increased emphasis on core subjects reflects a prioritisation of academic achievement within the structured learning environment at Brookside. This focus seems to be limiting Sam's time and energy for pursuing other interests, as noted by Taylor:

"I think partly they … uh, they are focused because they, they spent a bit of time, quite a bit of time in Brookside and then a lot of their energy is focused on working on the Maths and English ... it does take up a lot of their kind of emotional energy, I think. So, they haven't got loads of time for exploring their other interests at the moment." – Taylor (Sam's parent, p.8)

This highlights there while Brookside offers flexibility and autonomy in learning, Sam experiences pressure to prioritise academic subjects within the available learning framework in order to meet their learning goals (i.e. pursue GCSEs and attend college).

4.5.   GET 4: Motivations to home educate and attend a learning community

Motivations to choosing to home educate and attend Brookside emerged as an important theme, with several individual and family factors identified, including parental beliefs and experiences, the child's choice, and support for special educational needs. External factors also emerged, which included accessibility of HE groups, financial barriers, the impact of the mainstream school system and under resourced LCs.

4.5.1. Subtheme: Individual and family factors

The role of parental perspectives and beliefs on education in opting to home educate and attend a LC emerged as a theme for all three participants. For instance, Taylor shared that although they had good experiences of state education in the UK, they had heard and learned about HE as a young person. This interested them as a path for their children as their family lived overseas:

"I do remember thinking that I liked the sound of it, and that part of me thought I'd quite like to have been home-educated myself ... so we talked, but they wanted to go to school. And so they did that for two years ... they were quite happy there." – Taylor (Sam's parent, p.1)

However, Taylor shared their older children wanted to go to school (Sam's older siblings) and therefore these discussions continued as Sam (and their twin) entered the school system and began to experience difficulties with working under pressure in school. After feeling frustrated with the lack of progress being made, the family chose to "try out" HE while they were overseas.

"They couldn't work under pressure, and so even, they never managed to kind of progress with the maths test, even though they were able to do it ... so we decided to, um, try out doing HE and where we were which was in [country], there was a very big community there." – Taylor (Sam's parent, p.1)

Jamie shared that their initial influence on parenting emerged out of their research into child development and psychology, which focused on an autonomous and self-directed approaches. They shared that their observations of the school system during their teacher training degree were 'completely contradictory' and 'incompatible' to how their children functioned as a family.

"I was looking at how we were as a family, and I was looking at the school system, and I was thinking these things are really incompatible ... I really didn't want to put

Morgan into manipulative, heavily manipulative environment that was completely contradictory to everything we had been trying to do." – Jamie (Morgan's parent, p.1)

Morgan reflected on their parents' wishes in relation to HE, feeling able to access the type of "education [they] want[s]". This is reinforced by Morgan's contributions to practical projects at Brookside, emphasising their active role in co-constructing the LC.

Figure 19. Morgan's photo of the composting toilet that they helped create.

Figure 20. Morgan's photo of the stone oven that they helped create.

Similar to this, Charlie reflected on their own experiences of being schooled that they did not 'particularly like'. They shared that they had good friends who were home-educated and were able to engage in more play, while still being 'well ahead of that age group … academically'. Their reflection on choosing to home educate, they explained:

"It just seemed like a no brainer … that we did it." – Charlie (Alex's parent, p.1)

Their use of the word 'we' indicates the collaborative nature of this decision and a shared commitment to HE. However, Charlie spoke of this further and having to navigate and manage different opinions in the family context towards HE, as well as Alex's evolving views around changes at Brookside:

"We've gotta navigate both of our own opinions on being home-educated as well and us discussing that which is sometimes not the easiest thing 'cause it's obviously something we care so passionately about."- Charlie (p.1)

"Kind of gone worse and worse … they [mentor] think it's improving which to me it's not." – Alex (p.2)

Moreover, Charlie shared that the motivation for Alex to attend Brookside was primarily for him to independently meet and socialise with other home-educated CYP as:

"That quite often with home-schooling … parents have far more control over who their children are friends with because you have to organise play dates." – Charlie (Alex's parent, p.1)

This was also highlighted by Jamie who shared that they wanted a "sense of solid community" as a parent, but also for Morgan to meet other CYP, while also engaging in their own activities.

"I wanted my kids to see the same kids but not feel the pressure to be doing anything in particular, so they could build their own projects." – Jamie (Morgan's parent, p.1)

This sense of community for the family was also highlighted by Alex who spoke about choosing to visit Brookside while their older sibling initially attended, which allowed them to become more familiar with the environment and people and support their transition later

on. They reflected on fond memories of playing with their sibling by the pond and getting to know some of the children attending Brookside during this time.

"So then, I came for real, actually coming here. It was so easy since I knew everyone … and I knew my surroundings." – Alex (p.2)

Figure 21. Alex's photo of the bench where they and their sibling played by the pond.

It is important to note that all parents highlighted that the decision to attend (or return to) school should be the child's:

"I feel like if they does go to school … they has to want to." – Charlie (Alex's parent, p.2)

"They went into school for a bit but that wasn't mine or their choice." – Jamie (Morgan's parent, p. 1)

"We said to them, 'What do you think, do you want to try going to secondary school, or do you want to carry on with Home Ed?', and they decided they wanted to give it a try." – Taylor (Sam's parent, p.10)

These statements convey a sense of respect for their children's autonomy and individual agency in shaping their educational journey. There is a supportive and collaborative

approach to decision making wherein the child's voice is valued and considered in all matters concerning their education. This sense of choice in making this decision was reflected by Morgan and Sam, who shared their readiness of transition from Brookside to pursue academic qualifications and further education.

> *"I want to try; I want to go to secondary school in Year 9 and get my GCSE's." – Morgan (p.3)*

> *"I decided to come back to Brookside while I do my GCSE's and then next year, I'm gonna go to college." – Sam (p.3)*

Alex and Sam's parents also discussed the complexities in supporting special educational needs within the HE context, acknowledging the support and challenges involved. For instance, Charlie shared Alex's difficulties with speech and language, and that they had to privately source professional support for this. Charlie shared that as parents they were worried about Alex being bullied at school due to their needs, and that also contributed to their motivation to continue with Alex's HE and attending Brookside.

> *"Alex had a speech deficit, so we took them to a speech therapist and because they weren't being schooled then so we had to pay for that as well … and we also felt that when they came to school age, we - I just thought they would be ripped apart at school to be honest with you." – Charlie (Alex's parent, p.1)*

Charlie's narrative highlights the financial and emotional challenges with sourcing support independently for Alex, as well as the possibilities of Alex being bullied at school due to their additional needs. Similarly, Taylor reflected on Sam's diagnosis of Autism and profile of personal demand avoidance (PDA) and how that had impacted their anxiety and subsequent masking in school. They shared:

> *"Often people with PDA don't necessarily fit the traditional profile of autism like often they're more interested in socialising and they can be very good at masking and so it can be tricky to figure out what's going on." – Taylor (Sam's parent, p.3)*

Taylor's reflections around the complexity with symptoms associated with PDA, highlights the needs for greater awareness and sensitivity in supporting CYP with this presentation. However, Taylor and Sam shared they felt that the adults at Sam's previous settings made little to no effort to understand Sam's needs. This, in combination with feeling under pressure and anxiety in school contexts, led to Sam returning to HE and Brookside. Overall, these insights contribute to a greater understanding of the motivations which resulted in these three young people and their families choosing to home educate and attend a LC.

4.5.2. Subtheme: External factors

Taylor shared that their family lived overseas where they described HE as a "very big community". They explained that there was flexibility in enrolling into HE, which was viewed as a positive alternative option for families, with state access to co-operative classes, library, resources, and local community groups, that were all fairly inexpensive. However, Taylor shared that when moving back to England, they found it more difficult to access community-based support for HE as they found it to be a "lot more scattered".

> *"You had to kind of traipse around a lot more and find different things. You'd go to one thing and there'd be one group of people, and you'd go to something else and there'd be a different group of people … felt a bit less cohesive."* – Taylor (Sam's parent, p.2)

Similarly, Jamie shared that the big HE 'scene' in the area was "almost too much", indicating that there was a lack of cohesion within the community. Jamie shared their desires for a community with greater connectivity and cohesion among home educating families in the area. This motivated them to establish Brookside and offer a community space where CYP were able to socially interact with each other:

> *"What was missing … I wanted Morgan and later [sibling] to have this solid community so people that they saw regularly – there's a lot going in [area] and there has been for the whole time that we've been here. But it's almost too much so there*

isn't like one home ed community … there's probably people that you would never meet because you've always been home edding as well … it's such a big community." – Jamie (Morgan's parent, p.1)

Taylor highlighted that Sam's needs around feeling autonomy in their learning, their experience of anxiety and increasing pressures in school, contributed to the decision to request for an educational, health, care plan (EHCP) to access more funding from the local authority to meet their needs in a specialist provision. Here, Sam was hoping to be able to complete their GCSEs. Despite the specialist setting initially presenting as being more flexible in supporting Sam's needs, Charlie shared a lot of the provision outlined was not put into place.

"When we'd gone round, it seemed like it was going to be really good … they seem to be much more flexible in a way a mainstream school couldn't be … But then when we actually went … a lot of it wasn't." – Taylor (Sam's parent, p.4)

Not only this, but the commute to the specialist setting took an hour, which left Sam feeling exhausted. Sam also shared that the found the people at the school were "really bad":

"The people there didn't have like … they weren't taught how to behave, so they would make like, um, horrible jokes and do really bad things." – Sam (p.6)

Sam was motivated to attend this specialist setting to obtain their GCSEs, however, Taylor shared that the school had determined that Sam would not be capable of doing GCSE's (despite working at GCSE level) and suggested functional skills courses instead:

"Sam was really keen to do GCSEs. That was one of the reasons they wanted to go to school because they wanted a supportive environment to be able to do their GCSEs. But the school decided that they wouldn't be capable of doing GCSEs, or they [weren't] at the level to do them, and so they'd have to do functional skills instead." – Taylor (Sam's parent, p.5)

This impacted Sam's motivation to continue at the specialist setting, and led to the subsequent decision to return to Brookside, while continuing their GCSEs via HE and tutoring:

> *"They said they wanted to have something … that they enjoyed, and as well as just kind of working hard at the GCSE stuff … so we started talking about Brookside again. And so that's when, why they decided to go back there." – Taylor (Sam's parent, p.6)*

Similarly, Jamie reflected on the mainstream school system and discussed the pressure of proving oneself through a constant "doing" rather than "being".

> *"It's sort of constant doing rather than being. And I think what young people need more than anything is to just be and work out who they are … We need to find different ways of being. And I think a lot of that is less of an emphasis on the doing." – Jamie (Morgan's parent, p.4)*

For Jamie, there is an inherent tension between academic performance and individualised identity development with "political education frameworks". Jamie highlighted the need to prioritise holistic development and student-centred learning experiences. This was also reflected by Morgan who uses "you" to portray that it should be up to the person who decides what is best for them in terms of attending school or accessing an alternative space for learning:

> *"I think you should decide what is best for you and not let anyone else decide what is best for you. If you think that school is for you, then go to school … if school is not working for you then maybe a learning community … a place where you get to do whatever you want." – Morgan (p.3)*

In relation to participating in a LC, Sam spoke about the lack of infrastructure (including knowledge and resources) around options for alternative education to engage with in the UK:

"I think that a lot of people don't realise that there's any option that isn't school and they just think they have to go to school. When in reality, there's lots of other options that people can do. And there should be even more options to spread awareness about them … I think there should be a lot more learning communities instead of schools … 'cause for some people, there aren't any where they live." – Sam (p.4)

Sam's reflections highlight broader societal misconceptions around HE, emphasising the need for greater visibility and accessibility of LC. Their call for "more learning communities instead of schools" speaks to meeting the growing demand of educational environments that prioritise student-centred learning and community engagement over conventional school structures.

"It was really great to be able to chat to people and spend time with the other adults … I do think is important about the Brookside, even though I'm not necessarily able to participate in it as much as I would like to … I didn't feel like a part of the community in any of the other schools or centres that the kids have been to." – Taylor (Sam's parent, p.11)

It is important for Taylor to feel a sense of belonging at Brookside through accessing community-based support. However, they explained that they have not always been able to participate in family events (either due to time constraints or lack of available opportunities). This may be attributed to the nature of LCs being under resourced and facing financial challenges. For instance, in relation to the role of mentors, Jamie shared:

"The mentors are really the labour of love. We're always under resourced because of the nature of it – we want to be as financially accessible as possible so generally the people who do this, do this because they really care about it … it's important people get paid a fair wage and to balance that, balancing it all in this particular- in this climate, is quite challenging." – Jamie (Morgan's parent, p.6)

Their description of mentors as the "labour of love" highlights the dedication and passion of the adults involved in these communities despite the limited resources. Jamie recognised

the difficulty in balancing financial sustainability with accessibility for CYP, families and mentors. This seems to reflect ongoing systemic challenges in supporting alternative education initiatives within the current economic climate.

Chapter 5: Discussion

5.1.   Chapter overview

This study aimed to explore the pedagogical approaches used within a LC which impact CYP's experience of autonomy, competence and relatedness, as well as CYP's overall psychological wellbeing. A Mosaic-based approach was utilised to explore CYP's views using interviews, drawings, tours and photography, in addition to interviews with parents. The main findings are presented and contextualised in relation to the following research questions:

- How do the pedagogical approaches in a learning community impact CYP's experiences of autonomy, competence and relatedness?
- What pedagogical approaches within a learning community are perceived by its stakeholders as influencing CYP's psychological wellbeing?

The four Group Experiential Themes (GETs) that emerged from the interpretative analysis are as follows:

- Characteristics of the learning community
- Building and maintaining community bonds
- Motivations to home educate and attend a learning community
- An individualised approach to learning

In this chapter, I will address each research question by referencing the relevant themes. As new areas of interest emerged through the analysis, new literature will also be presented to further understanding.

5.2.   Research Question 1: How do the pedagogical approaches in a learning community impact CYP's experiences of autonomy, competence and relatedness?

This section will be presented according to the three areas identified in the basic needs theory, as part of self-determination theory (SDT; Ryan & Deci, 2000).

5.1.1. Autonomy

5.1.1.1. An individualised approach to learning

The CYP indicated that they experienced autonomy at Brookside through an individualised approach to learning where they are able to choose what and how they learn. The parents reported that a self-directed approach to learning had made a difference to their child's motivation and engagement to learn, as well as their overall wellbeing. At Brookside, this was highlighted by Jamie who spoke about the role of mentors in facilitating ideas CYP have around their learning and bringing them 'to reality'. Similarly, they also spoke about Brookside's responsibility in ensuring CYP have access to opportunities in their environment which align with CYP's learning interests, needs and preferences. For instance, learning at Brookside can be formal and informal, with opportunities for structured teaching (e.g. Maths) but only where it aligns with the interests of the CYP. This aligns with Fensham-Smith's (2021) reflections on how the *content* (the activity) and *processes* (degree of control between adult and child during the learning process) used in HE can overlap, which also seems to be the case for Brookside. This aligns with Cunningham et al. (2023) who reports that many settings are able to effectively accommodate to diverse learning needs and preferences across the developmental stages. The current study found that Brookside is one of these settings, which aligns with existing research which highlights CYP can function positively when their environments nurture their need for autonomy (Black & Deci, 2000; Jang et al., 2009; Roth et al., 2009; Haynes & Suissa, 2022).

Another way CYP experience autonomy at Brookside is through their choice in attending Brookside and/or being home-educated. Participants described the freedom of CYP to choose who home educate, whether they choose to attend Brookside (including attending on a daily or intermittent basis), and the freedom to be themselves once they are at Brookside. Parents accredited this freedom with CYP experiencing autonomy and choice, with the decision to return to mainstream school ultimately being the CYP's. This aligns with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNICEF, 1990) which places CYP to have their views sought and taken seriously in all matters regarding them (i.e. their education). In

fostering their autonomy, Brookside's pedagogy seems to align with the philosophy of home educators, who empower CYP to actively participate in decisions that affect their lives and education. This supports existing research from Nelson (2014) which found home educating parents and CYP exercised their autonomy in seeking educational and social opportunities including groups and social networks, resources, and activities. These approaches allow CYP to develop a tailored learning experience, feel responsible and accountable for their own learning. This sense of autonomy enables CYP to develop confidence and a strong sense of identity, which has been cited as a positive predictor of wellbeing (Karaś & Cieciuch, 2018).

5.1.2. Competence

5.1.2.1. An individualised approach to learning

Although this theme was discussed in relation to fostering autonomy and choice for CYP, it was also discussed as a barrier in experiencing competence (a sense of mastery) at Brookside. For instance, two of the young people reflected on the dissonance between creating a learning environment which is student-led and academic. They shared that although there were opportunities for structured learning at Brookside, they did not feel there were enough for their growing interests across subject areas. The young people expressed concerns about not feeling 'clever' enough, which was inhibiting the older learners at Brookside in achieving mastery in their chosen areas of interest. This also extended to some parental concerns around the LC environment not being 'stimulating enough'. In order to address these concerns, the young people discussed wanting to return to mainstream school to fulfil their feelings of competence through formal qualifications, such as GCSEs.

This reference to neoliberal views on intelligence suggests there is a broader societal influence on how CYP perceive intelligence is conceptualised and valued, which seems to be impacting the young people's perceptions of their own abilities, despite the learning environment they are in. In the neoliberal context which shapes traditional schooling, there is an emphasis on individual responsibility and competition, where success is measured by

one's ability to excel in the market economy (Ball, 2021). Within the context of traditional schooling, intelligence is often narrowly defined and equated with academic achievement, through a knowledge-based curriculum, reinforced through standardised testing and formal qualifications (such as GCSEs; Christodoulou, 2014; Ball, 2011). Due to these views, Brookside's philosophy is likely shaped by an active choice to pursue alternative approaches that deviate from pedagogy utilised in traditional schooling. This was reinforced by Jamie who felt there is a pressure in traditional schooling to constantly be "doing" rather than "being". Perhaps there is some resistance to offering pedagogy that is similar to school (i.e. structured lessons) because of Brookside's philosophy. This aligns with the Freedom to Learn (2024) manifesto, as well as Bowers' (2017) findings which found an emphasis on home educators pedagogy to be a process-driven approach, rather than outcome-focused approach. However, if intelligence is considered to be primarily associated with academic success in wider society, CYP are at risk of being subjected to an internalised sense of failure (Mind, 2021). This is particularly important as CYP who feel they are falling short of expectations, which may put them at risk of experiencing long-term consequences on their mental health and wellbeing (Maratos, 2020; Putwain, 2008). This may explain why the older young people at Brookside are struggling to feel competent, as Brookside's philosophy does not prioritise or reinforce traditional academic metrics.

This finding also highlights the barriers home-educated parents and CYP are faced with when wanting to access formal qualifications (in the form of reattending school, externally sitting exams, accessing funding for exam centres). The unjust position that home-educating families often find themselves in should be acknowledged by educators, researchers and policymakers. Although public funding for these spaces may involve its own difficulties and perhaps resistance from those within the HE community, funding should be considered for those CYP who desire it. A lack of these resources and support in Brookside may explain the noticeable dissatisfaction expressed by the young people in relation to specialist knowledge and access to exams. In the context of the SDT, feelings of competence are fundamental to intrinsic motivation and psychological wellbeing (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Although Brookside prioritises autonomy, freedom, student-led learning, and non-traditional approaches to education, there seems to be a gap in providing academic opportunities which align with CYP's aspiration and needs. It is important to note that these tensions seem

to be primarily rooted in societal norms, financial difficulties and accessibility, factors which cannot be fully addressed by LCs in isolation but continue to affect the learning experiences of CYP at Brookside.

5.1.3. Relatedness

5.1.3.1. Relationships with the community

The interactions CYP have with each other at Brookside are through the use of mixed age and gender groups, with other CYP in neighbouring LCs or the wider HE community, as well as adult interactions (with mentors and parents). The interactions are informal, with all members encouraged to intentionally be as non-judgemental, accepting and empathetic towards each other. This is consistent with Rogers' (1961) concept of unconditional positive regard which provides the foundation to members feeling heard and understood. This is achieved by allowing CYP to mix with other CYP, and mentors, in a relaxed and informal environment, which for the participants, seemed to be restorative to the social and emotional difficulties experienced in school. The use of community spaces (such as morning group check ins and weekly community meetings) serve as an opportunity for CYP to share new ideas and/or bring topics to the attention of members. An example of this included the younger children sharing the group dynamics they had observed in community spaces during recent weeks, where they felt the older young people were contributing more to discussions. These spaces were facilitated by mentors using solution focused frameworks in a supportive way which seemed to enable CYP to meaningfully engage in discussions, and therefore experience a sense of relatedness and belonging. This supports previous research which found HE groups provided CYP with opportunities to build meaningful relationships with peers of different ages (Bowers, 2017). These meaningful interactions offer opportunities for emotional support, feeling heard, and developing a sense of shared identity, which seem to foster their psychological needs (Tajfel & Turner, 1985; Haim-Litevsky et al., 2023).

In addition to this, Brookside offers a unique environment which enables CYP to build friendships beyond the limits of organised parental activities among the HE community. Although a lack of regular peer group social interaction has been cited as a limitation for HE in a number of studies (e.g. Shirkey, 1987; Jackson, 2007; Webb, 1999), and can be a misconception among professionals and/or outsiders to HE (e.g. Ed Psyched, 2024), the current study found that home-educated CYP have opportunities and the freedom to build meaningful friendships through diverse, mutual and shared experiences. By facilitating friendships that extend beyond parental oversight in HE, Brookside promotes autonomy and independence, while nurturing CYP's sense relatedness in the LC. However, two parents also highlighted the 'limited pool' of CYP available at Brookside for their children to socialise with and had considered alternatives for their children (e.g. joining additional HE groups or LCs, networking with other parents, and returning to traditional schooling). These insights indicate that despite the supportive relationships that exist within the community, the potential constraints on socialisation opportunities (particularly for the older young people) may leave some aspects of relatedness unfulfilled at Brookside. While Brookside has an important role in promoting social connectedness among home educating families, the area of peer interaction needs to be considered in the context of HE and LCs.

5.1.3.2. Conflict resolution

Similarly, relatedness at Brookside is also underpinned by the absence of hierarchy and the importance of conflict resolution. Brookside's focus on 'community' allows them to priorities the needs and interests of individual CYP, using non-hierarchical approaches. The open communication channels enable CYP to meaningfully engage in these discussions, without the fear of judgement. Similarly, rather than relying on disciplinary measures to address conflicts, Brookside utilises restorative practices to address conflicts among members. This is supported by research which highlights the benefits of modelling and supporting CYP to engage in peer mediation as part of restorative practice (Wearmouth, McKinney & Glynn, 2007) including relationship repair (Kehoe et al., 2018), student-teacher (or mentor) relationships (Syrjalainen et al., 2015), feelings of connectedness (Gregory et al., 2014), and social skills needed to navigate life beyond education (Kim & Mabourgne, 2003).

This aligns with parents' sentiments from the current study who felt their other children had left Brookside with lifelong lessons from experiences of conflict resolution. Overall, these findings suggest that CYP are supported to explore constructive ways to resolve conflicts through dialogue, mediation, and empathy building exercises, which helps promote understanding and mutual respect among members, and ultimately fosters their relationships in Brookside.

5.1.3.3. Motivations to home educate and attend a learning community

Participants discussed broader societal and contextual influences while attending a LC which impacted their experiences of relatedness. Taylor's experience of transitioning from a HE community overseas to England (where they felt there was a lack of cohesion) and the financial strain in initially joining Brookside, highlights the importance of accessibility and support networks for this group. This frustration echoes the existing literature that has found parents citing financial barriers, lack of or difficulty accessing support groups, and difficulty accessing exam centres, college courses and work placements when taking responsibility for home educating their children (Smith-Fields & William, 2009; Fortune-Wood, 2006; Nelson, 2014). This sense of disconnection may not only affect the psychological wellbeing of CYP, but also their families who may feel unsupported and misunderstood in their educational choices. For example, in Nelson's (2014) study, home-educated young people spoke of feeling 'failed again' as a consequence of a lack of support. The difficulties in accessing resources may hinder the educational opportunities that are available to the HE community, which may result in feelings of frustration and further marginalisation. Overall, these findings highlight the importance of addressing accessibility issues in supporting CYP and families from the HE to feel understood, accepted and a sense of belonging.

5.2. **Research Question 2: What pedagogical approaches within a learning community are perceived by its stakeholders as influencing CYP's psychological wellbeing?**

5.2.1. The physical environment

In examining the influence of pedagogical approaches on CYP's wellbeing, the physical environment emerged as a significant factor. An aspect of this included the integration of Brookside in nature, with participants expressing a preference for learning in the woodlands, rather than sterile, grey buildings that they associated with traditional school buildings. This theme is important as research in 2015 highlighted that 1.6 million UK children did not play in or visit a natural environment in their lives (Hunt et al., 2016). Exposure to nature improves mood and overall mental health, while also stimulating movement and supporting connection with nature (Collado & Evans, 2019).

In recent years, the use of outdoor learning (such as Forest Schools, residential trips, outdoor adventure programmes) and its positive benefits on CYP's wellbeing, creativity and mood, as well as physical health, have been well studied (Gustafsson et al., 2012; Passy, 2019). Since outdoor learning has been shown great potential for supporting the health and wellbeing of CYP, efforts to integrate outdoor learning into the curriculum have been attempted yet continue to be underutilised beyond the early years (Christie et al., 2014). Although research has indicated its ability to be applied across the developmental span, there continues to be a marked decline in outdoor learning experiences between the early years and later stages of primary education (Waite et al., 2008). The common barriers cited by teachers and headteachers include curriculum pressure, existing demands on teaching time, teachers' confidence, safety, cost and access to resources and/or training (Kings College London, 2010; Edwards-Jones et al., 2016). As Brookside is an educational provision operating outside of traditional schooling, the barriers to implementing outdoor learning are not experienced to the same extent as in traditional schools (such as curriculum pressure, demands on teaching time, cost and access). With its unique location, CYP are able to engage in activities which are rooted in the outdoor context of the LC. This suggests that the physical environment itself is part of the Brookside's pedagogy, with research citing the

positive effects of outdoor learning on the mental health and wellbeing of CYP (Marchant et al., 2019).

5.2.2. *Community culture and atmosphere*

Similarly, the enabling environment within the indoor spaces at Brookside allow for CYP to explore and learn in rich, safe, and varied learning environments. This is consistent with the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS; DfE, 2011b) who describe an enabling environment as one which "supports children's learning and development" (p.7). The CYP from the current study reflected on the stimulating environments that represent socialising and learning. This included cosy, calm spaces with soft furnished areas, book corners, areas for sitting, relaxing and sleeping, as well as play. The environment has been developed over time following mentors' observations of the CYP at Brookside in order to respond to their needs, interests and preferences. This is supported by research highlighting the role of adults in providing opportunities for CYP to revisit, practice and enjoy a sense of mastery (i.e. competence) in an environment which supports and promotes their active learning and development (Wilcock, 2007). Although the EYFS curriculum allows for these environments to be made available, primary and secondary schools often lack the stimulating and enabling environments conducive to exploration and learning observed at Brookside. This LC employs pedagogical approaches tailored for young children but extends them to all ages, providing opportunities for continued growth and development.

Although the use of small groups is utilised in traditional schooling (often for teaching and learning or social groups), the approach taken within Brookside differs. Here, the use of small groups extend are characterised by freedom of expression and interaction. All members celebrate the mixed ages and gender dynamics, and how they can foster diverse perspectives, as well as encourage collaborative learning experiences. This differs from conventional schooling pedagogy as due to the smaller nature of Brookside; the LC are able to create inclusive environments where every individual's strengths and contributions are valued and nurtured.

In relation to this, Alex spoke of their preference for smaller groups and not wanting Brookside to be famous, with the fear of too many people joining the LC. Research has found small group learning allows for CYP to work cooperatively and collaboratively in small groups to achieve academic, affective and social goals (Kutnick et al., 2002). This suggests that Alex's preference for smaller groups reflect their desire for a smaller LC where cooperation and collaboration is possible. Alex's sentiments also align with the concept of 'social integration' (the number of social groups or connections one possesses, and/or the level of engagement one has with these connections; Brisette et al., 2000). Research has found that social integration promotes wellbeing by allowing individuals to feel a sense of meaning, security, as well as social support during difficult times (Cohen, 2004; Glass et al., 2006). This may contribute to experiencing a sense of purpose and belonging, which is cited as a predictor of positive mental health and wellbeing (Allen et al., 2018). This is achieved through a number of approaches, including the use of shared decision-making processes where CYP, mentors and parents contribute to shaping the direction of the community (i.e. developing and revising guidelines and community rules, and activity planning). In contrast to traditional schooling, which often encompass large numbers of CYP and adults, it is arguably more challenging to interact meaningfully with every member of the school community. As a result, the size of traditional schools may impact CYP in establishing a sense of belonging, feeling 'socially integrated' and a sense of purpose. This aligns with research from Riley et al. (2020) who found that 1 in 4 young people feel they do not belong in school, a figure which is growing and leaving CYP with SEND, in care or from marginalised backgrounds most at risk (Timpson Review, 2019). Therefore, by prioritising smaller group settings and fostering a sense of community, Brookside's pedagogical approaches ensure that all members are able to thrive emotionally and socially.

5.2.3. An individualised approach to learning

The current study found Brookside's ethos around flexibility extends to various aspects of the LC, particularly in facilitating self-directed learning among CYP. Fortune-Wood (2005) found that HE parents utilise a range of pedagogical approaches to accommodate for different age ranges and learning styles. This practice was also observed in Brookside, with

CYP accessing opportunities and freedom to make mistakes and observe consequences for their choices over time. This aligns with research that indicates self-directed settings cater for highly diverse groups of CYP, many of whom who have come out of school because it was not working for them (Fisher, 2023).

At Brookside, this flexibility to learning also extended to CYP accessing opportunities that they may have 'missed' in school. For instance, Jamie shared that despite being of secondary school age, Morgan continues to be interested in imaginary play. Other CYP at Brookside are encouraged to engage in what works best for them, which for many, includes an interest in play. Child-led, social and unstructured play has been well researched with many positive benefits on children's development, such as cognitive development (Barker et al., 2014), creativity and development of socio-emotional skills such as turn taking and negotiating (McElwain & Volling, 2005; Gray, 2011), physical activity (Ramstetter et al., 2010) and mental health (Dodd & Lester, 2021). Play is considered to be so vital to a healthy childhood that it is protected within the United Nations Convention on the Right of the Child (UNICEF, 1990). Yet, in the UK, research suggests that approximately 20% of children's time at school is spent outside formal lesson time, with playtimes decreasing by an average of 45 minutes per week between 1995 and 2018 for Key Stage 1 pupils and by 65 minutes in secondary schools (Baines & Blatchford, 2019). The survey indicated that schools named the need for increased formal learning time to cover the curriculum and address issues around behaviour as drivers for declines in play time. By embracing play as a pedagogical tool, Brookside encourages its use for all CYP for a more holistic and child-centred approach to learning. They create an environment conducive to skill development through various domains (such as imaginative play, collaborative projects, and experiential learning opportunities in the physical environment) where CYP are afforded the freedom, space and encouragement to explore and experiment.

Furthermore, an individualised approach to learning was also noted through the ways CYP and their families are supported in transitioning out of school and into Brookside. For instance, Taylor's account of Sam's transition into Brookside highlighted the role of flexibility and patience. By accommodating for Sam's anxiety, fostering their relationships with the mentors and other CYP, and allowing for gradual adjustments to be made over

time, Brookside was able to nurture Sam's emotional resilience and confidence in a community environment. Research into emotionally based school non-attendance (EBSNA) has highlighted the importance of 'trusted adult' as a strong protective factor for a child's wellbeing, particularly in transitioning back into educational settings. Young Minds (2023) defines a trusted adult as one who is "a safe figure that listens without judgement, agenda or expectation … sole purpose of supporting and encouraging positivity within a young person's life". However, the Young Minds (2023) *Someone To Turn To* report indicated that teachers were not considered 'trusted adults' due to the structures and expectations within traditional schooling which can impact their ability to build meaningful relationships with CYP. However, this study identified that non-hierarchical pedagogy in Brookside allows for a collaborative, egalitarian ethos which allows mentors, CYP, and parents to foster a sense of shared responsibility in supporting one another, including newcomers during transition periods.

Similarly, all three parents highlighted the difficulties in mainstream school meeting the needs of their children, particularly with the added context of their SEN. They shared several benefits of smaller group settings and informal learning environments, which had subsequent positive effects on CYP's learning. This included one-to-one mentorship, opportunities for peer interaction, and support in safe environments where the genuine interests of CYP were being fostered and encouraged. This aligns with previous findings in HE settings where the pedagogy utilised helped to prioritise individual needs which helped to reduce SEN symptoms (Nelson, 2014; Fortune-Wood, 2006). This is contrasted within the hierarchical structures often found within in traditional schooling. The findings highlight a unique pedagogical approach in Brookside in facilitating an inclusive environment, which is supported by research as conducive to supporting CYP's psychological wellbeing (Boyle, Allen, Bleeze, Sheridan & Bozorg, 2023; Faircloth et al., 2021; Allen et al., 2021).

It is important to note that Sam's perception of a not ideal LC was described as a heavily controlled and formal environment. This perception highlights the potential impact of pedagogical approaches on CYP's wellbeing which exist in traditional schooling. For instance, as a result of a growing and inflexible curriculum, and rigid success criteria (i.e. exam results), there has been a growth of punitive behaviour policies to contain CYP who

contest this coercive system (Ball, 2003; Bagley, 2023). Consequently, these policies have resulted in a surge of disciplinary measures including sanctions, segregation, including the use of 'internal exclusion' rooms, and increased rates of exclusions (Graham, 2018). Such punitive measures can contribute to feelings of alienation, stress and disengagement among CYP. This can be defined through the psychological construct of 'belongingness' (Baumeister & Leary, 1995) which refers to feeling connected via safe, consistent and reciprocal relationships. However, as a result of market-oriented policies that enhance competition and choice in traditional schooling, CYP who are subjected to punitive measures (often CYP with SEND, living in care, or those from marginalised backgrounds; Timpson Review, 2019) are often most in need of relational security, are at risk of being marginalised and therefore miss opportunities to build these in traditional schooling. The juxtaposition between the traditional schooling environment and Brookside's environment emphasises the need for ongoing evaluation of pedagogical practices across various contexts to explore how they foster the psychological safety and wellbeing of CYP in education.

Chapter 6: Conclusions

6.1. Overview

The purpose for this chapter is to outline final conclusions for the study, offer implication for practice, explore strengths, limitations and areas for future research.

6.2. Conclusions

This research was of importance due to increasing numbers of CYP reported to be home-educated in the UK, with figures estimated to be around 86,200 in 2023 (Long & Danechi, 2023). Within the term 'otherwise' as highlighted in the Education Act (1996), exist a range of innovative approaches which are delivered through the form of HE, HE groups, LCs, and other alternative education settings. There was no empirical study exploring how CYP engage with education in a LC. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore the pedagogical approaches within one self-directed LC named Brookside, with the aims of focusing on children and parents' experiences.

Self-determination theory (SDT) was a valuable psychological framework which helped to structure the experiences of children and parents within the principles of autonomy, competence and relatedness. The theory suggests that when an individual's interactions with their environment meet their needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness, they are likely to experience increased wellbeing (Deci & Ryan, 1985). The findings indicated that Brookside fosters autonomy by providing individualised learning experiences and empowering CYP to contribute and make decisions about their education. However, challenges in CYP experiencing competence were noted which concerned the perceived lack of structured learning opportunities and barriers experienced to accessing formal qualifications. Relatedness was fostered through inclusive community interactions and conflict resolution practices, yet concerns were raised in relation to socialisation opportunities outside of the LC. The study also highlighted the positive impact of outdoor learning, enabling and cosy environments, the use of small groups, focus on play and family-

centred planning on the psychological wellbeing of CYP at Brookside. While the pedagogical approaches at Brookside indicated to be supportive of CYP's wellbeing, broader societal and contextual factors, such as accessing resources and neoliberal views on intelligence, posed as barriers. Findings of this study emphasise the significance of re-evaluating traditional educational pedagogy and embracing alternative approaches which prioritise the holistic development and wellbeing of CYP. As discussed, the context of HE and LCs is interwoven with the socio-political context of education. However, there are opportunities for school systems, researchers, EPs and policymakers to work collaboratively to address these implications for practice.

6.3.   Implications for practice

It is often not recognised that schooling is a relatively recent form of education, with the dominant narrative around schooling being an essential good for all learners and society. This study explores an alternative to traditional schooling by exploring an area of HE that provides a different pedagogical perspective. HE has been gaining popularity with families in the UK, fuelled in part by frustrations with traditional schooling. Yet, it was clear from this small sample that government guidance and research may be needed to make professionals, as well as the wider public, aware that HE and LCs are a genuine and legal alternative to schooling. It is important to raise awareness about LCs within the broader context of HE so that families and CYP, as well as professionals, are aware of education that exist outside of traditional schooling.

Access to support services, including SEN provision and examinations, is crucial for ensuring that vulnerable groups of CYP, including those with SEN, have equitable access to education. Although privately educated CYP are often funded by parents, the argument for providing support to home-educated CYP is important when considering the vulnerable characteristics of this group. As discussed in the literature review, many families who choose to home educate do so due to concerns about their child's safety, mental health, or specific complex needs that parents feel are not met in mainstream education (Smith et al., 2020; Education Otherwise, 2022; Square Peg & Not Fine in School, 2021). However, these families

may continue to face additional financial, social, and logistical challenges in accessing support services, that can be difficult without external support. Providing access to resources and facilities (such as professionals, e.g. speech and language therapists, EPs, occupational therapists, etc.), can help mitigate some of these challenges and ensure that all CYP have access to support they need to thrive academically, socially and emotionally.

Furthermore, supporting home educated CYP during transition points (e.g. those pursuing GCSEs) requires careful consideration in relation to support systems if CYP feel they have to return to traditional schooling to access these. This involves not only academic readiness for the pedagogy utilised in traditional schooling, but also their resiliency to cope with challenges they may encounter upon their return. Typically, receiving schools would utilise an induction process to introduce new pupils to the school context. Perhaps there is a role here for EPs to utilise their skills and expertise by working curiously and empathetically with families to help identify outcomes which accommodate the diverse preferences and needs of home educating families. Similarly, an accessible and transparent infrastructure must be in place for CYP and families to navigate available resources and services, which is supportive of the diverse educational choices of this group.

As a TEP mainly working in state-maintained schools, similar to Bowers (2017), I reflected throughout the study how I could be perceived as biased towards traditional schooling. I reflected on the risks of professionals working within LAs, such as EPs, challenging the pedagogy used by home educators who are intentionally providing an education different to what many professionals grew up in, experienced and then trained in, including myself. This is pertinent given the increasing number of home-educated CYP, particularly those with complex needs, and that 17% of parents cited barriers to attendance and health needs (including CYP's mental health) as their initial reason for choosing to home educate (Education Otherwise, 2022; BBC, 2021; Long & Danechi, 2023; Ed Executive, 2024). The data currently suggests that more children with SEN are being home-educated, which can leave the most vulnerable children in our society potentially feeling understood and without the necessary support (Square Peg & Not Fine in School, 2021; Ball, 2021). Therefore, the pedagogy utilised in self-directed education should be considered by EPs in the context of how statutory guidance is written for home educated CYP in this particular

context (Every Child Matters, 2003; SEND Code of Practice, 2014; Children & Families Act, 2014).

Indeed, some LAs across England have home education teams who offer advice lines, support services and drop in events for parents and CYP considering HE (e.g. Surrey County Council, 2024), while other support services are offered through School Admissions teams (e.g. Tower Hamlets, 2024). There is a role for LAs to consider how HE support services are offered (i.e. separate to School Admissions teams to avoid biases towards schooling and to promote a culture of acceptance), as well as how these teams are composed. For instance, the inclusion of EPs may help in engaging, understanding and supporting CYP and their families who are transitioning to (or out) of HE. Given the increasing number of home-educated children, professionals are likely to have ongoing interactions with CYP and families from this group. It is therefore important that unchallenged assumptions are identified and reflected upon in order to avoid working with this group in a counter-productive way. Particularly for EPs, any inherent biases must be acknowledged and addressed so that our role in supporting the most vulnerable children in our society by empowering the voice of the child and parents can be effectively met (SEND Code of Practice, 2014).

This research revealed the accessible methods through which CYP can learn when given the time and space to do so, and the sense of autonomy and relatedness that is experienced. However, the findings identified that CYP at this LC can find it difficult to experience competence. These findings highlight the neoliberal context which shapes traditional schooling (where intelligence is narrowly defined through academic achievement through standardised testing) also seems to be present within the LC context. Despite efforts to provide alternative learning experiences and foster autonomy and relatedness, the pressure for individuals to conform to traditional measures of intelligence and competence persists within the LC. It would be of interest for educators and researchers in settings utilising self-directed frameworks to critically examine and address the underlying factors which may impact how competence is fostered.

While I am not proposing that school systems should be replaced, perhaps it could be considered how the current curriculum and pedagogy in schools could be restructured

that is more reflective of self-directed and democratic education. Efforts must be made to redefine and broaden our understanding of competence in order to empower CYP across diverse learning environments. The current study highlighted other forms of intelligence observed in the LC such as creativity, problem-solving, emotional intelligence, and practical skills. This highlights the importance for wider educational practices to embrace diverse pedagogical approaches that cater to the needs and preferences of CYP, by offering both process-driven and outcome-focused learning experiences. This could be through exploring areas of the curriculum where self-directed learning can be meaningfully fostered.

As HE and alternative spaces for education continue to grow, knowledge should be shared among professionals, including LAs and EP doctoral training courses. Overall, the current findings raise broader philosophical questions about the type of education system western society seeks to promote using neoliberal methods (e.g. accountability measures and high-stakes testing). The findings highlighted the pedagogy used in HE and one LC can offer a genuine alternative to traditional schooling that has positive benefits on the wellbeing of CYP.

6.4.   Reflections, strengths and limitations

The methodological approach taken in this study which was underpinned by social constructivist assumptions required a recognition that my own views, positioning and interpretations would have influenced the research. For instance, the data generated during field work would have been influenced by the relationships I developed with the CYP, mentors and parents, the types of questions I asked, the activities I observed and considered important to note. The use of a reflective diary was particularly useful in noting things I felt were relevant during data collection. This was combined with helpful discussions with my research supervisors, as well as peers in my cohort, who encouraged me to consider what areas I had not noted or overlooked. My positionality as a female researcher was considered in relation to how that might have impacted my interactions and engagement with those from other cultural, ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds (Kennedy-Macfoy, 2013). However, my experience as a TEP in working with CYP and families who had difficult

experiences of school, prepared me with the appropriate skills to conduct this research and engage participants meaningfully.

The multi-method approach utilised in this study (use of participatory appraisal, as well as ethnographic principles) allowed me to embrace the process of dialogue and reflection throughout the data generation process (Thomas & O'Kane, 2000). My immersion in the LC context enabled me to ask clarification questions, listen to and understand individual's experiences, which enhanced the notes I gathered through field work. Similarly, due to the grounding in the philosophy of IPA, the interactional nature of the analysis allowed me to take an active role in the data generation process, as well as the analytical and interpretative processes. To ensure I was adopting a transparent, reflective and reflexive approach to my data analysis, I ensured I read in depth about the IPA methodology and conducted a rigorous data analysis (evidenced in Appendix 11 and 12).

An element of the Mosaic approach (Clark & Moss, 2001) highlights the assembling of data forms part of the reflexive interaction in which participants "can engage to interpret and negotiate meanings" (p.54). Due to time constraints and difficulties in returning to Brookside, I was unable to check the PETs and GETs with participants and fulfil this stage of the Mosaic approach. However, I ensured I used supervision with my supervisors and peers in my doctoral cohort to share my analyses and promote reflections. I was also able to use feedback on multiple draft submissions of individual chapters to ensure I was reflective throughout the process, aiding me to craft a flowing narrative.

The study utilised a small sample size of three units (three CYP and three parents) meaning that findings could not readily be generalised. However, qualitative methods such as IPA allow for a nuanced exploration of a phenomenon, while also offering valuable insights that could be considered in the wider context. Due to the heterogeneity of the participants, the sample provided a diverse range of experiences (e.g. being home-educated from birth, leaving school for HE, returning to school from HE, studying formal examinations while being home-educated). As a result, the study offered rich insights that can inform understanding and practice with the wider HE community such as the flexibility to tailor learning to individual needs, the positive impact of outdoor learning, enabling and cosy

environments, the use of small groups, emphasis on play and supporting family's through transitions in the context of an LC. These findings highlight the value of research with more diverse samples to explore these findings further in the wider context of LCs and HE.

6.5.   Dissemination

This study aimed to explore the experiences of home-educated CYP and parents who participate in a LC, and to understand the pedagogical approaches utilised within this context. Therefore, it is important for the findings to be disseminated to various audiences. A summary of findings will be sent to the CYP and parents who participated in the study. An informal session will be organised with Brookside where I will also share my findings in person through a dialogic process, as well as share my gratitude for the LC's participation.

I will present my research to my LA EP Service as part of professional development during a practice discussion, as well as with other EPs and trainee EPs at the UCL Institute of Education in June 2024. In order to share more widely the findings and implications from the study to those in the education field, I aim to publish my research in a journal relevant to education (e.g. *International Perspectives on Home Education).*

6.6.   Future research

The current study is, to the researcher's knowledge, the first to explore pedagogical approaches in a self-directed LC. It would be of interest for future research to continue exploring this area, and to consider other alternative HE settings, and how their pedagogical approaches address autonomy, competence and relatedness. It would also be of interest to explore the views of mentors in a LC and their views of the pedagogy utilised, as with my experience in this research, they were all experienced and qualified teachers who had left the education system due to dissatisfaction. Understanding the reasons to leave traditional schooling for HE and LCs could offer insights on the challenges and opportunities inherent in both systems. Overall, further research in this area has the potential to provide greater insights into learners in HE contexts, and to inform educational policy and practice.

References

Adamson, C. (2022). Stepping out of the system? A grounded theory on how parents consider becoming home or alternative educators. *British Journal of Educational Studies, 70*(3), 281-303.

Agbenyega, J. S. (2008). Early childhood education in Ghana: The policy hiatus. *Australian Research in Early Childhood Education*, *15*(2), 25 - 40.

Agile Learning Centres. (2023). *Agile Learning Centres.* Retrieved from: https://agilelearningcenters.org/

Allen, K.A., Kern, M., McInerney D., Rozec, C., & Slavich, G. (2021). Belonging: A review of conceptual issues, an integrative framework, and directions for future research. *Australian Journal of Psychology, 73*(5), 1-16.

Allen, K.A., Kern, M.L., Vella-Brodwick, D., Waters, L., & Hattie, J. (2018). What schools need to know about belonging: A meta-analysis. *Educational Psychology Review, 30*(1), 1-34.

Alliance for Self-Directed Education. (2023). *What is self-directed education?* Retrieved from: https://www.self-directed.org/sde/

Anderson, V. (2004). Research Methods in Human Resource Management. CIPD, London.

Apostoleris, N. H. (2000). *Children's love of learning: Home schooling and intrinsic motivation for learning* (PhD dissertation). Clark University.

Apple, M.W. (2000). Away with All Teachers: the cultural politics of home schooling. *International studies in Sociology of Education, 10*(1), 61-80.

Arai, A.B. (2000). Reasons for home schooling in Canada. *Canadian Journal of Education, 25*(3), 204-217.

Arnell, R. (2018). *Conceptualising Evidence-Based Practice in Educational Psychology* (Thesis). Retrieved from: https://ore.exeter.ac.uk/repository/bitstream/handle/10871/34078/ArnellR.pdf?sequence=3&isAllowed=y

Arora, T. (2006). Elective home education and special educational needs. *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs, 6*(1), 55-66.

Association of the Directors of Children's Services. (2021). *Elective Home Education Survey Report 2021.* Retrieved from: https://adcs.org.uk/education/article/elective-home-education-survey-report-2021

Atkinson, P. (2016). Digital ethnographies. Qualitative Research, 16(2), 236-241.

Badman, G. (2009). *Report to the Secretary of State on the Review of Elective Home Education in England*. Retrieved from: http://publications.everychildmatters.gov.uk/eOrderingDownload/HC-610_Home-ed.PDF

Bagley, C. (2023). Chapter 11: Show Me You Know Me. In Ian Gilbert (Eds.), *Square Pegs: Inclusivity, compassion and fitting in – a guide for schools.* Independent Thinking Press.

Bahm, A.J. (1984). Improving Applied Ethics. *International Journal of Applied Philosophy*, 2(1), 61-68.

Baines, E. & Blatchford, P. (2019). School break and lunch times and young people's social lives: A follow-up national study. Retrieved from: https://www.nuffieldfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Final-report-School-break-and-lunch-times-and-young-peoples-lives-A-follow-up-national-study.pdf

Ball, S.J. (2003) 'The teacher's soul and the terrors of performativity', *Journal of Education Policy*, 18(2), pp. 215–228.

Ball, S.J. (2011). *Politics and Policy Making in Education*. Routledge.

Ball, S.J. (2021). *The Education Debate.* Policy Press.

Banks, J., Forlin, C. & Chambers, D. (2023). Home-schooling in the Republic of Ireland. *British Journal of Special Education*, *50*, 394–402.

Barker, J. & Weller, S. (2003). "Is it fun?" Developing children centred research methods. *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*, 23(*1*), 33-58.

Barker, J.E, Semenov, A.D., Michaelson, L., Provan, L.S., Snyder, H.R., & Munakata, Y. (2014). Less-structured time in children's daily lives predicts self-directed executive functioning. *Frontiers in Psychology, 17(5),* 593.

Barley, R. & Bath, C. (2013). The importance of familiarisation when doing research with young children. *Ethnography and Education*, *9*, 182-195.

Baumeister, R. F., & Leary, M. R. (1995). The need to belong: Desire for interpersonal attachments as a fundamental human motivation. *Psychological Bulletin, 117*(3), 497–529.

Baxter, P., & Jack, S. (2008). Qualitative Case Study Methodology: Study Design and Implementation for Novice Researchers. *The Qualitative Report*, *13*(4), 544-559.

BBC News. (2010). *More home education information needed, say inspectors*. Retrieved from: https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/10332680

BBC. (2021). *Covid: Home-education numbers rise by 75%.* Retrieved from: https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-57255380

Beaver, R. (2011). *Educational Psychology Casework: A Practical Guide (2ⁿᵈ Ed).* Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Becker, C., Lauterbach, G., Spengler, S., Dettweiler, U. & Mess, F. (2017). Effects of regular classes in outdoor education settings: A systematic review on student's learning, social and health dimensions. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 14*(5), 485.

Belfield, C. R. (2004). Modelling school choice: A comparison of public, private-independent, private-religious and home-schooled students. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, *12*, 30.

Bellagiue, C. (2015). Home education 1750-1900: domestic pedagogies in England and Wales in historical perspective. *Oxford Review of Education, 41*(4), 421-429.

Bhopal, K. & Myers, M. (2016). Marginal groups in marginal times: Gypsy and Traveller parents and home education in England, UK. *British Educational Research Journal, 42*(1), 5-20.

Bhopal, K. & Myers, M. (2018). *Home schooling and home education: Race, class and inequality*. London: Routledge.

Bielick, S. (2008). *1.5 Million Home-schooled Students in the United States in 2007*. Retrieved from: https://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2009030

Billington, T. (2006). *Working with Children: Assessment, Representation and Intervention*. SAGE Publications.

Black, A. E., & Deci, E. L. (2000). The effects of instructors' autonomy support and students' autonomous motivation on learning organic chemistry: A self-determination theory perspective. *Science Education, 84*(6), 740–756.

Blacker, S. (1981). *Case Studies in Home-education.* Thesis, University of Sussex.

Blok, H. & Karsten, S. (2011), Inspection of Home Education in European Countries. *European Journal of Education*, *46*, 138-152.

Bowers, P. (2017). *The Home Education Experience: what can it teach us?* Thesis, UCL Institute of Education. Retrieved from: https://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/id/eprint/1572345/1/P%20Bowers%20Thesis%202017.pdf

Bowlby, J. (1979). *A secure base: Parent-child attachment and healthy development*. London: Routledge.

Boyle, C., Allen, K., Bleeze., R., & Bozorg, B. (2023). Enhancing positive wellbeing in schools: The relationship between inclusion and belonging. In White, M., McCallum, F., & Boyle, C. (Eds.). *New Research and Possibilities in Wellbeing Education.* Springer Verlag, Singapore.

Brissette, I., Cohen, S., & Seeman, T. E. (2000). Measuring social integration and social networks. In S. Cohen, L. G. Underwood, & B. H. Gottlieb (Eds.), *Social support measurement and intervention: A guide for health and social scientists* (pp. 53–85). Oxford University Press.

British Psychological Society. (2017). *BPS Practice Guidelines.* Retrieved from: https://www.bps.org.uk/guideline/bps-practice-guidelines-2017

British Psychological Society. (2021). *BPS Code of Human Research Ethics*. Retrieved from: https://www.bps.org.uk/guideline/bps-code-human-research-ethics

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The Ecology of Human Development: Experiments by Nature and Design*. Harvard University Press.

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1993). The ecology of cognitive development: Research models and fugitive findings. In R. H. Wozniak & K. Fischer (Eds.), *Scientific environments*. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.

Bronfenbrenner, U. (2005). Making Human Beings Human: Biological perspectives on human development. SAGE.

Bronfenbrenner, U., & Morris, P. (1998). The ecology of developmental processes. In R.M. Lemer (Vol. Ed.) & W. Damon (Series Ed.). *Handbook of Child Psychology, Volume 1: Theoretical Models of Human Development.* New York: Wiley.

Bronfenbrenner, U., & Morris, P. A. (2006). The Bioecological Model of Human Development. In R. M. Lerner & W. Damon (Eds.), *Handbook of child psychology: Theoretical models of human development* (pp. 793–828). John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Bruhlmeier, A. (2010). *Head, Heart and Hand. Education in the Spirit of Pestalozzi*. Sophia Books.

Bryman, A. (2004). Qualitative research on leadership: A critical but appreciative review. *The Leadership Quarterly, 15*(6), 729–769.

Bryman, A. (2012). Social Research Methods. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Burr, V. (2015). *Social Constructionism.* 2nd Edition: London: Routledge.

Burr, V., King, N., & Butt, T. (2014). Personal construct psychology methods for qualitative research. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, *17*(4), 341-355.

Byrne, E., Daykin, N., & Coad, J. (2016). Participatory Photography in Qualitative Research: A Methodological Review. *Visual Methodologies, 4*(2), 1-12.

Calear, A.L., McCallum, S., Morse, A.R., Banfield, N., Gulliver, A., … Batterham, P.J. (2022). Psychosocial impacts of home-schooling on parents and caregivers during the Covid-19 pandemic. *BMC Public Health, 22*(119).

Carper, J, C. (1992). Home schooling, history and historians: The past as present. *High School Journal*, 75, 252-257.

Carper, J, C. (2000). Pluralism to Establishment to Dissent: The Religious and Educational Context of Home Schooling, *Peabody Journal of Education*, 75 (1&2): 8-19

Chen, B., Vansteenkiste, M., Beyers, W., Boone, L., Deci, E.L … Verstuyf, J. (2015). Basic psychological need satisfaction, need frustration, and need strength across four cultures. *Motivation and Emotion, 39,* 216-236.

Child Law Advice Service. (2024). *Home education.* Retrieved from:

https://childlawadvice.org.uk/information-pages/home-education/

Children and Families Act. (2014). *Children and Families Act.* Retrieved from:

https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2014/6/contents/enacted

Christie, B., Beames, S., Higgins, P., Nicol, R., & Ross, H. (2014). Outdoor Education Provision in Scottish Schools. *Scottish Educational Review, 46(*1), 48-64.

Christodoulou, D. (2014). *Seven Myths About Education.* Routledge.

Cicourel, A. (2003). On contextualising applied linguistics research in the workplace, *Applied Linguistics*, *24*(3), 360-373.

Clark, A. (2005) '*Ways of seeing: using the Mosaic approach to listen to young children's perspectives*', in Clark, A., Kjørholt and Moss, P. (eds.) *Beyond Listening*. Children's perspectives on early childhood services. Bristol: Policy Press, pp. 29–49.

Clark, A. (2017). *Listening to Young Children: Expanded Third Edition: A Guide to Understanding and Using the Mosaic Approach.* Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Clark, A. and Moss, P. (2001) *Listening to young children: The Mosaic approach*, London: National Children's Bureau for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

Clark, A. and Moss, P. (2005) *Spaces to play*, *More listening to young children using the Mosaic approach*, London: National Children's Bureau.

Clough, P., & Nutbrown, C. (2012). *A Student's Guide to Methodology*. (3 eds.). Sage.

Coates, E., & Coates, A. (2011). The subjects of young children's drawings. *Exploring Children's Creative Narratives.* Routledge.

Cogan, M.F. (2010). Exploring Academic Outcomes of Homeschooled Students. *Journal of College Admission, 208,* 18-25.

Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2017). *Research Methods in Education: 8th edition.* Routledge: London.

Cohen, S. (2004). Social Relationships and Health. *American Psychologist, 59*(8), 676–684.

Collado, S., & Evans, G. W. (2019). Outcome expectancy: A key factor to understanding childhood exposure to nature and children's pro-environmental behaviour. *Journal of Environmental Psychology, 61,* 30–36.

Congress. (1993). *H.R.1308 – 103rd Congress (1993-1994)*. Retrieved from: https://www.congress.gov/bill/103rd-congress/house-bill/1308#:~:text=Religious%20Freedom%20Restoration%20Act%20of%201993%20%2D%20Prohibits%20any%20agency%2C%20department,government%20may%20burden%20a%20person's

Cordova, D. I., & Lepper, M. R. (1996). Intrinsic motivation and the process of learning: Beneficial effects of contextualization, personalization, and choice. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 88*(4), 715–730.

Cox, M., Perera, J., & Fan, X. (1999). Children's drawings in the UK and China. *Journal of Art & Design Education, 18(*2), 173–181.

Crompton, C.J. (2019). *Could participatory design offer a revolution to architecture? Field notes from a situated action in Hasselt, Belgium.* Retrieved from:
Https://iasdr2019.org/research-papers?keywords=Crompton&category=

Crotty, M. (1998). *The foundations of social research: Meaning and perspective in the research process*. London, Sage.

Cunningham, I., Gray, P., Illingwroth, M., Sutcliffe, T., & Symes, J. (2023). *Chapter 35: Beyond the Conventional* in Square Pegs: Inclusivity, compassion and fitting in: A guide for schools. Independent Thinking Press.

D'Arcy, K. (2012) *Elective Home Education and Traveller families in contemporary times: Educational Spaces and Equality.* EdD thesis, University of Sheffield.

D'Arcy, K. (2014). Home education, school, Travellers and educational inclusion. *British Journal of Sociology of Education,* 35(5), 818-835.

Darlington Trust. (2023). *Dartington Trust.* Retrieved from: https://www.dartington.org

Davies, R. (2015). A Suitable Education? *Other Education: The Journal of Educational Alternatives, 4*(1), 16-32.

De Beer, J. (2019). The Decolonisation of the Curriculum Project: The affordances of indigenous knowledge for self-directed learning. *In NWU Self-directed Learning Series Vol. 2.*, pp. i-406. AOSIS, Cape Town.

de Carvalho, E., Skipper, Y. (2019). "We're not just sat at home in our pyjamas!": a thematic analysis of the social lives of home educated adolescents in the UK. *European Journal of Psychology of Education, 34*, 501–516.

De Walt, K.M., & De Walt, B.R. (2002). *Participant observation: A guide for fieldworkers.* Altamira Press.

Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (1985). *Intrinsic Motivation and Self-Determination in Human Behaviour*. Berlin: Springer Science & Business Media.

Department for Education. (2003). *Every Child Matters*. London: HMSO.

Department for Education. (2011a). *Developing sustainable arrangements for the initial training of educational psychologists.* Retrieved from:
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/182106/DFE-10035-2011_review_of_EP_training.pdf

Department for Education. (2011a). *Developing sustainable arrangements for the initial training of educational psychologists.* Retrieved from:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a7b72d3e5274a34770ebc4e/DFE-10035-2011_review_of_EP_training.pdf

Department for Education. (2011b). *Tickell review of the early years foundation stage.* Retrieved from:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a7ac0ec40f0b66a2fc02915/DFE-00177-2011.pdf

Department for Education. (2013). *Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) Statutory Framework.* Retrieved from: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-years-foundation-stage-framework--2

Department for Education. (2018). *Home education: call for evidence and revised DfE guidance.* Retrieved from: https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/home-education-call-for-evidence-and-revised-dfe-guidance

Department for Education. (2022). *Children not in school: Government consultation response*. Retrieved from:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1052272/Children_not_in_school_-_consultation_response_Feb2022.pdf

Department for Education. (2023). *Keeping Children Safe in Education.* Retrieved from: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/64f0a68ea78c5f000dc6f3b2/Keeping_children_safe_in_education_2023.pdf

DeWalt, K. M., & DeWalt, B. R. (2002). *Participant observation: A guide for fieldworkers*. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira.

DfE. (2014). *Schools: guide to the 0 to 25 SEND code of practice*. London: DFE.

Dodd, H.F., & Lester, K.J. (2021). Adventurous play as a mechanism for reducing risk for childhood anxiety: A conceptual model. *Clinical Child and Family Psychology Review, 24,* 164-181.

Donovan, C. (2007). The qualitative future of research evaluation. *Science and Public Policy, 34*(8), 585-597.

Duane, M. (1995). *The Terrace: An Educational Experiment in a State School*. *Freedom Press.*

Durant, A. (2006). Raymond Williams's Keywords: meanings "offered, felt for, tested, confirmed, asserted, qualified, changed". *Critical Quarterly, 48*(4): 1-26.

Dwyer, S.C., & Buckle, J.L. (2009). The space between: On Being an Insider-Outsider in

        Qualitative Research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 8*(1), 54-53.

Ebrahim, A. (2010). *The Many Faces of Non-profit Accountability.* In: Renz, D. and Herman,

        R.D., Eds., The Jossey-Bass Handbook of Non-profit Leadership and Management.

        John Wiley & Sons, Hoboken.

Ed Executive. (2024). News: Sharp rise in home education sparks concern. Retrieved from:

        https://edexec.co.uk/news-sharp-rise-in-home-education-sparks-concern/

Eder, D.J., & Cosaro, W.A. (1999). Ethnographic studies of children and youth: Theoretical

        and ethical issues. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography, 28*(5), 520-531.

EdPsyched. (2024). *We don't need just SEND reform, we need a SEND revolution. Who's in?*

        Retrieved from: https://www.edpsyched.co.uk/blog/we-don-t-need-send-reform-we-

        need-a-send-revolution

Education Act. (1902). London: HMSO.

Education Act. (1918). London: HMSO.

Education Act. (1936). London: HMSO.

Education Act. (1944). London: HMSO.

Education Act. (1996). London: HMSO.

Education Otherwise. (2023). *About Education Otherwise.* Retrieved from:

        https://www.educationotherwise.org/

Edwards-Jones, A., Waite, S., & Passy, R. (2016). Falling into LINE: school strategies for

        overcoming challenges associated with learning in natural environments.

        International Journal of Primary, Elementary and Early Years Education, 46(1), 49-63.

Edwards, C.P., Gandini, L., & Forman, G.E. (1993). *The Hundred Languages of Children:*

        Reggio Emilia Approach to Early Childhood Education: The Reggio Emilia Approach to

        Early Childhood Education. Praeger Publishers Inc.

Einarsdottir, J., Dockett, S., & Perry, B. (2009). Making meaning: Children's perspectives

        expressed through drawings. *Early Child Development and Care, 179*(2), 217-232.

Elementary Act. (1870). *The 1870 Education Act.* Retrieved from:

        https://www.parliament.uk/about/living-

        heritage/transformingsociety/livinglearning/school/overview/1870educationact/

Ellyatt, W. (2013). *If UK children start school too early it could damage their learning for life.* Retrieved from: https://www.theguardian.com/teacher-network/teacher-blog/2013/dec/10/school-starting-age-five-six-uk-eu

Eraut, M. (2000). *Non-formal learning, implicit learning and tacit knowledge*, in F. Coffield (Ed)., The Necessity of Informal Learning, Bristol: Policy Press.

Fa'ave, D., Jones, A., & Manu'atu, L. (2016). Talanoa 'i 'ae Talanoa—Talking about talanoa: Some dilemmas of a novice researcher. *AlterNative*, 12, 138–150.

Faircloth, B. S. (2021). The right to belong: A critical stance. In B. S. Faircloth, L. M., & Gonzalez, K. R. (Eds). *Resisting barriers to belonging: Conceptual critique and critical applications* (pp. 32-81). Lexicon Books.

Fensham-Smith, A.J. (2021). Invisible pedagogies in home education: Freedom, power and control. *Journal of Pedagogy*, 12(1) pp. 5–27.

Fetters, M.D. & Rubinstein, E.B. (2019). The 3 C's of Content, Context, and Concepts: A practical approach to recording unstructured field observations. *Annals of Family Medicine, 17*(6), 554-560.

Fielding, M., & Moss, P. (2010). *Radical Education and the Common School: A democratic alternative.* London: Routledge.

Fields-Smith, C. & Williams, M. (2009). Motivation, sacrifices, and challenges: Black parents' decisions to home school. *The Urban Review, 41*, 369-389.

Finlay, L. (2014). Engaging phenomenological analysis. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 11*(2), 121–141.

Fisher, N. (2023). *A Different Way to Learn: Neurodiversity and Self-Directed Education.* Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Flick, U. (2006). *An Introduction to Qualitative Research.* London: SAGE publications.

Forrester, D. (2017). Outcomes in children's social care. *Journal of Children's Services, 12* (2-3), p. 144-157.

Fortune-Wood, M. (2005). Questionnaire 1 – Who and Why? In The Face Of Home- Based Education 1: Who, Why, And How. *Educational Heretics Press*: Nottingham, 15-37.

Fortune-Wood, M. (2006). *The face of home-based education: Numbers, support, special needs: Version 2.* Educational Heretics Press.

Francis, B. & Mills, M. (2012) Editorial: What Would a Socially-Just School System Look Like?' *Special Issue* of *Journal of Education Policy*, 27(5).

Francis, B., Mills, M. & Lupton, R. (2017). Towards social justice in education: contradictions and dilemmas. *Journal of Education Policy*, *32(*4), 414-431.

Freedom to Learn. (2023). *Freedom to Learn.* Retrieved from:

https://www.freedomtolearn.uk

Fricker, E. (2023). *Can't Not Won't: A story about a child who couldn't go to school*. Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Gaither, M. (2009). Home schooling in the USA Past, present and future. *Theory and Research in Education, 7*(3), 331-346.

Gergen, K. J. (1991). *The saturated self: Dilemmas of identity in contemporary life.* Basic Books.

Gergen, K. J. (2001). Psychological science in a postmodern context. *American Psychologist, 56*(10), 803–813.

Glass, T. A., De Leon, C. F., Bassuk, S. S., & Berkman, L. F. (2006). Social engagement and depressive symptoms in late life: longitudinal findings. *Journal of Aging and Health*, *18*(4), 604–628.

Goodman, P. (1962). *Compulsory Miseducation.* Penguin Books.

Grace, G. (1978). *Teachers, Ideology and Control.* London: Routledge.

Graham, B., White, C., Edwards, A., Potter, S., & Street, C. (2019). *School exclusion: a literature review on the continued disproportionate exclusion of certain children.* Retrieved from:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/800028/Timpson_review_of_school_exclusion_literature_review.pdf

Graham, P. (2023). *A Life Freeing the Minds of Children.* Routledge.

Gray, P. (2011). The decline of play and the rise of psychopathology in children and adolescents. *American Journal of Play, 3*(4), 443–463.

Gray, P. (2015). *Free to Learn: Why Unleashing the Instinct to Play Will Make Our Children Happier, More Self-Reliant, and Better Students for Life.* Basic Books.

Gray, P. & Riley, F. (2013). The Challenges and Benefits of Unschooling, According to 232 Families who Have Chosen That Route. *Journal of Unschooling and Alternative Learning, 7*(14), 1-27.

Gray, P. & Riley, G. (2013). The challenges and benefits of unschooling, according to 232 families who have chosen that route. *Journal of Unschooling and Alternative Learning,* 7(14).

Green, C. L., Walker, J. M. T., Hoover-Dempsey, K. V., & Sandler, H. M. (2007). Parents' motivations for involvement in children's education: An empirical test of a theoretical model of parental involvement. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 99*(3), 532–544.

Gregory, A., Clawson, K., Davis, A., & Gerewitz, J. (2014). The promise of restorative practices to transform teacher-student relationships and achieve equity in school discipline. *Journal of Educational and Psychological Consultation, 26*(4), 1-29.

Gustafsson, P.E., Szczepanski, A., Nelson, N., & Gustafsson, P.A. (2012). Effects of an outdoor education intervention on the mental health of schoolchildren. *Journal of Adventure Education & Outdoor Learning, 12*(1), 63-79.

Guterman, O., & Neuman, A. (2017). Schools and emotional and behavioural problems: A comparison of school-going and home-schooled children. *The Journal of Educational Research, 110*(4), 425–432.

Haim-Litevsky, D., Komemi, R., & Lipskaya-Velikovsky, L. (2023). Sense of Belonging, Meaningful Daily Life Participation, and Well-Being: Integrated Investigation. *International journal of environmental research and public health*, *20*(5), 41-21.

Hanna, G.L. (2011). Home schooling Education: Longitudinal study of methods, materials, and curricula. *Education and Urban Society*, 1-23.

Harber, C. & Sakade, N. (2009) Schooling for Violence and Peace: How Does Peace Education Differ from 'Normal' Schooling? *Journal of Peace Education*, 6, 37-41.

Hargreaves, A. (2005). Educational change takes ages: Life, career, and generational factors in teachers' emotional responses to educational change. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 21*(8), 967-983.

Hawkes, K. (2017). Research with Children. In: McNae, R., Cowie, B. (eds). *Realising Innovative Partnerships in Educational Research. Educational Partnerships and Collaborations.* SensePublishers, Rotterdam.

Hayes, N., O'Toole, L., & Halpenny, A.M. (2017). *Introducing Bronfenbrenner: A guide for Practitioners and Students in Early Years Education.* London: Routledge.

Haynes, J., & Suissa, J. (2022). Creating and sustaining democratic spaces in education. *Journal of Philosophy of Education, 56*(6), 939-942.

Health and Care Professions Council. (2015). *Standards of proficiency – Practitioner psychologists.* Retrieved from http://www.hcpcuk.org/assets/documents/10002963SOP_Practitioner_psychologists.pdf

Heidegger, M. (1927). *Being and Time* (J. Macquarrie & E. Robinson, trans.)*.* Oxford: Blackwell.

Henderson, A. S. (1992). Social support and depression. In H. O. F. Veiel & U. Baumann (Eds.), *The meaning and measurement of social support* (pp. 85–92). Hemisphere Publishing Corp.

Heron, J., & Reason, P. (1998). *The practice of co-operative inquiry: Research with rather than on people.* Retrieved from: https://wagner.nyu.edu/files/leadership/avina_heron_reason3.pdf

Hofer, G., Perry, N.E., Mykkanen, A. & Brenner, C. (2021). Youths' Perceptions of How their Self-Determination was Supported in Alternative Programs, *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk*, *26*(1), 45-69.

Holt, J. (1964). *How Children Fail.* Pitman Publishing Company.

Hopwood, V., O'Neill, L., Castro, G., & Hodgon, B. (2007). *The Prevalence of Home Education in England*. Retrieved from: https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/9063663.pdf

House of Commons, Children's, Schools and Families Committee. (2009). *The Review of Elective Home Education: Second Report of Session 2009-10.* Retrieved from: https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200910/cmselect/cmchilsch/39/39i.pdf

Hunt, A., Stewart, D., Burt, J. & Dillon, J. (2016). *Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment: a pilot to develop an indicator of visits to the natural environment by children - Results from years 1 and 2 (March 2013 to February 2015).* Natural England Commissioned Reports, Number NECR208.

Husserl, E. (1997). *Psychological and Transcendental Phenomenology and the Confrontation with Heidegger (1927–1931).* Springer Dordrecht.

Illich, I. (1971). *Deschooling Society*. New York: Harper and Row.

Isaacs S. (1927) The Function of the School for the Young Child, *The Forum of Education*, *5,* 116–33.

Isaacs S. (1930). *Intellectual Growth in Young Children*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Ivatts, A. (2006). *The Situation Regards the Current Policy, Provision and Practice in Elective Home Education (EHE) for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Children*. Retrieved from: http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/research/data/uploadfiles/RW77.pdf

Jackson, G. (2007). Home education transitions with formal schooling: Student perspectives. *Issues in Educational Research,* 17(1), 62-84.

Jacobs, G.M., Lee, C., & Ng, M. (1997). *Co-operative learning in the thinking classroom: Research and Theoretical Perspectives.* Paper presented at the International Conference on Thinking, Singapore.

James, A., & Prout, A. (1997). *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood: Contemporary Issues in the Sociological Study of Childhood.* Psychology Press.

Jang, H., Reeve, J., Ryan, R. M., & Kim, A. (2009). Can self-determination theory explain what underlies the productive, satisfying learning experiences of collectivistically oriented Korean students? *Journal of Educational Psychology, 101*(3), 644–661.

Jennens, R. (2011). Professional Knowledge and Practice in Health, Welfare and Educational Agencies in England in Relation to Children being Educated at Home: An Exploratory Review. *Childcare in Practice*, *17*(2), 143-161.

Johnson, V., Hart, R., & Colwell, J. (2014). *Steps to engaging young children in research: Volume 2, the toolkit.* The Bernard Van Leer Foundation.

Kanstrup, A. M., Bertelsen, P., & Madsen J. (2014). Design with the feet: walking methods and participatory design. *PDC '14*. ACM, New York, 51-60.

Karaś, D., & Cieciuch, J. (2018). The relationship between identity processes and wellbeing in various life domains. *Personality and Individual Differences, 121,* 111-119.

Kehoe, M., Bourke-Taylor, H., & Broderick, D. (2018). Developing student social skills using restorative practices: a new framework called H.E.A.R.T. *Social Psychology of Education, 21*(1).

Kelly, G.A. (1955). *The Psychology of Personal Constructs*, 2 volumes. New York: Norton.

Kennedy-Macfoy, M. (2013). 'It's important for the students to meet someone like you.' How perceptions of the researcher can affect gaining access, building rapport and securing cooperation in school-based research. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology, 16*(6), 491-502.

Kim, W.C., & Macbourgne, R. (2003). *Fair Process: Managing in the Knowledge Economy.* Harvard Business Review.

Kings College London. (2010). *Beyond barriers to learning outside the classroom in natural environments.* Retrieved from:

https://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/file/6621187224371200

Knighting, K., Rowa-Dewar, N., Malcolm, C., Kearney, N. & Gibson, F. (2011). Children's understanding of cancer and views on health-related behaviour: a 'draw and write' study. *Child: Care, Health and Development, 37*(2), 289-299.

Knowles, G, J., Stacey, E, M. & James, A. M. (1992). From Pedagogy to Ideology: Origins and Phases of Home Education in the United States, 1970-1990. *American Journal of Education*, *100(*2), 195-235.

Knowles, M. (1975). *Self-Directed Learning: A Guide for Learners and Teachers*. Chicago, IL: Follett Publishing Company.

Knowles, M.S. (1988). *The modern practice of adult education: Andragogy versus pedagogy* (Revised edition). Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall/Cambridge.

Kolb, B. (2008). Involving, Sharing, Analysing – Potential of the Participatory Photo Interview. *Visual Methods, 9*(3).

Kouroupa, A., Allard, A., Gray, K.M., Hastings, R.P., Heyne, D., … Totsika, V. (2022). Home schooling during the Covid-19 pandemic in the United Kingdom: The experience of families of children with neurodevelopmental conditions, *7.*

Kress, G. (1997). *Before Writing: Rethinking the Paths to Literacy.* Retrieved from:

https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED407683

Krishnan, V. (2010). *Early Child Development: A Conceptual Model*. Retrieved from:

https://www.ualberta.ca/community-university-partnership/media-library/community-university-partnership/research/ecmap-reports/ecd-conceptualmodel.pdf

Langsted, O. (1994). Looking at quality from the child's perspective. In P. Moss & A. Pence (Eds.), *Valuing quality in early childhood services: New approaches to defining quality*. New York: Paul Chapman.

Lave, J., & Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated learning: Legitimate peripheral participation.* Cambridge University Press.

Lees, H. (2011). *The Gateless Gate of Home Education*. Thesis, (PhD) University of

Birmingham. Retrieved from:

http://etheses.bham.ac.uk//id/eprint/1570/1/Lees11PhD.pdf

Long, R. & Danechi, S. (2023). *Home education in England*. Retrieved from:

https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/SN05108/SN05108.pdf

Love, B., Vetere, A., & Davis, P. (2020). Should Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)

be Used With Focus Groups? Navigating the Bumpy Road of "Iterative Loops,"

Idiographic Journeys, and "Phenomenological Bridges". *International Journal of*

Qualitative Methods, 19.

Lyman, I. (1998). Home schooling: Back to the Future? *Cato Institute Policy Analysis, 294*.

Lynch, M. F., La Guardia, J. G., & Ryan, R. M. (2009). On being yourself in different cultures:

Ideal and actual self-concept, autonomy support, and well-being in China, Russia,

and the United States. The Journal of Positive Psychology, 4, 290-304.

Manning, T. T. (2007). Learn to unlearn: Five key belief patterns that sabotage leadership

effectiveness. *Academic Leader*, 23(10), 4-5, 8.

Maratos, F. (2020). *The UK education system – have we got it wrong*? Retrieved from:

https://www.derby.ac.uk/blog/the-uk-education-system-have-we-got-it-wrong/

Marchant, E., Todd, C., Cooksey, R., Dredge, S., Jones, H. … Brophy, S. (2019). Curriculum-

based outdoor learning for children aged 9-11: A qualitative analysis of pupils' and

teachers' views. *PLoS ONE, 14*(5).

Mason, L. H. (2013). Teaching students who struggle with learning to think before, while,

and after reading: Effects of self-regulated strategy development instruction. *Reading*

& Writing Quarterly: Overcoming Learning Difficulties, 29(2), 124–144.

Mauthner, M. (1997). 'Methodological Aspects of Collecting Data from Children: Lessons

from three research projects. *Children and Society*, *11*, 16-28.

Maxwell, N., Droughty, J., Slater, T., Forrester, D. & Rhodes, K. (2018). Home education for

children with additional learning needs – a better choice or the only option?

Educational Review, 72(5), 1-16.

McCulloch, G. (2020). *Compulsory school attendance and the Elementary Education Act of*

1870: 150 years on. Retrieved from:

https://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/id/eprint/10118059/1/McCulloch%20-

%20BJES%202020%20Elementary%20Education%20Act%201870%20-%20final.pdf

McElwain, N. L., & Volling, B. L. (2005). Preschool children's interactions with friends and older siblings: relationship specificity and joint contributions to problem behaviour. *Journal of Family Psychology, 19*(4), 486–496.

Meighan, R. (2004). *Damage Limitation: Trying to reduce the harm schools do to children*. Nottingham: Educational Heretics Press.

Merewether, J. (2014). Young Children's Perspectives of Outdoor Learning Spaces: What Matters? *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood, 40*(1), 99-108.

Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2015). Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation. San Francisco, CA: Wiley.

Merriam, S.B. (1998). *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education*. Jossey-Bass Publishers, San Francisco.

Merry, M.S. & Howell, C. (2009). Can intimacy justify home education? *Theory and Research in Education, 7*(3), 363-381.

Mind. (2021). *Facts and figures about young people and mental health*. Retrieved from: https://www.mind.org.uk/about-us/our-strategy/doing-more-for-young-people/facts-and-figures-about-young-people-and-mental-health/

Mingers, J. (2003). The paucity of multimethod research: a review of the information systems literature. *Information Systems Journal, 13*(3), 233-249.

Ministry of Education. (2016). *Te Whāriki – Early Childhood Curriculum.* Retrieved from: https://www.education.govt.nz/assets/Documents/Early-Childhood/ELS-Te-Whariki-Early-Childhood-Curriculum-ENG-Web.pdf

Mitch, D. (2019). The Elementary Education Act of 1870: Landmark or Transition?. In J. Westberg, L. Boser and I. Brühwiler (Eds.), *School Acts and the Rise of Mass Schooling*. Palgrave Macmillam, Cham, 301-324.

Mitchell, D. (2020). *What really works in special and inclusive education: Using evidence-based teaching strategies.* 3rd edition: Routledge.

Monk, D. (2009). Regulating Home Education: negotiating standards, anomalies and rights. *Child and Family Law Quarterly*, *21*(2), 155-184.

Moore, R., & Moore, D. (1984). *Home Grown Kids: A practical handbook for teaching your children at home.* W Pub Group.

Moran, H. (2001). Who Do You Think You Are? Drawing the Ideal Self: A Technique to Explore a Child's Sense of Self. *Clinical Child Psychology and Psychiatry, 6*(4), 599-604.

Morgan, S.J., Pullon, S.R.H., & Gray, B.V. (2016). Case study observational research: A framework for conducting case study research where observation data are the focus. *Qualitative Health Research, 27*(7), 1060-68.

Morton, R. (2010). Home education: constructions of choice. *International Electronic Journal of Elementary Education, 3*(1), 45-56.

Moss, E., & St-Laurent, D. (2001). Attachment at school age and academic performance. *Developmental Psychology, 37*(6), 863–874.

Nelson, J. (2014). *Home Education: Exploring the views of parents, children and young people*. Thesis, (PhD), University of Birmingham. Retrieved from: https://etheses.bham.ac.uk/4888/

Nielsen, A. (2012). Forskeres arbejde med oplevelser af børns tegnin-gersomforskningsmetode [The researcher's work with children's experiences of drawing as a research method]. *Psyke & Logos, 33*, 343–360.

Niemiec, C. P., & Ryan, R. M. (2009). Autonomy, competence, and relatedness in the classroom: Applying self-determination theory to educational practice. *Theory and Research in Education, 7*(2), 133–144.

Northgate Academy. (2022). The history of home-schooling in the United States. Retrieved from: https://www.northgateacademy.com/the-history-of-homeschooling-in-the-united-states/#:~:text=In%201992%2C%20homeschooling%20was%20officially,to%20750%2C C000%20students%20in%201995.

Office of the Schools Adjudicator. (2020). *Office of the Schools Adjudicator annual report: September 2018 to August 2019.* Retrieved from: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5e690eced3bf7f2695546b79/OSA_A nnual_Report_Sept_2018_to_Aug_2019_corrected.pdf

Ofsted. (2010). *Local authorities and home education*. Retrieved from: http://ofstednews.ofsted.gov.uk/article/601

Ofsted. (2024). *Childminders and childcare providers: register with Ofsted*. Retrieved from: https://www.gov.uk/guidance/childminders-and-childcare-providers-register-with-ofsted

Olsen, N. B. (2008). *Understanding Parental Motivation to Home School: A Qualitative Case Study*. Graduate Student Theses, Dissertations, & Professional Papers. 1147. Retrieved from: https://scholarworks.umt.edu/etd/1147

Outdoor Learning Centre. (2023). *Outdoor Learning Centre.* Retrieved from: https://www.newforestcareeducation.com/outdoor-learning-centre/

Parsons, S. & Lewis, A. (2010). The home-education of children with special needs or disabilities in the UK: views of parents from an online survey. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, *14*(1), 67-86.

Passy, R. (2019). Integrating outdoor learning into the curriculum: an exploration in four nations. *Curriculum Perspectives, 39*, 73-78.

Patterson, J.A., Gibson, I., Koenigs, A., Maurer, M., Ritterhouse, G., Stockton, C. & Taylor, M.J. (2007). Resisting Bureaucracy: A Case Study of Home Schooling. *Journal of Thought*, *42*(3), pp. 71-86.

Perry, B., & Dockett, S. (2008). *Young Children's Access to Powerful Mathematical Ideas*. In L. D. English (Ed.), Handbook of International Research in Mathematics Education (pp. 75-108). New York, NY: Routledge.

Phoenix Education. (2023). *Phoenix Education.* Retrieved from: https://www.phoenixeducation.co.uk/

Pickert, L.M. (2012). *Project-Based Homeschooling: Mentoring Self-Directed Learners.* CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform.

Pietkiewicz I., & Smith J.A. (2012). A practical guide to using interpretative phenomenological analysis in qualitative research psychology. *Czasopismo Psychologiczne, 18,* 361–369.

Pink, S. (2001). More visualising, more methodologies: On video, reflexivity and qualitative research. *The Sociological Review, 49*(4), 586-599.

Progressive Education. (2023). *Progressive Education.* Retrieved from: https://www.progressiveeducation.org/

Putwain, D. (2008). Examination stress and test anxiety. *The Psychologist, 21*(12), 1026–1029.

Ramstetter, C.L., Murray, R., Garner, A.S. (2010). The crucial role of recess in schools. *Journal of School Health, 80*(11), 517-26.

Ravenette, T. (1999). *Personal Construct Theory in Educational Psychology: Practitioner's View.* JW.

Ravitch, D. (2010). *The death and life of the great American school system: how testing and choice are undermining education*. New York, Basic Books.

Ray, B. (2015). African American Homeschool Parents' Motivations for Homeschooling and Their Black Children's Academic Achievement. *Journal of School Choice, 9,* 71-96.

Ray, D.B. (1990). *A nationwide study of home education: Family Characteristics, legal matters and student achievement.* National Home Education Research Institute.

Reeve, J., Jang, H., Carrell, D., Jeon, S., & Barch, J. (2004). Enhancing Students' Engagement by Increasing Teachers' Autonomy Support. *Motivation and Emotion*, *28*, 147–169.

Reimer, E. (1971). *School is Dead Alternatives in Education.* Doubleday & Company Inc., New York.

Rethinking Education. (2023). *Rethinking Education.* Retrieved from: https://www.rethinking-ed.org/

Riessman, C. K. (2008). *Narrative methods for the human sciences.* London: Sage Publications.

Riffe D., Lacy S., Fico F. G. (2005). *Analysing media messages: Using quantitative content analysis in research*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Riley, B. (2016). The value of knowing how students learn. *Phi Delta Kappan, 97*(7), 35-38.

Riley, G. (2015). The role of self-determination theory and cognitive evaluation theory in home education. *Cogent Education*, 3(1).

Riley, K., Coates, M., & Allen, T. (2020). *Place and belonging in schools: Why it matters today.* Retrieved from: https://neu.org.uk/sites/default/files/2023-04/Belonging%20research%20booklet.pdf

Rinaldi, C. (2001). The image of the child and the child's environment as fundamental principle. In L. Gandini & C. P. Edwards (Eds.), *Bambini: The Italian approach to infant toddler care* (pp. 45-53). New York: Teachers College Press.

Rinaldi, C. (2006). *In dialogue with Reggio Emilia: Listening, researching and learning.* New York: Routledge.

Robson, C. (2011). *Real world research: A resource for social-scientists and practitioner-researchers*. 3rd edition. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.

Robson, C., & McCartan, K. (2016). *Real World Research* (4th ed.). Wiley.

Rogers, C.R. (1961). *On becoming a person: A Therapist's View of Psychotherapy.* Houghton Mifflin.

Rose, G. (2016). *Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to Researching with Visual Materials*. Sage Publications LTD.

Roth, G., Assor, A., Niemiec, C.P., Deci, E.L., Ryan, R.M. (2009). The emotional and academic consequences of parental conditional regard: comparing conditional positive regard, conditional negative regard, and autonomy support as parenting practices. *Developmental Psychology, 45*(4), 1119-42.

Rothermel, P. (2003). Can We Classify Motives for Home Education. *Evaluation & Research in Education*, *17*(2), 74-89.

Rothermel, P. (2010). Home education: practicing without prejudice? *Every Child Journal*, *1*(5), pp. 48-53.

Rothermel, P. (2015). *International Perspectives on Home Education: Do we still need schools?* Palgrave Macmillan.

Rudner, L. M. (1999). Achievement and Demographics of Home School Students: 1998. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, *7*, 8.

Ruzek, E.A., Hafen, C.A., Allen, J.P., Gregory, A., Mikami, A.Y. & Planta, R.C. (2016). How teacher emotional support motivates students: The mediating roles of perceived peer relatedness, autonomy support, and competence. *Learning and Instruction, 42*(3), 95-103.

Ryan, R.M., & Deci, E.L. (2000). Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and wellbeing. *American Psychologist, 55*(1), 68-78.

Ryan, R.M., & Deci, E.L. (2017). *Self-determination theory. Basic psychological needs in motivation, development and wellness*. New York: Guildford Publishing.

Sartre, J. (2003). *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology.* Routledge Classics.

Schleimacher, F. (1998). *Hermeneutics and criticism and other writings.* New York: Cambridge University Press.

Self-Directed. (2023). *The Alliance for Self-Directed Education.* Retrieved from: https://www.self-directed.org/sde/

Self-Managed Learning College. (2023). Retrieved from: https://smlcollege.org.uk/

Shelton L. G. (2019). *The Bronfenbrenner primer: A guide to Develecology*. Routledge.

Shirkey, B. T. (1987). *Students' perspectives of home schools: A descriptive study.*
 Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Florida, Gainesville.

Shute, C. (2008). *Joy Baker: Trailblazer for Home-Based Education and Personalised Learning.*
 Educational Heretics Press.

Silverman, D. (2015). *Interpreting Qualitative Data.* SAGE Publishing.

Smith-Fields, C. & Williams, M. (2009). Motivations, Sacrifices, and Challenges: Black
 Parents' Decisions to Home School. *Urban Rev*, *41*, 369-389.

Smith, E., & Nelson, J. (2015). Using the opinions and lifestyle survey to examine the
 prevalence and characteristics of families who home educate in the UK. *Educational
 Studies, 41*(3), 312-325.

Smith, J. A. (2007). *Qualitative Psychology: A Practical Guide to Research Methods.* Sage.

Smith, J.A., Flowers, P., & Larkin, M. (2022). *Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis:
 Theory, Method and Research.* SAGE Publications LTD.

Smith, K., Dickenson, C., & Smith, J. (2020). *Exploring the reasons why people home
 education in Hertfordshire.* Retrieved from:
 https://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/microsites/local-offer/media-
 library/documents/full-report-exploring-the-reasons-why-people-home-educate-in-
 hertfordshire-pdf842kb.pdf

Søndergaard, E., & Reventlow, S. (2019). Drawing as a Facilitating Approach When
 Conducting Research Among Children. *International Journal of Qualitative
 Methods*, *18*.

Spencer, G. (2021). Introduction: Ethics and Integrity in Research with Children and Young
 People. *Advances in Research Ethics and Integrity, Vol. 7.* Emerald Publishing Limited:
 Leeds.

Spencer, H. (1911). *Essays on Education and Kindred Subjects.* J.M Dent, Rutgers University.

Spiegler, T. (2010). Parents' motives for home education: The influence of methodological
 design and social context. *International Electric Journal of Elementary Education,
 3*(1), 57-70.

Spradley, J.P. (2016). *Participant Observation.* Waveland Press Inc.

Square Peg & Not Fine in School. (2021). *Evidence for behaviour consultation*. Retrieved
 from:

https://www.teamsquarepeg.org/_files/ugd/f3759d_234ec8b7357f4716a5cf39a24fe4b3fb.pdf

Stanczak, G.C. (2007). *Visual Research Methods: Image, Society and Representation.* Sage.

States of Mind. (2023). *States of Mind*. Retrieved from: https://www.statesofmind.org

Suissa, J. (2006). Anarchism, education and the politics of becoming. *Journal of Philosophy of Education,* 40(2), 215-228.

Suitable Education. (2023). *Suitable Education.* Retrieved from: https://suitable-education.uk/

Summerhill School. (2023). Retrieved from: https://www.summerhillschool.co.uk/

Surrey County Council. (2024). *Events and who to contact about home education.* Retrieved from: https://www.surreycc.gov.uk/schools-and-learning/educating-your-child-at-home/who-to-contact-about-home-education

Syrjalannen, E., Jukarainen, P., Värri, V., & Kaupinmaki, S. (2015). Safe school day according to the young. *Young, 23*(1), 59-75.

Tajfel, H. & Turner, J.C. (1985). The Social Identity Theory of Intergroup Behaviour. In: Worchel, S. and Austin, W.G., Eds., *Psychology of Intergroup Relations* (2nd Ed), Nelson Hall, Chicago, 7-24.

The Garden. (2023). *The Garden Bristol.* Retrieved from: http://www.thegardenbristol.org/

The Green Parent. (2023). *Home Education.* Retrieved from: https://thegreenparent.co.uk/articles/topics/home-education

The Guardian. (2010). *Home education and the children, schools and families bill.* Retrieved from: https://www.theguardian.com/education/2010/jan/11/home-schooling-education-children-policy

The Outdoor Learning Community. (2023). *Embers Learning Community*. Retrieved from: https://www.theoutdoorlearningcompany.co.uk/embers-learning-community

The Rewild Project. (2023). *The Rewild Project*. Retrieved from: https://www.therewildproject.com

Thomas, A. (1998). *Educating Children at Home*. Cassell, London.

Thomas, A. & Pattison, H. (2007). *How children learn at home*. London: Continuum.

Thomas, N., & O'Kane, C. (2000). Discovering what children think: Connections between research and practice. *The British Journal of Social Work, 30*(6), 819-835.

Thomson, P. (2020). *School Scandals: Blowing the Whistle on the Corruption of Our Education System.* Bristol University Press.

Timpson Review. (2019). *Timpson Review of School Exclusion.* Retrieved from:
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/807862/Timpson_review.pdf

Tower Hamlets. (2024). *Home schooling.* Retrieved from:
https://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/lgnl/education_and_learning/parental_support/home_schooling/home_schooling.aspx

Tudge, J. R. H., Mokrova, I., Hatfield, B., & Karnik, R. B. (2009). Uses and misuses of Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory of human development. *Journal of Family Theory and Review, 1*(4), 198-210.

Tudge, J., Brown, J., & Freitas, L. (2011). "The Cultural Ecology of Play: Methodological Considerations for Studying Play in its Everyday Contexts." In A. Pellegrini (ed.) Oxford *Handbook of the Development of Play*, pp. 119-137. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

UNICEF. (1990). *The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.* Retrieved from:
https://www.unicef.org.uk/what-we-do/un-convention-child- rights/

Valiente, C., Spinrad, T.L., Ray, B.D., Eisenberg, N., & Ruof, A. (2022). Homeschooling: What do we know and what do we need to learn? *Child Development Perspectives, 16*, 48-53.

Van Galen, J., & Pitman, M. A. (1991). Ideologues and pedagogues: Parents who teach their children at home. In *Home schooling: Political, historical, and pedagogical perspectives* (pp. 67–92). Norwood, New Jersey: Ablex.

Van Galen, J.A. (1988). Ideology, Curriculum and Pedagogy in Home Education. *Education and Urban Society, 21*(1), 52-68.

Van Leewan, T.V., & Jewitt, C. (2001). *The Handbook of Visual Analysis.* Sage.

Van Manen, M. (1990). *Researching Lived Experience: Human Science for an Action Sensitive Pedagogy.* New York: Routledge.

Waite, S., & Davis, B. (2007). The contribution of free play and structured activities in Forest School to learning beyond cognition–An English case. In N. Kryger, & B. Ravn (Eds.), *Learning beyond cognition* (pp. 257‑274). Copenhagen: Danish University of Education Press.

Wareham, K. (2012). Engaging with Young People through Narrative Co- Construction: Beyond Categorisation. *Educational and Child Psychology*, 29(2), 77-87.

Warnock, M. (1987). The good of the child. *Bioethics, 1, 141-155.*

Watkins, C. (2005). *Classrooms as Learning Communities: What's In It For Schools*. Falmer: Routledge.

Wearmouth, J., McKinney, R. and Glynn, T. (2007). 'Restorative justice in schools: a New Zealand example'. *Educational Research*, *49*(1), pp 37-49.

Webb, J. (1999). *Those unschooled minds: home-educated children grow up.* Educational Heretics.

Webb, S. (2011). *Elective Home Education in the UK*. Trentham Books Limited.

Wellington, J. (2015). *Educational Research: Contemporary Issues and Practical Approaches*. Bloomsbury Publishing.

Wheatley, K. F. (2009). Unschooling: A growing oasis for development and democracy. *Encounter: Education for Meaning and Social Justice, 22*(2), 27-32.

Whittaker, F. (2023). *Home education soars in the wake of the pandemic.* Retrieved from: https://schoolsweek.co.uk/home-education-soars-in-the-wake-of-the-pandemic/#:~:text=The%20number%20of%20children%20in,in%20the%20past%20year%20alone.

Wilcock, A. A. (2007). Occupation and health: Are they one and the same? *Journal of Occupational Science*, 14, 3–8.

Woodley, E. (2009). Practical work in school science – why is it important? *School Science Review*, 91 (335), 49-51.

World Economic Forum. (2020). *Fourth Industrial Revolution.* Retrieved from: https://www.weforum.org/focus/fourth-industrial-revolution

Wray, A., & Thomas, A. (2013). School refusal and home education. *Journal of Unschooling and Alternative Learning, 7*(13).

Yardley, L. (2000). Dilemmas in qualitative health research. *Psychology & Health, 15*(2), 215-228.

Yardley, L. (2008). Demonstrating validity in qualitative psychology *in* Smith, J.A. (2nd Ed) *Qualitative Psychology: A Practical Guide to Research Methods.* London, SAGE.

Yardley, L. (2016). Demonstrating the validity of qualitative research. *Journal of Positive Psychology, 12*(3), 295-296.

Yin, R.K. (1989). *Case study research: Design and methods*. London: Sage Publications.

Yin, R.K. (2003). *Case study research: Design and methods: Applied Social Research Methods, Volume 5.* SAGE Publications, Inc.

Yin, R.K. (2011). *Qualitative Research from Start to Finish*. New York: Guilford.

Yin, R.K. (2018). *Case Study Research and Applications: Design and Methods* (6th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Young Minds. (2023). *Someone to Turn To: Being a Trusted Adult for Young People.* Retrieved from: https://www.youngminds.org.uk/media/by3o0aru/someone-to-turn-to-report.pdf

Appendices

Appendix 1 - Details of systematic literature search strategy

Databases

The following databases were used to carry out a comprehensive literature search, and were selected for their relevance to education, psychology and social sciences:

- British Education Index (EBSCO)
- Education Resource Information Centre (ERIC)
- PsychINFO
- UCL Explore

Searching on key internet sites and search engines (such as Google and Google Scholar) was also conducted to include a wider range of sources such as peer-reviewed journals articles, conference papers, reports, books, systematic reviews, theses and dissertations, government policy and reports, legislation and work from third sector agencies. As the review progressed, the search terms were updated. Other relevant literature was sourced through a search of reference sections in relevant documents.

Search terms

Several scoping searches were utilised to refine search terms, with results initially scanned for relevance and considered for any additional key terms. The final list of search terms are included below:

	Concept 1	*Concept 2*
Area of interest	Pedagogy utilised in home education and alternative education sector (including learning communities)	Use of self-determination theory to understand the impact of pedagogical approaches on the motivation and wellbeing of CYP in these spaces
Search terms:	Keywords were combined with Boolean operators "OR" or "AND": • Pedagogy • Pedagogical approaches	Keywords were combined with Boolean operators "OR" or "AND": • Home education

	AND • Home education • Home schooling • Home school • Unschooling • Self-directed learning • Self-directed education • Democratic schooling • Alternative education	• Home schooling • Home school • Pedagogy • Pedagogical approaches • Unschooling • Self-directed learning • Self-directed education • Democratic schooling • Alternative education **AND** • Self-determination theory • Autonomy • Competence • Relatedness • Psychological needs • Motivation • Wellbeing
Inclusion criteria	• Original, peer reviewed research • English language	• Original, peer reviewed research • English language
Excluded concepts	• Source over 25 years old	• Source over 25 years old

Appendix 2 – Ethics Approval

IOE.Doctorate In Educational Psychology

To: ████████████

Cc: ████████████████████

Tue 25/04/2023 11:37

Dear Sapna,

I am pleased to inform you that your Ethics Application for your Year 2 research project on the Doctorate in Professional Educational, Child and Adolescent Psychology, has been approved. If you have any further queries, please contact your supervisor directly.

Please note that if your proposed study and methodology changes markedly from what you have outlined in your ethics review application, you may need to complete and submit a new or revised application. Should this possibility arise, please discuss with your supervisor in the first instance before you proceed with a new/revised application.

Many thanks,

████████████████████

████████████████████

Programme Administrator
Doctorate in Professional Educational, Child and Adolescent Psychology (DEdPsy)
Centre for Doctoral Education
IOE, UCL's Faculty of Education and Society
Academic Programmes Office
20 Bedford Way, W1CH 0AL

SS thesis ethics application.docx;

Hi,

Thank you for your application to register with the Data Protection Office. Please consider, adapt, update, and return for our records, the following amendment/additions to the identified document below.

Participant information sheets
(Data Protection Privacy notice)

The controller for this project will be University College London (UCL). The UCL Data Protection Officer provides oversight of UCL activities involving the processing of personal data, and can be contacted at data-protection@ucl.ac.uk

This 'local' privacy notice sets out the information that applies to this particular study. Further information on how UCL uses participant information can be found in our 'general' privacy notice:

For participants in research studies, click here

The information that is required to be provided to participants under data protection legislation (GDPR and DPA 2018) is provided across both the 'local' and 'general' privacy notices.

The lawful basis that will be used to process your personal data is: 'Public task'.

Your personal data will be processed so long as it is required for the research project. If we are able to anonymise or pseudonymise the personal data you provide we will undertake this and will endeavour to minimise the processing of personal data wherever possible.

If you are concerned about how your personal data is being processed, or if you would like to contact us about your rights, please contact UCL in the first instance at data-protection@ucl.ac.uk

With this action in mind, I am pleased to confirm that this project is now registered under, reference No **Z6364106/2023/04/39 social research** in line with UCL's Data Protection Policy.

You may quote this reference on your Ethics Application Form, or any other related forms.

You should make arrangements as early as possible for the secure long-term storage of your data, taking into account any specific requirements of your department or funder. UCL staff and PhD students can use the UCL Research Data Repository while undergraduate and Masters students may want to ask their supervisors about the Open Education Repository. The Research Data Management team can be contacted at lib-researchsupport@ucl.ac.uk.

UCL staff can contact the Records Office records.office@ucl.ac.uk to arrange for the long-term secure storage of their research records.

For data protection enquiries, please contact the data protection team at data-protection@ucl.ac.uk

For ethics enquiries, please contact the ethics team at ethics@ucl.ac.uk.

Please remember...

Always use the latest forms from UCL's DPO website – earlier versions should no longer be submitted.

Regards,

████████████████████

Data Protection & Freedom of Information Administrator & Chief Web Editor

Parent Information Sheet

Research project title: Exploring children and young people's motivation and wellbeing in a learning community

What is this research and why is it important?
- There is a lot of research exploring how children and young people's motivation and wellbeing but there are not many studies which explore children's views of home education and learning communities.
- Therefore, I would like to work with children to explore what they like, enjoy and perhaps find tricky in these spaces.
- The findings from this study will be shared with a group of Educational Psychologists and other professionals to consider children's views of alternative education settings.

The researcher
I am Sapna Sandhu, a Year 3 Trainee Educational Psychologist, on the Doctorate in Educational, Child and Adolescent Psychology at IOE, UCL's Faculty of Education and Society. I am passionate about supporting and promoting children and young people's wellbeing. I want to encourage the Educational Psychology profession to consider how children's views can inform change in education to support children's wellbeing and what that can look like.

What will my child be asked to do?
I am using a varied approach to gathering each child's views through different activities. The activities will include the following:
- *Drawing:* I will invite each child to do some drawing with me, around what an ideal learning environment and not ideal learning environment looks like and we will talk about their drawing together.
- *Child interview:* I will invite your child to talk with me about their experiences of participating in a learning community. Topics will include what a good day looks like, what they value and what help looks like.
- *Tours and taking photographs:* In order to 'see' the learning environment from the child's perspective, I will invite each child to take photographs using an instant camera of things important to them. Any pictures including other people, faces, names or any identifiable information will be withdrawn from the project and destroyed.

- *Parent interview:* I also hope to interview yourself and your experiences of participating in a learning community.

I will ensure each child knows they can pass on answering questions and stop participating at any time, should they feel uncomfortable.

The process
1. The learning community have agreed that I can work in their setting.
2. If you are happy for the child to take part in the project, please show them the children's information sheet and talk with them about this opportunity.
3. If the child would like to take part in the research, please sign and return the enclosed consent forms to the learning community. I need consent from you and consent from each child. If you would like to speak with me directly before participating, this can be arranged.
4. I will work with each child at the learning community. My work with each child (including drawing activities, interviewing, and taking photos) will approximately take around two hours in total. I will split these activities up over a number of visits and do one or two activities per visit with them. I can assure you that my activities will not get in the way of their education or any social activities. I can be flexible in my visits.
5. Once I have collected the data and analysed it, I will send a research summary to you, the children and the learning community.

What will happen to the information provided by myself and my child?
- All data will be pseudonymised (data that will not allow for children, staff and the learning community to be identified). Every effort will be made to ensure this.
- All data will be stored on an encrypted device that only I have access to. I will only have access to this until the end of the project (September 2024).
- I will ensure drawings and photos do not include any information identifying children or anyone else. Data that indicates any identifiable information will be destroyed and removed from analysis.
- The information gathered from interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed. These transcriptions will be stored separately from any contact details and personal information provided on consent forms and questionnaire. They will be stored securely and not shared with anyone.
- The interviews will be confidential. This means I will not be able to share what children tell me. If your child discloses any information which suggests he/she/they or others are at risk of significant harm, then I will need to follow routine safeguarding procedures.

What should I do now?

If you have further questions, please feel free to contact me by telephone (▮▮▮▮) or email
(▮▮▮▮▮▮). If your child would like to take part, please sign and return the consent forms to
me. Please note that all children can withdraw from the study at any time and all
information relevant to them will be destroyed.

Supervision and ethical approval

This research is being supervised by Dr Becky Taylor, Principal Research Fellow at IOE, and Dr
Chris Bagley, Educational Psychologist and Tutor on the Doctorate in Educational, Child and
Adolescent Psychology at IOE. The project has ethical approval from IOE Research Ethics
Committee, which means that the committee has carefully considered the risks and benefits
of the research.

Data protection privacy notice

The controller for this project will be University College London (UCL). The UCL Data Protection Officer
provides oversight of UCL activities involving the processing of personal data, and can be contacted at data-protection@ucl.ac.uk

This 'local' privacy notice sets out the information that applies to this particular study. Further information on
how UCL uses participant information can be found in our 'general' privacy notice:

For participants in research studies, click here

The information that is required to be provided to participants under data protection legislation (GDPR and
DPA 2018) is provided across both the 'local' and 'general' privacy notices.

The lawful basis that will be used to process your personal data is: 'Public task'.

Your personal data will be processed so long as it is required for the research project. If we are able to
anonymise or pseudonymise the personal data you provide we will undertake this and will endeavour to
minimise the processing of personal data wherever possible.

If you are concerned about how your personal data is being processed, or if you would like to contact us about
your rights, please contact UCL in the first instance at data-protection@ucl.ac.uk

> *Research project title: Exploring children and young people's motivation and wellbeing in a learning community.*

Child Information Sheet

Who am I?

I am Sapna. I am training to be an Educational Psychologist. I often work with children to find out what helps them at school.

Why am I doing this research project?

I would like to speak with you about how you find home schooling and being in a learning community. I would like to hear what you enjoy doing and what you like about school.

What will I be asked to do?

We will do a few different activities. This might include:

- **Drawing –** we will do some drawing together.
- **Interview –** I will ask you about how you feel about attending a learning community. I will record using my iPad.
- **Tour & Photos –** I will ask you to take photos of things important to you.

What questions will I be asked?

- I will ask you how you feel about home education and attending a learning community, what you like and enjoy.
- I will invite you to do some drawing with me, take me on a tour and take pictures.
- <u>You will not have to answer any questions or do anything you do not want to.</u>

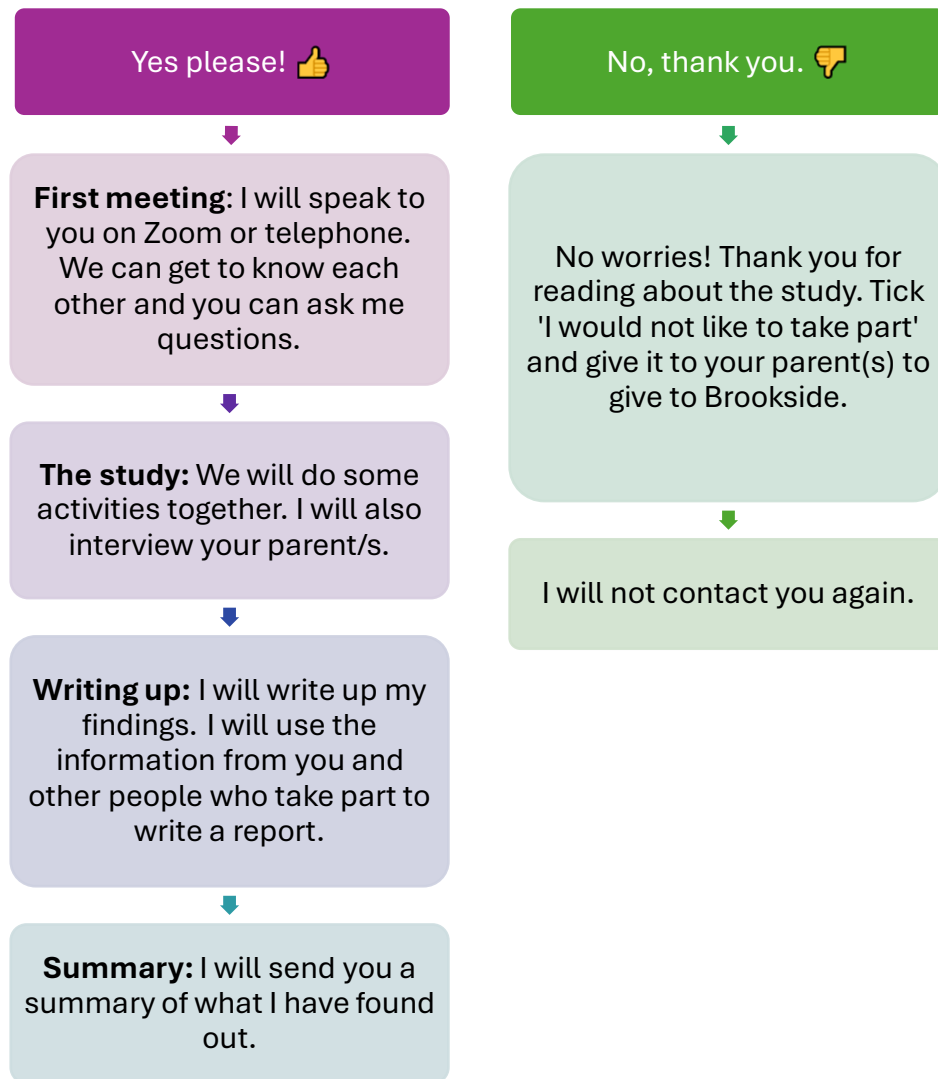**What will happen to the information I tell you?**

- I will type up my notes. I will then write a report about what I have found out.
- I will share the findings with other people, but I will not use your real name. This means that people will not know that it is you who has told me the information.
- <u>What you tell me is private between me and you.</u> But if you tell me anything which makes me, think you or anybody else is in danger, I will need to tell somebody.

What do I do now?

- There is a consent form for you to fill out to tell me whether you would like to take part.

- If you decide to take part, I will speak with you and your parents so that you can ask me any questions.
- If you would like to do two things one day and two things another day, we can organise this together.
- <u>If you change your mind about taking part, you can pull out at any time without giving me a reason.</u>

Do you want to take part?

Yes please! 👍	No, thank you. 👎
First meeting: I will speak to you on Zoom or telephone. We can get to know each other and you can ask me questions.	No worries! Thank you for reading about the study. Tick 'I would not like to take part' and give it to your parent(s) to give to Brookside.
The study: We will do some activities together. I will also interview your parent/s.	I will not contact you again.
Writing up: I will write up my findings. I will use the information from you and other people who take part to write a report.	
Summary: I will send you a summary of what I have found out.	

Appendix 5 – Parent Consent Form

Parent Consent Form

Research project title: Exploring children and young people's motivation and wellbeing in a learning community

Name of researcher: Sapna Sandhu

	Yes	No
I have read and understood the attached information sheet giving details of the project.		
I have had the opportunity to ask Sapna any questions that I have about the project and my child's involvement in it.		
I understand my role and my child's role in the project.		
I understand that I am free to ask Sapna any questions about the study at any time.		
My decision to give consent for my child to participate is entirely voluntary.		
I understand that the study will only be conducted if my child has agreed to participate. Any data they have contributed will not be used.		
I understand that the interview with my child is confidential and that Sapna won't be able to share the information that my child tells her with me.		
I understand that if my child discloses any information which suggests he/she or others are at risk of significant harm, Sapna will need to pass this information on to an appropriate adult/professional.		
I understand that the interview with my child will be audio recorded.		
I understand that the information gathered in this project will be used to form the basis of a report, and that the findings may be used in future reports and presentations.		
I understand that my child's name will not be used in any report, publication or presentation, and that every effort will be made to protect their confidentiality.		

Child's name   _____

Parent/carer name

Relationship to child

Parent/carer Signature   _____

Date   _____

Appendix 6 – Child Consent Form

Child Consent Form

Research project title: Exploring children and young people's motivation and wellbeing in a learning community.
Name of researcher: Sapna Sandhu

If you would like to take part, please tick one option below:

I would like to take part in this study	
I would <u>not</u> like to take part in this study	

If you would like to take part, please circle yes or no to each statement:

|		
I understand what this study is about and what activities I will be doing with Sapna.	Yes 👍	No 👎
I confirm that it is my decision to take part and not anybody else's.	Yes 👍	No 👎
I understand that I do not have to answer any questions I do not want to and can pull out at any time without giving a reason.	Yes 👍	No 👎
I understand that the interview will be recorded and typed up.	Yes 👍	No 👎
I understand that Sapna will use the information I tell her to write presentations and reports. I understand that no one will be able to identify me from what I've said. Sapna will make every effort to protect my identity.	Yes 👍	No 👎
I understand that if I tell Sapna anything that makes her think I or anybody else is in danger, she will have to tell somebody.	Yes 👍	No 👎

Name   _____

Signature   _____

Date   _____

Appendix 7 – Child Interview Schedule

Pre-interview reminders:

- Approximately 20-minute interview

- Audio recording

- Do not have to answer any questions they are not comfortable with (without reason)

- If they disclose something that makes me think they or anyone else is in danger, I will have to report to someone

- Can withdraw at any time during interview and following interview, before the write up of the thesis

The questions in the semi-structured interviews were not prescribed and they were adjusted to children's responses. The general questions I asked all children included:

1) Could you tell me a bit about your experience at Brookside?
2) What are you interested in at Brookside? Or, what do you enjoy doing?
3) Anything else you are interested in?
4) What do you like about being at Brookside? Why?
5) What do you like learning about?
6) When do you get to do your interests?
7) What does it look like?
8) How does Brookside help you to feel clever?
9) What difference does it make?
10) How does Brookside allow you to build friendships?
11) Do you remember that we took some photos? *(Points to photographs)* Do you know why we took these?
12) Did you have any thoughts that you wanted to share about them?
13) Is there anything else you want to tell me or talk about?

Appendix 8 – Parent Interview Schedule

Pre-interview reminders:

- Approximately 1 hour interview

- Audio recording

- Do not have to answer any questions they are not comfortable with (without reason)

- If they disclose something that makes me think they or anyone else is in danger, I will have to report to someone

- Can withdraw at any time during interview and following interview, before the write up of the thesis

The questions in the semi-structured interviews were not prescribed and were adjusted to responses from parents/carers and practitioners. The general questions I asked all parents/carers and practitioners included:

1) Could you tell me a little bit about your journey to Brookside?
2) What sort of things is [name of child] interested in?
3) What kind of things does [name of child] like doing at home?
4) What kind of things does [name of child] like doing at Brookside?
5) Where do you think [name of child]'s interests have come from?
6) Does Brookside support [name of child]'s interests? How so?
7) How does Brookside allow [name of child] feel clever?
8) How does Brookside allow [name of child] to build relationships?
9) Is there anything else you would like to talk about?

Appendix 9 – Visual data analysis example using content analysis (Sam)

Step 2 - Visual data analysis using content analysis

Table 10. *Photo content example (Sam)*

Photo location	Activity	Resources
Indoors	Sitting by heater	Heater, blanket, hot drink
Indoors	Sitting/lying on sofa bed	Bed, cushions, blanket, comfy/plushie toys
Outdoors	Swing	n/a
Outdoors	Football, playing	Goal post
Outdoors	Socialising in community area	Chairs, comfortable sofa/space
Outdoors	Relaxing	Nature
Outdoors	Pizza oven	n/a
Outdoors	Pod – chilling, relaxing	n/a
Outdoors	Learning and socialising	Tables, chair, whiteboard
Outdoors	Playing	Slide
Outdoors	The 'hole' – socialising	n/a

Table 11*. Photo motifs.*

Participant	Outdoors	Indoors	Playing	Socialising	Learning	Relax / cosy/ warmth	Nature
Sam	▨	▨	▨	▨	▨	▨	▨
Morgan	▨	▨		▨		▨	▨
Alex	▨		▨	▨			▨

Note: Orange shading to indicate which photo motifs emerged with each participant

Step 3 - Coding of photographs
- Photo motifs and content were revisited and developed into codes
- Codes were recorded into each child's folder under headings, as evidenced in Table 12 below:

Table 12. *Photo codes.*

Location	*Outdoors, indoors*
Characteristics of the space	*Trees, nature, heater, warmth*
Activity	*Playing, socialising, learning*
Resources	*Books, swings, football, lights, blanket*

Phase 4 – Generation of photo categories

- Photos, content, codes, transcripts from tours and photography activities and researcher's notes from these activities were discussed and considered in peer review
- Categories were generated from these discussions and are evidenced below in Table 12.

Table 13. *Visual data categories.*

Visual data categories
Outdoor play
Friends
Nature
Calm and comfort
Community social spaces
Privacy and quiet places

Appendix 10 – Example of field notes during observation

Note: Template based on Fetters and Rubinstein (2019) three C's approach (Context, Content, and Concepts) and Crompton's (2019) guidance.

Project title: Exploring home-educated children's experiences of pedagogy in a learning community	
Document type: Unstructured field observation	
Observer: SS	
Date: 5.10.2023	**Time**: 9.45am – 2.45pm
Observation Session Number:	
Location: 'Brookside' Learning Community	
Research questions: 1. How do the pedagogical approaches in a learning community impact children's experiences of autonomy, competence, and relatedness? 2. What pedagogical approaches within a learning community are perceived by its stakeholders as influencing children's psychological well-being?	
Context *(researcher observations about circumstances under which the observation is taking place, including information that might directly or indirectly influence data generation, affect researcher, and/or members at the learning community).* *Other prompts:* • *Being conscious of my own positioning (through clothing, behaviour and mannerisms) – how is this influencing the context?* The observation took place on a Thursday from 9.45 am to 2.45pm at Brookside. I arrived on Thursday (third day of three-day block) so was joining towards the end of the week. On my arrival, CYP and members were already engaged in discussions about experiments they could try which seemed like ongoing topics from earlier in the week.	
Content *(Who is being observed? What actions/events are occurring? How do individuals being observed respond? Timing/sequence of events? Quotes from interactions?* *Other prompts:* • *Noting language, symbols and shared meanings* • *What is said, what is not said?*	

On arrival at Brookside, CYP and mentors engaged in informal discussions about learning, interests and hobbies. For interest, one of the mentors asked, "What is the most complex thing in the world?" and a younger child, maybe aged around six, responded saying "Water because it gets smaller when it's hot and bigger when it's cold". The mentor then followed up with some suggestions for an experiment, to which the younger CYP eagerly responded saying "I'd be up for that".

The morning check in was a whole community one (rather than two separate groups as they are for Tuesdays / Wednesdays) with a temperature check to gauge how comfortable and members were feeling (using thumbs up, down, or in the middle).

During the community meeting, all members reviewed a visual board outlining Brookside's current topics of discussion. These topics were organised in the following way:

- Awareness – what is being noticed by members that needs to be addressed with the community?
- Needs/values – how does this align with the community ethos?
- Practicing – how is this being actioned? When can it be agreed to be stopped?
- Mastery – have the community mastered this?

Anyone is encouraged to bring any topics to the community meeting and are discussed by establishing an agenda at the start of the meeting. For instance, the issue of swearing in communal spaces was raised. Once raised, the mentors asked members to leave if they were not interested in discussing and agreeing solutions. I noticed that not many people left. The meeting then utilised a solution focused approach and went into the 'solution phase' where mentors facilitated the discussion. For instance, one mentor asked "What could happen when others swear? What could we be doing?" It was during this point that one of the mentors named the group dynamics of the community meeting. There were a higher number of older young people compared to the younger children (who initially brought this item to the community meeting). The younger children asked all the members present to respect the process and other people's opinions, with all members modelling how to share views respectfully in confidence, by trusting each other. One of the young people suggested smaller break out rooms to facilitate the discussion. By this point, the community meeting had lasted 25 minutes, with a few young people seeming frustrated. They shared that they wanted to leave, and named there was a divide between the 'older and younger group'. Although they formally left the community meeting, they continued their own conversations about the topic by the swings.

Mentors reflected on the process of the community meeting and considered how the process could be more circular to ensure reviews were taking place. The young people later shared that they were in the yurt all day (presumably earlier in the week), and to then be told they couldn't speak in a certain way in their own space, was not received well by them.

I was asked later by one of the mentors how I found the process, and I curiously asked about 'behaviour policy' or guidance that is considered to manage difficult / tense discussions. The mentors shared that their approaches are fluid and flexible, and although there is brief and public guidance on the website, they shared they are worried that they can often be misinterpreted by others outside of Brookside.

During the Project Labs session, a form of group work, some of the young people showed some resistance to reviewing their current projects, asking "How long do these usually take? / Do I have to write it?" I noticed that the mentor positively supported this and considered with the young people, different ways of reviewing their projects (e.g. drawing, talking through it, writing). They named use of self-directed principles, with mentors facilitating the organisation of activities of interest (e.g. suggesting times and opportunities) for the CYP to be able to bring their ideas to reality. They utilised a table to think about these ideas using 'to do / doing / done' to organise their ideas and future goals. The young people were asked to brainstorm areas of interest in the middle (e.g. cooking, gaming, fermenting) and then worked collaboratively with each other to identify connections to that interest. One of the young people shared that they were worried about getting it "wrong" but the mentor reassured them that there was no right/wrong way of doing this activity. They said, "This needs to work for you. If this activity is not helpful for you, we won't do it again and we'll try something else." The interests of the CYP were considered with the mentors in relation to opportunities but choices ultimately remained the CYP about what they wanted to do. For instance, one young person identified sport science as an area of interest, so the mentor supported their thinking around this topic (e.g. "What's the biology about how the body reacts to sports?"). Together, the young people and mentors thought together about what the next four weeks could look like (named the 'learning sprint') and what resources, materials, mediums (e.g. experiments, books, videos) could be used to facilitate their learning. Another young person identified animals and physiology as an area of interest, which was later developed into a learning topic on the 'creating a project on the physiology of animals'. The mentors supported the young people to think about the project to ensure they had enough to sustain their learning for the next four weeks, in and outside of Brookside. Goals were then identified with possibilities and tangible actions which were co-constructed with the CYP.

There were separate group activities occurring in parallel (with mentors supporting different groups but all discussing projects in either 1:1 / group settings).

Concepts *(Preliminary ideas, observations, what have I learned, implications from observation?)*

Other prompts:
- *Own sensory responses (sight, sounds, textures, smells, tastes)*
- *Personal reflections to recording of field notes?*
- *Noting curious questions for future exploration*

During the observation today, I felt like there was lots going on which was quite overwhelming. I wondered if this was a symptom of the 'order' I have experienced in mainstream schools. The amount of freedom the CYP and mentors experience here was eye opening and witnessing them co-constructing projects for learning was so interesting. Today highlighted to me how well the mentors and CYP know each other, particularly in relation to each other's interests, and how they used this knowledge to support each other's thinking around their learning. This also included being flexible In adapting approaches to suit the preference of individual CYP at Brookside.

The mentors shared the number of CYP at Brookside who are neurodiverse, and how this had led to a culture of everyone being quite direct and blunt with each other. I wondered if this way of interacting with each other had been officially 'contracted' and named in the group, with one mentor responding that it was 'assumed interaction'.

End of observation.

Appendix 11 – IPA analysis (outline of process and reflections) adapted from Smith et al. (2022) and Love et al. (2020)

Stage 1: Immersion in the data

- I transcribed all audio recordings verbatim, making notes on participant's use of tone, emotion and group dynamics where relevant.
- The child's data was kept separate from the parent's data at this stage.
- I read through each transcript several times to familiarise myself with the data to ensure I was slowing down the habitual process of reading and to ensure individual participants were the focus of analysis.

Stage 2: Identifying researcher orientation and potential bias

- A self-reflexive activity was carried out individually and in supervision to explore biases, perception and views of the research topic, and participant group, and how this could influence the data generation and analytical process.
- Biases and/or changes in views were noted in a research reflective diary and combined into the analysis and/or interpretations where relevant.

Stage 3: Exploratory noting

- I made notes directly into the table on the transcript, with an effort to note the following:
  - Descriptive notes (descriptions of experiences, summarising what participants said)
  - Linguistic (participant's use of language and tone)
  - Conceptual content (questioning and interpreting, adding meaning to what participants said)
- For the paired interview, additional adaptions were made where the following questions were considered as part of reflections and in relation to the analytical process:
  - How does the facilitator's role impact the paired interview dynamics (e.g. what is the function of statements made by respondents?)
  - How do participants support or impede each other to share their experiences?
  - What patterns of language are used at the individual and paired level? (e.g. repetition, jargon, stand out words, phrases, turn taking, prompting)
  - What is the function of the language used? (e.g. to emphasise, back up points, shock, amuse, provoke agreement or disagreement, lighten tone)

Stage 4: Constructing experiential statements

- This involved an analytical shift from reducing the volume of detail made in the exploratory notes to developing experiential statements that reflected the participant's original words and thoughts, but also interpretations made.
- I created an additional table in a separate word document and copied across the exploratory comments and began to develop experiential statements.
- Some of these statements were similar to the exploratory notes, while some were revised and rephrased.
- I ensured to note the page number of comments and associated quotes to each experiential statement.
- For the paired interview, additional thought was given to the emerging experiential statements with the following guiding questions:
    o What experiences are being shared?
    o What are individuals doing by sharing their experiences?
    o How are they making those things meaningful to each other?
    o What are the consensus issues?
    o Where is there conflict? How is it being managed/resolved?

Stage 5: Searching for connections across experiential statements
- This involved printing the experiential statements on paper and cutting them up to break up initial ordering and facilitate a search for conceptual ordering
- I searched for connections between statements, while considering how these clusters reflected the participant's experiences and their world

Stage 6: Naming the Personal Experiential Themes (PETs)
- Each group of statements were given a name to define its characteristics.
- I organised the PETs and aligning experiential comments and example quotes into a table on a separate Word document.

Stage 7: Continuing the individual analysis for each participant
- This involved repeating the process for each participant.

Stage 8: Working with PETs to develop case PETs for the individual units of analysis
- This step involved looking for patterns across each child and their parent's data to identify similar patterns, and potential case PETs. This was considered using the following questions:
    o What lies at the heart of these experiences?
    o How did participants live through it?
    o How did they make sense of it?
    o What connections are there across the emerging case PETs?

- Note: this resulted in three case PETs for each child, and an additional case for the paired interview.
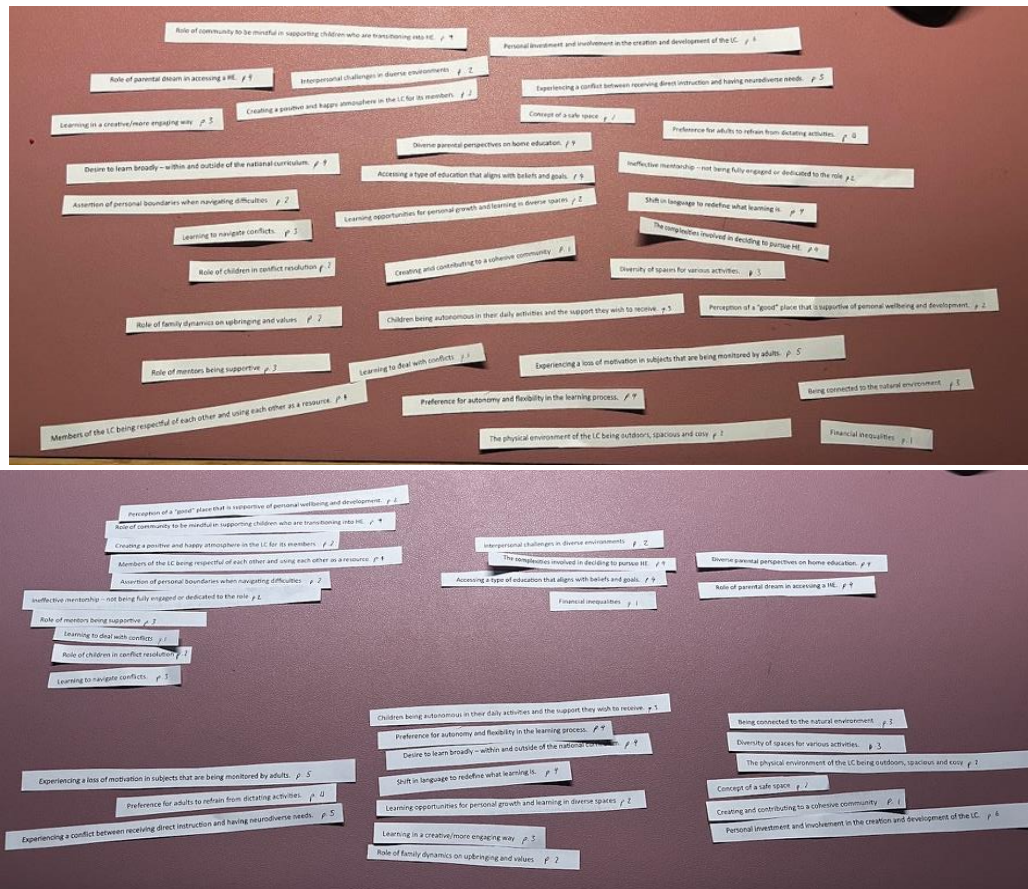
Stage 9: Developing Group Experiential Themes across the three cases and paired interview

- This involved looking for patterns across all three units of analysis and the paired interview to identify shared features across participant's experiences at Brookside.
- I ensured to refer to individual experiential statements during this process to ensure groupings at the PET level made sense to the individual's experiences.
- Four Group Experiential Themes (GETs) were identified and are presented in Appendix 13, with the linked PETs from each unit of analysis.

Reflections

- I initially found the approach to IPA more extensive in comparison to other qualitative approaches I had used in the past, such as thematic analysis. The interpretative aspect of IPA left me feeling quite 'stuck' and difficult to get started in the process for the fear of doing it wrong. It helped to speak with other EP colleagues who had used IPA in the past, hear their reflections and advice, as well as return to Smith et al.'s (2022) book on IPA, to support with this process.

- As a result of my training into psychology, I wondered if I was being too interpretative at times, and if I was jumping ahead by thinking about themes during the earlier stages. It helped to use supervisory spaces to think these ideas through.
- When starting new analyses for other participants, I tried to make sure I was not reproducing or repeating notes from previous participants. However, I soon realised that there were many shared experiences between the participants, and that I would be influenced by my earlier findings. However, new experiences and themes were noted for each participant so I felt I did justice to each participant's account.

Appendix 12 – Example of textual analysis using IPA (Morgan/Sam paired interview)

Exploratory comments and experiential statements

Exploratory comments (conceptual, linguistic, descriptive)	Page	Experiential statements	Example quotes
Repetition of "at all" – suggesting they have spoken about their views on education previously Participants speaking on behalf of each other Repetition of "very" to emphasise point Close friends for a long time Know everything about each other	1	Past discussions have shaped their current views on education Friendship is marked by passage of time and sharing of experiences Recognition of special bond between them	*"We don't really have opinions on education at all. Not on education." - Sam* *"We know each other very very well."- Sam* *"We've been friends for three and a half years. And they know basically everything about me. Like, things that my parents don't even know." – Morgan*
Use of turn taking Started attending LC after lockdown Already attended school for a few months but didn't like it Experience of anxiety during lockdown Feelings of isolation? Started attending another LC on Mondays Made friends "almost instantly"	2	Difference despite similarity, transitions between educational settings and returning to the LC Early schooling experiences prompting a reconsideration of educational pathways Friendships forming almost instantly – feels natural and effortless	*"I first got here after lockdown like I had already been into school once for a few months but like I didn't like it all. And then after going there, I [laughs], then lockdown came. And after that, like after that I had a lot of anxiety 'cause of lockdown so I didn't go out that much." - Morgan* **Removed for confidentiality* *"I made friends with Morgan, and we became best friends like almost instantly. So the XXX is the Brookside which is now*

Best friends Shared experiences of attending together Really good friends (repetition) Planning weekly activities Separate from LC "Just" – only went there first "Lured" use of language to amuse and also emphasise Morgan's role in bringing Sam to LC Tried school again and left LC Attended special school but didn't like it Sam has a diagnosis of Autism but not explicitly mentioned Morgan also neurodiverse (ADHD) – they shared during their individual activities Add to each other's stories – shared views on this? People not taught how to behave - not feeling understood? Not taught that it wasn't okay		Friendship strengthened through shared experiences at LC Planning of weekly activities through a collaborative approach Introductory nature of initially attending the LC Influence of wider community Schooling reattempts indicates a dynamic educational journey Powerful and complementary dynamic where they support each other to share experiences Stance on identifying and challenging social boundaries and unacceptable behaviour	*inside Brookside and we kind of plan things like weekly with them and that used to be weekly on Mondays, separate from Brookside and at first, I just started going to that. Then when I became really good friends with Morgan." – Sam* *"I lured you to Brookside". – Morgan* *"But then I left, to try out school. I really really didn't like that school." – Sam* *"It was like a special school for autism." – Morgan (adding to Sam's point)* *"It was just, um, the people there didn't have like – they didn't have – they weren't taught how to behave, so they would make like, um, horrible jokes and do really bad things. And they weren't taught that wasn't okay. They were just like that because they have a condition or something. That was how they decided to – not*

182

Repetition of "that's not okay"

Justified by having a condition – use of term 'condition'

Specific teachers described as quite bad

Negative experiences at the setting

Decided to come back to LC – a sense of safety, a base, somewhere to come back to?

Ambition to continue GCSEs

Plans for college

Positive experiences associated with LC

Naming friends as a key factor

Use of laughter/jokes to amuse and lighten tone

Removed for confidentiality

"very strict, they's very schooly" – associations of these concepts together

Removed for confidentiality

A sad time | Viewing the LC as a sense of safety to return to when other pathways break down

Experience the LC as a fun and enjoyable place to be

Desires to complete formal education

The influence of parental resistance to schooling on decision making

Motivation to create a LC

Conceptual association between perception of a particular parenting style and school

Navigating the imposed transitions between home education and schooling has posed emotional challenges | *even tell them that's not okay so that's how they learned that, which made them not very good people. And also some of the teachers there was also quite bad. Um, but anyway, after I went there, I decided to come back to Brookside while I do my GCSE's and then next year, I'm gonna go to college. So yeah. But my experience with Brookside is very good. I really like it here. Especially 'cause of my friend, Morgan." – Sam*

Removed for confidentiality |

Having a crush on someone in school	3	Positive social, adolescent experiences in school	*"I think that one of the things that I look back and laugh at was that I used to have a crush … It was this one person in my class. I used to write it in my diary, I still have it." – Morgan*
Had to stay		Staying in school despite having reservations	
Removed for confidentiality		A shared understanding between parent and child following legal proceedings to home educate	*Removed for confidentiality*
Idea of still not being somewhere they didn't want to be			
"Luckily"			*"I did try out secondary school … um, at the start of Year 7, I tried out two. For like 2 days, and then I saw someone get punched in the face and someone got stabbed so I didn't go back to that school." – Morgan*
After fighting – a sense of resolution reached		Feeling grateful to return and access the LC during the pandemic	
Tried two different schools			
Witnessed two incidences in school which impacted going back to that school		Unsuccessful experiences of visiting different schools with intentions to attend traditional schooling	
Laughs to lighten tone			*"Yeah. [laughs]. And it was someone in my class … by a guy that had followed me from primary school to secondary school … Like a little bit nerve-wracking. So my parent took me out … I didn't really like it so I left and went to home ed." – Morgan*
"Yeah" – to confirm researcher's reaction		Experiences of negative incidents shaping decision making to access HE	
Knew the young person affected by incident			
Incidences at school feeling nerve wracking		Educational aspirations, desire to return to school to complete GCSEs	
Went to a different school but didn't really like it			
Returned to home ed			

		A deliberate removal from schooling	*"I want to try, I want to go to secondary school in Year 9 and get my GCSE's." – Morgan*
"Left" – removed themself from situation Wants to return to school to get GCSEs – seems to view school as the only place to get their GCSEs from? Wants to try *Removed for confidentiality* Use of "I decided" / "want" – autonomy, reflects ultimately their decision Use of short, sentences Clear turn taking in dynamics – Morgan spoke at length on their experiences, so L responded to next question. Seemed attuned to each other's emotional states/responses Typical day is varied Role of choice in attending sessions Sessions being tailored for varied ages (Morgan and Sam are different ages)		A desire to try again; an openness to change Expression of personal autonomy through language choices There is agency in shaping own dynamic and evolving educational pathway Worries around parental reactions as a factor influencing return to schooling Sessions in the LC are tailored for different ages, reflecting a flexible learning approach There is choice to attend sessions	*"I don't really know if I have a favourite day but like, a typical day would be like going um, seeing Morgan, playing some games, like boardgames, card games, um, like, I like when we do some baking." – Sam* *"Me dragging you to do maths." - Morgan*
Social activities	4	Engagement in social and	*"Sometimes going on trips … um, just like hanging out with people." – Sam*

Use of 'actually' throughout – to emphasise surprising/unexpected information? Banter with mentor Mentor good at doing maths – finds it fun and enjoyable Enjoys doing work (learning) Completes additional work outside of LC Community activities (e.g. secret santa) Enjoys attending LC Asking each other questions to clarify and prompt each other Reflecting on previous social community activities Used this part of the interview to break up the more difficult content and to lighten tone		community activities foster a sense of belonging Relationships with mentors are established through a light-hearted and informal rapport Mentors have skill and enthusiasm for their subjects which contribute to positive learning environments There is experience of genuine enjoyment in the process of learning A proactive and commitment to learning flexibly in and outside of LC	*"I think I actually like to do Maths. I find it really fun."- Morgan* *"I do like them, they're okay, - I tell them I don't like them, um, so their actually pretty good at doing maths with us and I find it really fun and enjoyable. Um, I also do French with another mentor, and then I do writing with the same mentor that I do maths with. And then I do my work outside of Brookside which is fun." – Morgan* *"I liked people doing the secret santa when I first started coming, that was really good." – Sam* *"Just being here is pretty good." - Sam*
Researcher positioning to bring back on track Enjoys doing maths Able to do whatever they want	5	Sense of freedom and autonomy in choosing and engaging in learning activities	*"Okay … shall we carry on?" – Interviewer* *"The maths. Basically everything I want, I enjoy doing." - Morgan*

Enjoys social activities the most (e.g. trips) Use of 'my' to symbolise closeness of friendship / best friends Use of short words to confirm views Being with my pookie – close friends, most important Different definitions of 'clever' LC doesn't help to feel clever Focus on language of 'personally' and 'no' Attempts to justify further Nothing can make you clever Difficult to make somewhere student led and academic Feeling good after learning new things Use of language "want" and "do" Use of word "feel" – emotional responses evoked from learning?	6	A particular fondness for social activities Recognition of a special bond and closeness between them Curious around how the term 'clever' is defined The LC does not help foster feelings of cleverness There are complexities in achieving a balance between student autonomy and academic focus Positive emotional responses evoked the process of intentional and engaged learning	*"I enjoy going on trips most of all but I also really like hanging out with my Morgan but I also like doing baking and games." – Sam* *"Yes, yes, yes." – Morgan* *"And most importantly of course, being with my pookie." - Sam* *"It depends on what you mean by clever." – Morgan* *"Well personally I would say that I love Brookside, I think it's a really good place, but no." - Sam* *"Well nothing can make you clever." – Morgan* *"I don't think this should be the case but it's very hard to make somewhere very like student-led and very fun and very nice and also be quite academic, I would say." – Sam* *"I get to do maths, English and history and French, um, I feel like I do feel, I feel quite good after I've done all those things like ahhh. I've done these things, I want to do these things. I feel like I know everything and I can do anything." - Morgan*

Planning activities at the start of the day	7	Structuring the learning experience	"We just plan things in at the beginning of the day and then do that." – Sam
LC good at supporting CYP with what they want to do		Recognition of the LC's support in facilitating activities suggested by CYP	"I would say that Brookside is really good at like um, supporting people at what they do and what they like … and you can like plan in like lots of different things, you can bring things in." – Sam
Mentors working around children		There are flexible approaches to learning which accommodate diverse needs	"Yeah I think that you can just do whatever you want and the mentors will help you with that." - Morgan
Flexible in learning			
		The LC offers space for positive interactions between CYP which can contribute to formation of friendships	"It's very <u>up</u> to you what you want to do, so you can choose <u>whatever</u> you want to do." – Sam
Nice people at LC helps to make friends			"If there's lots of nice people there, and then you get really good friends from there." – Sam
Can also make enemies		Acknowledging the existence of conflicts, challenges and mistreatment in relationships	"But you can also make enemies … people treat you very badly and throw things at you and generally just very rude and horrible to you and annoying, so it's quite easy to make <u>enemies</u> with them." – Sam
Being treated badly			
Feeling injustice when a friend is treated badly			
Lifelong friends	8	Lasting nature of friendships established within the LC	"They are lifelong friends." – Morgan
Friends are main reason to attend LC			"Friends are like one of the reasons- friends are like one of the main reasons I go to Brookside. Actually it wouldn't be fun if there was no one you liked."- Sam
Wouldn't be fun without people you liked		Friends play a key role in influencing the decision to attend a LC	
Not enough girls at LC			

More boys being diagnosed with ASC/ADHD Emphasis on 'boys' Idea of not fitting in and implications in school system Participants adding to each other's points Girls hiding how they feel Girls not supposed to get into trouble Being brought up differently Identification of key terms *Removed for confidentiality* Empowered to have a voice Making it more equal		Some underrepresentation of girls in the LC A recognition of gender-specific dynamics in the diagnosis of neurodiversity Acknowledgements of implications associated with not conforming to conventional educational norms Recognition of gendered norms Ones upbringing can contribute to having a distinct perspective Importance of having a voice in shaping own experiences of the world A desire to create a more equitable system	*"I think there's not actually many girls here. I think – I don't think the Brookside is helping <u>that</u>. I don't think it's a bad thing. But I think that – I think its maybe because um, people only diagnose um like boys with things like autism and ADHD, and so only those <u>boys</u> get special help or only those <u>boys</u> are like 'oh, he's not fitting in here'". – Morgan* *"Like a lot of girls like might try and hide how they're feeling and stuff because that's how they're – that's how society – that's how they're sort of brought up like um, boys are brought up to not talk about their feelings but they're also expected to be like getting into trouble and boisterous, whereas girls aren't …if boys like fight with people or get into trouble, they're just like you know 'oh boys will be boys' but then if girls do it, it's too bad." – Sam* *Removed for confidentiality*
n/a	9		*n/a*
Important to parents so important to them	10	Important to parents – the impact of their values and beliefs	*"I took a picture of the pen cause these are the ones that my parent always gets." – Morgan*

Helped make something in the LC – it is important to them		Personal significance is attached to the act of participating and contributing to the LC	*"'Cause I actually helped make it. 'Cause you know … I also helped make this." - Morgan* *"I just love you." – Morgan*
Love each other Banter relationship		An emotional bond, mutual love and affection	*"Then why didn't you take a picture of me then? … I'm kidding … we have sort of a banter relationship." – Sam*
School is not the only option Decide what is best for you Go somewhere you want		Recognition there are alternative educational pathways beyond traditional schooling Advocating for individual agency in choosing an educational environment that align with personal needs and preferences	*"I'd like to share that my message is school not the only option." – Sam* *"I think you should decide what is best for you and not let anyone else decide what is best for you. If you think that school is for you, then go to school but I think if you think that – I think if you – if school is not working for you then maybe a learning community is or like something like – a place where you get to do whatever you want … A learning community. You should – I think if you think that would be good for you then, then that's good for you." - Morgan*

Personal Experiential Themes (PETs)	Subtheme	Experiential statements
Building community bonds	Sense of belonging within the community	Personal significance is attached to the act of participating and contributing to the LC (p.10) Relationships with mentors are established through a light-hearted and informal rapport (p.4) Engagement in social and community activities foster a sense of belonging (p.4) A particular fondness for social activities (p.6) Some underrepresentation of girls in the LC (p.8) A recognition of gender-specific dynamics in the diagnosis of neurodiversity (p.8)
	Friendship dynamics	The LC offers space for positive interactions between CYP which can contribute to formation of friendships (p.7) An emotional bond, mutual love and affection (p.10) Friends play a key role in influencing the decision to attend a LC (p.8) Friendship strengthened through shared experiences of LC (p.2) Lasting nature of friendships established within the LC (p.8) Recognition of special bond between them (p.1) Friendship is marked by passage of time and sharing of experiences (p.1) Friendships forming almost instantly – feels natural and effortless (p.2) Powerful and complementary dynamic where they support each other to share experiences (p.2) Acknowledging the existence of conflicts, challenges and mistreatment in relationships (p.7)
A dynamic educational pathway	Navigating educational transitions	Early schooling experiences prompting a reconsideration of educational pathways (p.2) Past discussions have shaped their current views on education (p.1) Schooling reattempts indicate a dynamic educational journey (p.2) Experiences of negative incidents shaping decision making to access HE (p.3) Staying in school despite having reservations (p.3)

	Safety in the learning community	Feeling grateful to return and access the LC during the pandemic (p.3)
		Introductory nature of initially attending the LC (p.2)
		Viewing the LC as a sense of safety to return to when other pathways break down (p.2)
		Difference despite similarity, transitions between educational settings and returning to the LC (p.2)
		Navigating the imposed transitions between home education and schooling has posed emotional challenges (p.2)
CYP empowered to take agency	To shape own educational journey	There is agency in shaping own dynamic and evolving educational pathway (p.3)
		Educational aspirations, desire to return to school to complete GCSEs (p.3)
		Desires to complete formal education (p.2)
		A desire to try again; an openness to change (p.3)
		Advocating for individual agency in choosing an educational environment that align with personal needs and preferences (p.10)
		Expression of personal autonomy through language choices (p.3)
		Sense of freedom and autonomy in choosing and engaging in learning activities (p.5)
		Structuring the learning experience (p.7)
	To advocate for wider systems	A desire to create a more equitable system (p.8)
		Importance of having a voice in shaping own experiences of the world (p.8)
		There are complexities in achieving a balance between student autonomy and academic focus (p.6)
		Stance on identifying and challenging social boundaries and acceptable behaviour (p.2)
Impact of family dynamics on educational choices	Parental values and beliefs	Important to parents – the impact of their values and beliefs (p.10)
		The influence of parental resistance to schooling on decision making (p.2)
		Acknowledgements of implications associated with not conforming to conventional educational norms (p.8)
		Influence of wider community (p.2)
		Motivation to create a LC (p.2)

	Impact of upbringing and experiences on current views of education	A deliberate removal from schooling (p.3) Unsuccessful experiences of visiting different schools with intentions to attend traditional schooling (p.3) Ones upbringing can contribute to having a distinctive perspective (p.8) Worries around parental reactions as a factor influencing return to schooling (p.3) Conceptual association between perception of a particular parenting style and school approaches (p.2) A shared understanding between parent and child following legal proceedings to home educate (p.3)
An adaptive and collaborative learning environment		Positive emotional responses evoked the process of intentional and engaged learning (p.6) There is experience of genuine enjoyment in the process of learning (p.4) There is choice to attend sessions (p.3) Recognition of the LC's support in facilitating activities suggested by CYP (p.7) A proactive and commitment to learning flexibly in and outside of LC (p.4) Mentors have skill and enthusiasm for their subjects which contribute to positive learning environments (p.4) Sessions in the LC are tailored for different ages, reflecting a flexible learning approach (p.3) There are flexible approaches to learning which accommodate diverse needs (p.7) Planning of weekly activities through a collaborative approach (p.2) The LC does not help foster feelings of cleverness (p.6) Curious around how the term clever is defined (p.6)

Table 14. *Group Experiential Themes (GETs).*

Group Experiential Themes (GETs)	Personal Experiential Themes (PETs)	Mosaic approach (including drawings, interviews, photos and tours, and parent interviews)				Observations / field notes
		Morgan	**Sam**	***Paired interview between Morgan and Sam***	**Alex**	
Characteristics of the learning community	The physical environment	▓	▓		▓	▓
	Community culture and atmosphere	▓	▓	▓	▓	▓
Building and maintaining community bonds	Relationships within the community		▓	▓	▓	▓
	Conflict resolution	▓			▓	▓
An individualised approach to learning		▓	▓	▓	▓	▓
Motivations to home educate and attend a learning community	Individual and family factors	▓	▓	▓	▓	
	External factors		▓	▓		