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An exploration of secondary school Teaching Assistants' lived experiences of supporting young people identified with Social, Emotional and Mental Health needs using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

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Chapter 1: Abstract

Recent government advice has identified the important role played by schools in supporting children and young people's (CYP) social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs, with direct reference to the role of teaching assistants (TAs). Research has highlighted the variable impact of TAs in supporting children and young people's academic achievement, Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and behaviour. Within the existing research, TAs voices are often buried or excluded and there is a lack of research exploring the role of TAs supporting children and young people identified with SEMH needs. This research focused exclusively on TAs' lived experiences in order to learn more about a role in an under-researched area from the perspective of those who undertake it. Using Interpretative Phenomenology Analysis (IPA), semi-structured interviews were undertaken with three TAs employed at the same English mainstream secondary school. Each of the TAs supported at least one young person identified with SEMH needs and challenging behaviour. Challenging behaviour was used to create a homogeneous sample within a broad area of SEND. Three superordinate themes were identified: understanding the young person, processing emotions and individual approach to the TA role, and are discussed within the context of existing literature, research and psychological theory. The implications of the research findings were explicated for school and Educational Psychology (EP) practice such as the use of supervision for reflective practice.

Chapter 2: Introduction

2.1. Research Interest

My interest in the lived experiences of TAs within mainstream schools supporting CYP identified with SEMH needs stems from my own professional experiences. As a support worker in a secure forensic mental health hospital, I supported adults detained under the mental health act. When I left the mental health sector and began working in education, I worked as a TA supporting a child identified as having social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD) and provided emotional well-being support and managed challenging behaviour. I discerned many points of similarity between the two roles such as undertaking therapeutic conversations, using de-escalation techniques for behaviour, being assigned as a 'key worker' and working in a one-to-one capacity.

As I left work within a mainstream primary school and became an assistant EP and then a trainee EP, these roles often brought me into contact with TAs supporting CYP, now under the category of SEMH. The experiences I heard of and from TAs in this role, and of the needs of CYP they were supporting, strongly reminded me of my previous experiences working in a mental health hospital. I listened to a TA talk about how helpful it was just to have someone to talk to. I listened to a Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCo) talk about a TA being 'signed off sick' because of their experiences supporting a young person. I listened to EPs discuss the varied, complex and sometimes severe nature of the SEMH difficulties experienced by CYP. I listened to these experiences and I reflected on my own. I had chosen to support people's mental health and received training and support to prepare and enable me to carry out the role. It was these experiences I drew from when working as a TA. This made me wonder about TAs' who support CYP with SEMH needs in schools: their prior experiences and knowledge of SEMH needs, their expectations of this aspect of the TA role and their access to support and guidance.

Reflecting on my current practice as a trainee EP, I work directly and indirectly with TAs, providing advice, strategies and recommendations by drawing from my own experiences and through listening to others for example: the time and funding they have available to prepare resources, access to information to support their knowledge, access to well-being support, ensuring there is time made available to TAs to communicate with the Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCo), class teacher and the CYP's parents/carers. Gaining an understanding of the lived experiences of TAs undertaking this aspect of their role would provide the opportunity to learn how TAs, schools and EPs may work more effectively in supporting CYP identified with SEMH needs.

2.2. Positionality

I view myself as both an insider and an outsider researcher (Gair, 2012). I have previous experience of being a TA supporting a child with SEBD but now I occupy a different role that works directly and indirectly with TAs. This positioning compliments my choice of analysis as within IPA, the researcher is said to take both an emic and etic position because they begin by eliciting the participants 'insider's perspective' and then interpret them to make sense of their experiences in relation to the research question (Reid et al., 2005).

2.3. Definitions

The following terms are defined as they pertain to their use within this research.

2.3.1. Teaching Assistant (TA)

TA refers to non-teaching staff who are employed to support children and young people within educational settings. TA was selected as a term to represent the various titles currently ascribed to this role such as Classroom Assistant, Learning Assistant and Learning Support Assistant.

2.3.2. Lived Experience

"Phenomonologists [sic] believe that truth and understanding of life can emerge from people's life experiences" (Byrne, 2001, p.830). Early philosophical explorations of experience distinguished 'Erlebnis' meaning 'lived experience' which is an experiential phenomenon of significance to the person and explored to gain understanding of the experience from those who have experienced it (van Manen, 1990; Mapp, 2008; Smith et al., 2009; Giorgi, 2010; Davey, 2016). Describing an experience as being 'lived' signifies this research's phenomenological ontology as it is rooted within an IPA framework. 'Lived experience' within this research refers to the TAs' experiences of supporting young people identified as having SEMH needs and displaying challenging behaviour.

2.3.3. Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH)

The definition of SEMH is taken from the SEND Code of Practice (DfE, 2015) which explains SEMH as:

> 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, 2015, Section 6.32, p.86)

Initially, I attempted to create my own definition for SEMH by drawing on level descriptors using NICE clinical guidelines (NICE, 2011). This was to address criticism (Norwich and Eaton, 2015) that SEMH had not clearly been defined within the SEND Code of Practice (DfE, 2015). In doing this however, I realised that I was moving further away from the definition of SEMH as it is understood by educational settings via the SEND Code of Practice (DfE, 2015) which is the statutory guidance that educational settings must adhere to within England under the Children and Families Act 2014.

2.3.4. Challenging Behaviour

In the above excerpt (Section 6.32, DfE, 2015) displaying challenging behaviour is explained as one of many manifestations of SEMH difficulties and its use within this research was to create a homogenous sample, as discussed further in Chapter 4: Methodology. The term 'challenging behaviour' has been used within government publications over the years (e.g. DfES, 2001a; DfE, 2011; DfE, 2015; DoH, 2015; DfE 2017) but none have provided a definition to explain in what way a behaviour is perceived to be challenging within an educational setting. Whilst there is a lack of agreed terminology (DfE, 2012), research findings indicate that the "Perception of challenging behaviour is relative and is conditioned both by the context in which the behaviour occurs and by the observer's expectations" (Ofsted, 2005, p.6). To apply Ofsted's findings as a working definition within this research, challenging behaviour is perceived by participants as the "observers" within the "context" of a mainstream secondary school.

<u>**Chapter 3: Literature Review**</u>

3.1. Chapter Introduction

I will begin my review of existing literature by exploring the introduction of mental health in education, the concept of SEMH and its inception within recent legislation in order to establish the context of its current usage within schools. Subsequently, I will examine the literature to develop an understanding of research exploring lived experience as both a concept and as a methodological approach. Due to the limited research that explores TAs' experiences generally and TAs' experiences specifically related to SEMH and challenging behaviour, I have explored the literature around my research focus such as the lived experiences of various school staff in relation to SEMH needs and of TAs as it pertains to supporting children with SEND. Research relating to the role of EPs is also explored. The initial key search terms used were TA, SEMH, challenging behaviour and school, which was then expanded to include SEN/D, school staff, mental health, education and EP. Literature cited in existing research was also explored. Through a critical analysis of the literature in the aforementioned areas, I will establish the rationale and aims of my research.

3.2. Supporting Mental Health in Schools

An exploration of the changes which introduced mental health into schools will be undertaken to present the context in which SEMH as an area of need within SEND came into being. In the UK, the 21st century has seen a policy shift in the way mental health and emotional well-being are viewed within schools, for example: Every Child Matters (DfES, 2003), Children Act (2004), Future in Mind (DoH, 2015), Children and Families Act (2014) and the SEND Code of Practice (DfE, 2015). A series of UK reports in the late 90s indicating a rise in CYP experiencing mental health difficulties and a link between mental health and educational outcomes (Coleman, 2009) informed subsequent government policies on CYP's mental health and well-being. The mental health in schools agenda began with the recognition that mental health plays a role in CYP's overall well-being (DfES, 2003), the increasing role of Local Authorities (LA) in improving CYP's mental health and emotional well-being (Children Act, 2004) and specifically in relation to SEND (Children and Families Act, 2014), culminating in the role of schools (DoH, 2015) working in partnership with Health and Social Care services (DfE, 2015).

Policy documents (e.g. DoH, 2015; DfE, 2018; DoH/DfE, 2017) and research (e.g. Hornby and Atkinson, 2003; Wells et al., 2003; Spratt et al., 2006) identify schools as playing a pivotal role in being able to support CYP with their mental and emotional well-being. However, there is contention amongst researchers as to what is the purpose of schools (e.g. Coleman, 2009; Cigman, 2012). For example, Cigman (2012) outlines several polarised views as to whether

the knowledge acquired in school is understood in terms of subject proficiency which can be a vehicle to achieving positive life outcomes or if it is knowledge that equips CYP with life skills that will enable them to thrive. Some have argued that the mental health agenda in schools obscures inherent problems with an educational system that has "pathologised 'emotions'" (Ecclestone & Hayes, 2009, p.148) and created labels of deficiency and deficit such as "vulnerable" or "at risk" (Ecclestone, 2007, p.455). It is reflective of a cultural narrative catastrophizing 'risk' and 'vulnerability' that has been operationalised by a government to re-focus questions onto the 'self' rather than the 'state' (Ecclestone & Hayes, 2009; Ecclestone, 2007, 2011, 2017). The use of state-sponsored "therapeutic pedagogies" (Ecclestone & Brunila, 2015, p.501) removes human agency and autonomy by privileging and thus legitimising emotional vulnerabilities (Ecclestone & Hayes, 2009; Ecclestone, 2011, 2017).

A further complication identified by research has been the adoption of mental health approaches within schools. Finney (2006, p.24) identified the 'problem of capacity' explaining:

> My own experience suggests that teachers see themselves as already stretched in their educational role, and initiatives relating to mental health are likely to be perceived as adding to the burden, rather than lifting it.

This personal reflection by Finney (2006) was supported by similar views shared by school staff in interviews as part of Kidger et al., (2009) research. A conflict was identified between what was considered as being competing agendas: academic achievement and supporting emotional health and well-being. Kidger et al., (2009) findings support the need for a whole-school approach to enable a better fit within the existing schools' goals. Spratt et al., (2006) researched the tensions between existing school systems and the adoption of mental health approaches, including the use of initiatives as 'bolt-ons' rather than undertaking a systemic review as part of a whole-school approach. Vostanis et al., (2013) identified school's implementation of mental health provision as being predominantly reactive rather than a preventative universal approach which would be inclusive towards all children. These barriers continue to exist however, despite policies outlining school structures and cultures (DfE, 2018a) and whole-school approaches for the promotion of children's mental health (DfES, 2001a) and research such as by Hornby and Atkinson (2003) who provide a framework of support for schools that comprises four levels, from the level of 'school ethos' down to the level of 'classroom practice'.

Research has highlighted an inherent problem in the bringing together of two disparate fields: education and health (e.g. Finney, 2006; Norwich & Eaton, 2015). For example, Finney (2006) identifies several barriers to a successful merger, including: a difference in language such as

inclusion as opposed to the deficit model; how success is evaluated through academic progress versus the acceptance of relapse; how practice is supported through individual inspections in contrast to systemic reviews and supervision. Furthermore, the introduction of the SEMH category within SEND legislation (DfE, 2015) has contributed to existing tensions between the conflicting models of health and education. For example, Norwich and Eaton (2015, p.126) query that with the addition of Social Care: "How can health, social care and education professionals using such different assumptions and language work together to promote the Social, Emotional and Mental Health of children and young people?" However, it is unclear whether these difficulties were resolved with the revision of the SEND Code of Practice (DfE, 2015) in which mental health became part of the statutory guidance for schools (Foreman, 2016) due to the limited research currently available on the new Code of Practice (Kennedy, 2015).

3.3. The Introduction of SEMH

A review of the literature and research has identified numerous difficulties regarding the implementation of supporting mental health in schools. Examples include but are not exhaustive to: its integration within existing school systems; the school's approach to the mental health agenda; the delivery of mental health interventions; the merging of disparate models i.e. health and education. Many of these complications were identified when the statutory advice around mental health was the "co-operation to improve well-being" (Children Act, 2004, Section 10, p.7). When this advice was elevated to "Promoting integration" (Children Act, 2014, Section 25, p.21) and communicated via the SEND Code of Practice it became a statutory duty for schools "to identify and address the SEN [Special Educational Needs] of the pupils that they support." (DfE, 2015, Section 6.2, p.93), including CYP's Social, Emotional and Mental Health. Given the contentious climate, SEMH had an inauspicious start.

3.3.1. What is SEMH?
The term SEMH entered into educational discourse through its inception within the revised SEND Code of Practice (DfE, 2015, p.86) as one of "four broad areas of need and support" within the SEND classification. Whilst the SEND Code of Practice (DfE, 2015) uses the descriptor "broad", Norwich and Eaton (2015, p.127) however described this category of need as ambiguous, its applicability as diverse and as offering no clear guidance for "specifying the thresholds for identifying such difficulties". The way in which Section 6.32 is written appears to vacillate between precise examples of SEMH to vagaries that are open to interpretation therefore implying its audience may have varying degrees of knowledge about mental health. To which the SEND Code of Practice (DfE, 2015) advises the following:

> There is a wide range of information available on appropriate interventions for pupils with different types of need, and associated training which schools can use to ensure they have the necessary knowledge and expertise to use them. (Section 6.26, p.97)

Within a school context the SEND Code of Practice is primarily targeted at SENCos who provide advice and support to teachers and TAs. It could be argued that acquiring the necessary level of understanding of "underlying mental difficulties" (DfE, 2015, p.86) through training to be able to select and deliver "appropriate interventions" is an unreasonable expectation. Although, a government document (DfE, 2018a) providing advice on 'mental health and behaviour in schools' was recently updated to support schools with the identifying of behaviours which may indicate a mental health difficulty.

3.3.2. Supporting SEMH in Schools

There is limited research which specifically focuses on SEMH due to its relatively recent entry into educational practice through the SEND Code of Practice (Kennedy, 2015). Hence, the majority of the research I have drawn upon uses previous categories of need such as SEBD (e.g. Groom & Rose, 2005) and Behavioural Emotional and Social Difficulties (BESD) (e.g. Burton & Goodman, 2011), as well as more general terms such as 'mental health' (e.g. Armstrong, 2014) 'emotional health' (e.g. Kidger et al., 2009) and 'well-being' (e.g. Spratt et al., 2006).

From within the literature, Kidger et al., (2009) identifies two main groups in relation to the role of education in supporting CYP's SEMH: at a whole-school level and at an individual level. Some of the ways of supporting children at a whole-school level include at a policy level (Hornby & Atkinson, 2003), within the curriculum (Spratt et al., 2006) and as part of the school's ethos (Hornby & Atkinson, 2003). At the individual level i.e. classrooms, groups, one-to-one, research has explored the varied roles of school staff in implementing behaviour management policies (e.g. Clarke & Visser, 2017), providing pastoral provision (e.g. Hornby & Atkinson, 2003) and delivering therapeutic interventions (e.g. Vostanis et al., 2013). This role often lies with TAs who are considered as crucial in supporting the inclusion of CYP with SEMH needs (e.g. Groom & Rose, 2005; Burton & Goodman, 2011).

3.4. The Role of TAs within Schools

The role of TAs within schools has changed significantly over the years (Groom, 2006) from their beginnings as a "mum's army of paint-pot washers" (Clarke & Visser, 2017, p.66) to their developing status as professionals placed within a "wider pedagogical role" (Webster et al., 2011, p.3). As their role and responsibilities has expanded, so too have the numbers of TAs (Blasford et al., 2017; Webster & Blatchford, 2019). Recent consensus data indicates that in

the past six years, the total number of TAs employed within English mainstream schools has increased by forty-three thousand (DfE, 2018b). Despite occupying almost one third of the staff workforce in schools (DfE, 2018b), there continues to be limited research that focuses directly on the voices, perceptions and experiences of TAs generally, and specifically in relation to SEMH (Roffey-Barentsen & Watt, 2014; Trent, 2014; Clarke, 2019). Due to the paucity of peer-reviewed research on TAs supporting CYP with SEMH, it became necessary to explore the TA role within existing available frameworks: SEN, academic achievement and behaviour.

3.4.1. Inclusion and SEN

The transformation of the TA role from "Mum's army" to professional (Blasford et al., 2017, p. 289) began with the inclusion of CYP with SEND within mainstream schools as part of a series of policy changes both nationally and internationally (e.g. 1981 Education Act; the Salamanca Statement, UNESCO, 1994; Excellence for All Children, DfEE, 1998). Understanding the meaning of inclusion is complex because "definitions and perceptions of disability and special needs are culturally and contextually determined" (Ainscow and Miles, 2008, p.30). Sikes et al., (2007) argue that because 'inclusion' as a concept is vague, the subsequent interpretation and application by schools is similarly confused. This confusion is apparent in the role of the TA (e.g. Webster et al., 2011; Webster et al., 2013) who are considered by some as being "central to…the inclusion agenda" (Burton & Goodman, 2011; Webster et al., 2011, p.4).

The request for clarification is a reoccurring theme amongst the research around the role of TAs (e.g. Rubie-Davis et al., 2010; Webster et al., 2013). The Schools White Paper (DfE, 2010) and SEN Green paper (DfE, 2011) outline the importance of effective support, training, deployment and management of TAs to enable them to support both teachers and CYP to achieve. However, other than defining the overuse of TAs in supporting CYP with SEN as unacceptable practice, the decisions around a TA's responsibilities is handed over to the schools. With no clear guidance from the government on how to use TAs effectively (Webster et al., 2013), researchers have developed their own recommendations (e.g. Webster et al., 2011) and strategies (e.g. Webster et al., 2013) to support school system's continued use of TAs in response to variable findings on the impact of TAs (e.g. Blatchford et al., 2007; Farrell et al., 2010).

3.4.2. Academic achievement

Initially employed to support CYP with SEN within mainstream classrooms as part of the "inclusion agenda" (Webster et al., 2011, p.4), the role of TAs was expanded to support the needs of all CYP (Alborz et al., 2008) including the progression of CYP's learning. There is a

prolific body of research exploring the impact of TAs in improving CYP's academic achievement (e.g. Blatchford et al., 2007; Blatchford et al., 2009; Farrell et al., 2010; Webster et al., 2010), including Webster et al., (2011) DISS project which was "the largest piece of research conducted into TAs worldwide" (Clarke, 2019, p.3). Research conducted on the impact of TA support on CYP with SEN has been highly critical as several studies found CYP made less progress when they were supported by a TA (e.g. Blatchford et al., 2007; Blatchford et al., 2009; Webster et al., 2010; Webster et al., 2013; Webster & Blatchford, 2017).

However, a critical evaluation of this body of research raises questions regarding the assessment of academic progress in CYP with SEN and the interpretation of research findings. Firstly, assumptions were made about the academic progress of CYP with SEN. For example, Webster et al., (2011, p.7) gauged the expected rate of progress for CYP with SEN as comparable to the "general" expectation for all pupils. Arguably this could be viewed as an unreasonable expectation when the Code of Practice's (DfES, 2001b, p.6) definition for SEN at the time of this research was: "Children have special educational needs if they...have a significantly greater difficulty in learning than the majority of children of the same age". In addition, it could be argued that research findings which noted "negative effects" between academic progress and TA support (e.g. Webster et al., 2010, p.319; Webster et al., 2011, p. 3) have viewed this as a causality as opposed to a correlation. For example, Webster et al., (2010, p.325) reasoned that "the most obvious explanation" for this relationship was that "pupils who were given most TA support would have been likely to make less progress."

Whilst this area of research identified difficulties around the TA role, it also noted these problems were often beyond the control of TAs for example, relating to organisational factors, and emphasised that "TAs were not to blame" (Webster et al., 2013, p.79). Consequently, a wealth of recommendations was generated from this research to help guide the systems around the TA role which for brevity is summarised below:

- **Deployment** – TAs are most effective when supporting individuals or small groups of CYP using a specific intervention as opposed to providing general whole-class support (Farrell et al., 2010; Rubie-Davis et al., 2010; Webster et al., 2011; Webster et al., 2013).
- **Initial Training and CPD (Continuing Professional Development)** – Misapplication of teaching strategies was believed to be caused by a lack of training. TAs require training in teaching strategies and in the intervention they are being asked to deliver (Groom, 2006; Wilson & Bedford, 2008; Farrell et al., 2010; Rubie-Davis et al., 2010).

- **Support and Monitoring** – Teachers need to continually support and monitor TAs in their delivery of interventions with CYP to ensure their effectiveness (Groom, 2006; Farrell et al., 2010).
- **Planning and Preparedness** – TAs misunderstanding of teaching concepts was considered to be due to a lack of preparedness. Time for joint planning between teachers and TAs enables TAs to feel prepared (Wilson & Bedford, 2008; Rubie-Davis et al., 2010; Webster et al., 2011).

Whilst this guidance is aimed at the systems around the TA role and the research conveys messages commenting on the "important role" and "huge potential" of TAs (Blatchford et al., 2009, p.140) these aspects of the research can become obscured by attention-grabbing headlines in the media which focus instead on the 'negative effects' of TAs (e.g. Friedburg, 2009; Patton, 2009).

A consistent finding amongst this area of research observed the positive effect the TA role for teachers' well-being and workload, and in managing CYP's behaviour (e.g. Blatchford et al., 2009; Webster et al., 2010; Webster et al., 2011) leading to questions which asked what the TA role could be (Blatchford et al., 2007) and whether that role should be pedagogical (Webster et al., 2011). An alternate view of the TA role considered their "untapped potential" which as a result of their role expansion enabled TAs to contribute in multiple ways (Groom, 2006, p. 203; Webster et al., 2013, p.80) including providing non-academic or 'soft skills' support such as well-being or behaviour (Webster et al., 2011; Sharples et al., 2015; Clarke & Visser, 2016; Clarke, 2019).

3.4.3. Behaviour and emotional well-being

Workforce re-modelling of the TA role under the Labour government during the late 90s expanded their duties on the inclusion of CYP with SEN to include, amongst other things, managing behaviour (DfES, 2001b; Bach et al., 2006). Prior to the SEND Code of Practice (DfE, 2015) and the introduction of SEMH, research exploring TAs' roles in relation to supporting CYP's behaviour, have also considered their social and/or emotional needs and used terms such as SEBD, BESD, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties (EBD) (Burton et al., 2009; Abbott et al., 2011; Armstrong, 2014; Mowat, 2015). Whilst treated as disparate needs by some research (e.g. Clarke & Visser, 2016), and collectively by others (e.g. Burton & Goodman, 2011), I have reviewed them here together as SEMH incorporates social, emotional and descriptions of behaviour that are "challenging, disruptive or disturbing" (DfE, 2015, p.86).

Research has highlighted behaviour management as playing a large part in the role of TAs (Blatchford et al., 2007; Abbott et al., 2011; Blatchford & Webster, 2018) either to support an individual's engagement with learning or as means of "containing behaviour" so as to reduce its impact on whole-class learning (Wren, 2017; Slater & Gazeley, 2018, p.8). This aspect of a TA's role is highly valued by teachers and is perceived by teachers as having a positive impact on CYP's behaviour (Woolfson & Truswell, 2005; Bach et al., 2006; Blatchford et al., 2009; Webster et al., 2010; Webster et al., 2011). Similarly, "the role of the teaching assistant is perceived as crucial to the effective inclusion of pupils with SEBD in mainstream classrooms." (Groom & Rose, 2005, p.20) and the "responsibility for including students with BESD in mainstream schools falls heavily on nonteaching staff" (Burton & Goodman, 2011, p.133).

Findings on the efficacy of TA support in this area however are deemed as being mixed (Alborz et al., 2009; Blatchford et al., 2009; Sharples et al., 2015) although this may be dependent upon how the TA role is construed within the research. For example, research findings from both Groom and Rose (2005) and Burton and Goodman (2011) reported TAs as having a crucial role in the inclusion of CYP with SEBD. Whereas Mowat (2015) considered the deployment of TAs as a perfunctory response to the inclusion of CYP with SEBD:

> The attachment of learning auxiliaries/assistants to such pupils within the classroom setting often does little more than act as a sticking plaster (while drawing even more attention to their difficulties), rather than dealing with the root of the problem – it is more about maintaining classroom order than meeting the needs of the individual child. (Mowat, 2015, p.169).

Whilst Groom (2006, p.203) envisioned utilising the "untapped potential" of a TA's role as part of the workforce remodelling, Clarke and Visser's (2016) review of literature on TAs managing behaviour found the changes to be problematic due to a lack of clear understanding of a TA's role and responsibilities. A continuing point made by researchers is the limited research in relation to TAs' support of CYP's emotional and behavioural needs, and that further research is needed (Alborz et al., 2009; Farrell et al., 2010; Webster et al., 2013; Sharples et al., 2015; Clarke & Visser, 2016).

3.4.4. SEMH

Since its relatively recent introduction as an area of need under the umbrella of SEND (DfE, 2015), there is a small but growing body of research specifically focused on SEMH (e.g. Kennedy, 2015; Sheffield & Morgan, 2017; Carroll & Hurry, 2018) some of which gives consideration to the role of TAs (e.g. Dimitrellou & Hurry, 2018; Middleton, 2018; Willis &

Baines, 2018). Initial findings from research conducted within the area of SEMH has noted the most common form of support for CYP identified with SEMH needs is one-to-one support from a TA (Sheffield & Morgan, 2017). Supervision has been recommended to support the impact on TA's personal and professional lives (Middleton, 2018). Other professions working in similar environments receive clinical supervision as part of their practice (Willis & Baines, 2018) because "These practitioners will often be involved in work that is emotionally draining, physically exhausting and occasionally dangerous" (Cole, 2010, p.1). Group supervision for staff working in a specialist SEMH school was found to raise staff morale, self-efficacy and team unity (Willis & Baines, 2018).

Further research in this area has become a necessity since explicit references to TAs are made within the SEND Code of Practice (DfE, 2015): TAs are named alongside other teaching professionals as providing appropriately differentiated teaching and learning "to meet a particular type of SEN" (Section 4.32, p.69); teachers are named as being "responsible and accountable" for the support CYP receive from TAs with regards to their progression and development (Section 6.36, p.99); when the support CYP receive from a TA is undertaken away from the teacher and/or classroom, teachers are required to work closely with TAs "to plan and assess the impact of support and interventions and how they can be linked to classroom teaching." (Section 6.52, p.101).

Parallels can be drawn between these three references and some of the themes I extrapolated from the literature offering guidance on the role of TAs within schools. For example, TAs will need support and monitoring by teachers to evaluate the intervention and planning time with the teacher to prepare the differentiated learning. There are no explicit directions as to how to deploy TAs or any mention of training TAs to enable a deeper understanding of the needs of the CYP they are supporting or of the intervention they are implementing. Comparable to the definition of SEMH, the use of TAs to support CYP identified with SEMH needs is also partially explained and partly open to the interpretation of the reader. One way of exploring how the role of TAs is being interpreted within school settings, is to listen to staff's lived experiences, a method that allows for the information to be presented in their own words.

3.5. Research Exploring Lived Experience
Researching lived experiences offers an opportunity to learn about what is happening within school settings through enabling the reader to 'look behind the curtain' to gain insight on a perspective that may ordinarily be unavailable to them. There are remarkably few pieces of research, in the context of supporting children with SEMH, that openly identify themselves as being phenomenological or as exploring staff's lived experiences. For example, Clarke and

Visser (2017) and Symes and Humphrey (2011) make oblique references to using phenomenology in their research. There is literature that has gathered perceptions, experiences and attitudes in relation to SEMH, although it typically focuses on the experiences of teachers (e.g. Rothì et al., 2008a; Graham et al., 2011), a mixture of school staff (e.g. Rothì et al., 2008b; Kidger et al., 2009) and to a lesser extent, those of CYP (e.g. Macleod, 2006; Sheffield & Morgan, 2017). It is from within this body of research that I will now explore.

3.5.1. Experiences of school staff

Research on teacher's experiences has identified gaps in their knowledge that are not filled during initial training or through CPD opportunities (e.g. Rothì et al., 2008a). A lack of capacity to take on more responsibility can lead to the 'bolt on' phenomena identified by Spratt et al., (2006). Attitudes and perceptions can be dependent upon previous experiences (Armstrong, 2014) and may be affected by the understanding and containment of teacher's well-being such as through the use of supervision (Rae et al., 2017). A need for supervision and/or emotional well-being support for teachers was a recurring theme throughout the research findings within literature that explored their experiences (e.g. Kidger et al., 2009; Graham et al., 2011, Rae et al., 2017).

One example of research that gathered the experiences of other members of school staff is by Kidger et al., (2009), who interviewed staff whose role related to, as they termed it, 'emotional health and well-being' such as TAs and Learning Mentors. Whilst their findings corroborated those of other studies whose focus was teacher's experiences for example, training needs and well-being support, one perceived limitation of the study is that support staff were not asked to discuss their own experiences.

3.5.2. Experiences of children and young people (CYP)

Research exploring CYP's experiences in relation to SEMH typically focuses on mental health services (e.g. Day et al., 2006; Day, 2008; Worrall-Davies & Marino-Francis, 2008) or their perceptions of mental health itself (e.g. Wahl, 2002; Roose & John, 2003; Chrisholm et al., 2016). With regards to research focusing on school staff supporting CYP with SEMH within school, one example is by Sheffield and Morgan (2017, p.50) who interviewed young people with a "BESD/SEMH classification" to explore their understanding of the label, their self-perceptions and experiences within school. Young people talked about the support they received from TAs: some viewed the academic support they received positively but others perceived certain aspects of the support negatively. For example, some found the support stigmatising as they differed from their peers or the TA support involved them being separated from their peers. Whereas, Fox and Butler (2007) gathered young people's perspectives on

school counselling services through surveys and focus groups. Recommendations were made about accessibility and acceptability: there were mixed views about speaking to strangers and concerns over stigmatisation. In this instance, a TA would arguably be in a better position to foster a relationship as opposed to an unfamiliar member of staff, although the issue of stigmatisation would remain.

3.5.3. Experiences of TAs

A critical evaluation of the existing research on TAs' experiences reveals a lack of TAs' voice (Mackenzie, 2011; Clarke, 2019) which are either excluded from research on TAs entirely (e.g. Wilson and Bedford, 2008) or more frequently gathered in conjunction with others such as CYP, parents/carers, teachers, SENCos or headteachers (e.g. Groom & Rose, 2005; Abbott et al., 2011; Trent, 2014; Slater & Gazeley, 2018). This is understandable if the purpose of the research is to explore aspects of the role related to perceptions of TAs (e.g. Wren, 2017), the inter-relationships between members of school staff and/or CYP (e.g. Watson et al., 2013) or to develop an understanding of wider perceptions (e.g. Sikes et al., 2007; Burton & Goodman, 2011). However, if the objective of the research is to explore TAs' perceptions or experiences of their role then it arguably becomes problematic if the information gathered about the role of TAs is provided by those who are not TAs. Furthermore, methods of data collection such as focus groups whereby TAs' experiences are gathered with other members of school staff could be affected by the power dynamic. Although, some research has highlighted that such groupings have a positive impact as they have encouraged staff unity (Willis & Baines, 2018) and the co-construction of meaning through the sharing of experiences (Watson et al., 2013).

Existing research that has exclusively focused on exploring TAs' experiences include their status (Watson et al., 2013) their self-efficacy (Higgins & Gulliford, 2014), supporting CYP with SEN (Mackenzie, 2011; Lehane, 2016; Bowles et al., 2018), with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) (Symes & Humphrey, 2011), with visual impairments (McLachlan, 2016) and in nurture groups (Middleton, 2018). To date, there is no peer-reviewed research that exclusively explores the experiences of TAs supporting CYP identified with SEMH needs within a mainstream classroom setting. Some researchers have viewed the lack of research using TAs' voice, particularly in the large-scale research projects, through a feminist lens and deem it indicative of the gendered perspective of the role (Graves, 2014; Clarke, 2019). For example, the largest research project on TAs worldwide gathered TAs' perspectives through questionnaires (Webster et al., 2010). As Roffey-Barentsen and Watt (2014, p. 29) propose: "maybe the voices of TAs should be heard to enable them to be more effective in their roles".

3.6. The Role of Educational Psychologists (EPs)

Within the body of research focused on the role of TAs, the role of EPs is seldom mentioned. Of the few studies that have made direct reference to EPs, their role is attributed to the delivery of training to school staff to support their professional development (Bowles et al., 2018) and to offer systemic support (Higgins & Gulliford, 2014). It is unclear why the role of EPs is not discussed more within research focused on TAs supporting the inclusion of CYP with SEND, particularly when the role of EPs is cited in statutory and non-statutory guidance (DfES, 2001b; DfE, 2015; DoH, 2015; DoH/DfE, 2017; DfE, 2018a; DHSC/DfE, 2018):

> The educational psychologist can be a very important resource for the school. The psychologist's knowledge of the school and its context is key. Through regular consultation with schools educational psychology services can provide help in clarifying problems and devising problem solving strategies; in carrying out specialised assessments, including techniques in managing behaviour, and evaluating individual pupil progress. In addition to working with individual children, the educational psychologist can work with groups of pupils or teachers and learning support assistants at the classroom or whole school level, for example assisting schools with the development of SEN and behaviour policies, helping to develop knowledge and skills for school staff and assisting with projects to raise achievement and promote inclusion. (DfES, 2001b, Section 10:8, p.136)

Supporting SEMH needs has recently been identified as a "fundamental" part of an EPs' role (DfE, 2019, p.11) therefore an understanding of the experiences of TAs supporting CYP in this area would better inform the recommendations made by EPs as part of their psychological advice such as identifying provision and interventions. EPs are well placed to identify areas of need and offer support and guidance through, for example, collaborating with TAs during consultations and observing TAs supporting CYP. Developing a better understanding of TAs' experiences would enable EPs to work more effectively in supporting the needs of CYP.

3.7. Rationale and Research Aims

There is a gap in the research exploring the role of TAs supporting CYP's needs as identified within the SEMH category. This is at odds with governmental advice which identifies the important role played by schools in supporting aspects of SEMH such as mental health (e.g. DoH, 2015; DfE, 2018a), statutory guidance that identifies SEMH as a category of need (e.g. DfE, 2015) and government proposals which outline how schools can support areas related to SEMH, including direct reference to the role of TAs:

> There is evidence that appropriately-trained and supported staff such as teachers, school nurses, counsellors, and teaching assistants can achieve results comparable to those achieved by trained therapists in delivering a number of interventions addressing mild to moderate mental health problems (such as anxiety, conduct

disorder, substance use disorders and post-traumatic stress disorder). (DoH/DfE, 2017, p.38).

Existing research exploring the role of TAs within schools has been carried out with a view of creating change at a whole-school or policy level (e.g. Webster & Blatchford, 2017) and has typically invited a multitude of perspectives in addition to TAs such as SENCos, teachers, parents/carers and CYP (e.g. Webster et al., 2011; Webster et al., 2013; Webster & Blatchford, 2013). This research focuses exclusively on TAs to learn more about a role in an under-researched area from the perspective of those who undertake it.

This study's research question is: what are the lived experiences of TAs within a mainstream secondary school who support young people identified with SEMH needs and challenging behaviour?

The research aims are:
- To explore TAs' lived experiences of supporting young people identified with SEMH needs and challenging behaviour.
- To discuss the implications for mainstream secondary school's practice regarding TAs within this role.
- To discuss the implications for EP practice regarding direct and indirect working with TAs in this role.

3.8. Chapter Summary
An exploration of the literature concerning the expansion of the TA role within the UK education system following workforce reforms as part of the inclusion agenda was undertaken to demonstrate the current context of this research. A number of large-scale projects have demonstrated the variable impact of TAs' regarding the academic achievement of CYP with SEND (e.g. Webster et al., 2010; Webster & Blatchford, 2013; Webster & Blatchford, 2017). Yet TAs continue to be identified within statutory and non-statutory government guidance to support the inclusion of CYP with SEND (DfE, 2015) and as part of the mental health agenda in schools (DoH, 2015).

A review of the extant research and literature on the role of TAs echoes assertions made by previous researchers on the lack of TAs' voices (e.g. Mackenzie, 2011; Clarke, 2019). This is of particular pertinence since the role of TAs has expanded further to supporting CYP's mental health under the SEMH category of need. The growing body of research on SEMH has noted the challenging nature of the work and its subsequent impact on staff well-being (e.g.

Middleton 2018; Willis & Baines, 2018). To date there is no peer-reviewed research that explores the experiences of TAs supporting CYP identified with SEMH needs within mainstream classroom settings.

Chapter 4: Methodology

4.1. Chapter Introduction

The information in the following two chapters is divided into components that informed the research's design such as the methodological approach (Chapter 4: Methodology) and the procedural elements, including the participant sample and recruitment (Chapter 5: Procedure). In this chapter I explain how my research philosophy guided my reasoning for choosing IPA as the approach for this research and how my decisions behind the research's design, including the development of the participant sample criteria and interview schedule were based on IPA guidance. Ethical considerations are discussed and a framework of research quality is presented. Personal reflections regarding the process of carrying out the methodology are interspersed throughout this thesis to demonstrate transparency as it relates to research quality and IPA's use of phenomenological reflexive bracketing.

4.2. Research Philosophy

As discussed previously, my dual positionality as both an insider and outsider researcher has guided my approach to this research (Gair, 2012). My experiences of working as a TA supporting a child with, what was then classified as SEBD, in addition to supporting adults with mental health difficulties, has influenced my perception of the existing literature on TAs. It was my experiences that made me curious about the experiences of TAs and I wondered why TAs' experiences had rarely been the focus of any research, particularly as they support CYP with a wide spectrum of SEND needs of varying degrees. My curiosity about TAs' experiences supporting young people identified with SEMH needs and challenging behaviour became the impetus for exploring a research method that would enable me to explore and understand these experiences through talking to TAs undertaking this role.

4.3. Choosing a Methodology

As a researcher, I subscribe to the aspect of pragmatic philosophy which views all research paradigms as being of equal import and selects a methodology most befitting the research question (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2005; Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006). Consequently, I explored various methodological approaches that could support this endeavour to ensure I had made an informed choice.

I rejected the use of quantitative methods and mixed methods approaches, as I wished for depth of individual experience over breadth of general experiences. I deemed that a quantitative approach would disenable the gathering of rich and detailed data which I

perceived TAs' experiences to be. In contrast, I regarded a qualitative approach as being able to facilitate the opportunity to delve deeper into TAs' experiences.

To demonstrate transparency as a researcher (Yardley, 2000) I offer a succinct overview of the reasoning behind my decision-making process when considering the four main qualitative approaches as potential research approaches: grounded theory, discursive (including Foucauldian discourse analysis), narrative and phenomenological psychology. Whilst grounded theory would enable the exploratory research of a particular phenomenon which I perceived as being missing from the extant literature, I did not feel that the exploration of individual TAs' experiences warranted a hypothesis-driven and theory-generating approach due to the lack of TAs' voices in existing research and particularly this aspect of a TA's role (Willig, 2008; Charmaz & Henwood, 2008). Although discursive psychology and Foucauldian discourse analysis focus on language in different ways, both approaches view 'reality' through the social construction of discourse, including experience (Willig, 2008). I did not wish to filter experience through the lens of discourse but to gain a closer understanding of their experience to enable my understanding of what this experience is like for them.

I wished to use an approach that explored TAs' experiences within a wider context which would be possible through a narrative or phenomenological approach. Both approaches give voice to participants and offer a window into their lives through recounting their experiences. Both approaches are influenced by the hermeneutics/interpretivist approach to the meaning-making of experience (Hiles & Čermák, 2008). Both approaches however view these experiences differently. Whilst narrative psychology would explore the structure or content of a TA's experience through the framework of a story (Smith et al., 2009), phenomenological psychology would be concerned with the TA's lived experience (Langdridge, 2007) and asks "what is this experience like?" in an attempt to gain understanding and meaning (Laverty, 2003, p.22) therefore further exploration of phenomenological approaches was undertaken.

Phenomenology offers two main approaches: descriptive and interpretative (Willig, 2008; Smith et al., 2009). The former, developed by Giorgi and derived from Husserl and Merleau-Ponty, involves the researcher adopting a phenomenological attitude or 'lifeworld' by engaging in pre-transcendental reduction (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2008). This form of phenomenology seeks to describe the phenomena of experience rather than explain the phenomena (Langdridge, 2007). Interpretative and hermeneutic phenomenology, as developed by Heidegger and subsequently Gadamer, seeks to interpret experience to gain understanding and acknowledges a researcher's pre-suppositions as part of their mean-making process (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2008; Willig, 2008). As it was my experiences that drew me to research TAs'

experiences, interpretative and hermeneutic phenomenology was viewed as a more suitable approach.

Of the various methods of interpretative phenomenology, IPA was chosen because its widespread use within qualitative psychology (Langdridge, 2007; Smith, 2011a) has generated a wealth of research by those who have developed it (e.g. Smith, 2004, 2011a, 2011b, 2017; Smith et al., 2009), used it (e.g. Warwick et al., 2004; Murray & Rhodes, 2005; Marriott & Thompson, 2008) and evaluated it (e.g. Brocki & Wearden, 2006; Larkin et al., 2006; Langdridge, 2007; Chamberlain, 2011; Finlay, 2014). In addition, its creator, Jonathan Smith co-developed guidelines that took into consideration researchers who were writing theses and/or are new to using this approach (Smith et al., 2009). Smith also offered guidance that was explicitly and repeatedly stated as not being prescriptive but actively encouraged researchers to use it flexibly and creatively (Smith et al., 2009). Furthermore, Smith (2017) proposed that IPA could be used to explore positive phenomena which would enable the TA's in this research to share their experiences in an inductive way.

In summation, drawing from the philosophy of the pragmatic paradigm which posits that the research question/s influences the research's approach (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2005; Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006), this research was interested in exploring the experiences of TAs within a specific aspect of their role, and having reviewed the various qualitative approaches, IPA was deemed as the most appropriate choice. Further exploration of IPA is necessary in order to demonstrate how it underpins this research's design and analysis.

4.4. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)

IPA is a qualitative research approach that represents a specific epistemological position with guidelines for data collection and analysis (Smith, 2004; Eatough & Smith, 2008). IPA is interested in exploring a person's lived experience, in particular how they understand and make sense of their experience (Eatough & Smith, 2008; Smith, 2011a). The researcher's engagement with the personal lived experience occurs through a process of analytical interpretation to explore the participant's cognitive and affective responses to their experience (Smith 2011a). Each individual's experience is examined to explore patterns in themes within a given sample and then related to existing psychological theory and literature (Larkin et al., 2006; Smith, 2011a, 2011b).

4.4.1. IPA's Theoretical Roots

Smith, the founder of IPA, explains IPA's theoretical basis as being phenomenological, hermeneutical and idiographical (Smith et al., 2009; Smith, 2011a, 2017). As IPA is the

principle qualitative approach that has been used in this research, an exploration of the individual theories which IPA has drawn from will give transparency regarding the coherency of this research's philosophy and design as part of my commitment to research quality (Yardley, 2000).

4.4.2. Phenomenology

IPA aligns itself with phenomenology because it seeks to understand a person's perception of the world through their lived experiences (Langdridge, 2007). Phenomenology has witnessed many permutations since its conception by Husserl at the beginning of the 20th century. In addition to Husserl, the phenomenological perspectives of IPA are derived from the works of Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and Sartre (Smith et al., 2009; Smith, 2011b). IPA recognises these variations and accordingly views phenomenology from a holistic standpoint (Smith et al., 2009; Smith, 2018).

Starting with Husserl, IPA takes the essence of 'intentionality' to inform its understanding of reflection by the individual of their experience, which can be achieved through 'bracketing' the researcher's preconceptions via systematic processes of 'reduction'. Whilst IPA does not follow Husserl's path of transcendentalism, it does utilise aspects of bracketing as part of its methodological and analytical framework for example, the researcher brackets their preconceptions before embarking upon an interview (Smith et al., 2009).

IPA also draws from the existential movement of phenomenology, primarily led by Heidegger and built upon by Merleau-Ponty and Sartre. IPA acknowledges that a person's perception of their lived experience occurs within a context beyond that of Husserl's individual, whether this is in the form of Heidegger's 'Dasein' (human existence) within a temporal and historical context, or Merleau-Ponty's subjective physical embodiment of experience at it relates to perception, or Sartre's concept of 'nothingness' and interconnectivity in relation to experience (Racher & Robinson, 2002; Larkin et al., 2006; Eatough & Smith, 2008; Smith et al., 2009). IPA stems from a multi-faceted phenomenological approach to reflect its ontology and epistemology. IPA research understands a person's intersubjective perception of their experience occurs within a personal, social and historical context, and it recognises lived experience as being complex phenomena (Eatough & Smith, 2008; Smith et al., 2009).

4.4.3. Hermeneutics

The role of hermeneutics underpins the interpretative aspect of IPA which references the work of Heidegger, Schleiermacher and Gadamer (Smith et al., 2009). Hermeneutics, like

phenomenology, was not originally designed for use within psychological research. As a result, the following concepts have been extrapolated for its application within IPA.

IPA draws from Heidegger who views interpretation as an integral part of phenomenology as a means of examining experiences as they appear to the person experiencing them, and where the concept of appearance suggests the uncovering of things that may be visible or hidden (Eatough & Smith, 2008; Smith et al., 2009). IPA also interprets Heidegger's thoughts around 'fore-conception' as a form of reflexive bracketing i.e. interpretation requires the active awareness of one's own thoughts which may change before, during and after the interpretation process (Smith et al., 2009). In IPA, this thinking informs the analysis of multiple participants' lived experiences because the researcher needs to be aware of their own prior knowledge regarding each analysis in order to consider each lived experience individually before comparing patterns across experiences. I have shared my personal reflections within the main body of this research thesis and refer to additional reflections within the appendices to demonstrate my awareness of my pre-suppositions and to share my internal dialogue throughout my research journey.

IPA is influenced by Schleiermacher's exploration of the individual and wider contexts of the lived experience and of the interpreter (Smith et al., 2009). Gadamer's work on hermeneutics builds on Schleiermacher's and Heidegger's regarding the level of engagement between the interpreter and the participant's lived experience i.e. understanding occurs through universality and the meeting of horizons between the researcher and participant (Dowling, 2007). IPA also recognises Ricoeur's hermeneutics of empathy and suspicion in relation to its interpretation of experience. Both approaches are utilised in IPA which allows for interpretation of experience from the insider perspective of the participant and from the outsider viewpoint of the researcher (Smith, 2004; Smith et al., 2009).

Finally, IPA utilises a concept known as the 'hermeneutic circle' as part of its interpretative process of analysis. This concept views interpretation as occurring within different contextual levels through repeated engagement with the data. IPA considers how with each engagement with the data brings with it a new perspective for the interpreter. IPA extends this concept to engage in a process known as 'double hermeneutics' wherein the interpreter, or in this case the researcher, is attempting to understand the lived experiences of the participants as they are understood by the participant (Smith 2004, 2017).

4.4.4. Idiography

IPA is congruent with an idiographic approach as it aims to examine each personal lived experience in detail before exploring the convergence and divergence amongst themes within a given corpus (Smith, 2004; Smith, 2011a, 2017). Due to the in-depth nature of the analytical process, IPA is predominantly undertaken using a small sample which allows the researcher to generate rich data through focusing on the particular details of the participant's lived experiences (Smith, 2004; Smith et al., 2009; Smith 2011a). For this reason, a nomothetic approach would not be compatible with the idiographic epistemology of IPA nor would it suit the purpose of this research which does not aim to generalise the participant's experiences but rather to privilege each one in its own right.

4.4.5. Evaluation of IPA

Literature evaluating IPA as a research approach has predominantly been undertaken by its creator, Smith as a means of providing guidance for researchers using IPA (e.g. Smith, 2004; Smith, 2011) and in response to criticism of IPA (e.g. Smith, 2010; Smith, 2011a; Smith, 2018). Criticisms directed at IPA typically focus on its method of analysis which is likened to Thematic Analysis and the integrity of its theoretical underpinnings (e.g. Langdridge, 2007; Chamberlain, 2011; Giorgi, 2011; Finlay, 2014; van Manen, 2017).

When outlining the analytical procedure of IPA, both Langdridge (2007) and Finlay (2014) use the term 'Thematic Analysis' to describe the method of interpretation used by IPA. Madill et al., (2005, p.617) similarly uses the term Thematic Analysis in relation to IPA, and explains that as a research approach, it is "less time-consuming than other more detailed approaches to analysis, such as discourse analysis." However, Larkin et al., (2006, p.103) attributes this overly simplistic and common misconception of what they describe as 'first order' analysis to misunderstanding "IPA [which] can be easy to do badly, and difficult to do well".

Braun and Clarke (2006) propose that IPA differs from thematic analysis in four ways: it seeks patterns across data, these patterns are underpinned by theory, its epistemology is phenomenological and it seeks to understand the phenomena of individual experience in great detail. In their research, Warwick et al., (2004) utilised both thematic analysis and IPA and in their conclusion noted that because IPA was "more informative" and due to space restrictions, their research paper gave more room to the IPA analysis and reduced the thematic analysis to a table. Perhaps this is because, as Brocki and Wearden (2006, p.89) explain: "IPA starts with, but should go beyond, a standard thematic analysis." Larkin et al., (2006) identifies this as 'second order' analysis as it involves the researcher's interpretation of the participant's lived world experience that is informed by existing theoretical constructs.

There have been a number of rebuttals between Smith and other researchers (e.g. Chamberlain, 2011; Giorgi, 2010; 2011; van Manen, 2017) regarding the aetiology of IPA. Chamberlain (2011) criticised Smith's prescriptive methods of analysis as not being hermeneutic and gave a description of IPA's analytical process which was similar to that of Thematic Analysis. Smith's (2011b) response to this criticism was an acknowledgement that by making IPA accessible to novice IPA researchers, it can be perceived as being descriptive and prescriptive but as Smith explains, these are guidelines and not a recipe. Smith goes on to emphasise IPA's commitment to iterative interpretative processes which adhere to the principles of specific hermeneutics that perhaps, Smith suggests, Chamberlain may not subscribe to. In response to Chamberlain's criticisms I have discussed in Chapter 5: Procedure which of Smith's guidelines out of the suggested options I followed in my application of IPA (Smith et al., 2009) and demonstrated how I engaged in hermeneutic interpretation through reflecting on the process of analysis.

Giorgi (2010, p.4) contends that without a "phenomenological theory of science" researchers who apply the philosophy of phenomenology for use within psychology are not consistent with the ontology and epistemology of phenomenology, and cites IPA as an example. Giorgi (2010, p.7) further criticises IPA's non-prescriptive methodology and analysis as examples of "poor science" because its freely adaptable method and lack of systematic analysis prohibits verifiability. Smith's (2010) response addresses the criticism of verifiability through discussing the nature of qualitative and quantitative research differences in terms of criteria for evaluating validity for example, the use of transparency over replicability. Giorgi's (2011) reply to this rebuttal by Smith (2010) raised concern regarding the 'superficial' nature of IPA's adherence to phenomenology and hermeneutics, its misuse of concepts such as bracketing and phenomenological reduction and its lack of explicit reference as to how IPA's methodology and analysis relate to its theoretical foundation. I have employed transparency to address two of Giorgi's criticisms of IPA: to demonstrate research quality and through my use of reflection, to show how I have applied IPA and its theoretical underpinnings within this research.

More recently, van Manen (2017)'s article attempted to distinguish phenomenology from other qualitative research methodologies that for example, explore experience or shared experiences of a specific group, by asking whether the research question, method and analysis are phenomenology. Using IPA as an illustration, van Manen identified several ways in which the 'P' in IPA is more psychological than phenomenological. For example, the focus of the research is on the individual having the experience rather than the experience itself as the phenomena. In Smith's (2018) response to van Manen, he argued that there is not a single

type of phenomenology but a shared central tenet around experience with differences in how this is approached and understood. He disputed van Manen's assertion of psychological versus phenomenological, suggesting the two can be mutually inclusive rather than exclusive. Smith described van Manen's discussion on participant's experience versus experience as phenomena as "binary categorizations" (p.1956) and "dualistic splitting" (p.1957). Rather, Smith views both aspects of experience, pre-reflective and reflective, holistically and as being of equal import as one can affect the other. I have discussed how IPA utilises its theoretical underpinning, including phenomenology within the context of psychological research.

4.5. Research Design

This research will use Ponterotto's (2005) definitions of ontology and epistemology:

> Ontology concerns the nature of reality and being. (p.130)
> Epistemology is concerned with the relationship between the "knower" (the research participant) and the "would-be knower" (the researcher). (p.131)

The position of this research is underpinned by a phenomenological approach as it is situated within an IPA framework. Within this context, ontologically, 'truth' is subjective and resides within the constructed reality of the participant's experiences (Ponterotto, 2005). Epistemologically, this research seeks to understand the participant's lived experiences through a process of "dynamic interaction between researcher and participant" (Ponterotto, 2005, p.131).

In line with the IPA approach to qualitative research, this research adopts an inductive approach (Smith, 2004; Smith et al., 2009) meaning that it is not hypothesis-driven and instead "aims to capture and explore the meanings that participants assign to their experiences." (Reid et al., 2005, p.20). This research is also idiographic because its focus is on the unique and particular experiences of the individual participants within the specific context of supporting young people with SEMH needs and challenging behaviour (Ponterotto, 2005; Larkin et al., 2006). Smith et al., (2009) describes IPA's commitment to idiography through its detailed analysis of each individual participant's particular experiences within a specific context.

Participants' lived experiences were gathered through semi-structured interviews using interview schedules. Semi-structured interviews, a common data collection choice amongst IPA research (Brocki & Wearden, 2006), was purposely selected as it would enable opportunities for me to become interactive and remain flexible in response to the participants' re-telling of their experiences (Smith & Osborne, 2008). The decision to create and use an

interview schedule during the semi-structured interviews with participants arose through reviewing IPA guidance (Smith & Osborne, 2008; Smith et al., 2009). Using a schedule would enable me to give prior consideration as to how best to elicit participants' lived experiences should they be required.

4.5.1. Homogeneity of Sample

When considering the relevant characteristics for the participant sample, IPA utilises purposive sampling to ensure homogeneity (Smith & Osborne, 2008) which used within this research context asks: what are the shared experiences of the TAs that support young people identified with SEMH needs and display challenging behaviour? In order to be able to answer this question, I developed a set of parameters that aimed to purposively recruit TAs with shared characteristics and consequently shared lived experiences.

Firstly, the TAs all needed to be working within the same type of educational setting within the same local authority, which in this instance was a mainstream secondary school, in order to ensure a certain level of similarity in their experiences with regards to working within school systems. For example, primary schools typically appoint the same TA/s to support a child during the course of a school year, whereas secondary TAs often support different young people over the course of a single day. This is the result of the different ways in which children and young people attend lessons: in primary schools children often remain with their year group classrooms and teachers whereas young people in secondary school frequently change classes and teachers over the course of a day. This is just one example of how school systems and consequently TAs' experiences can differ.

Secondly, TAs needed to be under paid employment, either part-time or full-time, to ensure this excluded participants that were volunteers or those undertaking training. Whilst specifying the length of a TAs employed experience was considered, this was ultimately not included as the TA would be asked to share their current experiences.

Thirdly, all of the TAs needed to be currently supporting at least one young person with the aforementioned identified set of characteristics i.e. SEMH needs and challenging behaviour. This would enable TAs to be able to share their lived experiences i.e. those that are occurring now, rather than reflect upon past experiences which may for example, be subject to memory distortion and therefore lose the essence of what that experience feels like for them.

Finally, TAs needed to be supporting young people on a one-to-one basis, whether that was inside or outside of the classroom, as opposed to providing general classroom support. The

purpose for this would be to gain access to 'rich' lived experiences as working with young people individually rather than generally would presumably affect the nature of the TAs' experiences.

Whilst it is not a participant characteristic as such, a further method employed to create a homogenous sample was through considering the group of young people the TAs were supporting. As previously discussed, the category of SEMH is broad and encompasses children and young people with a wide variety of needs (Norwich & Eaton, 2015). A specific characteristic was chosen i.e. challenging behaviour in order to narrow the focus of needs the participants would be supporting and subsequently the types of experiences the TAs would be sharing.

To summarise, the sample criteria were comprised of TAs who were:
- Currently in paid, part-time or full-time, employment at a mainstream secondary school within the same English LA;
- Currently supporting one or more young people identified by their schools as having SEMH needs and displaying challenging behaviour;
- Currently working on a one-to-one basis with a young person either inside or outside of the classroom

4.5.2. Interview Schedule

In my research proposal, I outlined my intention to use the first interview to pilot the questions in the interview schedule and my use of prompts to support the participant's responses in sharing their lived experiences. I had also planned to interview TAs from different schools, however due to the response I received from one school which elicited three participants (as discussed further in Chapter 5), I decided to forgo my original plan and use this as an opportunity in which to further develop a homogenous sample. Here I will relate how I developed and reviewed my interview schedule in preparation for these interviews and further explain my reasoning behind the decision to use three participants.

An additional reason for this transparency around the development of the interview schedule is in response to Brocki and Wearden's (2006) evaluation of IPA research. They noted that whilst the majority of IPA research used interview schedules, few revealed how they were developed or what questions and/or prompts were used, thereby impeding their ability to assess the quality of the research.

I decided to use an interview schedule to structure my interviews as it would provide the opportunity to consider in advance which questions to ask participants in order to ensure the questions would relate to the IPA framework. The first incarnation of the interview schedule was developed through reviewing existing literature on the impact of TAs supporting CYP in three main areas: academic achievement, SEN, and behaviour. Questions were created around themes in line with Smith and Osborne's (2008) guidance on developing an interview schedule for use with IPA research. The table in Appendix 11.1 details the themes with references to the research from where they were derived and the corresponding interview questions with associated prompts.

This first version of the interview schedule was presented to trainee EPs and university staff, including my research supervisor. Through discussion I realised that developing interview questions using this framework would contradict the inductive epistemology of IPA because it would be constraining participants' responses regarding their experiences around a pre-determined construct i.e. one that I had created based on previous research findings. I needed to give consideration as to how I could encourage TAs to share the experiences they felt were important to them and would consequently help me to understand their experiences.

In the second version of the interview schedule (Appendix 11.2), I considered how to elicit TAs' experiences, within a specific context, in a way that would enable them the freedom to share what was significant to them. Smith et al., (2009) IPA guidance was used in creating an interview schedule including: the number of questions (6-10 for interviews lasting between 45-90 minutes); the types of questions (e.g. descriptive, narrative, contrast, evaluative, prompts and probes) and the sequence of questions (i.e. starting with a question that will help the participant to feel at ease). For example, the question which asks TAs to share a "memorable experience" was specifically phrased to ensure neutrality thereby allowing the TA the choice to interpret and respond to the question in whichever way they wished. As part of this research's on-going commitment to quality (Yardley, 2000) the second version of the interview schedule was reviewed in consultation with my research supervisor subsequently leading to a further revision.

The third and final version of the interview schedule (Appendix 11.3) saw the removal of two questions from the second version which were considered as forcing TAs into sharing polarised experiences i.e. what they would change about their role or keep the same, thus becoming a more deductive rather than inductive way of exploring their experiences. These questions were replaced by an alternative way of attempting to encourage the sharing of a

range experiences, depending upon the individual TA i.e. providing advice on carrying out the role.

4.6. Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval for this research was granted by The University of Sheffield's School of Education Ethics Panel in May 2018 (Appendix 11.4). This ethical approval also took into consideration the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) legislation that came into effect across the EU, including the UK on 25th May 2018.

Informed consent was obtained through participants receiving a consent form (Appendix 11.5) and a participant information sheet entitled 'Information for Teaching Assistants' (Appendix 11.6) explaining what the research project was about, why it was being undertaken, what the participant's involvement would be and their rights as a participant. Participants were informed that they had the option to withdraw at any point before, during and after the research process in the 'Information for Teaching Assistants' document, and before signing the consent form at the start of the interview.

Consideration was given to any inconvenience the participant or their employer may potentially experience through participating in this research. Consequently, the time and location of the interview was arranged to be of convenience to the participant and their employer i.e. to take place at school and during working hours. Consideration was also given to the impact of participation on their role as TAs as participants may feel unsure or uncomfortable expressing their views as it pertains to their employers (the school), the young people talked about in the interview and/or their parents. Participants were informed in the 'Information for Teaching Assistants' document that the information gathered from participants during the interview would be kept confidential and participants would not be identifiable. Furthermore, participants were asked not to name or make identifiable, any young people they chose to discuss in the interview.

The aim of the interview was to explore the lived experiences of the participants within their job role which may have elicited recollections about incidents of a potentially sensitive, upsetting or stress-inducing nature. Participants were reminded that the interview could stop and/or they could withdraw at any point. I was also prepared to signpost any participants requiring well-being support should it become necessary to do so.

4.7. Quality of Research

The quality of this research is reviewed using two sets of criteria: one created for use with qualitative research i.e. Yardley (2000), and one that has been designed specifically for use on IPA research (Smith, 2011a). Yardley's (2000) criteria for good qualitative research are comprised of four key areas: sensitivity to context; commitment and rigour; transparency and coherence; impact and importance. In Smith's (2011a, 2017) evaluation of IPA research he acknowledged that whilst general qualitative measures are helpful, an IPA-specific set of guidelines would be more beneficial for the IPA researcher. Although Smith explains these guidelines review 'product' and not 'process' i.e. how IPA was undertaken, they emphasise the characteristics of what Smith considers to be good examples of IPA research. Consequently, Smith (2011a, 2017) created a quality assessment guide and encouraged its use by those writing papers and theses using IPA. Smith's (2011a, p.24) criteria consists of seven points: "it should have a clear focus; it will have strong data; it should be rigorous; sufficient space should be given to the elaboration of each theme; the analysis should be interpretative, not just descriptive; the analysis should be pointing to both convergence and divergence; it needs to be carefully written".

Both Yardley (2000) and Smith's (2011a) criteria for 'good' research will be revisited in Chapter 8 where the limitations of this research are discussed.

4.8. Chapter Summary

IPA was selected as the methodological approach for this research as it seeks to explore the lived experiences of participants thereby supporting the research's aim to explore the lived experiences of TAs supporting young people identified with SEMH needs and challenging behaviour. Whilst I was unable to develop my interview schedule through the conventional method of conducting a pilot study, I was nevertheless able to draw on expertise from different sources and develop a more inductive schedule in accordance with IPA guidance. In addition, the recruitment of participants from within the same school created the opportunity of furthering the homogeneity of the sample.

Chapter 5: Procedure

5.1. Chapter Introduction

In this chapter, I will outline the procedural details of the research, including participant recruitment and interview transcription. The analytical process which adheres to the IPA guidance as explained by Smith et al., (2009) is recounted and supplemented with reflections. Longer reflective accounts are referenced to the appendices.

5.2. Context of Sample

This research took place within a LA that is situated in the North of England. All three of the research's participants were employed by the same secondary school. The secondary school has a sixth form attached, is co-educated, and is attended by young people from the local town and surrounding rural area. The school is part of a multi-academy trust with schools within the same and neighbouring LA.

5.3. Participant Recruitment

Participants were recruited through two methods: TAs were identified by EPs, and through self-identification by TAs where schools had agreed to participate. Following a presentation of the research to EPs within an English LA, EPs were requested to identify schools and/or TAs where they were aware of applicable participants they had come into contact with through their roles. SENCos of the identified schools were thus contacted via email (Appendix 11.7) whereby the research was outlined and the requirements of the TAs as participants were detailed. In addition, the 'Information for Teaching Assistants' document (Appendix 11.6) was attached to the email and SENCos were invited to share this with potential participants that met the sample criteria. The 'Participant Consent Form' (Appendix 11.5) was subsequently emailed when a SENCo responded to confirm interest from TAs. SENCos were identified as the first person of contact as they oversee SEND provision within schools.

Of the four SENCos contacted using this recruitment method, two SENCos replied to my initial email. One of the SENCos referred me to the SEN Manager to arrange interviews but I did not hear anything further. The second SENCo that replied requested a telephone conversation to discuss the nature of the research in more detail. This SENCo gave permission for the research to take place at the school and agreed to forward my email with the attached 'Information for Teaching Assistants' document to the TA identified by the EP. I also requested that the email be passed onto any other TAs who may be interested in participating in the research. I was again referred to the SEN Manager to arrange interview times and dates and

was informed that three TAs, including the TA identified by the school's link EP had expressed interest in participating in the research.

5.4. Participant Sample

Each of the three participants were female and employed as full-time TAs. As part of my introduction to the interview, I ascertained that each TA was currently supporting at least one young person identified as having SEMH needs and challenging behaviour. The TAs will hereafter be referred to as Amy, Beth and Claire to maintain their anonymity. Amy was identified by an EP and at the time of the interview was on a fixed-term contract which was due to end that academic year. Beth and Claire both volunteered to participate in the research, they were on permanent contracts and had worked at the school for over twenty years.

Whilst I did not request nor knowingly gather the participants' details, information was shared during the interviews which has made it possible to create a brief profile of each of the participants. This information was shared because it has informed participants' experiences as they were related in the interviews and consequently will be discussed in Chapter 6: Analysis and Discussion.

5.5. Semi-Structured Interviews

A semi-structured interview was carried out individually with each participant. The interviews lasted between 45-60 minutes to fit in with the school's lesson timetable. Interviews were recorded in a digital audio format using a Dictaphone. The audio data files were stored in an online cloud service called 'Google Drive' which was encrypted and password protected.

As the word 'interview' can evoke different connotations such as job interview, I began by explaining to the TAs that the form of interviewing we would be using was less formal and closer to that of a conversation. This served the dual purpose of providing reassurance to TAs and preparing TAs for the dynamic interaction between us as a way of drawing closer to understanding their lived experiences. This dialogic interaction took the form of conversational rapport around the TAs' responses for example, my checking for meaning and/or asking searching questions. As a result, the interview schedule was used flexibly with each participant as conversations were led by the participant, for example questions from the interview schedule were introduced during natural breaks in the conversation.

Prompts from the interview schedule (Appendix 11.3) were used to guide TAs in retelling their experiences, for example by asking them to explain their answers further to gain a better understanding of what they mean rather to make assumptions of meaning. This is part of the

sense-making process of IPA which Smith et al., (2009) explains helps researchers to remain close to the experience thereby bracketing their own fore-conceptions.

I had originally intended on sharing my positionality as an insider researcher with TAs, as outlined in the guidance box on the interview schedule (Appendix 11.3). I had thought that through sharing my past experiences as a TA, it would aid in my rapport building with participants. However, upon reading Smith et al., (2009) I agreed with their comments that it might detract away from the focus of the interview which was the participants' experiences. This speculation was confirmed when I shared my positionality with one of the participants after the interview and the conversation then became focused on my experiences.

Ideally, the pilot study or first interview would have been used to learn from the interview process and to reflect on ways to ensure it adhered to the IPA framework. As an ethical consideration to reduce inconvenience to the school and TAs, the three interviews were scheduled by the SEN Manager who arranged them consecutively. There were brief breaks in between each interview which allowed me to engage in active reflexive bracketing (Appendix 11.8). Through the act of reflection, I made slight amendments to the wording of one of my questions based on TA's responses. Following the interviews, I noted my reflections to reveal my thinking of the interview process and my use of reflexive bracketing (Appendix 11.8).

5.6. Transcription

I transcribed each interview using the level of coding advocated by Smith et al., (2009) for example, identifying pauses. The process of repeatedly listening to and reviewing each transcription helped to embed or as Finlay (2014) phrases it to 'dwell' in the participant's lived experiences, thereby strengthening my familiarity and engagement with the experiences being recounted by the participants. Smith et al., (2009) advocates a deep level of familiarity through repeated readings of the transcript as part of the first step of analysis using IPA.

5.7. IPA Analysis Procedure

Whilst IPA advocates using a non-linear and iterative approach to analysis (Smith et al., 2009) for ease of accessibility, I have recounted the steps in the order outlined by Smith et al., (2009). These steps comprise: repeated reading of the transcript, noting exploratory comments and creating emergent themes. Each of these steps were repeated for all three transcripts in accordance with IPA and its commitment to idiography (Smith et al., 2009). Patterns across the emergent themes from each participant were searched to develop first subordinate and then superordinate themes. Findings were discussed in the context of existing psychological

theory and literature. I undertook test analyses to develop my understanding of the stages of IPA's analytical process. Each test was reviewed in consultation with my research supervisor to ascertain my comprehension of this approach. My reflections on this process can be found in Appendix 11.9.

5.7.1. Exploratory Comments

Each transcript was broken down into 'meaning units' which Finlay (2014, p.126) explains as: "phrases or passages of text, including nonverbal communication, which express a particular point or meaning that can be differentiated from preceding text". Each meaning unit was assigned a number based on its chronological order within the transcript. Meaning units became subject to change when I began writing my exploratory comments using a method Smith et al., (2008, p.91) describe as "free associating" i.e. commenting on "whatever comes into your mind when reading certain sentences or words." Smith et al., (2009) suggests this method could be undertaken in addition to the more systematic method of examining the transcript for descriptive, linguistic and conceptual comments. I used this second method as a guide for reviewing the initial exploratory comments noted whilst using the 'free associating' method. See Appendix 11.10 for an excerpt of the transcribed analysis from Beth's interview.

5.7.2. Emergent Themes

Emergent themes were developed in close consultation with the exploratory comments. As reflected in Appendix 11.9, the exploratory comments should be sufficient enough to enable this to take place (Smith et al., 2009) which warranted, in some instances, further review of the exploratory comments. Smith et al., (2009) explain that the statement assigned to an emergent theme should be representative of the transcript and the exploratory comments i.e. it is a synergistic reflection of both the participant's description and the researcher's interpretation.

5.7.3. Searching for Patterns Across Emergent Themes

The next stage involved a comparison of the emergent themes from all three participants. Subordinate themes were developed using a process Smith et al., (2009) term as 'abstraction' i.e. the grouping together of similar emergent themes. I wrote a list of all the emergent themes and then began to move them into different groups using the abstraction approach. I checked the emergent themes against the exploratory comments and transcript to ensure they were placed within the appropriate subordinate theme. Using the process of abstraction, superordinate themes were developed through the grouping of subordinate themes of a similar nature. Smith et al., (2009) explains that the re-naming of themes can occur at this point of

analysis to better reflect concepts that represent each individual as well as the overall group of participants.

5.7.4. Relating Themes to Theories

Connections to psychological theory and literature took place after the final stage of analysis i.e. the identification of superordinate themes. This was to ensure that my analysis was informed by a close examination of the transcript and were not influenced by outside pre-existing theoretical constructs. At this juncture, Smith describes a 'distancing' that is taking place between the text and the interpretation (Smith, 2004) as the analysis moves away from the participant and is placed within the wider context of existing psychological theory and/or literature (Smith et al., 2009).

5.6. Chapter Summary

The lived experiences of three TAs working within the same mainstream secondary supporting young people identified with SEMH needs and challenging behaviour were gathered using semi-structured interviews. Audio recordings of the interviews were transcribed and analysed using the steps of IPA as outlined by Smith et al., (2009) to identify themes, and search for patterns of convergence and divergence which are then discussed within the context of existing research and literature.

Chapter 6: Analysis and Discussion

6.1 Chapter Introduction

Within this chapter, the analysis and discussion are presented consecutively for each of the subordinate themes which comprise the three superordinate themes identified. My interpretations of participants' lived experiences are illustrated with excerpts denoted by italics. The purpose of presenting the analysis and discussion together was to remain immersed within the participants' lived experiences. The remaining emergent themes are explored and discussed as patterns of divergence. Reflections on using IPA to explore participants' lived experiences are given, with longer passages referenced to the appendices.

6.2. Identifying Patterns of Convergence and Divergence

In total, seventy-one emergent themes were identified (Appendix 11.11). Using the method of abstraction where 'like is placed with like' (Smith et al., 2009), emergent themes were first grouped according to frequency i.e. themes from all three participants, from two participants or themes belonging to individual participants (Appendix 11.11). Emergent themes deriving from all three participants were considered as patterns of convergence. Emergent themes which occurred in only two participants or from individual participants were classed as divergent patterns. Analyses, interview transcripts, the table of patterns of convergence and divergence, and the tables of superordinate themes (Appendices 11.10-14) were reviewed in consultation with my research supervisor.

6.3. Patterns of Convergence

A pattern of convergence was identified as similar emergent themes that occurred with all three participants. The table in Appendix 11.11 demonstrates that eight groups of emergent themes were identified. These eight groups became eight subordinate themes (Appendices 11.12-14). To ensure the grouping of subordinate themes represented the emergent themes, quotes were used. Using abstraction, subordinate themes were grouped to form superordinate themes. Three superordinate themes were identified overall: understanding the young person, processing emotion and individual approach to the TA role. Quotes from participants were used as a means of representing themes through the voices of TAs' lived experiences. Table 1 provides an overview of the three superordinate themes and eight subordinate themes.

Each superordinate theme will now be discussed to share participants' experiences and my interpretation of these experiences. Explanations will be given to share my reasoning for creating the subordinate themes based on my selection of certain emergent themes and how their relationship informed the overall superordinate theme.

Table 1: Superordinate and Subordinate Themes of TAs' Lived Experiences

Superordinate Themes	Subordinate Themes
Understanding the young person *"If I can understand them better, how they tick, it'll help me with them…" (Amy:115)*	Perception of need Sense-making Knowledge
Processing emotions *"I constantly worry about him. I go home on a night and I worry about him." (Amy:13)*	Emotional expression Protective factors Support systems
Individual approach to the TA role *"…your job is to help them, to help these children through, the ones who're struggling that bit more." (Beth:46)*	TA attributes Familial associations

6.4. Superordinate Theme: Understanding the young person

"If I can understand them better, how they tick, it'll help me with them…" (Amy:115)

Each of the participants shared experiences that I perceived to revolve around their attempt to understand the young person/people they support. Sometimes participants were aware that this was what they were trying to do, as can be seen from the above quote by Amy. At other times, it was my interpretation of their comments as part of Smith et al., (2009) double hermeneutic: I was trying to make sense of the participants making sense of their experiences. The following subordinate themes were each selected to create this superordinate theme as I thought they all contributed, either directly or indirectly, as a means by which the participants were compiling a *"bigger picture" (Beth:75)* of the young person.

6.4.1. Subordinate Theme: Perception of need

This subordinate theme references the participants' perception of the young person's needs based on their use of educational, diagnostic or medical labels. Whilst each participant's perception of 'need' as a concept differed, when viewed through a hermeneutic circle, I intuited they were all inter-related as I perceived them to be influential in terms of informing the participants' understanding of the young person. Table 2 outlines the emergent themes that comprise this subordinate theme.

Table 2: Subordinate Theme: Perception of need

Superordinate Theme: Understanding the young person		
"If I can understand them better, how they tick, it'll help me with them…" (Amy:115)		
Subordinate Theme: Perception of need		
Participants	Quote (meaning unit number)	Emergent Themes
Amy	*In my role I support maybe 5 or 6 children with SEN they range from mild autism, autism, Asperger's, ADHD, erm attachment issues and just, erm learning difficulties (1)*	Use of diagnostic labels as descriptors
Beth	*two of them have got statements you know EHC [Education, Health and Care] plans and one's on the register, about four on the SEN register (18)*	Differentiates young people through medical / educational labels
Claire	*I don't need to know exactly what their conditions are (60)*	Perception of diagnostic labels

Whilst the use of labels was particularly prevalent with Amy and Beth in comparison to Claire, again there were slight differences in how these labels were used. Amy tended to refer to young people's needs through diagnostic labels:

> "*In my role I support maybe 5 or 6 children with SEN they range from mild autism, autism, Asperger's, ADHD, erm attachment issues and just, erm learning difficulties*" (Amy:1)

Whereas Beth and Claire favoured more educational labels:

> "*…two of them have got statements you know EHC plans and one's on the register, about four on the SEN register*" (Beth:18)

> "*…you might be in there for Joe Bloggs who's got an EHCP [Education, Health and Care Plan] and that's officially the one you might be there for but there might be another five in there that are SEN support, and then there might be another five that are just behaviour kids…*" (Claire:70)

It is possible that the participants' use of labels was to replace the ability to provide names when asked to recall experiences involving these young people. However, I perceived that

participants were using these labels as means of differentiating young people based on a series of categories. As the educational labels of need were used by each participant, I wondered how prevalent this is within school and whether it is reflective of staff discourse. My reasoning for querying staff discourse as a source for labels was the level of confidence and frequency in which certain labels were used by participants over others. For example, when Beth says *"two of them have got statements, you know EHC plans" (Beth:18)* it suggests she is still familiarising herself with these changes; Amy's label of *"mild autism" (Amy:1)* caused me to question the genesis of this label; Beth's description of high ability young people as *"high flier" (Beth:49)* and Claire's categorisation of *"behaviour kids" (Claire:70)* suggested they were using their own labels as they were not repeated by other participants, possibly because there were no pre-existing ones for them to use.

Claire uses comparatively fewer diagnostic labels to either describe, differentiate or identify young people. Towards the end of the interview, Claire shares her perspective on diagnostic labels: *"I don't need to know exactly what their conditions are" (Claire:60)*. Here Claire is referring to supporting the individual needs of young people rather than supporting a perception of need based on a diagnostic label such as *"autistic" (Claire:60)*. Yet Claire continues to differentiate young people according to educational levels of need i.e. EHC Plan or SEN Support. I wondered if perhaps the need to differentiate by educational label was based on assigned level of TA support rather than perception of need but then Beth talked about offering support to a *"high flier… coz sometimes they're even a bit stuck" (Beth:49)* and Claire about supporting others in addition to the one she is *"officially" (Claire:70)* there for.

I wondered what purpose it served for participants to identify young people through educational labels. I believe the participants were using labels made available as part of the school's existing discourse on SEN as a means of understanding the types of needs they see and support in their role as TAs. To name something is to try and make sense of something. A name gives something meaning, existence. It becomes concrete, quantifiable and therefore understandable. Perceiving need through labels is a way of making sense of that need thereby opening up a way to support that need.

SEMH as a label was rarely used by any of the participants. I wonder if certain educational and diagnostic labels were more widely used because they are more widely known which is why SEMH, as a comparatively new label, was seldom used by participants. But that does not account for the use of the label EHC by participants. Perhaps then EHC is used much in the same way as SEN because it is an umbrella term that accounts for a wide array of needs. Or

perhaps SEMH is a label not yet clearly understood or used as much as the other labels within the school.

6.4.2. Subordinate Theme: Sense-making

Each of the emergent themes within this subordinate theme were unintentionally ascribed the same title: perception of young person/people. Whilst this may appear on the surface as a broad classification, my interpretation of the participants' lived experiences within this context all seemed related to their interpretation of the young people's behaviour based on their own observations. The purpose of which I inferred to be part of a sense-making process the participants were undergoing as an additional means of understanding the young person. Table 3 outlines the emergent themes that formed this subordinate theme.

Table 3: Subordinate Theme: Sense-making

Superordinate Theme: Understanding the young person *"If I can understand them better, how they tick, it'll help me with them…" (Amy:115)*		
Subordinate Theme: Sense-making		
Participants	Quote (meaning unit number)	Emergent Themes
Amy	*I think he just wants reassurance that somebody's actually there that nobody's gonna walk out on him (59)*	Perception of young person / people
Beth	*it puts a bit more of the jigsaw, it's a bit like a jigsaw puzzle really (76)*	Perception of young person / people
Claire	*But one to one, lovely pleasant young man… and then once they get out there with their mates, they're different. (42)*	Perception of young person / people

In the extract below, Amy shares her perceptions of a young person which are based on the way he behaves and speaks towards her i.e. that he is seeking her attention and reassurance:

"Yeah I'm not on their backs all the time…if the boy with attachment he wants to go to sleep for five minutes I, 'go on then' and then it gives me chance to work with the others (I: yeah). Yeah it gives me chance to go with the others as well so, yeah, coz he's quite needy when he wakes up [laughs] but (I: needy in what way?). He just wants your attention (I: ok) just wants, erm, he'll maybe start touching your arm or erm trying to hold your hand, things like that. I think he just wants reassurance that somebody's

actually there, that nobody's gonna walk out on him, (I: hmm) which in a way I find quite sad that he still feels like that coz he's a Year 9 but I still feel it's quite, quite a thing that he still needs, that he knows [pauses] because he keeps saying 'you are with me next year? Yeah? You are with me?' I say, 'I can't say, because I don't know'." (Amy:57-60)

Amy's use of 'I think' and 'I feel' indicates that this is her personal perception for example, "*I think he just wants reassurance that somebody's actually there, that nobody's gonna walk out on him*" (Amy:59). Amy offers a reason for why she feels this young person needs reassurance because she is trying to make sense of his behaviour.

Beth also shares examples of a young person's comments and behaviour but in response to my questions regarding her perception of the young person as *"caring"* and being a *"wind-up merchant"*:

"he's very, he's very caring (I: is he?) yeah he's a very caring lad (I: in what way?) erm 'are you alright miss?' you know erm he's always asking if you're alright but on the other hand he's a very wound, wind-up merchant kind of guy (I: in what way?) I mean yesterday we're in lesson I said 'oh it's so warm, it's so warm in here' I said 'I'll have to have that blind shut' and he puts his hand up 'sir can we have the blind open coz it's too, it's, I like the blind open' you know and if in winter coz it's always cold in class 'oh I'm freezing' and he'll say 'oh I'm just gonna open up the window it's boiling in here' but he won't" (Beth:14)

In the above extract, Beth has interpreted the young person's enquiries as caring but perceives his contrary behaviour as a joke. Based on these two examples, there could be a myriad of reasons why this young person is constantly checking if someone is okay. His behaviour in class could be construed as being purposefully antagonistic towards Beth. However, Beth is engaging in a sense-making process that is based on her personal perception of this young person as part of her overall understanding of him.

Claire's perception of the young person in the extract below is dependent upon the environment and group context i.e. within school, working on a one to one, versus out of school with a group of friends. This is how she has made sense of this change in his behaviour:

"But it was, again a likeable rogue (I: ok) out there on school he was excluded, he was only allowed back for his exams, he wasn't allowed on the school grounds, as soon as

the exam finished, he had to sign out and go home. But one to one, lovely pleasant young man. Polite, well mannered, fine. Can chat about anything. Coz we'd chat after you know, and then once they get out there with their mates, they're different." (Claire:42)

When sharing her perception, Claire moves from the singular to the plural; she first talks about this specific young person but then about young people in general. This is reflective of Claire's perception of young people out of school. For example:

"I: How does that feel when you see them out and about? Claire: I don't mind once, if they're nice kids and by that time they're old enough they're, but some of them I don't like to see coz some of them are not [pauses] they're intimidating. When you're at work [pauses] even though they're in their groups of gangs it's not as bad because you're at work, but they're on the school site and if there was a problem, somebody would be there to help wouldn't yeah and you'd like to think somebody'd be there to help you if you have a problem out of school, but people [pauses] in today's world turn a blind's eye don't they to things. Unfortunately, things happen." (Claire:47)

Claire's sense-making of young people in their "groups of gangs" is underpinned by her overall perceptions of safety outside of school. Consequently, this has shaped her understanding of young people.

6.4.3. Subordinate Theme: Knowledge

This subordinate theme was developed from participants' lived experiences which demonstrated they had knowledge about the young person. Knowledge in this context refers to knowledge that was acquired about the young person and how it was used as part of the participants' role as a TA for example, background, home life, understanding behaviour. Amy and Beth's emergent themes are very similarly phrased i.e. 'knowledge of young person/people' in comparison to Claire's emergent theme: 'access to personal information'. This was because whilst Claire also demonstrated her knowledge of young people, she also talked about how useful access to knowledge could be. Knowledge as a subordinate theme was grouped to form the Superordinate Theme: Understanding the young person because of the way in which this knowledge was used by participants, or in the case of Claire, how knowledge could be used. Table 4 depicts the emergent themes that were compiled to create this subordinate theme.

Table 4: Subordinate Theme: Knowledge

Superordinate Theme: Understanding the young person "If I can understand them better, how they tick, it'll help me with them…" (Amy:115)		
Subordinate Theme: Knowledge		
Participants	Quote (meaning unit number)	Emergent Themes
Amy	*they're vulnerable children some of them and they've come from very difficult homes (79)*	Knowledge of young person
Beth	*You can tell straight away that something is wrong with this student (10)*	Knowledge of young person / people
Claire	*so if you know those things, then you ain't going to be as angry with them (16)*	Access to personal information

Whilst Amy and Beth mentioned safeguarding in the context of responding to young people making disclosures, Claire however talked about the implications of safeguarding with regards to access to information about young people. When asked about the type of information staff can have access to, Claire explained:

"some information, yes. But not all of it coz some of it, if they think its child protection, it's kept to a minimum." (Claire:17)

Claire talked about the helpfulness of having prior knowledge of new students such as the young people's home life. Claire explains how this knowledge could be used to inform methods of support and influence staff perceptions and consequently their responses towards the young person:

"if you were to know those things… there's no wonder she's not going to remember to bring her PE [Physical Education] kit or forget to do her homework or leave her book, and so if you know those things, then you ain't going to be as angry with them, you know I think the PE department aren't gonna be, or her PE kit could be kept at school and somebody could wash it for her" (Claire:16)

Beth and Claire indicated they had prior knowledge of a specific young person before they began to support them. Prior knowledge appeared to have occurred over time through being in the same school with the young person rather than through a formalised sharing of

information. For example, Claire mentions seeing the young person in the nurture group. Prior knowledge of the young person for both of these participants appears to have created an expectation of behaviour:

> *"I'd never met him before but he's always on the behaviour log so I know that he's a little horror sometimes" (Beth:35)*

Yet in the experiences Beth and Claire shared, their pre-conceived notions of the young people's behaviour did not come to fruition and both participants described successful relationships. Whether this change in perception occurs every time was not elaborated upon but perhaps their reasoning for sharing these experiences may be as a way of celebrating examples of success.

Amy's knowledge of young people prior to her direct involvement seems to come from the young people themselves. This is probably due to the considerably shorter length of time spent working at the school in comparison to Beth and Claire. Amy's knowledge of young people's background is shared in the greatest level of detail of the three participants because I think this is reflective of the type of information that is most salient to her:

> *"they're vulnerable children some of them and they've come from very difficult homes" (Amy:79)*

All the participants appeared to use knowledge of the young person's background and/or home life to inform their understanding of young people. In the extract below, Beth's knowledge of the young person's home life and diet shapes her perception and approach of her support:

> *"the other student who I support in there erm he doesn't do any homework (I: hmm) I don't think, I don't, his home life is not brilliant erm so I'm his mentor but he will work for me erm he'll bring me his homework and I'll meet him from a lesson and he'll, I'll sometimes say you know 'I've got a KitKat' or something to eat on a lunch time you know if you've come, you know you have a little, little treat for coming at lunch time, I know this student doesn't eat a lot" (Beth:22)*

Knowledge of the young person's behaviour was not explicitly discussed but implicitly mentioned by all three participants. This type of knowledge appeared to be gathered by participants over time whilst working directly with specific young people:

"He'll get a pen and he'll break it in half and (I: oh right) he'll sit and crunch it and you know then straight away that something's bothering (I: ok) something's wrong. You can tell straight away that something is wrong with this student" (Beth:10)

Knowledge about the young person's behaviour is typically used by participants to inform the nature of their support such as needing to work in *"a quiet place"* (Amy:5), offering support to the whole class because *"they don't want to feel different"* (Claire:72), and recognising work avoidance strategies: *"so now I know that he wants to be out of lesson, I don't let him out of lesson."* (Beth:31)

6.4.4 Discussion

Applying double hermeneutics, my interpretation of participants' perception of SEMH as a label of need may reflect Norwich and Eaton's (2015) argument, as discussed in the literature review, that the definition of SEMH as outlined in the SEND Code of Practice (2015) is ambiguous. I wondered if perhaps school staff share this viewpoint. If for example, SENCOs felt unclear about this new area of SEND, it would logically follow that TAs would similarly feel unsure. Perhaps the participants' reticence in using this label is reflective of a lack of clarity within the school system as a whole. Further research around school staff's perception and understanding of SEMH as an area of need is required to explore this line of questioning.

Whilst there is an on-going debate about the purpose and impact of labels (e.g. Riddick, 2000; Shifrer, 2013) the focus of labels within this context is how it shapes TAs' perception of young people's needs. Participants' use of educational and medical labels correlated with Mackenzie's (2011) findings which postulated that the TAs' use of 'medicalised discourse' was derived from their personal experiences of having children with SEN. Research exploring school staff's beliefs and understanding around diagnoses and socially constructed labels has highlighted a need for further exploration around personal perceptions and their effects on supporting CYP (McMahon, 2012; Gibbs & Elliott, 2015). Attribution Theory could be used as a theoretical framework to understand TAs' perceptions of labels and their perceptions of the underlying causes of young people's SEMH needs. For example, Boysen and Vogel (2008) used attribution theory to explore stigma towards mental illness. It found that stigmatisation was attributed towards a disorder perceived as controllable (e.g. addiction) as opposed to uncontrollable (e.g. schizophrenia) due to its underlying causality i.e. behavioural versus biological.

Attribution theory will first be explained before exploring its application within research. Attribution as a concept can be understood through Asch's (1952, cited by Gleitman et al., 1999) explanation that people interpret their perceptions of aspects of one another in an attempt to understand the person as a whole. Asch compared this conception of people to pieces comprising an overall pattern which reminded me of Beth's simile for each new additional piece of information about a young person: *"it's a bit like a jigsaw puzzle" (Beth:76)*. The reason for interpreting their perceptions is to make sense of what people do through understanding why they do them i.e. the cause (Gleitman et al., 1999). Participants therefore are attributing meaning to young people's comments and behaviours to help them to understand why they do them i.e. through inferring cause. Attribution as a process therefore is the interpretation undertaken to assign cause to a behaviour which is also known as causal attribution (Glietman et al., 1999).

A theory of attribution developed by Weiner (1979, 1985) identified three dimensions of perceived causality: locus (internal within the individual or external to the situation), stability (stable or unstable i.e. a fixed/constant or variable/fluctuating state) and controllability (controllable or uncontrollable). Adapting Mavropoulou and Padeliadu's (2002) example, if a TA attributed the cause of a young person's behaviour as her lack of knowledge about autism, this would be an internalised view of herself but unstable and controllable as it can be changed. However, if the young person's behaviour was attributed to their autism, this causal attribution is externalised, stable and uncontrollable. Weiner's theory of attribution suggests the TA would respond differently to the young person depending upon their perception of the causal attribution of the behaviour.

Research using Weiner's attribution theory as a theoretical framework within education has predominantly focused on teachers': self-efficacy and/or stress (e.g. McCormick & Barnett, 2011; Wang et al., 2015), perceptions of young people's academic achievement (e.g. Grimes, 1981; Graham, 1991) and behaviour (e.g. Medway, 1979; Poulou & Norwich, 2000; Mavropoulou & Padeliadu, 2002; Ho, 2004; Cothran et al., 2009; Dobbs & Arnold, 2009). The existing research on teachers using attribution theory was explored and extrapolated where applicable for participants.

Ho (2004) explored the effect of cultural context (individualistic versus collectivistic societies) on teachers' causal attributions of young people's behaviour. It found that teachers attributed certain behaviours as relating to either the teacher, young person or their family depended on their cultural values, for example, the role of family in collective responsibility for behaviour. Teachers across the cultures studied consistently attributed internal (i.e. within-child) rather

than external (i.e. teacher-related) factors to young people's behaviour. In this research, participants' values were strongly evident to the extent they became a subordinate theme entitled: TA attributes. Ho's (2004) research highlights the impact of staff values on their causal attributions for young people's behaviour.

The tendency for teachers to make causal attributions for young people's behaviour that were external to themselves was also found in other studies. Cothran et al., (2009) compared teachers' and young people's attributions for behaviour within the context of PE lessons and found both attributed behaviour to factors that were perceived to be external to themselves. Mavropoulou and Padeliadu (2002) studied the relationship between teachers' perceptions of control and their causal attributions for children's behaviour. Teachers perceived factors that were external to themselves and the school as attributional causes of children's behaviour i.e. factors related to the child and their family.

Each of the emergent and subordinate themes that comprise the Superordinate Theme: Understanding the young person are causal attributions that are all external to the participants. In the subordinate theme: sense-making, participants perceived the causes of young people's behaviour as situational (e.g. in/out of school) or as an internal attribute of the young person (e.g. needy, wind-up merchant). As noted in the subordinate theme: knowledge, participants frequently mentioned their perception of young people's lives at home as an explanation for their behaviour in school to the extent where further background information about young people was construed as being helpful in managing staff expectations of young people's behaviour.

To provide balance, not all research found that teachers externalised their causal attributions. For example, Poulou and Norwich (2000) examined teachers' responses and causal attributions for young people identified as having EBD. Contrary to other research findings, teachers directed casual attributions of young people's behaviour at themselves over the child and their family. These results were consequently explained through a counter-defensive attributional bias framework i.e. the "acceptance of responsibility for negative outcomes" was used as a proactive countermeasure to protecting teachers' public image (p.567). Whilst none of the participants explicitly internalised their causal attributions as part of a theme which encapsulated all three participants' responses, individual differences explored during the analysis of divergence patterns between participants identified feelings of insecurity by Amy as they related to her perceptions of experience, qualifications and knowledge. However, I do not perceive Amy's insecurities to be a counter-defensive attributional bias but as an extension of an overall insecurity around her role as a TA.

Dobbs and Arnold (2009) argued that the student-teacher relationship can affect a student's experiences of school. They explored the relationship between teachers' perception of pre-school children's behaviour and the teachers' behaviour towards those children. Teachers' behaviour i.e. their use of either commands or praise towards children depended upon their perception of the behaviour displayed by children. Findings suggested that commands were used more in response to behaviours perceived as being an internal attribute of the child versus those attributed to an external cause such as a lack of sleep. Parallels can be drawn between Dobbs and Arnold's (2009) internal and external causal attributions for behaviour and Boysen and Vogel's (2008) controllable and uncontrollable causal attributions for mental illness. Broadly speaking, responses were negative if the underlying cause was perceived to be the responsibility or under the control of the 'problem-owner'.

Within this superordinate theme, participants' perceptions of young people's behaviour were attributed to their educational/medical labels and their home life. This suggests participants are making external and uncontrollable causal attributions for young people's behaviour i.e. the underlying causes of their behaviour is placed outside of the young person. This is reflected in the number of positive experiences with young people that were shared by participants and conversely may explain why those experiences which I interpreted as challenging were participants' emotive responses to young people's disclosures about their life experiences outside of school.

6.4.5. Summary

Understanding the young person was inferred as the overall objective following a process of interpretation undertaken by the participants through perceiving young people's needs, making sense of their behaviours and through acquiring knowledge about the young person. Research which used attribution theory as a theoretical framework explained this process of interpretation as participants' making causal attributions about young people to facilitate their understanding of young people. Using Weiner's theory of attribution (1979, 1985), participants attributed the cause of young people's behaviour as being external (e.g. home life) and uncontrollable (e.g. labels of need).

6.5. Superordinate Theme: Processing emotions

"I constantly worry about him. I go home on a night and I worry about him." (Amy:13)

This superordinate theme is comprised of three subordinate themes: emotional expression, protective factors and support systems. These themes were grouped together as I inferred

they all revolved around how participants responded to the emotional experiences of their role. Whilst each participant processed their emotions differently, each participant related experiences which revealed how they expressed emotion, coping strategies which acted as protective factors and their support systems.

6.5.1. Subordinate Theme: Emotional expression

Participants expressed their emotions in different ways from one another as indicated in the titles of the corresponding emergent themes seen in Table 5: emotional response to TA role, managing difficult situations and suppression of emotional expression. The way in which each participant expresses their emotions reflects how they process their emotions when supporting young people identified with SEMH needs and challenging behaviour.

Table 5: Subordinate Theme: Emotional expression

Superordinate Theme: Processing emotions *"I constantly worry about him. I go home on a night and I worry about him." (Amy:13)*		
Subordinate Theme: Emotional expression		
Participants	Quote (meaning unit number)	Emergent Themes
Amy	*I found myself that I do get too involved in it, that I do think about it far too much coz I'll take it home with me (91)*	Emotional response to TA role
Beth	*you just have to keep, try to keep a level head as much as you feel like 'oh god' you can't let them see that (79)*	Managing difficult situations
Claire	*I don't say anything, I bottle it up and I'll be real angry after (8)*	Suppression of emotional expression

Amy's emergent theme was entitled 'emotional response to TA role' due to the nature of her reactions to the experiences of supporting young people and in relation to her knowledge about their background and home life; experiences which left Amy feeling: *"awful" (Amy:60), "really heart-breaking" (Amy:86) and "worried" (Amy:93).*

> *"he will threaten in class to take the blades out of [pencil sharpeners], so you have to be constantly, constantly watching him. I: How does that feel for you like having to be constantly watching him? Amy: I constantly, I constantly worry about him. I: do you? I go home on a night and I worry about him." (Amy:12-13)*

In the extract above, Amy's role involves intense observation of a young person to prevent self-harm. This intensity overspills into Amy's personal life as she is unable to let go of her concerns for him. He preoccupies her thoughts. Her constant watching turns into constant worry for him. This is just one example. Some of the stories Amy shared about the young people she supports currently and in the past were harrowing:

> *"A little boy used to say 'that's my dad up there' and it was the stars…and his dad had, he'd hung himself…in prison…so yeah, that was really heart-breaking" (Amy:86)*

Where Amy was struggling to contain her emotions, Beth appeared to be actively managing to process her emotions in response to difficult situations within the context of her role as a TA. For example:

> *"you just have to keep, try to keep a level head (I: right) as much as you feel like 'oh god' you can't let them see that, it's maybe you know you're getting a bit upset coz you've got to try to remain calm and level headed at all times. (I: right) But yeah you can think afterwards 'oo poor lad' you know but then you've gotta switch off otherwise it would, you know." (Beth:79)*

In the above extract, Beth talks about how she tries to manage her emotions whilst she is in front of the young person and then again later if she continues to think about them. I wondered if she was always able to *"switch off"* her thoughts about supporting young people. In the below extract, Beth shares a particular concern that stays with her:

> *"The only one thing I do think about sometimes is when it's six weeks holiday is, it sounds daft this, it might not have any relevance to this (I: no, I'd like to hear it) but sometimes erm, some of the students say 'oh I'm dreading the holidays Miss' and I say 'oh why?' they say 'because we don't get anything to eat (I: oh gosh) coz they're on FSM [Free School Meal] (I: yeah) and I say 'aww well' I say 'I'm sure you will' but sometimes during the summer holidays, just now and again I think 'oh I hope they've eaten'… If something would get to me, that would be the only thing that would (I: yeah) and more so in the long summer break coz it's a long time (I: yeah) not maybe so much in the week (I: yeah, yeah, the half term ones?) yeah, yeah, you know so, and you sometimes think especially when you're sat down eating something you think 'oh look at me eating all this' and it's just a fleeting glance of the students that you know have said this and you think 'oh I hope they've eaten'" (Beth:81)*

Beth is unable to *"switch off"* these thoughts about young people eating during the summer holidays to the extent where they have become intrusive thoughts that occur whilst she is at home eating a meal. Yet Beth seemed hesitant about sharing this with me, prefacing her experience with comments of self-censorship until I provided reassurance. On the surface, Beth appears to be managing her emotions during difficult situations but perhaps this is because she is reluctant to share instances when this is not the case.

Claire talked less about her emotions in comparison to Amy and Beth. When viewed within the context of her interview overall, I think this was related to how Claire spoke about her experiences. For example, reflections using a collective voice (e.g. "*we all make mistakes*" *Claire:27*) or through rhetorical question (e.g. *"that's human nature isn't it?" Claire:6*) occurred when I perceived she felt less secure about what she was saying and so she used these devices in order to talk in generalities. Experiences spoken in the first person, such as in the extract below, reflect when Claire seemed more comfortable in owning that experience.

> *"And then when you get others that are quite rude, shouting across or doing stuff and wanting a reaction there and then and I think and I don't say anything, I bottle it up and I'll be real angry after" (Claire:8)*

In this extract, similarly to Beth, Claire talks about supressing her feelings in front of young people. But unlike Beth, emotions are suppressed to prevent the reaction she perceives these specific young people are wanting from her rather than to hide feelings of worry or upset about the young person. Claire's way of processing this anger forms part of the next subordinate theme: protective factors.

6.5.2. Subordinate Theme: Protective factors

Each of the emergent themes that formed this subordinate theme, as show in Table 6, are based on my interpretation of participants' lived experiences. That is to say, none of the participants explicitly expressed that humour, acceptance or letting go were characteristics they possessed that helped them to cope with supporting young people as part of their TA roles. Through the process of double hermeneutics, these were character traits I inferred acted as protective factors through listening to participants' responses throughout each of the interviews.

Whilst Amy shared the most examples of distressing experiences with young people and repeatedly mentioned its emotional impact upon her, she also laughed frequently throughout

the interview. Moreover, Amy appears to frame her perceptions of these experiences in a humorous way such as in the excerpt below where she finds the humour in supporting young people who all seem to talk extensively.

> *Most of the ones that I do support talk [both laugh] yeah they do talk, they do talk, they talk a lot [laughs] (Amy:81)*

Amy shared a further example of a time when she needed to give reassurance to a young person who was fearful of reprisals such as going to prison over a minor matter that *"wasn't something that needed reporting or anything else" (Amy:82)*. Amy viewed the catastrophizing of this young person with humour as opposed to frustration or exasperation at wasting her time. I perceived Amy's ability to view situations with humour is used as a coping mechanism to help her deal with certain experiences such as young people's behaviour.

Table 6: Subordinate Theme: Protective factors

Superordinate Theme: Processing emotions *"I constantly worry about him. I go home on a night and I worry about him." (Amy:13)*		
Subordinate Theme: Protective factors		
Participants	Quote (meaning unit number)	Emergent Themes
Amy	*Most of the ones that I do support talk [both laugh] yeah they do talk, they do talk, they talk a lot [laughs] (81)*	Use of humour
Beth	*each day's a new day, you know whatever happened yesterday you don't draw on it, it's a new day today so you forget about it (67)*	Tabula rasa (blank slate)
Claire	*I am bothered at the time of doing it but afterwards I'm not bothered because I've done my bit for that child and I have to move onto the next one and whatever will be will be. (46)*	Letting go

With the exception of the excerpt that refers to intrusive thoughts about young people eating during the summer holidays, Beth rarely mentions her emotional response to experiences of supporting young people. This is why I phrased Beth's emergent theme in the previous subordinate clause as 'managing difficult situations'. The protective factor that I feel aids in this management is Beth's use of forgetting and starting again from a blank slate i.e. tabula rasa.

"I've never had one lesson where I've thought 'oh thank goodness that's over' you know... I can't honestly say I've had one lesson that I've thought that, you know, I've thought some days 'oo you've been a little monkey today' but I've never thought 'oh god I'm dreading my lesson tomorrow'. I've never ever gone away and thought that with him because each day's a new day, you know, whatever happened yesterday you don't draw on it, it's a new day today so you forget about it." (Beth:67)

I initially had entitled this emergent theme as 'acceptance' but as I began to explore Beth's responses in greater detail, I realised that she was employing a 'blank slate' mentality both figuratively and literally. In the above excerpt, Beth is figuratively creating a blank slate of mind as a way of mentally drawing a line under past experiences to enable her to face future ones. Whereas in the extract discussed in the previous subordinate theme, Beth is literally employing a blank slate to her emotional expression: *"as much as you feel like 'oh god' you can't let them see that" (Beth:79)*. This use of tabula rasa over her facial expression is to protect the young person from witnessing Beth's emotions but also I believe acts as a way of distancing Beth from her emotions until she feels ready to process them: *"you can think afterwards 'oo poor lad'" (Beth:79)*. Both uses of tabula rasa can be construed as a protective factor because they enable Beth to process her emotions when she feels ready and to face experiences anew.

I deemed Claire's protective factor as her ability of 'letting go'. For example, in an earlier extract discussed in relation to the Subordinate Theme: Emotional expression, Claire talked about supressing her initial reaction, explaining she would be: *"real angry after" (Claire:8)*. When I asked Claire how she processes these emotions, she describes what I perceived as her releasing this anger:

"I feel angry at the time and then it's gone now...I mean I could see those kids now down the corridor and I'd be fine now" (Claire:9)

This character trait became an emergent theme due to the frequency in which Claire applied it in various situations. In the previous example, Claire is able to let go of emotions. This approach helps Claire to let go of unhelpful thoughts *"and just push it out the way" (Claire:60)* and to compartmentalise *"problems" (Claire:10)* experienced at school or home to prevent them from affecting one another. It is also used to help Claire cope with letting go of the relationships she has built with the young people she has supported, and what will happen to them once they leave school:

"I am bothered at the time of doing it but afterwards I'm not bothered because I've done my bit for that child and I have to move onto the next one and whatever will be, will be." (Claire:46)

Once a young person has completed their GCSEs, Claire's focus appears to shift: *"I've done my bit for that child and I have to move onto the next one" (Claire:46)*. Claire explains she is *"bothered at the time of doing it but afterwards I'm not bothered" (Claire:46)* as the *"SEN kids" (Claire:46)* rarely return to school for their A-Levels. Claire mentions that she could find out their GSCE results but appears to stop herself from doing this: *"I can't really" (Claire:46)*. This may be Claire's way of seeking closure as knowledge of the young person once they have left school is no longer readily available therefore Claire's response is to let go: *"whatever will be, will be" (Claire:46)*.

6.5.3. Subordinate Theme: Support systems

Through sharing lived experiences wherein the participants' reported strong emotional responses such as feeling *"worry" (Amy:13), "sad" (Beth:76)* or *"intimidated" (Claire:53),* the interview naturally led to questions about how these emotions were processed by participants to enable them to continue supporting young people as part of their TA role. For example, both Amy and Claire mentioned talking to family members and walking their dog as systems of support within the home, whereas at school each participant mentioned talking to staff. Table 7 details the emergent themes for each participant within this subordinate theme.

Table 7: Subordinate Theme: Support systems

Superordinate Theme: Processing emotions *"I constantly worry about him. I go home on a night and I worry about him." (Amy:13)*		
Subordinate Theme: Support systems		
Participants	Quote (meaning unit number)	Emergent Themes
Amy	*we'll always talk it through together (97)*	Systems of support
Beth	*I know that I can manage on my own. I'm self-sufficient, I know what I'm doing. (61)*	Self-support system
Claire	*I do have people I can talk to at work, at home (11)*	Systems of support

Amy mentioned walking her dog and talking to her son to help her to *"off-load" (Amy:94)* when she's had a *"stressful day" (Amy:96).* With prompting, Amy talked about the SENCo being a source of support within school:

> *"I've gone and spoken to [SENCo] about it…coz she's a very good listener, she's very good at what she does and she will always, we'll always talk it through together, about the best solution, erm, and how things will sort of work out" (Amy:97)*

When Amy talks about finding *"the best solution"* and working things out with the SENCo, it sounds as though Amy talks to the SENCo about how to perform her role rather than seeking support for her well-being. Although, perhaps helping the young person also helps Amy's well-being if the young person was the source of her *"worry" (Amy:13).*

Similar to Amy, Claire also mentioned family members and dogs as sources of support within the home:

> *"I do have people I can talk to at work, at home… If I want to, you know. And I've got a dog and a new puppy which is wonderful…very therapeutic." (Claire:11)*

At school, Claire talked about the importance of having *"the right back-up…the right support from the rest of your team" (Claire:66).* I wondered what Claire perceived as the 'right kind' and conversely, the 'wrong kind' of support. With prompting, Claire viewed support from line managers as more helpful than support from TAs which suggests the 'right kind' of support for Claire perhaps may be more procedural rather than emotional.

Beth's system of support differed from Amy and Claire as it was not based on external systems such as family members or school staff. I included it within this subordinate theme nevertheless because a change in the external school system enabled Beth to utilise an internal support system i.e. her English subject knowledge. Originally, the emergent theme selected to form part of this subordinate theme was 'awareness of effective methods of support'. A closer inspection of the transcript whilst analysing the findings revealed the nature of the support within the emergent theme referred to that which was given by Beth towards others. This theme therefore no longer fitted in with the overall subordinate theme and was removed. The extract below became the basis of a re-imaging of an existing emergent theme which was previously entitled: impact of TA's subject knowledge on performing the role. Upon viewing each of the sections of the transcript which pertained to this theme, I realised that the

impact of subject knowledge was that Beth now felt *"self-sufficient" (Beth:61)* and so the emergent theme was re-named and became: self-support system.

> *"now I can just know that I come to work and if I don't see any of like [SEN manager] or [SENCo] or anybody all week I know that I can manage on my own. I'm self-sufficient. I know what I'm doing. I: So why would you meet up with [SEN Manager] or [SENCo]? What would that be for? Beth: If I had any problems really (I: ok) yeah, but I don't really coz I know what I'm doing in English. (Beth:61-62)*

Through being allocated as *"an English TA" (Beth:1)* Beth now felt able to support herself whereas previously, her systems of support within school were the SEN Manager and the SENCo.

6.5.4 Discussion

As previously identified within the literature review, whilst there is a wealth of research exploring teachers' emotions (e.g. Schmidt & Datnow, 2005; Cross & Hong, 2012; Chen, 2016) and their well-being (e.g. Hobson & Maxwell, 2017; Rae et al., 2017), particularly as it relates to stress and burnout (e.g. Kyriacou, 2001; Mearns & Cain, 2003; Howard & Johnson, 2004; McCormick & Barnett, 2011), there are comparatively few studies focused specifically on the emotional well-being of TAs (Martin et al., 2019). As a result, research examining TAs' well-being typically draws from the existing pool of research on teachers (e.g. Middleton, 2018; Martin et al., 2019). Research and psychological theory will similarly be extrapolated where it is pertinent to participants' lived experiences within the Superordinate Theme: Processing emotions.

Initially, research focused on how teacher stress and burnout resulted in ill health and poor teacher retention, particularly amongst those new to the role, and was attributed to the school environment (e.g. Kyriacou, 2001; Mearns & Cain, 2003). This expanded into research that explored the individual traits of the teachers who seemed to cope well and be resilient under stressful circumstances (e.g. Mearns & Cain, 2003; Howard & Johnson, 2004; Gu & Day, 2007). When reviewing the literature on teachers' emotional well-being, resiliency is increasingly being used as a conceptual framework (Beltman et al., 2011). A brief overview on the concept of resiliency will be given before the research on teachers' resilience is discussed.

As a construct which has been broadly conceptualised for its application in research on teacher well-being, resiliency has developed over the past few decades from a deficit-model

approach focused on risk/protective factors, to one that is strengths-based and considers protective processes (Howard & Johnson, 2004; Gu & Day, 2007; Beltman et al., 2011; Fletcher & Sarkar, 2013). Research on resiliency began with children and adolescents' individual responses to difficult experiences and identifying factors that either increased the risk of a negative outcome or factors that protected them (Howard & Johnson, 2004; Smith et al., 2004). Protective factors include individual attributes such as positive emotions and access to a network of supportive relationships with friends and family (Smith et al., 2004; Gu & Day, 2007).

As part of a paradigmatic shift into positive psychology, research via the concept of resiliency explored the protective processes that enabled people to overcome adverse or stressful experiences (Rutter, 2006; 2012; DeSimone et al., 2017). Resiliency, as it relates to the participants' lived experiences included within this superordinate theme, adopts Gu and Day's (2007) two-part conceptualisation: a psychological concept, and a multi-dimensional, socially constructed concept. As a psychological concept, resiliency relates to participants' personal resources for example, the character traits identified as protective factors during the analysis. The second part of the definition refers to participants' resiliency as it relates to the environmental context such as home and school as sources of support. "Resilience does not happen in a vacuum" (Smith et al., 2004, p.570) but through a complex and dynamic interaction between individual and social contexts (Gu & Day, 2007).

Research exploring teachers' resiliency identify a number of factors related to the job role which can negatively or positively impact upon well-being that are also applicable to the role of TAs such as: support from family, friends and colleagues, relationships with colleagues, pupils and parents, and pupils' behaviour (Howard & Johnson, 2004; Gu & Day, 2007; Pretsch et al., 2012). A literature review of research on teacher resiliency by Beltman et al., (2011) identified similar protective factors as those noted in this research. Individual protective factors which was categorised as personal attributes included 'sense of humour' (Amy) and 'able to let go' (Claire) and were identified as coping skills. Contextual protective factors included support from family and colleagues (Amy and Claire).

More recently, research has explored teachers' emotions in relation to their experiences in school (Chen, 2016), how these emotional experiences affect teachers' well-being (Cross & Hong, 2012) and the effect of teachers' emotions on their teaching and their relationships with students (Burić et al., 2018). Whilst this body of research is focused specifically on teachers, it is discussed here to develop understanding around the emotions of participants which

informed the Subordinate Theme: Emotional expression and underpins the Superordinate Theme: Processing emotions.

Cross and Hong (2012) used Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems model as a conceptual framework to explore emotional influences from a micro (e.g. personal values) to a macro level (e.g. government policy change). Findings indicated the reciprocal influence of macro level events (e.g. national tests) on micro-level experiences (e.g. teachers' negative emotions impacting upon relationships with students) consequently effecting macro level changes (e.g. testing policies). Viewed through this lens, Beth's emergent theme 'self-support system' came into being through macro level change i.e. the allocation of TAs to a specific subject, which evoked positive emotions such as feelings of competency and self-sufficiency. Whilst the reciprocal influence of these changes was not explored, Beth's positive emotions will presumably have affected her relationships with young people.

Both Cross and Hong (2012) and Chen (2016) found that teachers experienced both positive (e.g. pride) and negative emotions (e.g. worry) through their interactions with students that primarily revolved around their academic achievement for example, if they did or did not make progress in their learning. Burić et al., (2018) also found that teachers experienced more positive emotions (e.g. joy) related to students' academic achievement but more negative emotions (e.g. anger) around students' behaviour directed towards teachers or its impact upon learning. These findings differed slightly from the participants' emotional expression in this research. Whilst participants also experienced positive emotions related to young people's learning, particularly Beth, negative emotions were predominantly related to young people's behaviour for example, Amy's feelings of constant worry regarding a young person's self-injurious behaviour. Such differences are to be expected when consideration is given to the differences in job roles between teachers and TAs and highlights a need for research that explores the emotions experienced by TAs.

6.5.5. Summary

Research findings suggest teachers' well-being is impacted by complex and dynamic interactions (Beltman et al., 2011) between individual personal and environmental variables (Hobson & Maxwell, 2017) which contributes to and is affected by their levels of resiliency (Gu & Day, 2007). Participants' interpretations of their lived experiences supporting young people identified with SEMH needs and challenging behaviour are congruent with these findings. Participants' in this research drew from protective factors and support systems when processing their emotions thereby enabling them to continue performing their roles as TAs. In addition, teachers' emotions play a central role in their perception of and response to

experiences related to school (Burić et al., 2018). Participants' processing of positive and negative emotional experiences underpins this superordinate theme and further research is needed to explore and understand the impact of emotions on the role of TAs.

6.6. Superordinate Theme: Individual approach to the TA role

"…your job is to help them, to help these children through, the ones who're struggling that bit more." (Beth:46)

This superordinate theme is comprised of two subordinate themes: TA attributes and Familial associations. Each subordinate theme illustrates the individualistic approaches used by participants with regards to their views on performing the TA role and their familial perception of young people. Both subordinate themes were selected to form part of this superordinate theme because of the way in which participants' beliefs and perceptions informed their individual approach to the TA role.

6.6.1. Subordinate Theme: TA attributes

The subordinate theme 'TA attributes' encompasses the emergent themes which depict participants' values and beliefs regarding the type of qualities TAs require to successfully support young people as shown in Table 8. Participants' viewpoints about TAs were generally a reflection of how each participant performed their role. It must be noted that whilst some of the emergent themes were developed from responses directly related to questions about performing the TA role (e.g. if somebody was interested in doing your role what advice would you give them?), the majority of these emergent themes were based on opinions volunteered by participants or were based on the participants' perception of my questions, for example:

> *"I: …could you tell me about what is important for you to be able to do your role? Amy: …you've got to be [pauses] calm, understanding, patient" (Amy:70)*

All of the participants named attributes they perceived as either owning themselves, or gave as a recommendation for other TAs. Amy shared some of the characteristics she possesses and how they inform her individual approach to the TA role:

> *"I'm quite easy going and laid back with them cos I don't believe being on their backs all the time is gonna get the best out of them anyway." (Amy:38) "I'm not on their backs all the time… if the boy with attachment he wants to go to sleep for five minutes I [say] 'go on then' and then it gives me chance to work with the others… coz he's quite needy when he wakes up" (Amy:57-59)*

Amy offers an example of how her personal attributes of being *"easy going and laid back"* *(Amy:38),* which she has interpreted as *"not [being] on their backs all the time" (Amy:57),* has shaped her approach which in this instance is allowing the young person to briefly sleep. Amy's justification is that it enables her to help other young people as she has learnt from previous experience that this young person requires her attention.

Participants Beth and Claire advised *"remain[ing] calm and level headed at all times" (Beth:79),* and *"be[ing] patient, hardworking" (Claire:36).* Whilst the former advice is offered as a response when hearing emotional stories from young people, the latter advice is suggested as a preventative measure:

> *"If you get annoyed [pauses] they'll get annoyed back. And you can't get annoyed with them (I: yeah) so patience is the key thing" (Claire:36).*

Despite being motivated by different reasons, each perceived TA attribute shaped participants' individual approach to the TA role.

Table 8: Subordinate Theme: TA attributes

Superordinate Theme: Individual approach to the TA role *"…your job is to help them, to help these children through, the ones who're struggling that bit more." (Beth:46)*		
Subordinate Theme: TA attributes		
Participants	Quote (meaning unit number)	Emergent Themes
Amy	*you've got to be calm, understanding, patient (70)*	Personal values regarding TA characteristics
Beth	*I mean ultimately you're there for the SEN but part of my role is to not to make the SEN stand out (50)*	Personal beliefs on performing TA role
Claire	*I mean you're not here, you aren't here as a mum are you? You're here to help them academically (38)*	Perception of TA qualities

Both Amy and Beth talked emphatically about what they believed a TA should and should not do. For example, Amy relates the importance of TAs listening to young people within the context of safeguarding. She shares her perception of young people as *"vulnerable"* due to

their *"very difficult homes" (Amy:78)* and the need to listen in case she misses something *"like a cry for help" (Amy:75).* The emotional fall-out of missing this and being "*always at the back of your mind" (P1:76)* is the driving force behind Amy's standpoint on TAs listening to young people. Whereas Beth talked about the importance of using positive reinforcement strategies (e.g. *"you've always got to be positive" Beth:41)*, supporting inclusion (e.g. "*part of my role is to not to make the SEN stand out" Beth:50)* and creating *"independent" (Beth:42)* learners, explaining: "*I'm not a TA who'll do it for them" (Beth:5).* These approaches are reflective of Beth's values as a person which she brings into her role as a TA.

Where the participants differed was the way in which they viewed their overall priority as a TA. Amy appeared to prioritise young people's well-being: *"as long as they're happy, and they're stable at school, and they…can get through the day safely" (Amy:111).* Whereas Beth and Claire appeared to prioritise young people's learning: *"it's your job to get that student to do some work" (Beth:41).* Participants' perceptions of the TA role will have a consequential effect on how they perform that role. For example, when Claire explains: *"you're not here…as a mum…You're here to help them academically" (Claire:38)* this implies her perception of being a TA revolves around young people's learning rather than associating the role with being a mother such as nurture and protection which is perhaps more congruent with Amy's perception of a TA attribute.

When reflecting on her belief that TAs need to be intelligent in order to support young people's learning, Claire sees a clear demarcation between the roles of TA and motherhood. Perhaps this is because she witnessed first-hand the evolution of TAs, from mothers to professionals, and is actively trying to distance herself from this conception.

> *"You need for kids to learn as well I think. I think you need to, in fact I think need to be kind of intelligent yourself. I think, initially the role was a role that people thought was ideal for mums with children and mum's with children would come into it with, I mean I'm guilty of that myself, I started that way, when your children start school but you do need to have a certain amount of education yourself because otherwise what's the point?" (Claire:38)*

In contrast, both Amy and Beth compared their beliefs and values on performing the TA role with their roles as mothers. Amy explained she has *"always been patient and calm" (Amy:72)* using the example of being a mother and raising children who were close in age to one another. Similarly, Beth reflected that her stance on the importance of creating *"boundaries" (Beth:11)* with young people was something she also practised with her own children. All three

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participants mentioned motherhood in relation to the role of TAs when discussing their perceptions of the necessary types of attributes. The next subordinate theme was developed as participants continued to make familial associations with aspects of carrying out the TA role.

6.6.2. Subordinate Theme: Familial associations

The Subordinate Theme: Familial associations embodies emergent themes that reflect how participants' perception of their relationships and/or interactions with young people was viewed through a familial lens. There were slight variations in how the emergent themes were phrased for each participant based on their personal perceptions which in turn informed their individual approach to the TA role. The participants' emergent themes are outlined in Table 9.

Table 9: Subordinate Theme: Familial associations

Superordinate Theme: Individual approach to the TA role: *"…your job is to help them, to help these children through, the ones who're struggling that bit more." (Beth:46)*		
Subordinate Theme: Familial associations		
Participants	Quote (meaning unit number)	Emergent Themes
Amy	*I think it's the mummy side in me yeah that wants them all to be looked after and make sure they're all happy and well (89)*	Maternal influence
Beth	*I've got three children of my own, I kind of treat them the same as I would me own (11)*	Parallels between roles of TA and mother
Claire	*he calls me Granny [surname] because, because he can I suppose because I let him (2)*	Familial perception of relationship between young person and TA

Both Beth and Claire reflected on being perceived by young people through a familial lens. For example, Beth said: "*They look to me sometimes as a mum role I suppose" (Beth:74).* Beth feels that she is sometimes perceived as a maternal figure to the young people she supports as she has been called 'mum' by them. Beth's response is to laugh it off as way of defusing and making light of the situation which she perceives as embarrassing for the young person. Beth also turns it into a joke when she says to them *"you wouldn't want me to be your mum" (Beth:74)* because they would receive an earlier bed time. Beth may be saying this as

part of a joke but I think the subtext relates to her earlier comment about a perceived lack of boundaries in their homes.

Beth's self-perception is derived from her perception of young people who accidentally call her 'mum', whereas Claire is repeatedly called by a familial term by one young person she supports: *"he calls me Granny [surname] because, because he can I suppose because I let him" (Claire:2)*. Claire described this young person as *"wacky" (Claire:1)* because he calls her *"Granny [surname]"* which perhaps suggests this familial perception is one-sided. Claire's reaction to the young person's use of a familial term appears to be indifference; she allows the use of this term as long as it serves a purpose:

> *"I don't mind, and if that's the relationship he feels that you know, as long as I can get on with him and get him to do some work that's fine" (Claire:2)*

The purpose in this instance was the building of the type of relationship that enabled Claire to support the young person *"to do some work".*

A further area where I inferred a familial association were the experiences that evoked a maternal and/or nurturing response from participants towards young people. The first example comes from Amy:

> *"I've always sort of dealt with those kids. I think it's the mummy side in me yeah that wants them all to be looked after and make sure they're all happy and well" (Amy:89)*

This comment was made when talking about the type of young people Amy feels she typically supports i.e. looked after or previously looked after CYP. Amy's perception of her support for *"those kids"* is maternal; she wants to nurture the young people as a mother nurtures her own children.

Beth similarly described experiencing emotional responses that were situated within a maternal perspective. In the quote below, Beth is explaining how she feels when young people make disclosures to her:

> *"You feel terrible for 'em, you feel as though you want to take 'em home and…if you can make life easier for them at school…they spend more time at school in a lot of ways than they do at home…so you've got to make school nice to come to" (Beth:77)*

I viewed Beth's response of wanting to take young people home through a maternal lens as it evinced notions of protection and nurture. My interpretation of her comment was Beth wanted to do more than just take the young people out of that environment, she wanted to take them home so she could look after them herself. Being unable to do this she makes a compromise and re-creates school as a 'home away from home' for them instead. Hearing the young people's disclosures evoked a maternal response in Beth. She also perceives her concern for young people as maternal. For example, when talking about her feelings of concern for young people eating over the summer holidays, she explains: *"that's just maybe the mum instinct coming out in me, I don't know" (Beth:81).* Beth has previously mentioned young people perceiving her as a mother figure and perhaps this comment is an indication that this perception is reciprocated.

I perceived Claire's maternal response towards young people as being comparatively more oblique. For example, when discussing her understanding of SEMH and the underlying causes she asks:

> *"two of the kids that I've mentioned, both of those two kids are fostered [pauses] so to me in my mind I'm thinking is that why they've got SEMH because of what happened in their early life…But if they hadn't been fostered, if they'd been born to me, would they've of ever had SEMH? (Claire:59).*

I wondered why she had chosen herself as an example. Claire had chosen to try to understand the young people's *"early life"* experiences through a maternal framework. I wonder if she would have done this if she was not a mother. Perhaps it is natural to try to understand the experiences of another's upbringing when she has brought up children of her own. I surmised Claire's question to be suggestive of her underlying feelings of nurture which stemmed from a maternal perception of the young people she is referring to.

A final familial association was specific to Beth who drew parallels between the roles of TA and mother through comparing her treatment of young people with the way she treats her own children:

> *"I've got three children of my own, I kind of treat them the same as I would me own" (Beth:11) "that's how I've always treated my own daughters" (Beth:23) "I try to think, what I tell my own children and I build on that really" (Beth:78)*

In the first quote Beth is referring to teaching young people her personal values i.e. *"that boundaries are very important" (Beth:11),* something which she explained is understood by her own children. In the second quote (Beth:23) Beth applies her method of developing relationships through communication from home to school: *"I never clamp down and shout at them" (Beth:23).* In the third quote (Beth:78) Beth reflects on the type of advice she gives young people *"if they've got a problem" (Beth:77)* drawing from experiences with her own children as a frame of reference. In each of these examples, Beth draws from her own values and experiences as a mother to inform her individual approach to the TA role.

6.6.3. Discussion

As discussed in the literature review, a key aspect of a TA's role is to build positive relationships with the young people they are working with to support their behaviour for learning (Powell & Tod, 2003; Groom & Rose, 2005; Groom, 2006), and for the TAs in this research, to support with SEMH needs and challenging behaviour. In building these relationships with young people, participants drew from their own personal values and beliefs to inform their professional practice. A part of this personal schema for each participant was their role as mothers which shaped their perception and influenced their individual approach to the TA role. Extant literature and psychological theory as it relates to school staff's personal and professional values, and their relationships with young people will be explored. Where research is focused on school staff other than TAs, findings will be extrapolated and discussed where relevant to TAs generally and the participants specifically.

Succinctly put, attitudes represent a set of beliefs that are governed by our values and can influence our behaviour (Hogg & Vaughan, 2002). Modelling and teaching values has increasingly become an intrinsic part of education within the UK (DfE, 2013; DfE, 2014; Ofsted, 2018). As part of their role, there is an expectation that school staff will model "core values" (Sunley & Locke, 2010, p.410) "positive attitudes" (DfE, 2013, p.10) and "expected behaviour" (Groom, 2006, p.201). Research exploring the values of school staff has discussed areas such as self-awareness of personal and whole-school values, and has highlighted the importance of exploring personal beliefs, attitudes and values as a means of understanding how they shape professional ones and the subsequent implications on practice (e.g. Jones, 2003; Sunley & Locke, 2010; 2012; Collinson, 2012).

Participants implicitly and explicitly shared what I perceived as their personal beliefs and values (e.g. calm, patient, understanding) of TA attributes but did not mention if they were in-line with the school's values. This may reflect a lack of awareness of the school's values. Research has highlighted the demands placed upon secondary school staff which can act as

a barrier to reflective and reflexive practice (Jones, 2003; Sunley & Locke, 2010). However, the lack of research examining the integration of personal with professional values within secondary schools (Sunley & Locke, 2012) prevents the extrapolation of findings to understand participants' relationship with personal and professional values.

Participants shared what I interpreted as strongly held beliefs on TA attributes which informed their individual approach to the TA role. A self-identified source for their beliefs by Amy and Beth stemmed from their experiences as mothers. Watson et al., (2013, p.112) noted that the TAs in their research felt that being a mother "added value to their role". This correlates with comments made by Amy and Beth who both used knowledge acquired as mothers to support their approach as TAs supporting young people. Whereas Claire's beliefs appeared to be shaped from her progression from 'mum helper' to TA thus a distancing was inferred as part of her developing a professional identity. Drawing from personal values such as experiences as a mother may be indicative of the current lack of professional guidance such as TA Standards (ATL, 2016; Skills for Schools, 2016). Although, Watson et al., (2013) argues that previous standards for TAs were reductive and demeaning of what is a complex and nuanced role. Or it may be symptomatic of the identity associated with TAs when considering the origins of the role and how starting as a voluntary parent helper still continues to be an introduction to the role for some TAs (Groom & Rose, 2005; Barkham, 2008; Hammersley-Fletcher & Lowe, 2011; Graves, 2014; Roffey-Barentsen & Watt, 2014; Clark, 2019).

Research has highlighted associations between the TA role, the role of mothers and gender stereotypes (Mackenzie, 2011; Watson et al., 2013; Clarke, 2019). The current demographic of the average TA in the UK are women aged 41-50 (Clarke, 2019). As outlined in the literature review, research conducted from a feminist perspective has raised questions about status, power, inequality (Clarke, 2019) and consideration of "woman's work" (Gilbert et al., 2011, p.22). Roles typically associated with women are subjected to lower pay and status (Gilbert et al., 2011; Graves, 2014). Power inequalities and low status are particularly felt by TAs in relation to teachers (Mackenzie, 2011; Watson et al., 2013) due to the ever-expanding TA role causing pedagogical tensions with teachers and a confused professional identity (Watson et al., 2013; Graves, 2014). TAs' professional identities are further compromised because of a lack of role definition and clarity, along with access to initial training and opportunities for professional development (Tucker, 2009; Mackenzie, 2011). Whilst I did not discern these issues in relation to this superordinate theme, they do relate to some of the participants' shared and individual themes such as their relationships with teachers, and are therefore further explored as part of the analysis on divergent patterns.

In addition to examining the professional boundaries between teachers' and TAs' roles, research also has explored the boundaries in the relationships developed between school staff and students. As has been discussed, relationships with CYP form the cornerstone of a TAs' role. Research on relationships within an educational context has explored a range of areas including the impact on teachers' emotional well-being (e.g. Split et al., 2011; Hagenauer et al., 2015), students' behaviour (e.g. Aldrup et al., 2018), motivation (e.g. Maulana et al., 2011), engagement and achievement (e.g. Klem & Connell, 2004; Roorda et al., 2011; Quinn, 2017). Yet there is little research which explores the nature of school staff's relationships concerning professional boundaries (Lord Nelson et al., 2004; Aultman et al., 2009) in comparison to other professions founded on relationships such as social care (e.g. Kagle & Giebelhausen, 1994; Pugh, 2007), mental health (e.g. Hartmann, 1997; Gabbard et al., 2011) and healthcare (e.g. Nadelson & Notman, 2002; Bosslet et al., 2011). Research exploring professional and ethical boundaries addresses the importance of reflexivity (Kagle & Giebelhausen, 1994; Hartmann, 1997), awareness of power differentials (Nadelson & Notman, 2002), the advent of the internet and social media (Bosslet et al., 2011; Gabbard et al., 2011) and being part of the same community (Pugh, 2007). Each of these issues are pertinent to this study's research findings: the time demands as barriers to reflexivity regarding awareness of personal values; the power differential between an adult and a young person; Claire commented on the use of social media; Beth and Claire discussed living in the same community as the young people they support.

Education, health and social care each follow their own paradigmatic models of practice but the advent of EHCPs via the SEND Code of Practice (DfE, 2015) has brought them together raising queries as to how such differences can collaborate (Norwich & Eaton, 2015). I view it as an opportunity of sharing methods of good practice, particularly as it relates to the education sector adopting the same level of awareness of professional boundaries as mental/health and social care. It is of particular importance to TAs supporting CYP with SEMH needs. When developing a positive relationship with a young person is a crucial part of a TA's role but as part of this relationship development the TA makes familial associations, where is "the line"? (Aultman et al., 2009, p.636). Research exploring boundaries in teacher-student relationships has revealed different types of boundaries i.e. emotional, personal and professional, and that boundaries are 'fluid' i.e. person specific and subject to personal interpretation (Aultman et al., 2009). It has also discussed the importance of reflective practice to develop self-awareness of emotional well-being and the need for boundaries to support family's expectations on staff's availability and commitment (Lord Nelson et al., 2004; Aultman et al. 2009).

There is a greater body of research that explores the nature of teacher-student relationships through the lens of attachment theory (e.g. Kennedy, 2008; Riley, 2009; 2013; Van Ryzin, 2010; Sabol & Pianta, 2012; Murray et al., 2016). Research based on attachment theory will be discussed as it relates to this study's findings in two mains ways: participants' direct mention of supporting young people with attachment difficulties and participants' indirect references to young people that were suggestive of familial associations. It must be noted however that as there were no other explicit references to attachment, it is unknown if participants received school-based trained on attachment theory and/or if they were knowingly following principles derived from attachment theory such as acting in the capacity of a 'key adult' (Bombèr, 2007, 2015).

Attachment theory proposes that the nature of the relationship developed between an infant and their primary caregiver can affect later interpersonal and intrapersonal relationships, and interactions with the environment such as school (Geddes, 2003; Slater, 2007). Research on attachment theory suggests that relationships formed with 'emotionally significant others' (Geddes, 2003) or a 'key adult' (Bombèr, 2007, 2015) can readdress the effects of adverse experiences with their primary attachment figure on their 'internal working model' i.e. their self-perception and perception of self in relation to others, which can be shaped by new experiences (Geddes, 2005; Slater, 2007; Kennedy, 2008). Bombèr (2015) explains this role is typically undertaken by TAs and advocates awareness of personal and professional boundaries (of self and others). The role of the TA therefore is to support CYP's social and emotional needs which would subsequently facilitate their readiness to engage with learning (Webber, 2017).

Literature discussing the application of attachment theory in developing school staff-student relationships provides little insight with regards to the impact or effect it has on school staff as the research naturally focuses on the outcomes for the student as it relates to their engagement, achievement or behaviour (e.g. Kennedy, 2008; Van Ryzin, 2010; Sabol and Pianta, 2012; Murray et al., 2016). Participants' comments about the young people they supported implied their relationships carried familial associations: attributing emotional responses to young people as being maternal (Amy), advising and treating young people the same as their own children (Beth), allowing familial perceptions by young people (Claire). For participants, perhaps the consequence of carrying out this role was the development of maternal and/or familial perceptions of their relationships with young people, which further strengthens the need for understanding around personal, emotional and professional boundaries.

6.6.4. Summary

Whilst literature has demonstrated the teaching and modelling of whole-school values, particularly by teachers, has increasingly become a part of their roles within schools, the dearth of research on the influence of personal values makes extrapolation for this research's findings problematic. Multiple factors were postulated as contributing to participants' use of their personal values regarding TA attributes and familial associations such as the absence of TA Standards and a history of confusion regarding their role and professional identity. However, the recommendations for aligning personal to whole-school values provide helpful advice for TAs as it highlights the importance of reflective and reflexive practice. This advice is repeated in the literature underpinned by attachment theory when entering into a relationship in the role of 'key adult' and in research discussing the need for professional boundaries when forming relationships. Participants' reflections indicated one source of their personal values stems from being mothers which has permeated their perceptions of their relationships with young people. Gaps in the literature and research have been identified which fail to address what the impact of forming relationships and the lack of guidance on personal and professional boundaries has for TAs utilising their individual approaches to supporting young people identified with SEMH needs and challenging behaviour.

6.7. Patterns of Divergence

Patterns of divergence refer to emergent themes that were not shared by all three participants. Emergent themes that were shared by two participants (Table 10) and emergent themes from individual participants (Table 11) are discussed. The reasoning for exploring divergent patterns is to discuss the ideographic detail of participants' lived experiences as TAs supporting young people identified with SEMH needs and challenging behaviour.

6.7.1. Shared emergent themes

Six sets of emergent themes that were shared by two of the participants were identified as depicted in Table 10. If these patterns were to be accorded subordinate status, they could be described, in the chronological order presented in Table 10, as: perceptions of young people's relationships with teachers; school environment; impact of young person's home life; relationship's with young person's family; relationships with young people and the TA role in flux.

As outlined in Table 10, relationships were discussed by each participant, whether it was their perceptions of teacher-student relationships, or their own relationships with young people or their families, thus indicating its salience as part of their lived experiences in this role. Participants' relationships with young people has been previously discussed in connection

with the Superordinate Theme: Individual approach to the TA role as it related to participants' use of personal values and its effect on their personal and professional boundaries. As 'relationships' is such a prevalent theme for participants, this strengthens the need for further research and guidance on TAs' relationships.

Amy and Claire's experiences of change around the TA role may have impacted upon their emotional well-being. Being subjected to constant change can evoke feelings of insecurity or lacking a sense of control in addition to feelings of fatigue or discomfort due to the environmental context of working in a large school. The 'protective factors' discussed in the Superordinate Theme: Processing emotions were viewed as participants' coping strategies in response to supporting young people but perhaps there is a wider context beyond their direct work with young people wherein they are needed.

Table 10: Shared emergent themes

Shared Emergent Themes		
Amy	**Beth**	**Claire**
X	Observations on relationship between teacher and young person	Dynamic between young people and teachers
X	Environmental factors effecting TA role	Impact of environmental factors
X	Impact of home life on school life	Impact of young people's home life on their time in school
Relationship with young person's family	Links with young people's home	X
Relationship with young person	Relationship with young person	X
Variable nature of TA role	X	Changeable nature of TA

Each of the participants discussed their direct experiences with parents and their perceptions of young people's lives at home. When analysed in isolation, participants' positive experiences with parents did not correlate with some of the research exploring teachers' emotions (e.g. Nias, 1996; Cross & Hong, 2012; Chen, 2016) but participants' comments on home life

corresponded to some of the TAs perceptions in Mackenzie's (2011) research. These emergent themes, when viewed in conjunction with the Superordinate Theme: Understanding the young person, provide an additional dimension to the overall 'picture' they have constructed about the young people they support. These themes would also inform the Superordinate Theme: Processing emotions as some of the emotions expressed by participants were directly related to their experiences and perceptions of parents/carers and young people's home life.

6.7.2. Individual emergent themes

Emergent themes which were considered as individual to the participant and could not be grouped with any emergent themes from other participants are displayed in Table 11. Exploring the emergent themes that were specific to participants provides insight into their personal lived experiences as individuals and has been used to further understand the subordinate and superordinate themes. Specific individual emergent themes were selected for discussion where findings correlated or contrasted with existing research.

Amy's emergent themes around insecurity were related to a lack of secondary school experience and being on a fixed-term contract that was coming to an end. At the time of the interview, she was waiting to apply for an up-coming permanent position in the same school, whereas Beth and Claire had worked at the school as TAs for over twenty years. Mavropoulou and Padeliadu (2002) found teachers' perception of causal attributions that were external to themselves increased somewhat with the teachers' level of experience leading to the suggestion that a higher sense of self-competence in teaching abilities leads to externalisation as a means of explanation for a continued occurrence such as misbehaviour. On a couple of occasions, Amy openly discussed her lack of experience, qualifications and knowledge, whereas Claire wondered about the generational effect of parenting on young people's behaviour. Extrapolating Mavropoulou and Padeliadu (2002) findings, perhaps Claire felt comparatively more secure to make causal attributions because of the length of her experience at the same school in comparison to Amy.

Whilst the positive relationships Beth describes experiencing with various members of staff is contrary to the negative perceptions by TAs as observed in Mackenzie's (2011) research, Amy's hyperawareness of other TAs possibly reflects the tensions Mackenzie (2011) described in her research findings. Although it may also be reflective of Amy's insecurities as she frequently compared her way of working with that of other TAs. Similar to Mackenzie's (2011) findings, some of Beth's comments about teachers, whilst positive, also were suggestive of a hierarchy which correlated with findings from Watson et al., (2013) who used

positioning theory. Beth was aware of her position in relation to the teacher i.e. she would not offer advice to teachers regarding the young people she supported unless she was specifically asked.

Table 11: Individual emergent themes

Individual Emergent Themes		
Amy	**Beth**	**Claire**
Interpretation of young person's behaviour to inform type of support	Interpretation of young person / people's behaviour	Perceptions of young people's home life
Perception of other TAs	Relationship with staff and impact on TA role	Association between young people, teacher and behaviour
Personal approach to TA role	Hierarchical perception of staff members and impact on communication	Dynamic between teacher and TA
Insecurity about lack of experience/qualifications/ knowledge	Preferred aspects of TA role	Reflecting on TA role using a collective voice
Perception of self as a TA	Avoids using SEMH label	Reflecting through use of rhetorical question
Perception of TA role as being challenging	Awareness of effective methods of support	Personal experience provides insight
Positive perception of TA role	Volunteer's personal time to support young people	Self-perception
Perception of TA role developed in relation to others	Description of TA duties / strategies	Voice of TA in systemic change
Balancing negative with positive comments	Communication with young person	Perception of TA role attributed to school systems
Insecurity around TA role		Perceptions of safety around young people in/out of school
		Perception of TA role related to young person

6.7.3. Summary

A concise exploration of the discarded emergent themes provided a greater sense of the individual participants as well enriching and contextualising the analysis of the subordinate and superordinate themes. The discarding of emergent themes and the depth of analyses of the divergent patterns is discussed as part of a wider appraisal on the limitations of this research.

6.8 Chapter Summary

Analysis using IPA found a total of seventy-one emergent themes. Patterns of convergence and divergence were explored amongst the emergent themes. Patterns of convergence were viewed as emergent themes that were shared by all three participants which identified eight subordinate themes. Using the process of abstraction, three superordinate themes were developed from the eight subordinate themes. Patterns of divergence occurred when emergent themes were shared by only two of the participants or were specific to an individual participant. Analysis of the subordinate and superordinate themes provided insight into how the participants made sense of their lived experiences as TAs supporting young people identified with SEMH needs and challenging behaviour. Analysis of divergent patterns revealed the idiographic detail of participants' lived experiences, some of which augmented the interpretations of the subordinate and superordinate themes.

Participants sought to understand the young people they support. Borrowing from Beth's metaphor, participants divined pieces of a puzzle to make sense of the overall picture. These puzzle pieces included the young person's category of need, their behaviour and their background history. Each piece was interpreted and attributed meaning to develop their understanding of the young person thereby enabling their ability to support them: *"If I can understand them better, how they tick, it'll help me with them…" (Amy:115).* As a consequence of this 'sense-making', participants expressed experiencing an array of positive and negative emotions: *"I constantly worry about him. I go home on a night and I worry about him." (Amy:13).* Resiliency was inferred through identification of participants' coping mechanisms which acted as 'protective factors' and discussions around their use of internal and external 'support systems'. Each participant drew on their own personal values to inform their approach and perception of the role: *"…your job is to help them, to help these children through, the ones who're struggling that bit more." (Beth:46).* The corollary of participants' use of values developed as mothers was interpreted through different conceptual frameworks: a feminist lens deemed it to be reflective of the TA role's development and perceived status within schools; attachment theory queried available guidance and understanding around personal, professional and ethical boundaries.

7. Overall Discussion

This chapter provides an overview of key points for further reflection following the completion of this research whereas the following chapter (Chapter 8: Limitations) focuses on identifying the procedural strengths and limitations of this research. Re-visiting key areas will provide transparency (Yardley, 2000) and demonstrate reflexivity (Smith, 2011a) as part of the on-going commitment to quality for qualitative IPA research.

7.1. The Problem with 'Challenging Behaviour'

Challenging behaviour (as previously discussed in Chapters 2.3.4. and 4.5.1.) was used to create a homogenous participant sample for three reasons: it is a requirement of IPA research as a means of capturing shared lived experience between different participants, in response to Norwich and Eaton's (2015) criticisms that the SEMH area of need is ambiguous, and it is identified as a manifestation of SEMH within the SEND Code of Practice (DfE, 2015).

The difficulty in using 'challenging behaviour' as a construct in which to create homogeneity of the TA's experiences supporting young people identified with SEMH needs became apparent when searching for its definition. Despite the frequency of its usage within school discourse, based on my professional experiences and when reviewing educational policy and guidance (e.g. DfE, 2012; DfE, 2017), there are few explanations offered as to how it is understood nor consensus regarding its meaning.

The definition of 'challenging behaviour' that I have used within this thesis was taken from Ofsted (2005) which offers a socially constructed concept that is dependent upon individual perception. When viewed in this way, 'challenging behaviour' would not provide homogeneity to the participant group as each participant could potentially perceive this construct differently. It is for this reason that 'challenging behaviour' was ultimately removed from the thesis title.

However, the findings from this research questioned participants' knowledge and understanding of the SEMH area of need based on its lack of use and/or the inferred hesitancy in using this term. In this instance, perhaps the 'challenging behaviour' term which has been in use for longer than 'SEMH' (e.g. DfES, 2001b) was more accessible for participants in their understanding of the lived experiences they were being asked to recount within this research.

7.2. Interview Preparation and Practise

As discussed in Chapter: 4.5.2. the development of the interview scheduled helped me to think about the phrasing of the questions and how they would enable me to draw close to the

participants' lived experiences. I did not however have the opportunity to practise interviewing using these questions as part of a pilot study. My original plan for the pilot study was to trial my questions and interview technique during an interview with a TA. Upon further reflection, this method of pilot study may not have been the most effective means of exploring these questions as it would have meant potentially having to disregard the experiences shared by the TA.

Alternatively, a focus group comprised of TAs that adhered to the sample criteria would have provided the opportunity to test my questions and practise my interviewing skills. For example, through gathering the TAs' views on my questions, inviting TAs to suggest alternative questions and practising the dynamic dialogic interaction which takes place during an interview informed by an IPA approach.

It was this latter aspect of my understanding on conducting interviews which I had the least opportunity to practise and consequently my learning occurred whilst undertaking the interviews. For example, during my first interview I became aware that I was losing focus on Amy's lived experiences and my role as a researcher, and slipping into my role as a Trainee EP:

> *"hopefully come September a plan'll be in place where he will have (I: are they applying for an Education, Health, Care Plan?) yes (I: ah, ok) yeah (I: so they're thinking that) he's been through the (I: the process) the process of it so yeah. So hopefully he will get more support" (Amy:100)*

It was in this moment, when I asked Amy if the school were applying for an EHCP, that I became self-aware and realised that I needed to consciously remind myself of the purpose of this interview. In retrospect, I believe this slip occurred because this was the first interview I had undertaken for research purposes whereas all of my other experiences of speaking to people in schools on a one-to-one basis have occurred in a professional capacity as either an Assistant or Trainee EP.

Through noting my mid and post-interview reflections (Appendix 11.8) I was aware of the development of my interview technique over the course of the three interviews. For example, during the second and third interviews, I was more conscious of the purpose of the interview and tried to return the focus onto the participants' lived experiences supporting young people with SEMH needs:

"So what element of your role is related to supporting children with SEMH and challenging behaviour, can you tell me a little bit more about what you do with those children." (Beth:7)

Beth began the interview by recounting her experiences of becoming an English TA. The above extract illustrates how I prompted Beth to tell me more about her experiences relating to a specific aspect of her role.

7.3. Understanding IPA's Theoretical Framework

Understanding "the theoretical foundations of IPA" (Smith et al., 2009, p.11) proved to be an immensely difficult challenge because IPA is a research approach and therefore underpinned every aspect of this research: from its design, data collection, analysis and discussion of the findings. In order to be able to undertake each of the aforementioned aspects of this research in line with IPA's theoretical framework, I wanted to develop a close understanding of what I perceived as a dense subject matter because of the complex interweaving of multiple theoretical strands deriving from phenomenology and hermeneutics.

As discussed in Chapter 4.4.2. Smith et al., (2009) draws from several phenomenological (Husserl, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and Sartre) and hermeneutical (Heidegger, Schleiermacher and Gadamar) perspectives to inform IPA. Whilst Smith et al., (2009) devote a chapter in their book to explaining each of these perspectives and their influence on IPA, its accessibility for novices to IPA, phenomenology and hermeneutics is problematic. For instance, some of the terms struggle to be translated into English or were created by the author and belong to differing schools of philosophy, each with its own rich and long histories.

To better understand the various philosophical approaches discussed necessitated further reading (e.g. Dowling, 2007; Finlay, 2008; McConnell-Henry et al., 2009). This provided greater clarity on the individual concepts but created confusion as to how some of these seemingly antithetical concepts could intersect. For example, articles have highlighted researchers' confusion and offered epistemological instruction on the difference between Husserl's transcendental phenomenology and Heidegger's hermeneutic phenomenology (e.g. Mapp, 2008; McConnell-Henry et al., 2009) and IPA utilises both.

When revisiting this body of research to become reacquainted with the philosophical framework of IPA in preparation for the presentation of my research to colleagues, some of the concepts made more sense through practical application. For example, IPA takes from Husserl's bracketing and Heidegger's fore-conception through its engagement with "the

process of reflection" (Smith et al., 2009, p.16). By reflecting before, during and in between each of the interviews, I tried to maintain my focus as a researcher on specific lived experiences of the participants and bracket my fore-conceptions as a Trainee EP, as discussed in Chapter 7.2.

7.4. Sharing Participants' Voices

A criticism noted by researchers is the lack of TA voices within literature and research which has focused on the TA role (e.g. Barkham, 2008; Roffey-Barentsen & Watt, 2014; Clarke, 2019). My research acknowledged this criticism by choosing to focus exclusively on TAs using a research approach that aimed to get close to their lived experiences. What I had not fully appreciated until using IPA was some of the restrictions on 'voice' imposed by its theme-based approach to presenting lived experiences.

IPA's idiographic analysis generates a wealth of rich data necessitating processes be undertaken to present this data in an accessible way. IPA creates overarching (superordinate) themes derived from individual case analyses (Smith, 2011a, Smith et al., 2009; Smith, 2017) with the stipulation:

> one should be able to learn something about both the important generic themes in the analysis, but also about the life world of the particular participants who have told their stories. (Smith, 2004, p. 42)

Smith (2011a) advises the close examination of patterns of convergence and divergence within select themes rather than a superficial discussion of all themes as part of IPA's commitment to idiography. This was a difficult balance to strike as the creation of superordinate themes meant that many emergent themes were discarded. It was hard to reconcile privileging some experiences to discuss over others, thereby editing the participants' voices as the idiographic detail of the participants' lived experiences and a sense of who the participants are stemmed from their individual emergent themes.

I attempted to include more of the participants' voices by conveying all of the discarded themes which were presented as shared and individual emergent themes in Chapter 6.7. In retrospect, presenting the idiographic details of participants' lived experiences as a narrative account would be more in-line with IPA (Smith et al., 2009). For example, although Mackenzie (2011) did not use IPA, she presented her research findings on TAs' experiences of inclusion in education as five individual case studies and then discussed overall patterns of convergence and divergence within the discussion section. Alternatively, Williams and Porter (2017, p.97) in their IPA research used pen portraits as a way of introducing their participants before

sharing their analysis findings on the experiences of "choice and control" of adults with learning difficulties.

Chapter 8: Limitations

The limitations of this research will be discussed using two assessment frameworks previously introduced in Chapter 4.7: Yardley's (2000) criteria for qualitative research, and Smith's (2011a) quality evaluation guide for IPA research. My reasoning for using both types of guidance was to review the quality of my research against a wider set of standards for qualitative research and those specifically developed for IPA research.

Yardley's (2000) criteria for good qualitative research acknowledges the difficulty in assessing the validity of such varied research methodologies and suggests the following four key areas be applied flexibly: sensitivity to context; commitment and rigour; transparency and coherence; impact and importance. Each of the four key areas will be explained and appended with examples as to how they have been addressed.

Yardley (2000) describes 'sensitivity to context' as demonstrating an awareness of the research philosophy and theory, relevant literature, socio-cultural setting and ethical consideration of the participants. Within this research I have demonstrated my commitment to 'sensitivity to context' through reviewing the existing research and literature on TAs to develop my research rationale. Extrapolations made from relevant research was problematic due to the paucity of existing research on TA's experiences relating to SEMH within mainstream classroom settings. I have discussed the phenomenological, hermeneutic and idiographic theories underpinning IPA and how this informed the research design and analysis. I have shared the context of the sample group and discussed the implications of the analysis through a feminist lens and extant research. I have demonstrated the ethical approval I received from the University of Sheffield, and outlined the ethical considerations I gave to participants such as their work commitments and emotional well-being.

The criteria of 'commitment and rigour' are explained as an in-depth engagement with the research topic, demonstrating methodological competence and skill such as immergence in the data and an in-depth analysis (Yardley, 2000, p. 219). My positionality, as discussed in Chapter 2, situates my engagement with the research as going beyond that of a researcher due to my professional experiences of being a TA supporting a child identified with SEBD, although this was within a mainstream primary setting. IPA requires data immersion and in-depth analysis as discussed in Chapter 4 where I outlined my methodological procedure. I undertook my analyses in line with Smith's et al., (2009) guidance on IPA research and demonstrated my engagement of the hermeneutic circle through sharing my reflections

throughout the main body of the thesis and presenting more detailed reflections and excerpts of raw data in the appendices.

Yardley (2000) explains the purpose of 'transparency and coherence' within qualitative research is the disclosure of research methods, the presentation of data and the coherency between theory and method. It is also to present the research in a narrative form that engages the reader in a meaningful way. My commitment to transparency and coherency in relation to the research methodology and analysis is demonstrated in Chapters 4 and 5 where I discuss the development of the research design with examples of my reflexivity, and outline the stages of analysis, following a close examination and adherence to the epistemology of IPA (Smith et al., 2009).

The 'impact and importance' of good qualitative research is the value and usefulness it has in advancing theory and research, and its applications for professional practice (Yardley, 2000). A review of existing literature and research identified areas of scarcity and gaps pertaining to TAs: TA voice within research, TA's experiences of supporting young people identified with SEMH needs in mainstream classroom settings, and the application of phenomenological approaches. A small-scale exploratory qualitative study enabled the gathering of rich data from an under-researched aspect of a TA's role. This focus was considered as timely given the current context of the mental health agenda in UK schools and the identified role of TAs. Recommendations for research and practice (for schools and EPs) were made based on interpretations placed within the wider context of existing theory and literature. A lack of application for EP practice in research was noted and discussed in relation to the EPs role within statutory and non-statutory guidance.

The quality and validity of this research will now be discussed using Smith's (2011a) quality assessment guide for IPA research. Smith (2011a, p.24) considers good IPA research to meet all seven criteria: it should have a clear focus; it will have strong data; it should be rigorous; sufficient space should be given to the elaboration of each theme; the analysis should be interpretative not just descriptive; the analysis should be pointing to both convergence and divergence; it needs to be carefully written. Each item will be described and discussed with examples to demonstrate how this research has addressed them.

Smith (2011a) explains the 'clear focus' of IPA research as being specific rather than broad. This research focused on the lived experiences of TA's performing one specific aspect of their role i.e. supporting young people identified with SEMH needs. To further homogenise the sample population of TAs, one specific type of setting was chosen i.e. mainstream secondary

schools, and challenging behaviour was utilised to reduce SEMH as an arguably broad category of need with SEND.

Reference to 'strong data' is in relation to the quality of interview data (Smith, 2011a). The development of the interview schedule was undertaken in line with guidance from Smith et al., (2009) and in consultation with my research supervisor. Questions were developed to avoid value-laden responses for example, 'can you tell me about a memorable experience' removes presumption and offers the choice to participants as to what they perceive 'memorable' to be. A perceived limitation was the scheduling of the interviews which prevented the opportunity for piloting, reflecting and consequently the possibility of improving the interview schedule and/or technique. However, the interviews were arranged in deference to the ethical considerations of the school as the employer of the participants.

IPA research is viewed as 'rigorous' if depth and breadth are demonstrated as it pertains to individual themes and the overall corpus regarding the prevalence of convergent and divergent patterns (Smith, 2011a). This research presented all of the identified emergent, subordinate and superordinate themes. In terms of exploring patterns of convergence, superordinate themes were developed from subordinate themes derived from all three participants, due to the small sample size. Within each superordinate theme, all of the subordinate themes were discussed and illustrated with extracts and quotes from participants. Regarding patterns of divergence, tables of data were presented to illuminate patterns of emergent themes shared between two participants and the emergent themes of each individual participant.

Smith (2011a) explains the need to give 'sufficient space' to the discussion of themes. Whilst the convergent patterns were discussed in-depth, a limitation of this research is the depth of analysis afforded to the patterns of divergence, as discussed in Chapter 7.4. Although, the interpretation of 'convergence and divergence' within a subordinate theme was demonstrated. For example, in the subordinate themes: 'emotional expression' and 'protective factors' each participant's emergent theme was individual to that particular participant but were inferred as sharing a common meaning within the superordinate theme.

Analysis in IPA research is considered as 'interpretative not just descriptive' when extracts are interpreted using double hermeneutics i.e. "trying to make sense of the participant and trying to making sense of their experience" (Smith, 2011a, p.24). Being mindful of Smith et al., (2009) critique of novice IPA researcher's tendency to be descriptive, I closely followed guidance from multiple sources as part of my 'sense-making' process of analysis (e.g. Smith, 2004; Smith et al., 2009; Smith, 2011a). This was undertaken for two reasons: to ensure coherency and in

reverence to the experiences shared by participants. As Smith et al., (2009, p.108) explains, the analysis "is by far the most important section in an IPA write-up" therefore careful consideration was given to interpreting and articulating the experiences of participants through the analytical lens of IPA. Through 'carefully written' research that aspires to engage the reader and develop their understanding of the phenomena being explored (Smith, 2011a), I aimed to provide insight of participants' lived experiences of supporting young people identified with SEMH needs and challenging behaviour within a mainstream secondary school setting.

Chapter 9: Implications, Recommendations and Conclusion

Findings from the analysis and discussion are used to discuss the wider implications and to make recommendations in relation to school and EP practice to address this research's aims. In addition, in response to the limited research pertaining to TAs which has been noted throughout this thesis, recommendations for research are also discussed. This thesis concludes by providing a summary of the research in totality.

9.1. School Practice

The following implications and recommendations are made to address the research aim:

- To discuss the implications for mainstream secondary school's practice regarding TAs supporting young people identified with SEMH needs and challenging behaviour.

As discussed in the Superordinate Theme: Understanding the young person, participants' lived experiences were interpreted as a hesitancy in using the 'SEMH' label and observed an interchangeable use of terminology between the previous and current SEND Code of Practice such as 'statements' and 'EHCs'. Analysis findings suggested this may be due to a lack of understanding and/or confidence. This could be addressed through receiving training on the SEND Code of Practice (DfE, 2015) with regards to revised changes for example, information on the four areas of need within SEND which includes SEMH, and the introduction of EHC Plans to replace statements and SEN Support to replace School Action and School Action Plus. As TAs are specifically referenced in the SEND Code of Practice (DfE, 2015) and often form part of the provision for CYP with EHCPs (Webster & Blatchford, 2019), it is necessary for TAs to have an understanding of their role within this context.

All three participants frequently used educational labels and two of the participants (Amy and Beth) to use medical/diagnostic labels which were interpreted as their 'perception of need' as part of their 'understanding the young person': *"If I can understand them better, how they tick, it'll help me with them" (Amy:115)*. TAs would benefit from the opportunity of having an open discussion about the use, understanding and meaning they attribute to these labels (Armstrong, 2014) and to reflect on its implication on their practice i.e. what is their understanding of the young person, their perception of need, and how is it used to inform their support. This should be undertaken as part of a systemic review of whole-school approaches to inclusion such as its policies and ethos (Dimitrellou & Hurry, 2018) as participants' use of educational and medical labels was discussed in the analysis as possibly reflecting existing school discourse. As previously discussed within the Literature Review, research has

highlighted the need for a whole-school approach to change to support its implementation within existing school systems (Spratt et al., 2006; Kidger et al., 2009).

Findings from the Superordinate Theme: Processing emotions raised questions about the participants' well-being and their awareness of emotional boundaries. Whilst participants' initial responses to questions of their personal well-being indicated they felt 'fine', further questioning prompted feelings of 'constant worry' for young people (Amy), of taking problems home (Beth) or the suppression of emotions (Claire). Whilst all of the participants discussed members of staff, they felt confident and able to talk to as part of their 'support systems', this appeared to be associated with following safeguarding procedures rather than seeking support for their well-being. A common practice in 'helping professions' is clinical supervision where the emotional impact is acknowledged (Willis & Baines, 2018). Whilst on-going supervision is offered to those who work with CYP with complex needs such as EPs and ELSAs (Emotional Literacy Support Assistants), it is rarely offered within schools (Rae et al., 2017). Access to supervision would create a protected and protective space for reflective practice, benefitting TAs and consequently the young people they support (Rae et al., 2017; Willis & Baines, 2018).

This research's findings within the Superordinate Theme: Individual approach to the TA role, discussed participants' perceptions of their roles via 'TA attributes' and how this informed their sense of professional identity. For example, it was clear that Beth's confidence was boosted by the systemic changes made to the TA role and consequently she gained a sense of self-sufficiency and identity through being 'an English TA'. Participants Amy and Beth also drew on their identities as mothers to inform their professional practice and 'familial associations' were inferred from all three participants' perception of their relationships with young people. Furthermore, Beth and Claire lived in the same community as the young people they support and shared experiences of accidental interactions. Opportunities to engage in reflective practice through supervision would be beneficial in supporting TAs' awareness and understanding of their personal and professional boundaries and should be viewed as part of their professional development (Sunley & Locke, 2012). Through open dialogue it may emerge that participants are self-identifying with the gendered persona that has been assigned to roles traditionally perceived as "women's work" (Barkham, 2008, p. 844) or surface the influence of their intrinsic values on their professional behaviour (Sunley & Locke, 2010).

9.2. EP Practice
The following implications and recommendations are given to address the research aim:

- To discuss the implications for EP practice regarding direct and indirect working with TAs in this role.

The implications for EP practice relating to the Superordinate Theme: Understanding the young person indicate a need to further explore how TAs' develop their understanding of the young people they support, particularly as it relates to the SEND Code of Practice (DfE, 2015) and the inclusive practices within schools. In the Subordinate Theme: Perception of need, participants were interpreted as using medical and educational labels to understand young people's needs but at the same time, these labels were construed to shape participants' perception of need. The source of the labels was perceived as deriving from existing school discourse and based on participants' usage, demonstrated confusion between the SEN (DfES, 2001b) and SEND Code of Practice (DfE, 2015) and hesitancy over the SEMH area of need.

The EP role is said to take place at an individual, group and organisational level and involve working with a range of people including SENCos, teachers, TAs, parents/carers and CYP (Wagner 2000; Fallon et al., 2010). For the participants in this research, the role of an EP at an individual level could provide support and guidance through exploring and re-framing pathologized, deficit model, within-child constructions of need (Quinlivan, 2002). At an organisational level, an EP could support and facilitate action research (Cohen et al., 2011) to explore school staff's understanding of the SEND Code of Practice (DfE, 2015) to identify and address misunderstandings or gaps in knowledge. As noted by Higgins and Gulliford (2014, p.134), through their direct work with schools EPs are ideally placed to offer systemic support "at an organisational and school improvement level". EPs are trained to apply systems psychology in a range of approaches to facilitate organisational change such as Appreciative Inquiry (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005; Doveston & Keenaghan, 2006), Solution Circle (O'Brien et al., 1996; Brown & Henderson, 2012) and Force Field Analysis (Thomas, 1985; Lewin, 1997). Staff discourse on areas of need could be explored as part of a systemic review of the school's inclusion practices and policies.

Research findings discussed in the Superordinate Theme: Processing emotions revealed participants experienced emotional responses to undertaking their roles. As noted in the Subordinate Theme: Emotional expression, through the use of probing questions it was revealed that Amy and Beth continued to experience these emotions when they were at home. As discussed within the Subordinate Themes: Protective factors and Support systems, participants were inferred to use coping mechanisms to enable them to continue performing their role. Whilst the participants in this research felt supported by the school systems in place, the examples shared only described professional guidance, with no reference to well-being

support. This highlighted a need for participants to access well-being support within school, particularly as research on teacher's emotional well-being demonstrates the range of its impact, including upon their relationships with CYP (e.g. Burić et al., 2018).

Consultation enables EPs to collaboratively problem-solve to effect change for CYP at an individual, group and whole-school level (Wagner, 2000; Nolan & Moreland, 2014). Individual consultation with TAs would provide EPs with the opportunity to gain an understanding of how TAs process emotions and to ascertain their access to emotional well-being support. As discussed in the recommendations for school practice, one method of support is the use of supervision which EPs are able to facilitate due to their own professional use and experience of supervision (Callicott & Leadbetter, 2013). Supervision could initially be modelled and guided by EPs to enable schools to continue independently, drawing from their internal resources. Group supervision with opportunities for peer supervision may counter barriers such as time constraints to adopting supportive practices within school settings. Moreover, involving TAs during group consultation with school staff and families would enable TAs to gather knowledge about CYP which as the research findings revealed was one way participants tried to develop their understanding of the young people they support.

School practice recommendations stemming from the Superordinate Theme: Individual approach to the TA role identified a need for reflective practice to explore participants' personal and professional boundaries. This was in response to participants drawing from their personal values and beliefs (Subordinate Theme: TA attributes) and their experiences as mothers (Subordinate Theme: Familial associations) to inform their approach to carrying out the TA role. Research exploring relationships between teachers and students (e.g. Aultman et al., 2009) and the influence of personal values, beliefs and past experiences of teachers on professional practice has identified reflective practice as one source to enable self-awareness (Collinson, 2012; Sunley & Locke, 2010, 2012).

Engaging in reflective practice is one of the standards of proficiency for practitioner psychologists working within the UK (HCPC, 2015). As such, an EP can use their knowledge and experience of reflective practice to provide guidance and support to TAs at an individual, group and organisational level. When working with TAs, either individually or as part of a group, through consultation or during supervision, EPs can encourage reflective practice through collaboratively surfacing personal influences on professional practice. At a systemic level, the role of an EP is well placed to develop a holistic overview of TA practice within a given school with regards to the understanding and application of reflective practice,

particularly as there is currently no statutory professional standards for TAs (ATL, 2016; Skills for Schools, 2016).

9.3. Research

For as long as government policies, advice and guidance continue to name schools as providing a role in supporting the SEMH needs of CYP (DoH, 2015; DfE, 2018a) and name TAs as part of that provision (DfE, 2015; DoH/DfE, 2017), there is arguably a need for research as to how this aspect of the role is undertaken. In line with recommendations made by research conducted on the TA's role supporting SEMH needs (e.g. Middleton, 2018) and research exploring TAs' experiences (e.g. Roffey-Barentsen & Watt, 2014), further research is also needed on TAs' experiences of supporting CYP identified with SEMH needs and challenging behaviour. Findings from this research identified a number of areas that would benefit from further exploration.

This research purposefully chose to focus exclusively on TAs' lived experiences of supporting young people identified with SEMH needs and challenging behaviour within secondary schools for two main reasons: the prevalence of mental health disorders increases with age (NHS, 2018) and the comparative complexities of SEN inclusion within a secondary school system (Symes and Humphrey, 2011). Existing research focused on specific settings has discussed the importance of developing a greater understanding of a TA's role in relation to changes in CYP's development during Key Stage 2 (Blatchford et al., 2007), during the transition from primary to secondary (Webster & Blatchford, 2017) and in further education (Warwick et al., 2008). Consequently, a wider exploration of a range of settings is needed to reflect the range of ages (birth to twenty-five) covered by the SEND Code of Practice (DfE, 2015), particularly as it relates to the experiences of TAs supporting CYP with SEMH needs in educational settings such as early years provision, primary schools, special schools and post-16 provision.

Findings from this research regarding participants' 'perception of need' through their use of medical and/or educational labels correlated with Mackenzie's (2011) research that explored TAs' experiences around the inclusion of children with SEN. Whilst Mackenzie proposed the TAs' use of labels in her study was a reflection of their experiences of medical assessments, diagnoses and treatment with their own children, this reasoning does not apply to the participants in this study. Research exists on the perceptions of school staff around previous constructs such as SEBD (e.g. Armstrong, 2014), however some of the labels used by the participants in this research were reflective of the changes introduced by the SEND Code of Practice (DfE, 2015) such as 'EHCP' and 'SEN Support'. Further research would provide an

up-to-date understanding of TAs' perceptions of these new constructs and the associated meaning attributed to them.

Considering the context of this research, SEMH was the 'label' least used by participants as part of their 'understanding the young person'. This may be a reflection of an ambiguous category of need (Norwich & Eaton, 2015) and consequently indicate a lack of understanding at an individual (e.g. TA) or potentially at a systemic level (e.g. whole-school). Recent government advice and guidance (e.g. DoH, 2015; DoH/DfE 2017; DHSC/DfE, 2018; DfE, 2018a) on supporting CYP's mental health in schools make no explicit links or references to SEMH which perhaps adds further confusion to its relevancy within the SEND Code of Practice (2015). Of the small body of research on SEMH, few discuss how this term is understood generally other than to acknowledge existing tensions around its lack of clarity (Carroll and Hurry, 2018). Sheffield and Morgan (2017) found that the young people in their research were not aware of this categorisation as it had been applied to them and when introduced to it by the researchers, perceived it as negative and refused to adopt it. When reviewing the extant literature, there appeared to be no peer-reviewed research which explored the perceptions of school staff on the SEMH label or their understanding of SEMH as an area of need within SEND. Considering the recent upsurge on prioritising CYP's mental health (e.g. DoH, 2015; DoH/DfE, 2017; DfE, 2018a) and the perception of schools as being on the "front line" (DHSC/DfE, 2018, p. 4), this could arguably be a pertinent area for further research.

A final area identified as benefiting from additional research was the interpretation of findings relating to participants' personal, emotional and professional boundaries as part of their 'individual approach to the TA role'. As role clarity has historically been an area of much discussion (Clarke & Visser, 2016), further research may determine the impact of the decision to remove the TA Standards and the handing over of this responsibility to schools (ATL, 2016). Perhaps the lack of a framework coupled with existing difficulties resulting from role expansion (Blasford et al., 2017) has problematized TAs' professional identity and subsequently their sense of self in relation to their role (Watson et al., 2013). Research on the use of supervision in specialist SEMH settings (e.g. Rae et al., 2017; Willis & Baines, 2018) may provide a springboard for future research as it applies to TAs supporting SEMH needs within non-specialist, mainstream settings. Additionally, further research is needed to expand on existing literature and findings that recognise the potentially challenging nature of the role (Cole, 2010) and its impact on staff well-being (DfE, 2018a) as discussed in the Superordinate Theme: Processing emotions.

9.4. Conclusion

Drawing from professional experiences and in response to a perceived gap in the existing literature and research on TAs, this study sought to answer the question: what are the lived experiences of TAs within a mainstream secondary school who support young people identified with SEMH needs and challenging behaviour? The research aims were:

- To explore TAs' lived experiences of supporting young people identified with SEMH needs and challenging behaviour.
- To discuss the implications for mainstream secondary school's practice regarding TAs within this role.
- To discuss the implications for EP practice regarding direct and indirect working with TAs in this role.

A qualitative small-scale exploratory research was carried out using IPA. Lived experience was gathered through individual semi-structured interviews which were undertaken with three TAs from the same mainstream secondary school. Participants' lived experiences were interpreted using IPA and through the method of abstraction, eight subordinate themes were used to develop three superordinate themes overall:

- Understanding the young person: Perception of need, Sense-making, Knowledge
- Processing emotions: Emotional expression, Protective factors, Support systems
- Individual approach to the TA role: TA attributes, Familial associations

Findings from the analysis and discussion in Chapter 6 addressed the research question and first research aim with regards to exploring the lived experiences of TAs. The second and third research aims regarding the implications of this research on school and EP practice were discussed in Chapter 9.

Where previous research on TAs has often buried their voices or left them absent, this research focused on TAs' lived experiences in order to gain a deeper understanding of an under-researched aspect of their role directly from those who undertake it. The three TAs in this research, Amy, Beth and Claire, support young people identified with SEMH needs and challenging behaviour within a mainstream secondary school. To help them do this, they draw from a range of sources to gain a better understanding of the young person, including their personal beliefs and experiences, which can cause varied emotional responses. Opportunities for the participants to further their knowledge, to engage in reflective practice and to receive supervision would develop their awareness of emotional, personal and professional boundaries thereby supporting participants to *"…to help them, to help these children through, the ones who're struggling that bit more." (Beth:46)*

Chapter 10: References

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Chapter 11: Appendices

Appendix 11.1. Interview Schedule Version 1

Themes	References	Interview Questions
Knowledge: Training on the use of strategies and interventions	Groom, 2006; Wilson and Bedford, 2008; Farrell et al., 2010; Rubie-Davis et al., 2010.	1) Tell me about your past experiences and how you came to be in the role you are currently doing? *Prompt: a brief history of prior knowledge and work experiences, initial training and CPD.*
Deployment: Role clarity and CYP's inclusion	Farrell et al., 2010; Rubie-Davis et al., 2010; Webster et al., 2010; Webster et al., 2011; Webster et al., 2013; Clark and Visser, 2017.	2) Tell me more about the role you are currently doing? *Prompt: TA's understanding of role, feelings on appropriateness of provision, the 5W's of supporting CYP (who, where, when, what and why).*
Practice: Planning, monitoring and reviewing	Groom, 2006; Wilson and Bedford, 2008; Farrell et al., 2010; Rubie-Davis et al., 2010; Webster et al., 2010; Webster et al., 2011.	3) Tell me about some of the things you do to as part of your role? *Prompt: day to day experiences, positive and negative, opportunities for planning, monitoring and reviewing.*
Relationships: Between TAs and CYP, school staff and families	Groom and Rose, 2005; Burton and Goodman, 2011; Clarke and Visser, 2017.	4) Tell me about the relationships that are important to you in the role you are currently doing and why. *Prompt: CYP, CYP's family, members of school staff, personal relationships.*
Supervision: Support for TAs around stress and well-being	Groom, 2006; Burton and Goodman, 2011.	5) Tell me about how you are supported in your role? *Prompt: communication, stress/well-being, support systems.*

Appendix 11.2. Interview Schedule Version 2

Introduction:
- Who I am and my positionality i.e. used to be a TA in this type of role
- Purpose of research i.e. lived experiences to develop understanding
- Check if they have read and understood the TA Information Sheet
- Reminder of participant rights i.e. withdraw
- Sign consent form together
- Do they have any questions?

1. Tell me about what you do? What's a typical day like? Or if you don't have one, tell me about what you did yesterday / on your last day at work?
   Prompts: Can you tell me more about that? What was that like? How did you feel before/during/after?

2. If you were to describe your role to someone who wanted to know what it was like, what would you tell them? Would your descriptions change depending on who you were talking to? A family member or a friend? A person interested in doing you role?
   Prompts: Can you tell me more about that? What was that like? How did you feel before/during/after?

3. Tell me about a memorable experience during your time in this role?
   Prompts: Can you tell me more about that? What was that like? How did you feel before/during/after?

4. Tell me anything about your role that you would like to change?
   Prompts: Can you tell me more about that? What was that like? How did you feel before/during/after?

5. Tell me anything about your role that you would like to keep the same?
   Prompts: Can you tell me more about that? What was that like? How did you feel before/during/after?

6. Tell me about what is important for you to be able to do your role?
   Prompts: Can you tell me more about that? What was that like? How did you feel before/during/after?

7. Is there anything more you can tell me that would help me to better understand your experiences in this role?

Reflective Questions: Do I fully understand what it feels like for them in this role? If not, what more could I ask?

Appendix 11.3. Interview Schedule Final Version

Introduction:
- (Who I am and my positionality i.e. used to be a TA in this type of role
  – I did not share this so as to keep the focus on the participant's experiences)
- Purpose of research i.e. lived experiences to develop understanding
- Explain interview style e.g. conversational
- Check if they have read and understood the TA Information Sheet
- Reminder of participant rights i.e. withdraw
- Do they have any questions?
- Sign consent form together

1. Tell me about what you do? What's a typical day like? Or if you don't have one, tell me about what you did yesterday / on your last day at work?
   Prompts: Can you tell me more about that? What was that like? How did you feel before/during/after?

2. If you were to describe your role to someone who wanted to know what it was like, what would you tell them? (Would your descriptions change depending on who you were talking to? A family member or a friend? A person interested in doing you role? – I did not ask this part of the question in interview three following participants' responses in interviews one and two).
   Prompts: Can you tell me more about that? What was that like? How did you feel before/during/after?

3. What advice would you give to someone interested in doing your role?
   Prompts: Can you tell me more about that? What was that like? How did you feel before/during/after?

4. Tell me about a memorable experience during your time in this role?
   Prompts: Can you tell me more about that? What was that like? How did you feel before/during/after?

5. Tell me about what is important for you to be able to do your role?
   Prompts: Can you tell me more about that? What was that like? How did you feel before/during/after?

6. Is there anything more you can tell me that would help me to better understand your experiences in this role?

Reflective Questions:
Do I fully understand what it feels like for them in this role? If not, what more could I ask?

Appendix 11.4. Ethical Approval

Naomi Angel
Registration number: 160102350
School of Education
Programme: Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology (DEdCPsy)

Dear Naomi

PROJECT TITLE: Exploring the lived experiences of Teaching Assistants supporting children and young people identified by mainstream secondary schools as having Social, Emotional and Mental Health needs and displaying challenging behaviour.
APPLICATION: Reference Number 018896

On behalf of the University ethics reviewers who reviewed your project, I am pleased to inform you that on 21/05/2018 the above-named project was **approved** on ethics grounds, on the basis that you will adhere to the following documentation that you submitted for ethics review:

- University research ethics application form 018896 (dated 08/05/2018).
- Participant information sheet 1042549 version 2 (08/05/2018).
- Participant consent form 1042550 version 1 (16/04/2018).

The following optional amendments were suggested:

Please outline in the information sheet what you will do with any information that you deem necessary to be shared with the relevant authorities

If during the course of the project you need to deviate significantly from the above-approved documentation please inform me since written approval will be required.

Yours sincerely

David Hyatt
Ethics Administrator
School of Education

Participant Consent Form

Title of Research Project: Exploring the lived experiences of Teaching Assistants supporting children and young people identified by mainstream secondary schools as having Social, Emotional and Mental Health needs and displaying challenging behaviour.

Name of Researcher: Naomi Angel

Participant Identification Number for this project: **Please initial box**

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet explaining the above research project and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the project.

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason and without there being any negative consequences. In addition, should I not wish to answer any particular question or questions, I am free to decline. The person I can contact is Naomi Angel on [mobile number] or [university email address]

3. I understand that my name will not be linked with the research materials, and I will not be identified or identifiable in the report or reports that result from the research.

4. I agree for the anonymised data collected from me to be used in future research.

5. I agree to be recorded during the interview. I understand this recording will be anonymised, stored securely and destroyed once the research is completed.

6. I agree to take part in the above research project.

_____   _____   _____

Name of Participant   Date   Signature

_____   _____   _____

 Lead Researcher   Date   Signature
To be signed and dated in the presence of the participant

Once this has been signed by all parties the participant will receive a copy of the signed and dated participant consent form, the information sheet and any other written information provided to the participants. A copy of the signed and dated consent form will be scanned and stored electronically in an encrypted and password protected file. The audio recording of the interview will also be stored in this file. The original versions of both will be destroyed.

Appendix 11.6. Information for Teaching Assistants

Information for Teaching Assistants

Hello, my name is Naomi Angel and I'm Trainee Educational Psychologist studying at the University of Sheffield and currently on placement at the [Educational Psychology Service] in the [Local Authority]. You have been invited to take part in a research project exploring the experiences of TAs that support children and young people identified as having social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs and displaying challenging behaviour.

Before you decide whether you want to take part, please take some time to read the following information which explains what the research project is about, why it is being undertaken, what your involvement will be and your rights as a participant. Hopefully this information sheet will answer your questions but if you have any further questions or need any additional information, please get in contact with me using the contact information at the end of this document.

Thank you for taking the time to read this.

What is the research about?
The aim of this research is find to out what it is like for TA's whose role is to support children and young with SEMH needs and display challenging behaviour. This is because there has not been much research in this area and there is increasing interest in schools becoming more involved in supporting children and young people's emotional well-being and mental health e.g. Future In Mind (DoH, 2015), Transforming Children and Young People's Mental Health Provision (DfE, 2017).

Why have I been asked?
I chose to focus my research on TAs because of the amount of direct work they already undertake with children with SEND needs, including SEMH, and the lack of previous research which explored the experiences of TAs in this area. In addition, TAs may have more involvement in supporting children and young people with SEMH needs in the future. I think this research will provide the opportunity for TAs to share their experiences which may be helpful in supporting other's understanding and knowledge of how to support TAs in this role e.g. teachers, SENCos and Educational Psychologists.

What will I have to do?
To gather the information about the experiences of TAs in the role of supporting CYP with SEMH needs, I wish to carry out a single semi-structured interview. This means that I will be asking set questions but the rest of the interview will develop around the

answers that are given. The interview is expected to take no longer than an hour but it may finish sooner than this. The interview will be recorded using a Dictaphone. This is to ensure that I can accurately capture what is being said. The audio data file will then be transcribed and analysed alongside information gathered in other interviews with TAs.

What will happen to the information I share?

Your consent form and the audio recording of your interview will be saved onto a Google Drive file created specifically for this research and the original versions destroyed. Data stored on Google Drive is encrypted and password protected. All information that is taken from you will be anonymised to maintain confidentiality. You will not be identifiable within the research. From the research findings, I will be creating a set of recommendations for SENCos and Educational Psychologists to develop their understanding and knowledge in supporting TAs within this role. These recommendations will be shared in writing with yourselves, your school's SENCo and the Educational Psychologists at the [Local Authority]. The analyses from all of the interviews will be used as part of my doctoral thesis which will be published online at: https://etheses.whiterose.ac.uk/. The contents of the Google Drive file will be deleted once my thesis has been approved and published.

What are the potential benefits and risks of taking part?

The benefits of taking part in this research include having the opportunity to share your experiences to help others understand what you do and how you and other TAs in your role can be better supported. The risks of taking part are sharing experiences that may have been stressful or upsetting and could cause you to feel upset when talking about them.

Do I have to take part?

Your participation is voluntary so you do not have to take part in this research. You have the right to withdraw from this research at any point and you do not have to give a reason for withdrawing from the research. You can also choose not to answer any questions you do not want to during the interview.

What happens next?

If you would like to take part in this research, please contact me using the details listed below and I will email you a consent form to read. We can then arrange a date and time with your SENCo when I can come into your school to carry out the interview. Before the interview begins, we will complete and sign the consent form together. Once we have completed the interview, there will be no other expectations placed upon you.

My Contact Information:
Naomi Angel
Trainee Educational Psychologist
Telephone: [mobile number]
Email: [university email address]

My Research Supervisor:
[Supervisor's name]
School of Education
The University of Sheffield
Email: [supervisor's email]

This research project has received ethical approval from the University of Sheffield.

New data protection legislation came into effect across the EU, including the UK on 25th May 2018; this means that we need to provide you with some further information New data protection legislation came into effect across the EU, including the UK on 25th May 2018; this means that we need to provide you with some further information relating to how your personal information will be used and managed within this research project. This is in addition to the details provided within the information sheet that has already been given to you.

The University of Sheffield will act as the Data Controller for this study. This means that the University is responsible for looking after your information and using it properly.

In order to collect and use your personal information as part of this research project, we must have a basis in law to do so. The basis that we are using is that the research is 'a task in the public interest'.

Further information, including details about how and why the University processes your personal information, how we keep your information secure, and your legal rights (including how to complain if you feel that your personal information has not been handled correctly), can be found in the University's Privacy Notice https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/govern/data-protection/privacy/general.

Appendix 11.7: Email to SENCos

Dear [SENCo],

My name is Naomi Angel and I am a Trainee Educational Psychologist with the University of Sheffield currently on placement at the [Educational Psychology Service] within the [Local Authority]. I will be undertaking a research thesis on the experiences of TAs who support children and young people who you have identified as having Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) needs and displaying challenging behaviour. The aims and objectives of this research are to learn more about a TA's role within this capacity and to develop a better understanding of how to support them.

As part of this research, I would like to interview TAs who currently occupy this role within your school. TAs will be required to participate in a single interview that is anticipated to last no longer than an hour. The interview can take place at your school, at a date and time that can be arranged to be of mutual convenience to all involved. Can you please give out the information sheet attached to this email to all TAs who are currently working within this capacity. Any TAs wishing to take part in this research will need to get in contact with me on the contact information outlined below.

If you have any questions or would like further information, I can be contacted on [mobile number] or at [email address]

Kind regards,
Naomi Angel

Appendix 11.8. Interview Reflections

Mid-Interview Reflections

Amy: she seemed the most relaxed. Perhaps we had a better rapport? We had more chance to talk prior to the interview as we tried to find the room together. Her responses were more focused on SEMH. I shared my positionality at the end and she seemed really interested and wanted to hear about my experiences. IPA was right! Beth: she kept checking if what she this was saying was relevant to the interview – why? Perhaps she was feeling nervous? She was holding and/or rubbing her arms. She spoke more generally about the role versus SEMH specifically. After Amy's response, I didn't tell her about my positionality. Claire: I wasn't sure if our interview was focused on 'experiences' although I was feeling quite tired at this point. I was unsure how she felt about being interviewed but then after I switched off the recorder she said I reminded her of her neighbour e.g. same mannerisms/facial expressions. She was also the only one to shake my hand.

Post-Interview Reflections

The SEN Manager scheduled all three interviews to take place consecutively with a brief break in between. I had not anticipated this and whilst I would have preferred to have separated the interviews across different days to enable a deeper level of reflection, I agreed to this arrangement to accommodate the school. Conducting the interviews in this way meant I did not need to bracket my fore-knowledge as I had not yet started my analysis, however it was difficult at times to remain focused on the participant I was currently interviewing without making prior connections or comparisons to the previous interviews.

The first interview was slightly delayed and we were placed in a room where a meeting could be overheard in the adjoining room. The SEN Manager came into the room towards the end of the interview to explain I would be moved to a different room when ready. The room for the subsequent two interviews was quieter and felt more private. The environment factors intruded upon the privacy of the first interview and consequently Participant One's responses.

To support my focus and attention on the participants, I decided not to make notes during the interview. Ordinarily this is a practise I follow during consultation to support my recollection and aid my questioning. However, I am conscious that I am looking down rather than at the person I am talking to whilst I am engaged in note-taking therefore I felt it would be more authentic and naturalistic if I did not make notes.

Test Analysis One

Emergent Themes	Original Transcript	Exploratory Comments
Emotional impact of role Confused/blurred boundaries/ relationships Dichotomy of feelings	Amy: I constantly, I constantly worry about him (I: do you?). I go home on a night and I worry about him. (I: hmm) Yeah, I do, I, I've got quite attached to him really (I: yeah). Yeah. I mean sometimes he'll call me mum and I'm saying 'look, I'm not you're your mum, you've got a mum at home' (I: yeah) 'I'm just here, I work here with you'. So yes, yeah, I mean I do love the job but some days I do find it very [pauses] challenging (I: yeah). Yeah.	Describes feeling constantly worried about him. *Second repetition of 'constant' for emphasis – same word used.* <u>Conscious use of word 'attached' when describing relationship with child with "attachment issues"? Contradiction? Detachment from this attachment when accidentally called 'mum'.</u> Loves the job but finds the job very challenging.

Exploratory Comments Code: descriptive comments = normal text; linguistic comments = *italic text*; conceptual comments = <u>underlined text</u>

In the first test analysis, I used the first 15 minutes of Interview one to practise Step 2: noting exploratory comments, and Step 3: identifying emergent themes. For Step 2, I used guidance from Smith et al., (2009) to explore the text at three levels: descriptive, linguistic and conceptual. I formatted the notes in the suggested style to distinguish the three sets of comments i.e. descriptive comments in normal text, linguistic comments in italics and conceptual comments were underlined. Whilst I felt this method supported a detailed examination of the text, it felt prohibitive towards my engagement with the participant and the experiences they were recounting because I felt detached and distanced. This was reflected in the clinical sounding and superficial nature of the exploratory comments. I discussed with my research supervisor alternative methods to support deeper levels of interpretation including a method suggested by Smith et al., (2009) called 'free associating'.

Test Analysis Two

Transcript	Exploratory Comments
Claire: But no I don't find it daunting and don't even think about it, I just go in and sit with the person you're meant, coz sometimes you do have some kids that don't want you to sit with them (I: ok) you might be there to support that student but they don't want you to sit with them because it makes them look different, doesn't it? I: So how do you support those ones?	Claire's demonstrating awareness of the young person's perspective – empathy for wanting to be the same, not different.

Claire: Well you would, me personally would probably go and stand at the back of the class or get a chair just near you and say 'I'm not staying, I'm just gonna sit here just for a minute while the teachers finish talking' (I: yeah) and I do that and then when she's finished talking I just wander about and go help everybody and then they don't feel as though you're there just to help that, coz that's part of the trouble, they don't want to feel different really and most people like a bit of help anyway (I: I think so) don't they?	"part of the trouble" – for who? Claire or the young person? Does Claire find this aspect of the role troubling? Or does Claire realise that her role can cause trouble for those young people who do not want to be perceived as being different?

Exploratory Comments	Emergent Themes	Super-Ordinate Themes
Indicative of Claire's opinions overall re: relationships with young people. Sees them as individuals with a right to have their own values, opinions, personalities etc. X is one of many "SEN kids" that she supports. All of equal weighting. Claire demonstrating awareness of young person's perspective – empathy for wanting to be the same, not different. "part of the trouble" – for who? Claire or the young person? Does Claire find this aspect of the role troubling? Or does Claire realise that her role can cause trouble for those young people who not want to be perceived as different?	Claire's perception of young people as individuals with individual needs and a right to have them.	Perception of young people

In the second test analysis I used the last 15 minutes of Claire's interview to practise using the method of 'free associating'. I found this method to be less constrictive and more freeing thereby enabling a closer engagement with the text. I presented the information in the suggested table form (Smith et al., 2009) but when discussing the test analysis with my research supervisor it was difficult for both of us to trace the path of analysis i.e. from the original source of the transcript, through the exploratory noting, towards the emergent theme. We discussed alternative methods of presenting the analysis that diverged from Smith et al., (2009) which suggests presenting the transcript as central within a table, with exploratory comments and emergent themes presented on either side. It was agreed that starting with the transcript and then moving on to exploratory notes and emergent themes within a table format would be more accessible. In addition, my research supervisor suggested sectioning the transcript and associated exploratory comments and themes into order to clearly present each 'chunk' of analysis. Again, this differs from the way raw data is presented by Smith et al., (2009) however I do not think it detracts from their steps of analysis and, as will be discussed in tests analysis three, I felt that it aided my engagement with the text through furthering the iterative process of analysis.

Test Analysis Three

No.	Transcript	Reflections	Sub-ordinate	Super-ordinate
1	I: Ok so my first question is, erm, could you tell me about, a little bit about what you do in your role? P1: In my role I support [pause] maybe 5 or 6 children with SEN (I: mm-hmm) they range from [pause] mild autism, autism, Asperger's, ADHD, erm attachment issues [pause] and just, erm learning difficulties (I: ok) in various subjects.	Lots of pauses to think before answering question about her role. P1 groups young people via need and uses diagnostic labels. P1 differentiates levels of autism ("mild autism, autism, Asperger's") – how does she know to do this? Is this classification her own and been informed through others?	Use of diagnostics labels as descriptors	Understanding around children and young people

In this final test analysis, I analysed the entirety of Amy's Interview which was presented on a single table using the sectioning technique discussed in Test Analysis Two. First, I separated the transcription into sections for analysis to clearly demonstrate which exploratory notes refer to which sections of the transcript. These sections changed slightly as I began free associating to write my exploratory comments. For example, some sections were merged whilst others were separated as I began a closer analysis of the transcript. I undertook the analysis one step at a time i.e. I first completed the exploratory notes before embarking on developing the emergent themes. This was to enable my ability to remain focused on the task at hand. When writing the emergent themes, it became necessary to review some of my exploratory comments to make sure they made sense i.e. when reviewed out of context some the comments were difficult to decipher, necessitating further explanation.

Part-way through writing the emergent themes, I realised that I was creating further subsections within a single section of exploratory comments. Upon reflection I realised that if I did not separate the transcript and associated exploratory comments to reflect each individual emergent theme, this would become confusing when trying to trace their genesis. Following this realisation, I retrospectively revisited each instance in which I had created further subsections of emergent themes to ensure they were each connected to the appropriate transcription and exploratory comments that related to these themes. I realised this was a good decision when there were times when I was unable to trace the emergent theme with the associated transcript and/or exploratory comments. Consequently, in reviewing my

emergent themes, I was further reviewing my analysis overall which I felt was in-line with IPA's iterative engagement as part of the process of analysis.

When reviewing Test Analysis Three with my research supervisor we were in agreement that this method of presentation supported the ability to trace my analysis from transcription through to the emergent themes. The next aspect of my analysis that required further attention was the names I had allocated to my emergent themes. My reasoning was to create accessible themes that clearly related and represented the exploratory comments. However, my supervisor explained phenomenology's evocative and poetical use of language which prompted me to re-assess my understanding of the purpose of these themes and to research their use within phenomenology.

Beth's Interview Analysis Reflections

First, I reviewed my transcription to help with my engagement with the text. I noted down any thoughts that came to mind during transcription review as part of my reflexive bracketing i.e. to enable me to remain focused on transcription but also to return to these at a later point during the analysis. For example, I comment "brilliant" in response to Beth's comment about having a home/school communication book. I realised my comment was made as a trainee EP rather than as a researcher.

Following transcription, I created an analysis table (same as the one developed for analysis test three). I placed the transcript into preliminary 'meaning units' which are subject to change once I begin writing my exploratory notes. These initial meaning units are very broad and sectioned off according to topic e.g. Beth's response to a question. Upon reflection there is probably no need to create meaning units at this stage however I feel that it adds another layer of familiarity and engagement with the text as part of my analysis. Before starting writing exploratory comments, I re-read Smith et al., (2009) guidelines to remind myself of the technique I am following: free associating with the text and then the three-levels of textual analysis.

When generating subordinate themes, I viewed each 'meaning unit' individually; I re-read the transcript and accompanying exploratory notes and choose a theme which represented the content of both of these sections. Through rereading each meaning unit, I am also reviewing my exploratory notes. For example, I changed meaning unit 17 in Interview Two which originally used the word "equivocal" but then changed it to "conflicting" as Beth was not being vague when she used contrasting terms to describe the young person as "grown up" but "immature". When generating subordinate themes, it was difficult not to be aware of the

preceding themes and to generate ones that specifically represented that meaning unit. I was continually revising subordinate themes to ensure they were specific and not to be confused with superordinate themes which are broader.

Examples of bracketed thoughts during the analysis of Beth's Interview:

- Bracketed thought: there are similar emergent themes between the first and second interview e.g. comparing role of TA with young people to mothering methods with own children, comparisons made with other TAs.

- Bracketed thought: Beth asks things like *"if that's what you want?"* or *"if that's any help?"* Is this to seek reassurance? Why? Is Beth confused about what information I'm seeking? Perhaps Beth does not understand the purpose of my questions because I did not fully explain.

- Bracketed thought: I decided after Beth not to ask the part of the question which asks: would your descriptions change depending on who you were talking to? A family member or a friend? A person interested in doing you role? because it felt like a strange question to ask, like I was insinuating the participant could be underhand or that there was a reason to be guarded about what information is shared. Was this question related to something from my own personal experiences?

- Bracketed thought: *I'll mostly be supporting him next year coz if you support them in Year 10, you support them in Year 11 (I: oh that's good so you've got that continuity)* – my comment is again made with my trainee EP hat on or perhaps because I have insider knowledge. Would I have asked this question if I was naïve to the role of TA? I have made an assumption here that continuity would be good for P2 rather than ask her what she thinks/feels about supporting this young person for a second year.

Claire's Interview Analysis Reflections

Examples of bracketed thoughts notes during the analysis on Interview Three:

- *Claire: And I've got a dog and a new puppy which is wonderful, so (I: oh well that's a different kind of challenge!) very therapeutic.* Bracketed thought: as soon as I heard Claire talk about a new puppy my own experiences intervened and I made an assumption about Claire's experiences which were incorrect. If I'd remained focused on what Claire was saying I would have heard her use the adjective "wonderful". Luckily my comment did not detract her thoughts and she continued to explain that her puppy was "very therapeutic".

- *Claire: …the little boy had some marks on his arms and I just said to him what have you done to your arms and immediately he said 'er nobody's hit me' [laughing] (I: I*

wonder how many times he'd been asked that). The comment I made here was because I felt that the young person's answer to Claire was automatic based on having to explain his scratches many times to others.

- *Claire: …if you've got a dog to stroke they make you feel so much better' and he looked at me as though I was an alien! 'Why would a dog make you feel better?!' (I: he doesn't know he hasn't got one) [laughing].* I have over-identified with Claire's experiences to the extent where I am adding my thoughts and commentary during Claire's recounts of her experiences.

- *I: So if like somebody was wanting to do your role, what advice would you give them?… Claire: For all the reasons I've just said about the kids.* I think this response is because I have already asked Claire a question that is similar: *So if you were to describe your role to someone who wanted to know what it was like what would you tell them?*

- *Claire: Just hard work and patient. (I: why?) Why? I: Yeah. Pretend I don't know schools. Claire: For all the reasons I've just said about the kids.* My understanding at the time was Claire was confused as to why I was asking her to explain an obvious question. Now I think Claire is asking me 'why?' because she feels she has already answered it.

- *Claire: …Can chat about anything. Coz we'd chat after you know, and then once they get out there with their mates, they're different. I: Do you find that that's a lot, that you experience that a lot? (Claire: Yes) Hmm. What do think it is about working on a one to one that you know, that certain children seem to kind of respond positively to?* I think Claire's comment about the young person changing was about him being with his friends rather than working on a one-to-one. I may have based my initial interpretation of my own experiences of improved relationships with children and young people when working with them individually. If I had kept close to Claire's experience I may have realised that this was the focus of her point: Claire feels the young person changed because he was with his friends and not because he was working in a one-to-one.

- *I: Yeah? Does it ever feel overwhelming having, knowing that you're kind of, there's just you and all these children that have got – (Claire: different needs) yeah. Claire: No. No it's fine. I: How are you able to cope with that? Coz that sounds quite, I don't know.* I now feel that I was asking Claire a leading question. Even when Claire gave her response, I continued to probe because I had a different expectation of what this response would be which was developed from own professional experiences, from listening to the responses from the previous participants and from my reaction/emotional response to hearing this aspect of the role.

Appendix 11.10. Transcript and Analysis Excerpt

A partial transcript with analysis is presented to preserve the anonymity of the young people referenced during this interview.

Beth's Analysis

I = Interviewer
Descriptive comments = normal text i.e. describing the content of what the participant has said, the subject of the talk within the transcript.
Linguistic comments = *italic text* i.e. exploring the specific use of language by the participant.
Conceptual comments = underlined i.e. engaging at a more interrogative and conceptual level.

(Smith et al., 2009, p.84)

No.	Transcript	Exploratory Comments	Emergent Themes
1	I: So you've been doing this twenty years then? (Beth: Yes) At this school or? (Beth: Yes) [laughing] Have you? Right (Beth: Yes) so. P2: I'm now in the English department though, I'm an English TA now. (I: ok) Yes. Just, specify, coz that's my subject so I just specialise in English (I: ok). Erm I also do intervention with the SEN students. (I: mm-hmm) I do that five mornings a week and I do revision erm and homework classes for English (I: right) for the SEN students.	Twenty years is a long time in the same job. Why did Beth stay with this school? *Repetition of "English" and "now" suggests this may be a recent change. Beth refers to the young people she supports as "the SEN students" when explaining what she does as part of her job role.*	Description of TA duties Differentiates young people through educational labels
2	I: So the, are the SEN interventions, are they related to English (Beth: English) as well? P2: Yes (I: ok) yeah so.	*Question is asked to seek clarification between Beth's mention of being an "English TA" and how this relates to her work with "SEN students"*	Description of TA duties
3	I: I didn't realise you had like subject specific TAs? Beth: Yeah we do now, we never used to do but we actually (I: right) we have science, maths and English (I: ok) and then we have year group, years, year group TAs (I: right) so a TA'll be, two for Year 7 or, maybe two for Year 8 two for Year 9. (I: Right ok) Yeah so. It's only just come into force this year. (I: Has it?)	Beth describes recent systemic change to the role of TAs in this school: TAs are now allocated to either a core subject or to a year group. *The phrase Beth uses to describe the implementation of this change is: "come into force". This phrase evokes images of the hierarchical top-down imposing of rules. In actuarial terms, it relates to the passing and enforcement of matters legal or legislative.* Is this Beth's impression of the school's	Systemic change to TA role

	We've just been doing it for a year so.	system and their SLT's policies and procedures?	
4	I: How's it feel? Beth: It's marvellous (I: yeah?) I've always wanted to be in English (I: Oh really?) so it's dream come true for me [laughs] (I: oh fantastic) yeah it is, it's totally dream come true so (I: yeah ok) because it's my subject and I know what I'm doing (I: yeah) and it's a lot easier being in a lesson (I: mm-hmm) when you can help them rather than if I'm in science or maths (I: hmm) it's hard to help them coz I don't know it myself. (I: yeah and especially coz they keep kinda changing the curriculum as well) Yeah yeah (I: it just seems to be there's that that higher and higher) yeah (expectation of knowledge isn't there?) yeah so in English I know that I'm quite capable of supporting anybody in English	I was curious about Beth's feelings about the TA role changes as her comments suggest self-identification with this new role but also that this change was enforced from above. Beth however describes the change as a "dream come true" and a wish fulfilment of something she's "always wanted". Beth explains why "it's marvellous" to be an English TA: "it's my subject". Does the "my" suggest a sense of belonging? Of ownership? Beth explains that she knows what she's doing and she finds it easier. Beth compares this to her experiences in other subjects such as maths and science. The reason why Beth feels this way about a subject is to be able to support others; in English Beth feels "quite capable of supporting anybody".	Self-support system
5	erm more I like supporting the Year 10s and 11s best. (I: oh do you?) I like the GCSE work best, yeah. I: How come? Beth: I don't know I just find them more challenging and erm it's more interesting coz you know, you've got a mission to get them through this GCSE and you'll do as much as you can to get them through this GCSE and you know I'll make them work and work and work and I'm not a TA who'll do it for them (I: yeah) I'm not one of them because I'm not gonna be sat in their exam with them and holding their hand as I say to them (I: true yeah)	The aspect of the role that Beth likes "best" is the one that gives her a sense of purpose: "you've got a mission to get them through this GCSE". *Beth uses the adjectives "challenging" and "interesting" to explain why she prefers this area of her role.* *When explaining how she "get[s] them through", Beth switches from "you" to "I'll" i.e. talking in the general sense to the personal to reflect her own opinion on a TAs i.e. "not do [the work] for them".* Does "I'm not one of them" imply Beth thinks other TAs do this? *"Holding their hand" indicates Beth's disapproval of infantilising young people.*	Personal beliefs on performing TA role

6	erm and yeah I do, I get a lot out of Years 10s and 11, I mean I do support the Year 8s and 9s erm but I don't support Year 7 at all but this year (I: ok) erm but I do, I do mainly, I think I do 15 lessons of GCSE work a week (I: right) and the rest is made up of Year 9s and Year 8s (I: yeah). Yes so it's erm, it's good because you know, I go on results day and see them (I: oh do you?) Yeah [laughs] yeah so it is good. I find it very challenging and very, very fulfilling.	Beth is able to recall the number of lessons of "GCSE work" but does not quantify the work related to Years 8 and 9, referring to it as "the rest". <u>Perhaps this detailed versus generalisation reflects Beth's affinity with the GCSE work.</u> *Beth's previous comment of preferring GCSE work because it is challenging; the use of "challenging" here can be seen as positive and complements the repetition of "good" and "very" relating to "fulfilling".*	Preferred aspects of TA role
7	I: Hmm. So what element of your role is related to supporting children with SEMH and challenging behaviour, can you tell me a little bit more about what you do with those children. Beth: Yeah I do support a student who's got that (I: yeah?) erm he's, I support him five lessons a week (I: ok) in English (I: yeah) and erm I'll mostly be supporting him next year coz if you support them in Year 10, you support them in Year 11 (I: oh that's good so you've got that continuity?	*The purpose of this question was to refocus Beth's recounting of experiences within the realm of SEMH and challenging behaviour.* *Beth says "got that" referring to SEMH.* <u>Why? How does Beth feel or what does she think about this term?</u> Beth supports this specific young person frequently this year and will again next year.	Avoids using SEMH label Description of TA duties
8	Yeah he's very, he's got a lot of social, emotional (I: has he?) erm needs. He's fostered (I: ok) erm and but he's in a very good home, very good (I: ok) you know (I: yeah) stable home life (I: mm-hmm) you know beautiful home life so erm.	*The hesitation before Beth says "needs" may offer further information about Beth's relationship with the term SEMH.* In this instance, Beth shares "he's fostered" as if to explain his "needs" but goes on to name "very good" aspects of his life.	Avoids using SEMH label Knowledge of young person
9	Since he's been here, his behaviour now (I: hmm) is a lot different to what it was in Year 8, 9 (I: right). In Year 10 he seems to have really erm you know grown up a little bit but having said that there's still a lot of lessons where he's very, very hard to settle. (I: mm-hmm) Very hard to	<u>This comment on the change of this young person's behaviour suggests Beth has prior knowledge of him.</u> *Beth uses conflicting descriptors of this young person to categorise wanted/unwanted behaviour in relation to his age – "grown up" but "immature". Repetition of "very" indicates how strongly Beth*	Knowledge of young person Perception of young person

	settle, very erm very immature	*feels when expressing this opinion.*	
10	erm he'll crunch pens. I: What do you mean crunch pens? Beth: He'll get a pen and he'll break it in half and (I: oh right) he'll sit and crunch it and you know then straight away that something's bothering (I: ok) something's wrong. You can tell straight away that something is wrong with this student (I: hmm) erm because he's very unsettled (I: hmm).	Beth's recount of her experiences of supporting this young person focuses on the behaviour she finds problematic i.e. he's "very hard to settle". Beth gives an example of this "unsettled" behaviour i.e. "crunch pens" which she uses this as an indicator for his ability to "settle" to work.	Knowledge of young person

Appendix 11.11. Patterns of Convergence and Divergence

	Amy	Beth	Claire
Convergence – across three	Use of diagnostics labels as descriptors	Differentiates young people through medical / educational labels	Perception of diagnostic labels
	Personal values regarding TA characteristics	Personal beliefs on performing TA role	Perception of TA qualities
	Maternal influence	Parallels between roles of TA and mother	Familial perception of relationship between young person and TA
	Emotional response to TA role	Managing difficult situations	Suppression of emotional expression
	Perception of young person / people	Perception of young person / people	Perception of young person / people
	Knowledge of young person	Knowledge of young person / people	Access to personal information
	Use of humour	Tabula Rasa (blank slate)	Letting go
	Systems of support	Self-support system	Systems of support
Divergence – across two	X	Observations on relationship between teacher and young person	Dynamic between young people and teachers
	X	Environmental factors effecting TA role	Impact of environmental factors
	X	Impact of home life on school life	Impact of young people's home life on their time in school
	Relationship with young person's family	Links with young people's home	X
	Relationship with young person	Relationship with young person	X

		X	Changeable nature of TA
	Variable nature of TA role		
Divergence – individual	Interpretation of young person's behaviour to inform type of support	Interpretation of young person / people's behaviour	Perceptions of young people's home life
	Perception of other TAs	Relationship with staff and impact on TA role	Association between young people, teacher and behaviour
	Personal approach to TA role	Hierarchical perception of staff members and impact on communication	Dynamic between teacher and TA
	Insecurity about lack of experience/qualifications/ knowledge	Preferred aspects of TA role	Reflecting on TA role using a collective voice
	Perception of self as a TA	Avoids using SEMH label	Reflecting through use of rhetorical question
	Perception of TA role as being challenging	Awareness of effective methods of support	Personal experience provides insight
	Positive perception of TA role	Volunteer's personal time to support young people	Self-perception
	Perception of TA role developed in relation to others	Description of TA duties / strategies	Voice of TA in systemic change
	Balancing negative with positive comments	Communication with young person	Perception of TA role attributed to school systems
	Insecurity around TA role		Perceptions of safety around young people in/out of school
			Perception of TA role related to young person

Appendix 11.12. Superordinate Theme: Understanding the young person

	Superordinate Theme: Understanding the young person "If I can understand them better, how they tick, it'll help me with them…" (Amy:115)	

	Subordinate Theme: Perception of need	
Participants	Quote (meaning unit number)	Emergent Themes
Amy	*In my role I support maybe 5 or 6 children with SEN they range from mild autism, autism, Asperger's, ADHD, erm attachment issues and just, erm learning difficulties (1)*	Use of diagnostic labels as descriptors
Beth	*two of them have got statements you know EHC plans and one's on the register, about four on the SEN register (18)*	Differentiates young people through medical / educational labels
Claire	*I don't need to know exactly what their conditions are (60)*	Perception of diagnostic labels

	Subordinate Theme: Sense-making	
Participants	Quote (meaning unit number)	Emergent Themes
Amy	*I think he just wants reassurance that somebody's actually there that nobody's gonna walk out on him (59)*	Perception of young person / people
Beth	*it puts a bit more of the jigsaw, it's a bit like a jigsaw puzzle really (76)*	Perception of young person / people
Claire	*But one to one, lovely pleasant young man… and then once they get out there with their mates, they're different. (42)*	Perception of young person / people

	Subordinate Theme: Knowledge	
Participants	Quote(meaning unit number)	Emergent Themes
Amy	*they're vulnerable children some of them and they've come from very difficult homes (79)*	Knowledge of young person
Beth	*You can tell straight away that something is wrong with this student (10)*	Knowledge of young person / people
Claire	*so if you know those things, then you ain't going to be as angry with them (16)*	Access to personal information

Appendix 11.13. Superordinate Theme: Processing emotions

Superordinate Theme: Processing emotions
"I constantly worry about him. I go home on a night and I worry about him." (Amy:13)

Subordinate Theme: Emotional expression		
Participants	Quote (meaning unit number)	Emergent Themes
Amy	*I found myself that I do get too involved in it, that I do think about it far too much coz I'll take it home with me (91)*	Emotional response to TA role
Beth	*you just have to keep, try to keep a level head as much as you feel like 'oh god' you can't let them see that (79)*	Managing difficult situations
Claire	*I don't say anything, I bottle it up and I'll be real angry after (8)*	Suppression of emotional expression

Subordinate Theme: Protective factors		
Participants	Quote (meaning unit number)	Emergent Themes
Amy	*Most of the ones that I do support talk [both laugh] yeah they do talk, they do talk, they talk a lot [P1 laughs] (81)*	Use of humour
Beth	*each day's a new day, you know whatever happened yesterday you don't draw on it, it's a new day today so you forget about it (67)*	Tabula Rasa (blank slate)
Claire	*I am bothered at the time of doing it but afterwards I'm not bothered because I've done my bit for that child and I have to move onto the next one and whatever will be will be. (46)*	Letting go

Subordinate Theme: Support systems		
Participants	Quote (meaning unit number)	Emergent Themes
Amy	*we'll always talk it through together (97)*	Systems of support
Beth	*I know that I can manage on my own. I'm self-sufficient, I know what I'm doing. (61)*	Self-support system
Claire	*I do have people I can talk to at work at home (11)*	Systems of support

Appendix 11.14. Superordinate Theme: Individual approach to the TA role

<table>
<tr><td colspan="3" align="center">Superordinate Theme: Individual approach to the TA role:
"…your job is to help them, to help these children through, the ones who're struggling that bit more." (Beth:46)</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3" align="center">Subordinate Theme: TA attributes</td></tr>
<tr><td>Participants</td><td>Quote (meaning unit number)</td><td>Emergent Themes</td></tr>
<tr><td>Amy</td><td>you've got to be calm, understanding, patient (70)</td><td>Personal values regarding TA characteristics</td></tr>
<tr><td>Beth</td><td>I mean ultimately you're there for the SEN but part of my role is to not to make the SEN stand out (50)</td><td>Personal beliefs on performing TA role</td></tr>
<tr><td>Claire</td><td>I mean you're not here, you aren't here as a mum are you? You're here to help them academically (38)</td><td>Perception of TA qualities</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3" align="center">Subordinate Theme: Familial associations</td></tr>
<tr><td>Participants</td><td>Quote (meaning unit number)</td><td>Emergent Themes</td></tr>
<tr><td>Amy</td><td>I think it's the mummy side in me yeah that wants them all to be looked after and make sure they're all happy and well (89)</td><td>Maternal influence</td></tr>
<tr><td>Beth</td><td>I've got three children of my own, I kind of treat them the same as I would me own (11)</td><td>Parallels between roles of TA and mother</td></tr>
<tr><td>Claire</td><td>he calls me Granny [Claire's surname] because, because he can I suppose because I let him (2)</td><td>Familial perception of relationship between young person and TA</td></tr>
</table>