



UCL Institute of Education

**Doctorate in Professional Educational Child and
Adolescent Psychology**

**Participatory Research Exploring the School
Experiences of Secondary School Students
with EHCPs for Social Emotional Mental Health**

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May 2020

Word Count: 37,349

I, Caroline Daw 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.

Acknowledgements

This research would not be here without the work and support of many individuals who have played such a large role in my life over the last 3 years.

I'd like to take this opportunity to thank Dr Jane Hurry and Dr Melernie Meheux for their help and support in getting me through this process. Their words of advice and encouragement were invaluable and I am forever grateful.

To my wonderful gatekeepers, without whom I would not have been able to conduct this research. Julie, Shelley, everyone in the EP team, and all the school staff who agreed to support this research, and who provided warm welcomes and hot beverages during my data collection.

Thank you to my parents, who instilled in me from a young age the value of determination and hard work. This thesis was quite possibly the hardest thing I have done to date and I could not have got to this point without your love and support.

And finally, thank you to my brilliant research assistants. Becca, Caitlyn and Rosie – thank you so much for all your hard work over the last 12 months. This research would not be here if not for you and the time and the energy you committed to this project. Be proud of yourselves. WE DID IT!

Abstract

The SEND Code of Practice (DfE & DoH, 2015), Article 12 of the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 2009), and a growing body of literature highlights the need to “unmute” the voices of children and young people (Alderson, 2008; Christensen & James, 2008; Kellett, 2010). Within educational psychology practice, emphasis is placed on gathering views of children and representing these views fairly.

Shier’s “Ladder of Children’s Participation” (Shier, 2001) was used to quantify not only the participatory methods used to explore how students with EHCPs for SEMH needs experience school, but also to ascertain the level of participation afforded to participants during the EHCP process. Data from 17 participants was captured through an online questionnaire and an adolescent research assistant-designed interview schedule. A survey was used to capture the views of the research assistants, who were involved in the design, analysis, and dissemination of this project.

Results found that most participants were positive about the support they receive, describing this as “easy to access”. Factors of belonging (peer and staff relationships) were highlighted as important, though participants also spoke of bullying experiences during their school journey. Despite participants reporting varied levels of participation in EHCP decisions, most were satisfied with their experience. However, five participants completing the questionnaire, and most of the interviewed participants reported not to know that they had a plan, or asked “what is an EHCP?” Analysis of the adolescent research assistant’s survey found that they valued the contribution of their “unique perspective” to the research and developed research skills during the project.

Implications are discussed in relation to educational psychology and Local Authority practice, raising questions about the ways in which young people are asked to participate in EHCP processes. The research assistants gave recommendations for future researchers with regards to recruitment and participatory practices.

Impact Statement

This research was conducted as part of the core requirements for the Doctorate in Professional Educational Child and Adolescent Psychology. It is designed to provide a contribution to both academic knowledge and professional practice.

The impact of this research can be demonstrated in three main areas. Firstly, it builds on previous findings (Adams, Tindle, Basran, et al., 2017) regarding student's perceptions of the EHCP process. Secondly, it adds to the body of existing literature (Craggs & Kelly, 2018a; Greenwood & Kelly, 2019a; Weare, 2015) on students' experiences of school support and sense of belonging. Finally, it demonstrates a participatory model that could be replicated in future work interested in collaborating with young people to design, analyse and disseminate research.

Academically, this research adds to two broad fields of literature; namely the literature exploring the experiences of students with Education Health and Care Plans, and the literature developing participatory research practices. Data found that 50% of participants reported to understand what their EHCP was for, and 46% felt that they participated adequately in the assessment process. These figures provide insight at a Local Authority level about how statutory assessment processes are being understood by young people, and reflect existing findings around how young people describe their experiences of receiving an EHCP (Adams, Tindle, Basran, et al., 2017). Actions to address power imbalance concerns within participatory research (Alderson, 2008; Kellett, 2010; Roberts, 2017) appeared to be received positively by the adolescent research assistants, who also provided additional insights into the motivations behind participation and suggested factors to be considered by future researchers interested in this field.

Professionally, this research is highly relevant to educational psychology practice and to the management of the EHCP process, as it draws attention to a gap in the information sharing about what an EHCP is and what the assessment process involves. Considering who has responsibility for talking

to children and young people about EHCPs, educational psychologists could have a role in providing children and young people with appropriately accessible information as part of their statutory duties. It is also likely that those with responsibility for ongoing communication about EHCPs may benefit from support from educational psychologists to do so in a way that is suitable for the individual and the situation. Providing children and young people with the information required to make informed choices will enable them to participate more successfully in the process, as required by the SEND Code of Practice (DfE & DoH, 2015) and Article 12 (UNCRC, 2009).

The impact of this thesis will be brought about through the dissemination of findings at UCL Institute of Education in June 2020, and during an EPS team meeting at the Local Authority later in the year. Brief summary reports will also be distributed to all schools who participated in the research. In addition to the full thesis being made available online through the university library, at least one article will be written for publication in an academic journal, and one in a professional journal.

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Glossary of Terms

Below is a table of key terms and acronyms used in this report alongside their meanings.

Alternative Provision	A school designed to provide education to children who, on account of illness, exclusion or for other reasons, are unable to attend a mainstream school.
EHCP	Education Health and Care Plan. This is a statutory document. An EHCP details the education, health and care support that is to be provided to a child or young person who has a Special Educational Need or a Disability (SEND). It is drawn up by the Local Authority after an EHC needs assessment of the child or young person has determined that an EHC plan is necessary, and after consultation with relevant partner agencies.
Mainstream Setting	In this report, this indicates a school or college that is not a specialist education setting.
Primary Need	A term used to describe the main area of need (Communication and Interaction, Cognition and Learning, Social Emotional Mental Health, or Physical and Sensory) on a final EHCP. This is often referred to on admissions guidance for specialist provisions – “children will have an EHCP with a Primary Need of ...”
Resource Provision	A resource provision provides specialist provision within a mainstream school. Students attending the resource provision are typically taught alongside their mainstream peers in class, where appropriate for the individual.
SEMH	Social Emotional and Mental Health
SEN	Special Educational Need. A child or young person has SEN if they have a learning difficulty or disability which calls for special educational provision to be made for him or her.
SEND	Special Educational Needs and Disabilities
Specialist Setting	A school which is specifically organised to make special educational provision for pupils with SEN. Special schools with pupils aged 11 and older can specialise in 1 of the 4 areas of special educational needs: communication and interaction; cognition and learning; social, emotional and mental health; or sensory and physical needs.
Statement	Statement of Special Educational Needs. This is the former Statutory guidance replaced by EHCP's in 2014.

1. Introduction

This participatory research explores the views of students who have Education Health and Care Plans (hereafter referred to as EHCPs) where the primary need has been identified as Social Emotional Mental Health (SEMH). Specifically, it will look at their views on their experience of obtaining an EHCP and on available school provision. This research also highlights possible future implications to educational psychology practice in the UK, recognising the impact that well-informed recommendations within EP reports have on education provision for students with special educational needs (SEN).

The Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Code of Practice 0-25 (DfE & DoH, 2015) states that “local authorities must ensure that children, their parents and young people are involved in discussions and decisions about their individual support and about local provision”. However, the information relating to the nature of this involvement is vague, and much of the practice that has been adopted can be broadly conceptualised as participation in the process (UNCRC, 2009), meaning an “ongoing process” which is based on mutual respect and open dialogue. Article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child dictates that:

“parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.” (UNCRC, 2009; page 3)

Since the introduction of Article 12, many researchers have called for people to do more to listen to the views of pupils regarding their experiences of inclusion and support (Dimitrelllou, 2017; Pivik, McComas, & Laflamme, 2002; Sellman, 2009).

The SEND Code of Practice (DfE & DoH, 2015) which introduced EHCPs indicates a “presumption of mainstream education” for all students, whilst also highlights the right of those with an EHCP to “seek a place at a special

school". However, in practice, specialist provisions are often at capacity as more and more students request to move from their mainstream schools (DfE, 2018c). Exploring why it is that so many students with EHCPs move to specialist provisions, rather than stay in their mainstream school, may provide insight into how schools can become more inclusive for this population of students.

My interest in this topic stems from previous experience working within Tier 4 inpatient mental health services for children and adolescents (CAMHS). My roles over the years allowed me to work closely with young people in crisis and see them work with professionals and their personal support networks to recover and prepare for reintegration back into the community and back into a community school. Through this work I became aware of the attitudinal barriers facing young people with mental health diagnoses and of "labels", both in community schools and in wider society. Some of the literature on inclusion for SEMH students within mainstream schools (Caslin, 2014; Nind et al., 2012) highlights issues with using labels, suggesting that these emphasise a "within-child" attitude and often lead to exclusive (rather than inclusive) practice. With the introduction of the SEND Code of Practice (DfE & DoH, 2015) and the term "Social Emotional and Mental Health" as a category of SEN, I expected to witness a turning point towards acceptance, understanding, and inclusion of children and young people with mental health difficulties. However, little changed for the young people with whom I was working.

Though training and placement opportunities as a trainee educational psychologist, I became acutely aware of the purpose and benefits of accurately capturing "the voice of the child" in assessments and reports. With research continuing to identify children and young people with SEMH as "difficult to engage", I believed that my previous work experience would help me to take on this role within this field of research.

1.1 Participation

Participation as it relates to this research can be discussed both in terms of participatory research processes, and with regards to students' participation in the EHCP process. In recent years, research looking at exploring children's voices has called for researchers to do more than to just ask for their views. Christensen and James (2008) suggested that "children are the primary source of knowledge about their own views and experiences" and as such will have a unique perspective on what is and is not important to them. In order to ascertain these perspectives, researchers should do more to recognise children as "subjects rather than objects of research". They called for future researchers exploring the views of children to do more to include children researchers within planning stages of research. This enables a shift in the power dynamic and allows for the child's voice to speak through the whole research, rather than just in the results section.

Throughout the literature exploring participatory research practices, a number of typologies have been developed, including Hart's "Ladder of Participation" (Hart, 1992), Shier's "Ladder of Children's Participation" (Shier, 2001), and Lundy's "Interrelated Concepts" (Lundy, 2007). Hart's typology is the only one that acknowledges "non-participation" with the hope that all researchers should avoid conducting research that is manipulative, decorative, or tokenistic towards children and young people (Hart, 1992). However, the "participation" rungs focus on what the children will do during the research and so is not flexible enough to account for all types of participation. For example, where children and young people are involved in many, but not all, steps of the planning and implementation of a piece of research, they would fall between rungs 5 and 6 (Hart, 1992). Shier's "Ladder of Children's Participation" (Shier, 2001) addresses this by focusing on what the adult will do to support children and young people to participate (Figure 1).

Lundy's "Interrelated Concepts" (Lundy, 2007) explores the factors that need to be considered in order to promote participation of children and young people. It is argued that children require "space" to express their views, a "voice" that is informed with the required information, an "audience" that is

receptive and prepared to listen, and an opportunity to “influence” decisions. It can be considered that Lundy’s concepts sit alongside Shier’s “Ladder of Children’s Participation” (Shier, 2001), rather than an alternative typology, as the concepts provide specific guidance on how professionals can support children to participate.

For this research, Shier’s “Ladder of Children’s Participation” (Shier, 2001) was chosen as it could be used to measure the effectiveness of child and young person participation within research by looking at the outcomes of participation. As this research focused on participation in the EHCP process as well as participation in the research itself, it was felt that a consistent typology should be used. Lundy’s “Interrelated Concepts” (Lundy, 2007) focuses on the process of participation in considerable detail and could be difficult to apply retrospectively to explore the extent to which children and young people participated in the process of receiving an EHCP.

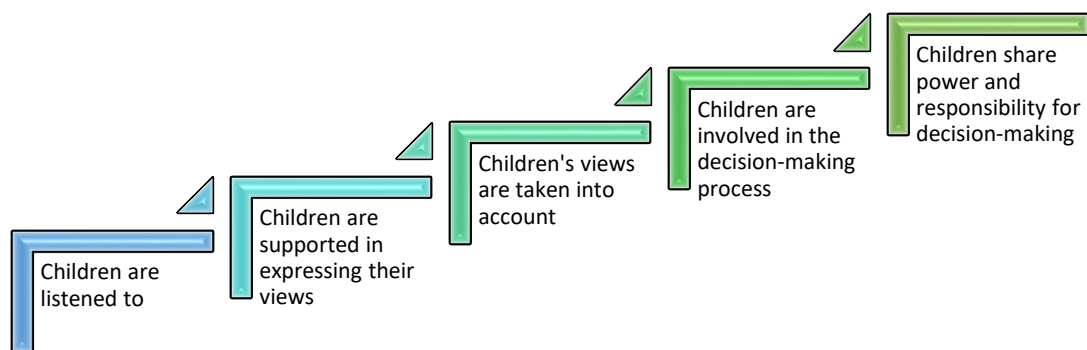


Figure 1: Shier's "Ladder of Children's Participation" (Shier, 2001)

Shier's typology will be used to establish the level of participation within this current study, as well as to assess how well children and young people were supported to participate in previous literature. By not making itself specific to research, and by focusing on what adults will do to facilitate children's participation, this typology will also be used to establish the level of participation afforded to students during various stages of the EHCP process.

Thomas (2011) highlights some limitations of previous participatory research practices. Firstly, that the researcher does not give “real power” to children, and secondly that the research fails to include hard-to-reach children, including children who are disadvantaged or who have special educational needs. This research described herein recruited adolescents with identified SEN who were being educated in a specialist provision for students with SEMH needs. With regards to giving them “real power”, the adolescent research assistants will “share power and responsibility for decision-making”, described as the highest Step in Shier’s “Ladder of Children’s Participation” (Shier, 2001). More details on the participatory aspects of this research can be found in Chapters 4, 5 and 6.

1.1.1 Good Practice in Participatory Research

Bucknall (2010) describes the work of the Children’s Research Centre at The Open University. Taking the research experiences and findings from five schools using a multiple case-study approach, she constructed a model for good practice in participatory research. This can be described in relation to the following central themes: participation; voice; ownership; resources; outcomes; set-up; and power. Table 1 shows how the themes from Bucknall’s model for good practice within participatory research links to recommendations from the literature and from existing practice of organisations using service user involvement groups (Tait & Lester, 2005).

Table 1

Good Practice recommendations for Participatory Research

Themes from model of Good Practice in Participatory Research (Bucknall, 2010)	Good practice recommendations from the literature	References
Participation	There are different levels of participation that children and young people can hold in research.	Thomas (2011)
	Adult researchers should include child researchers in the analysis of data.	Woodhead & Faulkner (2008)
	Adult researchers should provide overt training to children researchers in the research methods used, so that they understand the process (reduces tokenism).	Nind (2011); Lushey & Munro (2014)
Voice	It is important to recognise the role of having (or not having) choice in what is researched. Researchers should not restrict children's choices, as this could lead to reduced motivation to participate.	Bucknall (2010)
	Sometimes what serves a research agenda (as designed by adolescents) does not also fulfil a policy or practice agenda. Researchers need to be flexible and prepared that when giving children and adolescents power in the design phase, they relinquish control over decisions.	Roberts (2017)

	Ethnography allows children a more direct voice.	Prout & James (1990)
Ownership	True participatory research is initiated by youth.	Fox (2013)
	Using service users at all levels of research, including data collection, can lead to greater ownership of the findings, and more honest and rich responses from participants	Tait & Lester (2005)
Resources	Use of participatory tools such as drawings, flow diagrams, body maps, stories, photovoice, timelines, group discussions, life grid activities.	O’Kane (2017); O’Connor et al (2011)
	Use of ice-breaker games to build rapport between adult researcher and young people.	O’Connor et al (2011)
Outcomes	Through the process of engaging in participatory research, child and adolescent researchers should acquire research skills, knowledge, and/or curriculum skills.	Bucknall (2010)
	Child and adolescent researchers should be involved in dissemination and feedback.	Bucknall (2010)
	User involvement may increase professionals understanding of a particular experience or phenomenon	Tait & Lester (2005)
Set-up	Research should be conducted on neutral ground as schools are inherently power imbalanced.	Davies (2017)
	Consent should be gathered from the child and adolescent researchers, as	Coyne (2010)

	well as from their gatekeepers (e.g. parents).	
Power	Power dynamics are central and have a significant impact on participatory methods.	Bucknall (2010)
	Researchers need to be critically reflective and recognise the role they have played in the informing and shaping of the research. They should be reflective throughout the process and name instances of disagreement between researcher and adolescent researcher.	Connolly (2017); Nind (2011)
	Adults should aim to develop a “participant status as an atypical, less powerful adult”. Where possible, seek to avoid taking on the role of a “traditional adult”, such as a teacher or rule enforcer.	Cosaro & Molinari (2017); Fox (2013)

Service user involvement appears to be a popular term within companies and organisations, and is being used within the NHS to support recruitment processes, training programmes, and service planning and delivery (Tait & Lester, 2005). Further information regarding participatory practice is discussed and critically reviewed in Chapter 2.

1.2 National Demographics and Government Policy

The research presented in this paper will focus primarily on the experiences of young people with SEMH needs who meet the criteria for an EHCP. As such, many of the young people may experience poor mental health and poor wellbeing, concepts recognised as overlapping in both key guidance and legislation (DfE & DoH, 2015; DfE, 2018a; DoH & DfE, 2017) and

support strategies (DoH & DfE, 2017; Weare, 2015). Specifically, the SEND Code of Practice (DfE & DoH, 2015) identifies features of presentation that allow students to meet the criteria for an EHCP, and does not require students to have a formal diagnosis. Therefore, defining wellbeing and recognising that wellbeing sits on a continuum alongside poor mental health, enables greater understanding of the lens through which schools in the UK are currently perceiving their supportive role (DfE, 2018a).

The World Health Organisation (2004) defines wellbeing as “a state in which every individual recognises his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her own community”. More recently, the New South Wales Commission for Children and Young People (2007) explored how children described wellbeing and what it meant to them, allowing researchers to compare the child generated definition with that of WHO. Themes from the study identified the importance that children and young people placed on “agency” and having the power to make their own decisions about their everyday life. Wellbeing for participants also included having a sense of “security”; feeling and being safe. Finally, having a “positive sense of self” was identified as an important characteristic of wellbeing, described as seeing yourself and being seen by others as a good person. These themes seem to relate closely to the World Health Organisation (2004) definition of wellbeing, suggesting that when discussing wellbeing as a general concept, both adults and young people have the potential to be referring to the same thing. This definition appears to be widely accepted within the literature and is referenced most recently within the Mental Health and Behaviour in Schools documentation (DfE, 2018a).

The Office of National Statistics (2018) reported that one in eight 5-19 year olds had “at least one mental disorder”, based on their scores on the Development and Wellbeing Assessment (DAWBA). Of these disorders, emotional disorders such as anxiety and depression were most prevalent. These new prevalence rates show an increase in mental health disorders over time, with the prevalence rate in 2004 being one in ten (Office of National Statistics, 2018).

The Green Paper (DoH & DfE, 2017) “Transforming Children and Young People’s Mental Health Provision” built on the ideas put forward by “Future in Mind” (DoH, 2015) as a response to the growing concerns about the prevalence of mental health difficulties in child and adolescent populations. It highlighted concerns that “half of all mental health conditions are established before the age of 14” and provided recognition of the benefits of early intervention. The latest “Mental Health and Behaviour in Schools” (DfE, 2018a) guidance recognises schools as “crucial” in the observation and identification of children and young people whose behaviour suggests that they may be experiencing mental illness, or be at risk of developing mental ill health. This advice suggests that schools should use whole school approaches to manage mental health, as well as consider the needs and circumstances of individual students.

1.3 Local Authority Interest

From a Local Authority perspective, there are several reasons why research seeking to explore the views and experiences of children and young people with EHCPs would be beneficial at this time. As mentioned above, children and young people’s participation in the EHCP process is mandated within the SEND Code of Practice (DfE & DoH, 2015). This practice of participation is among a number of different responsibilities assessed by OFSTED and the Care Quality Commission (CQC) during Local Area Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Inspections (Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission, 2016). These inspections, introduced in 2016, aim to “hold Local Areas to account and champion the rights of children and young people” (OFSTED, 2019).

Specifically, the inspections look at how well the Local Authority engages with children and young people to identify and assess their needs, and how well they include children and young people (as well as their parents and carers) in decisions around provisions and services on a strategic level. Following the inspections, outcome letters are published highlighting the Local Area’s strengths and areas for further improvement. The Local

Authority recruited for this research received their first inspection in 2017, and received a follow-up visit whilst this research was taking place. The research findings in this paper can be used by the Local Authority to supplement their evidence of gathering the views of children and young people.

1.4 Scope of Current Research

This research has been co-designed with a small group of adolescent research assistants. During the first meeting, a discussion took place regarding the scope of the research, under the broad umbrella of research “exploring the school experiences of students with EHCPs for SEMH”. This broad topic was presented to the adolescent research assistants as it was important to provide them with as much freedom as possible within the “Design” phase of the research, whilst recognising that some decisions had needed to be made in advance of the first meeting (described in more detail in Chapter 4). Areas such as “access to support provisions”, “school belonging”, “moving schools”, and “benefits of EHCPs” were chosen by the research assistants as important factors to explore when gathering views about the overall school experience for this population of students. In order to follow good practice guidance for participatory research (Bucknall, 2010; Roberts, 2017), these areas form the scope of the current research and will therefore be looked at in further detail within the Literature Review. This will enable critical reflection on the current understanding of these factors as they relate to children and young people who have SEMH difficulties. It is recognised that these topics remain broad, but reflect the design decisions of the adolescent research assistants involved in this project.

2. Literature Review

The literature review sought to identify research and practice in five key areas:

1. The inclusive practice of education provisions in the UK that relate to support for students with SEMH difficulties
2. The research into the experiences of students with EHCPs
3. The research into students with SEMH difficulties who move schools
4. The research into students' sense of school belonging
5. The research and practice of gathering the children's voices within research.

Each of these areas will be discussed in detail within this chapter.

A comprehensive search was performed of the following online databases: Web of Science; ERIC; Google Scholar. Around 30 search filters were attempted, and the following were successfully used to find results: "School Inclusion and SEMH"; "School Inclusion and BESD"; "SEMH"; "School Support for SEMH"; "Education Health and Care Plan"; "EHCP"; "Statutory Assessment"; "Changing Schools"; "Atypical School Moves"; "School Belonging"; "Voice of the Child"; "Child Views"; "Child Perspectives"; "Child Voice"; "Participatory Research and Children"; "Research with Children"; and "Children as Researchers".

Papers were included if they were written in English and published in peer-reviewed journals. Abstracts of retrieved papers were then read to determine relevance and relevant papers were scanned for further sources. Thesis databases were also searched for results. The following journals were then hand-searched for further literature: "Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties"; "British Journal of Special Education".

As a key focus on this research was on the SEMH population, the literature reviewed was primarily associated with the needs of pupils with SEMH, their educational experiences, and their voices.

For areas 1 and 3, it was important to note that with the change in terminology over the years, there have been changes to the population represented with these terms. It is not the case that the current SEMH student population is synonymous with the previous EBD, BESD/SEBD populations. This literature review will aim to focus on research collected with the SEMH population and therefore since the introduction of the term in 2014. However, where significant research has taken place prior to this, views and findings will be included where appropriate.

For area 2, all research published before the SEND Code of Practice (DfE & DoH, 2015) was excluded as it did not relate to the experience of receiving and having an EHCP.

For area 3, school moves were discussed in regards to atypical transitions or in-year moves, rather than moves at typical transition points. This narrowed the research reviewed and excluded all papers on traditional school transitions.

A total of 92 papers were found to meet the criteria discussed above. The most relevant of these will be used to inform this report. Relevance was considered in relation to the following inclusion factors: research published in the last 20 years (unless a significant primary source was found to be important for historical context), research directly related to SEMH or EHCPs, and research exploring the UK school context.

2.1 What do we mean by Inclusion?

The word “inclusion” as it relates to education is a relatively new term, replacing “integration” in the early 1990s (Farrell, 2004). Over the last 30 years, there has been much debate about this complex issue, with researchers attempting to qualify what it means to be inclusive (Booth & Ainscow, 2002; Donnelly & Watkins, 2011; Farrell, 2004; Lindsay, 2007; McCoy & Banks, 2012). Farrell (2004) states that “for inclusion to be effective, all pupils must actively belong to, be welcomed by, and participate in a mainstream school and community.” He references the Manchester University model of inclusion which lists four criteria that can be used to

measure inclusive practice: Presence, Acceptance, Participation, and Achievement. This model appears in line with the “Index for Inclusion” (Booth & Ainscow, 2002) which emphasised the relevance of inclusive practice for all students. Booth and Ainscow (2002) outlined several key components of an inclusive environment including the equal valuing of all students and staff; the reduction of barriers to learning and participation for all students; the viewing of the difference between students as a resource to support learning rather than as a problem to overcome; and the acknowledgement that students have a right to access education in their locality, rather than having to commute long distances to reach a “suitable placement.” For the purpose of this thesis, inclusion will be considered in reference to all students, regardless of special educational needs, being accepted as a member of their school community and being supported to learn and achieve. Literature around school belonging and student’s experiences of inclusion will be discussed later in this chapter.

To further complicate the concept of inclusion, McCoy and Banks (2012) challenge the underlying assumption that inclusion is the answer when thinking about supporting students with SEN. Specifically, they argue that not all children with SEN will benefit from a mainstream school environment and from social contact with their peer group. There has been much debate over the years for and against inclusion within mainstream education, with different researchers coming at the topic from a variety of angles. A number of researchers explored the relationship between inclusion and school engagement on peer relations (Frostad & Pijl, 2007; Shah & Priestley, 2010). Other researchers highlighted concerns about an inclusive model of learning, promoting specialist schools over mainstream (Rioux & Pinto, 2010).

2.1.1 Mainstream versus Specialist Provision Debate

The mainstream versus specialist provision debate has been present within education discourse for over 40 years, with some literature pointing to the Warnock Report (Warnock, 1978) as the match that lit the flame. This report, which sparked the move of children and young people with SEND from specialist provisions to mainstream schools, suggested that specialist placements should only be sought in extreme situations. In short, it promoted

an “under one roof” model of inclusive practice (Donnelly & Watkins, 2011). Research widely reported the short-falls of specialist provision; namely the provision of “poor educational opportunities” and discrimination and stigmatisation of its students by the mainstream public (Norwich, 2008), and the reduced opportunities for social interactions (Simmons & Bayliss, 2007).

However, the debate was further amended following Warnock’s later suggestion that inclusion was best defined as “all children in the common educational enterprise of learning, wherever they learn best” (Warnock, 2005). She clarified earlier statements, reporting that the “under one roof” attitude to inclusion could disadvantage children whose disabilities are “not obvious or visible” (House of Commons Education and Skills Committee, 2006). Shaw (2017) conducted an extensive review of the literature into the mainstream versus specialist school debate and reported the presence of good evidence for the positive impact of specialist provisions, particularly for children with Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties (EBD), and for children with Profound and/or Multiple Learning Difficulties (PMLD).

2018 School Census data (DfE, 2018b) indicates that 49.1% of students with an EHCP attend specialist provision. This shows an increase from 42.9% in 2015-16 (Shaw, 2017) and suggests that despite the call for inclusive practice within mainstream schools, specialist provisions remain a significant part of England’s educational provision for students with SEND. Interestingly, this increase has also come at a time when the number of Local Authority maintained specialist provisions in England is reducing, with the number of schools last reported to be 973 in 2017 (down from 1,113 in 2000) (BESA, 2018).

A continuum of educational provisions has been suggested with a desire to change thinking away from being polarised (Shaw, 2017) and instead to consider mainstream and specialist provisions as part of a larger “inclusive system” (Norwich, 2008). This continuum (Norwich, 2008) ranges from full-time attendance in a residential special school to full-time attendance in an “ordinary” class, and highlights the possible inclusive provision options a student with SEND may access across their school career. At present, the

SEND Code of Practice (DfE & DoH, 2015) states that the decision to indicate school preference falls to the parents, though there is increasing onus on consultation with children and young people during this process. Later in this Literature Review, research will be discussed which comments on the experiences of students following a school move.

2.2 School Inclusion for SEMH Students

In relation to the inclusion of students with SEMH difficulties, there is a body of literature that suggests this group (inclusive of those who present with challenging behaviour) are the most difficult to successfully include within a mainstream environment (de Monchy et al., 2004). de Monchy et al. (2004) suggested that these inclusion barriers may be as a result of the hidden nature of the difficulties (i.e. that the SEND is not clearly visible) for those students with internalising mental health difficulties, and due to the students' difficulties with presenting in a well-adapted manner for those students with externalising difficulties. Jalali and Morgan (2018) suggested that it is the externalised nature of these difficulties (referring to behaviour needs) that mean that SEMH students are more likely than other students with SEN to be excluded from mainstream school provisions.

However, it is worth noting that much of the literature into SEMH does not clearly distinguish between internalising and externalising behaviour presentations, and instead often considers SEMH, EBD, BESD, and SEBD to be a homogenous group where all individuals present in similar ways. It is suggested by some researchers (Harvest, 2018) that externalising and internalising behaviour presentations are not mutually exclusive, and that it is possible for people to experience co-occurring difficulties that create varied presentations.

A case study from one Local Authority in the UK set out to explore professionals' perspectives on national policies and their implementation at a local level in relation to the inclusion of students with BESD within secondary school provisions (Burton et al., 2009). Researchers found that school staff felt that they lacked sufficient resources to support students with BESD, and

that the push to support these students was often at odds with the government focus on academic standards. In addition to being a small case study and so having limited generalisability to a wider geographic area, this research has a number of significant limitations. Firstly, the purposive sampling method aimed to provide “breadth of opinion” could be considered heavily biased, as the professionals approached for the study were recommended by only one Behaviour Support Teacher. Secondly, no clear research question is outlined, and the methodology section doesn’t provide sufficient information to enable replication of data collection methods. Finally, the analysis of the data gathered from unstructured interviews used pre-existing themes, meaning that the data was coded to fit the themes pre-agreed by researchers. As such the findings are not data led, and many of the themes discussed in the article do not include direct evidence from the transcripts. Whilst this research adds to the debate around barriers to inclusion for students with BESD, more robust studies are required in order to better understand the challenges facing students and the professionals with whom they work.

To build on this research further and respond to the previous studies limitations, Burton and Goodman (2011) conducted a small-scale study with four SENCO’s and eight support staff to explore their perspectives of the inclusion of students with the BESD label. Researchers used a purposive sampling method, choosing staff from four secondary schools with a high percentage of SEN students and a high percentage of students with Free School Meals (FSM). The reported findings focused on staff experiences of students with externalising presentations and highlighted the roles that non-teaching staff have in promoting inclusion of these students. However, the researchers didn’t take into account the number of students with BESD at each school and so the views and practices of the staff are likely to vary considerably depending on the level of experience they have in working with students with this label.

A systematic literature review was conducted of articles published in the journal “Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties” (Willmann & Seeliger, 2017). Researchers identified 81 articles that made reference to inclusive education

for students with SEMH/SEBD, and discussed 39 research reports in detail. Identifying key themes across these reports, Willmann and Seeliger (2017) found that more inclusive and less inclusive schools differed in several main areas. Inclusive schools were more likely to demonstrate consistency over use of school-wide behaviour policies; they were more likely to apply a variety of behaviour management strategies, and they were more likely to hold the view that they could cause more positive behaviour presentations in students by adapting their approach.

Carroll and Hurry (2018) highlighted the importance of understanding why students with SEMH, specifically those with externalising mental health difficulties such as Conduct Disorder, are being excluded, in order to identify strategies that can support the inclusion of these students within mainstream schools. They completed a scoping review and found 168 relevant papers and reports on the subject of effective practice models for working with SEMH students. Findings highlighted the need for a “positive approach” to be adopted by teachers and school leaders towards students with SEMH. This approach emphasised a move away from a deficit model of disability, as well as the idea that this population of children is simply “naughty”. Carroll and Hurry (2018) also found that many papers recognised the impact that building good teacher-student relationships had on student motivation and academic attainment.

Recently, a small-scale study exploring the views of students with SEMH needs who attend alternative provisions has been conducted (Jalali & Morgan, 2018). Findings highlighted a number of identified “supportive factors” that students reported to be positive about their education provision. These factors included space, calmness, organisational structure, the use of reward systems (rather than punishment systems) and personalised learning. Students also commented on sense of belonging within the school environment, with older students tending to report negative views of mainstream schools due to not feeling that they had a “place” there, or feeling like an “outcast”. Similar themes arose from research looking at the experiences of children with SEMH and MLD in mainstream secondary schools (Dimitrellou & Hurry, 2018). This highlights the need to build on this

research, exploring the views of children with SEMH needs placed in a range of different educational provisions, both to explore their experience of schooling and to see if there are lessons to be learnt around how to better promote inclusion for this student population.

Caslin (2014) described the SEMH/BESD label as a “double-edged sword”, where students would often need a label in order to access appropriate support, but the act of having the label itself would often lead to being marginalised by other adults, who felt that the label meant that behaviour was “fixed” and no adaptation to provision would improve the child’s outcomes. This perception of the negative consequences of the SEMH label were reiterated by Nind et al. (2012) who discussed the “pathologising” of the SEBD/BESD label; placing students in a box in order to be better understood by school staff. Researchers commented that this labelling rarely appeared to lead to the implementation of good inclusive practice.

2.3 Timeline of Terminology Surrounding this Student Population

The phrase Social Emotional Mental Health (SEMH) has become the latest in a long list of terms used to group and describe this student population. Introduced with the SEND Code of Practice (DfE & DoH, 2015), it replaced terms such as Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties (EBD) and Behavioural Emotional and Social Difficulties (BESD). This section will highlight the timeline of terms used in the UK over the past 60 years.

The earliest terminology was introduced in 1964 by Sir Cyril Burt when he listed the range of student needs he worked with, including “youngsters who were emotionally rather than intellectually subnormal—the potential neurotics and the maladjusted” (pg. 564: Rushton, 2002). In this phrase, Burt captured the idea that educational psychologists could work with children who displayed both internalising and externalising emotional difficulties, and the term “maladjusted” appears to have instigated a strong focus on “behavioural difficulties” as a way of describing the needs of this population. The Warnock Report (Warnock, 1978) later criticised the term “maladjusted” as being too stigmatising; suggesting “a permanent condition” without identifying what sort

of provision would be needed to meet the needs of the learners. Warnock (1978) proposed the term “Emotional or Behavioural Disorders” to reflect more accurately the needs of the learners who fit this description.

The Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs (DfE, 1994b) used the term “Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties (EBD)” to describe children who might meet the criteria for a Statement of Special Educational Needs. The Code of Practice defined this population as having emotional difficulties that could be related to “periods of depression...other mental health problems...eating disorders such as anorexia or bulimia...being affected by bullying or difficulties in establishing personal relationships” (pg. 29: DfE, 1994b). The behavioural difficulties described included “withdrawn or disruptive behaviour, and a marked and persistent inability to concentrate” (pg. 66: DfE, 1994b). The supporting circular entitled “The Education of Children with Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties” (DfE, 1994a) outlined the scope of the term and how it should be used in schools suggesting that “children with EBD are on a continuum. Their problems are clearer and greater than sporadic naughtiness or moodiness and yet not so great as to be classed as mental illness.” (pg. 4: DfE, 1994a). The Code of Practice document (DfE, 1994b) suggested that educational psychologists should be used by schools to provide advice or discuss pastoral care arrangements for the children.

In 2001, with the publication of a new Special Educational Needs Code of Practice (DfES, 2001), the term “Behavioural, Emotional and Social Development” was introduced, replacing the previous label. Students were felt to have BESD if they presented with “persistent emotional and/or behavioural difficulties, which [were] not ameliorated by the behaviour management techniques usually employed in the school” (pg. 75: DfES, 2001). Types of needs contained within this term were almost identical to that of EBD, but also emphasised social factors such as “difficulties in establishing and maintaining balanced relationships with their fellow peers or with adults; and evidence of a significant delay in the development of social skills.”

Despite the use of the word “development” within the SEN Code of Practice (DfES, 2001), subsequent publications and literature describe BESD as “Behavioural, Emotional and Social Difficulties” (DfES, 2005; Lindsay & Dockrell, 2012). It is unclear at what point the acronym changed, though some argue that the continued inclusion of “difficulties” in the label emphasised the “within-child” nature of the condition and sought to remove the blame for the behaviour from families or schools (Caslin, 2014).

The term “Social, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties (SEBD)” appears to have surfaced in Northern Ireland (Northern Ireland Curriculum, 2014) and Scotland (The Scottish Government, 2010) much earlier than in England, and no updated government guidance or legislation published between 2001 and 2015 suggests a government-directed shift in preferred terminology for this student population. Therefore, for the purpose of this thesis, it will be held as an alternative term to BESD; running alongside it chronologically. Regardless of the term’s origins, SEBD as a term is represented within the literature looking at the experiences of children in the UK with these labels, and so is relevantly included here.

2.4 Social Emotional and Mental Health

The Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Code of Practice (DfE & DoH, 2015) introduced and defined the term SEMH and the range of difficulties that may be experienced by the students:

“Children and young people may experience a wide range of social and emotional difficulties which manifest themselves in many ways. These may include becoming withdrawn or isolated, as well as displaying challenging, disruptive or disturbing behaviour. These behaviours may reflect underlying mental health difficulties such as anxiety or depression, self-harming, substance misuse, eating disorders or physical symptoms that are medically unexplained. Other children and young people may have disorders such as attention deficit disorder, attention deficit hyperactive disorder or attachment disorder.” (DfE & DoH, 2015; page 98)

The phrase “mental health” was included to recognise the impact that mental illness can have on academic success and future outcomes, with a mental health problem moving to meet the definition of special educational needs is when it is “persistent or serious” (DfE, 2018a). At this point, the child or young person can be identified as having a Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) need.

The American Psychological Association (2018) separates mental health into two broad categories: namely externalising mental health difficulties, and internalising mental health difficulties. Externalising mental health presentation is defined as “actions in the external world, such as acting out, antisocial behaviour, hostility, and aggression”. Regarding externalising mental health presentations in relation to diagnostic labels, individuals could be considered to fall into this category if they had a diagnosis of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), oppositional defiant disorder (ODD), or conduct disorder (Frick & Thornton, 2017). The American Psychological Association (2018) compares this presentation to that of those experiencing internalising mental health difficulties, described as “processes within the self, such as anxiety, somatisation, and depression”. Individuals could be considered to fall into this category of mental health if they had diagnoses of anxiety, depression, or an eating disorder (Merrell, 2008). The distinction of mental health in relation to these two broad types of presentation suggests that there may be different experiences of school for students with externalising difficulties and students with internalising difficulties.

There is no clear guidance, other than the SEND Code of Practice (DfE & DoH, 2015) definition of SEMH, that indicates what students with EHCPs for SEMH needs are like. However, a number of local authorities have published information outlining the types of behaviours children and young people could exhibit that would indicate that they may have SEMH needs. The following examples have been chosen for their clarity and accessibility of message, rather than for being linked to the Local Authority in which the current research took place. Wigan Local Authority published guidance stating that children and young people with SEMH needs may present with “passive behaviours” such as low mood, low self-worth, isolation, speech

anxiety, task avoidance, or anxiety (Wigan Council, 2020). They also state that children and young people may present with “active behaviours” and describe these as non-compliance, mood swings, impulsivity, physical aggression, verbal aggression, or lack of personal boundaries”.

Leicestershire Local Authority have published guidance suggesting that in order to reach the threshold for an EHCP, the child or young person must have had access to support for at least six months and that reviews of this support have shown “little or no progress towards the targets set” (Leicestershire County Council, 2018). As such, SEMH needs should be considered to be long-term difficulties that cause a significant impairment to the development and wellbeing of the individual.

Whilst the new term is the first to describe this student population without using the word “behaviour”, the description used to “categorise” students who may fall under the SEMH umbrella is not dissimilar to that used to describe BESD (DfES, 2005). Specifically, the inclusion of the descriptor “displaying challenging, disruptive or disturbing behaviour” continues to keep behaviour difficulties at the heart of this new term. Norwich and Eaton (2015) suggest that the move away from the word “behaviour”, replacing it with “mental health” was “due to a push to reduce the number of students identified with having SEN.” They also raised concerns about the functional distinctions, relating to impact on education, between diagnosed and non-diagnosed psychiatric difficulties. The literature also recognises a continued “lack of clarity” on the label (Norwich & Eaton, 2015), raising concerns that this ambiguity of meaning could result in variable “labelling” practices across Local Authorities which could have implications for the EHCP process when it comes to agreeing primary need.

Setting out to explore the extent to which young people with the SEMH label were aware of the label given to them by professionals, Sheffield and Morgan (2017) used semi-structured interviews and life grids with nine students aged 13-16 years with a Statement of SEN where BESD/SEMH had been identified as the primary need. Researchers found that only three of the nine participants reported using BESD labels to identify themselves, and only one reported having heard the labels used by professionals to describe

them. Interestingly, none of the participants reported being aware that they had been issued with a Statement of SEN. This research questioned the purpose of labelling and raises the question “what is the purpose of labels and who do they serve?”

Caslin (2019) further explored the narratives of young people aged 14-16 years who have been given the label of SEMH. Using life grids to capture their educational experiences, she found that some students reported that they were glad to have received a label because they felt that this formal recognition (either from the SEMH label or a diagnosis) meant that they could now explain why they were “different”. These findings appears in contrast with that of Sheffield and Morgan (2017), and reinforces the importance of gathering the views of students with SEMH needs as they are not an homogenous group and each student is likely to have a different views about school and about being labelled.

However, Caslin (2019) also concluded that whilst young people may see the labelling as a positive, there is potential for school staff to see the label or diagnosis as confirmation of a fixed presentation within the child that cannot be altered. As such, the young people with these labels could be viewed as “*being* the problem, rather than *having* a problem” (Caslin, 2019). This medical model view of disability as being “within-child” seems to be at strong odds with the SEND Code of Practice (DfE & DoH, 2015) which highlights the need for systemic approaches within schools and suggests that through the use of appropriate provisions and the graduated approach, all children regardless of SEND can make progress towards individualised outcomes.

2.5 School Support for Students with SEMH

At the point of identification of a SEMH need, as with any other type of SEN, schools have a duty to provide reasonable adjustments to promote the inclusion of children and young people (Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2012). A research programme called “Supporting Wellbeing, Emotional Resilience and Learning” (SWERL) (O’Brien & Roberts, 2019) used a biopsychosocial perspective to produce an audit tool for schools to

use to analyse and develop their practice in seven key domains associated with supporting students with SEMH needs. These domains were: (1) supported and informed staff; (2) graduated response to need; (3) enabling environment for students; (4) whole school coherence and design; (5) building relationships; (6) robust communication systems; and (7) planning transitions. Research applying this audit tool in schools is ongoing.

As discussed previously, Willmann and Seeliger (2017) conducted a systematic literature review using articles published in the journal "Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties". They noted that 19 of the 39 research reports reviewed measured the effectiveness of interventions and programmes designed for students with SEMH. Interventions had a range of different focuses, including behaviour management, using relaxation techniques to promote self-regulatory behaviour, anger management, developing social-emotional competencies, and developing effective learning and problem-solving skills. Their literature review provides scope for this section, and suggests that in order to explore the support offered to students with SEMH needs, it would be helpful to look at the provision of learning support separately to non-learning support.

2.5.1 Support for Students with SEMH in Relation to their Learning

Relatively little research has to date looked at the impact of providing learning support to students with SEMH needs. One study explored the theoretical benefits of co-teaching practices for students with Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties (EBD) (Conderman & Hedin, 2015). Co-teaching refers to classrooms where there are 2 adults present; one general teacher, and one specialist professional. These adults have equal power in decision making and contribute equally to lesson planning and classroom management. As such, it does not describe the typical teacher and teaching assistant dynamic. Conderman and Hedin (2015) highlight literature that suggests that co-teaching increases students' exposure to effective and individualised differentiation, which can support students with EBD (as well as other learners) to make academic progress. Whilst research in this area remains in its early stages, and impacts have not yet been ascertained, the idea of co-teaching, rather than allocating a member of staff to directly work

with the student who has EBD/SEMH needs could enable discrete support to be given to those students. In doing so, students may feel less “embarrassed” when they are offered support (as found by Webster and Blatchford (2019) in relation to the one-to-one allocation of Teaching Assistants).

2.5.2 Support for Students with SEMH in Relation to Other Aspects of School Life

There has been a lot of research providing an evidence base for programmes targeting students with SEMH needs. Some programmes have focused on general social and emotional wellbeing, such as SEAL (Humphrey et al., 2013) and TaMHS (Wolpert et al., 2013), whilst others have focused on specific characteristics, such as resilience (Weare, 2015).

The Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) programme was launched in primary schools in 2005 and secondary schools in 2007. It was designed to promote the “social and emotional skills that underpin effective learning, positive behaviour, regular attendance, staff effectiveness, and the emotional health and wellbeing of all who learn and work in schools” (Humphrey et al., 2013). Humphrey et al. (2013) concluded that the SEAL programme “failed to meet its intended objectives” but that many schools who were involved in the programme found it valuable. They suggested that government-led approaches may not be the best way forward with regards to wellbeing programmes, and instead proposed the use of frameworks that could be tailored by each school as required.

The TaMHS initiative, starting in 2008, built on the previous SEAL programme, responding to early data from SEAL research findings (Humphrey et al., 2013). TaMHS used a wave model of prevention and intervention, aimed at providing early intervention and targeted support for children aged 5-13 at risk of (or already experiencing) mental health difficulties (Wolpert et al., 2013). Findings from the Randomised Control Trial (RCT) indicated that the initiative benefited primary school children who presented with externalised mental health needs, but not internalised needs, and that no benefit was seen for any need in older children. Wolpert et al.

(2013) suggested that the intervention may have been more effective in supporting students with behavioural difficulties, as these students were more easily identified and could then be directed to targeted and individual support. This finding highlights the potential differences in support offered and available to children and young people presenting with different forms of SEMH, and suggests that students with different SEMH presentations may have very different experiences of the types of non-learning support offered to them.

Weare (2015) reviewed the evidence base for interventions aimed at providing social and emotional support to students at universal, targeted, and individual levels. Discussing the core skills for social and emotional learning, she concluded that children and young people with greater mental health needs require more support than can be offered at a universal or whole-school level. She also recommended that targeted and explicit teaching of skills such as emotional literacy, resilience, social skills, and self-awareness should be provided to these students, and delivered by qualified professionals. Weare (2015) highlights the role of educational psychologists in setting up these types of interventions, and argues that evidence-based practice calls for psychologist involvement in this support. Thinking about what this involvement looks like, Weare (2015) suggested that in the longer term, school staff should work alongside the EP and receive training to deliver the intervention themselves. However, they should receive supervision from psychologists in order to “quality control” the intervention and monitor ongoing effectiveness.

Atkinson et al. (2011) explored the role of educational psychologists in supporting children and young people with SEMH needs. They found that EP’s reported using Solution-Focused Brief Therapy, Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, Personal Construct Psychology, Narrative Therapy, Play Therapy, and Video Interactive Guidance. The EP’s involved in the study identified that these interventions were most frequently used in relation to secondary school aged children (77.1% of therapeutic time) who had been identified as having SEMH needs. This provides further evidence to suggest that research into the experiences of young people in this age range will provide practical

recommendations to inform the practices of schools and educational psychologists.

2.6 Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP)

Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) were introduced in 2015 as part of the new reforms from the SEND Code of Practice (DfE & DoH, 2015), replacing the previous statutory assessment process known as a Statement of Special Educational Needs. Spivack et al. (2014) outlined the three main differences between a “Statement” and an EHCP, stating that EHCPs request more information at the point of referral, that the family is more involved throughout the assessment and implementation process, and that EHCPs are designed to be more outcome focused rather than needs focused.

It is the right of the school or parent of a child with SEMH, or of the young person themselves, to submit to the Local Authority an application for an EHCP (DfE & DoH, 2015). This plan, if approved, provides detailed information about the provision needed to support the child or young person within education or training settings. Whilst there is a presumption of mainstream education for all children and young people, parents of children with an EHCP and young people themselves “have the right to seek a place at a special school, special post-16 institution or specialist college” (DfE & DoH, 2015). The increased emphasis on the participation of the family and of the young person within the EHCP process is drawn in part from the Children and Families Act (Council for Disabled Children, 2014). This act recognises the importance of providing “greater choice and control for young people and parents over support”. Looking at this in relation to the “Ladder of Children’s Participation” (Shier, 2001), it could be argued that the level of participation recognised by the Children and Families Act (Council for Disabled Children, 2014) is at least Step 4: “Children are involved in the decision-making process”. This suggests that there is an expectation for professionals working with young people to do more than merely listen to children; instead

actively engaging them in decisions that will directly affect the level of support they receive.

To date, there has been some research seeking to evaluate the effectiveness of EHCPs, and to gather the views of key individuals (parents, young people, and professionals) in relation to their benefits. Much of the research has highlighted difficulties in collecting evaluation information from children and young people (Cochrane, 2016; Redwood, 2015; Skipp & Hopwood, 2016), reporting that “engaging the young people and gaining feedback was difficult” (Skipp & Hopwood, 2016), or that parents often expressed a preference to give feedback on behalf of the child or young person, rather than have researchers speak directly to the child (Redwood, 2015). This suggests a real gap within the literature in that those who are at the heart of the plan and who are receiving the support are not having adequate opportunities to speak about their own experience.

A small scale study aimed at exploring the views of parents, professionals and young people about their experience of the new EHCP process used questionnaires, semi-structured interviews and a parent focus group. Sales and Vincent (2018) interviewed 11 adult participants (including parents, SENCO’s, medical professionals, social workers, educational psychologists, and independent parent support workers), conducted a focus group with five parents, and asked four children aged 10-17 years to complete a questionnaire. Themes that arose from the data included “involving and valuing parents”, “outcomes”, “multi-agency working” and “ascertaining the views of children and young people”. Disappointingly, the views of the children were only included in the latter mentioned theme, limiting their inclusion in the conclusions drawn. Additionally, there is no information provided about how the children were sampled, and how the questionnaire was created, leading to concerns around validity and reliability of the study and its findings. Overall, a total of six key themes were found by the researchers, though the examples given as evidence for each theme suggest that further narrowing could have been completed as part of the analysis process. Furthermore, the researchers appeared to put more weight on

professional views, over parents and children, leading to possible questions around motivations for including such a wide range of participants.

Two further pieces of research that have captured the views of young people with EHCPs are Adams, Tindle, Basran, et al. (2017) and Webster and Blatchford (2019). Webster and Blatchford (2019) conducted research speaking to 49 young people aged 13-14 years with EHCPs about their experience of the support they have received since obtaining a plan. These young people were recruited through their schools, having been identified as possible participants by the school SENCO. Triangulating views with teaching assistants and other school staff, a significant finding reflected that whilst one of the key methods of supporting students with EHCPs included the allocation of a teaching assistant, many students reported that it was unhelpful or “embarrassing”. This study mainly focused on students who had an EHCP with Cognition and Learning identified as the primary need, rather than SEMH. However, it shows that capturing the voices and experiences of children is possible and calls for further research in this area.

Adams, Tindle and Basran et al. (2017) conducted a large-scale national survey exploring the views of children and young people and their parents about the EHCP process. All participants had received (or were parents of a child who received) an EHCP in 2015. A total of 13,643 people responded to the survey, representing 24% of the population of individuals who had an EHCP at the time of the study. The Technical Report from the study (Adams, Tindle, Dobie, et al., 2017) reports response rates of 22% for parents, and 23% for young people; significantly below that which is considered to be the goal for researchers (60-75%) (De Vaus, 1996; page 107). However, only 4% of possible participants approached refused to take part in the study. The remaining families did not participate for other reasons, typically due to lack of access to the research measures. Results found that 66% of parents and young people who participated were satisfied with the process of getting an EHCP. However, only 55% of children and young people felt that their views and wishes had been included in the final plan (compared to 80% of parents), and young people often reported that they hadn’t understood what

was happening during the assessment process, and that they weren't given choices about how to participate in the assessment.

As the results reflect views gathered from less than one-quarter of the available sample, it is possible that the views are not reflective of the population of children and young people, and their parents, involved in the EHCP process. Instead, what can be concluded is that the findings reflect views held by some of the intended group. This study was undertaken soon after the introduction of the EHCP process, and it is possible that changes and improvements have been developed since. Part of the purpose of the current study will be to gather updated information about the views and experiences of young people who have received an EHCP, in order to explore the extent to which satisfaction and service user involvement in the process has changed or stayed the same since 2015.

2.7 Moving Schools

The topic of moving schools focuses on literature looking at students' experiences of transition from one school to another outside of typical "transition points" such as primary-secondary transition at the start of a new academic year. As such, any research exploring primary-secondary transitions for students has been excluded from this review because these transitions are typically well structured, and commonly involve a whole cohort of students starting at a new provision at the same time. In contrast, moving schools for other reasons, such as receiving an EHCP, often means that the student is entering a school mid-year, and is doing so independently of other students.

School mobility is a phenomenon described as "a child joining or leaving a school at a point other than the normal age at which children start or finish their education at that school" (Dobson et al., 2000). Messiou and Jones (2015) suggest that possible reasons for school mobility include family relocation, school exclusion, or being taken into care. Interestingly, moving schools as a result of receiving an EHCP is not included in the list, though as this can happen at any point during the school year, it could be considered

within this phenomenon. Looking at student's views on changing schools during the school year, Messiou and Jones (2015) conducted a small-scale participatory study in one secondary school in England. Semi-structured interviews as well as questionnaires and photo-elicitation methods were used with 12 students aged 12-15 who had recently (within the last month) joined the school. Themes such as perceived social challenges and learning in a new environment were found, though the analysis was not completed with the student co-researchers.

Greenwood and Kelly (2019b) conducted action research to explore the sense of school belonging for students in care experiencing in-year school moves. Six students in years 7-10 and seven members of staff took part in the research, having been recruited during an activity day in the local area. Researchers used focus groups and participatory tools to gather views, and findings highlighted a number of practical changes that schools could make to increase belonging following in-year transitions. These were: advanced information about teacher's names and room locations; receiving information about the new school's layout in advance of the transition; and being presented with information about the school using child-friendly language. Whilst practical changes could increase sense of belonging, Greenwood and Kelly (2019b) do not go as far as to evaluate them, and the lack of information about how students were chosen and recruited for the study limits opportunities for replication in the future.

Research looking at students' experiences of school transition from mainstream school to a specialist setting is minimal and has tended to focus on other special educational needs including physical difficulties (Pivik et al., 2002) and moderate learning difficulties (Norwich & Kelly, 2004). To date, there has been some research exploring the views of SEMH students in specialist provisions, both in the UK and abroad (Cefai & Cooper, 2010; Wise & Upton, 1998). However, much of this research focused on what went wrong in the child's mainstream school, and did not focus on the student's experience of transition or their new provision.

A study conducted in two specialist schools for Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties in England asked 36 12-16 year olds about their experiences of mainstream school (Wise & Upton, 1998). Using informant-style interviews, trigger questions were used to explore student's narratives about causal factors influencing their presentation of "disruptive and disaffected behaviour". Wise and Upton (1998) found themes relating to school and class size, consistency of teaching, curriculum content, and social interaction to be linked to the display of challenging behaviour, with many students reporting that their mainstream schools contributed to their difficulties. The researchers used their trigger questions in the analysis to group their data. This use of a deductive approach in their research limited their findings only to what they expected, as any data not directly related to the question (i.e. if the student talked about anything else in their answer) was not analysed. As a result, further insight into students' perspectives may have been lost.

2.8 School Belonging

A commonly cited definition of school belonging is Goodenow and Grady (1993) who defined it as "students' sense of being accepted, valued, included and encouraged by others in the academic classroom setting, and of feeling oneself to be an important part of the life and activity of the class". Dimitrellou (2017) argued that school belonging is linked to three psychological theories: Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Maslow & Frager, 1987), Bowlby's attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969), and Baumeister and Leary's belongingness hypothesis (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). These theories underline the importance of feeling emotionally secure within an environment in order to reach full learning potential, and highlight the need for both relational connectedness and physical safety.

Craggs and Kelly (2018a) reviewed literature which gathered pupil voices on how it feels to "belong" within a school context. Concepts generated from the final eight articles explored the feelings of intersubjectivity, with pupils reporting that belonging links to having positive interactions with peers, "warm relationships with staff", and an overall sense of membership to an "in-

group”. Other overarching themes looked at pupil’s experiences of acceptance as an individual, with pupils reporting that they feel most like they belong when they are able to be themselves and when they feel safe both within their social relationships and the physical environment. This presentation of pupil views about what belonging means for them links closely with the definition of school belonging (Goodenow & Grady, 1993).

A systematic literature review (Greenwood & Kelly, 2019a) of five qualitative studies investigating the views of secondary school staff on how schools create a sense of belonging found two predominant themes present in the research. Namely the practices of individual staff, and the aspects of the school context. Regarding staff practices, teachers noted staff accessibility and personal characteristics (such as humour, assertiveness, and enthusiasm) to be important when working to develop a sense of school belonging. School context aspects emphasised the use of policies and procedures to create a “positive school culture” and “nurturing ethos”. Greenwood and Kelly (2019a) concluded that though the literature review produced only a small number of studies, all from Western cultures, the consensus of their findings placed great importance on staff-pupil relationships.

Exploring the perceptions of school staff regarding what facilitates the creation of a sense of school belonging following a managed move, Flitcroft and Kelly (2016) conducted a small-scale study with six Deputy Headteachers from secondary schools in one area of the UK. Thematically analysing transcripts from a focus group, they grouped themes by research question to produce a total of 11 basic themes. The discussion of their findings is often repetitive, due in most part to how they grouped their themes, and rarely supported with evidence from transcripts. However, considering the information as a whole, the main conclusions from the research suggest that adequate preparation for integration, generating school identity, home-school-pupil partnerships, positive staff approach, and knowing your students are all important for the creation of a sense of school belonging for “managed moved” pupils. A significant limitation of this study is that Flitcroft and Kelly (2016) report that their findings indicate “good

practice” without measuring the effectiveness of these actions on student’s sense of school belonging. A more accurate conclusion is that the study identifies practice across a small number of schools and calls for future research to measure the effectiveness of these practices using standardised school belonging measures.

Building on previous research (Flitcroft & Kelly, 2016), Craggs and Kelly (2018b) asked four secondary school students about their experiences of school belonging following a managed move. Themes included making friends and feeling safe, support for SEND, and school protocols and practices. Researchers raised an interesting point in that the students interviewed made little mention of staff interactions, but instead emphasised the significance of making positive peer relationships to their sense of school belonging.

There is considerable research exploring the impact of school belonging on children and young people’s outcomes (e.g. Bond et al., 2007; Jessor & Jessor, 1977; Jessor, Turbin, & Costa, 1998), with studies typically reporting a positive relationship between school belonging and desirable outcomes across academic, social and health domains. Focusing on school belonging for students with SEN, Murray and Greenberg (2001) found that students with EBD were most likely, out of SEN and non-SEN students, to report that they didn’t like school. One explanation put forward for this was that including these students often meant overt differentiation in a way that separated students from their peers, for example through the allocation of a one-to-one teaching assistant. This could suggest that settings with more covert inclusive practices may be more positively viewed by SEN students.

Dimitrellou and Hurry (2018) explored the views of students with SEMH and MLD in relation to school belonging, social relations and school ethos. 1440 students in years 7-10 across three secondary schools in England completed a Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire in order to measure severity of need for students identified as having SEMH needs. Using a new scale tested for internal consistency (school belonging 0.79, social relations 0.71-0.8, ethos 0.83), researchers found that students who self-identified as

experiencing externalising mental health difficulties (through use of the SDQ), reported lower scores for sense of school belonging than those self-identified as experiencing internalising mental health difficulties, other types of SEND, and typically developing students. This finding supports previously discussed literature (e.g. de Monchy et al., 2004) and suggests that the bi-directional nature of relationships between students and teachers, and the impact on these relationships when students present with behaviour that could be considered “challenging”, could account for lower belonging scores.

2.9 The Voice of the Child or Young Person

The SEND Code of Practice (DfE & DoH, 2015) states that “Local Authorities must ensure that children, their parents, and young people are involved in discussions and decisions about their individual support”. This falls neatly in line with Step 4 of the “Ladder of Children’s Participation” (Shier, 2001) which says “Children are involved in the decision-making process”. In addition, children and young people with special educational needs or disabilities should be consulted in reviewing educational and training provisions as required. This guidance reflects Article 12 of the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 2009) which argues that children who are capable of forming his or her own views have the right to express those views, and that those views are given “due weight” by all parties. Within EP practice, a large focus of the role is to gather the views of the child and ensure that these views are represented fairly and accurately in meetings with parents and other professionals (Gersch et al., 2017).

The role of the educational psychologist in gathering children’s views is long standing, though research into the methods used by EPs is limited. One such study (Harding & Atkinson, 2009) looked at how EPs in one Local Authority in the UK gathered children’s views, and how these views were included in reports. Findings showed that of the information recorded in EP reports related to children’s views, 19.5% focused on their interests and preferences outside of school. A further 16.1% discussed children’s views on the support arrangements within school and their hopes and goals for the future. A focus

group with EPs from the Local Authority looked at how children's views were gathered, with a range of methods being highlighted. Researchers concluded that EPs within this service typically gathered views through questionnaires, therapeutic-based approaches (e.g. personal construct psychology), and through using specific view-gathering resources (e.g. "All About Me" profiles). This suggests that EPs are using child-friendly methods to accurately gather and report children's voices within their work, indicating that Step 2 of the "Ladder of Children's Participation" (Shier, 2001), namely "Children are supported in expressing their views" is reached through the work of the EP. However it should be noted that this research was conducted prior to the release of the new SEND Code of Practice (DfE & DoH, 2015), and so may not reflect current EP practices.

Prout and James (1990) discussed changes to research practices considering Article 12 as researchers attempt to "unmute" the voices of children. Engaging in research aimed at capturing children's voices to explore their perceptions of inclusive practice, Adderley et al. (2015) conducted a small-scale research project with 48 five-nine year olds from one primary school in the UK. Participatory tools such as photo elicitation, Post-It note activities, whole group discussions, and drawings were used by researchers to ask children about their experience of school, with the aim of finding out what children thought about the practices that helped or hindered inclusion. Using the "Ladder of Children's Participation" (Shier, 2001) to comment on the effectiveness of this participatory research, this research reached Step 3: "Children's views are taken into account", as adult researchers initiated the topic and decided on the methodology. The use of participatory tools does however speak to the researcher's strong desire to respect and value the contributions of the children, and to give their voices more power. Themes fell under a broad umbrella of relationships, highlighting the importance of adult-child and child-child connections when creating an inclusive environment in schools.

Cefai and Cooper (2010) suggest that children and young people with SEMH needs are the most unheard population. Thinking about possible explanations for this, it could be suggested that those who present with

externalising mental health needs may be “too challenging” or “too disruptive” to engage. In contrast, those who present with internalising mental health needs may be hidden from researchers, or may experience higher drop-out rates in research due to high anxiety and low engagement. Cefai and Cooper (2010) also state that “what students with SEBD have to say about their learning and behaviour at school is not only valid and meaningful, but also helps to provide a more adequate and useful construction of the situation, contributing to a better understanding and resolution of difficulties.” They called for more research looking at the voices of SEMH students, and suggested that future research may wish to explore the stories of students who have SEMH but who have stayed in mainstream schools despite their difficulties. The hope would be that these stories would help to highlight good inclusive practice.

Wise and Upton (1998) suggest that listening to students with SEBD provides professionals with more insight and an improved understanding of student’s behaviour. However, concerns about eliciting views from this student population have also been raised (Wise, 1997), highlighting the danger that these perspectives will be dismissed by professionals or will hold less value due to attitudes that the views held by those with SEBD/SEMH needs are tainted by their “disturbed” or “emotional” state. Other literature argues that externalised behaviour is a form of communication for many people (Sellman, 2009), and as such research should consider the use of participatory activities when seeking to hear voices of these individuals.

2.10 Children as Researchers and Co-Researchers

Child researchers are defined as “children who direct their own research from inception to dissemination, generating original knowledge relating to issues which they themselves identify as significant to their lives” (Bucknall, 2010). The following examples of participatory research have been chosen as they reflect practice that reached Step 5: “Children share power and responsibility for decision making” on Shier's (2001) “Ladder of Children’s Participation”.

One of the first research projects to be co-led by young people was a Save the Children study on the experiences of young people leaving the care system (West, 1997, in Christensen & James, 2017). Care leavers aged 16 and older designed research to explore the experiences of other young people leaving care in Britain. The adolescent researchers chose the research topic, designed the questions, and interviewed all the child and adult participants. Following analysis of the qualitative data, they disseminated the findings through a written report and a video, as well as through interviews with the media. This research project paved the way for participatory research and began to challenge assumptions about how children and young people could be involved in research.

Over the last 30 years, there has been a growth in research led by children and young people with some researchers suggesting that this movement has stemmed from a number of different factors, including a greater recognition of children and young people's agency (Christensen & James, 2008), an increased awareness of the rights of children (Kellett, 2010), and an interest in including the perspectives of service users in the research of provisions (Mcveety & Farren, 2019).

“The experience of participating as active researchers is an empowering process that leads to a virtuous circle of increased confidence and raised self-esteem, resulting in more active participation by children in other aspects affecting their lives” (Kellett, 2010; page 197)

Mcveety and Farren (2019) found this to be the case when they recently explored a “child-voice enabling initiative” with upper primary school age children, aged 11-12 years, in one class in Ireland. Over 3 cycles of action research, students were asked to design a school timetable and reflect on its effectiveness. The latter cycles found the students taking responsibility for their decision-making and becoming more self-aware as learners. Whilst it is unfortunate that the researchers do not indicate whether the child-created timetable remained in place after the action research had finished, this small-scale study does highlight good practice in gathering children's voices and enabling them to influence provisions that directly affect them.

2.10.1 Child and Adolescent Researchers with SEMH

Participatory research with children and young people with SEMH difficulties has been conducted in the UK by a number of researchers (O'Connor et al., 2011; Sellman, 2009; Silverman, 2012). Sellman (2009) recruited six 13-16 years olds from a specialist provision for SEMH to explore student perspectives on the school's behaviour management policy. These adolescent researchers met together as a group to explore their own attitudes towards the policy, and then designed research to gather the views of other students from the school. Whilst time constraints meant that the latter research aims could not be actualised, analysis of the adolescent researcher meetings did indicate positive attitudes towards the school policy that could be shared with the wider staff team. Specifically, the adolescent researchers reported that they liked the structure, consistency and range of curriculum activities provided at the school. However, they also identified aspects of the school's behaviour management policy that were "problematic"; namely the restraint procedures. Considering the reported challenges of engaging students from the SEMH population within research, Sellman (2009) recognised the potential disparities between the views of students who volunteer to engage in research, and those who continue to remain "unheard". However, despite not hearing from the larger student population, he argued that these views were still worthy of dissemination to school staff, in order to address the points made by the adolescent researchers.

O'Connor, Hodkinson, Burton, and Torstensson (2011) set out to engage young people in a pilot study aiming to explore the views of students with BESD who had been excluded from school due to challenging behaviour. Three students aged 14-16 years attending an alternative provision participated in the pilot, attending "activity days" that incorporated a range of participatory activities such as ice-breaker games, group discussions, and life grid activities. Researchers met with participants again during the analysis phase of the research to discuss emerging themes from the pilot and ensure that the young people's experiences had been captured accurately. An interesting finding from the pilot was the student's lack of

awareness of the label “BESD”. Students reported that they had been unaware of the label being used to describe them, and would not use the label themselves. Instead, they reported to relate better to specific diagnostic terms, such as ADHD. These findings have been replicated more recently (Caslin, 2019; Sheffield & Morgan, 2017) and discussed previously within this literature review. O’Connor et al. (2011) concluded that the pilot study highlighted the importance of gathering views from “hard to reach” students such as those with BESD, and by including these students within the analysis phase of the pilot, researchers were more confidently able to accurately report the voice of the child.

Silverman (2012) conducted a STARs (Students as Researchers) project with primary school students from a specialist provision for SEMH. The child researchers designed, conducted, analysed and disseminated findings on several topics about student’s experiences of school. During early meetings with the STARs, Silverman placed herself in a power role, with the training taking the form of a lesson from a person of power, rather than of peer researchers sharing knowledge. Unlike many participatory research projects that report the findings of the research itself, Silverman (2012) looked primarily at the process and the experiences of the child researchers, with the themes emerging from feedback from the STARs themselves. Using semi-structured interviews, Silverman received positive feedback about the project, and key themes included views towards the project, development of skills, perceived value of the project, and pupil competence.

2.10.2 Power Within Research “with” Children

One of the main challenges highlighted through much of the literature on working with child or adolescent researchers is the disparity of power and status between the adults and the children (Corsaro & Molinari, 2017; Kellett, 2010; Kirk, 2007; Roberts, 2017). Some researchers have gone so far as to suggest that children’s voices are often ignored, or edited, in order to fit with the “adult agenda” (Roberts, 2017).

A literature review exploring the ethical and methodological issues surrounding qualitative research with children and young people (Kirk, 2007)

highlighted “power relations” as a key concern. From the literature reviewed, strategies to manage the power imbalance emerged, such as involving children as part of the research team, using group interviews, and giving children and young people control over the recording equipment. Alderson (2008) suggested several ways in which adult researchers could unintentionally create a power imbalance. For example, perceiving or treating children as immature, talking down to them, using over-simplified language, or limiting children’s responses to provide less detail. Additionally, using over-complicated language can also be indirectly disrespectful as it can make children and young people appear ignorant or incapable of meaningfully engaging with the research (Alderson, 2008).

Roberts (2017) suggests that “listening to children, hearing them, and acting on what they have said are three different things” and that researchers benefit from specialist training and expertise in order to engage in participatory research that is as power balanced as possible. Bradbury-Jones and Taylor (2015) discussed the ethical challenges facing all levels of participatory research, including the lack of research competence in child and adolescent researchers, complex remuneration processes, and power dynamics. Researchers concluded by urging all future researchers engaging in participatory methods to be reflexive throughout the research process. This reflexivity enables researchers to recognise the role that they have played alongside child and adolescent researchers in informing and shaping the research (Connolly, 2017).

2.10.3 Criticisms of Participatory Research

Alongside the growing body of literature into participatory research as an effective way of gathering the voices of children and young people, there is also evidence that calls for caution amongst researchers intending to conduct participatory research. Children as researchers is “a mantra now recognised as normative” and is typically considered to be “ethically superior” to other approaches in child research (Clark & Richards, 2017). The “Ladder of Children’s Participation” (Shier, 2001) which focuses on how adults can facilitate participation for children and young people is part of this narrative. Research critiquing or challenging participatory approaches suggests that

researchers need to acknowledge the other agendas at play. Clark and Richards (2017) suggest that in a desire to gather children's views, researchers place higher value on the act of participating, using the UNCRC (2009) as an agenda that because everyone has the *right* to a voice, everyone should *want* the chance to be heard. In holding this agenda, researchers risk the further marginalisation of those who make the informed choice not to share their views.

In addition to questioning the method on principle, others have questioned the levels of participation taking place in so-called "participatory research". Fox (2013) reflects on her own experience of conducting participatory research during a small-scale study where 4 boys aged 14-15 years formed a participatory group exploring experiences of school exclusion. Focusing only on the experience of the adult researcher, Fox (2013) highlighted the social (power imbalances, adult role norms) and institutional (gathering prior consent from gatekeepers) barriers which can make young people's participation difficult. For example, she reported to unexpectedly find herself often taking on a "traditional adult role" with the adolescent researchers, taking responsibility for ensuring that they adhered to the school rules.

Skelton (2008) describes "gatekeepers" as people who have the capacity to share or withhold information about research with desired participants. This results in "the power of participation being placed in the hands of the one who already has a form of social power over the potential research participant." Examples of gatekeepers in research exploring the views of children and young people included parents and carers, and schools. Participatory research designed to take place within schools often faces challenges where school staff refuse access to the researchers (Dentith et al., 2012), citing concerns about the potential negative feedback given by students about the school. Dentith et al. (2012) explain that they were able to overcome this barrier in one of their studies as one of the researchers was an "insider" and already worked for the school in which the research was planned to take place. Some research argues that the barriers caused by gatekeepers within participatory research are in part a result of inflexible ethical guidelines that are not "fit" for social science research (Coyne, 2010;

Skelton, 2008). They call for a review of these to ensure that ethical procedures take into account children's competence to make decisions for themselves and at the same time protect children from inappropriate research procedures (Coyne, 2010).

Whilst there has been a lot of research into gathering views and creating child-friendly research methods, Woodhead and Faulkner (2008) suggest that the power of the child's voice can often be lost in the analysis. They argue that during the analysis phase of research, researchers are often keen to ensure that the data gathered fits with their "agenda", which is rarely in line with a "child's agenda". By increasing participation of children and young people across all stages of research, including analysis and dissemination, researchers exploring children's views can be more confident that the power of the child's voice has remained intact.

Challenges to the notion of participation extending to data analysis and dissemination have highlighted time constraints on research and the risks that the act of analysis conducted by children and young people could become merely tokenistic if the researcher fails to follow through with conclusions drawn by their younger co-researchers (Nind, 2011). Nind (2011) proposes that for participatory data analysis to be effective, the adolescent researchers should take on the role of "sense-maker", with the adult researcher taking the role of "trainer and scaffolder". A few researchers have demonstrated good practice in this area, training children and young people in thematic analysis (Lushey & Munro, 2015; O'Connor et al., 2011) so that they could be involved in the coding of interview transcripts and the later identification of key findings.

2.11 Aims of the Study

This study aims to provide education professionals at a school and Local Authority level with a greater understanding of the views and experiences of students with identified SEMH needs who go through the EHCP process. This has implications for educational psychologists who meet with children

and young people as part of the statutory assessment process and who contribute advice and recommendations for EHCPs. Findings from this research may tailor how EPs work with children and young people during this process, and provide information about how children and young people with a primary need of SEMH feel about the support they receive at school. On a Local Authority and wider national policy level, this research could contribute to the debate over mainstream versus specialist provisions for students with SEMH. However, it is recognised that there is likely to be no “one” consistent experience of receiving an EHCP, and that young people experience school very differently, regardless of having a common label (SEMH).

Academically, this study is rare in that it will work with adolescent research assistants, all of whom have SEMH needs, in the planning, analysis and dissemination phases of the research. This study will provide insight into how future researchers may use adolescent research assistants to provide an alternative perspective to research looking at collecting children’s views.

There are four main research questions that will be explored through this study:

1. How do students with SEMH feel about the support they receive at school?
2. What do students with SEMH report about their experience of the EHCP process?
3. How does a student’s sense of belonging differ based on type of school provision?
4. How do adolescent research assistants experience participatory research?

These research questions were developed following the initial meeting with the adolescent research assistants, and reflected the broad topics chosen by them: accessing support; EHCPs; and belonging. As with best practice guidance on participatory research, the questions are exploratory in nature.

The Methodology section for this thesis will be divided to enable clear understanding of the work completed by the adolescent research assistants. As such, Chapter 3 will provide an overview of the methods used in this

research, with Chapters 4, 5 and 6 detailing the work carried out by the adolescent research assistants.

3. Methodology

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of the methodological approach used within this research project. The research has participatory components to it, working alongside adolescent research assistants in the design, analysis and dissemination phases of the project. As such, specific chapters have been created to increase clarity on the role and function of the adolescent research assistants. Chapters 4 and 5 provide a detailed account of the “Design Phase” of the research, including the pilot study, and Chapter 6 discusses the role of the adolescent research assistants in the analysis and dissemination of the findings.

To reflect the ontological and epistemological perspectives described below, this thesis will use “I” to reflect the role of the “researcher” for the remainder of this thesis. This will allow for greater recognition of my subjective interpretation of the events that took place during the research, and further highlight the importance of voices within academic research. To aid clarity for the reader regarding the aspects of the research that are participatory, Figure 2 provides a breakdown of the involvement of the adult researcher (me), the adolescent research assistants, and the participants within this project.

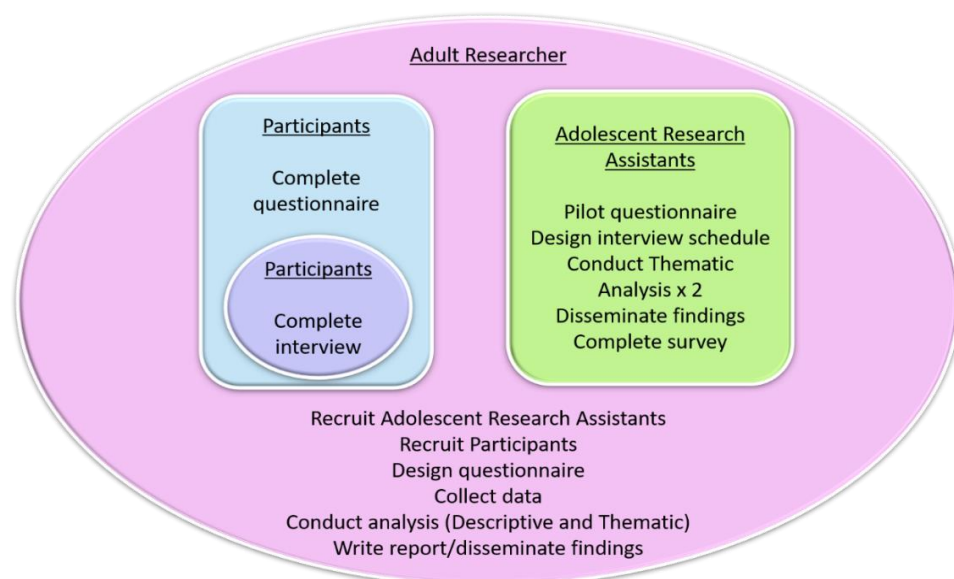


Figure 2: Graphic to explain roles of adult researcher, adolescent research assistant, and participant within this project

This research set out to explore the subjective nature of reality and experience of young people who have EHCPs. Whilst there are aspects of the gathered data that could be objectively measured (such as duration of plan and type of provision), qualitative responses and ratings were considered as subjective representations of the views of the young people involved in the study. This reflects a relativist ontology, whereby it is understood that there are multiple constructions of reality and what is considered to be real or true differs with time and context. Guba and Lincoln (2005) explain that from a relativist perspective, reality cannot be separated from the subjective experience of it. As this research is exploring the experiences of young people, as reported by them, the views of the students will not be triangulated with the recollections of parents or professionals.

With regards to epistemological perspective, the current research project takes a constructivist view, whereby it is agreed that “individuals create or construct their own new understandings or knowledge through the interaction of what they already believe and the ideas, events, and activities with which they come into contact” (Ultanir, 2012). This maintains that reality is socially constructed and that our “sense-making” of our world is an active learning process that is heavily influenced by our experience and environment. As this research explores students’ experiences and opinions of the provision they have accessed since the receipt of their EHCP, it is understood that reports are subjective and based on the individual students’ own background and understanding of what “good” or “helpful” is.

My relationship with the researched started off detached, as participants who only completed the questionnaire never met with me. However, those who engaged in the follow-up interview became more familiar with me, and as such the data gathered from this methodology can be considered to be influenced by my involvement with the process. This research took a multi-method approach to data gathering and was inductive in nature, allowing the conclusions to be drawn directly from the data, rather than from existing theories.

3.1 Adolescent Research Assistants

This study recruited students to take on the roles of adolescent research assistants. A group was established in June 2019 at a specialist provision supporting students with a primary need of SEMH. All of the research assistants had identified SEMH needs, however not all of them had EHCPs in place at the time of the project. Details about the recruitment of the school and of the adolescent research assistants can be found in Chapter 4. The group, eventually comprised of 3 students aged 12-16, met seven times during the research, with the arrangement to meet once more after the project had finished. Table 2 outlines the phases and functions of each of the meetings.

Table 2

Phases of Adolescent Research Assistant meetings

Phase	Meeting Number	Function/Main aims
Design	1	Introduce research and design scope
	2	Pilot questionnaire
	3	Create interview schedule
Analysis	4	Thematic Analysis training
	5	Thematic Analysis 1
	6	Thematic Analysis 2
Dissemination	7	Confirming thematic map, writing abstract and completing survey
	8	Creating presentation

More detail about the meetings and the role of the adolescent research assistants can be found in Chapters 4, 5 and 6, with agendas presented in Appendix 6.

3.1.1 Evaluating the Research Assistant Experience

As a largely under-researched phenomenon, it was important to gather feedback from the adolescent research assistants about their experience of

participatory research. Specifically, how they understood their role in designing and analysing the research, and whether future research could change anything about the ways in which the voices of children and adolescents are included. During meeting seven, the research assistants were asked to complete a short survey (Appendix 7) capturing feedback on their whole experience. This was then analysed alongside my field notes, to enable rich reflection on the participatory aspects of this research.

3.2 Participants and Recruitment Methods

Participants for this study had an EHCP with the primary need on their plan identified as SEMH. They all attended Year's 7-10 in a mainstream or specialist school, or a resource provision attached to a mainstream school. As highlighted in the January 2018 census (DfE, 2018b), 30,023 students in England had an EHCP with SEMH as the primary need. Over 1/3 of these EHCPs were held by students aged 13-15. In addition to being the peak age for having an EHCP, this age range fits within Year's 7-10 at secondary school, and data collection would not interfere with student's studying for GCSE examinations.

Following the recruitment of the Local Authority through email conversations between myself and the Principal Educational Psychologist, this study adopted a similar recruitment method for schools used in previous research (Dimitrellou, 2017). Secondary schools were contacted initially through the Headteacher and provided with information about the study. Schools who did not respond during the summer term 2019 were contacted through their link Educational Psychologist in September 2019. If school staff agreed to support the project, they were asked to send home an information pack containing the information sheet (Appendix 1), parental consent forms (Appendix 2), and a link to the online questionnaire (Appendix 3). Information packs were sent to the parents of all students in Years 7-10 on roll who had an EHCP with the primary need of SEMH. A flowchart detailing the recruitment process can be found in Appendix 5.

This recruitment method links to a criterion referenced sampling method for the questionnaire, as all students who met the following criteria were asked to take part:

1. The students are on roll at a secondary school (either mainstream, specialist SEMH or resource provision) that had agreed to take part in the research
2. The students are in Years 7-10
3. The students have an EHCP with a primary need of SEMH

Completed parental consent forms were asked to be returned to the school's SENCO. However, within the information sheet and details of the questionnaire, it was emphasised to parents that this study assumed parental consent if the student completed the questionnaire. Parents were informed that if they did not wish their child to participate in the research, they should not provide the student with the questionnaire link and that they should contact the school to "opt out". No parents contacted me during this study, and no parents expressed "opt out" preferences to the schools involved. Participants were asked to complete the consent form at the beginning of the online questionnaire. Those who marked "no" to any of the questions were directed to the "finish screen" and thanked for their participation. I was made aware of 3 students for whom this occurred. Additionally, school staff reported that several students expressed a preference not to participate.

The sampling method for the interviews was designed to be self-selecting. Participants who completed the questionnaire were asked if they would like to be considered for follow-up interviews. Those who responded "yes" to the question were asked to provide their name and the name of their school. Those who marked "no" were taken to the "finish screen" and thanked for their participation.

Questionnaire – Details from the Local Authority database indicated that the maximum number of participants that could be recruited for this study was 62. Out of 22 schools contacted, 14 schools expressed interest in engaging with the research. However, only 6 of these had students in years 7-10 with

an EHCP for SEMH. In total, 17 participants completed the questionnaire out of a possible 26 (three completed the consent form and marked “no”, the remainder were approached to participate but declined). Therefore, this study had a response rate of 65% which falls within the level considered acceptable for research (De Vaus, 1996).

Interview – 11 students indicated on their completed questionnaire that they would be interested in being interviewed. However, one student was unwell on the day of the interview and it was not possible to reschedule. A further student originally agreed to an interview, but later expressed disinterest in meeting with me. Finally, a student indicated that they would like to be interviewed but gave a pseudonym and a fictitious school, which meant that I was unable to contact them to arrange an interview. Therefore, a total of eight interviews were conducted during this research.

3.2.1 Participant Demographic Details

For this study, 17 participants were recruited across 5 schools in one Local Authority in England. Three reported to attend mainstream school provisions, three were from resource provisions attached to mainstream schools, and the remaining 11 reported to attend specialist school provision. Two of the participants were female, 14 were male, and one marked the “prefer not to say” box. Participants were recruited from across the Year Groups; three from Year 7; six from Year 8; six from Year 9; and two from Year 10.¹ All of the participants had EHCPs in place with the primary need recorded as SEMH.

3.3 Methods of Data Collection

This research used a sequential multi-method approach to data collection. Questionnaires were completed between June 2019 and January 2020, and interviews were conducted between November 2019 and January 2020. The interviews typically lasted around 30 minutes, with time at the beginning and

¹ Participant demographic information was reported in this way to ensure anonymity, specifically of the female participants who may otherwise be identifiable to readers from the Local Authority or the schools in which this research took place.

end available for ice-breaker and plenary games (such as cards, Top Trumps, and Jenga). The audio recording of the interview questions and answers ranged in duration from 7 minutes 47 seconds and 15 minutes 12 seconds, with the average duration of 10 minutes 40 seconds. The shorter interviews were typically as a result of the participant having no school moves.

3.3.1 Questionnaire

The questionnaire focused on student attitudes towards and experiences of receiving an EHCP. Specifically, it was designed to provide data in response to research questions 2 and 3. I wanted questions that looked at participants' involvement in the assessment process, their views on the current and potential future impact of their EHCP, their involvement in educational placement decisions, and information about the labels they themselves use to describe their needs or difficulties.

For the first three requirements, as well as questions gathering demographic data, I used 21 questions from the Education Health and Care Plan Survey (Adams, Tindle, Basran, et al., 2017). The original survey included 86 questions; 45 for parents of children with SEN, and 41 for the young people themselves. I used questions from the young person's section of the survey, excluding questions relating to duration of the EHCP process, personal budgets, other types of SEN, and the DfE. Of the remaining 21 questions, two questions relating to involvement in educational placement decisions were reworded to aid clarity.

Adams, Tindle and Basran et al. (2017) created the "Experiences of Education Health and Care Plans Survey" in collaboration with a Department for Education project team and an advisory panel of staff from Derby University. The survey was then read and tested by young people and their parents, and piloted by 317 parents and young people. The final survey was completed by 13,643 participants, of which 4,690 represented the target age range for this current research project (aged 11-15) and 1,592 represented the target primary need (SEMH) (Adams, Tindle, Dobie, et al., 2017). Whilst there is no published reliability measure for this survey, the scale of the

questionnaire and the use of follow-up interviews to clarify and confirm questionnaire responses suggest that it is a valid tool to measure the experience of applying for and receiving an EHCP.

In addition to questions relating to the EHCP, the current study explored sense of belonging, asking participants questions about their views on their current school. To achieve this, I incorporated the Belonging Scale (Frederickson, Simmonds, Evans, & Soulsby, 2007) into the questionnaire. This scale was chosen over alternatives, such as the Psychological Sense of School Membership Scale (PSSM) (Goodenow, 1993) due to number of questions (12 compared to 18) and ease of response (3 options rather than 5). The Belonging Scale was scored as per the manual instructions, and the score calculated for each participant was then used to compare sense of belonging between different groups of participants (mainstream versus specialist versus resource provision). Frederickson et al. (2007) reports a high internal consistency reliability of 0.87, suggesting that the Belonging Scale accurately measures a students' sense of belonging to a school environment.

Finally, a question was added to the questionnaire to ask participants to "self-identify" with labels relating to SEMH. Many of the labels were taken verbatim from the SEND Code of Practice description of SEMH (DfE & DoH, 2015), whilst others were rephrased to aid clarity. For example, "displaying challenging, disruptive or disturbing behaviour" was reworded to say "get in trouble due to behaviour". This question was included to provide descriptive information about the participants in relation to their type of SEMH. For example, answers to this question could enable analysis to determine whether the prevalence of externalising versus internalising SEMH labels used by participants who have completed the questionnaire is representative of the general UK population of young people with SEMH. Additionally, it could highlight the narratives participants use to describe themselves, and provide greater understanding of the potential barriers to accessing school support.

The questionnaire was approved in draft form by my academic and professional supervisors, and was then used to create an online questionnaire using Qualtrics software. It was piloted by the adolescent research assistants in June 2019. No significant changes were made to the questionnaire as a response to the pilot study, details of which can be found in Chapter 5.

3.3.2 Interview

A smaller group of participants completed a semi-structured interview, using interview questions created by the adolescent research assistants during Meeting 3. The interview was designed in part to follow-up on questions from the questionnaire (such as the questions relating to moving schools and the EHCP process), with further questions looking at other factors that may influence a student's experience of school (such as social relationships and accessing support). The adolescent research assistants reviewed the initial notes on the research and identified which topics they felt required further exploration and follow-up from the questionnaire. With guidance from me limited to support around the wording of questions (conversational style, unambiguous questions), the adolescent research assistants worked together to write nine questions. Following the creation of this interview schedule, questions were then approved by the research supervisors in September 2019, checking clarity and flow. The interview relates to research questions 1, 2 and 3 and the full Interview Schedule, including suggested starter and plenary activities can be found in Appendix 4.

3.3.3 Research Assistants' Survey

As research question 4 explores the experience of adolescent research assistants within participatory research, a survey was designed to gather their feedback at the end of the research. The interview schedule used by Silverman (2012) was converted into a 10-question survey, with questions asking about the role of a research assistant, the value of participatory research, feedback on the experience, and feedback on working with an adult researcher. The questions were then approved by the research supervisors, checking for clarity and suitability. Surveys were given to the adolescent research assistants in February 2020 and completed

anonymously and individually. A copy of the final survey used in this study can be found in Appendix 7. In addition, research assistants were given an opportunity to provide informal feedback at the end of each meeting. The information obtained through the survey, the feedback, and my field notes was analysed in response to research question 4.

3.4 Analysis

Quantitative data gathered from the questionnaire was analysed using descriptive statistics to explore type of SEMH, and on reported experiences of the EHCP process and perceived impact on future outcomes. Qualitative data from the questionnaire explored the views of participants in relation to what worked well or didn't work well about receiving an EHCP, and about their reasons behind wanting to move to a new school placement (if applicable). This was analysed alongside the transcribed interview data, using Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), allowing me to take an inductive approach to the data and explore possible patterns between participants. As there was significant cross-over of themes from the questionnaire and interview, the themes were merged. Table 3 shows the phases of Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) followed to conduct this analysis.

Table 3

Phases of Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006)

Phases of Thematic Analysis	Description of process in relation to the present research
Phase 1 Familiarising yourself with the data	All interviews were transcribed, allowing me to become familiar with the data. Two of the transcripts (see Chapter 6) were read and re-read with the adolescent research assistants and initial notes were made to acknowledge regularly occurring ideas or topics. The

	remaining six transcripts were read and re-read by me alone, following the same process.
Phase 2 Generating initial codes	To code interesting features of the data within each transcript, the transcripts were printed and features were highlighted and annotated. For two of the transcripts, this phase was completed alongside research assistants. See Appendix 10 for example of a coded transcript.
Phase 3 Search for themes	After all data had been initially coded, I (and research assistants for two of the transcripts) used Post-It notes to transfer codes from each transcript onto a larger page where they could be moved and grouped during discussion. This process enabled the organisation of overarching themes and sub-themes.
Phase 4 Review themes	This phase involved the refinement of themes. I engaged in a back and forth process from the transcripts to the developing “thematic map” (made up of the Post-It notes) and created ten possible themes to be discussed with research assistants. During meeting 7 with the research assistants, two of the themes merged together and one collapsed into other themes, leaving five final themes.
Phase 5 Define and name themes	During meeting 7 with the research assistants, working titles were assigned to the main themes. Later I finalised sub-themes and theme categories, ensuring that they accurately captured and reflected the data. These were then discussed and approved by the research supervisors.
Phase 6 Producing the report	The report was written, with a table outlining the thematic map produced alongside description and direct quotes for each theme and subtheme.

The reliability calculation (Miles & Huberman, 1994) was used to measure the reliability of the thematic analysis. Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest that an inter-rater reliability (IRR) of 80% agreement between coders on 95% of the codes is sufficient agreement among multiple coders. The adolescent research assistants and I individually analysed 2 transcripts and compared interpretations in order to ascertain a level of agreement. The level of agreement for the first and second transcripts were 83.96% and 85.96% respectively, both for 95% of the codes. These levels reached the “sufficient agreement” threshold for multiple coders (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

The research assistant survey contained scaling and open questions gathering both quantitative and qualitative data about the experience of being an adolescent research assistant. Responses from the survey were analysed apart from the other data, using Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I took an inductive approach to the data as there is little information within current literature to create a theoretical basis for findings. Themes generated, however, were compared to the existing literature evaluating children and young people’s experiences of engaging with participatory research (e.g. Silverman, 2012).

3.5 Ethics

Ethical approval was granted by the UCL Data Protection Office in March 2019, following approval from research supervisors. Further ethical approval was granted by the Research and Development team within the Local Authority participating in this research. In order to ensure that the research conducted was ethical, a number of considerations were taken into account. As data was being gathered from young people, parental consent was obtained using consent forms sent to parents as part of the information pack (Appendix 2). Questions seeking consent from the young person were added to the beginning of the online questionnaire, following information about the research (Appendix 3). Further consent forms were sent to parents and young people prior to the conducting of the semi-structured interviews. Additional information and consent forms were sent to the parents of the

adolescent research assistants, as well as the young people themselves, to explain their role in the research and ascertain their consent to take part. Confidentiality and anonymity were upheld throughout the research and no disclosures were made that led to safeguarding concerns. Data was stored anonymously and securely and only myself and the research supervisors had access to raw data.

4. Adolescent Research Assistants – Design Phase

This chapter will discuss the involvement of the adolescent research assistants in the “Design Phase” of the research project. It will start by discussing how the research assistants were recruited, and the information they were given about the research. The chapter will go on to detail the discussions which shaped the research, including the creation of the interview schedule. At the request of the research assistants themselves following a discussion about dissemination of the research, their real first names will be reported throughout these chapters. Whilst the pilot study formed part of this phase, it will be discussed in more detail within Chapter 5.

4.1 Recruitment of the School and Advertising the Positions of Adolescent Researcher

Following receipt of ethical approval from UCL Institute of Education Ethics board, as well as from the Local Authority, a specialist school was contacted to gauge interest in participating in the research. The school provides education for secondary school age students with SEMH needs, and who are known to CAMH services in the community (Tier 3). Many of the students who attend the school have EHCPs, though this is not an essential part of the admissions criteria. By recruiting from a specialist provision for SEMH, my concerns around “outing” students with EHCPs were reduced, as all students attending the school have similar needs and were likely to know each other.

I met with the Interim Headteacher in June 2019 and discussed the research and the role of the adolescent research assistants. The school showed interest in participating and suggested several students who they thought might wish to engage in the research. A flyer advertising the role was distributed to all students at the school, and students who were interested were asked to inform staff so that parental consent forms could be sent home.

4.1.1 Gatekeepers

In order to conduct this participatory research, I recognised the presence of two main gatekeepers: the school, and parents. In the recruitment of the adolescent research assistants, I was keen to ascertain their interest in the project, before seeking parental permission. Though I provided parents with my contact details should they wish to ask any questions about me or my research, I never had any direct contact with the parents, as communication with them was made through the school. During the research, I remained conscious that my access to the research assistants was through the school, and that the Interim Headteacher had the power to restrict access or to end the project if the school felt that it was taking up too much time. To manage the arrangement, I contacted the Interim Headteacher regularly, providing updates on the research and plans for what would take place in the next meeting with the research assistants. Though initially only four 1-hour sessions were agreed, this was extended to eight over the course of 12 months. Meetings were timetabled in consultation with the research assistants and school staff to reduce their disruption to academic studies.

4.2 Recruitment of Research Assistants and Building Rapport

In total, four students expressed interest in becoming an adolescent research assistant. They were all female, reflecting the predominantly female school cohort at the time of this research, and were in Years 9 to 11. They had all attended the school for at least 6 months and two had EHCPs in place. I received completed parental consent forms for the students, and an initial meeting date was arranged. However, one student dropped out of the study after she finished her exams, and therefore the majority of the meetings were held with three research assistants.

My first meeting with the research assistants took place in June 2019 with the aim of building rapport as a team and discussing their potential role within this research. I brought snacks to the meeting, as well as some ideas about possible ice-breaker games that we could play in order to get to know each other. Learning from Silverman (2012), I was keen to participate as

much as possible in the ice-breaker games, so that I could build a relationship with the research assistants alongside them building a relationship with each other. The games played in the first meeting included juggling, and two truths/one lie. Whilst not all research assistants participated in the games, I felt that the games, along with the snacks, helped create an informal and relaxed ethos to the group, which supported later discussion. As these activities had been so popular during the first meeting, I continued to bring snacks and games to every meeting. This enabled the further development of rapport throughout the project, and provided space for the adolescent research assistants to interact with me on an informal level. Games such as Uno, Jenga, and cards were played regularly, often at the end of the meeting.

4.2.1 Addressing Power Imbalance

Considering the power imbalance between adult and child researchers discussed widely in the literature (Connolly, 2017; Corsaro & Molinari, 2017; Woodhead & Faulkner, 2008), I was keen to do all that I could to promote equality within the research group. There were a number of aesthetic changes I made to my appearance in the hope that this would support the research assistants to see me as a “different kind of adult” (Corsaro & Molinari, 2017). For example, I dressed in casual clothes, rather than work attire, and did not wear an ID badge. I also asked that all the research assistants call me by my first name, rather than “Miss”. Finally, due to the set-up of the room where the initial meetings were held, and in order to sit in a position where everyone could see each other, I often sat on the floor. This allowed me space on the floor to spread out large paper and take notes during discussions, and also positioned me physically lower than the research assistants, further indicating their power in the relationship. I feel that these changes helped me develop status as a “less powerful adult”.

Davies (2017) talks about the inherent power imbalance when conducting research in a school, arguing that “schools are often deemed spaces in which adults exercise power over children”. Throughout my meetings with the research assistants, I was keen to highlight my role as a doctoral student, rather than as a professional, coming to my research group for help and

advice. Within this research into the school experiences of children and young people with SEMH difficulties, they are the experts, and I wanted to emphasise their role in shaping this research.

Some of my attempts to re-dress the power imbalance were met with challenges. For example, the teachers at the school struggled with my request to use my first name and would often refer to me as “Miss” around the research assistants. In addition, many teachers struggled with the idea that I was happy to sit on the floor and were keen to rearrange the room so that the research assistants could sit at the school desks and I could stand at the front. I kindly rejected these suggestions, as I felt that they could lead me to take a more “teacher-like” role with the research assistants, and impose power onto the dynamic.

4.3 Shaping the Research

The latter part of the first meeting with the four research assistants focused on shaping the research and defining the research parameters. As I was keen to have the research assistants decide, as much as possible, on the focus, my instructions at this stage were minimal. I informed them that I was interested in conducting research into the experiences of students who have SEMH needs and would like their help as research assistants to tell me what I should be asking. However, as I had already obtained ethical approval for a sequential multi methods approach (questionnaire and follow-up interview), the methods used within the research project were fixed prior to this first meeting.

The research assistants engaged in a group discussion about the possible experiences of students with SEMH, whilst I created a spider diagram of their discussion points. My involvement in the discussion was limited to asking clarifying questions, such as “what do you mean by confidence in accessing support systems?” or giving information about the participant group (secondary school age). Appendix 8 shows the full spider diagram of the research parameters discussed by the research assistants. Discussing how the questionnaire should be sent to participants (online or on paper), the

research assistants suggested that online would be better as it was more accessible, and told me that students would be used to completing questionnaires online.

4.3.1 Piloting the Questionnaire

As part of the submission for ethical approval, I had created a draft questionnaire combining the EHCP Survey (Adams, Tindle, Basran, et al., 2017) and the Belonging Scale (Frederickson et al., 2007). Fortunately, the topics agreed by the research assistants (EHCPs, moving schools, friends, relationships, supportive school practices) were present within these existing scales, and therefore fitted well with the research project. I compiled the pilot questionnaire using the online survey platform Qualtrics, and presented it to the research assistants to pilot and provide feedback regarding content, coverage of the research topics, and aesthetic appearance. Details of the pilot study can be found in Chapter 5.

4.3.2 Designing the Interview Schedule

Following the pilot study and the approval of the questionnaire, the research assistants were asked to design an interview schedule that I could use for the follow-up interviews. The research assistants consulted the spider diagrams completed in earlier meetings, and discussed topics that needed further exploration. Prior to designing the questions, I provided brief training on interviews and how to write an interview schedule. During the discussion, I took notes on big sheets of paper, and limited my involvement to supporting the research assistants to stay focused on the task, and to reminding them about the “conversational style” needed for an interview question.

The three research assistants (Caitlyn, Rebecca, and Rosie) who attended the third meeting came up with nine interview questions as well as prompts that I could use during the interview to add clarity or gather further information. Included within the interview schedule, the research assistants also discussed how I should start the interview, suggesting possible games I could bring as ice-breakers, and how the interview should end.

The full interview schedule used in this research can be found in Appendix 4.

5. Pilot Study

This chapter provides an account of the involvement of the adolescent research assistants in piloting the online questionnaire. The purpose of the pilot will be discussed, followed by details on the process and the feedback from the research assistants. At the end of the chapter, there are details about the changes made to the online questionnaire following this pilot study.

5.1 Conducting a Pilot Study

Piloting a questionnaire enables the researcher to check the clarity of the questions, as well as gather feedback on how the questionnaire is experienced by participants. It also gives the opportunity to check the practicalities of completing the questionnaire, including using the online link, and duration. Robson (2011) suggests that piloting has the added benefit of allowing the researcher to check that the phenomenon hoping to be explored can be “captured” sufficiently using the methods designed, providing opportunities for reflection and revision.

For the purpose of this study, the pilot was carried out for the questionnaire to test the appropriateness of the questions, and to test for any weaknesses in the administration process. Most of the questions were taken from pre-existing scales (Adams, Tindle, Basran, et al., 2017; Frederickson et al., 2007), whilst others were designed by me.

In June 2019, three adolescent research assistants (Caitlyn, Rebecca and Rosie) completed the pilot questionnaire, accessed through a weblink, using a school laptop. Other than support to type in the weblink, and guidance to answer the questions honestly as if they were a participant, each research assistant completed the questionnaire independently and then provided feedback on their experience.

5.2 Feedback from Research Assistants

The research assistants reported that the questionnaire was “good” and “nicely worded”. Some of the features they reported to particularly like were the percentage complete bar, and the “prefer not to say” option for gender. They reported that the questionnaire included many of the topics that they had suggested in an earlier meeting, and found that the wording for all the questions was clear. The research assistants suggested changes to the title page and end screen, as well as the order of the demographic questions. Specifically, they suggested putting the “SEMH label” question prior to the “having an EHCP” question, and to add an “I don’t identify with any of these labels” option. Finally, one research assistant reported finding the minimum character length (150 characters) for the open questions difficult to fill, and suggested that it might put participants off finishing the questionnaire. After discussion, it was agreed that the minimum character length should be removed for the final questionnaire.

5.3 Reflections on Pilot Study

The pilot was very informative and it was pleasing to hear that the wording of the questions was clear and unambiguous. Asking the adolescent research assistants to pilot the questionnaire enabled me to show them that their views had been heard and included. Early discussions about what the research should cover and the questions that should be asked were reflected in the questionnaire, specifically the Belonging Scale (Frederickson et al., 2007) and some of the open questions from the EHCP Survey (Adams, Tindle, Basran, et al., 2017). This confirmed my decision to use these pre-existing scales, and increased my confidence in the relevance of this research for children and young people with EHCPs for SEMH.

5.4 Final Questionnaire

Following the pilot, the final questionnaire was created. A copy of the final questionnaire can be found in Appendix 3.

6. Adolescent Research Assistants – Analysis Phase

This chapter outlines the involvement of the adolescent research assistants during the “Analysis Phase” of the research project. Here I will discuss the training I delivered on Thematic Analysis, as well as the process through which the research assistants conducted analysis of the interview transcriptions. Within this phase, and therefore this chapter, the thematic map was created and agreed, and plans to disseminate the research findings were discussed.

I met with the three adolescent research assistants in September 2019 and provided them with an update on the data collection and the write-up of the research. All of the research assistants reported a continued interest in engaging with the project during the academic year. At this meeting, I spoke to them about how they would like to be referenced in the report (what they would like to be called) and also asked them to think about whether they would be interested in being involved in the dissemination of the findings, through the writing of the Thesis abstract, and the co-creation of a PowerPoint presentation.

6.1 Training on Thematic Analysis

To prepare for the training, I created an easy-read guide on Braun and Clarke’s (2006) Thematic Analysis to explain what a theme was and to guide the research assistants through the six phases. Appendix 9 shows the guide used within this training. In addition to preparing the guide for how to conduct Thematic Analysis, I also used an anonymised transcript extract that I took from a university assignment I completed in Year 1 of my doctoral training. The focus of the extract was on school staff’s perspectives on the support they offer students with SEMH needs, and I felt that the contents would be of interest to the research assistants.

All the research assistants attended the training and engaged well in the activity. Independently, we each read the extract and highlighted phrases

that were of interest or that seemed to recur. We then each discussed something that we had highlighted, noticing instances of agreement or disagreement between us. I made notes on the discussion as well as the codes that had been generated. Towards the end of the training, we discussed the agreed codes and defined our themes, before re-reading the extract to check that the themes reflected the content. I then spoke about the themes I had generated during the university assignment, and how I had reported these.

On reflection, I feel that the training went well and that the research assistants left with an understanding of Thematic Analysis. Using the easy-read guide seemed helpful for them, and they reported high levels of enjoyment from the session.

6.2 Analysis and the Construction of a Thematic Map

The analysis of two transcripts was completed over two sessions, one in November and one in January. This enabled careful consideration of each transcript, without feeling rushed to read two interviews within the session. Due to time constraints, it was not feasible for the research assistants to analyse all of the transcripts in the project, and so I made the decision that two transcripts would provide me with a guide on how to conduct the rest of the analysis.

6.2.1 Analysis of Transcript 1

The first transcript analysed was that of a Year 9 student from a mainstream school. Prior to the meeting with the research assistants, I had transcribed the interview and ensured that it was fully anonymised. The four of us read through the transcript independently and highlighted short phrases that were interesting or that seemed to recur. As done during the training, we then each took turns discussing a phrase that we had highlighted, explaining why we had done so. I noticed that one of the research assistants appeared reluctant to engage in the discussions, and also appeared to withdraw herself from presenting her ideas for code generation or theme identification. In this session, a member of school staff sat with us and the research

assistant appeared happy to be supported by the member of staff to engage. In my research log from this session, I wrote about this:

“One of the things that concern me about the presence of the member of staff and her involvement in the session is that her views are now included within this analysis. During the activity, I observed her suggesting phrases to highlight, or suggesting reasons why phrases that the student had independently highlighted may be important. Whilst I greatly appreciated the support from staff and understood that during this session, Rosie seemed to be having a tough time, I am now just wondering if the analysis of this transcript was actually done by five people, rather than four.” (Research Log, 22/11/19)

During the discussion, a total of 21 codes were generated, and then grouped into 7 themes. Levels of agreement are discussed within Chapter 3 (Methodology). Figure 3 shows the breakdown of codes generated by each researcher. It is worth noting that whilst most of the codes were generated independently, some came from the discussion of the transcript. For example, during the discussion on codes relating to EHCPs, one of the research assistants found that she agreed that this was an important and interesting part of the transcript and so added her own code to the theme. All of the codes were generated inductively (i.e. from the transcript) rather than as a result of knowledge about findings from the literature.

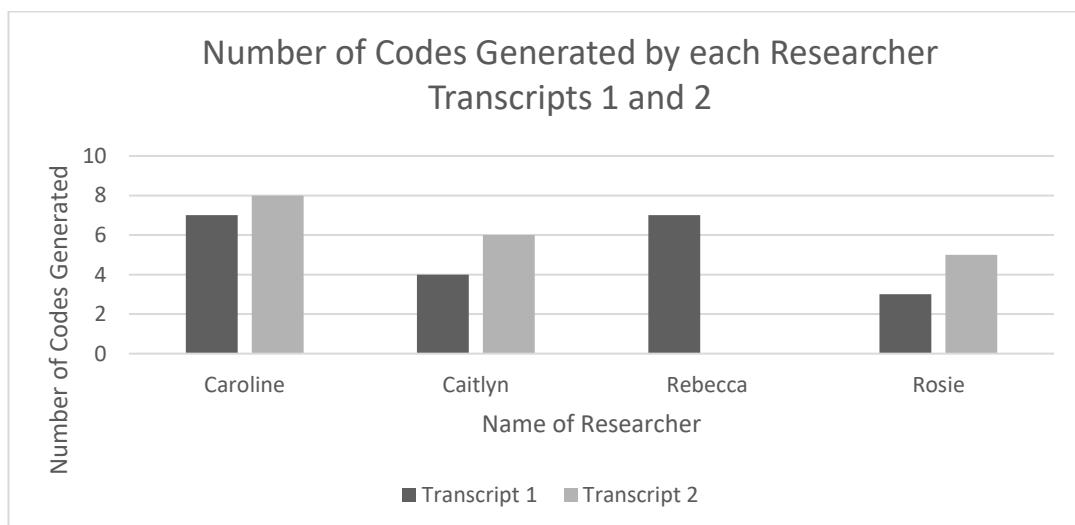


Figure 3: Graph showing number of codes generated for Transcripts 1 and 2 for each member of research team

6.2.2 Analysis of Transcript 2

The second transcript analysed was that of a Year 8 student from a specialist school. As with the first transcript, I had transcribed and anonymised the interview prior to the meeting. Following the same structure as the first analysis, I met with two of the research assistants and the analysis generated 19 codes which were then grouped to form 8 themes. The themes from transcript 1 were not discussed during the meeting, and we did not refer back to the codes or themes generated in the earlier meeting during this analysis. Both research assistants engaged fully with the task and together we had a rich discussion on the similarities and differences between the experience described by the participant, and their own experiences of school. Figure 3 provides a breakdown of the number of codes generated by each researcher. Again, all of the codes were generated inductively. Rebecca did not attend the session and therefore did not take part in the analysis of transcript 2.

6.2.3 Constructing the Thematic Map

Following the second analysis session with the research assistants, I conducted the analysis of the remaining transcripts independently using Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Table 2 in Chapter 3 provides greater detail about how the analysis was conducted. The codes from the meetings with the research assistants, as well as the codes from my independent analysis of the other transcripts were merged together, with many instances of overlap. Where there were differences in the codes generated through my analysis compared to the analysis conducted with the adolescent research assistants, I acknowledged this and included these new codes and themes within the analysis. After I had independently defined and named all of the themes, I created a draft thematic map (Figure 4) which outlined the key findings gathered from the interviews and the qualitative responses within the questionnaire. At the start of session 7 with the research assistants, I presented them with the draft thematic map to discuss and agree. This enabled the research assistants to provide feedback on any new themes that had arisen from transcripts they had not seen.

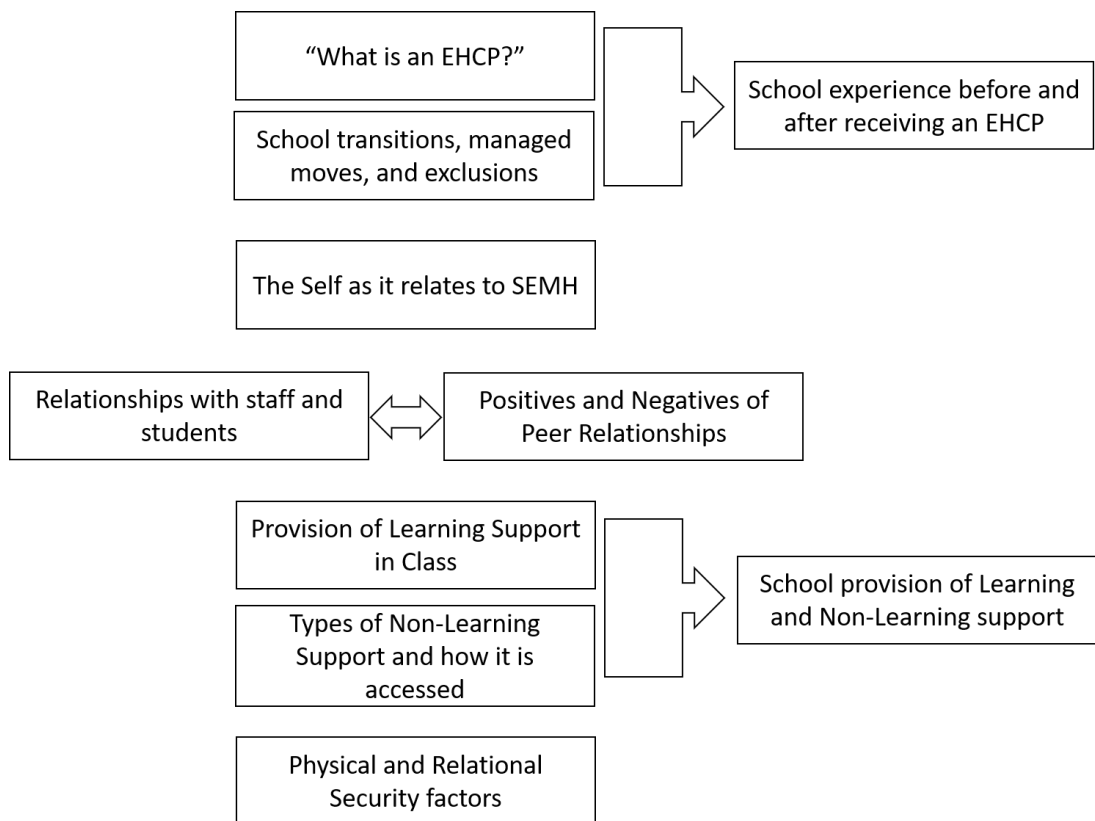


Figure 4: Original Thematic Map presented to Research Assistants

Unfortunately, due to low attendance to session 7, the discussion around the thematic map was minimal. However, some changes were made. For example, Caitlyn felt that the “security” theme could be merged with the “school provision” theme, as many of the subthemes overlapped. Additionally, she expressed preference for “school support” to be considered as one large theme, rather than split into “learning” and “non-learning” elements. In my research log for this session, I wrote:

“This meeting was very difficult as the activity really suited all of us meeting together and discussing the findings. In a perfect world, where time wasn’t such an issue, I would have been able to reschedule and try again. Nevertheless, Caitlyn was brilliant. I really enjoyed her views on the relationship between the “EHCP” theme and the “school moves” theme, and our discussion about whether they should be merged. She showed such insight, and it shows how much she has grown in confidence since we started the project – she would never have met with me by herself last year, or spoken so freely.” (Research Log 11/02/2020)

We discussed the “EHCP” and “school transitions” themes as individual and as merged themes before agreeing that separate themes would recognise that whilst these issues are related, they capture different elements of the school experience. The themes “relationships with staff and students” and “positives and negatives of peer relationships” were presented at this time as an either/or option for grouping subthemes, as I felt that the subthemes could be discussed either as a wider picture or relationships and social experiences, or as a narrative associated with peer groups. Caitlyn expressed a preference for separating peer themes from staff themes, and told me that she saw these as very separate factors. During this meeting, Caitlyn and I reviewed the theme labels and definitions and created the final thematic map, which can be found in Chapter 7.

6.3 Dissemination of Findings

Due to low attendance during meeting 7 and time constraints, it was decided between Caitlyn and myself that I would write the thesis abstract independently. However, we did agree to meet back in May to create the presentation for sharing with the Local Authority and my university cohort. This would enable the research assistants to be involved in the dissemination of the research. Meeting 8 was scheduled to take place in May, after the thesis had been submitted. As such, the minutes and outcomes of the meeting will not be included within this report.

6.4 Completion of the Research Assistant Surveys

At the end of meeting 7, I distributed the research assistant surveys to Caitlyn and Rosie, and left a copy for Rebecca to complete when she was next in school. The research assistants each completed their survey’s independently without input from either me or each other. The findings from the completed survey are discussed in the next chapter.

7. Results

The purpose of the chapter is to present the findings of this research project. Due to the multi-method approach used within this research, these findings will be presented using the following structure. This chapter firstly presents the quantitative analysis of participants' responses to the online questionnaire. This is followed by the qualitative analysis of the interview data and open questions from the questionnaire. The research assistant's survey analysis was conducted separately to the analysis from the participant interviews, and therefore will be reported separately within this chapter. This is to keep the themes drawn from the participant data apart from those drawn from the research assistants.

7.1 Quantitative Data

The quantitative data gathered in this research explored the types of SEMH labels participants used to describe their needs, their experience of receiving an EHCP, their attitude towards having an EHCP, and their sense of belonging at their current school. These areas were chosen as they reflect demographic information about the participants involved in the study, and because they relate to the research questions around students' experiences of the EHCP process and their sense of belonging within their current school.

7.1.1 SEMH Labels

In addition to the demographic information collected about each participant (school year, gender, ethnicity, type of school), this research asked participants to self-identify with SEMH labels created by using the SEND Code of Practice (DfE & DoH, 2015) description of what conditions constitute an SEMH need. The 17 participants who completed the questionnaire reported identifying with 48 labels, with 11 participants identifying with more than one label. The number of labels participants used to describe themselves ranged from one to seven. Table 4 shows how participants

identified themselves in relation to SEMH labels, and Table 5 provides information about how many labels were used by each participant.

Table 4

Participants use of SEMH labels (N=17)

Label	Frequency
Withdrawn or Isolated Behaviour	4
Anxiety	10
Depression	4
Self-Harm	3
Eating Disorder	2
Exclusively used Internalising SEMH labels	3
Drug/Alcohol problems	0
Get into trouble because of behaviour	10
ADHD/ADD	11
Exclusively used Externalising SEMH labels	4
Other – ASD	2
Prefer not to say	0
I don't identify with any of these labels	1

Three of the 17 participants reported to identify exclusively with internalising SEMH labels, and four exclusively identified with externalising SEMH labels. The remaining participants reported to identify with a range of labels across the broad categories, with two adding “ASD” as a label that they would use to describe themselves. One participant reported not identifying with any of the SEMH labels, despite having an EHCP with a primary need of SEMH. As such, for Table 4, only 16 participants were included to show how many SEMH labels were used by each participant.

Table 5

Number of labels used by each participant (N=16)

Number of labels used	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Frequency	5 31.3%	3 18.8%	3 18.8%	2 12.5%	2 12.5%	0	1 6.3%

As Table 4 shows, 11 of the 16 participants reported to identify with more than one label. Examples of the groups of labels participants used include “anxiety/get into trouble because of behaviour”; “anxiety/depression/self-harm/eating disorder”; and “depression/get into trouble because of behaviour/ADHD”. These examples show how participants have used SEMH labels from both internalising and externalising mental health categories to explain their needs.

7.1.2 Experience of the EHCP Process

All participants were asked if they had an EHCP in place, however only 12 reported that they did have a plan with five participants responding with “I don’t know”. Of those who recorded that they had a plan, nine participants provided information about how long that plan had been in place. Duration for having a plan ranged from two months to six years, with the average duration being exactly two years. One participant reported having a Statement of Special Educational Needs before receiving an EHCP. Replicating the practice of Adams, Tindle, Basran, et al. (2017), who excluded from the questionnaire those who indicated “no” and “don’t know” to the question “Do you have an EHCP?”, only the 12 participants who reported “yes” were asked questions about their experience of the process. Table 6 shows their responses.

Table 6

Participant's experiences of the EHCP process (N=12)

Question	Response		
	Yes	No	Don't know
To what extent did your family's personal needs and circumstances get taken into account?	33.3% (4)	16.7% (2)	50% (6)
To what extent did different services work together to make the EHCP?	41.7% (5)	0	58.3% (7)
To what extent was communication about the EHCP clear?	25% (3)	33.3% (4)	41.7% (5)
To what extent were steps taken to help you understand what took place and why?	16.7% (2)	41.7% (5)	41.7% (5)
Were you included in meetings? *	45.5% (5)	45.5% (5)	9.1% (1)
Were you asked if you wanted to take part in meetings?	33.3% (4)	33.3% (4)	33.3% (4)
Were you given choices about how to take part?	16.7% (2)	75% (9)	8.3% (1)
Did people make an effort to listen to and understand your opinions?	58.3% (7)	33.3% (4)	8.3% (1)

* one participant did not complete this question, and so the percentages and figures reflect the 11 completed responses.

Positively, over half of the participants reported that they felt professionals had made an effort to listen to and understand their views. However, only two participants reported that professionals had taken steps to help them

(the participants) to understand what was going on and why. What does come across from participants' responses to these questions is the frequency that they reported "I don't know" to the questions about their experience of getting an EHCP. It could be suggested that as some participants had received their EHCPs many years ago, they may not remember the process. Looking at the correlations between participant's attitudes towards the process and the age they received their plan, the only pattern which emerged related to being asked to take part in meetings. Participants who were older when they received their EHCP (Year 9 and above) reported that they were asked if they wanted to take part in meetings. Participants who received their EHCP in Years 7-8 reported that they were not asked if they wanted to take part, and participants who received their EHCP in Primary School (Years 4-6) reported that they "didn't know" if they were asked or not. Follow-up questions about participants' experiences of getting an EHCP were included in the interview schedule to obtain increased clarity on this matter.

7.1.3 Attitude towards having an EHCP

Within the questionnaire, there were seven questions that asked participants about their views around having an EHCP. These questions, taken from Adams, Tindle, Basran, et al. (2017) asked participants about the contents of their plan, as well as their perceptions on how it has and will impact on their life. Again, as only 12 participants reported knowing that they had a plan, only they were asked these questions. Table 7 details their responses.

Table 7

Participant's attitudes towards having an EHCP (N=12)

Question	Agree (Strongly Agree, Agree)	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree (Disagree, Strongly Disagree)	Don't Know
You understand what your EHCP is for	50% (6)	8.3% (1)	41.7% (5)	0
Your EHCP is easy to understand	41.7% (5)	0	41.7% (5)	16.7% (2)
Your wishes and opinions were included	33.3% (4)	8.3 (1)	50% (6)	8.3% (1)
The EHCP includes preparations for your next move in life	33.3% (4)	16.7% (2)	16.7% (2)	33.3% (4)
Taking part in the EHCP process was a positive experience	58.3% (7)	8.3% (1)	16.7% (2)	16.7% (2)
The help and support in the EHCP will help you achieve what you want in life	50% (6)	25% (3)	0	25% (3)

Question	Satisfied (Very Satisfied, Satisfied)	Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied	Dissatisfied (Dissatisfied, Very Dissatisfied)	Don't Know
How satisfied are you with the whole EHCP experience?	50% (6)	25% (3)	8.3 (1)	16.7% (2)

Participants did, in general, seem to have a positive attitude towards their EHCP, with seven participants saying it was a positive experience, and six saying that having a plan would help them to achieve their goals. However, five participants reported that they didn't know what their EHCP was for and six said that their views were not included in their final plan. Comparing the frequency of "I don't know" responses around having a plan to getting a plan, it could be seen as positive that more participants reported knowing about the contents of their plan, even though some were not happy with what it said.

7.1.4 Sense of Belonging

The questionnaire explored participants' sense of belonging using The Belonging Scale (Frederickson et al., 2007) which reports a minimum possible score of 1.00 and a maximum score of 3.00. Scores were obtained for each participant, and then grouped into "good belonging" (above 2.00) or "low belonging" (below 2.00) using the scale's scoring manual. Scores were considered for each participant individually and then grouped based on school provision. Scores ranged from 1.42 to 3.00 ($M = 2.46$, $SD = 0.46$). One of the participants received a belonging score of 1.42 which was considered an outlier. However, removal of the score did not significantly alter the mean, and due to the small number of participants and therefore low statistical power, it was felt that all responses should be considered within the analysis. Table 8 shows the belonging scale scores grouped by type of school provision.

Table 8

Belonging scores grouped by school provision (N=17)

Type of School	No. of Participants	Mean	Std. Deviation	Min Score	Max Score
Mainstream	3	2.78	0.32	2.42	3.00
Specialist	11	2.36	0.48	1.42	2.92
Resource Provision	3	2.47	0.49	1.92	2.83

Each type of provision received a mean score that reflected “good belonging” (Frederickson et al., 2007). Participants from mainstream provision reported the highest scores, with even the minimum score obtained falling into the “good belonging” category. Participants from specialist provision reported the lowest mean, however this is likely to have been affected by the outlier score (1.42). Due to the small participant size and the wide discrepancies in group size (11 participants in specialist compared to three in mainstream and three in resource provision), it is not possible to ascertain whether the differences in group scores are statistically significant.

7.2 Qualitative Data

The findings from the Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) conducted on the participant data (open questions from the questionnaire and the follow-up interview) will now be presented. Themes are listed in table format, and each theme is discussed in detail, accompanied by quotes from participants. The thematic map was agreed by one adolescent research assistant during meeting 7. The final five themes, along with associated sub-themes and categories, are detailed in the thematic map below (Table 9).

To maintain the anonymity of the participants interviewed, and to protect their responses from being identifiable, each participant was randomly assigned a letter of the alphabet. School provision for each participant is not reported to reduce the risk that individual participants could be identified, especially given the small sample size. Where themes and subthemes are restricted to

one type of provision, I make reference to this. Otherwise, these themes and subthemes reflect reports from participants across mainstream, specialist and resource provision settings.

Table 9

Thematic Map for participant data (questionnaire and interview)

Theme	Subtheme	Subtheme categories
School provision of learning and non-learning support	Attitudes towards staff	Positive attitudes Feelings of safety Negative attitudes
	Access to learning support	Easy to access Role of TA's
	Access to non-learning support	Easy to access Access routes are unclear
	Types of non-learning support available	Range of staff Impact of support
	Wider experience of school provision	Reward schemes Physical security
Experiences of positive and negative peer relationships	Positive peer relationships	School enjoyment Friendships Feelings of safety
	Bullying/difficulties with other students	
	Different peer groups	Mainstream and Resource Provision
	School responses to social difficulties	
School transitions,	Experience of moves during Primary School	Many in-year moves No moves
	Experiences of exclusion	

managed moves, and exclusions	Experience of moves during Secondary School	
	Attitudes towards school	Mainstream versus Specialist
What is an EHCP?	Involvement in the EHCP process	
	Attitudes towards having a plan	Frustration Disinterest Lack of clarity
	Benefits of having an EHCP	
	Improvement suggestions	
The Self as it relates to SEMH	Labels used to describe self and presentation	
	Reduced involvement in EHCP process linked to labels	

7.2.1 Theme 1: School provision of learning and non-learning support

This theme encompasses all school support discussed by participants and includes support in class, support for emotional needs, and wider school provision such as reward schemes and physical security measures designed to keep students safe. This theme also discusses participants' attitudes towards staff in school, as the research assistant felt that all subthemes relating to staff should be grouped together.

7.2.1.1 Subtheme 1: Attitudes towards staff

Many participants spoke positively about staff in their current school, with some speaking about how staff increase their enjoyment of school and make them feel safe.

Participant H: "They [teachers] are just nice and kind to me...they talk to me nicely...and they understand me."

Participant C: "I think school's erm pretty alright for me especially like this one because it's actually helped me to understand and I kind of understand most of the work here."

Participant A: "I like some of my teachers and TA's because they are nice and they're helpful...they listen, um, and they help me with my work."

Participant E: "[I feel safe because] teachers are literally around- basically around every corner...if something does happen [with another student], I can immediately go find the teacher in like, five seconds."

However, some participants reported negative attitudes towards staff, saying that not all staff respond to them in a consistently friendly way.

Participant B: "Some [teachers] are moody. Some are nice."

Participant F: "I don't like many members of staff. [The ones I like are] a bit more kinder...they talk to you a bit more."

The words "nice" and "kind" were frequently used by participants to speak about the members of staff with whom they had a good relationship. Even those participants who spoke about an inconsistent approach from the staff team were able to identify staff who were kind.

7.2.1.2 Subtheme 2: Access to learning support

All the participants who talked about in-class support spoke about how easy it would be for them to access. Most identified either teachers or teaching assistants as the members of staff they would most likely go to for support.

Participant B: "Teachers come over and help you...help me write. Sometimes I try to make them write for me but they say "no"."

Participant G: "I get help...sometimes they [TAs] write it down if I can't see the board or...so I can get them to write it down."

Participant E: "Teachers will quite happily help you with work and stuff like that...they'll come over and scribe or explain it a bit more. You just stick your hand up and ask for some help and they'll come over if they are available."

Participant F: "[TAs] go around the class helping everyone. Yeah. You can just put your hand up and call. And they'll come over. But I don't usually get TAs cuz I don't feel like I need them."

Participant D: "The TA or the teacher helps me...they help everybody. We just have to call them over."

These quotes suggest that in-class support is relatively easy to access, either from the teacher or from a TA, and that the perception is that the TA is available to support all students rather than just those with an EHCP.

7.2.1.3 Subtheme 3: Access to non-learning support

Many of the participants reported that they find it easy to access support for things not related to learning. In the interview, I qualified this type of support when needed as “social things, or worries or feeling low”.

Participant C: “A lot of teachers I can go to and just talk to, if there’s anything that is bothering me before I end up kicking off.”

Participant H: We get quite a lot of support for that kind of stuff [emotional needs]. I have loads of teachers I can talk to.”

Participant A: “I go to the TAs. [TA] is always there and so is [SENCO]...I can go whenever I need.”

However, some participants spoke either about not wanting to or feeling unable to access non-learning support, or not being aware of the access routes for this kind of support.

Participant B: “I guess there are [people I could talk to] but I wouldn’t. I’d just probably go home and tell my mum...because I don’t like telling people that kind of stuff.”

Interviewer: “Do you get any support for things outside of learning?”

Participant G: “No”

Interviewer: “So that could be for social things, or worries – things that don’t directly relate to learning.”

Participant G: “No”

Interviewer: “Is there any support available in school that you or someone else could get for things outside of learning?”

Participant G: “I don’t know.”

Here, it could be suggested that the access routes for non-learning support are not as clear as for learning support, and have not always taken into account student preferences for how they wish to discuss their feelings with others.

7.2.1.4 Subtheme 4: Types of non-learning support available

When talking about non-learning support, participants often identified internal members of school staff who they would go to for support. Many participants also spoke about the impact of this support on their mental wellbeing.

Participant G: “My form tutor...he would help me out.”

Participant E: “Teachers up in the welfare office...they’re available most time of the day. [They help by] explaining about things like if I had something on

my mind, they would explain it a bit more. I tend to be quite angry, sad, or just confused when I go there and then just happy or just chilled when I come out.”

Participant D: I see [THERAPY DOG] and then [THERAPY DOG] calms me down. He looks at me and then he grounds me.”

Participant F: “I’d talk to [HEAD OF RESOURCE PROVISION] about it. That’s the only person I’d talk to.”

Participant B: “Go to the fish tank or, I guess, go with [ASSISTANT SENCO] and come and play with the [therapy] dog and that.”

Some participants mentioned external professionals that come in to see them and who provide emotional support.

Participant E: “I have a lady that comes in to see me...therapy I think. I think it’s like a play therapy or something like that. I find it quite helpful for if I’ve got something on my mind and just really want to get it off. I don’t really want to talk to the teacher about that. So I talk to her.”

Participant H: “I had my counsellor.”

This subtheme highlights the range of available support across mainstream, resource provisions, and specialist schools and well as within these settings. This suggests that the provision for non-learning or emotional support has been tailored to suit the needs of the participants.

7.2.1.5 Subtheme 5: Wider experience of school provision

This subtheme relates to whole school services available to all students and was discussed by many of the participants from specialist provision. Some participants reported that a reward scheme implemented by their school was an important part of their school experience as it encouraged them to reflect on their own behaviour.

Participant E: “If you’re good you get rewards...you go out on Friday. [There’s a] points sheet where you get a certain amount of points per lesson. So let’s say I was to be good during Maths, I’d get – and no problems – I’d get all six points but if I was to do something which the teacher would not like he would either drop me one to six points.”

Participant B: “Here [at this school] you get to go to laser tag and flip out and ice skating and swimming each week. You have to get like over 90 points [for good behaviour]...I’m going to do the laser tag today because I’ve been good this week.”

Other participants spoke about how physical security measures such as walls and locked doors helped them to feel safe and contained at school.

Participant C: "I do feel safe at school because every single door is fobbed. So it does secure you a lot more."

Participant D: "I can't run out...the doors...they open. They shut. And sometimes they can't be booted open...you can just lock the door. And then you're safe."

Here participants described aspects of their school experience that are accessed by all students and explained the positive impact these factors have on their experience of school on their sense of safety.

7.2.2 Theme 2: Experiences of positive and negative peer relationships

This theme explores reports from participants about the importance of peer relationships to their experience of school. Some participants spoke about how friends increased their enjoyment of school, whilst others described their experience of bullying. Participants in a resource provision identified clear "separateness" between their mainstream peers and those from the provision. Finally, this theme also includes feedback regarding staff responses to social or peer difficulties.

7.2.2.1 Subtheme 1: Positive peer relationships

Some participants spoke about their friends when talking about their experience of school.

Interviewer: "So is there anything that you do like about school?"

Participant B: "Friends."

Participant E: "There aren't any issues [with peers] going on at the moment. Everything's good."

Another participant spoke about how he recently made friends at school.

Participant F: "I just started socialising with this boy called [1] and another boy called [2] so I wasn't so lonely."

The inclusion of discussions around friendships within participants' narratives about school highlights the importance of strong peer group relationships during this time in adolescent development.

7.2.2.2 Subtheme 2: Bullying and difficulties with other students

Six of the eight participants interviewed spoke about difficulties with other students and bullying. Five told me that they had experienced these difficulties within their current school.

Participant C: "Yeah like one of the recent ones that happened...I just went to like, go get the ball off somebody and he just came up and kicked me in the side of my knee."

Participant B: "Everyone has issues with other students...I mean, I'm not getting bullied right now...it was at the very, very start when I first joined [the school]. Then a month after, I stopped being bullied."

Participant H: "Before I had a problem with my friend but now like we're really good friends again."

Participant A: "Problems with other students...I can go to [SENCO] or [TA] and they speak to them [the students]."

Participant D: "Kids sometimes like wind us up and that...there's a kid that I hate and he just annoys me and just winds me up all the time."

Of the six who discussed difficulties, one told me that they didn't believe they could be bullied, and explained the steps they had taken to reduce the risk of being bullied or picked on by other students.

Participant F: "I feel like I can't be bullied...no one has anything on me that they can bully me with."

The prevalence of discussions about difficult peer relationships and bullying highlights the significance of these events within the participant's experiences of school.

7.2.2.3 Subtheme 3: Different peer groups

Interviews conducted with the participants from the resource provision gathered interesting perspectives on different peer groups within the school, with a very clear "separateness" between students from the mainstream school and those who attended the resource provision.

Participant G: "[I like school because] I have my own section of the school which is the [RESOURCE PROVISION] that none of the like the mainstream school students can come in."

Participant H: "The people are nice."

Interviewer: "Which people?"

Participant H: "In the [RESOURCE PROVISION] mostly...the students."

Participant F: "I've tried to talk to people in mainstream but sometimes I just get really stressed out."

These quotes suggest that the participants feel that they are separate from the mainstream school students who they see as "others", despite the fact that all of the students wear the same uniform, and share the same lessons.

7.2.2.4 Subtheme 4: School responses to social difficulties

A number of participants spoke about how teachers responded to social difficulties or instances of bullying.

Participant C: "I am happy when teachers do sort it out, incidents especially when they [other students] say stuff about my family...I just know that if someone says something, teachers will sort it out."

Participant A: "I can also go to my [ASSISTANT DIRECTOR OF LEARNING] and then they deal with it...they speak to them [the students] and then log them or give them a detention."

However, some participants were critical about how school staff respond to incidents, reporting that it can take too long for staff to become involved.

Participant E: "Sometimes they [staff] don't get onto things like...occasional bullying straight away. It takes them a few hours to get onto it."

This suggests that whilst many participants are happy with staff responses in relation to negative peer relationships, others have higher expectations from staff and so are less satisfied about the support they receive.

7.2.3 Theme 3: School transitions, managed moves, and exclusions

This theme relates to participant's experiences of moving schools before and after receiving an EHCP. Some participants spoke about frequent in-year moves, often following an exclusion, whilst others reported only moving schools to transition from primary to secondary school. Some participants also spoke about the support they received during their moves.

7.2.3.1 Subtheme 1: Experiences of moves during primary school

Of the participants who spoke about their experience of primary school, many told me about their frequent changes in school, with the number of primary schools attended ranging from no moves to six moves. One participant gave a detailed account of their moves, and the description was

comparable to other participants who also discussed school moves during primary school.

Participant F: "So I started off in [PRIMARY 1], and then I moved school and house to [PRIMARY 2]. I got kicked out first time. But they let me back in and then I got kicked out again. Then I moved to [RESOURCE PROVISION 1] and I got moved there for a while. And then I was moved to [PRIMARY 3]...I was at [PRIMARY 3] till Year 4. Then I was put in this [ALTERNATIVE PROVISION 1]...Then I got moved to a school called [SPECIALIST PROVISION 1]...and now I'm here."

Participant F then reflected on how these school moves had affected their education.

Participant F: "If I could change it I would. So like cuz I would have been so much better. If I had listened to people. Because I'm like very smart. I'm in top set. And I didn't have a very good primary. So for me to be very- quite smart and not done like anything in primary...if I, I thought "what could I have achieved if I had gone to primary?" I lot more."

This subtheme links closely with the next one, as many of the participants discussed exclusions as reasons for why they had moved schools so frequently.

7.2.3.2 Subtheme 2: Experiences of exclusion

Of the eight participants interviewed, three discussed their experiences of being excluded from primary schools.

Participant F: "I was only expelled from one school."

Participant H: "I got expelled from a lot of them [PRIMARY SCHOOLS]. I got expelled from two others until I went to another one, which was [INDEPENDENT SPECIALIST PRIMARY]."

Participant D: "It was like before like I...got permanently excluded. And then the EHCP came along and got me a new school."

For those participants who reported frequent moves during primary school, at least one of these moves was described as an exclusion. This experience of school moves typically occurred before receiving an EHCP, with school moves reducing in frequency after a plan had been issued.

7.2.3.3 Subtheme 3: Experiences of moves during secondary school

Data for this subtheme came from both the questionnaire and the interview, with many participants reporting that they had moved to a different secondary school since receiving their EHCP. Some described their moves as something that happened to them, rather than something they were a part of.

Participant I: "Was in a mainstream school and had to leave."

Participant J: "I was in a mainstream school, they asked me to leave."

Participant B: "I knew I was changing and then I was at the [MAINSTREAM SECONDARY] for one more week and then I just left...and then I came here. I didn't have a choice [to move schools]. My old school just told me to come here...when I first got here [SPECIALIST SECONDARY], yeah, I didn't like the school at all."

Participant C: I left [MAINSTREAM SECONDARY] just after Year 8."

These quotes suggest that participants felt very separate from the decisions made about their school moves, with these decisions coming to them from the school after the EHCP had been agreed.

7.2.3.4 Subtheme 4: Attitudes towards school

Two of the participants in specialist provision spoke about their attitude towards their current school in comparison to their previous mainstream school. For one participant, they explained that their previous school had been better and cited more freedom to behave how they wanted to.

Participant B: "[MAINSTREAM SECONDARY] was so much more fun...I didn't have to do no work."

The other participant spoke more favourably about specialist provision, saying that they felt more able to access support than in a mainstream setting.

Participant C: "[SPECIALIST SECONDARY] is a lot better than my previous secondary school, which was a mainstream school...in every class I'd have like 30 students in it and I struggled to understand everything."

Overall, participants generally spoke positively about their current provision. Further comments about their attitude towards school have been placed in other themes as they relate to support provided and peer relationships.

7.2.4 Theme 4: What is an EHCP?

The last question during each of the interviews asked participants about their EHCPs. On several occasions, before I had finished the question, participants would ask “what is an EHCP?” or “I don’t know what that means”, leading me to provide an overall explanation of what it is. This theme came from participant’s responses to that question, and their understanding of what it means to have an EHCP.

7.2.4.1 Subtheme 1: Involvement in the EHCP process

Several participants spoke about their awareness of the EHCP process in relation to meetings they had attended. Whilst some reported that attending these meetings was a positive experience, one participant spoke about experiencing confusion.

Participant G: “Everyone involved was very helpful to me.”

Participant A: “A...um...psychologist or psychiatrist came. First she saw me at school. And then she came to my house...I can’t remember [what we did].”

Participant H: “It wasn’t always explained to me what was going on. There were lots of meetings which was very scary.”

Other participants spoke about wanting to have been more involved in the process, such as by being invited to meetings that occurred between professionals and their parents.

Participant C: “I’d actually would of liked to be in some of the meetings of when my parents and that got it. Cuz it just feels like they stopped me from knowing something that is something in life that I probably should have known.”

Despite acknowledging that they weren’t involved in the process, one participant did express a preference for this and told me that he is happy to have not been involved.

Interviewer: “Did you ever meet with anyone during the process?”

Participant B: “No. Except for my Social Worker”

Interviewer: “Would you have liked to have someone to come and talk to you?”

Participant B: “No. I liked in the way it was.”

This suggests that participant's involvement in the process of getting an EHCP were varied, but that not every participant would have wished for their experience to have been different. This highlights the different views around participation held by each participant, and suggests that a "full participation" approach for all aspects of the EHCP may not be in line with the wishes of all students going through the EHCP process.

7.2.4.2 Subtheme 2: Attitudes towards having a plan

This subtheme relates to participant's views about their own EHCP now it has been issued. Many reported experiencing confusion about what an EHCP was or what it means to have one.

Participant F: "I don't understand what that [an EHCP] is...I just know I have one. I don't know. I can't remember anything about it."

Participant H: "What is that [an EHCP]?"

Participant E: "I don't know. I don't even know what mine is."

Participant G: "I'm not sure. I don't remember [getting a plan], I just know I have one."

Other participants told me that they didn't want to know more about their plans, and that they were happy not having information about what it was or what it said about them.

Participant F: "I don't really think about that [my EHCP]. I don't think about my special educational needs. Because if I think about that, it'll just get in the way."

Participant G: "I know I have one. I don't need to know what it says. It's not important [to know]."

This is significant as it suggests that providing more information about EHCPs may not be in the best interest of every student, and that professionals should ask young people with EHCPs about whether or not they would like to be informed about their plan, or if they are happy for other key adults (such as parents or carers) to speak on their behalf.

7.2.4.3 Subtheme 3: Benefits of having an EHCP

In discussing their EHCPs, a number of participants spoke about how it had helped them and described the positive difference it had made to their access to support and to their education.

Participant B: "Moving here [to a specialist school] was a good change."

Participant A: "It [the EHCP] means I get more support in place. Because they [staff] prioritise the ones that have the EHCP. I think. So then I get the support that I need...I have more support now than before I had it."

Participant D: "It's for the kid's educational needs and yeah, it'll help...it's got me in a school. I'm where I should be. It's helped me."

Participant H: "Getting more help now than at my old school."

Whilst only four who were interviewed spoke about the benefits of having an EHCP, no negative consequences from having a plan were highlighted by any participant.

7.2.4.4 Subtheme 4: Improvement suggestions

The final subtheme describes improvement suggestions for the EHCP process as several participants spoke about how the process either could have been made better for them, or could be improved for future students.

Participant H: "I would like to know everything that's happening. Cuz if there's something happening that, say if I have to, go to a meeting that I don't know what it's for, it would confuse me a little bit."

Participant E: "[Professionals should] talk and show it...maybe write down key stuff on a piece of paper. Yeah that could help...just explain to him properly, cause like I can't even remember what mine is."

These improvements, such as asking for advanced notice of meetings or providing visual information, could have a big impact on students' experience of getting an EHCP, and their attitude towards having a plan.

7.2.5 Theme 5: The Self as it relates to SEMH

Two participants spoke about their SEMH needs or used labels associated with SEN or SEMH during their interviews. This was included as a theme as I felt that it spoke to their experience of school and of having needs that would enable them to receive an EHCP. Though relatively small, the inclusion of this theme reflects the perspective of Braun and Clarke (2006) that

researchers using Thematic Analysis should consider the “keyness” of a theme. Braun and Clarke (2006) argue that the inclusion of a theme should not simply be dependent on prevalence of the theme across the data set, but also on whether it “captures something important in relation to the overall research question”. I feel that this small theme reflects that sense of “keyness” and hence included it as a main theme within these findings.

7.2.5.1 Subtheme 1: Labels used to describe self and presentation

Two of the participants interviewed described themselves in relation to diagnostic and non-diagnostic labels.

Participant C: “Even children with the slightest amount of autism, they [the primary school] couldn’t handle that. So they had no chance of handling me...I was a bit hard to control...my anger especially.”

Participant F: “I get a lot of anxiety.”

These labels were used as a way of explaining their presentation and were given by participants without clarification about what it means to them to have or to use these labels.

7.2.5.2 Subtheme 2: Reduced involvement in EHCP process linked to labels

One participant went further in their use of labels and talked about how having SEMH needs may have been the reason why they were “left out” of the EHCP process.

Participant C: “Maybe they [parents] kept it from me for good reason, cuz three years ago I was really bad. Anger was out of control...but I’m a bit upset that they kept it from me.”

This use of labels such as “anger” by the participant to explain why they may have been left out of meetings is interesting as it places the responsibility for being included or not included in the EHCP process on the participant themselves, rather than on the professionals or parents who were seeking the plan. Whilst only one participant made this comment (therefore limiting the size and spread of the theme), this view is still powerful.

7.3 Qualitative Data from the Research Assistants Survey

The research assistants survey was used to gather views from the adolescent research assistants about their experience of participatory research. Findings are reported in line with the research question looking at how research assistants experience participatory research. Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was conducted on the completed surveys and three main themes were created and defined. As there were only three research assistants, some of the subthemes are drawn from only one of the responses. However, larger themes span two or three of the responses. The themes, along with subthemes and categories are outlined in Table 10.

Table 10

Thematic Map from Research Assistant Survey

Theme	Subtheme	Subtheme categories
The role of the Adolescent Research Assistant	Adolescent research assistants provide a unique perspective	Have their own views and want to share them Views need to be listened to
	Adolescent research assistants are helpful	
	Adolescent research assistants should be chosen carefully	
The research project	The topic of the research	Topic/area of research Findings from research
	Developing research skills	
	The role of the adult researcher	

Practicalities of participatory research	Meetings with Adolescent research assistants	Number of meetings Frequency Scheduling
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7.3.1 Theme 1: The role of the Adolescent Research Assistant

The adolescent research assistants described their role in terms of the perspective that they bring to research and their personal characteristics as being helpful. One research assistant gave a warning to future researchers considering participatory research, suggesting that adult researchers need to be cautious about who they recruit to be a research assistant.

7.3.1.1 Subtheme 1: Adolescent Research Assistants provide a unique perspective

The research assistants were able to identify the perspective they brought to the research, with one discussing this at length, urging future adult researchers to recognise the value of their voices and listen to their views.

“[Research assistants] provide opinions from their perspective...provide a different viewpoint and opinion.”

“[Adult researchers should] listen to [research assistants] opinions and views.”

“[Research assistants] give their own views on what they think and help make choices.”

“Try [working with research assistants] because sometimes working with younger people can help, especially if they have kind of gone through what you are researching about.”

This suggests that the research assistants recognised their value in providing a unique perspective to the research, and that they felt this was important when conducting research related to children and young people.

7.3.1.2 Subtheme 2: Adolescent Research Assistants are helpful

Some of the research assistants spoke about their own personal characteristics, such as a desire to be helpful, and how this attracted them to the role.

“[Research assistants] help researchers.”

“I like helping as best I can, so that was probably the most enjoyable [part of the research project] for me.”

“[Research assistants] help make questions.”

This sheds light on the characteristics of individuals who volunteer to participate in projects, and provides a perspective for researchers looking at recruiting those whose voices are considered to be hard-to-reach.

7.3.1.3 Subtheme 3: Adolescent Research Assistants should be chosen carefully

One research assistant raised concerns about the recruitment of adolescent research assistants, stating that adult researchers have to be careful to pick individuals who are truly interested in engaging with the project.

“[Adult researchers should] pick the right [research assistants] and make sure that they want to do the project.”

Reading this, I wondered whether there had been a hidden reaction to having one of the research assistants drop out of the project that had been left undiscussed. As the original meeting had taken place with four research assistants, with one making the choice not to come back after they had finished their exams, it is possible that this exit did have emotional consequences for the remaining research assistants. Recruitment and retention of adolescent research assistants is therefore an area that may warrant further research and exploration.

7.3.2 Theme 2: The research project

This theme includes reports regarding motivation for participating in the research project, as well as the perceived benefits of participating, such as increased knowledge and acquisition of research skills. Finally, some of the research assistants described the role of the adult researcher within the project, shedding light on their perceptions of the role I played.

7.3.2.1 Subtheme 1: The topic of the research

One of the research assistants reported that her desire to participate in the research project was due to having a strong interest in the topic of study.

She later went on to talk about her interest in the findings generated by the research.

“I find this [topic] interesting...[Findings from the project have shown me] that not many people had help and that there was always a problem around the corner.”

Thinking about the rationale for participating, this feedback suggests that I approached an appropriate group of students to take part in the project as research assistants, as they had an interest in learning more about the topic I was studying.

7.3.2.2 Subtheme 2: Developing research skills

Other research assistants highlighted actual and potential interests that they or future adolescent research assistants may have in learning more about research. They discussed the increased understanding they gained regarding the processes involved in conducting research, and suggested that this role would be of interest to individuals seeking to engage with research in the future.

“[I learned] how to pick out the key things in researching.”

“[I enjoyed] seeing how the research all worked and the analysis of the data...the planning.”

“[People would be interested in being an adolescent research assistant if] they want to do research when they are older.”

Again, this information provides insight into the research assistants' motivations for volunteering for the role, and suggests ways in which researchers could advertise the role for future participatory research projects.

7.3.2.3 Subtheme 3: The role of the adult researcher

The research assistants discussed the role of the adult researcher, both in reference to their experience working with me, and in thinking about how future adult researchers should work with adolescent research assistants.

“[Working with an adult researcher] helps quite a lot, because you can ask if you don't understand something and they should be able to tell you.”

“[Adult researchers should] bring snacks!”

“[Working with an adult researcher is] interesting and insightful.”

“[Working with an adult researcher is] fun, good.”

Whilst I recognise concerns regarding the potential demand characteristics associated with gathering views related to myself within a survey, their views on the role of the adult researcher within the survey as well as informal feedback from them during the project has been consistent throughout.

7.3.3 Theme 3: Practicalities of participatory research

The final theme explores the practicalities of conducting participatory research; specifically, the time spent meeting with adolescent research assistants, and the frequency and scheduling of these meetings.

7.3.3.1 Subtheme 1: Meetings with Adolescent Research Assistants

All of the research assistants reported that the contact time they had during the research project was “just the right amount of time”, using the scale (See Appendix 7 for details of the scale). However, two of the research assistants reported that they had experienced difficulties with the length of time between meetings and the scheduling of the meetings themselves.

“The waiting for the results [was least enjoyable].”

“Do [the meetings] more closer together.”

“We should know ahead of time when we were meeting.”

Whilst it is positive that the research assistants found that the number of meetings (7 at the time of completing the survey) was an appropriate commitment for them, the long gaps between meetings and difficulties in scheduling highlight greater need for communication and joined up working between the adult researcher and the research assistants. In the case of this research, factors such as school holidays and initial challenges in recruiting participants for the questionnaire meant that there were occasionally gaps of two months between meetings. Furthermore, the meetings were typically arranged in discussions between the Interim Headteacher and myself, and whilst I would request for dates and times to be checked with the research assistants it was not possible for me to have these conversations with them directly. As such, it is possible that they were not given advanced notice of every meeting.

This chapter has provided a detailed account of the findings from this study, broken down into quantitative and qualitative data gathered from the participants, and qualitative data gathered from the adolescent research assistants. In the Discussion section (Chapter 8), these findings will be discussed in relation to the studies research questions, and linked back to existing literature where appropriate. Findings will also be discussed in terms of their academic and professional practice implications, before final conclusions are drawn.

8. Discussion

The purpose of this chapter is to summarise the main findings from this research and link these to the original research questions, as well as existing literature. I will comment on my experience of conducting the research, including how I overcame the challenges faced. Strengths and limitations of the research, as well as recommendations for future research areas will be discussed, alongside implications for educational psychology and Local Authority practice.

8.1 Main Findings

8.1.1 Research Question 1

The first research question set out to explore how participants feel about the support they receive at school, with the idea that being supported to learn and achieve is crucial to feeling included at school. This model of inclusion (Farrell, 2004) also describes the feeling of being accepted within the school community, which will be discussed in reference to research question 3. Almost all students reported that they liked school, naming access to support from staff as one of the key reasons for this. This provides an alternative perspective on school enjoyment for students with SEMH needs, with existing literature suggesting that students identified as having EBD were most likely out of other types of SEN to report that they didn't like school (Murray & Greenberg, 2001).

Analysis conducted on the interview transcripts highlighted the range of learning and non-learning support accessed by participants. Discussion about the help they receive from teachers and teaching assistants in relation to their learning reflected similar findings to Webster and Blatchford (2019). However, unlike previous findings, the participants in this study reported that the support from a teaching assistant was helpful and welcome, rather than "embarrassing" (Webster & Blatchford, 2019). An explanation of this discrepancy could be that participants taking part in Webster and

Blatchford's study (Webster & Blatchford, 2019) had EHCPs where the primary need had been identified as Cognition and Learning. In addition, many of the participants had been assigned a teaching assistant on a 1:1 basis, who would therefore sit close to them in lessons to offer learning support. In contrast, participants in this current study described how teachers and teaching assistants were available (or perceived to be available) to all students in the class, and therefore were not allocated specifically to students with EHCPs. This more discrete method of providing support could explain participants' positive attitudes. Additionally, this research mirrors findings from Burton et al. (2009) emphasising the role of non-teaching staff in the support of students from this SEN population.

With regards to non-learning support, participants recognised a varied range of professionals they could go to for support, and many spoke about how easy this support was to access. Schools' use of interventions such as play therapy, counselling, and pet therapy, alongside having key adults who are available to speak with students if required, reflects recommendations from Weare (2015) around providing a range of evidence-based interventions supporting students at universal, targeted, and individual levels. Additionally, participants' positive views about their experience of these interventions provides insight into how educational psychologists could write their recommendations within reports, specifically related to supporting SEMH needs. As suggested by the findings, having key adults for students to speak to about their worries, and the use of therapeutic interventions within school, are valued and appreciated by participants. EPs are well placed to discuss potential options for SEMH support with children and young people during the assessment and can highlight the benefits and limitations of these interventions to the young person themselves. Not only does this increase young people's participation in the EHCP process, it can also help to write the "provision" section of an EP report, further validating the voices of young people. Finally, the reports from the students attending specialist provision regarding the school's use of reward systems to promote good behaviour reflects findings from research in alternative provisions (Jalali & Morgan,

2018) and suggests that reward systems may be useful in a range of different settings.

8.1.2 Research Question 2

Research question 2 considered participants' reports about their experience of the EHCP process. Data from the online questionnaire found that five out of 12 participants (45.5%) felt that they were included in meetings, though only two of the 12 (16.7%) said that they were given choices about how to take part. Positively, seven out of 12 participants (58.3%) reported that professionals had made an effort to listen to and understand their views. These findings are similar to those reported by Adams, Tindle, Basran, et al. (2017) who found that 58% of young people reported that effort had been made to listen to and understand their views, 51% had been included in meetings, but only 19% had been given choices about how to take part. Considering this, the current study highlights that several years on, young people are still reporting gaps in how professionals are involving them in the process of getting an EHCP.

Furthermore, data from the online questionnaire revealed that six of the 12 participants (50%) reported to understand what their EHCP was for, and five out of 12 (41.7%) said that it was easy to understand. However, only four of the 12 participants (33.3%) said that their wishes and opinions were included in the final plan. These findings provide a slightly different picture from Adams, Tindle, Basran, et al. (2017) who found that whilst 55% of children and young people felt that their wishes and opinions had been included in the plan, only 26% reported that the final plan was easy to understand, and only 36% understood what the EHCP was for. It is important to remember that Adams, Tindle, Basran, et al. (2017) collected data from a wider age range of children and young people, and they report that the rates of understanding increased with the age of the young person.

The SEND Code of Practice (DfE & DoH, 2015) and the Children and Families Act (Council for Disabled Children, 2014) describe levels of participation that should be in place to support children and young people engage in decisions that directly affect them. The Children and Families Act

(Council for Disabled Children, 2014) which recognises the importance of providing “greater choice and control for young people and parents over support” can be used alongside the Ladder of Children’s Participation (Shier, 2001) to assess the level of participation reported by each participant during their experience of receiving an EHCP. The findings above suggest that their participation in the process reached at least Step 2, “Children are supported in expressing their views”. The findings that participants did not feel that they were given choices about how to participate, and that they did not feel that their views were reflected in their final plan indicates that their views may not have been taken into account (Step 3) and that they may not have been involved in decision-making processes (Step 4).

Following the same procedure as Adams, Tindle, Basran, et al. (2017), participants who responded “I don’t know” to the question “Do you have an EHCP?”, which in the case of the current study reflected the responses of five participants, were excluded from this analysis. This exclusion, from both the current study and from previous research, could result in concealed views of students who were not suitably informed of their EHCP status, or did not engage with or understand the process. Considering the later theme generated from the qualitative data was “what is an EHCP?”, it could be suggested that more than the five participants who said “I don’t know” in relation to having an EHCP actually understood what an EHCP was.

Thinking about how to accurately capture the voices of all children who wish to participate in research such as this, it may be helpful for future researchers to reconsider the exclusion criteria they use, or alternatively consider follow-up practices when participants’ responses go against what you can objectively determine (i.e. that all the participants recruited did actually have an EHCP in place).

Though 12 participants reported to understand the purpose of their EHCP during the questionnaire, the majority of the participants interviewed required clarification about what an EHCP was, or told me that they “didn’t know” what it meant. Other participants reported to know that they had one, but struggled to give information about what it did or how it helped them. One participant even suggested that the reason that he didn’t know more about his EHCP

was because of his SEMH needs, telling me that he was “angry” at the time the plan was issued, so his parents probably hid it from him to limit his distress. This view might suggest a narrative that SEMH needs are an excuse for non-participation, echoing concerns that views from students with SEMH needs can be dismissed due to their “disturbed” or “emotional” state (Wise, 1997). Alternatively, it could indicate that young people blame themselves for their non-participation, rather than look to the more powerful adults who limited their participation in the process. As with recommendations that researchers require training in participatory research in order to support children and young people to participate (Roberts, 2017), so might children and young people require support and training in participatory skills. Research highlighting the entrenched disparity of power and status between adults and children focuses on adults reducing their own power to account for working with children (Alderson, 2008; Kellett, 2010; Kirk, 2007). However, supported by Article 12 (UNCRC, 2009), children and young people could be encouraged to develop their own power so that when asked to participate in activities such as assessments and meetings, or research, they feel more confident and comfortable in a powerful role.

Whilst some participants expressed frustration or sadness that they didn’t know about their plan, others reported that they were happy with “the way it was” and preferred not to know. These comments suggest that it is not necessarily the goal of every student to be fully included in the EHCP process. Clark and Richards (2017) discuss this in relation to children’s participation in research, arguing that whilst children have the right to be offered opportunities to participate (UNCRC, 2009), they also have the right to say no, and to opt out of participating. Considering the EHCP process and the agenda to increase children and young people’s participation in their plans (DfE & DoH, 2015), professionals such as educational psychologists and SEN case officers need to ensure that children and young people are given information about the EHCP process and afforded opportunities to make choices about their level of participation (or non-participation) in assessments and meetings.

During the interview, some participants suggested ways in which the process could be improved, such as being given advanced notice of meetings, and using visual aids to improve students' understanding of what an EHCP is. It is possible that these suggestions could also be applied to the Annual Reviews process. The seven participants who reported to have received their EHCP over 12 months ago should have been asked to participate in a review of their plan, which may have involved attending a meeting. Whilst the current study did not ask participants about the Annual Review process, it is likely that the requests for advanced notice of meetings and the use of visual aids would apply to all aspects of receiving and maintaining an EHCP.

A number of participants discussed their school moves following the receipt of their EHCP in both their questionnaire responses and during the interview. Many saw themselves as "separate" from the decisions to move schools, stating that school staff "told them to leave", rather than being part of the decision-making process. Of note, these moves were discussed by participants as different to school moves as a response to an exclusion. This speaks to poor participatory practices as it suggests that professionals have not enabled the young people to feel "involved in the decision-making process" (Shier, 2001). Alongside professionals thinking about how best to provide children and young people with information about the EHCP assessment process and about their plans, it may also be important to think about how they can be included in discussions about school provision, either during the assessment or following the issuing of the final plan, acknowledging that this may be challenging in some instances.

8.1.3 Research Question 3

The third research question looked at how reported sense of belonging differed based on school provision, providing the other half of the picture looking at feelings of inclusion (Farrell, 2004). Data gathered to respond to this question came from the use of The Belonging Scale (Frederickson et al., 2007) and from the interviews. Quantitative results found that all types of school provision produced a mean score within the "good belonging" range, however, due to small sample size and varied size of group (mainstream/specialist/resource provision) it was not appropriate to measure

differences statistically. As such, this area continues to require further investigation. Looking at the scores on an individual level, 13 of the 17 participants received a belonging score in the “good belonging” range. This high level of belonging reported by participants could indicate that these students feel that they are in an appropriate provision, and that since receiving an EHCP, they have found a suitable education placement.

Themes around relationships with peers, relationships with staff, and feelings of security, were prominent within the interview transcripts. Participants reported that having positive peer relationships at school increased their level of school enjoyment and their feelings of safety. Other participants cited positive attitudes towards staff, especially those who provide a consistent and predictable response to situations such as bullying. These factors link strongly with sense of school belonging (Goodenow & Grady, 1993) around being accepted, valued and included by others. The findings also reflect previous literature (Craggs & Kelly, 2018a) around the importance of group membership in school, and of strong staff-pupil relationships (Greenwood & Kelly, 2019a). A large number of participants spoke about negative peer relationships and of their experiences of bullying, though also described how consistent responses from staff to reports of bullying helped them to feel safe. Despite saying that these experiences occurred within their current school, The Belonging Scale (Frederickson et al., 2007) scores remained high. This suggests that positive relationships with peers and staff may act as protective factors that help students maintain a sense of school belonging despite bullying.

Interestingly, participants from specialist and resource provision settings also emphasised the sense of security they feel associated with the physical building of the school. Aspects such as locked doors or segregated areas were discussed as ways that help them feel emotionally contained and safe. This importance of the physical environment was also found by Craggs and Kelly (2018a) and links closely with Maslow’s hierarchy of needs (Maslow & Frager, 1987), recognising the importance of meeting physical and safety needs before one can develop belonging and reach academic potential.

Considering belonging and inclusion in relation to the debate on mainstream versus specialist school provisions for students with SEMH, these findings suggest that the participants in this study feel that they are placed in an appropriate provision that meets their needs. Due to the small sample size for this study, it is not possible to comment on the extent to which students in specialist provision feel more included than those in mainstream, or vice versa (de Monchy et al., 2004; Shaw, 2017). What it does suggest is that placement decisions are by their nature individualised and as such, a student's individual characteristics need to be considered when looking at placement suitability. The research took place in a Local Authority where specialist provision for SEMH was available, and therefore participants had opportunities to attend a number of different types of provision on the continuum (Norwich, 2008). Research conducted within Local Authorities that have fewer placement opportunities for students with SEMH may produce different findings.

8.1.4 Research Question 4

Research question 4 explored how the adolescent research assistants felt about their experience of participatory research. The purpose of this question was to add to existing literature on the participation agenda, focusing on increasing the use of children researchers and co-researchers within academic research (Bucknall, 2010) and on valuing children's perspectives (Kellett, 2010). Findings from the survey indicated positive attitudes towards the project, with research assistants highlighting their role in providing a unique perspective and in helping the adult researcher with the research project. They also discussed the research skills acquired during the project, and provided insight into how adult researchers could recruit adolescent research assistants in the future. These themes reflect findings from Silverman (2012) who also found that her child researchers valued the research skills they developed through their involvement in participatory research.

The inclusion of this research question, and of the findings which showed the research assistants valuing the research skills developed provides further evidence for the use of participatory research methods. Criticisms to this

methodology has raised concerns about the level of participation achieved (Nigel Thomas, 2011), and argued that children's voices are typically lost in analysis to make way for the adult agenda (Woodhead & Faulkner, 2008). This current research utilised the adolescent research assistants throughout the research process, including in the analysis and dissemination phases of the project, in order to maintain a greater presence of children's voices and reduce the risks that findings would be marginalised by adults.

Whilst the responses from all the research assistants was positive, concerns around demand characteristics need to be considered as it is possible that they gave feedback in line with what I might want to hear, rather than giving their true opinions. They received no remuneration (pay or rewards) for participating in the research, and instead had to complete more work in order to catch up with academic activities missed due to research meeting attendance. Despite this, the research assistants continued to report an interest and eagerness to attend meetings, and reported that non-attendance was due to instances of poor mental health rather than a specific disinterest in meeting with me. This gives greater confidence that the feedback from the research assistants about their experiences is genuine and accurate.

8.1.5 Other Findings

Other findings of interest include analysis of the SEMH labels with which participants identified, where 16 of the 17 participants reported to identify with the SEMH labels given. Only seven participants identified with exclusively internalising or externalising behaviour labels, with the majority of participants self-identifying with labels across the broad categories. The purpose of this question within the current research was to provide descriptive information about participants and to explore how participant's narratives relate to terms associated with SEMH. The findings suggesting that participants did not typically place themselves in either externalising or internalising behaviour categories is discussed within the parameters of this study, and the subjective nature of reality that it represents. However, it is possible that the labels used by participants in the current study may not reflect actual diagnoses. This alerts professionals to the complex nature of experiencing mental health difficulties, not fully captured at the subjective

level in classic diagnostic categories. These findings are in contrast with existing literature (Caslin, 2019; O'Connor et al., 2011; Sheffield & Morgan, 2017) which found that very few of their participants would use these types of labels to describe themselves, and would rather use diagnostic terms such as ADHD. It is worth noting that previous research specifically focused on young people's attitudes towards labels used more thorough assessment tools, and this could account for the different results.

The theme of school transitions, managed moves, and exclusions was prevalent within the qualitative data gathered in this study. Many participants reported frequent in-year moves, some as a result of an exclusion, with several participants feeling that they didn't have choices in when or how they moved schools. Difficulties with inclusion and the prevalence of exclusions for students with SEMH needs (especially needs that present as challenging behaviour) are well documented (de Monchy et al., 2004; Jalali & Morgan, 2018) and these findings support that which has been previously reported. Participants descriptions of the moves fit with the "school mobility" phenomenon (Dobson et al., 2000; Messiou & Jones, 2015), as do their reports that moving schools caused challenges such as learning new routines and making friends (Greenwood & Kelly, 2019b). Some of the participants who had moved to specialist provision following the receipt of their EHCP explained the differences between mainstream and specialist. As with previous research (Wise & Upton, 1998), participants in this study reported preferences for the smaller class sizes and the level of support available at specialist, compared to mainstream school. These findings contribute to the conversation around mainstream versus specialist provision, providing insight into the voices of students who have moved schools following the receipt of an EHCP.

8.2 Challenges Faced with the Research

Throughout this research, I encountered challenges in the access and recruitment of participants, and in my use of a narrow criterion-referenced sampling technique.

8.2.1 Accessing Participants

In the initial stages of my research, I faced significant challenges with recruitment as schools acted as gatekeepers to the students and appeared reluctant to respond to my emails and phone calls. This challenge reflects the institutional barriers that Fox (2013) discussed in recruiting young people and enabling them to participate in research. This “position of power” given to the school staff meant that I struggled to access potential research participants in order to seek their consent to participate (Skelton, 2008). During the research, I took steps in an attempt to support the schools to engage, such as contacting them through their link educational psychologist, who was known to the school, and by printing off packs of the parental information sheet and consent forms, making it easier for SENCO’s to post to parents. This reflected recommendations from the literature to use “insiders”; namely professionals that are already present within the school system who can “vouch” for the researcher and for the research (Dentith et al., 2012).

This challenge ultimately resulted in low participant recruitment for the study. Despite having a response rate of 65% based on the number of students who were offered the opportunity to take part, the views gathered with the questionnaire only reflect 27% of the population eligible to take part. Future studies should consider how they access participants for recruitment, in relation to the number of gatekeepers (schools, parents) they have to approach and work with in order to engage the young person themselves.

8.2.2 Narrow Sampling Criteria

When schools were interested in supporting the research, the second challenge faced was that many schools did not have students who had an EHCP with a primary need of SEMH. For example, one school expressed strong interest in supporting the research, however on further inspection found that the students for whom the research would be relevant (as they had SEMH needs) actually had an EHCP with a primary need of Communication and Interaction/Autistic Spectrum Disorder. As per the criterion-referenced sampling method used here, this meant that I was not able to recruit these students. The definition of SEMH needs given by the SEND Code of Practice (DfE & DoH, 2015) is broad and fairly vague, and

with fears from the literature that the label will lead to different interpretations of the need from different professionals or Local Authorities (Norwich & Eaton, 2015), careful consideration should be made around how these students are sampled. It is possible that future studies will need to explore the inclusion of all students with an EHCP where SEMH needs have been highlighted as a concern, rather than specifying a primary need.

8.3 Strengths of the Research

Academically, this research adds to two broad fields of literature; namely that which explores the experiences of students with EHCPs, and that of developing participatory research practices.

8.3.1 Experiences of students with EHCPs

Providing recent commentary on how students are experiencing the process of receiving and having an EHCP, this research highlights the positive steps towards young person participation that have been taken since the introduction of the system in 2015. Despite researchers (Adams, Tindle, Basran, et al., 2017; Cochrane, 2016; Redwood, 2015; Skipp & Hopwood, 2016) reporting difficulties with engaging children and young people in evaluating their experience the EHCP process, this research found that young people were interested in engaging in these discussions. Participants had fairly strong views about their experience of getting and having an EHCP and, for the most part, the views expressed reflect previous findings (Adams, Tindle, Basran, et al., 2017), though participants did respond more positively to questions relating to understanding the purpose and contents of their EHCPs. The participant group itself is quite heterogeneous and reflects the views of young people with differing presentations of SEMH need. As it is likely that students with externalising mental health presentations will experience school differently to students with internalising mental health presentations (Burton & Goodman, 2011; Dimitrellou & Hurry, 2018; Harvest, 2018; Jalali & Morgan, 2018), it is interesting that several common narratives emerged from the data. This suggests that there are elements of the school experience (such as social difficulties and accessing support) that could be

considered pervasive within the SEMH student population, if not beyond. The current research reflects the principle that “children are the primary source of knowledge about their own views and experiences” (Christensen & James, 2008) and as such focused only on the voices of young people, rather than attempting to triangulate responses with professionals and parents.

8.3.2 Participatory Research

In relation to the literature on participatory research practices, this research provides an example of a methodological approach that could be replicated to recruit and involve adolescents in research design and analysis. It also responds to recommendations from the literature regarding good practice, linking with the model of participatory research (Bucknall, 2010). I feel that this research directly responds to and adds to existing good practice in four of the seven areas: participation, voice, resources, and power. Considering participation, the adolescent research assistants received specific training in research methods such as Thematic Analysis so that they could meaningfully engage in the analysis phase of the research. This reflected guidance from the literature (Lushey & Munro, 2015; Nind, 2011; Woodhead & Faulkner, 2008) and appeared to be well received by the research assistants. Furthermore, in relation to voice, the research was introduced to the adolescent research assistants very broadly, allowing them choice and opportunities to shape the research during the design phase. Whilst elements of these choices were restricted due to ethics procedures, I feel that the research assistants did feel motivated to continue with the project that they had helped develop (Bucknall, 2010).

O'Connor et al. (2011) suggests that good practice in relation to the “resources” theme (Bucknall, 2010) is the use of ice-breaker games to build rapport between the adult researcher and the child and young person researchers. This current research extends this recommendation and suggests that games should be used throughout the project to continue to develop positive and strong relationships between the research team. Finally, responding to concerns raised regarding power imbalances (Alderson, 2008; Kellett, 2010; Roberts, 2017), I acted intentionally to reduce my position of power with my adolescent research assistants, changing how I

dressed, how I was addressed, and even where I positioned myself in the room. These actions appeared to be received positively by the research assistants, and came comfortably to me due, in part, to my training. Within educational psychology practice, there is a focus on stepping away from the “expert role” and instead being curious and attuned within interactions (Beaver, 2011). Throughout my interactions with the adolescent research assistants and participants, I was aware of my use of this perspective to reflect on and adapt my approach to provide a more power balanced environment to facilitate participation and elicit the voices of young people.

The use of the survey itself followed on from research by Silverman (2012) looking at how child researcher’s experience participatory research methods, and as such added to this body of literature. Themes generated from the survey, including the role of the research assistant and the development of research skills, add to existing findings about how child and adolescent researchers feel about their involvement in participatory research. This information provides additional insights into the motivations behind participation and suggests factors to be considered by future researchers interested in this field.

The adolescent research assistants provided recommendations for future researchers in relation to recruitment of research assistants, and participatory practices. Specifically, they talked about the types of young people who may be interested in taking on the role of research assistant (someone interested in psychology or in future studies where there is a research element), as well as highlighted the need to be cautious with recruitment to reduce the potential for individual’s dropping out. Reflecting on this, it could be argued that recruitment of research assistants should focus on students who will be available for the full duration of the project, and exclude those who are due to leave a setting part-way through. In relation to participatory practices, the feedback from the adolescent research assistants showed recognition towards some of the steps I had taken to present myself as a “different kind of adult”. These included the use of games throughout the project, the bringing of snacks to meetings, and the ways in which I listened to their opinions and views and used them to shape the research.

8.4 Limitations of the Research

This research was conducted as part of a three-year Doctorate in Educational Psychology and as such was subject to strict time constraints. The challenges of time coupled with difficulties overcoming barriers caused by multiple gatekeepers resulted in a small sample size for the final questionnaire. The size of the final sample, consisting of only 17 participants, limited use of statistical analysis and therefore understanding of the differences in school experience between school provisions. Additionally, the small sample size especially from mainstream schools limits the insight that can be gathered into the inclusive practices within these settings that enable students with EHCPs to remain there, rather than moving to specialist or resource provisions. Whilst this means that the further study recommendations made by previous researchers (Cefai & Cooper, 2010) cannot be met by the current study, this study does provide a methodology framework and research tools (such as the online questionnaire) that could be used on a larger scale to provide greater insight into the experiences of students who receive an EHCP with SEMH as the primary need but who remain in mainstream school.

The findings from this research reflect the views of 17 secondary school-age students attending schools in one Local Authority in England. These students have EHCPs in place with the primary need identified as SEMH. As the purpose of this research was to collect and present children's voices, the intention is not to present results that are generalisable to a larger population. Instead, these voices provide insight into how school is experienced by some young people, and contributes to the conversation around participation within the EHCP process and academic research. Considering the participants' level of participation in this research, I would argue that they were "supported in expressing their views", reaching Step 2 in the "Ladder of Children's Participation" (Shier, 2001).

Further limitations can be found in the participatory elements of this research project. Due to ethics procedures I was subject to, the broad research topic

and methodological approach were fixed prior to my initial meeting with the adolescent research assistants. This reduced their involvement in some of the decisions during the “Design Phase” of the research project and restricted their choices in what was researched. Bucknall (2010) describes this in relation to the theme of “voice” and suggests that good practice for participatory research is to remove restrictions from the choices made by child and adolescent researchers. Additionally, none of the research assistants were involved in the collection of the data, due to the logistical complexities of conducting research across a number of different schools. This was not in line with good practice guidance suggesting that using adolescent researchers (or service users) at all levels of research, including data collection, leads to greater ownership of the findings and richer responses from participants (Tait & Lester, 2005). However, as they were integral to the interview schedule design and to the analysis of the interview data, I would still argue that the participatory elements of this research reached level five on the “Ladder of Children’s Participation” (Shier, 2001), namely that “children share power and responsibility for decision-making”. Future participatory research projects may need to consider recruiting a more gender-balanced group of research assistants in order to reduce the impact of gender on data analysis. In this current study, all the research assistants were female whereas most of the participants recruited for the study were male. As it is likely that gender plays a role in the experiences of students at school, it is possible that gender also influenced the designing and analysis of the research.

8.5 Implications

The professional implications of this research can be considered in relation to educational psychology practice at a National and Local level, and also in relation to how the Local Authority where this research took place could respond to feedback from participants on the ECHP process.

8.5.1 For Educational Psychology Practice

Findings in response to research question 2 draw attention to a gap in communication about EHCPs for children and young people; specifically, in the information sharing about what an EHCP is and what the assessment process involves. Many participants in my study reported that they didn't know what an EHCP was, or knew that they had one but were unable to say what they meant for them. With this in mind, the question becomes "who is responsible for talking to children and young people about this?"

Educational psychologists could have a role in providing children and young people with appropriately accessible information about EHCPs when meeting with them as part of their statutory duties. Additionally, further thought may be needed around how children and young people are told that they have a plan, after it has been issued. Whilst EPs may feel that the responsibility for this lies elsewhere (with parents or school staff) it is likely that those with this responsibility may benefit from support from EPs to communicate this news in a way that is suitable for the individual and the situation.

Considering the role of educational psychologists in the writing of advice for statutory assessments, feedback from participants about the learning and non-learning support they receive can be helpful for EPs writing their recommendations. Specifically, participants reported that learning support that was perceived to be available to the whole class (rather than having an allocated one-to-one teaching assistant) was seen to be positive.

Additionally, access to a range of key adults who were available to discuss emotional and social worries was seen to be an important part of making school a positive experience. Knowing this, EPs could include the allocation or identification of such staff as standard within the "recommendations for provision" elements of their reports.

Thinking beyond EP practice in relation to statutory assessment and instead considering how educational psychologists conduct research, I would advocate for the use of participatory methods in any future research conducted by EPs looking at experiences of children and young people. Thomas (2017) argues that there are a number of different levels of

participation that children and young people can hold in research, often depending on how involved they have been in the initiation of the research project themselves, with truly participatory research being initiated by the children and young people themselves (Fox, 2013). This current research, alongside the existing body of literature on participatory methods demonstrates the positive impact this methodology has on the adult researcher(s), the children and young people participating, and on the richness of data gathered. With a strong professional narrative of gathering and listening to the voices of children and young people, a natural step forwards would be to develop research practices that actively involve children and young people in all phases of research.

8.5.2 For the Local Authority

This current study can be used by the Local Authority to provide further examples of how the views of children and young people are gathered, adding to existing evidence for Local Area SEND Inspections. The online questionnaire created for this research could be developed into an audit tool that is distributed regularly to capture children's voices about how they experience the process of receiving and having an EHCP. Whilst it is important to capture views of a range of stakeholders (professionals, parents, and children), the power dynamics in relation to adult and child relationships often place limits on the impact children's voices have within decision-making processes (Roberts, 2017; Skelton, 2008). As such, opportunities should be afforded to children and young people wherever possible to increase their access to participation in matters that directly affect them, which may require them to receive training in how to participate. This would then allow children and young people more informed choices around their participation, and increase their confidence to share power with adults (Roberts, 2017).

Additionally, the Local Authority in which this research was conducted has a current practice of using co-production meetings with schools and parents following agreement to issue EHCPs. In light of feedback from some participants stating that they felt "left out" of meetings, SEN managers may consider reviewing the process to include the invitations of children and

young people to these meetings. This would provide a space for parents, SENCO's, and wider professionals (including educational psychologists) to inform students that they have an EHCP and provide opportunities for them to ask questions and receive answers. If the child or young person expresses a desire not to attend, an action from that meeting should be for an allocated person to speak to the student about their EHCP and go through the final plan with them at a later stage (if the student wishes). In providing opportunities to include children and young people in these meetings, the Local Authority would have a greater case for saying that they promote participation from children and their families at every stage of the statutory assessment process. This change in practice at the EHCP issuing stage may also influence the level of participation experienced during Annual Reviews. Whilst reviewing EHCPs was not included within the scope of this current research, professionals should consider the implications of the findings on all aspects of receiving and maintaining an EHCP.

Considering the Local Authority practices in relation to research, this is also a place where participatory methodology and practices could have a significant role. Tait and Lester (2005) discusses how organisations such as the NHS have developed service-user involvement groups who are actively involved in staff recruitment, service planning, and staff education and training. Thinking about existing service-user forums at the Local Authority in which this research was conducted, more could be done with these young people to engage them in the early stages of research. This would not only increase the power these young people had to make decisions (Bucknall, 2010), it would also positively impact the outcomes of the research (Bucknall, 2010; Tait & Lester, 2005).

8.6 Recommendations for Future Research

This thesis highlights areas where further research could be useful, and also suggests ways in which future research could be conducted. Building on the findings discussed within this report, future research could use the online questionnaire on a national level to increase information known about

students' experiences of the EHCP process. Additionally, research looking to collect views specifically of students with EHCPs for SEMH may wish to consider using a broader sampling method, possibly looking at students with EHCPs where SEMH needs have been identified (rather than only as a primary need). This would reduce the impact from different interpretations of the SEMH definition in the SEND Code of Practice (DfE & DoH, 2015) and increase the size of the population who would be eligible to participate in the research.

Considering methodology recommendations, especially in terms of recruitment and overcoming difficulties with working with gatekeepers, researchers seeking to gather views from children and young people with EHCPs should discuss opportunities to link with existing Local Authority procedures. For example, researchers could distribute a questionnaire when final plans are issued, or when SEN case officers are sending out information about Annual Reviews. This process of research information distribution would reduce the number of gatekeepers (as it would bypass the school staff) between the researcher and potential participants.

Moreover, this research reflects a model of participatory research that has worked successfully and could be replicated or built upon in the future. Working with adolescent research assistants through this research highlighted their capacity to bring interesting and unique perspectives to the research, especially as they represented the intended participant group. Their insight was invaluable, and I would recommend use of participatory methods in all research involving children and young people. This research was heavily shaped by the adolescent research assistants recruited for this project, and as such is unique to them and their ideas. Researchers working with child and adolescent research assistants have to reflect on their own research perspectives and accept that in order to engage in participatory research that follows best practice guidance, power and control has to be handed over to the research assistants, and the project and the findings become shared among the team of researchers. The research assistants themselves spoke about qualities that should be looked for when recruiting for these roles, including wishes to learn more about research methods and

interests in the research topic. Future researchers should consider these qualities when looking to recruit children and young people to engage in future participatory research.

8.7 Final Thoughts

This study investigated the school experiences of secondary school aged students with EHCPs where SEMH had been identified as the primary need. The research has provided opportunities for these students to comment on their experience of getting and of having an EHCP, and on their perceptions of the support they receive within school. My findings revealed that understanding around what an EHCP is remains inconsistent, and highlights need for further work to bridge this communication gap and ensure that students with an EHCP understand what it means to have a plan.

This research championed children's voices and made best endeavours to support children's narratives through analysis and discussion, using a constructivist epistemology and adolescent research assistants to support this goal. However, as is the case with any research gathering views, the findings are subjective and limited only to what the participants have experienced and are familiar with. Therefore, these voices need to be held alongside other voices to build an increasing picture within academic and professional research around the experiences of students with EHCPs.

The current study was primarily about young people's voices, and how these voices are heard, both within professional practice and in academic research. Through the use of participatory methods and the recruitment of a small group of adolescent research assistants, I was able to increase the presence of young people's voices throughout the design, analysis, and dissemination phases of this project. Whilst this came with its own set of challenges, I strongly feel that working with these research assistants made me a better researcher and a better practitioner. My hope is that this research demonstrates to the wider academic world that students with SEMH needs have powerful voices and are ready to share these with those who are ready to listen.

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List of Appendices

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Appendix 1: Parent/Carer Information Sheet

Participatory Research Exploring the School Experiences of Secondary School Students with EHCPs for Social Emotional Mental Health

February 2019 – March 2020
Information sheet

My name is Caroline Daw and I am a Trainee Educational Psychologist, working for the Local Authority. As part of my training, I am conducting research into the views of students who have Education Health and Care Plans for Social Emotional and Mental Health needs.

I am hoping to find out about how students feel about having an Education Health and Care Plan, and what they think about the support they are receiving in school. Some of the questions will ask about previous schools, if the student has moved schools recently. The questionnaire has been co-created with a group of students, as part of a drive within research to increase student participation.

This information sheet will try and answer any questions you might have about the project, but please don't hesitate to contact me if there is anything else you would like to know.

Who is carrying out the research?

Caroline Daw, Trainee Educational Psychologist, Local Authority

Why are we doing this research?

There is currently very little research on the experiences of children and young people who have an EHCP for Social Emotional and Mental Health needs. I am interested to find out the views of these students, specifically how they feel about the EHCP process and about moving schools (if they have moved). Research exploring the views of children and young people aims to put the voice of the young person at the centre. Therefore, for my research, I want to make sure that I speak to as many young people as possible to hear what they have to say.

What will happen if I give consent for my child to take part?

If you are happy for your child to take part in the research, please give them the sheet with the web link included in this pack. The link will take them to the online questionnaire where they will be given information about the research and asked to give their own consent to take part. The questionnaire itself should take no more than 10 minutes to complete. At the end of the questionnaire, they will be asked if they are interested in taking part in a follow-up interview that will likely take place in the Autumn Term 2019. If they agree to take part in the interview, you will receive another information sheet and consent form.

Please note that it is assumed that all students who complete the online questionnaire will have received parental consent to participate in the research. If you do not wish for your child to participate, please do not give them the web link to the questionnaire.

What will happen to the results of the research?

The results of the research will be written up as part of my Doctoral Thesis, and will be submitted to UCL Institute of Education for review. Part of the research may also be put forward to be published in an academic journal. All the answers to the questionnaire and the interview will be kept safe and secure, and answers will be anonymised so that no one will be able to tell who wrote/said them. In my report, I might write something that your child has said, but I will say "Student X said", rather than say provide a name.

Data Protection Privacy Notice

The data controller for this project will be University College London (UCL). The UCL Data Protection Office provides oversight of UCL activities involving the processing of personal data, and can be contacted at [EMAIL]. UCL's Data Protection Officer can also be contacted at [EMAIL]. Further information on how UCL uses participant information can be found here: www.ucl.ac.uk/legal-services/privacy/participants-health-and-care-research-privacy-notice

The legal basis that would be used to process your personal data will be performance of a task in the public interest. The legal basis used to process special category personal data will be for scientific and historical research or statistical purposes/explicit consent. 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 [EMAIL].

Contact for further information

If you have any further questions before you decide whether to give consent, you can reach me at [EMAIL] or [PHONE]

This project has been reviewed and approved by the UCL IOE Research Ethics Committee [Reference No. Z6364106/2019/03/06]

Thank you very much for taking the time to read this information sheet.

Appendix 2: Parent/Carer Consent Form

Participatory Research Exploring the School Experiences of Secondary School Students with EHCPs for Social Emotional Mental Health

Consent for Questionnaire: Parents

	Yes	No
I confirm that I have read and understood this information sheet, and have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions, and had any questions answered adequately	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand that my child's participation is voluntary and that he/she is free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I know that my child can refuse to answer any or all of the questions and that he/she can withdraw from the questionnaire at any point.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I agree for my child's responses to be sent electronically to the researcher, and that the data will be kept secure and destroyed at the end of the project. I know that all data will be kept under the terms of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I agree that small direct quotes may be used in reports (these will be anonymised).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
In understand that in exceptional circumstances anonymity and confidentiality would have to be broken, for example, if it was felt that practice was putting children at risk, or there were concerns regarding professional misconduct. In these circumstances, advice would be sought from a senior manager from the Local Authority who will advise the researcher as to the appropriate course of action and as to whether the Local Authority Children's Safeguarding Officer needs to be informed.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Name.....

Signature: Date:

Name of School which your child attends:

Name of researcher: Caroline Daw

Contact details: [EMAIL]

Please return completed consent forms to the SENCO

FINAL - Student views of Education Health and Care Plans

Student Questionnaire

Hello, and welcome to this questionnaire. My name is Caroline Daw and I am inviting you to take in part in my research project, “**Participatory research exploring the school experiences of secondary school students with EHCPs for SEMH**”

I am a Trainee Educational Psychologist, working for the Local Authority. As part of my training, I am conducting research into the views of students who have Education Health and Care Plans for Social Emotional and Mental Health needs.

I am hoping to find out about how you feel about having an Education Health and Care Plan, and what you think about the support you are receiving in your current school. If you have recently moved schools, I would also be interested to know what you think about the move, and what you think has changed about the support you receive now that you have moved schools.

This questionnaire should take no more than 10 minutes to complete. It will ask you questions about your EHCP and about what you think about your current school. At the end of the questionnaire, you will be asked if you would like to take part in a follow-up interview.

Data Protection Privacy Notice

The data controller for this project will be University College London (UCL). The UCL Data Protection Office provides oversight of UCL activities involving the processing of personal data, and can be contacted at [EMAIL]. UCL’s Data Protection Officer can also be contacted at [EMAIL].

Further information on how UCL uses participant information can be found here: www.ucl.ac.uk/legal-services/privacy/participants-health-and-care-research-privacy-notice

The legal basis that would be used to process your personal data will be performance of a task in the public interest. The legal basis used to process special category personal data will be for scientific and historical research or statistical purposes/explicit consent.

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 [EMAIL].

Contact for further information

If you have any further questions before you decide whether to take part, you can reach me at [EMAIL]

Q38 I confirm that I have read and understood this information sheet, and have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions, and have had these questions adequately answered.

Yes (1)

No (2)

Q39 I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.

Yes (23)

No (24)

Q40 I know that I can refuse to answer any or all of the questions and that I can withdraw from the questionnaire at any point.

Yes (1)

No (2)

Q41 I agree that small direct quotes may be used in reports (these will be anonymised).

Yes (4)

No (5)

Q42 I consent to take part in this research

Yes (4)

No (5)

Q34 If you are happy to continue, please click the arrow to start the questionnaire

Page Break

Start of Block: A little bit about you

Q37 Questions about you

Q1 What is your Year group?

▼ Year 7 (1) ... Year 11 (5)

Q2 What gender do you most identify with?

▼ Male (1) ... Prefer not to answer (5)

Q3 Which of the following best describes your ethnic background

- Black or Black British (1)
 - Caribbean (2)
 - African (3)
 - Any other Black background (4)
 - White and Black Caribbean (5)
 - White and Black African (6)
 - White and Asian (7)
 - Asian or Asian British (8)
 - Indian (9)
 - Pakistani (10)
 - Bangladeshi (11)
 - Any other Asian background (12)
 - Chinese (13)
 - Any White background (14)
 - Other (Please write in) (15)
-
- Prefer not to say (16)

Page Break

Q4 What type of school, college or other educational setting are you attending now?

- Not in education (1)
 - Educated at home (2)
 - School or Academy (3)
 - College (4)
 - Alternative provision e.g. Pupil Referral Unit (PRU), e-learning centre (5)
 - Young offenders' institute (6)
 - Other (please write in) (7)

 - Don't know (8)
 - Prefer not to say (9)
-

Q5 Is the school, college, or other educational setting you are attending...

- Specialist (specifically for young people with special educational needs) (1)
 - Mainstream (2)
 - Mixed specialist/mainstream (this means that you are in a mainstream school/college etc. but are sometimes taught separately in a base or facility specifically for young people with special educational needs) (3)
 - Don't know (4)
 - Prefer not to say (5)
-

Q6 How long have you been at your current school?

- Since Year 7 (1)
- More than 12 months (2)
- Less than 12 months (3)
- Less than 6 months (4)

Page Break

End of Block: A little bit about you

Start of Block: Block 3

Q11 Some people have needs that relate to their "Social Emotional Mental Health". This can describe lots of different things. Are there any of the labels listed below that YOU think could be used to describe YOU? (You can tick more than one label)

- Withdrawn or isolated behaviour (1)
 - Anxiety (2)
 - Depression (3)
 - Self-Harm (4)
 - Get into trouble because of behaviour (5)
 - Drug/Alcohol problems (6)
 - Eating disorder (7)
 - Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) / Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) (8)
 - Other (please write in) (9)
-
- Prefer not to say (10)
 - I don't identify with any of these labels (11)

End of Block: Block 3

Start of Block: Questions about your Education Health and Care Plan

Q36 Questions about your Education Health and Care Plan

Q7 Do you have an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) in place?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)
- Don't know (3)

Skip To: Q28 If Do you have an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) in place? = No
Skip To: Q28 If Do you have an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) in place? = Don't know

Q8 Roughly how long ago was this EHCP put in place?

- Please write in Years and Months (1)
-

Q9 Did you have a Statement of special educational needs before you had an EHCP?

- Yes (1)
 - No (2)
 - Don't know (3)
 - Prefer not to say (4)
-

Q10 What "Primary Need" is on your EHCP?

Communication and Interaction (1)

Social Emotional Mental Health (2)

Other (please write in) (3)

Cognition and Learning (4)

Physical and Sensory (5)

I don't know / prefer not to say (6)

Page Break

Q15 To what extent did the following happen during the PROCESS of getting an EHCP?

	Yes, most or all of the time (1)	Yes, some of the time (2)	No (3)	Don't know (4)	Prefer not to say (5)
Your and your family's personal needs and circumstances were taken into account in the process (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Different services (e.g. education, health, and care) worked together to make the EHCP (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Communication about the EHCP was clear throughout the process (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Steps were taken to help you to understand what took place and why (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q16 Did the following happen when YOU were taking part in the PROCESS of getting YOUR EHCP?

	Yes (1)	No (2)	Don't know (3)	Not applicable (4)
You were included in meetings (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
You were asked if you wanted to take part in meetings (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
You were given choices about how to take part (e.g. attending in person, using a video) (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
People made an effort to listen to and understand your opinions (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q17 Overall, how much do you agree or disagree that TAKING PART in getting your EHCP was a positive experience for you?

- Strongly agree (1)
- Agree (2)
- Neither agree nor disagree (3)
- Disagree (4)
- Strongly disagree (5)
- Don't know (6)

Q18 How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements about THE EHCP?

	Strongly agree (1)	Agree (2)	Neither agree nor disagree (3)	Disagree (4)	Strongly disagree (5)	Don't know (6)
You understand what your EHCP is for (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Your EHCP is easy for you to understand (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
YOUR wishes and opinions were included in the EHCP (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The EHCP includes preparations for your next move in life (e.g. to college, apprenticeship or work) (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q22 Overall, how much do you agree or disagree that the help and support included in the EHCP will help you achieve what you want to in life?

- Strongly agree (1)
- Agree (2)
- Neither agree nor disagree (3)
- Disagree (4)
- Strongly disagree (5)
- Don't know (6)

Page Break

Q23 Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the whole experience of getting the EHCP?

- Very satisfied (1)
- Satisfied (2)
- Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied (3)
- Dissatisfied (4)
- Very dissatisfied (5)
- Don't know (6)

Q24 Thinking about your experience of getting the EHCP, what worked well for you?

Q25 Thinking about your experience of getting the EHCP, what didn't work well for you?

Page Break

Q26 During the EHCP process, were you asked which school or college you would prefer to attend?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)
- Don't know (3)
- Prefer not to say (4)

Skip To: Q28 If During the EHCP process, were you asked which school or college you would prefer to attend? = No

Skip To: Q28 If During the EHCP process, were you asked which school or college you would prefer to attend? = Don't know

Skip To: Q28 If During the EHCP process, were you asked which school or college you would prefer to attend? = Prefer not to say

Q27 What was your response?

- To stay in mainstream school/college (1)
- To move to a different mainstream school/college (2)
- To move to a specialist school/college (3)
- Don't know (4)
- Prefer not to say (5)

Page Break

Q28 Have you moved schools recently?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Skip To: End of Block If Have you moved schools recently? = No

Q29 What were the reasons for the move?

Page Break

End of Block: Questions about your Education Health and Care Plan

Start of Block: Questions about your feelings towards your current school

Q35 Questions about your feelings towards your CURRENT school

Q31 Read each statement carefully and try to decide how much you agree or disagree with it. There is no right or wrong answer

	Yes / True (1)	Not Sure (2)	No / Not True (3)
I feel really happy at my school (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
People here notice when I'm good at something (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It is hard for people like me to feel happy here (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Most teachers at my school like me (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Sometimes I feel as if I shouldn't be at this school (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
There is an adult in school I can talk to about my problems (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
People at my school are friendly to me (7)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Teachers here don't like people like me (8)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel very different from most other children here (9)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I wish I were in a different school (10)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel happy being at my school (11)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other children here like me the way I am (12)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Page Break

Q32 I am interested in speaking with young people about their experiences of schooling, and would like to have a follow-up conversation with you, possibly at your school. Is this something that you would be interested in?

Yes (1)

No (2)

Skip To: End of Survey If I am interested in speaking with young people about their experiences of schooling, and would lik... = No

Q33 Please write your name and the name of your school in the boxes below, and I will write to you to give you some more information

Name (1)

School (2)

End of Block: Questions about your feelings towards your current school

Thank you for completing this survey.

If you have expressed an interest in taking part in a follow-up interview, you will be contacted shortly.

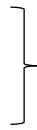
If you would like to know more about this questionnaire or about the research, please contact Caroline Daw by emailing [EMAIL].



Appendix 4: Interview Schedule

Starting the Interview

- Introductions
- How are you?
- How was your summer?



Conversation should be 2-way

Optional Ice-breaker games

- Uno
- Jenga
- Cards

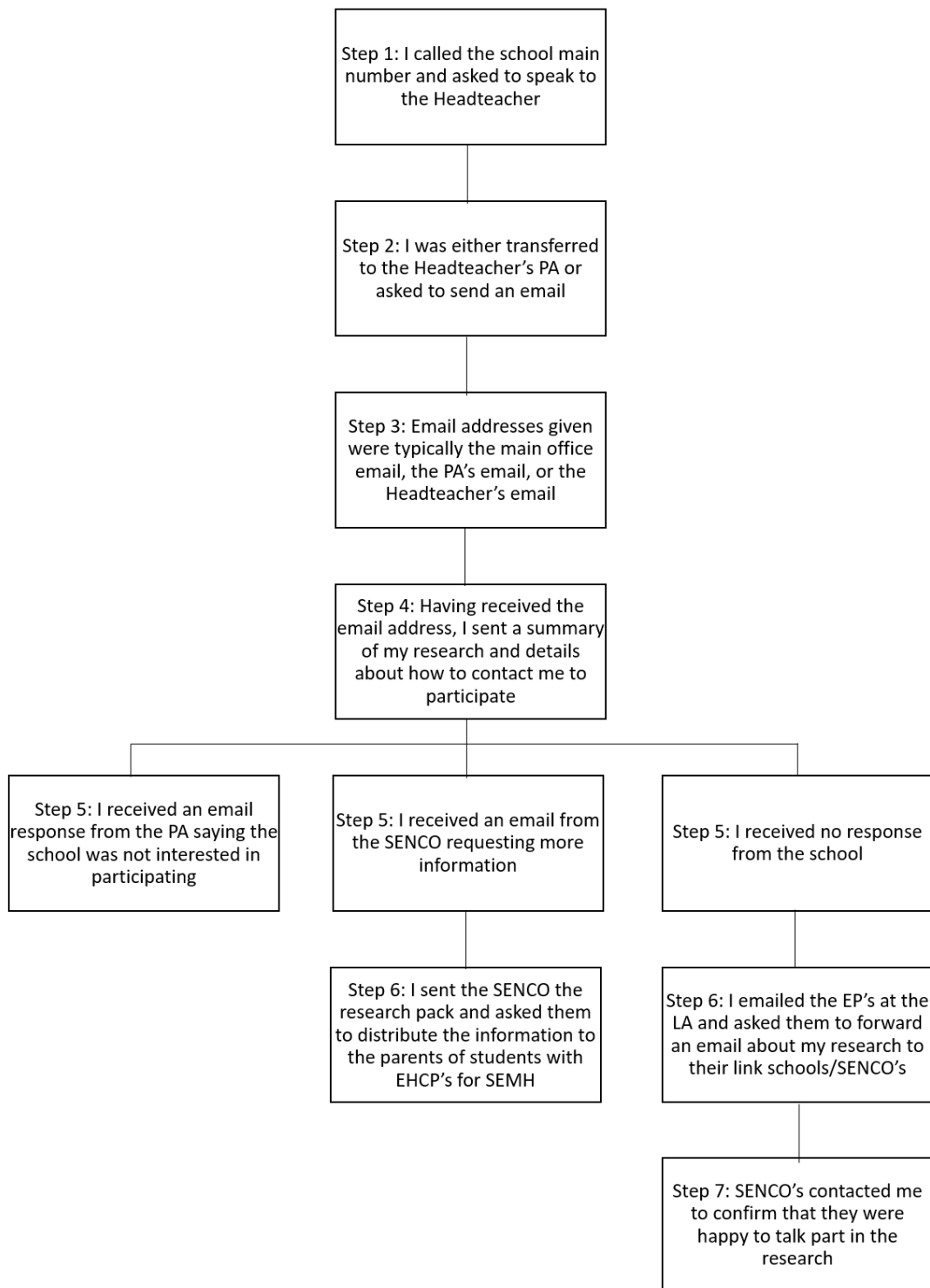
- 1. Could you first start by just telling me about what you think of school?**
(Do you like it/dislike it? Why?)
- 2. Do you get any learning support at school, as well as for things outside of learning?**
 - a. If yes, what is that support and is it easy to access?**
 - b. If no, can you think of any support that could be helpful?**
- 3. Do you know of any other support that is available at your school?**
- 4. Do you feel emotionally safe at school?** *(comfortable, able to express yourself, not bullied/teased)*
- 5. How did you find the move from your old school to your new school? ***
 - a. Was there any support to help you settle in?**
 - b. How involved were you in the decision-making process?**
- 6. If there was something in school that was bothering you, are there people you could talk to about it?** *(Has this ever happened to you or someone you know?)*
- 7. Thinking about your relationships with other students, have there been any issues and if so were they resolved?** *(How?)*
- 8. Does the school have any methods for helping students if they are feeling isolated?**
- 9. Finally, do you have any advice or key tips for anyone who has recently received an EHCP?**

* Only ask this question if they have moved schools since receiving the EHCP

Ending the Interview

- How did you find this whole experience of the interview and the questionnaire?
- Is there anything else you would like to add?

Appendix 5: Recruitment Process Flowchart



Appendix 6: Brief Minutes for Meetings with Adolescent Research Assistants

Date	18/06/19
Whereabouts	Specialist Provision for SEMH Students – Lounge Area
Attendees	Researcher, E, R, B, C, Teacher
Agenda Item	Minutes/Actions
Welcome	All attendees introduced themselves and shared snacks brought by the researcher
Ice Breaker	Researcher initiated two ice-breaker activities – <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Two truths and a lie 2. Juggling
Talk about research	<p>Researcher briefly outlined research – focused on getting the views of students who have EHCPs for SEMH. Emphasised the role of research assistant – to tell the researcher what to research (what questions to ask, how to ask them, what the research should be about)</p> <p>Research Assistants and Researcher discussed ideas for the research and created a spider diagram focused on several key topics of interest to the RA's</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Access to school-based support systems 2. Experience of receiving an EHCP 3. Social life and peer inclusion 4. Experience of moving schools
Plan for next session	Researcher discussed ideas for the next session – to pilot the current questionnaire and give feedback on it
Feedback	RA's gave feedback on experience of the meeting (including ratings on a scale of 1-10). They requested different types of snacks for the next session
Games	With remaining time for the meeting, RA's and Researcher played Uno

Date	20/06/19
Whereabouts	Specialist Provision for SEMH Students – Lounge Area
Attendees	Researcher, R, B, C
Agenda Item	Minutes/Actions
Welcome	Researcher welcomed everyone to meeting and shared snacks
Pilot Study	Using weblink and laptops, RA's completed pilot questionnaire and gave verbal feedback on experience/questions/problems as they went, which the Researcher recorded on big paper
Feedback on questionnaire	RA's came together to discuss feedback on questionnaire – created a strengths and weaknesses table RA's identified five aspects of pilot questionnaire that should be changed
Changing questionnaire	Researcher went through agreed changes on questionnaire, though some could not be completed in the meeting. ACTION: Researcher to make changes and share with RA's in the next meeting

	RA's signed off on aesthetic elements of questionnaire – font, colour, background, layout, progress bar
Plan for next session	Researcher discussed ideas for next session – creating an interview schedule
Feedback	RA's gave feedback on the session (including ratings using a 1-10 scale)
Games	With remaining time for the meeting, RA's and Researcher played Uno

Date	04/07/19
Whereabouts	Specialist Provision for SEMH Students – Lounge Area
Attendees	Researcher, R, B, C
Agenda Item	Minutes/Actions
Welcome	Researcher welcomed everyone to the meeting and shared snacks
Final questionnaire	Researcher showed RA's the final questionnaire which RA's signed off to launch
Interview Schedule	<p>RA's discussed contents of questionnaire in reference to spider diagram created in Meeting 1 and circled/ticked topics that had been covered by the questionnaire.</p> <p>Researcher explained how to create interview questions – focusing on the interview being a conversation that flows, rather than a structured questionnaire.</p> <p>RA's created eight main interview questions, with several follow-up questions, and agreed on how the Researcher should start and end each interview. As the RA's spoke, the Researcher wrote out the questions on big paper stuck to the walls for everyone to see.</p>
Feedback	RA's gave feedback on the session (including ratings using a 1-10 scale)
Next steps / plan for next session	<p>Researcher discussed next steps for the research:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To recruit schools and participants to complete the questionnaire and hopefully agree to be interviewed 2. To share designed interview schedule with supervisors for approval <p>RA's and Researcher agreed date and time for next meeting (September 2019). Researcher offered email/call/letter updates over the summer but all RA's declined.</p>
Games	With remaining time for the meeting, RA's and Researcher played Uno

Date	19/09/19
Whereabouts	Specialist Provision for SEMH Students – Classroom
Attendees	Researcher, R, B (arrived late), C
Agenda Item	Minutes/Actions
Welcome	Researcher welcomed everyone to meeting and shared snacks
Update on research	Researcher explained that the questionnaire was now live but that not many students had completed it yet.

	Researcher talked about continuing to contact schools, and shared that the first interviews were likely to take place before the October half term
Training on Thematic Analysis	Researcher gave RA's handouts on thematic analysis – what it is and what the 6 steps are. RA's read through a sample transcript twice, the second time highlighting short interesting phrases, or phrases that reoccur (steps 1 and 2). Then RA's and Researcher discussed what phrases they highlighted and why, discussing agreement and disagreements. Phrases were then turned into codes and grouped into themes (step 3). RA's re-read transcript to review themes (step 4) and then defined the themes they had generated (step 5).
Plan for next two sessions	Researcher discussed sessions in the analysis phase: 1. Bringing at least 1 typed transcript to analyse in the next session
Between session task	Researcher asked RA's to think about how they wanted to be addressed in the research (real names, pseudonyms, other) and also whether they would be interested in writing part of the report (abstract) so that they could be part of the dissemination of the findings
Feedback	RA's gave feedback on the session (including ratings using a 1-10 scale)

Date	22/11/19
Whereabouts	Specialist Provision for SEMH Students – Lounge Area
Attendees	Researcher, R, B, C
Agenda Item	Minutes/Actions
Welcome	Researcher welcomed everyone to the meeting and shared snacks
Discussion on between session tasks	Discussed RA's decision around names for report and involvement in dissemination of findings: 1. All RA's agreed to real first names being used in report 2. All RA's agreed to be involved in writing part of the report
Analysis of Transcript 1	Researcher and RA's read through transcript and completed Thematic Analysis steps 1-4 individually and as a group. 21 codes were generated which were grouped into 7 themes
Plan for next session	Researcher to bring Transcript 2 (interview with student from a specialist provision)
Between session task	Researcher asked RA's to think about whether they would like to attend a presentation at the Local Authority Council Office where the Researcher will be presenting the research to Educational Psychology team (around 15 people)
Feedback	RA's gave feedback on the session (including ratings using a 1-10 scale)
Games	With remaining time for the meeting, RA's and Researcher played Uno

Date	17/01/20
Whereabouts	Specialist Provision for SEMH Students – Lounge Area
Attendees	Researcher, C, R
Agenda Item	Minutes/Actions
Welcome	Researcher welcomed everyone to the meeting and all played a round of Uno
Discussion on between session task	As B was not present for the meeting, it was agreed that the discussion about attendance to the LA presentation in the Summer term could carry over to the next session
Analysis of Transcript 2	Researcher and RA's looked through second transcript, independently generated codes, and then discussed codes/themes. 19 codes were grouped into 8 themes.
Plan for next session	Discussed the plan for the next session: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Researcher to bring draft thematic map to discuss with RA's 2. Researcher and RA's to create draft abstract/summary of the research 3. RA's to complete survey of their experience
Feedback	RA's gave feedback on the session (including ratings using a 1-10 scale)
Games	With remaining time for the meeting, RA's and Researcher played Uno

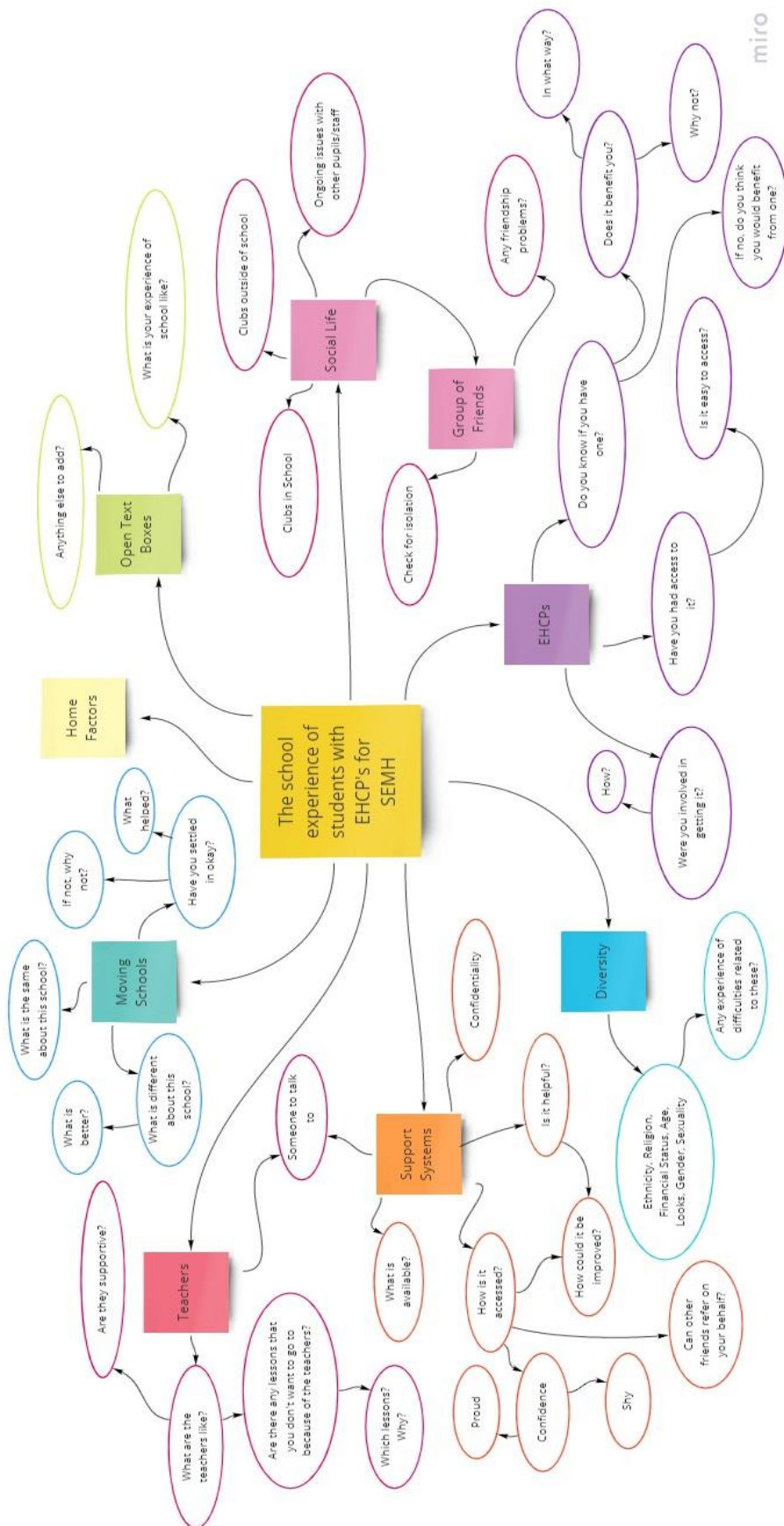
Date	11/02/20
Whereabouts	Specialist Provision for SEMH Students – Lounge Area
Attendees	Researcher, C
Agenda Item	Minutes/Actions
Welcome	Researcher welcomed C to the meeting
Discussion of thematic map	Researcher shared options for thematic map (themes and subthemes) with two aims: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To discuss findings (expected, unexpected) 2. To discuss analysis (sense making) Each theme was discussed with subthemes and decisions were made around splitting/merging themes together
Abstract writing	Discussed planned task to write the abstract. C reported feeling that this was a group activity, rather than one she could do alone. Formatting was discussed using example abstracts taken from previous submitted DEdPsy thesis ACTION: Researcher to write thesis abstract independently, splitting text into short paragraphs (with or without key headings)
Research Assistant Survey	C completed survey independently. Survey was also given to R (who did not wish to attend meeting) and left for B (who was absent from school).
Plan for next session	Discussed the plan for the next session: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Researcher and RA's to create PowerPoint presentation to be used to share research findings with Local Authority EP service and University students

Appendix 7: Research Assistant Survey

1. From your experience, what does an Adolescent Research Assistant do?
2. Why would someone want to be an Adolescent Research Assistant?
3. What was the most enjoyable part of being an Adolescent Research Assistant?
4. What was the least enjoyable part of being an Adolescent Research Assistant?
5. Thinking about how much time it took, would you say that this role took (please circle):

A	B	C
Too much time	Just the right amount of time	Not enough time
6. What have you learnt from being an Adolescent Research Assistant?
7. If we were to do the research project again, what would you suggest that we change?
8. If another researcher came to you for help, what advice would you give to them about having Adolescent Research Assistants in their project?
9. What was it like to work with an adult researcher?
10. Is there anything else that you want to say about this research project or your experience?

Appendix 8: Spider Diagram of Research Assistants Topics of Interest



miro

Thematic Analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006)

What is Thematic Analysis?

- It is a method of identifying patterns (or themes) in qualitative data (open questions, interviews)

What is a theme?

- A **recurring subject** of conversation
- A **central idea** that runs through the answers
- Can be present in one interview or across several interviews
- Different people could have **different opinions** about the theme

How do we do it?

There are 6 steps to Thematic Analysis:

1. Familiarisation – Read through the transcript several times
2. Code generation – Highlight short phrases that are interesting and that seem to recur
3. Identifying themes – Group similar codes together into larger patterns
4. Review themes – Read through the transcript with the themes in mind. Do they reflect what has been said? Do you need more/less?
5. Define and name themes – How would you describe the theme? What does it include?
6. Generate a report – Describe your findings

Appendix 10: Example of coded transcript

The first question is can you just start by telling me what you think about school?

Yeah I think schools erm pretty alright for me especially like this one because it's actually helped me to understand and I kind of understand most of the work here

Learning support is good at this school

Okay,

A lot better than my previous Secondary School, which was a mainstream school. And in every class I'd have like 30 students in it and I struggled to understand everything

Moved schools
Differences in learning support

Okay, so what specifically do you like about this school?

The fact that I can understand the work a lot easier. And the teachers know when I'm stuck and when I need help.

Different work (easier?)
Teachers aware of support need

Okay. And so you're talking about the help that you get? What does that help look like? What would they do?

So like the teachers just see me just sitting there like kinda a bit frustrated and stuck. They'll come over to be and be like "alright [NAME] what do you need help with?" And then I'll just say what I need help with and they'll just help me

How the teachers help
How support is accessed

Okay, and is that help in terms of giving you the answer or helping you-

Just help me understand it. And most of the time if it's like something new then teachers- I'll say to the teachers that this is something I've actually never done before and they'll just explain it to me like once and I'll just catch on to it.

Type of learning support (explanation) given

Okay

Because I'm a really-but certainly in Maths, I'm a really quick learner on that stuff. English I'm still a bit struggling because most of the stuff we're doing now is working towards our GCSEs. And again, a bit tricky but still managing.

Reflection on when support is needed and why

That's good. And it's good that there are people that are helping you. And is it a specific person in every one of your lessons or is it lots of different staff?

Lots of different staff like every single kind of staff can help me

Support is easy to access

Okay.

And it does help to know that I've got teachers that can actually help me with my stuff

Positive thoughts about school linked to confidence in school support

Good. And you get help for anything outside of your learning as well?

What do you mean like at home?

At home or it could be kind of help within school but that's not relating to your learning.

Yeah I think I do. It is kind of a bit tricky when you've got to do school work, and then you get help with other work and you're like you're thinking in the back of your head like is this school work or is this something else. You get like teachers [inaudible]. So, yeah I think I do get that. It's just like as I said, to help me understand.

And do you know of any support that's available at school that you could access if you wanted to, but the you don't access right now?

Not really

So the next question is do you feel emotionally safe at school?

Yea I do feel emotionally safe at school. A lot better than what I did at my previous school because it was by a road that if you walked far enough going one way you'd actually get to a motorway.

Feelings of safety differ from school to school

Oh, okay

So and the gates they will literally just push like and most of the doors were like fobbed on the inside of the building but the doors to

Physical security

<p>take you out inside the actual core area of the school they were not fobbable. So they would just push open and then the gates to get out of there of the school premises were just a push of a button. So it was really like bad if I go out at school which I actually did. Like back in there I lost my temper bad. And I actually ended up running out. And I managed to get pretty far but then teachers had to be sent. So about three, four teachers come and got me. By then I was just sitting down. Calming down. So that school was just not safe because back then it was just a push of a button to get out and then you had to walk so far one way, like not even a mile or two and you're at a motorway. With like cars doing like 50 or like 56 or something. So I do feel a lot safer at school because every single door is fobbed. So it does secure you a lot more.</p>	<p>elements of old school building</p>
<p>So you feel that bit safer because you're sort of - Enclosed, yeah</p>	<p>Didn't feel safe Was able to leave</p>
<p>Yeah. Okay. And you were talking about your old school and now you've come to this school. What was the- how did you find the move from one school to the other?</p>	<p>Didn't feel safe</p>
<p>Like every other school I've been to, like because I've been to a total of four schools now, this one making the fourth. So in two primary schools and obviously my first one, they couldn't handle autistic children. And even children with the slightest amount of autism, they couldn't handle that. So they had no chance of handling me and then I started doing half days at that school and half days of the other school, that could handle my autism. And then eventually we started swapping that around so I went to the school handled me a lot more first and then went to the other school after that.</p>	<p>Difference in new school. Physical security increases feelings of safety</p>
<p>Yeah.</p>	<p>Frequent school moves Labels – ASD</p>
<p>And then soon enough after that I just came straight over to that school. And then when I left that school, I actually found it a bit hard to go from that school. And then I went to my previous school. Which was [MAINSTREAM SECONDARY].</p>	<p>Negative self image? Previous support accessed/transitions</p>
<p>Yeah.</p>	<p>Difficulties with transition</p>
<p>And like every other school like when I went into the second primary school, I was a bit hard to control because new school and all that, just forgot about all the stuff that happened. So my anger especially came and was a lot worse when I first started at [MAINSTREAM SECONDARY]. And it was like this at this school. I left [MAINSTREAM SECONDARY] just after Year 8. And one thing that people say to me like, what just ticked me off and I'd go off on one. So it was a bit hard to get used to it but now I actually can control my anger a lot more. And now people can say all kinds of stuff or call me all the names under the sun and say stuff about me. They don't bother me the only one thing that will tick me off the most is when they take the mick out of my family. Cause it's like my family and all that.</p>	<p>SEMh label – Anger School moves</p>
<p>Yeah.</p>	<p>Changes in SEMh presentation</p>
<p>You're kind of more reluctant to kick off about that stuff. So I think I find changes going from school to school a lot harder. But as soon as I get used to it, I'm fine.</p>	<p>Transition</p>
<p>And was there anything particular that helped you get used to this school when you moved?</p>	<p>How staff helped with transition – flexible timetable Changes in SEMh presentation –</p>
<p>No I think it was, well I was a really hard one to control and sometimes in lessons I choose what day to do what stuff.</p>	
<p>Okay</p>	
<p>And then when I - it must have been year nine, and then I just realised if I keep doing this, we're going to get nowhere, when I leave here. So I started realising that if I don't do work, not going to get anywhere I started doing the work a lot more. So I think that's where</p>	

it like kind of stopped me being what I was when I was younger. To now me being who I am now.

Kind of change in your mindset.

Yeah, yeah.

That's great. So next question is if there was something at school that was bothering you, are there people that you can talk to about it?

Yeah. I feel like if there was something that was bothering me like, like I say if people took the mick out of my family and I kicked off. All I do now is I'd just punch stuff and then I'd end up calming down the teachers come up to me and go "well what happened?" and then I tell them. Obviously, when I first came here that was very hard for me to do. I had to wait till I was calmed down fully. And even then I- because of how bad my anger was I actually used to pretty much forget what happened and so like they used to ask me and I used to just go [shrugs] "I dunno. I don't know what happened". And then, but now I can lose my temper as bad as I want but I can still remember everything that happened.

Okay

I think like it's just a change in life, getting like me just getting a bit older means you learn to control it. And learning not to just put all the stuff that happened that made me go angry to like back my head it's me keeping it now to the front of my mind. So it's always there. And a lot of teachers I can go to and just talk to, if there's anything that is bothering me before I end up kicking off. So it is nice to know I have teachers. To talk to.

Yeah, that's really good. So thinking about your relationships with other students, and you've kind of said that sometimes that can be kind of words said and that sort of thing. But have there been issues and have they been resolved to a way that you're happy with the with the resolution?

Yeah, like one of the recent ones that happened was a student didn't say anything. But I was actually playing a game of football because we play it. Sometimes within our PE lessons and I just went to like, go get the ball off somebody and he just came up and kick me in the side of my knee, and that proper ticked me off to the point where I actually hurt my hand.

Okay.

And then he got excluded for it so I was a bit happy about that. But teachers can only do what they can do. I mean, I did kick off bad, but I did actually end up because now I control my anger a lot more. I can talk while I'm very angry. But it's hard for teachers to understand me when I do that. I am happy when teachers do sort it out incidents especially when they say stuff about family. It can happen but teachers I know they sort it out for the amount of time I've been here. I just know that if someone says something, teachers will sort it out. **That's good. And do you know whether or not the school has any methods of helping students if they're feeling isolated or alone?**

Well like other students can be isolated like away. I don't really know about that because I'm not one to be isolated. When I'm angry I tend to just walk around the school and kick off. So I'm never isolated from anybody else.

What if a student was walking around, they're feeling lonely? Is there anything that the school would do to help them kind of build relationships?

There's one kid who would kick off bad. And I think there's a teacher he can talk to that he knows that teachers will not try and restrain him to stop him hurting himself. Well, teachers will restrain him if they need to if they think he'll hurt himself bad, but most of the time

personal shift in attitude
Reflection on past presentation

Using strategies to manage anger
Change happened since move to specialist provision
Impact strategies have had
Changes in SEMH presentation over time – attributed to growing up
Feeling confident about teacher support – secure attachment

Issues with peers / poor peer relationships

Response from school
Reflection on own behaviour/ response to incident

Confidence in teacher response – predictable
Different definitions of "isolated"

Other peers have predictable and consistent

teachers just try and like speak to the students and try and calm them down that way.

So the last question is thinking about the education health and care plan, the EHCP and I know that when you answered the questionnaire, actually it sounds like you can't really remember getting the plan or kind of being involved in that process?

Thinking back on it now how would you like it to be different?

I'd kinda like it to be different for where like, I'd actually would of liked to be in some of the meetings of when my parents and that got it. Cuz it just feels like they stopped me from knowing something that is something in life that I probably should have known. Maybe they kept it from me for good reason, cuz three years ago I was really bad. Anger was out of control. So maybe they kept it from me, and my mum and dad tend to forget about stuff if it's like really long ago. I mean my dad not so much. Maybe it just doesn't want to tell me because maybe it just made him feel better. But I'm a bit upset that they kept it from me.

Yeah

So I think they did it for good reason. I don't think they did it because they just didn't want to tell me or that they didn't want to include me.

They probably did it so because they probably did it when I was in school and they kind of thought "yeah we won't tell him because he would probably...he probably won't know about it" and they probably wanted me to stay in school and they were doing it when I was in school.

And if you have any tips so usually what happens is during an EHCP; during an assessment, students will meet with an educational psychologist. So do you have any tips for the educational psychologist for how to talk to students about their education health and care plans?

Not really because like I said I wasn't even included in most of the meetings that mum and dad had. So i wouldn't really know. I don't really know stuff about that. It's a bit hard for me to answer questions like that. I'll still try and give in a shot.

And it sounds like maybe quite soon be able to read your read your plan and you be able to understand what it's about. Okay, but that was my last question. Is there any questions that you have for me?

Not really

Okay, should we stop the recording?

Yes

responses from teachers
Restraint used only in extremes

Feeling left out of EHCP process/ meetings – not included
Explained not being included – because of SEMH need
Feeling upset

View that Mum and Dad had best interests at heart – didn't do it to hurt him

Hard to comment on a process you know nothing about – even after 2 years of having a plan