Educators' Constructions of SEMH. A Foucauldian Discourse Analysis

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Abstract

In recent years, Social, Emotional, and Mental Health (SEMH) needs among children and young people (CYP) in educational settings have gained increased attention. Despite being a relatively new concept and operating within a realm characterised by limited pre-existing understanding or misunderstanding, SEMH is now recognised as the second-largest category of Special Educational Needs (SEN) (DfE, 2023). Ambiguities in SEMH's definition suggest potential underestimations in reported figures, impacting the identification and support of such pupils. This exploratory study investigates how educators construct SEMH needs through discourse and examines how these constructions shape their perceptions and actions in supporting individuals with SEMH needs. Using a flexible qualitative design, semi-structured interviews were conducted with three educators. Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (FDA), informed by Willig's framework (2013), was employed for data analysis. Findings reveal that educators construct SEMH through four key discursive themes: SEMH as heterogeneous, SEMH needs challenge traditional disciplinary practices, SEMH support is marginalised in favour of academic priorities, and SEMH demands a shift towards greater systemic understanding. This study provides insights into how these discursive constructions of SEMH can either open or close opportunities for effective support and interventions for CYP with SEMH needs. It contributes to Educational Psychology by highlighting the nuanced nature of SEMH needs and emphasising the diverse approaches required for effective support. This study underscores the importance of addressing entrenched power dynamics perpetuating inequalities and advocates for inclusive and equitable practices within educational settings. It calls for collaborative efforts among Educational Psychologists, educators, policymakers, and stakeholders to promote inclusive language, challenge dominant discourses, and foster empathetic and equitable practices in educational environments.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Contextualising Mental Health in Education Settings

In recent years, there has been a perceived "crisis" of mental health, with improving individuals' mental health long identified as one of the most important public health priorities (Sadler, Vizard, Ford, Marchesell, & Pearce 2018). In a report by the Education Committee in 2023, findings highlight a significant increase in mental health difficulties among children and young people (CYP) following the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2023, The Mental Health of Children and Young People Survey found that 20.3% of 8- to 16-year-olds had a probable mental health disorder. Among those aged 17 to 19, the rates of probable mental health disorders had risen from 1 in 10 (10%) in 2017 to 1 in 6 (18%) in the year 2020. Additionally, 445,000 individuals sought assistance from a mental health service in November 2023, a 23% increase from November 2021. Waiting lists for accessing mental health services are at all-time highs, with some CYP waiting three years to access support in certain regions, being described as "grossly inadequate" (NHS Digital, 2023, p. 133).

Integrating mental health discourse into education corresponds with an increased demand placed on schools and educators to identify and address the mental health needs of CYP (Department for Education [DfE], 2018), especially considering schools as a primary developmental context. The significant impact of mental health difficulties on various aspects of CYPs' lives and the disparities in accessing appropriate support, addressing mental health needs is a recurrent theme in government policy, public discourse, and education agendas (Backes & Bonnie, 2019; DfE, 2018; Zafeiriou & Gulliford, 2020).Figure 1 below highlights the landscape of mental health discourse in education is essential for understanding SEMH in educational settings as it is intertwined with the development and implementation of strategies and interventions aimed at supporting pupils' mental health needs .

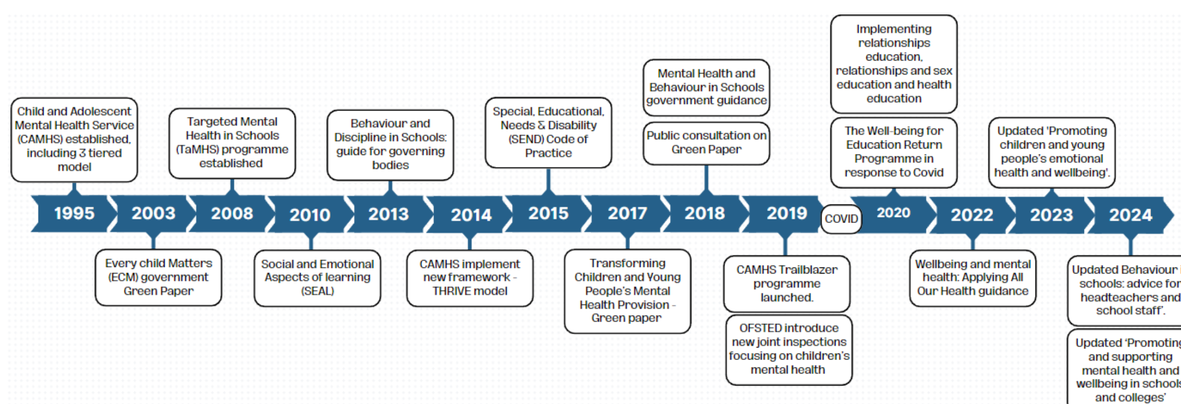

Figure 1: Development of Mental Health Promotion(s) in schools since 1995.

Over time, there has been a significant shift in understanding behaviour, recognising it as intricately linked to broader mental health concerns. This evolving perspective is key, as it is hoped that educators will move beyond viewing behaviour in isolation and begin to understand it within the context of mental health, aligning with a broader drive for inclusive education (Sailor, Dunlao, Sugai and Horner, 2010; Cosma & Soni, 2019; Hickinbotham & Soni, 2021). However, critics argue that some of these initiatives are overly ambitious and overlook inequalities, advocating instead for a greater focus on early intervention and prevention strategies (Griffin, Wistow, and Fairbrother, 2022).

1.2 An Introduction to SEMH and its Definition

Simultaneously with the emphasis on supporting mental health, there is a parallel effort to understand and support CYP's Social, Emotional, and Mental Health (SEMH) needs in education settings. First introduced in the revised Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Code of Practice (CoP) (DfE, 2015), SEMH encompasses a comprehensive descriptor:

> " 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, Department of Health [DoH], Section 6.32, p. 98).

This integration within policy and practice aligns with broader mental health discourse efforts to address the complex interplay between social, emotional, and mental health needs impacting CYP.
By recognising SEMH as a category of need, educational practices can begin to prioritise the holistic well-being of CYP, shifting away from the previously prevalent narrow focus solely on behavioural difficulties. Additionally, it signifies a step towards more nuanced approaches in both educational settings, emphasising the importance of early identification, tailored support and interventions, and collaborative support systems to promote the overall well-being and academic success of CYP.

1.3 Prevalence of SEMH Needs.

In 2023, pupils with Social, Emotional, and Mental Health (SEMH) identified as their primary need made up almost a quarter (22.3%) of the pupil population with Special Educational Needs (SEN) (DfE, 2023). However, obtaining reliable data on the prevalence of SEMH remains a challenge. These figures represent only those pupils who have been formally identified through an Education, Health, and Care Plan (EHCP) or who are receiving SEN support in schools. It would be imprudent to assume these figures accurately reflect the complete prevalence of SEMH needs among CYP in educational settings. There are likely CYP with SEMH needs who are not formally identified or supported under these frameworks. Additionally, some CYP may have an EHCP where SEMH is not specified as their primary area of need, despite having associated co-morbidities related to SEMH. Furthermore, the ambiguity and variability in how SEMH is understood, acknowledging its broad definition, can contribute to inconsistencies in these figures (Norwich & Eaton, 2015). This ambiguity may lead to disparities in identifying and supporting CYP experiencing SEMH issues, thereby complicating efforts to accurately assess the extent of these needs in educational settings.

1.4 Use of Terminology

Within the literature, SEMH "needs," "difficulties," and "challenges" are often used interchangeably, alluding to the same underlying concept. This research will refer to these as SEMH "needs" for consistency.

The term "discourse" is also used throughout this research. Various definitions of discourse exist, reflecting its multifaceted nature and significance in shaping social interactions and perceptions. A discourse, according to Cheek (2004), can be understood as "A set of common assumptions that sometimes, indeed often, may be so taken for granted as to be invisible or assumed" (p. 1142). This suggests that discourse mirrors societal norms and serves as a repository for them. These norms establish patterns that influence behaviour and shape expectations regarding the subjects discussed within the discourse (Mills, 1997).

In parallel, "construct" denotes socially produced categories or concepts that emerge through discourse. Within this study, constructs are understood as products of discourse that organise and structure knowledge, contributing to what is deemed normal or abnormal in specific contexts. Foucault (1972) asserts that constructs are not fixed and evolve over time. Thus, discourses and

constructs serve as a lens through which we perceive and interpret SEMH-related phenomena, shaping our understanding of SEMH, its manifestations, and its implications for CYP.

1.5 Personal and Professional Interest

As Fox, Martin, and Green (2007) assert, "the beliefs of researchers affect the world that they research. Conversely, the world that they research affects their thoughts and beliefs" (p. 186). This interplay highlights the significance of reflecting on my own interests and experiences that have motivated me to pursue this research.

Throughout my career journey working in various roles within educational settings, and now as a trainee educational psychologist (TEP), I have upheld the values of social justice, equality, and inclusion. These values guide my interactions and intentions with pupils, educators, and stakeholders. They inform my advocacy efforts and shape my approach to addressing systemic barriers within educational systems. Central to this is a continued acknowledgement of the power of language, prompted by the questions posed by Billington (2006). Billington urges us to reflect on how language constructs our perceptions of CYP and the impact it has on their experiences and opportunities within educational contexts:

> "How do we speak of children?
> How do we speak with children?
> How do we write of children?
> How do we listen to children?
> And how do we listen to ourselves (when working with children)?" (Billington, 2006, p. 8).

As a TEP, I had the privilege of working closely with a young person who, for this research, will be called Bobby*. Bobby was said to have "significant SEMH needs," according to the Special Educational Needs Co-Ordinator (SENCO). Upon receiving the Request for EP involvement form, I was taken aback by the terminology and language used to describe Bobby. Descriptors such as "demand avoidant," "being a constant distraction to himself and others," and "having no respect for authority" painted a stark and concerning picture of Bobby's presentation. These labels reduced Bobby to deficits and challenges, overlooking any strengths and potential for growth. School staff contributed to the form, describing his needs as "profound" and that he was "struggling immensely in school." Despite concerted efforts to support him, Bobby "wasn't making progress," leading to a sobering reflection by his head of year, who said, "We pull from the top and drag from the bottom."

Such descriptors carry significant weight. As Foucault (1972) argues, it is important to understand how the language and narratives used within education shape the identities and roles of pupils. What he calls “normative and regulatory discourses” (p. 54) not only describe, but also construct the perceptions and realities of pupils' abilities and needs. In this context, the discourses surrounding Bobby and his SEMH needs were subject to examination. For example, I questioned if Bobby's difficulties with regulating his impulses were, in fact, due to executive functioning difficulties given his specific learning needs (dyslexia) and diagnoses of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and autism spectrum condition (ASC). Recognising these factors as potential influences on his learning, problem-solving abilities, and adaptation to classroom demands, it is plausible that they contribute to the perception that he is “demand avoidant.”

The language used to describe behaviour can significantly influence interpretation, framing, and subsequent responses (Stanbridge & Mercer, 2019). This influence was evident in a teacher's mention of Bobby's "violent nature" and the suggestion of a potential change of placement due to the "risk of permanent exclusion." Misunderstanding and misinterpretations of need carry implicit judgments, reinforcing harmful stereotypes and limiting perceptions of Bobby's potential. What struck me, even more, was the juxtaposition between how staff spoke of Bobby as one teacher commented, "he is incapable of regulating impulses," and his own voice, which he shared during one of our discussions: "I know the teachers think I am naughty, but I promise I don't do it on purpose."

While the school commissions EP involvement, the child remains the client (Woods, 2012). Rather than seeking to confirm or reinforce the narrative and preconceived notions that were so very evident, I sought to deconstruct the labels given to Bobby and understand the nuanced complexities of his experiences. By examining the language specifically, I aimed to challenge the deficit-based narratives that framed him solely regarding his externalised behaviour. In doing so, I aimed to foster a more inclusive and empowering perspective centred on the potential for understanding (for the adults around him) and potential for growth (for Bobby). I aimed to promote a more compassionate approach to supporting Bobby above any external pressures that may be influenced by considerations such as financial incentives or school suggestions (Woods, 2012).

Educators' constructions of pupils with SEMH needs, like Bobby, are influenced by internal dynamics and external pressures. For example, policies, institutional expectations, and societal norms contribute to how SEMH needs are perceived, understood, and addressed within educational settings. This highlights the intricate interplay between subjective interpretations of SEMH and the systemic

pressures that shape and constrain educators' practices. While SEMH is viewed through subjective lenses, educators operate within these objective structures, navigating demands for inclusion, policy changes, and increasing expectations that shape their daily realities and responses to pupils' needs.

Like Chachamu (2012), I believe every behaviour holds intrinsic meaning. It is uncommon to find descriptions of children and young people (CYP) with SEMH needs that closely align with Bobby's situation. Given the diverse manifestations of SEMH needs, educators perceive SEMH as one of the most challenging areas of need to both identify and support in their classrooms (Carroll & Hurry, 2018; Dimitrellou & Hurry, 2019). In endeavouring to support pupils like Bobby, it is important to reflect on and, indeed, challenge the language that has the potential to shape our understanding of SEMH.

1.6 Purpose of this Research

This research aims to explore and analyse the language educators use to construct SEMH needs in CYP within educational settings. While existing literature has explored the discourses surrounding SEMH, particularly in relation to inclusive education, a gap exists in understanding how educators shape, perpetuate, and challenge these discourses. This study aims to understand how discourses shape educators' perceptions and actions, and the inequalities embedded within these discourses. By employing Foucauldian Discourse Analysis, it seeks to uncover how educators' language influences thought, talk, and actions in supporting students with SEMH needs. This exploration addresses the identified gap in the literature regarding the language used to discuss SEMH and aims to contribute to developing more inclusive and equitable educational practices. Ultimately, the research aims to provide insights into how discursive constructions of SEMH can either open or close opportunities for action aimed at providing support for CYP with SEMH needs in educational settings.

1.7 Chapter Summary and Structure of Thesis

This chapter introduced the thesis, outlining the background and detailing the personal and professional motivations of the researcher. Chapter 2, the literature review, establishes a foundational understanding of SEMH relevant to this research. It starts with the historical constructions and evolving perspectives of SEMH. It recognises that SEMH is a complex area of need and explores the balancing of priorities in SEMH provision and contextual factors influencing educators' constructions of SEMH. The implications of educators' perceptions of CYP and the impact of language ambiguity are considered. The chapter concludes by synthesising key insights to inform the research framework.

Chapter 3 provides an overview of the methodology employed in this research. It begins with the research orientation adopted and then explores Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (FDA), detailing the rationale of this approach, its key components, and the associated challenges. Procedural aspects are addressed next, covering ethical approval, participant selection, and data collection methods. The chapter concludes by detailing the data analysis stages, including reflective thoughts.

Chapter 4, analysis, and discussion, critically examines the discursive constructions, drawing on data gathered from participant interviews to explore the complexities and implications of SEMH in educational settings. Reflection boxes are present throughout, offering insights into my thoughts during this process.

This research concludes with Chapter 5, synthesising the analysis and discussion findings to address the research questions, emphasising implications for Educational Psychology practice, and suggesting avenues for future research. The research is evaluated using Yardley's (2015) quality criteria, highlighting strengths and limitations and ends with personal reflections.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

Unlike topics with well-established bodies of literature, SEMH, given its relatively new introduction into policy and practice within the last decade, presents a landscape marked by diverse, sometimes contradictory, and still evolving perspectives among researchers. As a result, this literature review adopts a critical approach that does not merely summarise previous literature. The aim is to examine existing theories, empirical studies, and 'grey literature' (Pappas & Williams, 2011, p. 229) related to SEMH. This approach seeks to situate the research within the broader landscape of existing knowledge while providing a theoretical foundation for the proposed study (Baumeister & Leary, 1997; Webster & Watson, 2002). In addition, it aims to help readers contextualise the research findings and contribute to the broader discourse on SEMH in educational settings.

Structured around key subheadings, the review begins by examining the historical constructions of SEMH. It explores how evolving perspectives contribute to the current understanding of SEMH and emphasises its significance within education. It explores the complexities of addressing challenging behaviour while balancing competing priorities in SEMH provision. Factors influencing educators' constructions of SEMH are considered. Central to this is navigating the ambiguity of language and its impact. The literature review concludes with the implications of educators' perceptions of SEMH needs for CYP.

2.2 Historical Constructions of SEMH

Over time, the terminology used to describe CYP experiencing SEMH has undergone several revisions, reflecting a longstanding focus within education. While it is outside the scope of this research to conduct a historical analysis, this section will highlight some key shifts and transitions that contextualise current perspectives pertinent to the discourses surrounding SEMH.

Cole and Visser (1999) trace concerns about CYP's behaviour and mental health to as early as the 19th century. At this time, children thought to be "misbehaving" were perceived as inherently “bad” and subjected to punitive measures. The compulsory schooling instruction following the 1881 Education Act meant that keeping order remained a priority due to an increased pupil population (Harwood & Allan, 2014).

Historically, terms like "maladjusted" and "educationally sub-normal" were used under the 1944 Education Act to categorise pupils based on medically diagnosed disabilities and "psychological disturbance." These terms reflected discourses rooted in deficit-based language, which views mental health issues primarily as individual deficits requiring 'treatment' to 'readjust' the affected individuals (DfE, 1944, Section 34).

The Underwood Report (1955) represented a shift in focus on individual deficits by viewing “maladjustment” as a reaction to “abnormal conditions of children” (p. 113), which could result in failure to respond to discipline. This highlighted the beginning of policy and legislation, recognising that environmental factors contributed to CYP's emotional and behavioural well-being. The Warnock Report (1978) maintained the term 'maladjusted,' yet growing concerns over the stigma associated with this label led introduction of a more comprehensive descriptor, 'Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties' (EBD), as outlined in the 1994 Code of Practice (DfE, 1994). However, Cooper, Smith, and Upton (1994) assert that there persisted a predominant emphasis on identifying and addressing behavioural challenges through medical model discourses.

EBD was then replaced with “Behavioural, Social, and Emotional Difficulties” (BESD) following the 2001 Code of Practice (DfES, 2001), recognising the interacting aspects between social, emotional, and behavioural challenges faced by CYP. Frederickson and Cline (2015) argue that this change in discourse towards considerations of social model discourses reflected an understanding that constructions of SEN need to consider broader societal factors, not just within child attributes.

Despite promising movements towards a more comprehensive understanding that incorporates systemic factors and promotes inclusion (Frederickson & Cline, 2015), concerns remained regarding the implications of terminology. Specifically, the standardisation of behaviour that created expectations for CYP to conform to being 'good' or 'normal' (Laws, 2012). As a result, there has been an emergence of 'experts' and the development of specialist services such as Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), whose role is to help identify CYP perceived to deviate from such norms. This development is not portrayed negatively; rather, it indicates a growing recognition of the diverse needs of CYP within educational settings and proactive steps toward addressing mental health needs among CYP.

The evolving terminology and policies surrounding mental health have reflected shifts in understanding and addressing the needs of CYP. While early approaches were grounded in medical

model discourses, there has been a gradual recognition of the role of environmental factors, prompting a shift towards a more holistic understanding.

2.3 SEMH: Evolving Perspectives

The most recent revision of the SEND Code of Practice (DfE, DoH, 2015) replaced the term BESD with the new needs category, 'Social, Emotional, and Mental Health' (SEMH). This signalled more than just a change in nomenclature, reflecting an evolution in how emotional and mental health needs were conceptualised within policy. Within the 2001 CoP, there was a distinction between behaviour and mental health as separate yet interconnected domains. The introduction of 'SEMH' led to a more integrated approach to understanding such needs. It encouraged educators and practitioners to consider behavioural manifestations as potentially linked to mental health needs. This signalled a move towards addressing the holistic well-being of CYP rather than a sole focus on 'behavioural difficulties' noted within previous acts and guidance(s). As a result, it influenced the terminology within educational discourse and school practices towards a more nuanced understanding of SEMH needs.

However, criticism remains regarding the continued focus on identifying and assessing needs in policies like the CoP (2015) despite changes in terminology. Since SEMH is situated within diagnostic discourses including "attention deficit disorder, attention deficit hyperactive disorder or attachment disorder" (DfE/DoH Section 6.32, p. 98), it is constructed as a discrete category of SEN. Thomas and Loxley (2022) argue that attribution error persists as the terminology used in policy and education, particularly diagnostic labels, continues to place the 'problem' within the child and overlook wider environmental and systemic factors. Such deficit and labelling discourses surrounding mental health are not confined to education; they are also evident in broader societal discourse. For example, linguistic expressions are found across various platforms, ranging from clinical classifications within the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM) to everyday conversational language. Within these frameworks, less politically correct terms such as 'mad' or 'crazy' are commonly used, contributing to the stigmatisation of individuals with mental health difficulties. Moreover, a narrow understanding rooted within medical discourses can hinder the efforts to support SEMH needs (Conti-Ramsden, 2018).

Shifts toward greater systemic discourses do not view SEMH as “an abnormality requiring a cure” (Mathews, 2009, p. 231) but stress a clear distinction between individual needs and the attitudinal obstacles faced by people with SEMH needs (Goering, 2015). Recently, the importance of focusing more on contextual factors when understanding mental health difficulties has been apparent (Kinderman, 2018). Bronfenbrenner's (2005) ecological systems theory, for instance, underscores the

layered influences surrounding individuals, including the immediate environment (microsystems) and cultural and societal factors (macrosystems). Similarly, Morton and Frith's (1995) causal modelling sheds light on how genetics, cognition, environment, and social influences interact to shape behaviours. These scholars acknowledge the need to understand and examine mental health within socio-environmental contexts, moving beyond the within-child or medical model lens.

While it may be easier to attribute behaviour through a lens of medial or social models of disability, this can be problematic. This dichotomous view oversimplifies the nature of behaviour and its underlying causes and implies a binary understanding. Stanford and Rose (2020) advocate for a more nuanced perspective where both models can co-exist. They suggest reframing these as 'individualised' (challenge lies within the individual) and 'contextualised' (challenge lies within the context). This integrated approach offers a view that moves beyond the simplistic dichotomy.

2.4 SEMH: A Complex Area of Need

Research into SEMH has examined the interconnectedness and reciprocal impact of SEMH and various domains of functioning. For example, CYP with SEMH needs often experience difficulties with concentration, motivation, and impulse control, impacting their ability to engage in learning and achieve academic success (Public Health England, 2018). Conversely, those with poorer academic outcomes can experience increased SEMH needs, leading to frustration, low self-esteem, and disengagement from school (DfE, 2017). SEMH needs can also impact a CYP's ability to form positive peer relationships and family dynamics. CYP with SEMH needs may struggle with social skills, emotional regulation, and conflict resolution, leading to difficulties in making friends and navigating social interactions (Humphrey & Mullins, 2002). Equally, experiencing rejection and isolation can, in turn, exacerbate SEMH needs, which can lead to feelings of loneliness and contribute to low self-esteem (Mental Health Foundation, 2020).

Despite efforts in statutory and non-statutory guidance on identifying and assessing SEMH, educators continue to grapple with the ambiguity of the construct given its dual nature: both a distinct area of SEN and one that interacts and overlaps with other areas of SEN. For example, Hollo, Chow, and Wehby (2018) found that 81% of CYP who present with SEMH also had needs related to language and communication. They argue that SEMH needs (particularly externalising behaviours) overshadow other 'less obvious' needs (p. 201). For example, a pupil may present as talkative yet may not have the skills to understand complex language (Bühler Perovic & Pouscoulous, 2018), they may talk at length about a topic of interest but not be able to identify or label their feelings (Rieffe & Wiefferink, 2017),

they may have many peer relationships, but have difficulty with inferencing and verbal reasoning - their difficulty in following instructions may easily be labelled as poor concentration rather than difficulty understanding spoken words.

When understanding SEMH, it is crucial to consider a range of contextual factors that significantly influence children's well-being. Contextual factors encompass both the immediate and broader environments impacting children (Aura, Sormunen & Tossavainen, 2016). Immediate factors include family dynamics, educational settings, and community resources, which directly affect children's daily experiences and development. For example, positive parent-child relationships, higher parental income, and greater parental involvement in schooling are associated with better behavioural outcomes for children (Lee, Wickrama, & Simons, 2013). Conversely, family risks and stressors, such as adverse childhood experiences, can heighten the risk of SEMH needs (Wright et al., 2023).

Broader contextual factors include societal norms, cultural expectations, and socio-economic conditions. Social inequalities, such as poverty and marginalization, significantly impact mental health outcomes, contributing to higher rates of mental health difficulties among children and adolescents (Chaudry & Wimer, 2016; McLaughlin, Costello, Leblanc, Sampson, & Kessler, 2012; Collishaw, Furzer, Thapar, & Sellers, 2019). Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic has introduced new stressors and uncertainties, including health concerns, disruptions to routines, social isolation, economic hardship, and an unpredictable future. These new challenges have further exacerbated existing issues and impacted the mental health of children and adolescents (Pfefferbaum & North, 2020).

A comprehensive understanding of SEMH necessitates a thorough examination of these diverse contextual factors, as they shape children's experiences and responses. These factors can act as either protective elements, fostering resilience, or risk factors, increasing vulnerabilities to adverse outcomes (Brown, Khan, & Parsonage, 2012). Examining these elements serves as a crucial precursor to deeper exploration, facilitating a more nuanced understanding of SEMH and its implications for educational contexts.

2.5 Balancing Priorities in SEMH Provision

2.5.1 Inclusion & Exclusion of CYP with SEMH Needs.

Understanding inclusion and inclusive education can be described as complex, broad, and ambiguous (Szumski, Smogorzewska, & Karwowski, 2017), which poses significant challenges for both exploring and understanding it (Ainscow & Sandill, 2010).

Ainscow, Slee, and Best (2019) argue that the primary goal of policies and procedures for inclusive education is to counteract discrimination and exclusion related to diversity. Whilst some include all forms of pupil diversity when discussing inclusion (e.g. Florian, Young, and Rouse, 2010), others such as Westwood (2018) refer to specifics such as curriculum, teaching and learning in their inclusive education definition.

Most widely accepted definitions of inclusive education view it as an ongoing process rather than a final goal (Timmons & Thompson, 2017). According to the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities' (UN, 2016), inclusive education is:

- A fundamental right to education
- A principle that values students' wellbeing, dignity, autonomy, and contribution to society
- A continuing process to eliminate barriers to education and promote reform in the culture, policy, and practice in schools to include all students.

While one might assume that those working within schools would be able to identify the characteristics of an inclusive school, the absence of a universally agreed-upon definition of inclusive education likely contributes significantly to the challenges in implementing inclusive practices (Florian, 2014). Without a clear and consistent framework for what constitutes an inclusive school, educators and policymakers may find it difficult to translate these principles into effective practice (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011).

One perspective that resonates is offered by Waitoller and Artiles (2013), who propose that inclusive education is "a systematic process of overcoming barriers to participation and learning for all students" (p. 327). This aligns with the exploration of Social, Emotional, and Mental Health (SEMH) needs by highlighting the importance of systematically removing barriers that prevent the inclusion and adequate support of students with SEMH needs in educational settings.

A great deal of research is founded on the principle that all children have a right to be in the same educational space (Cobley, 2018; Florian, Black-Hawkin & Rouse, 2017; Schuelka & Johnstone, 2012). Nilholm and Göransson (2017) examined the ambiguity surrounding definitions of inclusion in education. They found that educators understood inclusion in terms of 'placement' - the location of where education occurs. In contrast, the SEND Code of Practice (DfE, 2015) emphasises that inclusion should prioritise the support offered, regardless of the setting. This is problematic for understanding how best to meet the different needs within a student population, including CYP with SEMH needs

(Gray, Wilcox, & Nordstokke, 2017). Specialist schools face mounting pressure to accommodate the diverse needs of pupils, resulting in a shortage of available places, including those with SEMH needs. This places considerable pressure on mainstream and other settings where such placements may not be well-equipped to support such needs (DfE, 2019).

Pupils with SEMH needs face disproportionate rates of exclusion from school (NHS Digital, 2018), and notably, CYP with SEMH needs who do not have an ECHP are nearly four times more likely to face permanent exclusion compared to CYP without SEN (DfE, 2019). Moreover, Carroll and Hurry (2018) suggest that experiencing one exclusion can set a pupil toward further exclusions. Continued exclusion and isolation from education are associated with long-term mental health issues and have consistently shown increased risk for negative life outcomes (Timpson, 2019). The DfE (2017) underscores the association between SEMH needs and persistent absence from school, including lower academic attainment and higher exclusion rates.

Fullan (1991) posits that the actions and perspectives of teachers drive educational change and improvement: "What teachers do and think… it is as simple and complex as that" (p. 117). Some research highlights that teachers' attitudes, beliefs, and actions influence implementing inclusive policies and practices (Malak, Sharma & Deppeler, 2018; Pit-ten & Glock, 2019). Achieving successful inclusion of CYP with SEND necessitates educators consider curriculum adjustments, behavioural management, learning resources, and instructional methods (Kurth, Lyon & Shogren 2015). Despite teachers recognising the necessity to implement inclusive practices to support the varied needs of CYP, their implementation lacks consistency (Warin, 2017).

In a study involving 55 members of staff and 53 pupils across six secondary schools, Gazeley, Marrable, Brown & Boddy (2015) explored the relationship between educational inequalities and school exclusions. They identified a correlation between inclusive practices and lower rates of exclusion. Within participant interviews, the “differences in schools thresholds for inclusion” were discussed often (p. 500). These thresholds reflect the level of tolerance for managing challenging behaviour. Schools that considered exclusion a last resort demonstrated greater patience and a more proactive approach toward behaviour management. In contrast, those who felt they lacked the capacity and expertise to meet the needs of those CYP were more likely to exclude pupils. This highlights how inconsistencies in exclusion policies can make some CYP more vulnerable to negative outcomes.

2.5.2 Academic Performance and Holistic Well-Being

Debates often arise around the conflicting priorities of academic performance and the holistic well-being of pupils. Prioritising achievement whilst concurrently promoting well-being has led academics to describe this as "antithetical" (Ryan & Weinstein, 2009, p. 226). Since well-being and academic achievement correlate with positive life outcomes (Farmer & Hanratty, 2012), this presents educators with a policy dilemma.

Furedi (2009) argued that education should be “saved from those who want to turn it onto an all-purpose institution for solving the problems of society (p. 6)” In his view, the emphasis is on equipping CYP with the knowledge and skills necessary for success in their academic pursuits instead of diverting resources and attention toward addressing societal challenges. In 2018, the Centre for Education Economics (CfEE), an independent think tank, published a report titled “The achievement-wellbeing trade-off in education” (Heller-Sahlgren, 2018). The central discussion point was policymakers deciding whether to prioritise CYP's well-being or academic achievement. Heller-Sahlgren (2018) also addresses a notion implicit within the relationship between well-being and academic performance that improvements in one will be at the expense of the other in the form of a “trade-off” (p. 67). While Heller-Sahlgren cautions against “ignoring pupil well-being entirely” (p. 6), some argue that schools can pursue multiple objectives concurrently (Cigman, 2012). Contrary to Furedi's and Heller-Sahlgren's perspectives, Kidger, Donovan & Biddle (2009) highlight a holistic view of education, aligning with the growing recognition of the interplay between academic success and mental health. Underpinning beliefs about the purpose of education inevitably shape various aspects of school functioning, including how resources are allocated, organisational structures are designed, and approaches are developed to meet the needs of students who may not fit traditional expectations (Clarke, 2020).

School settings are key environments for promoting positive mental health and well-being and providing early intervention for those with SEMH needs (DoH & DfE, 2017; Sharpe Ford, Lereya, Owen, Viner, & Wolpert 2016). However, the historic prioritising of academic programs and attainment pursuits has resulted in the marginalisation of efforts to support social and emotional aspects of learning (Carmel & Cavioni, 2015). A culture of 'performativity,' as described by Ball (2003), can have adverse effects on well-being (Brown & Woods, 2022). This perspective aligns with neoliberal principles that prioritise measurable outcomes and academic achievement as a priority. When the focus is on competition, creating inclusive education environments becomes increasingly difficult (Corbett, 1999). Consequently, practices and policies driven by this agenda may inadvertently demote

initiatives that aim to address SEMH, making it increasingly difficult for educators to manage and support CYP's broader mental health and well-being needs in schools (Weare, 2015).

Since the introduction of various Government Education Acts, such as the Education Reform Act (1988), the Education and Inspections Act (2006), and the Academies Act (2010), educators have been operating within a framework that Gleeson and Gunter (2001) term 'productive autonomy' (p. 142). This implies that educators are subjected to increasing accountability measures with only a small degree of autonomy. Ball (2008) argues that changes that proceeded with the 1988 Reform Act have a "ratchet effect" (p. 97), implying that there are small incremental changes within reforms and policies over time that become increasingly difficult to reverse. This leads to shifts within practice and encourages "taken-for-granted" practice (p. 97) in which educators know of no other way. As Poulson (1998) argues, "accountability is an ambiguous term in discourses about education; within it are condensed a range of meanings and emotions" (p. 420). This creates an environment of balancing priorities and requires an approach that recognises the importance of both.

2.5.3 Policy Intentions and Practical Realities.

There is growing recognition internationally that schools are important settings to implement support for SEMH needs, often encompassed in the broader framework of 'mental health and well-being.' Studies have shown that school-based services can offer early intervention for mental health support (Wells, Barlow, Stewart-Brown, 2003; Neil & Christensen, 2009). By providing early support and intervention, the goal is to minimise the need for specialist services. While the demand for specialist services remains significant in education settings, prolonged waiting times can further strain schools' capacity to support CYP's SEMH needs (Roanes & Hoagwood, 2020).

A tiered approach to organising provision for CYP with SEND is used more often in health services and is now frequently implemented in schools (Mendez, Ogg, Loker & Fefer, 2013). Universal provision (Tier 1) is considered preventative, including whole school approaches, school ethos, curriculum, and teaching strategies that promote positive mental health and social-emotional learning for all CYP (Lavis & Robson, 2015). Tier 2 support is provided when a pupil is identified as vulnerable, at-risk, or with a specific SEN that requires additional support in a small group or one-to-one setting. Specialist support (Tier 3) is for CYP with greater or complex needs. Support within this tier is individualised and may be delivered from other professionals or agencies.

While applying a tiered approach to support SEMH needs is beneficial, identifying, addressing, and implementing support across the tiers is more nuanced. Many researchers endorse and provide commentary on the positive use of whole-school approaches and consistently indicate that Tier 1 support is most successful when it is integrated into daily practice, school culture, engages all staff, includes strategies to enhance parental engagement, and links with external agencies (Goldberg, Sklad, Elfrink, 2019; Wyn, Cahill, Holdsworth, Rowling, & Carson 2000). Specific to SEMH, Blatchford, Bassett, Brown, Russell, and Webster (2019) found that education settings that embed inclusive practices within a whole-school approach encourage greater social and emotional development, improve academic attainment, and reduce the risk of marginalisation and exclusion for pupils with SEMH difficulties. However, several factors hinder the effectiveness of whole-school initiatives. Limited resources, inconsistent leadership, competing educational priorities, and lack of staff training can undermine the consistency and quality of SEMH support at the whole school level (Patalay, Gondek, Moltrecht, Giese, Curtin, Stanković & Savka, 2017).

The disproportionate rates of exclusions for pupils with SEMH indicate a significant concern that their needs are not being adequately addressed (Graham, White and Potter 2019). A closer examination of how statutory guidance is implemented is required. Timpson (2019) argues, “Children who have been excluded are more likely to go on to be identified as having SEN or those with SEN support being issued with an EHCP after their exclusion” (p. 38). This suggests a possible reactive approach to identifying SEN, raising questions about the timing and adequacy of Tier 1 support provided to students before exclusion. If exclusions are prompting the identification of SEN, this could indicate systemic shortcomings in early intervention and support.

The challenges related to implementing initiatives have persisted over time, reflecting ongoing difficulties in translating policy into practice. For example, early initiatives such as Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) introduced nearly 20 years ago (DfE, 2005) aimed to support 'goodness-of-fit' and encouraged ownership to implementation and sustainability. However, its vagueness and lack of clear guidance left schools 'confused' and unsure how to deliver such support (Smith, O'Donnell, Easton & Rudd, 2007). Thus, the variety of support schools provide for supporting SEMH differs significantly in approach and quality. Such diversity stems from schools' autonomy in interpreting and implementing guidelines (Patalay et al., 2017) and resource availability, funding, staff training, and school culture.

Although the CoP (DfE, 2015) states that schools "must" consider what the Code outlines and "cannot ignore it" (p. 12), frequent use of the term "should" throughout the guidance implies a degree of flexibility rather than an obligation to adherence. While it allows schools and educators the flexibility to tailor approaches depending on their school context, it also underscores their autonomy in the extent to which they implement it. However, there is often no structured process to evaluate whether these support strategies achieve their intended outcome or positively impact CYP. A lack of systemic evaluation makes it difficult to ascertain the efficacy of support provided in schools. Consequently, schools may prioritise compliance with the guidance rather than engaging in a more comprehensive understanding of the CYP needs. This has the potential to overlook factors contributing to SEN, which could, in turn, hinder the provision of appropriate support and intervention. As a result, some CYP necessitating Tier 2 and 3 supports may not present with more at-risk or acute needs but rather adversely affected by the inadequacies in schools' ability to implement and execute Tier 1 strategies, highlighting the disparity between policy intention and realities of implementation.

2.5.4 Challenging Behaviour and Behaviour Management

Challenging behaviours often serve as the initial indicator for schools where CYP presents with SEMH needs. However, challenging behaviour is not a universally agreed-upon construct. The shift from 'emotional and behavioural difficulties' (EBD) to 'social, emotional and behavioural difficulties' (SEBD) and now to' social, emotional, and mental health' (SEMH) highlights such evolution. Notably, 'behaviour' was removed in the transition to SEMH. Despite this, behaviour continues to be a central feature in understanding SEMH. While challenging behaviour itself should not be considered an SEN, the Code of Practice (2015) stresses the importance of not overlooking its significance. Schools are still expected to consider behaviour when identifying SEMH needs since it can serve as a potential indicator of mental health needs (Norwich & Eaton, 2015). Thus, behavioural challenges should be interpreted as outward manifestations of SEMH needs (Frederickson & Cline, 2015).

A foundational concept in helping understand SEMH needs in CYP stems from early seminal work from Achenbach on 'internalising' and 'externalising' disorders (Achenbach, 1978). This dichotomy offers a valuable framework for examining the varied manifestations of SEMH needs. Internalising behaviours encompass withdrawal, anxiety, and depression, predominantly affecting one's internal psychological state. Cefai and Cooper (2010) found that in mainstream settings, students exhibiting internalised behaviours like withdrawal, avoidance, and self-harm often go unnoticed. In contrast, externalising behaviours, being more observable, tend to garner more attention from educators and create greater challenges in mainstream classroom settings (Dimitrellou & Hurry, 2019). Externalising behaviours

denote "negative" behaviours where a child or young person may "act out" (Campbell, Shaw, and Gilliom, 2000 p. 474), and their behaviour may not “conform to the norm” (Dyson, 1997, p. 153). These actions or behaviours include aggression, defiance, and disobedience (Eisenberg, 2001).

However, it is crucial to recognise the limitations inherent in this dichotomy. For instance, CYP who present with externalising behaviours may also experience internal distress. In addition, within the definition of SEMH as outlined in the SEND CoP (DfE, 2015) it encompasses specific diagnoses (e.g., ADHD) and more generalised manifestations such as 'challenging' and 'disruptive' behaviours. Dimitrellou and Male (2020) argued that such a broad scope lacks clarity regarding the specificity, severity, and frequency of the SEMH, leading to the inequitable identification of SEMH needs.

Gender differences also contribute to the nuanced insights into behavioural discourse. Studies consistently reveal that girls tend to exhibit internalising behaviours like anxiety and depression, whereas boys are more prone to externalising behaviours such as aggression (Bask, 2015; Hamblin, 2016; Chaplin & Aldao, 2013). This reinforces dominant thinking about gender and behaviour, implying boys are more challenging due to their propensity for behaviours considered more 'challenging'.

Frederickson and Cline (2015) argue that the inclusion of mental health within SEMH recognises that behavioural challenges are indicators of underlying SEMH needs. Yet, research into teacher perceptions supports the argument that more attention is paid towards externalised behaviours such as disruptive behaviour in the classroom compared to internalised behaviour such as withdrawal and more often than not, teachers view challenging behaviours as an initial indicator of SEMH needs (Hinshaw, 1992). George, White and Schlaffer (2007) argues that insufficient attention is placed on assessing the needs of CYP who exhibit externalising behaviours. This underestimation stems from the belief that some school staff feel that the child or young person is in control of their behaviour and their actions result from conscious choice rather than underlying needs. Consequently, the causes of such behaviours may be overlooked, misinterpreted, and misunderstood, hindering the efforts to provide appropriate support (Sheffield & Morgan, 2017).

‘Behaviour and discipline in schools: Guidance for governing bodies’ (DfE/DoH, 2015) serves as a key document guiding educational institutions in managing behaviour and discipline among pupils. This guidance explores disciplinary actions such as sanctions, exclusions, and the ‘*power to discipline beyond the school gates’* (p. 4), reflecting a traditional behaviourist approach rooted in behaviour changes through consequences. While maintaining discipline is important for creating conducive

learning environments (Crowley & Childs, 2017), an overreliance on punitive measures and adherence to rules may fail to address the underlying SEMH needs that contribute towards such behavioural challenges in CYP.

Research by Hepburn, Beamish, and Alston-Knox (2021) investigated approaches to managing challenging behaviour and found a discouraging situation characterised by a reliance on punitive measures such as sanctions and exclusions. These strategies often prioritise behaviour modification and feature the pervasive nature of disciplinary practices in education over participation and learning (Egeberg, McConney & Price 2021). However, the relationship between learning and behaviour is multifaceted. For example, Worp-van der Kamp, Pijl, Bijstra, & van den Bosch, (2014) found that when pupils struggle academically, they may experience anxiety, frustration, or a sense of failure, which can manifest into disruptive behaviour in an attempt to manage or cope with such academic challenges. This suggests that addressing the root causes of disruptive behaviour requires a more integrated approach that considers both the academic and emotional needs of pupils.

One could argue that educators' lack of understanding regarding externalising behaviour as a form of communication results in an incomplete approach to supporting students' needs with empathy and understanding. For instance, Jean-Pierre and Parris (2018) discuss how punitive measures do not contribute towards improved conduct or better self-regulation. On the contrary, they explore literature that indicates punishment worsens and escalates behaviour.

Research has examined educators' difficulties when trying to adopt more relational approaches to supporting CYP's needs and transitioning away from usual behaviourist strategies. They found that educators lack the training and knowledge to encourage relational approaches, especially when schools have deeply ingrained behaviourist practices (Wilson & Lipsey, 2007). Similarly, factors such as rigid disciplinary policies, limited resources, and limited opportunities to encourage relationship building with CYP contributed towards barriers to a more relational approach to supporting those with SEMH needs. Pennacchia and Thomson (2016) argue that behaviourist practices are still deeply embedded even though alternative provisions tend to adopt a more relational approach to supporting SEMH needs. This shift, they argue, and I also argue, is purportedly influenced by the prevailing emphasis on evaluation metrics and the need for quantifiable measures to assess outcomes and effectiveness with minimal recognition, highlighting improvements in CYP's social and emotional needs.

2.6 Contextual Factors Influencing Educators' Constructions of SEMH

2.6.1 Evolving Roles and Responsibilities of Educators

The roles and responsibilities of educators have evolved over time. While schools are being relied on for early identification and management of mental health and well-being, and thus SEMH needs (Patalay et al., 2017), there continues to be diversity in educators' attitudes and ability to support such needs. While promoting positive mental health and well-being is seen as a fundamental aspect of their role, many teachers felt inadequate in addressing these needs due to their heavy workloads, prioritising other responsibilities over mental health concerns (Mazzer & Rickwood, 2015). While legislation such as Children and Families Act (2014) exists to protect both students and staff, there is insufficient clarity on how this translates into practical support for staff members dealing with vulnerable CYP. Much research identifies challenging classroom behaviour as a significant factor contributing to stress and burnout among staff (Gibbs & Miller, 2014). Some educators feel hesitant and unable to promote mental health and well-being due to feeling that their own needs are neglected (Kidger, Gunnell, Biddle, Campbel & Donovan, 2010). Consequently, there is little surprise that a quarter of teachers consider leaving the profession due to the stress of managing challenging behaviour (Association of Teachers and Lecturers, 2015).

Establishing a work-life balance in education highlights the importance of establishing boundaries that mitigate the risk of burnout (Farley & Chamberlain, 2021). There is a widespread cultural and institutional expectation that values and praises educators' dedication to their work (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017). Ball's seminal work titled "The Teacher's Soul and the Terrors of Performativity" offers insights into the consequences of educational policy changes on teachers' personal and professional lives. The introduction of "market values, managerialism, and performativity" (Goodley & Perryman, 2022, p. 20) has marked a shift from covenant to one replaced by contract, what Bernstein (2000) characterised as "reprofessionalisation." Ball (2003) argues that navigating a performative culture gives rise to "dualisms and tensions" that manifest as potential "splitting" (p. 221). In addressing SEMH, splitting, according to Ball, would mean educators are confronted with following "good practice" while fulfilling performance-driven metrics or "rigours of performance" (p. 221). This tension reflects the challenges of autonomy and accountability with many competing demands on educators and schools.

Historically, research has predominantly focused on the teacher's role in supporting SEMH. However, there is also a growing research base acknowledging the role of other staff, such as teaching assistants (TAs), learning mentors, and support staff. Knight (2015) explored how TAs contribute to pupils' well-being and academic success through qualitative interviews and observations. For pupils with specific

SEMH needs, TAs provided individualised support such as social skill development and emotional guidance. Given the expanding roles and responsibilities in supporting SEMH needs, it is important to consider the views of all educators when gaining a comprehensive understanding of how SEMH support is delivered in schools.

2.6.2 Teacher Training

Some research highlights the role of training in developing educators' confidence in supporting CYP with SEMH needs. While Aprile and Knight (2020) highlight the crucial role of Initial Teacher Training (ITT) in fostering positive and inclusive attitudes among educators, others suggest that these attitudes dimmish over time. Aydin (2021) argues that ITT does not adequately prepare teachers for the demanding emotional and behavioural challenges they face in the classroom. In Alvarez-Hevia's (2018) study, they discuss how new teachers reference “emotional damage” (p. 311) when addressing pupils' externalising behaviour. This suggests a gap between theoretical preparation and practice experience. This is further evidenced by findings from Boyle, Topping, and Jindal-Snape (2013), who suggest that attitudes towards inclusion begin to diminish as early as one year after ITT.

The predominant focus of training in schools on academic procedural aspects such as curriculum and assessment with less emphasis on understanding contextual influences and support strategies needed to support specific needs (Hagenauer, Hascher & Volet 2015) poses implications for educators' ability to support SEMH needs. Neglecting contextual influences and exploring causation and function of behaviours can limit educators the ability to address SEMH needs effectively.

While it may be assumed that years of experience working in education may be associated with a greater ability to support CYP's social, emotional, and mental health needs (Woodcock, 2020), this warrants further exploration. Some researchers argue that mastery experiences contribute to teachers' self-efficacy in managing behaviour in novice and experienced educators (Wilson, Woolfson & Durkin, 2018). Similarly, Gulsun, Malinen, Yada & Savolainen (2023) found that years of teaching experience positively influenced teachers' ability to manage behaviour. Over time, educators with more experience may develop coping strategies through reflection to manage the emotional impact of student behaviours, contrasting with less experienced teachers who often find these challenges overwhelming (Farouk, 2014). However, others argue that more experiences teachers hold negative attitudes compared to less experienced colleagues (MacFarlane & Woolfson, 2013). Such findings highlight the complex relationship between training, experience, and attitudes. This highlights the importance of professional development, which enhances teachers' understanding and competence

in addressing SEMH needs. Therefore, developing and integrating targeted efforts to support educators in managing SEMH needs can empower them to create more inclusive environments.

2.6.3 Leadership

While individual teacher motivation to engage in professional development is important, school leadership practices can influence and encourage a collaborative culture among educators (Grosemans Boon, Verclairen, Dochy & Kyndt, 2015). Austin and Harkins (2008) emphasise the role of leadership in ensuring daily practices are aligned with a shared vision among educators. When educators feel secure and appreciated by their leaders, they are more likely to contribute towards wider school goals and participate in decision-making. Supportive leadership consistently facilitates the implementation of positive changes in schools (Nguyen & Hunter, 2018). Leadership teams can encourage shared values and culture among staff, influence teaching and learning, play a role in teachers' motivation, and improve outcomes for CYP (Day, Gu & Sammons, 2016; Early & Greany, 2016). 'Transforming Children and Young People's Mental Health Provision' (DfE/DoH, 2017) acknowledges the importance of senior leadership teams in schools (SLT), encouraging all schools to designate a senior leader responsible for promoting and supporting mental health and well-being in schools.

Gibbs and Powell (2012) found that when educators have greater confidence in their school's leadership, policies, and consistency in implementing policies, there are lower levels of student exclusion. They describe this as "collective efficacy" (p. 2) and suggest that strong support from leadership makes educators feel more capable of fulfilling the demands of their role, including supporting social and emotional needs. While promising aspects for supporting CYP with SEMH needs, the concept of collective efficacy necessitates exploration of the variability of leadership in schools, which may undermine this confidence. For example, it is important to recognise that some schools may lack the leadership or culture to nurture such an environment (Meyer, Le Fevre & Robinson, 2017). These discrepancies may result in variations of support for CYP with SEMH needs, potentially exacerbating inequalities for CYP. So, while collective efficacy is significant, its success depends on the school leadership's quality.

2.7 Implications of Educators' Perceptions of SEMH Needs on CYP

Given the ambiguity of the SEMH label (Norwich and Eaton, 2015), it becomes imperative to consider the implications associated with its use for CYP. Some research supports the idea that language not only reflects, but also shapes attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours toward SEMH needs (Levin, 2015). For

example, educators with positive attitudes and high expectations are more likely to create inclusive environments that best support CYP's academic, social, and emotional outcomes (Tschannen-Moran, Salloum, and Goddard, 2015).

While staff may find it easier to identify and discuss a CYP's SEMH needs in terms of diagnoses and observable behaviours (Arora & Mackey, 2004), as was apparent with the case of Bobby in the introduction, such labelling may offer very little to a young person who chooses to perceive themselves differently. Stigmatising language can contribute to feelings of shame, alienation, and low self-esteem among young people with SEMH needs. Conversely, affirming language that validates their experiences and strengths can foster a sense of agency, belonging, and resilience. By reframing SEMH needs in a more positive strength-based approach, such as opportunities for connection, educators and policymakers can create more inclusive environments where CYP can thrive (Wright & Masten, 2005).

Kelly and Norwich's (2004) research revealed that CYP did not self-identify or describe their needs as teachers did, since they were aware of the negative connotations associated with SEN labels. In this instance, the internalising labels discussed by Norwich (1997) become relevant. CYP identified as having SEMH needs may go through an internalisation process whereby they reconcile the external perceptions with their own self-perceptions. This active process can result in the CYP navigating their understanding of how others view them and how they view themselves in relation to their SEMH label. For example, Sheffield and Morgan (2017) found that most young people viewed the label SEMH negatively despite little understanding of its meaning. This is further supported by Caslin's (2019) findings, which reveal that CYP resorted to informal labels such as 'naughty' and 'mischievous' to describe how they felt others perceived them.

Some have raised concerns that CYP are viewed and treated differently following the SEMH label used when describing needs. For example, feeling “unwanted” by teachers (Nind, Boorman, and Clarke, 2012), “disempowered” (Caslin, 2019), and blamed by others for their difficulties (Michael & Frederickson, 2013). This leads to pupils being seen as “other” or “different” (Oliver, 2013). This aligns with Hacking's (1999) concept of "interactive kinds" where classifications, like SEMH, can influence individuals' self-perceptions and behaviours. When CYP are categorised or labelled as having SEMH needs, they may internalise this, leading to changes in their behaviour, emotions, and self-perception that have the potential to reshape understanding and label of SEMH itself, akin to what Hacking describes as the" looping effect" (p. 104).

Billington (2006) further emphasises the potential for long-term narratives and the enduring impact of the language used to describe and characterise CYPs' needs: "If the ways of speaking about a young person are repeated often enough, it is likely that a way of professional thinking and talking will begin to emerge in which the young person might ultimately come to be viewed as synonymous with their behaviour" (Billington, 2006, p. 52).

2.8 Navigating the Ambiguity of Language and Its Impact

The significance and impact of language when working with CYP is a recurring theme mentioned in government guidance and policy papers, often concerning behaviour management. In February 2024, the Department for Education issued updated guidance titled 'Behaviour in School: Advice for Headteachers and School Staff', it emphasises that '*Consistent and clear language should be used when acknowledging positive behaviour and addressing misbehaviour*' (DfE, 2024, p. 11). Additionally, the guidance stresses that '*all staff should communicate the school expectations, routines, values, and standards both explicitly through teaching behaviour and in every interaction with pupils'* (p. 5). However, it lacks explicit guidance on what constitutes "clear" language. Such omission creates room for interpretation, potentially leading to inconsistencies in how behaviour is addressed and described.

There is a longstanding debate regarding the terminology used to describe, diagnose, and label SEN and the potential consequences of such labelling within the literature. Some argue that labelling can lead to negative expectations, stigma, perceptions of permanency and thus reinforcement of pathologising discourses that can potentially disempower staff and parents (Lauchlan & Boyle, 2007; Frederickson & Cline, 2015). Conversely, advocates of labelling argue that labels serve as beneficial functions for CYP, including mitigating blame, promoting greater tolerance, and understanding that can facilitate equitable distribution of resources and access to support services (Gillman, Heyman, and Swain 2000; Reindal, 2008; Riddick, 2012).

Since thought influences action (Armstrong, 2018), educators' perception of CYP with SEMH needs is important to explore. Horridge's (2019) study emphasised the importance of accurately describing CYP's needs in understandable terms, ensuring they are well documented and communicated effectively to avoid misinterpretation or misunderstanding. Research Kalu (2002) found that terms such as "troubled" or "problematic" used to describe behaviour can evoke negative stereotypes and lead to stigmatisation of CYP with social or emotional needs. In contrast, person-centred language that acknowledges a more strength-based approach and considers the complex nature of SEMH needs can

promote more positive attitudes and responses from educators (Corrigan, Morris, Michaels, Rafacz, & Rüsch, 2017).

2.9 Conclusion

In Bloome's (2017) "Words and Power," the central argument is that "words themselves do not possess inherent power" (p. 148); rather, it is the actions we take with words and our responses to their usage that determine their power. Similar to Billington's view, Bloome emphasises that language is not passive, but rather an active tool that shapes social relationships and identities. Language serves as a means of establishing hierarchies, affiliations, and exclusions within social groups. For example, the choice of words and language registers can signal belongingness or exclusion, dominance or subordination, and inclusion or marginalisation. Exploring the language educators use can uncover implicit biases, stereotypes, and inequalities embedded within discourse. This awareness could empower educators (and CYP) to advocate for more inclusive and equitable language practices.

Stanbridge and Mercer (2019) highlight a noticeable gap in the literature concerning the language used to discuss children, particularly relevant in the discourse surrounding SEMH needs. They emphasise the importance of gaining an accurate shared understanding of CYP needs as the foundation for considering appropriate support and interventions. As the understanding of SEMH needs evolves, there is a growing recognition of the diverse roles that different school staff members play in addressing these needs.

The literature surrounding the understanding, identification, and support of SEMH in schools reflects a complex and multifaceted landscape. Despite legal delineations, the inherent ambiguity surrounding the definition of SEMH necessitates exploration beyond statutory boundaries to attain a more nuanced understanding of its conceptualisation within educational policy, practice, and literature. As primary agents of change, educators' words, attitudes, and understanding of SEMH can greatly influence their response, support, and outcomes for CYP. Since thought influences action, educators' perception of CYP with SEMH needs is important to explore.

This research aims to explore the language used by educators to construct SEMH needs in CYP, how this is influenced by the available discourses, and how, in turn, these influence thought, talk, and action when supporting those with SEMH needs. These dynamics are explored through the guiding research questions:

1. **How do educators construct Social, Emotional, and Mental Health within discourse?**

2. **What roles or identities do the discursive constructions of SEMH create for educators and pupils?**
3. **To what extent do these constructions open or close opportunities for action aimed at providing support for children and young people with SEMH needs in educational settings?**

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the research methods and procedures for investigating the research questions. It begins with a discussion of my philosophical positioning guiding the research and the rationale for using Foucauldian discourse analysis, exploring its key components. Descriptions of the chosen research design follow. Practicalities of the procedure, including data collection, recruitment of participants, and ethical considerations, are given. The chapter ends with an exploration and researcher reflections on the data analysis process.

3.2 Research Orientation

Ontological assumptions pertain to beliefs about the nature of social reality and mirror what Maxwell (2012) refers to as "the nature of reality" (p. 10). This research assumes that various understandings of SEMH exist rather than a single, objectively verifiable “truth” (Gray, 2009, p. 29), upholding a relativist ontology, which serves as the foundational principle for this research. The aim of the research is to explore different ways in which educators have constructed meaning and knowledge about SEMH (Mertens, 2020).

Epistemological assumptions concern beliefs and theories about the study of knowledge, including how knowledge is acquired, validated, and interpreted within a specific research context (Rosenberg, 2016). A social constructionist epistemology is pertinent in the context of this research as it enables an examination of how SEMH is constructed through language and discourse within particular social and educational settings, acknowledging the importance of differing perspectives and interpretations (Robson & McCartan, 2016). This viewpoint acknowledges that what is seen as ‘true’ can change depending on the individual or the cultural setting, placing this research within a social constructionist epistemology (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). The idea that knowledge and reality are neither set nor absolute but are instead shaped by human perceptions, experiences, and social interactions is highlighted within this philosophical framework (Levers, 2013).

3.3 Foucauldian Discourse Analysis

3.3.1 Analysing Discourse

In its broadest sense, discourse analysis (DA) originated during the “turn to language” in the 1970s and 1980s, corresponding with the growth of social constructionism (Georgaca and Avdi, 2012). Language is used to actively create interpretations of social reality and to further particular social objectives (Willig, 2008). Thus, discourse analysis provides an alternate viewpoint on the nature of psychological phenomena and goes beyond being just a research tool (Billig, 1997). It also acts as a critical lens for challenging the traditional beliefs of mainstream psychology.

In this research, Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (FDA) is identified as the most suitable approach. FDA examines language and communication to understand social phenomena beyond immediate contexts, distinguishing it from other forms of discourse analysis. Foucault (1971) posits that multiple discourses coexist in society but are often hierarchically structured, whereby certain discourses are privileged over others. Through examining how people discuss a particular topic, e.g., SEMH, FDA can expose the broader systems of meaning within society, revealing power dynamics and social hierarchies at play.

3.3.2 Rationale for taking a Foucauldian approach.

Initially, I was drawn towards thematic analysis as the methodology for this research, as I was familiar with its approach. However, after engaging in many discussions with my supervisor and exploring FDA further, I realised its alignment with exploring educators' constructions of SEMH. In the context of this research, FDA is apt for exploring how the language employed by educators not only shapes immediate interactions but also influences their perceptions (subjectivity), actions (practices), and the overall conditions within the educational environment where SEMH is addressed. Through this exploration, the study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of how educators navigate the discursive landscape around SEMH, ultimately influencing their practices and responses to SEMH needs in educational settings.

As with any FDA, I aim to uncover versions of the phenomenon that have been constructed through language rather than seeking the “true nature” of the phenomenon (Willig, 2008, p. 120). In the context of this research, Parker's (1992) view suggests that the way educators and stakeholders discuss SEMH, the terminology they use, and the discourses that influence their understanding all contribute to constructing what SEMH means in the educational setting. According to Georgaca (2014), dominant

discourses related to mental health (and, by extension, SEMH) can be challenged when we apply a social constructionist framework. This approach allows suppressed discourses to emerge and/or develop, potentially leading to a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. The emphasis lies on "what is silently articulated beyond the text" (Foucault, 1981, p. 58) and on attempting to uncover the implications, assumptions, and power dynamics embedded within discourse rather than just focusing on its intended meaning.

The distinguishing feature of FDA, in comparison to other methods of discourse analysis, is the emphasis placed on the 'how' and 'why,' attempting to establish discourses that maintain our practice and institutions, which I feel corresponds more closely to my research questions (Springer & Clinton, 2015; Georgaca & Avdi, 2011). Like Foucault's exploration of 'mental illness,' this research delves into the social and cultural contexts that shape our understanding of SEMH. This perspective challenges the notion that SEMH is an objective and universally defined concept and instead recognises that societal norms, ethical standards, and the dynamics of power and knowledge influence it. While entrenched discourses may be more prevalent in established fields like mental health, exploring their potential impact on understanding and integrating relatively new concepts such as SEMH is essential.

3.4 Key Components of Foucauldian Discourse Analysis

Foucault acknowledges the complexity of his own exploration and describes discourses as "cautious" and "stumbling" (Foucault, 2002, p. 17). Some argue that his unconventional and unsystematic approach is contradictory, having the potential to undermine the philosophies he aimed to achieve. Whilst enriching the depth of analysis, it also invites varied interpretations and debates about the coherence and application of his ideas. Nevertheless, there are proponents who "reject the view that the critical aspect of his philosophy eclipses its positive and emancipatory potential" (Taylor, 2011. p. 3). Below, I describe some key concepts aligned with the FDA approach that help inform the later analysis process. Given Foucault's reluctance to assert definitive understandings of the world (Taylor, 2011), terms such as "concepts" and "perspectives" when relating to his work are employed with caution.

3.4.1 Objects

Objects, as conceptualised within DA, are formed through language and discourse (Coyle, 2007) and may not necessarily have existed outside of discourse as suggested by Parker (1992). In the context of

this research, the object is SEMH itself. As Burr (2003) outlines, an object, such as SEMH, can be constructed by multiple discourses, each relating to different aspects of it.

3.4.2 Subjects

In the context of FDA, the subjects are the individuals or groups positioned within the discourse. Subjects, as described by Kendall and Wickham (1999), are "the bodies on and through which discourses act" (p. 53). Such description aligns with the understanding that subjects in FDA are more than just the speakers; instead, within a collection of statements, there exists space for individuals to occupy the role of a subject. This positioning is beyond the individual's control and is intricately tied to the discourse reflected in their language (Foucault, 2002; Willig, 2008). Therefore, a subject's position within discourse carries implications for the actions they undertake and the language they employ. The ‘subject(s)’ in this research refers to the roles, identities, or perspectives that the educators adopt or imply through their constructions of SEMH needs. These roles and identities are explored further in Question 2, which investigates how these subject positions influence and shape the experiences and practices of educators within the framework of SEMH.

3.4.3 Norms and Normalisations

A primary purpose of FDA is to reveal what is commonly accepted or taken for granted in society, such as societal norms or widely held beliefs. In addition, FDA aims to illustrate how these norms function as instruments of power and offer alternative perspectives to such dominant discourses, as highlighted by Cheek and Porter (1997).

In this research, Foucault's perspective on norms and normalisation serves as a lens through which to examine educators' constructions of SEMH. Foucault contends that normalisation is intricately linked to mechanisms of capitalism and is associated with the standardisation of behaviour (Foucault, 2008). For Foucault, norms are not merely descriptive observations of behaviours, but rather idealised standards that impose how individuals should behave in society. These norms are not neutral; they are characterised by their prescriptive nature towards specific goals or outcomes and can be leveraged and perpetuated by those in positions of power, sometimes unintentionally. Within this research, it is important to uncover how these norms influence educators' perceptions and practices regarding SEMH, shedding light on how dominant discourses shape understanding and responses to SEMH needs in educational settings.

3.4.4 Power

According to Foucault's perspective, power is not solely possessed by a specific group of individuals but can be wielded by anyone, as Smith (2008) asserted. As Gaventa (2003) argues, "power embodied and enacted rather than possessed, discursive rather than purely coercive, and constitutes agents rather than being deployed by them" (p. 1). Contrary to being seen as solely oppressive, power is regarded as productive and capable of shaping new forms of behaviour while simultaneously constraining others. As Mills (1997) suggests, power relations play a pivotal role in constructing subjectivity and behaviour, rather than merely repressing them.

3.4.5 Governmentality

Murray (2007) explains governmentality as "the attempt to shape human conduct by calculated means" (p. 275). According to Foucault, governmentality extends beyond just governmental institutions and permeates other spheres of society, including education (Billington, 2000; Doherty, 2007). This includes the techniques, strategies, and rationalities through which governing authorities seek to shape and govern conduct, often by cultivating self-regulating subjects (Foucault, 1979).

Billington (2006) further discusses how adult behaviour can function as a function of control within a complex network of regulatory practices and power dynamics. The actions of others, intended or otherwise, can become entangled within the web of governmentality, which can exert influence and further shape societal norms and practices.

Foucault's concept of governmentality illuminates the relationship between external authorities' exercise of power and individuals' (voluntary) adherence to and/or internalisation of societal norms and values. This interplay is particularly relevant in education settings, where educators play a crucial role in shaping perceptions and constructions of SEMH.

3.5 Challenges of Using Foucauldian Discourse Analysis

Some critics have pointed out the inherent contradictions in Foucault's writings, noting the evolution of his views over time, from early explorations of madness and mental illness to later analyses of sexuality, power, and governmentality. These shifts sometimes led to inconsistencies in arguments and methodologies. For example, his earlier work emphasised structural influences, whilst his later work adopted a more post-structural perspective, questioning the foundations of knowledge and power.

Whilst this reflects the changing nature of Foucault's thinking, it challenges readers when attempting to synthesise such thinking into a cohesive framework. As such, adopting a Foucauldian perspective is not without difficulties. Foucault referred to his books as "little toolboxes" (cited in Patton, 1979, p. 115). This metaphor reflects the subjective nature of FDA, which lacks a prescribed analytical method, as Potter (2003) noted.

The socio-cultural position adopted by researchers, including myself, plays a pivotal role in shaping our worldviews, exerting covertly or overtly and continuously influence the research process (Walter, 2019). This influence extends to formulating research questions, their answers, and the subsequent interpretation of findings (Walter, 2019). While Foucault did not provide a rigid method for his analysis, this allows for flexibility, empowering researchers to apply his conceptual tools in a manner they deem suitable for their specific contexts. Thus, this research represents my personal application of Foucault's ideas and aligns with his view that the aim is not to find a theory but to explore the possibilities (Foucault, 1979).

3.6 Procedure

3.6.1 Ethical Approval

Before initiating participant recruitment, I obtained ethical approval from the Sheffield University Ethics Committee (see Appendix A). This approval process follows the ethical standards and guidelines established by Sheffield University, ensuring the ethical integrity and oversight of the research project. The following below (Table 1) are the measures implemented to maintain the safeguarding of participants:

Ethical consideration	Risk Management Measures Implemented
Informed Consent	Potential participants received a Participant Information Sheet containing details about the research and their rights as participants (see Appendix B). The voluntary nature of participation and the participant's right to withdraw were emphasised. Transparency in data storage procedures was maintained to ensure confidentiality was provided. Contact information for my research supervisor was also shared. Interested participants indicated their willingness to participate by returning a signed consent form to me via encrypted email (See Appendix C).
Right to Withdraw	The Participant Information Sheet included information on participants' rights to withdraw (See Appendix B). Participants were informed that they could withdraw before, during, and up to four weeks after the interview.

Confidentiality	Arrangements for the interviews were coordinated directly with each participant, allowing them to choose between virtual (Google Meet platform) and in-person interviews at their convenience. Participants were given the flexibility to decide whether to have their cameras on or off during the online sessions. It was clarified that the presence or absence of the camera would not impact the analysis process, ensuring their comfort and autonomy in the virtual setting. Participants were also notified that the conversation would be transcribed for analysis and only by myself. Additional information about how and with whom the research findings would be shared was also outlined (See Appendix B)
Anonymity	Codes (P1, P2, and P3) were assigned within the transcription to ensure that the names of the participants, their schools, and local authorities were not identifiable.

Table 1: *Ethical Considerations and Risk Management Measures Implemented to Safeguard Participants*

3.6.2 Participants

A non-probability sampling design, specifically 'voluntary sampling,' was chosen for this research. Voluntary sampling involves participants self-selecting into the study, meaning they willingly choose to participate. Given the exploratory nature of the research and the desire to capture diverse perspectives within educational settings, voluntary sampling allows for the inclusion of participants who are genuinely interested and willing to share their experiences and insights. It provides an avenue for those educators who actively engage with SEMH-related matters in their professional roles to contribute, ensuring that the study encompasses individuals with a genuine interest and expertise in the subject matter. Although this method may not yield a representative sample, it aligns with the qualitative and exploratory nature of the research, offering a rich source of information and insights from participants who have a vested interest in the topic under investigation.

I circulated an email among Educational Psychologists (EPs) within my Local Authority (LA) to facilitate recruitment. The email outlined my intention to engage with individuals to discuss their understanding and experiences of working with CYP with or presenting with SEMH needs. I requested they kindly share this information with their designated schools and staff. I also engaged with staff for whom I served as the designated EP, sought their support for the research, and encouraged them to disseminate information to their broader staff team. Interested participants contacted me via my university email account, after which I provided them with the participant information sheet and consent form. The goal was to recruit at least 3 participants who met the following inclusion criteria. Table 2 below shows the inclusion criteria for participant selection, along with the rationale for ensuring participants have relevant experience in school or Local Authority settings.

Inclusion criteria	Rationale
Employment within a school setting or Local Authority (LA) provision.	This criterion ensures that participants share a common geographical setting, contributing to examining the coherence or divergence of dominant discourses within that particular region.
A minimum tenure of at least two academic terms of employment.	The aim is to ensure that participants possess a well-established foundation in their educational roles. This requirement seeks to capture the insights of individuals who have had sufficient time to navigate the complexities of working in an educational setting, particularly in supporting SEMH.

Table 2: *Inclusion Criteria and Rationale for Participant Selection*

In recent years, much research has shifted focus on examining other educator roles beyond teachers in supporting CYP with SEMH needs. Whilst much of the existing research concentrates on teachers experiences and practices in addressing SEMH needs (Middleton, 2018; Stoll & McLeod, 2020), research recognises other key roles, such as teaching assistants (TAs) and pastoral staff in support of the vulnerable CYP, including those with SEMH (Blatchford, Russell & Webster, 2012). The term 'educator' was used inclusively to refer to anyone "working with a child or young person in a school context or learning provision", such as a LA or learning mentor, expanding beyond the role of teachers (Oxford English Dictionary, 2016: online). Table 3 below shows the participants' demographics collected before their interviews, including their ethnicity, current role and school setting, years spent in their current role, and total years of experience working in school settings.

Participant	Ethnicity	Current role and school setting	Years spent in current role	Total years of experience working in school setting(s)
P1	White British	Deputy Head and teacher In a specialist setting	4 years	16 years
P2	White British	Head of Year and PE teacher in an all-girls mainstream secondary school	3 years	10 years
P3	White British	Positive behavioural support assistant in a specialist setting	2 years	8 years

Table 3: *Participant Demographics*

3.6.3 Data Collection

Whilst focus groups are common for researchers using the FDA, the decision to use individual interviews was informed by the recognition of the nuanced exploration required to investigate educators' constructions of SEMH. While focus groups offer advantages in facilitating spontaneous discussion, individual interviews felt more appropriate for this research due to their ability to establish rapport and delve deeply into participants' experiences and insights (Wilhelmy & Köhler, 2021) Moreover, concerns about potential passiveness or conformity within group settings and the desire to avoid capturing shared assumptions underscored the preference for individual interviews (Kidd & Parshall, 2000; Martin-Denham, 2020).

A pilot study was conducted to ensure the transparency and robustness of the interview questions. While informative, the findings from this were not recorded or included in the formal research dataset. Feedback and reflections from this pilot study prompted minor adjustments to the interview schedule. These included rewording certain questions to enhance clarity and eliminate potential leading responses. Additionally, the sequencing of questions was revised, while additional prompts/probes to encourage greater reflection of experiences were also noted.

Before starting the interviews, participants were briefed on the semi-structured format, ensuring transparency and setting expectations for the interaction (Thomas, 2017). This approach enabled adherence to the interview schedule while allowing participant autonomy and facilitating an interactive atmosphere conducive to open discussion (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018).

The interview format comprised a combination of structured questions and semi-structured elements, with the discussion beginning with demographic information before questions centred upon key themes related to understanding, identification, and support for CYP with SEMH needs. These themes were selected to align with the overarching aims of the research (see Interview Schedule in Appendix D).

Three participants were interviewed, which was considered adequate in terms of transcripts to identify discourses surrounding SEMH. This approach prioritised depth and quality of analysis over breadth and quantity of the data, enabling thorough examination of interpretations provided by each participant. It has been said that larger data sets increase the administrative burden without significantly improving the analytical result (Coyle, 2007).

3.6.4 Reflexivity

Reflexivity, known as "active consideration of and engagement with the ways in which his own sense-making and the particular circumstances that might affect it" (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012, p. 100), must be considered in any research. While passion is a crucial factor in selecting a research topic, Saldana (2011) cautions against turning the research into a "forum for working out personal demons" (p. 67). Without recognition of this connection throughout the research process, there is a risk of compromising integrity, so this caution is relevant, considering that the chosen topic aligns with my own experiences. Given the significance of reflexivity, particularly in navigating biases and motivations, it is important to acknowledge how one experiences information and guide the research topic and approach.

The decision to research this topic stems from a deep-rooted commitment to advocate for and make a meaningful difference in the lives of children and young people (CYP) with social, emotional, and mental health (SEMH) needs. My experiences working with CYP with SEMH needs have profoundly shaped my understanding and interpretations of SEMH, fueling my interest in fostering more inclusive and supportive educational environments. As the researcher, I recognize that complete separation from the research is unattainable (Taylor, 2003). My social and cultural experiences inevitably influence data collection and interpretation processes.

In light of the critical realist ontology and social constructionist epistemology that underpin this research, I further acknowledge how my power and expertise as a trainee educational psychologist may have influenced the construction of knowledge within this study. Critical realism asserts that while there is an objective reality, our understanding of it is shaped by the social and cultural contexts in which we operate. From this perspective, my professional role, training, and experiences undoubtedly shape how I perceive and interpret the realities of educational settings, SEMH needs, and the discourses surrounding them.

Simultaneously, the social constructionist epistemology I uphold emphasizes that knowledge is co-constructed through interactions between individuals and their environments. My engagement with participants is not neutral; it is informed by my professional expertise and positionality, which may have influenced how both I and the participants made sense of the issues being explored. The power dynamics inherent in my role could have impacted how participants shared their experiences and how I interpreted those narratives.

This interaction between power, knowledge, and discourse is further illuminated through Foucauldian discourse analysis, which highlights how power relations are embedded in the production and dissemination of knowledge. According to Foucault, discourses are not merely reflections of reality but are shaped by power structures that determine what is considered valid knowledge. My role as a trainee educational psychologist places me within these power structures, influencing which discourses are foregrounded and how they are interpreted. By acknowledging and reflecting on these influences, I aim to ensure that my experiences and motivations enhance rather than compromise the integrity of this research. This awareness aligns with my commitment to reflexivity, ensuring that I critically reflect on how my power and expertise, as well as the broader power relations identified in Foucauldian analysis, may have shaped the discourses presented in the research, and how they fit within broader educational and social contexts.

I wanted participants to perceive me as a curious researcher (Sangar, 2018) with a genuine interest in their experiences and perspectives. During the interviews, I facilitated discussions by offering follow-up questions but refrained from personal reflections to prevent any potential priming or influence on the participant's constructions. Occasionally, participants shared frustrations or challenges they encountered, which paralleled my own experiences. I kept a research diary throughout the process, which served as a space for introspection and personal reflections. Some of these reflections will be shared below and throughout the research in reflective boxes.

3.7 Data Analysis

Doing discourse analysis, according to Walton (2007), goes beyond adhering to a prescribed set of methodological steps and is instead about developing confidence in utilising analytical concepts and presenting outcomes in a manner that is “consistent with the theories and epistemological positions of discourse analysis” (p. 117). Many researchers agree that there is no manualised approach to engaging in FDA (Coyle, 2007; Georgaca & Avdi, 2011). Foucault himself changed his approach with each publication (Mills, 2003).

In an endeavour to best understand FDA and apply it in a manner that I perceive is best suited as a novice researcher, I chose to utilise stages of FDA according to Willig (2013) As such, I did not approach the stages in a strictly linear manner but rather as a framework to assist the process, aligning with Harper O'Connor, Self, & Stevens (2008) characterisation of it as a "craft-like process" (p. 194) (See Appendix E for FDA stages and questions used to analyse interview data). I incorporated reflexive notes

to provide transparency and insights into my reflections and challenges encountered at various stages of the analysis.

3.7.1 Stage 1: Identifying Discursive Constructions.

During this stage, the focus is on identifying and examining the ways in which the object, in this case SEMH, is constructed within the transcripts. This involves highlighting all instances of reference to SEMH (Willig, 2013). Despite the limited number of interviews, I experienced a sense of overwhelm when confronted with an abundance of information and the task of identifying relevant construction of SEMH. Initially, I was drawn to searching for keywords such as 'mental health' and 'behaviour' but recognised that doing so may overlook the implicit references. Instead, a nuanced approach of looking for explicit and implicit references must be considered. This involved paying attention not only to terminology but also context and implications of the language used by participants. For example, statements such as "displaying disruptive behaviour" or "experiencing emotional distress" alluded to SEMH needs without explicitly naming the needs. Focusing on shared meaning rather than "strict lexical comparability" (Willig, 2013, p. 131) aimed to explore more breadth of SEMH in constructed.

Throughout this stage, I remained attuned to the interplay between my role as the researcher and the research context, acknowledging my subjective positioning and being mindful of its potential influence on the analysis process. I also appreciated that another researcher with differing backgrounds, values and epistemologies might identify different discursive constructions. It was essential for me to feel confident that I had thoroughly explored the nuances of the text and exhaustively documented the various constructs evident within it to a point where I felt saturation had been achieved. Through this iterative process, I continually revisited the transcripts to identify the discursive constructions present within the data (refer to Appendix F).

3.7.2 Stage 2: Identifying Discourses.

This stage examines how the different discursive constructions contributed to shaping the understanding of SEMH within the broader discourses. "Discursive research is all the better," according to Parker (2013, p. 224), for its ambiguities, requiring researchers to "confront, develop, and redraw methodological boundaries" (Thompson, Rickett and Day 2018, p. 94). Navigating the seemingly boundless array of discourses proved to be a challenging aspect of the analysis process. Jorgensen and Phillips (2002) raise a pertinent question for this research: Are there any parameters or boundaries to what can be known if all knowledge is socially constructed? This highlights the challenge of identifying

the limits and scope of SEMH's discursive constructions. I often found myself grappling with identifying what could be considered a wider or less dominant discourse, questioning whether they should be incorporated considering their potential overlaps and contributions to broader discussions.

Additionally, there were occasions where the same statements from the participants could link to an array of different discourses, e.g., “I think in school SEMH is the least understood need” could be viewed within stigma discourse, complexity discourse, or training discourse (to name a few). However, I found reassurance in Dicks' (2004) explanation that "the researcher is seeking to identify social constructions that have regulatory effects, and which, to some extent, are presented as self-evident or common-sense features of the social domain that is being researched” (p. 205). The focus at this stage, therefore, gravitated towards discourses that appeared self-evident within the transcripts, rather than identifying every conceivable discourse, finding a balance between comprehensiveness and pragmatism (See Appendix G).

3.7.3 Stage 3: Action Orientation

This focus at stage 3 is on understanding the functions of language and the implications of constructing SEMH in a particular manner within specific contexts. It helps uncover how language shapes responses and understandings of discursive construction's intended and unintended consequences. The aim is to uncover what is being said about SEMH and why it is being said that way, allowing us to consider its possible effects. For example, if SEMH within the context of labelling discourse is linked to ‘disruptive behaviour’ or persistently framed as a behaviour problem, this may lead educators to orient actions towards disciplinary measures as opposed to preventative measures.

As a novice researcher, I encountered challenges during this stage due to the inherent complexity of grasping the functions of discourse and language and the intentions behind the language being used since these are not always explicit. Despite such challenges, I felt this stage heightened my awareness of my inherent philosophical inclinations both as a practitioner and a researcher. For instance, being grounded in social constructionism, I naturally gravitated towards discourses that recognise and highlight the significance of social interactions, relationships, and contextual factors. As such, I found myself more adept at identifying and interpreting the implications of relational discourses compared to medical model-like discourses.

3.7.4 Stage 4: Positioning

Subject positioning within discourse refers to the designated role(s) or 'positions' available to individuals, thereby establishing a framework within which speakers (the participants) can adopt or assume. If we take the example above, within a labelling discourse, educators may position themselves as authoritative figures responsible for managing and disciplining pupils while concurrently positioning the pupils as disruptive. Subject positions influence how individuals perceive themselves and others, shapes their attitudes, behaviours, and interactions (Willig, 2013). By exploring the subject positions of educators and CYP, you can examine the implicit power dynamics and expectations that influence how SEMH is understood, supported, and experienced within education settings.

During this stage, it is important to acknowledge the dual role of both a researcher and a practitioner. Failure to acknowledge my own positioning within the discourses could lead to a loss of reflexivity and potential bias (Harper et al, 2008). As I interpret the data, I actively engage in the educational discourses surrounding SEMH. Engaging in reflexivity fosters transparency and accountability whilst also allowing me to recognise my own potential assumptions and perspectives.

3.7.5 Stage 5: Practices, Institutions, and Power

This stage involves exploring how "discursive constructions and subject positions open or close opportunities for action" (Willig, 2013, p. 136), meaning that certain ways of speaking and thinking can either facilitate or hinder behaviour and responses. Taking the example of the labelling discourse and educators positioning themselves as authoritative figures during this stage, I examine how these discursive constructions translate into everyday practices within educational settings. For example, this may open opportunities to assert control within the classroom but close down opportunities for collaborative and relational approaches to supporting SEMH. This could influence how educators interact and respond to pupils with SEMH needs, potentially reinforcing existing power dynamics and disciplinary approaches. Thus, this stage elucidates how language and subject positioning shape actions and behaviours, thereby influencing the experiences of CYP, particularly those with SEMH needs.

3.7.6 Stage 6: Subjectivity

By adopting specific subject positions, individuals view the world through a particular lens and interpret their experiences accordingly. This final stage seeks to understand the impact of assuming different subject positions on participants' subjective experiences, including those of the CYP they

work with. While stage 5 (practice) explores “what can be said and done within the different discourses” (p. 136), this stage shifts towards what is felt, thought, and experienced.

Coyle (2007) discusses how “some discourse analysts contest the premises of this analytic stage" (p 109), and I found myself resonating with this perspective. Willig (2013) acknowledges that this stage is the "most speculative" (p. 136). I viewed this stage as largely interpretive and somewhat less directly pertinent to the research than earlier stages. Since participants may not explicitly share their feelings, I could only suspect what could be felt and thought from different subject positions. This highlights the complexity of understanding subjective experiences just within linguistic expressions. (See Appendix H for transcript annotations linked to all stages of Willig (2013).

In conclusion, this chapter outlined the research design, ontological and epistemological underpinnings, and specific methodological choices to explore how educators construct SEMH. Employing FDA, the rationale for this analysis method is explored. This chapter provides the basis for subsequent analysis and discussion chapter below.

Chapter 4: Analysis and Discussion

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents findings and discussions from three semi-structured interviews conducted with educators. While FDA serves as the primary analytical framework, references to other analytical methods, such as discursive analysis, are also made to highlight qualitative features. Although the main focus is not on analysing spoken language or specific semiotic events within the interviews, instances where participants' word choices prompted deeper reflexivity as a researcher and contemplation of action orientations and their implications within the research context are considered.

The research questions guiding this analysis are:

1. **How do educators construct Social, Emotional, and Mental Health within discourse?**
2. **What roles or identities do the discursive constructions of SEMH create for educators and pupils?**
3. **To what extent do these constructions open or close opportunities for action aimed at providing support for children and young people with SEMH needs in educational settings?**

The analysis of participants' transcripts revealed numerous discursive constructions and related discourses that illuminate the diverse perspectives, experiences, and understandings surrounding SEMH in educational settings. These discursive constructions and discourses were not consciously chosen by the participants but rather emerged as resources drawn upon during the interviews. However, not all discursive constructions are presented in this chapter. In keeping with the principles of rigour and commitment (Yardley, 2015), the focus is on those that appeared most prominent, shared commonalities across the transcripts, and were most relevant to the research context.

The four specific discursive constructions that emerged as particularly salient and will serve as thematic frameworks guiding the presentation of the analysis in this chapter are:

- SEMH as heterogeneous.
- SEMH needs challenge traditional disciplinary practices.
- SEMH support is marginalised in favour of academic priorities.
- SEMH demands a shift towards greater systemic understanding.

Each discursive construction is linked to relevant discourses, providing a framework for the subsequent analysis. Table 4 below shows a detailed view of these constructions and their associated discourses, which will be further discussed in Sections 4.2-4.4

Discursive construction	Discourse
SEMH as Heterogenous	- Complexity Discourse - Labelling Discourse Stigma Discourse
SEMH Needs Challenge Traditional Disciplinary Practices	- Discipline/Control Discourse - Relational Discourse - Restorative - Discourse - Empowerment Discourse
SEMH Support is Marginalised in Favour of Academic Priorities	- Academic/Performance Discourse - Accountability Discourse - Prioritisation Discourse - Resource Allocation Discourse
SEMH Demands a Shift Towards Greater Systemic Understanding	- Policy Discourse - Structural/Institutional Discourse - Pedagogical - Discourse - Equity and Social Justice Discourse

Table 4: Discursive Constructions and Related discourses identified from Participants' Transcripts.

This selective approach aims to provide a nuanced analysis while recognising that this chapter does not comprehensively explore all discourses in the participants' transcripts. This aligns with Fairclough's (1992) notion of intertextuality, where labels given to constructions represent recurring patterns in the data and what social constructionists would call 'relative stabilities' (Dick, 2015). However, this does not imply that clear boundaries exist between these discourses.

Each discursive construction is explored using Willig's stages as a guide, aligning with research questions. The constructions are supported by illustrative quotes and situated within broader discourses and literature.

4.2 SEMH as Heterogenous

Within educational settings, SEMH encompasses a landscape characterised by diverse and often ambiguous definitions. Consequently, when exploring participant responses to answer the first question, "What is your understanding of the term 'Social, Emotional, and Mental Health' (SEMH) within the context of education?" it becomes evident that their responses are linked to the broader

complexity discourse also present in the literature. Participants had difficulty in clearly articulating their perspectives. The statement ***"We probably use the term SEMH loads when talking about some pupils" (P1)*** implies that SEMH is a commonly employed term among educators to describe various issues related to pupils' social, emotional, and mental health. P2's use of a rhetorical question reflects a sense of humility where instead of asserting expertise on the topic, they acknowledge their own uncertainty: ***"Erm… its…, I would say, erm, I Dunno (laugh) it's hard to define isn't it" (P2) .*** The acknowledgment of ambiguity evidenced by prolonged pauses and filler words suggests that anyone may struggle to provide a clear answer, and this seems to be the case. However, despite such frequent use of the term, participants' uncertainty about how to articulate SEMH has implications for identification and, thus, support, as explored further below.

P3's answer reflected a sense of uncertainty surrounding the term SEMH, particularly in relation to its wide-ranging nature "***…when asked a question like this it's like ahh where to start"***. The difficulty in knowing ***"where to start" (P3)*** indicates the challenge of navigating the breadth and complexity of SEMH when attempting to define it. This resonates with P1's reflection that ***"it's not like there is a checklist where they have to tick off specific things to signal SEMH. (P1) "*** Together, these remarks underscore the ambiguity inherent in identifying and recognises what characterises SEMH needs.

Reflection: Given this was the starting question of the interview, I wondered if this was a contributing factor to the apprehension and difficulties in formulating their thoughts to a broad question. The broad nature of the question was deliberate and aimed at eliciting participants' overarching understanding (Rubin and Rubin, 2012). I wanted to avoid a narrowly defined question and instead use prompts and facilitating questions in the hope they would offer more comprehensive responses, as emphasised by Patton (2015). Drawing on Lincoln and Guba (1985), I sought to create a conversational atmosphere that fosters participant engagement and openness, encouraging them to explore their perspectives more deeply. Nevertheless, the very breadth of the question may to have posed a challenge for the participants, and I did find myself using probing and follow-up questions to elicit greater understanding.

Starting with P1's description of SEMH as an ***"umbrella term" (P1), P2*** adds further nuance by depicting CYP with SEMH on a ***"spectrum."*** This spectrum illustrates the diverse range of behaviours and characteristics observed among them**:** ***"Often those pupils who engage in inappropriate***

behaviours in class that may disrupt others learning, shouting out, leaving class you know those sorts of things. And then on the other end of the spectrum, they may be shy and quiet, in the background but are also struggling" **(P2).** This interpretation aligns with SEMH as an umbrella term, encompassing a wide range of experiences and challenges. P2's use of the word ***"behaviours"*** and ***"struggling"*** serve as central points in understanding and what they discuss as "***common buzzwords that we hear a lot in school" (P2)***, highlighting the complexities of SEMH that are a common thread throughout each discursive construction.

> **<u>Reflection:</u>** With regards to the use of the 'umbrella term,' my initial thinking was that this term was a useful tool for understanding such 'wide-ranging' challenges and manifestations encompassed by SEMH. However, as I reflect on its use and interpretation in a research context, I cannot ignore the potential negative conations associated with the term 'umbrella,' implying a lack of specificity and consensus to understanding SEMH. Nevertheless, I realise that both interpretations of the term indeed hold merit, and it is important to critically reflect on how it is used and interpreted in different contexts.

P3 highlights the recognition of individual differences among children who have or present with SEMH by stating that ***"no two children with SEMH are the same" (P3).*** Instead of viewing SEMH as a monolithic category where all children are assumed to have similar characteristics or respond in the same way to interventions, P1 emphasises the importance of considering individual differences: ***"it's not like, a single need, you know, as it says in the name, it's got social, emotional, and mental health needs which are all different and so the support will be different depending on their needs" (P1).***. This also aligns with participants' tendency to compartmentalise SEMH needs.

This compartmentalisation was evident in their language as they often described social needs, emotional needs, and mental health needs as distinct and separate concerns. For instance, discussing social needs in terms of pupils' interactions with peers and social support systems ***"I think about a lot of the pupils that I work with who lack social skills like understanding of social cues and boundaries…. some have difficulties in social nuances and understanding of interactions"*** **(P3);** emotional needs in terms of their feelings and emotional well-being ***"their General well-being day-to-day that can affect obviously emotion but moods"*** **(P2)** and ***"I work with some pupils that are unable to regulate their emotions, so they can't quite determine a difference between sadness and anger for example"*** **(P3),** and mental health needs in terms of diagnosable conditions or psychological

issues such as anxiety: ***"I would say the majority of the pupils that I work with have some form of mental health needs and these needs comes before whatever way their autism or their ADHD like anxiety"*** **(P3).** This finding corresponds with the work of Brown (2016), who highlights the tendency within educational discourse to categorise and separate various forms of special educational needs.

Despite P1 arguing that ***"SEMH is not a one-size-fits-all scenario"*** **(P1)** there was a common thread among participants in tending to conflate difficulties and challenges CYP with SEMH needs experienced: "***Like those with EHCPs, if they have specific learning needs like Dyslexia then I think staff generally know what that is, but then when you've got a pupil with ADHD, they may shave needs that impacts on their concentration, behaviour, friendships, emotional regulation and that, but maybe fine academically, then it seems their main area of needs is always SEMH. So sometimes it feels that everything not related to ASD needs or academics performance or like sensory needs then put into SEMH" (P2).*** This conflation arises when pupils have multiple intersecting needs leading to categorising them as having SEMH, regardless of the specific nature of the challenges, including behaviour. For example, if difficulties manifest as behaviour, educators may attribute them to SEMH needs, as exemplified by P1: ***"Or if it's more about their behaviour, then they probably say, oh they've got SEMH needs" (P1).*** Despite P1's recognition of the need for an individualised approach to support strategies, the tendency to categorise all challenges under 'SEMH' aligns with the labelling discourse and highlights the broader pattern of ambiguity and oversimplified categorisation in understanding and identifying SEMH needs within educational settings.

Understanding SEMH as heterogeneous acknowledges that CYP may exhibit a wide variety and manifestations of needs, strengths, and challenges. Participants' interviews showed a notable absence of strengths-based terminology when expressing their understanding of SEMH. Instead, there seems to be a tendency towards deficit thinking, particularly with the use of words such as 'lacking' or 'unable to.' While it is important to acknowledge that children with or present with SEMH are indeed likely to face challenges and difficulties, it is equally important to recognise that this does not define their entire identity or potential. Adopting a more strength-based perspective can encourage and enhance assessment practices, intervention planning, and outcomes for those with SEMH.

The absence of strengths-based terminology in discussions about SEMH needs can have significant implications, particularly in terms of labelling and perception. Participants agreed that "***SEMH needs are portrayed negatively"*** **(P3).** This negative portrayal contributes to the stigma surrounding behaviour, as expressed by P1***: "I think challenging is used a lot in schools, like a lot, and I feel***

challenging indicates difficulty in some way, yeah, but when you're in meetings having discussions about those pupils, it feels that challenging is just synonymous with naughty" (P1). This labelling associated with SEMH tends to oversimplify experiences and contribute towards stereotypes and stigma that lead to marginalisation and misunderstanding, which can close down opportunities for more nuanced understanding.

Furthermore, the stigma associated with SEMH needs is exacerbated by unfair portrayals in both educational settings and the media. P1 raises concerns regarding these portrayals: ***"I read it and felt like they're missing the bigger picture and making it seem like every kid with SEMH needs is causing trouble, which I feel is unfair and incorrect" (P1).*** This negative framing not only closes opportunities for supportive action but also has the potential to reinforce harmful stereotypes that may affect educators' willingness to engage with SEMH needs in a constructive manner.

4.3 SEMH Needs Challenge Traditional Disciplinary Practices.

P2's assertion that "***there needs to be clear expectations and, I guess, consequences for pupils***" ***(P2)*** reflects an understanding about the importance of behaviour management and the role of discipline in schools. In the absence of a behaviour policy, they expressed it would be ***"chaos probably"*** emphasising their perceived necessity to ***"have some level of guidance on how to manage behaviour that implemented with some level of consistency across school" (P2).*** Paying attention to the word 'some' in reference to guidance and consistency, suggests an understanding of the complexity involved in behaviour management, where strict adherence to standardised approaches may not always be effective. P2's response that "***there needs to be a degree of flexibility in some circumstances" (P2)*** suggests a need for adaptive responses to individual needs as opposed to uniformity in approach. Similarly, P1 conveys a pragmatic understanding of their role as an educator that aligns with the discourse of behaviour management and discipline. Their acknowledgement of having a "***duty and responsibility to create safe and inclusive environments for all pupils including those with SEMH***" ***(P1)*** parallels P2 and the need for clear expectations as well as broader perspectives that consider individual needs.

Nonetheless, participants reflected on the tensions between maintaining disciplinary discourse whilst considering individual needs. This was evident when discussing pupils who have SEMH needs and conceding that there are occasions where traditional disciplinary practices may be necessary, in one example, to ensure the lesson proceeds uninterrupted since "***you can't always be stop starting the lesson because of particular pupils. Sometimes giving a verbal warning is not enough***" ***(P1).*** P1's

feeling about the need to implement measures such as sending the pupil out or having to "***explain they would get a detention if I had to tell them one more time to focus***" (***P1)*** typifies the challenge educators face in navigating the individualised nature of the discipline, where actions taken to maintain order in the classroom may be of benefit to the teacher but come at the expense of the student's learning.

> **Reflection:** I found these reflections particularly insightful, often resonating with my own experiences in practice. Hatton (2013) discusses how these disciplinary measures while providing immediate relief and control for educators, can have adverse effects on the educational experience of pupils. Reflecting on this, I am also reminded of the study by Orsati and Causton-Theoharis (2013), who discuss how teachers utilise disciplinary practices aimed at removing what they consider 'the problems' (e.g., the young person themselves) from the classroom (p.507)
> This challenges the prevailing discourse by encouraging a more critical evaluation of the outcomes of such practices and their impact on pupils. When I think about Bobby, exclusion was spoken about as the 'necessary' response when control is prioritised in the classroom. Such exclusionary practices not only reinforce the labelling of pupils but could also deny them access to classroom learning, further perpetuating marginalisation and disengagement.

Disciplinary practices such as detention and exclusions are common in educational settings, frequently utilised to manage behavioural challenges that are said to deviate from school expectations (Smith and Broomhead, 2019). The imposition of punitive measures like detention reflects the disciplinary mechanisms aimed at regulating student behaviour within the school environment. P3 offers a poignant reflection on their experience of a "***cycle of detention with the same pupils every time***" ***(P3)*** *and* their perspective on behaviour management in their school as being "***just the norm way of managing behaviour, their way of supporting pupils is to just punish them***" ***(P3)*** Here, they discuss how there seems to be a systemic reliance and recurrence of disciplinary actions that appear to be 'the norm' in the school culture.

> **Reflection:** The use of the term "norm" underscores the concept of "normalisation" within the context of Foucault's theory of disciplinary power. Ignalls (2002) argues that punitive measures are more likely to be used given their short-term effectiveness that may be perceived to provide quick fixes. This normalisation not only reinforces existing power

dynamics within the school but also serves to legitimise and perpetuate disciplinary practices that may be ineffective in addressing SEMH needs. By normalising punitive measures as the standard response to behavioural issues, educators may inadvertently close down opportunities for more effective, supportive interventions. Linking back to Orsati and Causton-Theoharis (2013), those who do not follow the expectations and norms of well-behaved pupils consequently become 'problem' pupils.

In aligning with Hyman and Perone's (1998) study, which argues the potential exacerbation of behaviour by punitive disciplinary practices, P2's reflection highlights the importance of flexibility within disciplinary practices. They shared an example of a student's reluctance to engage in their work that prompted consideration of the broader context, given they ***"recognised there was definitely a change in her behaviour*"** ***(P2)*** Despite policy constraints dictating what the school policy is, P2 recognised the need to understand the underlying issue, which she discovered was a family issue: ***"like imagine I adhered to the behaviour policy and gave her a detention because she did not complete her work…You could have made her day 10 times worse, and she was already having the worst day" (P2).*** The reflection emphasises the importance of holistic support and informed decision-making in addressing behavioural challenges (and changes) within educational settings linked with restorative discourse. By acknowledging the potential negative impact of adhering to the school's behaviour policy on the student, P2 advocates for a more compassionate and supportive approach to behaviour management.

Alternative discourses, such as restorative practices, offer promising avenues for addressing challenging behaviours within educational settings, signalling a necessary shift in culture and discourse as illustrated by P2's emphasising ***"time, care, support, relationship-building, and patience to foster a sense of belonging and readiness to learn" (P2)*** for pupils who have SEMH needs. Unlike punitive measures such as detentions and exclusions, restorative discourse aims to repair and restore relationships through collaboration and dialogue (Morrison & Vaandering, 2012). This shift in culture and discourse aligns with the broader goal of promoting equity and social justice within educational settings (Hopkins, 2004).

P2 shares about how they allocate time during their lunch breaks for regular check-ins and 'chats' with pupils: ***"A couple of pupils used to come to see me often, and I managed to find a time. It was during my lunch, but I was willing to use that to help the***m" (***P2).*** P2's willingness to allocate their lunch breaks for student check-ins reflects relation and empowerment discourses by giving pupils agency

and autonomy in seeking support while fostering teacher-student relationships. By offering opportunities that encourage teacher-student relational connections, they create a more inclusive and supportive environment where all pupils, including those with SEMH needs, feel valued, heard, and supported.

Additionally, to illustrate the potential impact of alternative approaches, P1 highlights the positive effects of restorative practices: "***One school where they were big in restorative practice, I did notice the difference that made. They actually set aside time for it and swapped the detention. Because then you get into the root of the behaviour and you're not just punishing the impact***" ***(P1).*** This suggests that when educators allocate time to alternative practices, they open up opportunities to understand and explore the functions and motivations of pupils' behaviours. This was also evidenced in participants' reflections of behaviour being a form of communication: ***"They focus on this whole naughty Behaviour like the pupil kicking or swearing. While yes this behaviour is not appropriate, But it signals that they are communicating something" (P1).*** Whilst the participants recognised the disciplinary measures that govern behaviour management, they also acknowledge the importance of trying to unpick the potential reasons why they are behaving in such a way.

> **Reflection:** Viewing these insights through the lens of broader societal narratives has developed my understanding of SEMH and the balance between ensuring discipline and control while challenging existing discourses. I am reminded of the need to advocate for a more holistic approach. After examining the intersection of discipline, restorative and relational discourses, it becomes evident that challenging dominant discourses offer a more inclusive and equitable approach to behaviour management within educational settings (Gillung and Rucker, 1977). This resonates with my own practice, where prioritising relationships and accountability has often meant challenging the power dynamics inherent in traditional disciplinary approaches and embedded within schools. By promoting a culture of empathy and collaboration, as Zehr (2002) suggests, I have observed how this shift can lead to a more supportive environment for CYP. This stresses the value of continually evaluating and adapting approaches when wanting to meet the diverse needs of all pupils, including those with SEMH needs.

Embedded within relational discourse, participants positioned themselves as supportive figures who emphasise the importance of building relationships to support SEMH needs. This aligns with

empowerment discourse, where pupils are given opportunities and space to express their concerns and seek support if needed (Sanderford-O'Connor, 2003). This proactive approach aligns with findings from Roorda, Koomen, Spilt & Oort, (2011), which highlight the importance of engaging with pupils to foster engagement, motivation, and achievement. Normalising support practices and demonstrating a commitment to helping pupils offers a pathway for educators to navigate obstacles and create more supportive environments.

Kohn's (2006) critique of traditional discipline highlights the limitations of punitive measures in fostering a positive classroom environment. P3's observations of other staff members reveal a common focus on reactive measures aimed at stopping or reducing behaviour incidents where staff is trying to ***"stop them doing that or reduce the number of incidents" (P3).*** Such an approach would limit opportunities for providing effective support to CYP with SEMH needs, as it tends to overlook the underlying causes of their behaviour. A narrow focus on managing the problem, rather than understanding and addressing the potential underlying causes, may inadvertently close down opportunities for implementing more comprehensive and supportive interventions or actions tailored to the unique needs of pupils with SEMH needs.

In contrast, P3, as a Positive Behavioural Support (PBS) assistant and advocate, adopts a proactive stance where they consider "***thinking about how we can change the environment that reduces triggers for the young person" (P3).*** This approach directly opens opportunities for more effective action by focusing on preventing problem behaviour through environmental improvements and teaching, as argued in the literature by Bambara, Janney, and Snell (2015): "The intervention practices used in PBS focus not on manipulating consequences to manage or suppress problem behaviour but on preventing problem behaviour by improving the environment and teaching" (p. 11). The ambition for system-wide reform in relation to CYP's behaviour in schools has popularised approaches such as PBS (Sugai and Horner, 2009).

P2 shared a positive experience from their previous school, saying, ***"But my second school, they were really into restorative practices and mindfulness. They even had designated spaces for people to take a breather if they needed it, like quiet corners and stuff" (P2).*** This opens up opportunities for more meaningful interventions. Similarly, P1 discusses how ***"I think it is about trying to make it easier for the student to manage the difficulties they're having" (P1).*** This proactive stance aligns with the principles of PBS on understanding and addressing the underlying causes of behaviour rather than solely implementing punitive measures.

Wachtel and McCold (2012) emphasise the importance of both care and control when engaging in restorative practice, something which P2 acknowledges when giving an example of a young person who, due to their SEMH needs and co-occurring learning needs, means they have difficulty in engaging and accessing learning: "***and because they don't want to be there and then school intervene on the behaviour sanction system and then that sets them off again and it's finding that balance between supporting and disciplining: which It's not ideal***" ***(P2)***. Zehr (2002) cautions against individuals viewing restorative practices as a replacement for punishment. For educators, including P2, this caution from Zehr may evoke discomfort if schools lean on punishment and control as a tool for organisational efficiency (Cameron & Thorsborne, 2001). This example illustrates the closing down of opportunities to implement more inclusive approaches.

When exploring the discourses present within this discursive construction, particularly in the realm of behaviour management, it is clear that participants often navigate a dichotomy of feelings and emotions. Linked to Willig's (2013) subjectivity stage, they may find themselves with conflicting feelings, sometimes experiencing them simultaneously within particular situations as the participants highlighted. Participants who assumed the subject position of agents of control within discipline discourse may experience feelings of authority, responsibility, and/or even pressure to maintain order within the educational environment. This could evoke feelings of empowerment in imposing institutional norms and behaviour policies but also be burdened by the weight of disciplinary expectations and the need to assert their authority over pupils: ***"There needs to be a degree of flexibility in some circumstances" (P3).*** Additionally, they may feel stuck within a moral dilemma or conflict between acknowledging disciplinary measures and the well-being of pupils, particularly those with SEMH issues. For example, when P3 discusses their scepticism against detentions, they may be feeling frustrated with the prevailing disciplinary norms within their school.

On the other hand, participants who adopt alternative subject positions, such as challengers of institutional power, may experience emotions like determination. They may feel empowered at the prospect of promoting positive change within their classrooms: "***I work in a role that is not classroom based, so when I speak to those who are classroom-based, it is very much negative narratives constantly" (P3***). They may feel frustrated by the constraints imposed by traditional power structures and the resistance they encounter when advocating for alternative approaches to behaviour management: "***Why would you punish someone when they are just trying their best" (P3)***? However,

they may also feel determined to challenge the status quo and empower pupils by promoting empathy, collaboration, and student empowerment.

4.4 SEMH Support is Marginalised in Favour Of Academic Priorities.

Performance discourse within education is characterised by an emphasis on quantifiable outcomes, often evidenced by standardised testing and academic metrics that contribute towards performance league tables. A prevailing thread within this discourse is that educators are required to demonstrate proficiency in ensuring pupils make progress toward achieving academic objectives and targets. When asked which they think is the school's biggest priority, P2 responded: "***Definitely academics, unfortunately. Don't get me wrong, the school is trying to push for a more holistic approach to supporting wellbeing, but they still need to show progress at the end of the day" (P2)***. Similar commentary was noted from P3, where it seems the difficulty lies within a paradoxical stance: "***The difficulty is the education system as much as a prize itself on changing curriculum to focus more on our mental health and recognising that it's important, so like all the mental health first-aider and whatever. We still can't negate from the fact that it's completely performance driven still" (P3).*** Whilst there is recognition of a shift in pedagogical practice, the underlying priority remains centred on performance.

> **Reflection:** When considering the implications of these participants' reflections, I observe that when SEMH support is marginalised in favour of academic priorities, it reflects the unconscious reproduction of discourses aligned with a neoliberal agenda, manifesting as a focus on improving academic performance at the expense of SEMH needs (Biesta, 2009). As a result, both policy and practices shaped by such principles may disproportionately allocate resources that focus on academic efficiency over holistic support. Pupils who do not fit neatly into such standardised performance metrics due to diverse learning needs or, indeed, SEMH, for example, may become further marginalised, having broader societal implications that perpetuate such inequality. This reinforces the idea that academic success is the goal of education.

Ceplak (2012) argues that neoliberal educational reforms and pedagogical discourse encourage what he calls 'soft power', encouraging individuals to make decisions without relying on external authorities. This would enable educators to have greater autonomy and power through consent rather than coercion. In this context, educators align their actions with the demands of evolving policy contexts, as articulated by Gillies "the self-working on the self, the self-shaping its own conduct." (p. 79)

Assuming a subject position of engaging in performance discourse, educators may feel a sense of accomplishment if their pupils achieve well academically but equally feel anxious about meeting their performance targets that may be at the expense of some pupils' SEMH needs: ***"There is pressure and stress on everyone in schools for academics" (P1).*** They may feel a juxtaposition of feelings of guilt and frustration in equal measures. As Ball (2003) articulates, they may feel "'challenged or displaced by the terrors of performativity" (p. 216).

It appeared that participants in specialist settings experienced a greater sense of autonomy in contrast to greater feelings of ***"constantly having to ensure that the pupils show progress" (P2)***, who was in a mainstream setting.

> P1: ***I feel there is more flexibility and accommodations for supporting needs and those with SEMH in specialist provision definitely.***
>
> R: Why do you think that?
>
> P1: ***I've noticed that massively. In fact, that was the thing when I moved to special needs teaching, that was the thing that made me enjoy it so much***.
>
> R: What was it that you think made you enjoy it more?
>
> P1: ***I think the fact that it was tailoring things like the curriculum and the support to the pupils themselves and with smaller class size and more TA support then this was more able to do. That is what Is needed in mainstream but not always happening.***

Similarly, P3: ***"I think for us when we go in as PBS so have more capacity to think about things that teachers may not think about. Being in a speciality setting with a lot of SEMH needs I think we are able to think more closely at everyday practice that may not be possible in mainstream schools" (P3).*** The statements above suggest that greater autonomy opens up opportunities for more individualised support for CYP with SEMH needs. P3's remarks emphasise the capacity for deeper reflection and consideration of SEMH needs in specialist settings compared to mainstream schools. This subject positioning allows educators to place greater emphasis on the well-being of pupils.

In contrast, P2's current experience aligns more closely with challenges described in the literature where the threat of inspection from both SLT and OFSTED alike may result in educators' autonomy being diminished, fostering a sense of disempowerment. Here mechanistic approaches towards their role leave them feeling disconnected from authentic practice (Borman and Dowling, 2008): ***"there is pressure and stress on everyone in schools for academics. I know as a teacher I am constantly having ensure that the pupils show progress so it's a juggle when you also have kids with needs like SEMH who may be struggling with all sorts, as well as learning" (P2).*** This statement underscores the challenge the participant faces in reconciling the competing demands on academic objects whilst also providing support for pupils with SEMH. For some, this may affect their satisfaction in their role, as evidenced in P1's greater enjoyment now in a specialist setting (Connell, 2007). For others, it may contribute towards leaving the profession altogether (Buchanan, 2010).

P2 shares positive steps from their school to supplement the efforts of staff, such as employing a school counsellor. However, they express limitations imposed by budget constraints, resulting in the counsellor being available for only three days. Similarly, P3 echoed: ***"We've got a school counsellor full-time for the first time ever now...she's already back-to-back Monday to Friday appointments and means some kids are still waiting" (P3),*** suggesting that even working full time, the demand for such support surpasses capacity. This underscores the difficulties in meeting the needs, particularly mental health needs of pupils, within the constraints of available resources, despite efforts to expand support services. The persistence of these challenges illuminates how practice is still constrained by larger systems of power where the holistic well-being of CYP has limited priority compared to academic achievement.

Nevertheless, all participants reflected on the challenges and reciprocal influence of institutional priorities and allocation of resources. The most referenced constraint participants discussed was time, highlighting how prevailing discourses and political priorities regarding performance metrics influence their practice and reduce the resources available to help support SEMH needs and, indeed, CYP's needs as a whole. This extends beyond just acknowledging the impact of limited time but also on the implications for action orientation toward supporting CYP with SEMH needs. For example, P2 shared how they are not always able to take on additional responsibilities ***"Given my teaching timetable, I just wouldn't have the time to do this as well as my teaching and head of year duties" (P2).*** Not only does the participant recognise the limitation of time but also how it influences their ability to engage in support initiatives due to their teaching and administration duties.

Within performance discourse, educators may position themselves as responsible for achieving outcomes, with a primary focus on prioritising academics over the broader emotional well-being of pupils. This reflects a power dynamic where educators hold the authority to define success primarily in terms of academic achievement and performance. As P2 expressed, ***"So it's a juggle when you also have kids with needs like SEMH who may be struggling with all sorts, as well as learning*"** ***(P2).*** This highlights the challenge educators face in balancing the diverse needs of pupils, including those with SEMH, within the context of learning. Consequently, pupils are positioned as products of academic achievement, suggesting that those with SEMH needs may encounter barriers to academic success.

> **Reflection:** These insights, I feel, parallel Foucault's 'panopticon' when studying the origins of prisons. He described this as an institutional building designed for surveillance where a guard could see others without being seen themselves (Foucault, 1975). First coined by Perryman (2006), 'panoptic performativity' draws on Foucault's concept but argues there are parallels within education settings, where both surveillance and testing can be equally applied to educators and pupils. Both may feel there are expectations to behave in certain ways to please and align with evaluators; educators focus on performance progress, and pupils focus on attainment. This could lead to a loss of autonomy for both. This shift away from surveillance and testing towards a more systemic and inclusive practice would enable greater equitable actions.

P3 highlights the systemic barrier that limited time poses to taking action towards SEMH support initiatives: ***"To be honest, I think time is the biggest factor. There's just not enough of it, especially for teachers, to implement anything new" (P3).*** P2 echoes this, sharing their difficulty in consistently implementing new practices in the midst of everyday hecticness within a school.

> P2: ***I think people get motivated when they are there and motivated to implement new things they've learnt like little tips and tricks, but how consistently these things are then implemented afterwards when normal work resumes then I'm not sure*.**
>
> ***R:*** *Why do you think that may be the case?*
>
> P2: ***Honestly, just the hecticness of school. If it is something that requires a lot of time, often then it would need to be someone with the capacity and training to fulfil this. So, I can try introducing things in my registration like mindfulness and I have things in***

> ***place that aren't expected of me like check ins with pupils and friendship groups with some girls, but the like of specific interventions, then it would need to be a TA probably.***

Explicit references to resource allocation and its pervasive influence on actions toward supporting SEMH were identified many times by participants. The strain of resources and time poses a significant barrier to the implementation of initiatives and opening opportunities aimed at addressing SEMH's needs. P1 expressed concerns about the limited capacity to implement new initiatives due to other competing demands in their role as a teacher: ***"Teachers are already stretched thin, and there's only so much you can cram into a school year" (P1).*** When educators are already overwhelmed with their existing workload, they may struggle to find or dedicate the time, energy, and resources needed to address SEMH effectively. This sentiment is echoed by P2, who articulated that even when they are not teaching, their time is often occupied by other administrative tasks***: "If you've got a free period, you're more often ringing parents or sorting things for the next lesson" (P2)*** It seems this juggling act of teaching responsibilities and administrative tasks closes down opportunities for meaningful engagements of SEMH initiatives or support.

Participants discussed the sporadic nature of implementing initiatives and interventions ***"I think they are done but not on a consistent basis all the time" (P1).*** Whilst this suggests efforts are being made to address SEMH, they are not consistently applied, indicating a lack of continuity and reliability in support provision. This sporadic nature of these close-down opportunities for consistent support and sustainable support for pupils with SEMH needs. Furthermore, P1 highlighted additional burdens such as scarcity of staff and how this may be a reason for difficulties in implementing consistent support: ***"Yeah like the number of staff available, especially in mainstream settings where having a TA isn't always common" (P1).*** While educators may be positioned as advocates for SEMH support, systemic constraints, and resource limitations seem to hinder their ability to effectively address SEMH needs.

As a result, educators might feel pressured to implement interventions aimed at supporting SEMH needs to appease SLT and those of hierarchy rather than a genuine commitment to embed into their practice: ***"It's like it becomes more of a showpiece than something genuinely impactful" (P1).*** This pervasive nature may shape educators' positioning where they may want to satisfy external accountability but feel a disconnect between their authentic professional identities. This identity negotiation could lead to conflicts as educators aim to maintain integrity within their evolving professional duties (Ball, 2003).

Reflection: Initially, my intention was to structure the analysis of each discursive construction using a staged approach to FDA, systematically exploring each stage of analysis as outlined within Willig (2013). However I encountered significant overlaps between the stages during the analysis, which I felt disrupted the flow and coherence of the findings. To address this, I opted for a more fluid and flexible approach, which allowed for a more nuanced and integrated analysis of each discursive construction. As you will recognise, this has enabled me to cover multiple stages of Willig's approach within one paragraph, which I felt provides a richer, more cohesive analysis. I feel this aligns well with the dynamic nature of qualitative research, where analysis often involves moving back and forth between findings to refine and deepen insights (Wilhelmy & Köhler, 2021)

4.5 SEMH Demands a Shift Towards Greater Systemic Understanding.

There was recognition of the historical neglect of SEMH issues within educational training amongst participants ***"There's definitely been a slight shift because when I qualified in 2008 it was it wasn't discussed on my training at all whereas now, you start to get a little bit of CPD on things related but that it's it, not massive" (P1).*** Similarly, ***"I know we are talking about SEMH, but I don't feel there was much training about SEN as a whole which is mad isn't it considering the school population now" (P2).*** Participants recognised the shift towards a greater acknowledgement of SEMH within education, yet allude to concerns that this is not enough or not being given often.

The acknowledgement of the limitations inherent in dichotomous categorisations of SEMH needs, such as externalising versus internalising behaviours (Achenbach, 1991), resonates with the insights provided by participants regarding the complex and multifaceted nature of SEMH needs: ***"It's not something that a child is purposely doing they're doing it because something has fizzed them up from there and this is them trying to communicate whether they're happy sad annoyed. Something has over simulated them" (P3).*** While externalising behaviours may attract more attention due to their overt nature, participants emphasised the need to recognise that these behaviours often stem from underlying internal distress. This perspective aligns with research indicating that children exhibiting externalising behaviours may also be grappling with internal emotional turmoil (Dimitrellou & Hurry, 2019). By challenging simplistic categorisations and emphasising the interconnectedness of internal and external experiences, participants contribute to a more nuanced understanding of SEMH needs within educational contexts.

P1's observation of pupils who present with challenging behaviour often becomes the focal attention within school underscores manifestations of disciplinary power whereby pupils with SEMH needs may receive disproportionate attention due to behaviour perceived as 'problematic' "Orsati and Causton-Theoharis (2013): *"I think the pupils who require a lot of the teacher's time become the focal point of discussions so narrative that those who cause the most problems end up being the ones who are spoken about most"*. This selective attention closes opportunities for more support for CYP with SEMH needs by reinforcing a narrow focus on managing the behaviour rather than understanding and addressing their root causes.

Participants all concurred about the significance of recognising behaviour as a form of communication. P1 shared: ***"I think everyone knows that behaviour is communication but sometimes I think teachers in the moment don't think this" (P1).*** This acknowledgement challenges simplistic understandings and interpretations of behaviour, suggesting the need to understand the context behind it. Similarly, ***"behaviour is them trying to communicate whether they're happy sad annoyed. Something has overstimulated them*" *(P3).*** This perspective highlights shifting position towards one that recognises the interacting factors that may contribute towards behaviour.

In contrast, those who show internalised behaviours may go unnoticed or receive less attention***: "some kids might end up in the shadows, especially those who don't cause a scene" (P2)***. This oversight can lead to missed opportunities for early intervention, particularly for those who may not outwardly display disruptive behaviours, which can ultimately perpetuate their marginalisation. Consequently, as soe literature highlights, pupils with SEMH needs who exhibit externalising behaviours may find themselves subjected towards heightened scrutiny. This selective attention may further perpetuate their marginalisation and the narrative that P1 recognises (Wood, 2007). The focus on externalising behaviours closes opportunities for a more nuanced understanding and supportive approach that could benefit all pupils, including those with SEMH needs. It stresses the need for a greater systemic understanding of these needs, recognising that SEMH needs can manifest in diverse ways beyond just overt behaviours which educators may see. As a result, while the intent to support pupils with SEMH needs aligns with social justice discourse, the practices may fall short by reinforcing inequities and neglecting the diverse ways in which these needs manifest.

> **Reflection:** When I reflect on the participant's transcripts, I note the absence of discussions around gender with behaviour. This was initially surprising, given existing literature and my own experiences working within single-gender schools. However, I recognise that the interview schedule was developed to maintain neutrality and avoid influencing participants' responses. I wondered if gender exerts have as much influence

on understanding SEMH as initially thought or if it is just the concept of behaviour itself. This suggests that participants' reflections on behaviour, regardless of gender, maybe their primary focus in understanding manifestations of SEMH needs. Exploring this intersection more explicitly could provide greater insights. Future research avenues will be discussed in 5.8.

Whilst participants advocated a more nuanced understanding of behaviour as communication, it is important to acknowledge that not all educators may adopt such positioning. P3 sheds light on the perspective of staff who do not advocate for alternative approaches: ***"People just automatically think you're letting them get away with murder" (P3).*** This resistance to alternative approaches reflects entrenched practices and a reluctance to embrace an eco-systemic understanding of behaviour. Instead of recognising underlying needs or skill deficits, as P3 acknowledges, some may interpret efforts to understand and support pupils as leniency in discipline or a failure to enforce consequences: ***"but there's a reason why these pupils are swearing being loud hitting out, self-harm and they're not just doing it just because, there may a skill deficit somewhere and they've got needs to be nourished" (P3).*** This divergence in viewpoints illustrates the tension between punitive discipline and approaches focused on understanding and addressing the root causes of behaviour. It highlights the difficulty of shifting potentially entrenched beliefs about behaviour and how to manage it and underscores the need for continued advocacy for more effective, proactive approaches, such as PBS. This can significantly open up opportunities for providing necessary support for pupils with SEMH needs (Bradshaw, Mitchell, and Leaf, 2010).

In the complex landscape of managing student behaviour, interactions between educators and pupils with SEMH often reveal nuanced dynamics and perceptions:

> "***I remember I worked with one pupil who has SEMH, and they told me they had a detention that day from another teacher, and when I asked what for they said there was a group of them talking but they were the one whose name was said first to stop. When they said, "it's not just me" the teacher said, "stop arguing" and I think it was a bit of back and forth of defensiveness from both about who was right. When it was logged on the school system it was down as significant disruption" (P3).***

Here, it seemed that when the student attempted to explain, ***"It's not just me,"*** their voice was dismissed with a directive to ***"stop arguing."*** In this context, the power asymmetry between the

teacher and student becomes apparent, as the teacher's authority to assign detention ultimately prevails over the student's attempts to assert their perspective. The word “significant” imbues the behaviour with a sense of gravity, suggesting it is not minor but rather has meaningful impact on the classroom environment. The categorisation of 'significantly disruptive' not only legitimises the imposition of the disciplinary measure but also has the potential to contribute towards the construction of narratives surrounding the young person's behaviour. In this case, such actions have the potential to perpetuate instances where CYP with SEMH are labelled as disruptive and are subjected to greater disciplinary measures, further reinforcing marginalisation within the school (Kuther, 1994). Whilst such measures may feel justified for the teacher in question, recognising the subjective nature of behaviour perception underscores the importance of ongoing professional development and training for educators.

Consideration of institutional and structural discourses had an influence on participants' actions related to early intervention, training, and pedagogical practices related to supporting SEMH within their settings. This influence is intertwined with the principles espoused by ecological systemic theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), which emphasises the interconnectedness of individuals within their social and physical environments. As P2 reflects: ***"In an ideal world, it would be a whole school approach to supporting pupils to make sure everyone has a similar level of understanding" (P2)*** This highlights the desire for whole-school approaches to provide consistent support, reflecting the ecological perspective that we must consider the broader systemic context. P3 also discusses the need for coordinated action across the different levels that need to happen. They emphasise the significance of a whole-school approach: ***"And I cannot place blame on the individual staff; I think it’s a whole school approach that needs to shift" (P3***). They highlight the need for collective responsibility as a setting rather than attributing responsibility (or blame) to individual educators.

However, it appears that the translation of training initiatives into tangible outcomes remains limited and is reflected in the challenges of enacting meaningful changes beyond compliance: ***"It's like the whole school approaches in training that we get shown end up being more of a tick-box thing… like, 'Yep, we've done it,' but then it doesn't always translate into real action"(P3).*** This is likely to lead to SEMH-related training sessions being standalone events that become disconnected from ongoing CPD that effectively equips educators and staff on how to address SEMH needs and resulting in sporadic efforts that lack depth and sustainability: ***“Training often was like tick box things where nothing was really implemented over long period of time” (P2).*** This would result in limited long-term impact on pupils SEMH well-being. While structural constraints like time and resources, as highlighted before, certainly play a role, beyond these, the tokenistic efforts reflect the complex balance of responsibilities

and demands on educators' shoulders and argue for a more holistic and systemic approach to supporting SEMH. This aligns with Ferguson's (2008) findings that the rhetoric of inclusive education does not match reality. Ferguson argues that there is a need to move away from 'didactic teaching' that assumes CYP as passive listeners towards an emphasis on incorporating a variety of good practices.

> **Reflection**: Reflecting on Ball's (2003) and his concept of 'fabrication' (p224), I recognise how it parallels with participants observations of SEMH training initiatives. Fabrication, according to Ball, refers to practices and tactics used that create an appearance of accountability, even when they do not fully align with genuine teaching practices. In this vein, educators are engaging in behaviours that intend to demonstrate compliance but may not authentically reflect their everyday practice or show any pedagogical value. Such fabrication in this context manifests as training being seen as tick-box exercises rather than encouraging meaning change. It highlights the need to push for genuine engagement over superficial compliance.

Lack of training in SEMH awareness and understanding can impact educators' ability to accurately perceive and appropriately respond to student behaviour (Bradshaw et al., 2014). Educators may default to their own biases and assumptions related to SEMH, which can lead to misinterpretations of behaviour and, thus, inappropriate disciplinary actions and ineffective inclusive practices. Without comprehensive training for educators, efforts to create supportive environments is hindered (Rones and Hoagwood, 2000). The institutional emphasis placed on training and professional development in SEMH can either facilitate or hinder educator confidence. Education settings that prioritise SEMH-related training and provide ongoing support, create an environment where educators feel equipped to address these needs effectively. This, in turn, opens up opportunities for more comprehensive and supportive interventions. In contrast, a lack of focus on SEMH in training can perpetuate feelings of inadequacy among educators, closing down potential avenues for effective SEMH support and intervention. This underscores the role of school leadership in facilitating such training initiatives, positioning educators as not just enforcers of policy but as capable of nuanced understandings and responses to SEMH needs.

School leadership is recognised as a crucial factor in influencing school improvement (Benoliel, 2018). Much of the literature suggests that visible leadership plays an important role in positively influencing and shaping school culture (Leithwood, Harris and Hopkins, 2008). Participants discussed the importance of headteachers and senior leaders in fostering inclusive practices, highlighting how their dedication to supporting CYP, particularly those with SEMH, can either open up or close opportunities

for support: ***"Culture makes a massive difference because if you have got an SLT team who are dedicated to supporting pupils and prioritise the likes of SEMH and wellbeing, then it can translate into proper time given for these initiatives" (P1)***. Whilst this highlights how school leadership can serve as a catalyst for greater opportunities for action in promoting equity by ensuring that all pupils, especially those with SEMH needs, receive the necessary support and resources, a lack of emphasis or investment from them could result in missed opportunities and limited resources allocated or prioritised, thereby perpetuating inequities within the educational system.

It becomes evident that the construction of SEMH support within educational settings is significantly influenced by leadership practices. P3, who works in a setting that encourages PBS initiatives, expressed, ***"My boss now lives and breathes PBS and does whatever she can to ensure the staff in her team are up to date with their knowledge and skills" (P3).*** This exemplifies how strong leadership commitment to SEMH initiatives can positively impact staff engagement. Conversely, P2's reflection that***: "You've got to be strong because you can't wobble in front of them," (P2)*** suggests a pressure to maintain resilience in the face of SLT. This pressure may lead to a perception of limited agency and a reluctance to challenge or question decisions made by senior leadership resulting in directive rather than collective practice. This top-down approach can hinder collaborative practices and limit the potential for equitable support systems, as it suppresses the proactive engagement needed to address the diverse needs of pupils with SEMH. Thus, this reinforces existing power dynamics and could impede efforts to encourage collaborative efforts toward greater inclusive practice.

In addition to school leadership, it is important to consider Willig's (2013) stage 6, subjectivity, and, in particular, educators' confidence, which also contributes to the effectiveness of supporting pupils with SEMH needs. Participants exhibited variability in their responses when asked about how confident they felt in addressing CYP with SEMH needs. There are several studies that specifically explore the role of teacher efficacy on support behaviour in CYP (Hind, Larkin, and Dunn, 2019; MacFarlane & Woolfson, 2013). Participants' reflections regarding their confidence in supporting CYP with SEMH needs align with findings from Hosford and O'Sullivan (2016), who demonstrated that educators with greater self-efficacy perceived challenging behaviour as something they were able to manage and were more assured in their ability to support/manage it: ***"I think I have somewhat of an understanding" (P1), "I would say relatively confident" (P2)***. ***"I think in my previous role, not so much so. Even though this was a specialist provision with a high population of SEMH pupils. But now I am in a positive behaviour support role then definitely more so yes" (P3).*** When educators feel assured, they adopt a proactive subject positioning, attempting to understand the context of needs. Conversely those with lower confidence may show hesitancy or uncertainty towards addressing SEMH needs.

<u>Reflection:</u> As perceived experts (Woods, 2012), the confidence and competence of the EP in relation to SEMH can impact how educators perceive and approach SEMH support, particularly if they are prominent persons within a school setting. Just as educators' self-efficacy affects their proactive stance in understanding and addressing SEMH needs, EP's confidence in their understanding can shape the support they provide. This acknowledges the importance of EPs in creating a supportive environment where educators feel empowered in their ability to support CYP with SEMH needs. Approaching this responsibility with humility and commitment to ongoing learning and reflection is essential. Implications for EP practice is discussed further in section 5.6.

In addition to the challenges of shifting entrenched beliefs, educators also navigate their roles within the constraints of their professional boundaries. P2's declaration, ***"But I am not a therapist…I can be there as a safe adult in school to talk to, but I've got no training on counselling therapy" (P2)*** provides an example of how they negotiate their position within these discourses. By emphasising their role as a "safe adult" as opposed to a trained therapist, P2 establishes their position as a supportive presence as opposed to someone trained in this area.

<u>Reflection:</u> Educators are tasked with building positive teacher-student relationships that foster learning and concurrently support students' emotional well-being. However, "Teachers need to manage and control their personal engagement with pupils so that they are able to form constructive learning relationships without also becoming enmeshed in difficulties which they are then unable to resolve" (Farouk, 2014, p. 27). This implies that they must be mindful of becoming too involved in the difficulties of their pupils, especially if they cannot facilitate ongoing intervention and support. That being said, like P2 shared, some educators feel "helpless" and "hopeless", particularly if they cannot support them. The pressure to support SEMH needs can lead educators to assume roles beyond traditional responsibilities, such as feeling like therapists or social workers.

Additionally, their statement reflects their awareness of their position by delineating the boundaries of their role as an educator. They continue by stating: ***"If the pupils can't access that support so we end up acting like a buffer support" (P2).*** This positioning reflects the participant's subjective perception of the broader systemic challenges within the educational system, where they find themselves filling gaps in support services.

Reflection: One could argue that the subject position of 'buffer support' has both positive and negative implications. On the one hand, this could empower educators since they are uniquely positioned to provide additional timely support for pupils with SEMH needs. This empowerment stems from their willingness to take on additional responsibilities to support the diverse needs population (Hargreaves & Troman, 2003). In doing this, they advocate for greater holistic support, despite constraints imposed by resource and external professionals. On the other hand, being a 'buffer support' could suggest an overburden experienced by teachers. Given that participants already discussed the constraints on them, the reliance on educators to bridge the support gap could create a sense of dependency, not only from pupils but also the broader educational community (e.g., school administrators, policymakers, and parents). As a result, educators may face additional pressures and unrealistic expectations that perpetuate the marginalisation of SEMH support within education settings.

This chapter has presented findings and discussions derived from three semi-structured interviews with educators. The four main discursive themes were explored, and these insights will serve as the foundation for addressing the research questions in the subsequent chapter, offering a deeper understanding of how educators construct and interpret SEMH needs and their implications for support strategies in educational settings.

Chapter 5: Conclusions and Implications

5.1 Introduction

This research used Foucauldian discourse analysis to explore educators' constructions of SEMH needs in CYP in education settings. This chapter synthesises the analysis and discussion findings to address each of the research questions. Implications for EP practice are explored, as are avenues for future

research. The research is examined through quality criteria (Yardley, 2015), and the limitations of the study are discussed. The chapter concludes with personal reflections.

5.2 Research question 1: How do educators construct Social, Emotional, and Mental Health within discourse?

Despite its seemingly smaller discussion compared to the other discursive constructions, ‘SEMH as heterogeneous’ is significant in exploring participants’ understanding of SEMH. The term "heterogeneous" denotes the inherent difficulty of having to navigate the breadth and depth of SEMH, resulting in participants expressing uncertainty and hesitation in defining and addressing its diverse manifestations and presentations in CYP. The discursive construction revealed an understanding from participants marked by complexity discourse, ambiguity, and a tendency towards deficit thinking. Participants recognised that SEMH is not a homogenous area of need but rather a complex and diverse domain characterised by a myriad of factors and manifestations. Sometimes, the oversimplification, paired with deficit-focused language, contributes to the stigma discourse surrounding SEMH and perpetuates stereotypes that marginalise and misunderstand those affected.

The discursive construction ‘SEMH needs challenges traditional disciplinary practices’ emerged from participants discussing SEMH needs in CYP, specifically related to behaviour and their subsequent reflections on how they respond to and address such behaviours. Through anecdotes and sharing experiences, participants highlighted the complexities and tensions inherent in managing student behaviour within educational settings as well as the assumed role they have as educators. Dominant discourses were uncovered, encompassing traditional disciplinary practices reflecting a sense of control and adherence to regulatory norms.

Participants reflected on how there was a need to deviate from the traditional approaches to discipline in some contexts. They acknowledge the importance of clear expectations and consequences for behaviour but also advocate for flexibility and understanding the underlying causes of behaviour. Participants expressed frustration with punitive disciplinary norms and emphasise the need for alternative discourses that embed holistic support and proactive approaches, such as relational practice, restorative practice, and Positive Behavioural Support (PBS). Despite frustrations and barriers, participants showed actions towards greater inclusive and equitable approaches that encourage greater importance placed on understanding, supporting, and empowering pupils with SEMH needs. However, participants did not always feel able to adopt alternative ways of behaviour management

into their everyday practice due to the inherent challenges of reconciling the limitations of traditional methods with both the individual needs of the CYP as well as power and institutional dynamics that seem embedded within education settings.

Within the current climate of education, there is a prevailing emphasis on academic achievement and performance. Participants' constructions of ‘SEMH support is marginalised in favour of academic priorities’ aligns with this. The participant's experiences allude to the common interplay and nuances of different discourses, including performance and accountability discourses, prioritisation and resource allocation discourses, and their impact on pedagogical practices. Despite efforts and acknowledgment of the need to address SEMH needs, systemic constraints such as resource allocation and institutional barriers, specifically time, hinder consistent and meaningful support for pupils. This marginalisation was highlighted through participants' reflections on the pervasive pressure between meeting academic targets and attending to the holistic needs of their pupils.

Curriculum delivery, testing, and ensuring pupils make progress were seen to take precedence in everyday practice, meaning that pedagogical initiatives are felt to be marginalised and given less priority. Participants expressed concerns about the systemic and structural barriers that hinder their ability to give a greater level of resources and time to those pupils who seem to need it most, including those with SEMH. As a result, SEMH support initiatives were seen to be sporadic, inconsistent, and sometimes superficial, reflecting a disconnect between institutional rhetoric and authentic practice. Participants navigated the pressures of performance expectations that intersect with professional values. By challenging the dominance of performance discourse and rethinking institutional priorities, participants had tried to create more inclusive and supportive environments that place greater efforts towards ensuring the well-being of all pupils as a daily practice.

The discursive construction ‘SEMH demands shift towards greater systemic understanding’ reflects a recognition of the need for a more comprehensive and integrated approach to understanding and addressing SEMH needs among CYP that necessitates a paradigm shift that extends beyond individual factors to acknowledge the systemic influences within educational settings. Reflections from the other discursive constructions are embedded and align with this construction. Participants stressed that SEMH cannot be comprehensively understood or indeed supported in isolation from the broader socio-structural milieu within which they are situated and manifest. Participants suggested this involves effective training initiatives, strong leadership commitment, and proactive efforts to empower educators while addressing systemic constraints. As participants navigated the complexities of power

dynamics within institutions and practice, they demonstrate a commitment to fostering greater understanding and support that aims to contribute to a more holistic and responsive approach to behaviour management.

Reflection: Interestingly, it seems that these responsive approaches are not developed in spite of the institutional barriers but seem, in some cases, prompted by them. This makes me reflect on Foucault's statement that "Where there is power, there is resistance" (Foucault, 1978, p. 95). For example, constraints such as policies and/or traditional disciplinary measures highlight the inadequacies in supporting the complex and diverse nature of SEMH needs. This encourages educators to develop innovative and more student-centred strategies. This empowers educators to challenge embedded practices in the hope of creating more meaningful changes for CYP and to better support their SEMH needs. It suggests that institutional barriers become the catalyst for growth and change, not the limitation.

5.2.1 Intersectionality Between the Discursive Constructions.

The intersectionality among the discursive constructions from interview dialogue is briefly discussed to provide a more nuanced understanding of how educators construct SEMH in CYP in educational settings. As already mentioned, the analysis of participants' transcripts revealed numerous discursive constructions, but the selection of those explored within the analysis and discussion chapter appeared most prominent, shared commonalities between participants, and most relevant to the research context. It is important to not view these in isolation but rather as interwoven. Their overlapping nature and mutual influence underscore the complex interplay of factors shaping the constructions of SEMH in educational settings.

For example, the recognition of SEMH as something heterogeneous, and complex necessitates a systemic approach that takes into account the diverse and multifaceted nature of pupils' needs. This complexity intersects with labelling and stigma discourses, where oversimplified labels can lead to marginalisation, thus influencing how pupils are both perceived and supported. The tension between traditional disciplinary practices and the nuanced needs of pupils with SEMH highlights the conflict between control-oriented approaches and the need for understanding and greater empathy within interactions between educators and pupils. This conflict is further compounded by the pressure of

academic priorities resulting in the marginalisation of SEMH support, driven by performance and accountability discourses that stress academic outcomes over holistic well-being despite great efforts to establish a balance. These overlapping discourses create a challenging environment for educators, who must navigate systemic pressures and institutional dynamics while attempting to understand and thus support SEMH. A greater systemic understanding of SEMH that recognises the broader socio-structural context in which CYP is situated can help integrate greater equitable support and interventions into everyday practice, thus challenging the marginalisation and encouraging more holistic thinking and action. Below are the discursive constructions and related discourses discussed within this research. (*See Appendix I for a list of all discursive constructions and discourses identified within transcription and analysis).*

5.3 Research question 2: What roles or identities do the discursive constructions of SEMH create for educators and pupils?

Within this research question, the aim is to reveal the nuances and complexities inherent in how educators and pupils negotiate their roles and identities (which Foucault would call 'subject positioning') within educational settings. Foucault's concept of subject positioning pertains to how discourses establish specific roles and identities for individuals within a given framework, influencing their interactions and self-perceptions. Through examining how participants navigate their roles and negotiate their identities in the context of SEMH, we are uncovering the subject positions that discourses impose.

For participants, multiple discourses were always at play, positioning both them and pupils in various, dichotomous, and sometimes conflicting ways. By focusing on the discursive constructions and associated discourses identified within the participant interviews, the subject positionings highlighted serve as lenses through which individuals navigate their interactions and negotiate their roles within the broader institutional framework. Additionally, examining the different subject positionings available can help us understand the influences and implications of these roles on interactions and actions, such as how they perpetuate or challenge power dynamics in schools and reinforce or contest existing inequalities.

Reflection: Due to the length of this section, it has been divided into subsections for each discursive construction. I recognise that I have not done this for the other research questions. While it is important to maintain consistency in presentation, I

think this should be balanced with the need to convey the answers most effectively. I feel this structure, particularly for this question, allows for a detailed explanation that acknowledges the implications for educators' subject positions and also those for CYP themselves.

Additionally, whilst I chose to discuss dichotomous subject positions that I felt aligned with the discursive constructions and discourses identified within participants' interviews, the complexity of human experience suggests that there could be an infinite number of nuanced positions available within educational contexts. As Foucault (1977) argues, there is no place where people exist outside of discourses. The concept of subjectification, according to Foucault, acknowledges that positions are shaped by a myriad of factors, including personal beliefs, institutional norms, societal expectations, and power dynamics. Consequently, the subject positions were not merely arbitrary labels but rather fragmented and influenced by the discourses they encountered. This fluidity means that subject positioning is not static; it changes depending on the factors highlighted. Educators and pupils may shift between different subject positions in response to changing contexts, interactions, and the specific discursive environments they navigate.

5.3.1 SEMH as Heterogeneous

The discursive construction 'SEMH as heterogenous' offers educators various subject positionings. As explored within participants' interviews, they all positioned themselves as navigators of complexity due to the diversity, nuance, and complexity of SEMH needs. This subject positioning influences both interactions and actions, prompting them to adopt a more individualised approach to supporting CYP with SEMH needs. For example, rather than viewing SEMH as a monolithic category of needs, they recognise the importance of considering the context and comorbidity of different needs. This approach is driven by the belief that individualised interventions and support are of the greatest benefit to pupils with SEMH needs.

However, for some educators, the umbrella nature of SEMH may lead them to adopt subject positions that align with deficit thinking, where they place emphasis on what they see and how CYP presents those results in identifying difficulties and challenges rather than strengths and capabilities. Not only does this perpetuate stigma and stereotypes, but it also encourages greater marginalisation of understanding SEMH. Educators may feel limited in their ability to understand the complexity of SEMH

and constrained by particular discourses that lead to reluctance (or inability) or engage with SEMH in a constructive manner.

5.3.2 SEMH Needs Challenge Traditional Disciplinary Practices.

The dominant discourse of discipline depicts the management of behaviour that reflects a traditional approach to discipline, where punitive measures are relied upon to address behaviour (Barker, Alldred, Watts and Dodman, 2010). This is evident in the 'Behaviour for school' government guidance, updated in February 2024, that asserts, "Staff should also challenge pupils to meet the school expectations and maintain the boundaries of acceptable conduct" (DfE, 2024, p. 12). This assertion aligns with Foucault's concepts of power within institutions wherein authority figures (in this case educators) exercise control over individuals (in this case pupils) through the establishment and enforcement of norms and expectations. The language of "challenging" pupils to "meet school expectations" implies a power dynamic where educators assert their authority to dictate and enforce behavioural standards. This approach positions educators as disciplinary agents who wield power over pupils, reinforcing hierarchical structures within educational institutions.

Assuming the role of control agent, educators may be tasked with enforcing behaviour policies, which exercises power to regulate student behaviour and ensure compliance. This involves implicit expectations to maintain order within classrooms. Such subject positions represent normalisation, where certain behaviours are categorised as either "acceptable" or "not acceptable" within school behaviour policies. This positioning requires pupils to comply with these norms, often at the expense of their autonomy and empowerment. Consequently, this subject position may discourage educators from adopting more supportive and empathetic approaches to managing behaviour, which can be crucial for pupils with SEMH needs.

Orsati and Causton-Theoharis (2013) also explore the connection between viewing pupils as problematic and the subsequent positioning of pupils as 'others', as noted by Waterhouse (2004). In this context, pupils exhibiting challenging behaviour are identified as 'others' when compared to pupils who do not display similar behaviour. This construction can inadvertently contribute towards the stereotypes and stigmatisation of pupils with SEMH as being 'naughty,' as participants consider. Such unhelpful comparisons can perpetuate the marginalisation of pupils with SEMH.

Alternatively, participants who reflected and adopted alternative behaviour management discourses like relational, restorative, and empowerment approaches can occupy subject positions that disrupt

traditional power dynamics. They advocate for more inclusive and equitable approaches to behaviour management. For example, when P2 shared their experiences of working in a school that engaged in restorative practice and its observed positive effects, they adopted a subject position focused on understanding the root causes of behaviour rather than using discipline that lacks empathy or collaboration.

5.3.3 SEMH Support is Marginalised in Favour of Academic Priorities

Within the discursive construction of 'SEMH support being marginalised in favour of academics', educators may adopt either pragmatic or idealistic positioning in addressing the needs of pupils. For example, pragmatic positioning means educators engage in practices that are practical and feasible in the constraints of resource limitations and institutional demands. This aligns with focusing on meeting targets and metrics as opposed to emotional well-being. Decisions on what is supporting is implemented are guided by pragmatics, e.g., what is achievable within the existing systemic context in which they are situated, even if this means compromising support forced on SEMH support. As highlighted by participants, allocating limited time for interventions or these being implemented inconsistently. Whilst they recognise the importance of supporting the holistic well-being of pupils, thereby supporting CYP with or presenting with SEMH, they prioritise academic practices.

When considering Foucault's (1975) concept of normalisation, this perspective suggests that the overarching emphasis on academic priorities often comes at the expense of supporting the holistic well-being of pupils (Rose, 1999). Similarly, within the discourse of prioritisation, educators may assume the role of decision-makers who balance various competing demands, reflecting their authority in determining how resources and attention are allocated. This normalisation of practice perpetuates the marginalisation of SEMH support within educational settings, reinforcing the prioritisation of academic performance over pupils' emotional and mental well-being (Ball, 1994).

Alternatively, educators who adopt idealistic positioning place greater emphasis on the well-being and holistic development of pupils, even when it challenges institutional constraints and norms. As participants discussed, they were driven by a strong commitment to advocating for CYP with SEMH that goes beyond academic achievement. They may push back against institutional pressures or policies and powers, advocating for greater systemic understanding and changes through the likes of whole-school approaches, training, and continued professional development. Participants reflected that their actions are often guided by a commitment to inclusive, equitable, and responsive support

to the diverse needs of all pupils, including those with SEMH, regardless of institutional constraints imposed by them, such as time, resources, and staffing.

Reflection: Tian, Zhao, and Huebner (2015) suggest that educators adopting idealistic approaches contribute to positive student outcomes beyond academic attainment. However, navigating the complexities of educational settings often requires pragmatic approaches as well. I felt these subject positions were neither opposing nor contradictory but complementary. While idealism is a vision of what education could be, educators must be pragmatic and acknowledge the constraints and realities of implementing change within education settings.

5.3.4 SEMH Demands a Shift Towards Greater Systemic Understanding

When exploring constructions of SEMH, the delineation between reactive and proactive subject positions highlights a dichotomy in participants' perspectives and subsequent actions. It seems this position is often necessitated by policy discourse, especially if educators are under pressure due to performance metrics and institutional order (Slee, 2011). Those who engage in reactive positioning to address SEMH needs usually respond to difficulties as they arise, implementing short-term solutions aimed at immediate problem-solving. For example, sending a student out of class, giving detention as a consequence for misbehaviour (both of which participants discussed), and exclusion. While these actions may provide temporary relief for educators and manage surface-level issues, they often fail to consider the underlying causes of SEMH needs. In contrast, those who engage in discourses aligned with equity and social justice encourage the subject positioning of an advocate for CYP with SEMH. They engage in practices that challenge the institutional barriers, aiming to promote greater access to resources and support, thus advocating for systemic changes (Smyth, 2006).

Equally significant is the dichotomy of being positioned as an influencer of policy or recipient of policy. Drawing on policy, equity, and social justice discourses, educators who position themselves as change agents engage in development processes that advocate for effective measures to address SEMH needs (Ball, 1994). Interestingly, P3's positioning, given their role as PBS assistant, emphasises their unique relationship with the students they support and a systems-level perspective on intervention strategies. Their role is distinguished from the teacher, where they build connection and trust with pupils over time. This positioning implies confidence in their ability to provide individualise support, contrasting with potential limitations of other educators' relationships with the same pupil. Additionally, their role

signifies a greater systemic understanding of behaviour involving staff training, parent liaison, and collaboration with various professionals. This systemic level perspective underscores their role in creating more inclusive, supportive environments, facilitating a shifting position of pupils also by empowering them to navigate and advocate for their own needs.

In contrast, educators who perceive themselves as recipients of policy adopt positions where they feel constrained by top-down authorities and institutional structures that limit both their autonomy and influence over decision-making processes (Bowe, Ball, & Gold, 2017). Shaped by structural and institutional discourse, these educators may experience a sense of powerlessness. They may feel compelled to comply with what they are told to do by either those of higher authority, e.g., senior leaders, headteachers or policies, without meaningful input, collaboration, or agency in how best these measures should be implemented. As a result, they may perceive policy implementation as a bureaucratic obligation rather than an opportunity for engaging or enacting meaningful change toward supporting pupils with SEMH needs.

Within the discussion of resource allocation, both participants and pupils are positioned as recipients of limited resources. This reflects a power dynamic where those responsible for resource allocation have the authority to decide how resources are distributed. One participant argued this necessitates their role as 'buffer support.' This suggests attempts to bridge the gap between the level of support needed and what is accessible. Implicit within this subject position are complex power dynamics and expectations, where educators find themselves navigating a power imbalance and are tasked with addressing SEMH needs despite limited resources and support from external agencies. As secondary support providers, educators gain a sense of authority and responsibility, but this simultaneously may restrict their ability to access necessary resources or advocate for systemic change.

5.4 Research question 3: To what extent do these constructions open or close opportunities for action aimed at providing support for children and young people with SEMH needs in educational settings?

Foucault's concept of governmentality sheds light on the relationship between external authorities' exercise of power and individuals' (voluntary) adherence and/or internalisation of societal norms and values. This interplay is particularly relevant in education settings, where educators play a crucial role in shaping perceptions and constructions of SEMH. One of the most significant aspects of governmentality is its role in constructing knowledge and disciplines that produce 'experts.' Educators

could be positioned as experts due to their role and power in shaping the discourse and practices surrounding SEMH support, which is facilitated by the construction of knowledge and disciplines within the framework of governmentality. This power dynamic inherently influences the extent to which opportunities for action aimed at providing support for CYP with SEMH needs in educational settings are either opened or closed.

The endeavour to transition from the term 'Social, Emotional, and Behavioural Difficulties' (SEBD) to 'Social, Emotional, and Mental Health' (SEMH) aimed to shift the focus away from behaviour towards a more holistic understanding of pupils' needs. However, there remains a predominant focus on behaviour within educational discourse. It seems that despite evolving educational frameworks and discourses within behaviour management, such traditional 'old school' disciplinary approaches remain in modern education settings.

The emphasis on behaviour management, as discussed within participant interviews, reflects a disciplinary power dynamic that may close down opportunities aimed at providing support for CYP with SEMH needs. By focussing on surveillance, compliance, and regulation rather than holistic understanding, these constructions may close opportunities for implementing alternative measures that better address and support the needs of pupils with SEMH. This aligns with the historical evolution of disciplinary practices from overt forms of punishment towards mechanisms aimed at regulating behaviour to instil compliance (Foucault, 1977). Central to his analysis is 'disciplinary power.' Foucault posits that institutions like education settings play a significant role in shaping individuals into "docile bodies" that can be "manipulated, shaped, trained" in an attempt to maintain social order (Foucault, 1978/2012, p. 136). Such attempts encompass and reflect notions of surveillance, normalisation, and regulation within hierarchical frameworks of authority.

Participant interviews reflected a concurrent effort to open up opportunities for change that challenge traditional disciplinary power dynamics and norms present within education settings. Participants noted that traditional approaches, such as implementing consequences for non-conforming behaviour, were ineffective over time. The reliance on consequences for non-conforming behaviour reflects a normalisation of practice governed by regulations that are indicative of the workings of governmentality in shaping institutional practices**.**

Challenging the dominancy discourse of behaviour management in education settings is not without limitations. A closer examination is warranted regarding the practical implementation of both government and school policies regarding behaviour and, in particular, 'challenging behaviour' as it relates to SEMH needs. Participants' accounts revealed the pervasive influence of power dynamics on SEMH-related practices within educational settings. All participants expressed feelings of constraint

imposed by institutional norms and expectations, which constrain them (at times) to conform to dominant discourses and adhere to behaviour policies even when they may personally disagree with them. All participants shared experiences of actively trying to challenge existing power structures by advocating for alternative approaches to SEMH support, but opportunities are closed down due to structural barriers such as time, resource, and role clarity, limiting their ability to enact meaningful change concerning supporting behaviour and SEMH needs. This struggle to balance competing demands and navigate complex institutional expectations underscores the entrenched nature of power dynamics within educational settings.

Similarly, whilst discipline may be considered an effective deterrent for disruptive behaviour, there are concerns that it has many negative implications that fundamentally undermine the focus on inclusion (McCluskey Lloyd, Kane, Riddell, Stead, & Weedon, 2008). Rather than just being an immediate consequence, such actions could exacerbate feelings of marginalisation amongst these pupils, perpetuating the cycle of disengagement that could lead to further behavioural challenges (Stinchcomb, Bazemore and Riestenberg, 2006).

What is apparent in literature and, indeed, participants' discussions is a disconnect between neoliberal politics as it applies to the education context. This includes economic policies and ideologies that prioritise competition, accountability, and market-driven efficiency over values of equity and sustainability (Webb, Briscoe and Mussman, 2009). As Grimaldi (2012) contends, there is a discrepancy of attention within educational discourse where more is paid towards changing how CYP are expected to conform to better fit within the school system as opposed to considering how changes in the school system itself can be made to accommodate needs, as participants echo**.** When there is a focus on 'technical rationality', the significance of education diminishes and becomes reduced to a means of meeting benchmarks rather than a mechanism for developing instruction (Parker, 1997). Whilst the intention of such benchmarks may be to enhance the effectiveness and accountability of education, the outcomes often contradict the goal. Such paradox results in CYP being positioned as an 'economy of pupils' worth' (Ball, 2004).

Reflection: Participants in this research indicated they navigate policies rather than outright resisting them. Foucault's perspective on policy resistance is relevant here. He writes, "My problem has always been … the problem of the relationship between subject and truth. How does the subject enter into a certain game of truth?" (cited in Bernauer & Rasmussen, 1988, p. 9). Similarly, Foucault's notion of the "eye that knows and decides, the eye that governs" highlights the power dynamics inherent in evaluation mechanisms embedded within educational systems (Foucault, 1963,

pp. 88–9). Educators' professional worth and effectiveness are questioned as they view themselves as under scrutiny. Thus, educators' dedication to holistic student well-being, including addressing SEMH needs, may be overshadowed due to pressures adhering to externally imposed criteria. This, too, suggests a governance structure that suggests accountability measures and performance metrics inherently shape education policies.

In this view, it is insightful to draw on Ball's (1990) work, specifically his book "Foucault and Education: Disciplines and Knowledge" (1990), which explores power dynamics at play within educational institutions. Whilst published before the introduction of OFSTED in 1992, Ball's analysis of organisational management may reveal how 'efficiency models' in schools may encourage prioritisation of academic performance over the implementation of wider holistic SEMH support. Ball contends that methods of surveillance teachers away from decision-making processes given that 'within such a discourse the curriculum becomes a delivery system, and teachers become its technicians and operatives' (Ball, 1990, p. 156).

In conclusion, while participants' actions and reflections highlight there are opportunities for action aimed at providing support for CYP with SEMH needs in educational settings, these opportunities are often constrained by dominant discourses and structural barriers. Efforts to challenge these discourses and promote more holistic approaches to support are recognised, and some implementing them (albeit not always consistently) face significant challenges within the current educational landscape shaped by neoliberal agendas and disciplinary power dynamics.

5.5 Implications for Educational Psychology Practice

Findings from Atkinson, Bragg, Squires, Muscutt, & Wasilewski, (2011) highlight that Educational Psychologists (EPs) acknowledge the importance of their role in addressing and supporting SEMH needs in CYP, recognising that EPs have the power to define, implement and shape practices and interventions related to SEMH support. However, a great deal of literature suggests that there is a limited understanding of the role of EPs (Greig, MacKay & Ginter 2019). Insights into the implications of the findings from this study for EPs will be further explored within this section.

Throughout this research, there is consistent emphasis that language can wield significant power and influence on understanding and subsequent actions. Being mindful of language is not merely about semantics or choice of words; it is about recognising and challenging underlying assumptions and power dynamics that language can perpetuate. This understanding draw attention to the simple yet

impactful measure of EPs (and indeed any professional) to be conscious of the language they use when speaking of, speaking with, writing of, and listening to CYP (Billington, 2006). This can avoid inadvertently reinforcing stigmatising or deficit-focused understanding and serve as a proactive step towards more inclusive communication practices.

Wider systemic implications can include adjustments around discussions of SEMH. EPs have a role beyond just challenging dominant constructions of SEMH. EPs can help shape constructions of CYP, and being cognizant of dominant discourse is an important part of this role. This research found that there were varying levels of confidence expressed by participants in supporting CYP with SEMH needs effectively. EPs are well positioned to facilitate the co-construction of alternative positioning at both individual and organisation levels. This would help to address reflections from some participants who feel unequipped and/or inadequately trained to address and implement support strategies in their daily practices. By engaging in reflective discussions, EPs can assist educators in challenging the prevailing thinking that undermines their ability to support SEMH needs. As the case of Bobby mentioned within the introduction, my role in this context was to help the educators around Bobby develop a more nuanced understanding of SEMH needs and their role in supporting pupils like him. By implementing alternative approaches to dominant understandings, however, educators can strive to create a more supportive environment that acknowledges pupils' individual needs and experiences, particularly those with SEMH needs. In addition, they can seek to question and critique power structures and pull apart potentially oppressive systems embedded within school culture towards promoting greater equity and social justice.

This study also emphasises the necessity of shifting from a within-child perspective towards a more systemic understanding of SEMH which many EPs endorse already (Farrell, 2006; Lomofsky & Green, 2004). EPs can help broaden educators' understanding of SEMH beyond behaviour and towards the inclusion of systemic influences, recognising that behaviour continues to be a central feature of SEMH. By highlighting the wider context and unpicking functions of behaviour, EPs can help educators address systemic factors that may contribute to SEMH needs.

For example, EPs can actively challenge deficit-focused and stigmatising discourses around SEMH. This could include developing SEMH awareness training and CPD sessions where educators could learn more about the importance of relational and restorative practices within disciplinary frameworks, the importance of fostering positive teacher-student relationships, the creation of trauma-informed learning environments, and implementing proactive behaviour management approaches that focus on

understanding the causes and functions of behaviour. By encouraging relational and restorative practices, EPs can open opportunities for more inclusive and equitable behaviour management practices. This would promote further shifts from normalised approaches entrenched within schools towards one encouraging empathy, collaboration, and student empowerment.

Additionally, promoting positive behaviour support (PBS) strategies can further enhance SEMH support. P2, from a setting that engaged in a whole-school approach to PBS, provided insightful comments about its benefits. Although challenges remain, the EP can be an additional facilitator and advocate for this approach, supporting schools in adopting and sustaining PBS to foster a more positive and inclusive school environment.

EPs can also collaborate with policymakers and stakeholders to shape inclusive policies and practices that empower educators to resist oppressive discourses and ensure SEMH support is embedded within daily practices. For example, advocating for appropriate resource allocation and policy initiatives that support SEMH initiatives. By providing actionable recommendations, the hope is for educators to feel more empowered to effectively support CYP with SEMH and create greater inclusive and supportive environments that benefit all pupils, including those with SEMH (Van der Aalsvoort & Elliott, 2007).

As noted in participants' reflections and illuminated within FDA, there are deeply embedded power structures within education settings. While participants highlighted their engagement in efforts to challenge such structures, meaningful change would require collective efforts towards whole-school systemic change. It necessitates a concerted and collective effort to shift entrenched dynamics. Similarly, whilst an individual EP can influence change in an education setting, expanding impact to other schools with wider local authority would require the EP service as a whole to embrace such critical thinking.

5.6 Future Research

Based on the findings of this research and acknowledging the limitations, there are some avenues for potential future research. As mentioned, the analysis of participants' transcripts revealed numerous discursive constructions and related discourses, but only those that appeared most prominent, shared commonalities across the transcripts, and were most relevant to the research context were discussed. Future studies could extend this research by exploring less dominant yet potentially significant constructions (see Appendix I). This could enrich greater insights into broader constructions surrounding SEMH and potentially uncover new areas for intervention or support.

This research aimed to explore the language used by educators to construct SEMH needs in CYP, how this is influenced by the available discourses, and how, in turn, these influences thought, talk, and action when supporting those with SEMH needs. Applying FDA enabled me to explore how educators' construction shaped the subject positions available to CYP. Recognising that subject positions can influence how individuals perceive themselves and others and shape their attitudes, behaviours, and interactions (Willig, 2013) underscores the importance of exploring CYP's perspectives also. Including the perspectives of CYP in future research could provide a greater understanding of how they perceive the language and practices used by educators concerning their SEMH needs. As noted with Bobby, there can sometimes be a juxtaposition between how educators position pupils and how the pupils view themselves.

Given that SEMH is a relatively new term operating within a realm characterised by limited and arguably ambiguous understanding, future research could explore whether and how policy amendments and shifts in educational practices over time impact educators' understanding and support of SEMH needs. For example, investigating the impact of initiatives such as Transforming Children and Young People's Mental Health (2018), specifically the implementation of Designated Senior Lead(s) and Mental Health Support Teams (MHSTs). This could provide valuable information on the effectiveness of such initiatives in both enhancing understanding and capacity to support the SEMH needs of CYP in their setting.

Future gender-based comparative studies could contribute to understanding how gender influences educators' constructions and responses to CYP with SEMH needs. Similarly, a comparative study focusing on different school settings could provide a greater exploration of perspectives, especially given that there were notable differences among participants in this research who were in mainstream, specialist, and specialist with PBS. Further research could uncover insights into how the different settings could highlight any gaps in support and inform the development of targeted interventions specific to that setting.

> **Reflection:** As a researcher using Foucauldian discourse analysis, the goal was not to seek out clear, unified conclusions but to illuminate the multiplicity of viewpoints. This reflexive awareness highlights my curiosity about how participants' roles within different educational systems may have shaped the discourses they engaged in and informed their understanding of SEMH. Through

the process of Foucauldian discourse analysis, it became increasingly clear that participants' educational contexts—whether mainstream, specialist, or specialist with Positive Behavioural Support (PBS)—played a key role in shaping the discourses they engaged in. This raised important questions about how each participant's environment influenced their perspectives on inclusion, SEMH needs, and educational practices.

I now recognise that the educational context provided a critical lens through which participants' discourses were formed and articulated. The mainstream participant may have contributed a perspective rooted in particular institutional norms and practices that differed from those in specialist settings, which potentially shaped the nuances of what they said. The imbalance in representation between mainstream and specialist voices became more apparent upon reflection and may have influenced the range of discourses I was able to capture. This reflection suggests that future research would benefit from a more balanced range of participants across educational settings, to have greater opportunity to explore the rich diversity of discourses present within these environments.

5.7 Examining Research through Quality Criteria.

Whilst objectivity, reliability, and validity are common quality measures of a study (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012), Thomas (2017) argues that these are less relevant within qualitative research, particularly in studies adopting social constructionist epistemology. A Foucauldian approach is used in this research exploring how educators construct SEMH. According to Burr (2015), the creation of meaning is a process. Data is not simply found but rather created through interactions (Howe, 2009), emphasising the subjective nature of discourses, and acknowledging their diversity based on a relativist ontology (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012). Therefore, in interpreting participants' constructions and discourses of SEMH, they are not assessed against traditional scientific research criteria but understood within the context of co-construction and the socially situated nature of the data. This invites reflexivity and critical engagement of the discourses under analysis. The evaluation of this research is under Yardley's (2015) criteria for evaluating qualitative research. The importance and implication of this research was explored in section 5.5.

Regarding coherence and transparency, I explored my methodological and analytical choices in-depth, acknowledging their potential influence on the research through reflexivity. Yardley (2015) highlights

the importance of maintaining a "paper trail" (p. 235) to enhance transparency, which is exemplified through detailed documentation provided in appendices (See Appendix F-J).

Additionally, sensitivity to context was upheld through exploration and analysis of historical emergence, existing literature, and policies to provide a nuanced understanding of the socio-political and institutional context shaping SEMH constructions and discourses. I have addressed my positionality and reflexivity, most evident within the methodology chapter, where I documented my experience of conducting FDA according to Willig (2013) (See section 3.7). Additionally, I have integrated reflective boxes throughout the analysis and discussion chapter to provide reflections on my role, biases, and influences within the research process. Consequently, these have contributed towards transparency and accountability, acknowledging that the findings presented were not predetermined but rather constructed throughout the iterative process of FDA.

Regarding commitment and rigour, choosing FDA as a methodology for this research, despite having no prior experience, I feel reflects the dedication to this topic and the epistemological position underpinning it. At times, it did feel ambitious, especially considering the time constraints, but I was driven by a desire for thoroughness. Indeed, one could argue that my unfamiliarity with the analysis method could have limited its application and my interpretation. However, I argue that my novice status promoted a more rigorous approach. It motivated me to ensure the utilisation of the FDA from my perspective was justified and clear, particularly the absence of a universally accepted or 'right' way of doing FDA. I undertook wider reading on different ways to engage with FDA and had many discussions with my supervisor regarding this methodology approach which I feel enhanced the quality of the research.

5.8 Limitations of this Research

Building on the subjective nature of discourses, I acknowledge selecting specific discursive constructions for analysis within the research is not a fully neutral process. How people discuss a topic can reveal broader systems of meaning within society. Foucault (1980) suggests that multiple discourses may exist about a phenomenon but are hierarchically organised, meaning certain discourses may be privileged over others. In certain instances, a specific discourse may become more prevalent and gain more power over time as it is consistently upheld, reinforced, and supported through language.

In this context, my decision to focus on particular discursive constructions also influenced how SEMH is understood and constructed within education settings. By emphasising certain discourses, I am also contributing to potential growing dominance, allowing specific constructions to be accepted as the prevailing truth or dominant perspective (Willig, 2008). Consequently, the continual reinforcement of the dominant discourse can significantly shape the construction of individuals and related concepts, amplifying the influence of the dominant discourse while potentially disempowering those affected by its effects. This dynamic concurrently marginalises alternative discourses, diminishing their perceived power and contributing to an unequal distribution of truth within a given context. Therefore, it is crucial for me as the researcher to recognise my role and the impact of my choices in shaping the discourse on SEMH. It is important to reflect on the implications of these decisions to ensure a nuanced understanding and representation of diverse perspectives.

Makel, Meyer, Simonsen, Roberts & Plucker (2022), define generalisability as the ability to replicate research findings across various contexts. With a small sample size of only three participants recruited through voluntary sampling, one might argue that this limits the extent to which findings can be generalised to broader populations or contexts. However, discourse analysis emphasises the contextual and interpretive nature of data, where meanings are co-constructed through interactions within specific contexts (Burr, 2015). Therefore, research findings in discourse analysis are inherently specific to the unique context in which they are situated. Subsequently, future research could include a greater range of perspectives and voices, thereby enriching the understanding of SEMH constructions beyond the limited scope of the current findings.

Despite limitations, this research successfully showcases the utility of a discursive approach to exploring SEMH. By uncovering discursive constructions, discourses, positioning, power dynamics, and subjective experiences within educational settings, this research contributes to the ongoing discourse and encourages further examination and reflection in the broader discourse of education.

5.9 Personal Reflections and Concluding Statements.

As both a researcher and a practitioner, I find this research instrumental in deepening comprehension of social constructionism and its implications for social action. Reflecting back on Bobby from my introduction, when exploring the rationale for this research, I recall the educator's remark, "We pull from the top and drag from the bottom." Whilst this initially came as a shock to me and may indeed come as a shock to others, now, having completed this research, I understand even more profoundly the implications of this statement within the broader context of dominant discourses in education.

It was never about criticising the educator for their comments but rather about trying to unpick *why* they said that. This study is grounded in a relativist ontology. This means that social, emotional, and mental health discussions are seen as inherently subjective. From this perspective, the understanding and interpreting behaviours and characteristics associated with SEMH vary among individuals. These variations are shaped by personal experiences, cultural backgrounds, and societal norms, highlighting the dynamic and context-dependent nature of SEMH. I now understand that it requires greater consideration than taking it at surface value. The remark highlights the complexities, pressures, and power dynamics embedded within educational systems and schools. Through this lens, it becomes clear that the educator's frustration reflects the systemic constraints and challenges they face, underscoring the need for a more nuanced and empathetic approach to understanding the experiences and perspectives of educators within these systems.

I feel it encapsulates the ongoing struggle educators face in balancing the demands of an educational system that prioritises standardised outcomes with the diverse and complex needs of individual pupils. It suggests a dynamic where teachers are attempting to support all pupils but are ultimately constrained by the prevailing norms and expectations of the system. This insight stressed the need for systemic change that acknowledges and addresses the diverse needs of pupils without compromising the well-being and professional autonomy of educators. It highlights the importance of critically engaging with dominant discourses and striving to create a more supportive and flexible educational environments. Through this reflection, it becomes clear that the challenge lies not in individual shortcomings but in the broader systemic issues that shape educational practices and outcomes.

This research has given me the opportunity to explore various constructions of SEMH, which has been an enlightening experience. I am mindful not to be naive to the current and inherent challenges educators face in today's climate, recognising that there are many institutional and systemic challenges that do require change. Rather, in the context of understanding educators' constructions of SEMH, I have explored the diversity of discourses and their impact on subject positioning, examining how they open or close opportunities for action to support SEMH. Beyond this research and beginning the journey as an EP, I am eager to continue exploring such constructs further, with the aim of continuing to challenge oppressive practices and advocating for pupils like Bobby and many others.

The aim of this research was not to secure a less ambiguous definition of SEMH. I acknowledge that the use of this term carries implicit values and judgments. However, as Parker (1995) asserts, using

“friendly euphemisms” (p. 2) does not address the fundamental issues at hand. Instead, this research aimed to encourage more nuanced thinking about how we use the term SEMH and its implications for understanding and supporting CYP with SEMH needs. Indeed, the findings of this research highlight the interplay of discourses surrounding SEMH within education settings as well as insights into these shape SEMH support practices and educators' actions.

Achieving utopian finality or universal agreement in education is not feasible. With complexity and diversity inherent within education, there will always be ongoing debates, challenges, changes, and resistance. In the context of understanding and addressing SEMH needs, there is no one-size-fits-all approach. As found within participants' interviews, there is nuance and fluidity to educators' constructions of SEMH. Therefore, expecting a single universally accepted understanding or solution is unrealistic. Nonetheless, in true Foucauldian discourse analysis fashion, understanding power dynamics within education contexts does not seek to uncover final truths or conclusions. Rather the emphasis is on critically examining such dynamics and the possibilities of change within them. Consequently, there are always opportunities for educators to enact change within the educational landscape. After all, “We cannot jump outside the situation, and there is no point where you are free from all power relations. But you can always change it ... There is always the possibility of changing it” (Foucault, 2000, p. 167).

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Appendices

Appendix A: Ethics Approval Letter

Downloaded: 15/09/2023
Approved: 21/07/2023

Danielle Mccluskie
Registration number: 210103281
School of Education
Programme: Doctorate of Educational and Child Psychology

Dear Danielle

PROJECT TITLE: An exploration of how Social Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) is constructed by educators.
APPLICATION: Reference Number 053553

On behalf of the University ethics reviewers who reviewed your project, I am pleased to inform you that on 21/07/2023 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 053553 (form submission date: 16/07/2023); (expected project end date: 31/07/2024).
- Participant information sheet 1122392 version 1 (23/05/2023).
- Participant information sheet 1122394 version 1 (23/05/2023).
- Participant consent form 1122393 version 2 (16/07/2023).

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.

Your responsibilities in delivering this research project are set out at the end of this letter.

Yours sincerely

James Bradbury
Ethics Administrator
School of Education

Please note the following responsibilities of the researcher in delivering the research project:

- The project must abide by the University's Research Ethics Policy: https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/research-services/ethics-integrity/policy
- The project must abide by the University's Good Research & Innovation Practices Policy: https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/polopoly_fs/1.671066!/file/GRIPPolicy.pdf
- The researcher must inform their supervisor (in the case of a student) or Ethics Administrator (in the case of a member of staff) of any significant changes to the project or the approved documentation.
- The researcher must comply with the requirements of the law and relevant guidelines relating to security and confidentiality of personal data.
- The researcher is responsible for effectively managing the data collected both during and after the end of the project in line with best practice, and any relevant legislative, regulatory or contractual requirements.

Appendix B: Participant Information Sheet

An exploration of how Social Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) is constructed by educators.

My name is Danielle McCluskie, and I am a Trainee Educational Psychologist with the University of Sheffield. As part of my course, I am looking to complete a piece of research which aims to exploring understanding of Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) needs, what informs this understanding, as well as the barriers and facilitators to support SEMH needs of pupils in school. I hope that exploring this will provide leverage to embed more responsive pedagogy for those who work with children and young people (CYP) who have, or present with SEMH needs. It is hoped that the research may help to shape future processes and practices in Educational Psychology Services.

I am looking for school staff members to talk about their understanding, thoughts and feelings relating to experience of working with CYP who have or present as having SEMH needs. This will be via a one-to-one interview with myself that will take approximately 1 hour of your time. I may prompt you with some questions that follow up on what you say (e.g., how did that make you feel?, can you tell me a little more about that?) but there will be opportunities to include any information that you would like to share. You do not need to answer any questions that make you feel uncomfortable.

The interviews will take place online using Google Meet software which is secure through the university. The audio of the interview will be recorded through the Google Meet software. You may choose whether to have your camera on during the interview as this will also be recorded through the Google Meet software if you choose to have this on, however the video recorded will not be analysed for the study. The recording will be immediately saved to the university secure Google drive using participant codes to keep the information anonymous. If you chose to take part in the research you have the right to withdraw at any time without giving a reason before an interview.

If you are interested in becoming involved in this research and sharing your experiences, or would like to ask further questions, please contact me on the email address below:

Danielle McCluskie (Year 3 Trainee Educational Psychologist)
Contact: dmccluskie1@sheffield.ac.uk

If at any point you felt uncomfortable with the research, research process or wished to find out more from the University of Sheffield it is possible to contact my supervisor Dr Rob Begon on Email: r.begon@sheffield.ac.uk.

Thank you for your reading this information sheet.

Appendix C: Consent Form

An exploration of how Social Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) is constructed by educators.

Researcher: Danielle McCluskie (Trainee Educational Psychologist)

Please check any boxes below to which you agree and give consent:

Please tick the appropriate boxes	**Yes**	**No**
Taking Part in the Project		
I have read and understood the project information sheet dated DD/MM/YYYY or the project has been fully explained to me. (If you will answer No to this question please do not proceed with this consent form until you are fully aware of what your participation in the project will mean.)	☐	☐
I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the project.	☐	☐
I agree to take part in the project. I understand that taking part in the project will include being interviewed (either on an online platform or face to face)	☐	☐
I understand that by choosing to participate as a volunteer in this research, this does not create a legally binding agreement nor is it intended to create an employment relationship with the University of Sheffield.	☐	☐
I understand that my taking part is voluntary and that I can withdraw from the study at any time/before [DATE]; I do not have to give any reasons for why I no longer want to take part and there will be no adverse consequences if I choose to withdraw.	☐	☐
How my information will be used during and after the project:		
I understand my personal details such as name, phone number, address and email address etc. will not be revealed to people outside the project.	☐	☐
I understand and agree that my words may be quoted in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs. I understand that I will not be named in these outputs unless I specifically request this.	☐	☐
I understand and agree that other authorised researchers will have access to this data only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form.	☐	☐
I understand and agree that other authorised researchers may use my data in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs, only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form.	☐	☐

I give permission for the [specify the data] that I provide to be deposited in [name of data repository] so it can be used for future research and learning	☐ ☐	
So that the information you provide can be used by the researchers:		
I agree to assign the copyright I hold in any materials generated as part of this project to The University of Sheffield.	☐	☐

Name of participant: ______________________________

Signed: ____________________________ **Date:** _________________

Name of lead researcher: _________________________

Signed: ____________________ **Date:** _________________

Once all parties have signed this the participant should receive a copy of the signed and dated participant consent form, the letter/pre-written script/information sheet and any other written information provided to the participants. Please note that if at any point you felt uncomfortable with the research, research process or wished to find out more from the University of Sheffield it is possible to contact my supervisor Dr Rob Begon - r.begon@sheffield.ac.uk

Appendix D: Interview Schedule

Introductions: Review participant information sheet and consent form; offer a further opportunity for questions.
Demographic and contextual questions: current role, years of experience, years of working within education.

Understanding
What do you understand by the term "Social, Emotional, and Mental Health" (SEMH) in the context of education? Can you provide examples of specific terms or phrases commonly used within schools when discussing SEMH? ***Prompt****: What do these terms signify to you?* Have you noticed any shifts or changes in how SEMH is discussed and perceived within the education system over the years? ***Prompt:*** *If so, what do you attribute these changes to?* What, in your opinion, are the key factors that contribute to SEMH challenges among pupils? Are there any attitudes or beliefs about SEMH you have noticed when talking with pupils, colleagues, or parents?
Identification
How do external factors (*prompt:* such as educational policies, guidelines, or societal expectations), influence the way SEMH is discussed and addressed within the school setting? Is there a clear system or process for identifying pupils who may have SEMH needs in your school? - If yes - Could you describe this system and how it works? - If no – How would you identify pupils with SEMH? ***Prompt:*** Can you share some common signs or indicators you would look for?
Responding/Supporting
How would you respond to support a child with SEMH needs? ***Prompts:*** - What strategies or interventions do you use to support children and young people with SEMH needs? - Can you describe any successful instances where these strategies have effectively supported SEMH in pupils? - To what extend do you feel confident in support CYP who have SEMH needs? Are there any challenges or barriers you've encountered when trying to support SEMH needs? What resources or external support systems do you rely on when dealing with SEMH-related challenges? Where do you seek additional support if required? ***Prompts:*** - Why is additional support required? - How do you collaborate with other school staff, to address SEMH concerns? - What outcome do you want from their involvement? What changes or improvements could be made at a systemic level to better support children and young people with SEMH needs in schools?

Is there anything else you would like to add or discuss regarding SEMH and your role as an educator?

Concluding comments and thanks.

Appendix E: FDA According to Willig (2013) and Guiding Questions for Analysis

Stage	Guiding questions
Stage 1: Discursive constructions	• What are the explicit and implicit references to SEMH within the transcripts? • How do participants frame and discuss SEMH-related issues? • Are there any dominant discursive constructions evident in the data? • Are there any constructions that challenge the dominant themes?
Stage 2: Identifying discourses.	• How do the different discursive constructions contribute to shaping the understanding of SEMH within broader discourses? • What are the main discourses surrounding SEMH evident in the data? • How do participants' perspectives reflect or challenge these discourses?
Stage 3: Action orientation	• What functions does language serve in constructing SEMH within specific contexts? • How do discursive constructions influence responses and actions towards SEMH? • What implications do these discursive constructions have on practices and interventions related to SEMH?
Stage 4: Positioning	• What subject positions are available within the discourses surrounding SEMH? • How do participants position themselves and others in relation to SEMH? • What power dynamics and expectations are implicit in these subject positions?
Stage 5: Practices	• How do discursive constructions and subject positions shape everyday practices and interactions within educational settings? • What opportunities for action are opened or closed by these discursive constructions? • How do language and subject positioning influence power dynamics and disciplinary approaches in addressing SEMH?
Stage 6: Subjectivity	• How do different subject positions influence participants' subjective experiences and interpretations of SEMH? • What emotions, thoughts, and experiences may be associated with assuming specific subject positions? • How do participants' subjective experiences reflect or challenge the discursive constructions present in the data?

Appendix F: Stage 1, Identifying Discursive Constructions

34 P1: well I have a full class to teach and I can't always be stop starting the lesson
35 because of particular pupils. Sometimes giving a verbal warning is not enough.

SEMH as something that disrupts learning

36 R: *Is the verbal warning part of the schools behaviour policy?*

37 P1: yeah that's what our schools policy on behaviour is, you give a pupil a verbal
38 warning and then ends up with detention if they're told more than twice. Which I
39 don't want to do and doesn't even bother some kids anyway, but sometimes with 28
30 other kids in the class I can't have their learning interrupted do I have to do
31 something.

32 R: *Have you noticed any shifts or changes in how SEMH is discussed and perceived*
33 *within the education system over the years? What do you attribute this towards*

34 P1: There's definitely been a slight shift because when I qualified in 2008 it was . it
35 wasn't discussed on my training at all. There was a discussion around safeguarding
36 which can link to SEMH I guess, but there wasn't discussions around the challenges
37 that these pupils are facing really. Whereas now, you start to get a little bit of CPD
38 on things related, but that its not massive.

SEMH as an evolving concept

39 **R: *What has been your experience of training whilst on the job?***

10 It's not as much it needs to be, no way, in my first school I can't remember anything
11 to be honest, maybe discussion in twilights or briefing but I don't remember actual
12 training that you could say was linked to SEMH. I was teaching there for six seven
13 years too.

SEMH as something still unknown

14 R: *So if there was little to no training, how did you learn about things?*

15 P1: It was only through experience that I was learning and understanding myself
16 about not just SEMH but all needs really. I know we are talking about SEMH but I
17 don't feel there was much training about SEN as a whole, Which is mad isn't it
18 considering the school population now and the amount of pupils with some from of
19 SEN. But as soon as I moved to my second school, which would have been 2016, I
20 think, there was some CPD more focussed on SEMH and more so as I've moved to
21 special needs teaching (pause)

SEMH influenced by perspectives, experience and contextual factors.

SEMH as integeral to holistic well being

SEMH as something more focussed on in specialist

22 R: **do you attribute the increase in training towards anything?**

23 P1: I think I'd attribute that to just there being a little bit less of a stigma talking about
24 Mental Health. And I think a lot of adults are starting to discuss it more with regards
25 to themselves and I think that's kind of filtering down a little bit maybe.

SEMH as something spoken about more

SEMH requires top-down support

26 R: *Yeah*

27 P1: Also, now I think there is more of an need for such support in school - not that it
28 wasn't needed early in my career, but I think the needs of students today mean that
29 there is more talk about SEMH and mental health and how schools can help. You
30 know it's a big push in schools

SEMH as a school priority

31 R: *What, in your opinion, are the key factors that contribute to SEMH challenges*
32 *among students?*

33 P1: I think there's a lot of outside influences.

SEMH is interconnected with broader factors

34 R: *Can you give examples?*

35 I think social media has a massive impact on pupils and I think the impact of that is
36 only just sort of properly being seen now and I don't think we know enough about
37 that yet. So there's that. But within school, I think what doesn't help is the black and
38 white approach that everybody must be treated the same.

SEMH as something influenced by broader factors.

SEMH requires shift towards greater inclusive practice

39 R: *Can you elaborate a little more on what you mean?*

4

40 P1: Ermm, I think in some schools that's more evident than others (pause) I think in
41 mainstream schools that's very much the case (pause)

42 R: *In what sense?*

43 P1: So like, policies like behaviour and inclusion and that. We are told often about
44 what is expected of students academically, constantly needing to show progress, .
45 what is expected of them with attendance etc and yes there needs to be these
46 policies in place, but I think sometimes this blanket approach is not helpful for some
47 students.

SEMH intertwined with educational and academics

48 R: *What students are you referring to?*

49 P1: some students may have needs, you know like SEMH that mean their behaviour
50 may not necessarily fit within the confines of the behaviour policy but rather than
51 coming from an individual basis, sometimes it is hard to do this when there are many
52 students who have needs.

SEMH as something that doesn't fit the confines of behaviour policy

53 R: *What happens in those instances?*

54 P1: So sometimes are hands are tied and we have to do what is in the policies or
55 what the school rules are. All the students do have individualised targets yes but I
56 still have to teach a curriculum aligned with years group and there are some kids who
57 are academically not at the same level. But regardless, no matter what, I and all
58 teachers are pressured to show the students have made progress and this is tough
59 when you have some students who are working way behind the year group
50 expectations, even when you adapt the work.

SEMH associated with individual needs

SEMH is something that competes against academic priorities.

51 R: *You mentioned there about mainstream schools. Is this your view about*
52 *specialist school too?*

53 P1: I feel there is more flexibility and accommodations for supporting needs and
54 those with SEMH in specialist provision definitely.

SEMH as something that requires accomidations.

55 R: *Why do you think that?*

56 P1: I've noticed that massively. In fact, that was the thing when I moved to special
57 needs teaching, that was the thing that made me enjoy it so much .

58 R: *What was it that you think made you enjoy it more?*

59 P1: I think the fact that it was tailoring things like the curriculum and the support to
70 the students themselves and with smaller class size and more Ta support then this
71 was more able to do. That is what is needed in mainstream but not always
72 happening.

SEMH as something that requires tailored support

SEMH as something that demands flexibility

73 R: *Why do you think it's not always happening in mainstream?*

74 I think it possibly depends on the teacher because I think if you've got some teachers
75 who have only every worked in mainstream or just newly qualified and they're so
76 used to it being like, a certain way in schools, like this is how it's done then kind of
77 attitude, then they carry that over because that's just their practice and what they're
78 use to it I guess. But I think for the people that have more experience teaching and
79 working with special needs, then I think they realise that black and white approach
30 doesn't fit.

SEMH as something that affects teaching practices

31 R: *So, do you think this educators experiences influences their thoughts and*
32 *practice?*

33 P1: Absolutely. My attitude and understanding for SEN and SEMH has definitely
34 evolved over time with experience and working with so many kids over the years and
35 working with so many different needs. I think that definitely better prepared me to
36 work in specialist setting that any training ever has.

SEMH as something that influences educators thoughts and practices

SEMH requires greater understanding

SEMH as something that better prepares educators

Appendix G: Stage 2, Identifying Discourses

28 related to school, there is media coverages and obviously a big narrative that we just
29 don't have the support and the resources that we need to support Mental health and I
30 guess SEMH, in fact most needs. That's well known. And I think that's a cross all
31 education, So kind of like, as you're fight in a losing battle because, knowing what is
32 coming but not knowing how to support them. I think in school SEMH is the least
33 understood need. **Complexity discourse** – implies recognition of difficulty fully grasping/ understanding

34 R: *can you elaborate more on your last point?* – implies need for greater understanding

35 P2: so, from my experience with pupils, more so those with EHCP's, if they have
36 specific learning needs like Dyslexia then I think staff generally know what that is, but
37 then when you've got a pupil with interacting needs like ADHD that impacts on their
38 concentration, behaviour, friends and stuff but maybe fine academically, then it seems
39 their main area of needs is always, like they've got SEMH. Sometimes it feels that
10 everything not related to ASD or like what grades they're getting then like its harder to
11 pinpoint and just say its SEMH. I think the difficulty though is SEMH is a category of
12 need not a label. **Complexity discourse** – recognition of nuances and interacting factors and underscores importance of individual support.

13 R: *is there anything else can comment on here?*

14 Well unfortunately in schools labels are sometimes the door to funding. There has
15 been occasions where it is clear the pupils needs are in line with SEMH difficulties but
16 it isn't enough to say they have SEMH needs, and so they may make referrals to
17 pathways or ask for high needs fundings that means sometimes someone else will
18 have to come an see the pupils and also say the same thing.

Labelling and funding discourse – suggest process of obtaining funding. Suggest pressure to assign label to justify support? May prioritise administrative tasks rather than practical support?

19 R *when you say someone else, who do you mean?*

20 P2: well like yourself, or another professional, someone who has a better
21 understanding of needs. **Labeling/Funding discourse** – suggests involvement of external professionals determines eligibility?

22 R: *and what do you think their role in this instance would be?*

23 P2: well its not easy to just get fundings and I know loads of referrals are made for
24 support but often would need external professional to come in and assess or observe
25 to give their view.

Expert discourse – emphasises value of securing professional input.

26 R: *and what outcome do you think is hoped from their involvement?*

27 P2: well they're the ones that will often give greater access to help or at least give
28 recommendations or like training to help

Equity discourse? – challenges in ensuring equitable access to support but not seen by professional, could face barrier to accessing?

29 R: *In line with that, have you received any guidance or training on SEMH?*

30 P2: if I had been picked for our mental health first aid course then I probably could say
31 yes but given my teaching timetable I just wouldn't have the time to do this as well as
32 my teaching and head of year duties. We've had General CPD with school and we've
33 had pastoral CPDs that are for like mental health and I guess other SEMH related
34 things.

Prioritisation discourse – Suggests limited time for educator to engage in activities beyond their core teaching duties.

35 R: *do you have any examples of such training if you can remember:*

36 P2: Emm we recently had someone from [....] Company who are helping the school
37 become more trauma informed. That was really good and talked about the impact of
38 stress and shame and the importance of building relationships with students and the
39 power of that. We have had people in to help implement mindfulness. We have had
40 educators from the likes of [...] that helps inform us about common ADHD
41 characteristics and what it looks like in the classroom. We have had many one-off
42 things from external companies that the kids loved but were just one off like drama
43 companies to explore transition towards adolescence and managing relationships.

44 R: *do you think these have been effective?*

6

45 P2: I mean they've been good to attend and often includes lots of discussion which I
46 feel is good to let others offload and understand that everyone is experiencing the
47 same stressors and I think people get motivated when they are there and motivated to
48 implement new things they've learnt like little tips and tricks, but how consistently
49 these things are them implemented afterwards when normal work resumes then I'm
50 not sure.

51 R: *Why do you think that may be the case?*

52 P2: honestly just the hecticness of school. If it is something that requires a lot of time,
53 often then it would need to be someone with the capacity and training to fulfil this. So,
54 I can try introduce things in my registration like mindfulness and I have things in place
55 that aren't expected of me like check ins with pupils and friendship groups with some
56 girls, but the like of specific interventions, then it would need to be a TA probably.

Prioritisation/ resource allocation discourse – reflects awareness of complexity but highlights systemic barriers eg time, training

57 R: *and does the TA manage to do many of these interventions*

58 P2: Emm, I think they are done sometimes but not on a consistent basis no. And that's
59 not the fault of the TA, but more about them also being stretched thin. There have
60 been times when the TA who runs a friendship group is unable to do it because they
61 are needed in a lesson where the usual TA is not in and asked to fill in. And this
62 happens often because the TA and key mentor turnover is quite high in this school
63 which I think is noticeable loss and means its even harder to ensure things with small
64 groups or 1-1 gets done.

Resource allocation discourse – underscores the systemic barriers and competing demands. Suggests need for increased staff to share capacity

65 R: *Why do you think this is the case?*

66 P2: well the pay isn't great for a start. But I think it is about what I said before about
67 them being stretched thin. They are being asked to support the teacher, help with
68 admin, support individual pupils, run groups, help manage behaviour, all sorts. For
69 some it's just too much in the end. Especially if they're working with difficult kids or
70 those who have behaviour difficulties. It's stressful and eventually they've have
71 enough or go do job that pays better with less stress.

Attribution/ retention discourse

72 R: This kinds of links to the next question: *from your experience are there clear*
73 *system in place to support identification of SEMH needs and support for child and*
74 *young people that have or present with SEMH?*

75 P2: so we have this system called C-POMS. And yeah so we log it on there and then
76 that goes to SLT to action.

77 R: What do you log?

78 P2: Anything that we feel requires attention, or needs to be logged for record, or
79 behaviour incident, or safeguarding. The options that you log it as are like pastoral,
80 mental health concern etc. It automatically copies in and the SLT staff who are linked
81 to support mental health. It'll be the two assistant heads who are overseeing key stage
82 3 and 4 and it will be their head of year as well.

83 R: is for example then you had concerns regarding a pupil, lets say observed changes
84 that you thought was liked to mental health, how would that be logged?

85 P2: And so we kind of identify and log it as a mental health on the system and we put
86 as much information as we can. And then if you leave that kind of active, it means that
87 SLT or whoever's received that has to follow up on it. [...] our head has come in and
88 really pushed that everything needs to be evident. Everything needs to be there.

Early Identification discourse – Emphasises the value of addressing SEMH needs, Reflects potential impact if neglected. Also highlights role of leadership/ SLT.

89 R: and what about after you have logged it?

90 P2: on the system it tells you, we know that things have been followed up and then
91 personally I like them to go and speak to SLT and said happy followed up with XYZ
92 students just to make sure because we then don't get any confirmation on that system
93 whether they've done that or not so I could pass something on and then it might not

Appendix H: Stages 1-6 Exert of Transcript Annotations

KEY
- DISCURSIVE CONSTRUCTION
- DISCOURSE
- ACTION ORIENTATIONS
- POSITIONING
- PRACTICE
- SUBJECTIVITY

often I feel SEMH needs are portrayed negatively.
ne more about this.

ays about this struggle, or this difficulty, or this behaviour
rson in unable to this, has difficulties doing or not engaging
nk it's called the medical model of disability, or something

al model in this sense would be viewing the young person
that focuses on deficits, struggles or difficulties without
...tion of the wider factors that could also contribute.

47 P3: yeah, you took the words out of my mouth haha. That's exactly what I
48 feel like is constantly happening. Constantly seeing the child as the problem
49 I think in a role in some ways is to promote and encourage different thinking
50 to this.

51 *R: in what way?*

52 P3: I work in an environment where we try as much as possible to be
53 proactive in supporting young people rather than reactive to what we
54 observe. I work in a role that is not classroom based so when I speak to
55 those who are classroom based, it is very much negative narratives
56 constantly. Like SEMH or any sort of SEN or disability. It's still very much
57 what can we do to fix the person and instead of fixing we should be
58 supporting. I feel with most teachers It's more about fixing and being
59 reactive rather than being proactive.

60 *R: Yeah*

61 P3: like they see things as challenging, and sometimes they focus on what
62 they can observe, and some staff will consider what do we do to stop them
63 doing that or reduce the number of incidents for example, rather than
64 thinking about how can we change the environment that reduces triggers
65 for the young person.

66 *R: Why do you think they use that approach*

67 P3: sometimes I think they don't even realise they are making it worse. I get
68 it, I've worked in classroom roles before, its busy and sometimes hard to
69 think about everything and every need and that. But sometimes just taking
70 a step back and looking at the wider picture can explain a lot.

71 *R: What would this wider picture look like?*

72 P3: just like the fact that these kids, in a SEN school, obviously have some
73 level of need, that will affect particular things like ability to manage
74 emotions, social interactions etc, so taking that into account can sometimes

75 help with understanding behaviour or thinking about what triggers may
76 have their behaviour that others would label as challenging.

77 *R: so, when teachers discuss a young person to you and say they are*
78 *challenging, how would they describe the situation?*

79 P3: so, we have MDT referral and Read the referral and it will just be like
80 they have kicked through the door and they have damaged this or called
81 someone this and there's so much emphasis on my negative and the end
82 results like damaged equipment etc. And while yes some behaviour is not
83 acceptable, very often no one discusses what happened before like if
84 anything happened on the way to school its just about this and not what
85 led up to this type talk.

86 *R: given that you are in a school that integrates PBS practice, maybe think*
87 *also about your previous experiences and in comparison to this current*
88 *role, do you think there was a shift in the way people talk about SEMH do*
89 *you think?*

90 P3: Now I work in in PBS role. It is fairly new to me and still learning. Whilst
91 I do think the culture and language use within this school is different, I still
92 recognise that not all staff have the same understanding. When I think
93 about other roles in previous school, it was definitely focus on presenting
94 behaviour always. There was never discussions on exploring incidents. I
95 would like to think that things have changed given the number of young
96 people with SEN, but I don't think it will be the case. And I cannot place
97 blame on the individual staff I think it's a whole school approach that needs
98 to shift.

99 *R: can you elaborate more on this*

100 P3: I've worked in a school previously that had team teach and we had
101 training on how to restrain the young person. It seemed at times that it was
102 normalised, you know that this happened often and was I guess part of the
103 job rather than having constant discussions about okay so what may of
104 caused this, how can we try prevent this. Instead, it was just logged on
105 CPOMS and it was the staff thinking about what they thought was a trigger.
106 There was no getting to know the kids to have those conversations.

107 *R: and in your role now?*

108 P3: Now I am in a PBS role, which is a new addition to this school, the first
109 few months of introducing it, there are staff still not getting their heads
110 around the fact that we don't do consequences or sanctions and we are
111 more about position behaviour support. It quite a challenge to be honest.
112 Having discussions with staff about changing their usual way of working.
113 We still have team teach but that's only 5% of the practice. It's about the
114 other 95%. What can we do before that.

Appendix I: Identified Discursive Constructions and Linked Discourses.

Discursive construction & Linked discourses

	Discursive construction	Linked discourses
*	SEMH is something that disrupts learning.	~~Beha~~ Behaviour / systemic / Behaviour management
	SEMH is something that is still unknown.	Stigma / complexity / Awareness
*	SEMH is a school priority.	Policy / Prioritisation / Resource Allocation
*	SEMH is something that is spoken more about now.	Awareness / Policy
	SEMH as an evolving concept	Complexity discourse / Policy
*	SEMH as influenced by individual perspectives, experiences, and contextual factors.	Relational discourse
	SEMH support as integral to well-being.	Empowerment discourse
	SEMH as a continuum	Complexity discourse
*	SEMH as an opportunity for fostering understanding, and inclusivity within educational environments.	Equity / Social justice / Systemic
*	SEMH as a lens to explore systemic inequities.	" "
*	SEMH as an umbrella term.	Complexity / labelling
*	SEMH support is marginalised in favour of academic priorities.	Resource Allocation / Prioritisation
	SEMH as linked with academic achievement.	Performance / Accountability
*	SEMH requires proactive and preventative support strategies.	Intervention / Prevention / Early identification
	SEMH as intersecting with other identities socioeconomic status.	Institutional / intersectionality
*	SEMH is heterogeneous.	Diversity / complexity / Individualised
	SEMH as a lens through to address trauma-informed practices in schools.	Intervention / Pedagogical
	SEMH to promote mental health literacy and awareness among educators.	Empowerment / Inclusion
	SEMH as central to creating inclusive and supportive learning environments.	Awareness / Training
*	SEMH as an area for ongoing professional development	" "
*	SEMH challenges traditional disciplinary practices.	Discipline discourse, control, relational / restorative
	SEMH is impacted by systemic inequalities.	Equity / Systemic / Structural
*	SEMH demands a shift towards greater systemic understanding.	Systemic / complexity / Equity
	SEMH is impacted by educating inadequacies.	Deficit thinking / Reform / Equity
	SEMH as a lens for understanding the connection between well-being and academic success.	Academic / well-being
*	SEMH as influenced by societal stigma and misconceptions surrounding mental health.	Stigma / Awareness / misconception
	SEMH as influenced by external factors such as access to mental health services.	Resource Allocation / Intervention / Access
	SEMH is connected to broader issues of mental health awareness.	Awareness / Advocacy
	SEMH as central to creating inclusive and supportive learning environments for all students.	Complexity / Policy / Structural
	SEMH as a dynamic construct that evolves over time.	Complexity
*	SEMH is something connected with teacher training and professional development initiatives.	Training / Pedagogical
*	SEMH as embedded within educational policies and legislative frameworks.	Policy / Structural / Governance
	SEMH as linked to community partnerships and collaboration with external agencies.	Collaboration / Systemic
	SEMH as something that require pupils voice.	Empowerment / Participation.

Key - Identified / discussed within transcript:

- (yellow) Participant 1
- (green) Participant 2
- (pink) Participant 3

Appendix J: Four Main Discursive Constructions/Discourses Explored.

Main Discursive constructions.
Linked DCs and discourses.

SEMH support is marginalised in favour of academic priorities:

- SEMH is embedded within educational policies and legislative frameworks
- SEMH is something connected to teacher training and professional development.

- · Resource Allocation discourse
- · Prioritisation discourse
- · Training / Pedagogical discourse
- · Accountability discourse

SEMH is heterogeneous

- SEMH is something that is spoken more about now

- · complexity discourse
- · Labelling discourse
- · Stigma discourse
- · Deficit thinking discourse
- · Individualised discourse
- · Intersectionality discourse
- · Diversity discourse

SEMH challenges traditional disciplinary practices:

- SEMH is something that disrupts learning
- SEMH is an opportunity for fostering understanding and inclusivity
- SEMH requires proactive and preventative support strategies
- SEMH as something linked to behaviour

- · Discipline discourse
- · Behaviour management discourse
- · Relational discourse
- · Restorative discourse
- · Empowerment discourse

SEMH demands shift towards greater systemic understanding:

- SEMH is a school priority
- SEMH is influenced by perspectives, experienced and contextual factors
- SEMH is opportunity for fostering understanding and inclusivity
- SEMH is an area of on going development
- SEMH is something connected to teacher training and professional development initiatives

- · Policy discourse
- · Equity discourse
- · Social justice discourse
- · Intervention discourse
- · Power discourse
- · Structural discourse
- · Institutional discourse