The University Of Sheffield.

Listening to the stories of parents whose children have attended an Alternative Provision during primary school

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Abstract

Alternative Provision (AP) is an ill-defined (Power et al., 2024) component of the education system that provides education for children and young people (CYP) outside of their mainstream school or classroom. There is an emphasis on CYP attending AP returning to their mainstream environment (DfE, 2023), a process commonly termed ‘reintegration’. Existing research suggests that parents (and carers) play an important role during this process. However, there is a paucity of research exploring parental perspectives on reintegration. Additionally, existing research primarily focuses on the reintegration of secondary-aged pupils following permanent exclusion.

Adopting a social constructionist positionality, the current research explored the narratives of parents of children who had attended an AP and subsequently reintegrated into a mainstream primary school. It utilised a narrative approach to interview two parents, intending to privilege their voices. An in-depth analysis of each participant’s narrative was then conducted by the researcher using the Listening Guide (Gilligan, 2003). A discussion of the analysis constructs points of convergence between narratives and resonance or dissonance with wider literature.

During their children’s education so far, these parents have experienced times of disempowerment through their interactions with systems and practitioners. Parents narrated their experiences of making sense of their children’s needs through grappling with diagnoses and seeking additional school support. Generally positive experiences of their children’s AP placement were discussed, indicating that this was not only an ‘intervention’ for the child but also provided support for them (as parents), and aimed to support their child’s reintegration into mainstream school. AP is discussed as being situated in a complex position of potentially fostering individual inclusion, while concurrently enabling systemic educational exclusion. Implications for education practitioners, including educational psychologists, are presented to encourage critical reflection on the use of AP to support CYP and reintegration processes.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Chapter Overview

My research focuses on Alternative Provision (AP). In this introductory chapter, I discuss my interest in AP and the motivations behind conducting narrative research. I then explore various definitions and understandings of AP. Lastly, as this research is situated within a broader socio-political context, I acknowledge the change in government that has occurred during the course of this research project.

1.2 My interest in AP and story

I was introduced to AP while seeking work experience as an undergraduate psychology student. I volunteered at an AP located in a portacabin on an industrial estate on the outskirts of the large city where I have lived throughout my child and adult life. The AP supported approximately eight children and young people (CYP), with three core staff members and occasional student helpers like myself. I was emotionally moved by the stories shared by the CYP about their life circumstances and educational experiences, and these stories have stayed with me nine years later. This highlighted to me the emotionally powerful nature of story.

As a pupil, my only experience with education had been mainstream school. I noticed the differences in approaches to education between the AP and mainstream education, in terms of the environment, staff approaches, and curriculum. From then on, I remained curious about AP, which persisted when I started my role as a trainee Educational Psychologist (EP). As I began to develop ideas for potential research topics, the SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) and AP Improvement Plan (Department for Education [DfE], 2023) was published, indicating that this was a timely and worthwhile area for research.

1.3 Defining AP

The DfE (DfE, 2018b, p.15) defines AP as “education outside school, arranged by local authorities [LAs] or schools, for pupils up to age 18 who do not attend mainstream school for reasons such as school exclusion, behaviour issues, school refusal, or short or long term illness”. AP can include a variety of settings such as Pupil Referral Units (PRUs), independent providers, and AP free schools and academies (DfE, 2018b). More recently, on-site APs have been set up within schools (Ofsted, 2022), for example those titled “inclusion

centres" (Hulme et al., 2023, p.1) or "in school support units" (DfE, 2025, p.3). AP can be provided through full or part timetables, and short or longer-term placements (DfE, 2018b). Additionally, there is variety in the nature of provision available between different APs (Thomson & Pennacchia, 2014). For instance, APs may follow the national curriculum, or could instead offer therapeutic support, vocational (e.g. vehicle maintenance) or complementary activities (e.g. outdoors-based provision) (Thomson & Pennacchia, 2014).

The purpose of AP is identified by Ofsted (2022) as addressing the needs of pupils which cannot be met in mainstream schools. In a review of the literature, the most frequently cited reason for a child attending AP was "inappropriate behaviour", with other factors relating to the mental health of the pupil, SEND, and disengagement from a mainstream curriculum (DfE, 2018b, p. 156). Research has suggested an absence of a shared understanding of what constitutes (in)appropriate behaviour between school staff, even within the same school (Hatton, 2013), indicating that this is an ill-defined referral criterion which is open to interpretation and potential biases. Additionally, it is widely acknowledged that behaviour can be understood as a form of communication for an unmet need (Cooper et al., 2024), which could be supported, for example through an adapted or alternative environment, interventions, or modified expectations and approaches.

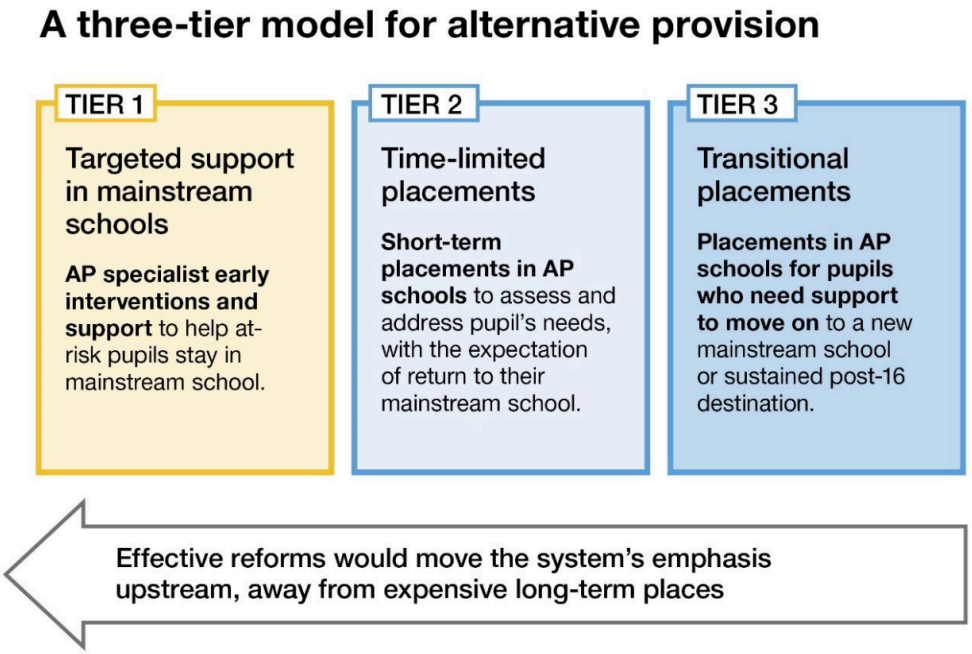
To summarise, there is great diversity that exists in the AP sector, both within cohorts of CYP attending an AP, but also, between APs which have been described as a "bewildering array of projects" (Bridgeman, 2024, p.59).

1.4 SEND and AP Improvement Plan (DfE, 2023)

In March 2023, the DfE published the SEND and AP Improvement plan (DfE, 2023). This proposed a "three-tier model for AP" (p.25), as illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1.

A three-tier model for AP (DfE, 2023, p.25)



The model emphasised the use of AP as an intervention, intending to support CYP to remain in, or transition into, mainstream education or further education (Figure 1). Financial motivations for this are alluded to, in shifting placements "upstream, away from expensive long-term placements" (DfE, 2023, p.25), and therefore in using AP as an "intervention, not a destination" (p.24).

1.5 A change in Government

The SEND and AP Improvement Plan (DfE, 2023) was published under the Sunak Conservative Government during my first year of EP training. It was instrumental in my decision to explore the topic of AP and reintegration, as I felt it positioned AP as an established and important part of the education system, whilst emphasising the importance of CYP returning to mainstream education. As this was an area of limited previous research, I felt that I had a strong rationale for proposing a research project on the topic.

Nevertheless, in 2024, during the course of my research, a General Election led to a change in Government. At the point in time of completing this thesis, we are under a Labour Government, led by Keir Starmer. At present, we do not know Labour's perspectives on the SEND and AP Improvement Plan. I have decided to keep all references to the policy paper

within this thesis, to reflect that it has been constructed at a particular point in time, within the broader socio-political system.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Chapter Overview

In this literature review, I will discuss the role of AP, with an emphasis on exploring how AP is used to support CYP to transition into a mainstream education setting, a process known as reintegration. I will review literature exploring reintegration, as well as research gathering the views of pupils, their parents/ carers and education staff involved in this process. Reviewing this literature through a critical lens has led to an identified gap, related to exploring the stories and experiences of parents whose children have attended an AP during primary school.

2.2 Approach to literature search

This literature search was conducted using Google Scholar, StarPlus (the University of Sheffield's online library database), search engines, and White Rose eTheses Online between May 2023 and February 2025. I searched terms such as "Alternative Provision", "AP", "Pupil Referral Unit", "PRU" and "reintegrat*" combined with a variety of Boolean operators.

I quickly learned that the term AP is loosely defined in academic literature, both within the geographical context of this research, and nationally. For example, in Northern Ireland, APs are termed 'Education Other Than at School (EOTAS) Centres' (Duffy et al., 2024). In recent research aiming to compare AP within the United Kingdom, Power et al. (2024) stated that the variety in definitions and terminology presents "significant challenges" for research (p.4). As a result, in order to avoid missing literature, I have adopted a 'snowballing' process, through following up references within literature and using the 'cited by' tool on StarPlus and Google Scholar. This process has enabled me to take a broad approach to reviewing and reflecting upon relevant literature, allowing me to consider multiple sources and perspectives to support my critical stance on the dominant discourses surrounding AP and reintegration.

2.3. Exclusion and inclusion in education

AP is fundamentally connected to the concepts of inclusion and exclusion in education. A critical discussion of inclusion and exclusion, relevant to the topic AP, will follow.

2.3.1 Inclusion

The Salamanca Agreement, a key international policy on inclusion, stated that all children have a right to an education, and should be included and accommodated for in mainstream ('regular') schools, whenever possible (UNESCO, 1994). This, therefore, placed an emphasis on adapting to meet the needs of all children within the same school setting. Inclusion, broadly, can be understood as "increasing learning and participation for all" (Booth & Ainscow, 2002, p.3), therefore, it is the process through which all pupils can be included, through an "unending process" of developing new ways to respond to diversity. In keeping with inclusion, The SEND Code of Practice (DfE & Department of Health [DoH], 2014) stated a commitment of the government to the "removal of barriers to learning and participation in mainstream education" (p.24).

However, Graham (2020) argues that 'mainstream' and 'inclusion' are not always mutually compatible, despite the terms often being treated synonymously. Additionally, understandings of 'inclusion' differ, for example, between practitioners working in mainstream school settings and striving to support the inclusion of all pupils (Sikes et al., 2007), suggesting that a shared understanding of 'inclusion' has not been reached.

It is widely recognised that schools are under pressure to respond to financial constraints (DfE, 2024c). It has been suggested in some respects, it is easier and makes more financial sense for schools to be exclusionary than to be inclusive (Cole et al., 2019). Some argue that the government indirectly encourages schools to exclude and marginalise some children through a current emphasis on test-based accountability (e.g. Holder, 2022; Cole et al., 2019). Indeed, "getting rid of poorly behaved students" has been discussed as a "quick win" approach to improving schools which were deemed to be inadequate (Hill et al., 2016, as cited in, McLean, 2024, p.76).

2.3.2 Exclusion

Inclusion and exclusion are linked; inclusion involves actively combatting, and ensuring an absence of exclusion (Rogers, 2007). The DfE state that there are two kinds of exclusion: suspension and permanent exclusion, which can be directed by Headteachers "in response to serious incidents or persistent poor behaviour" (DfE, 2024a, p.25).

However, exclusion can be understood more broadly than this. Gill et al. (2024) argue that any cause which prevents a child from being in a classroom or mainstream school community can be considered a form of exclusion, due to an emphasis on lost learning opportunities. The authors have constructed a 'continuum of exclusion' (Gill et al., 2024) or

‘lost learning’ (Harris et al., 2025; Figure 2), ranging from permanent exclusion, in which a child is formally removed from the school’s roll, to less formal forms of exclusion that involve the child’s absence from the classroom, such as being directed to stand outside (Gill et al., 2024). I have reflected on the conceptualisation of this continuum in Reflective Box 2.1.

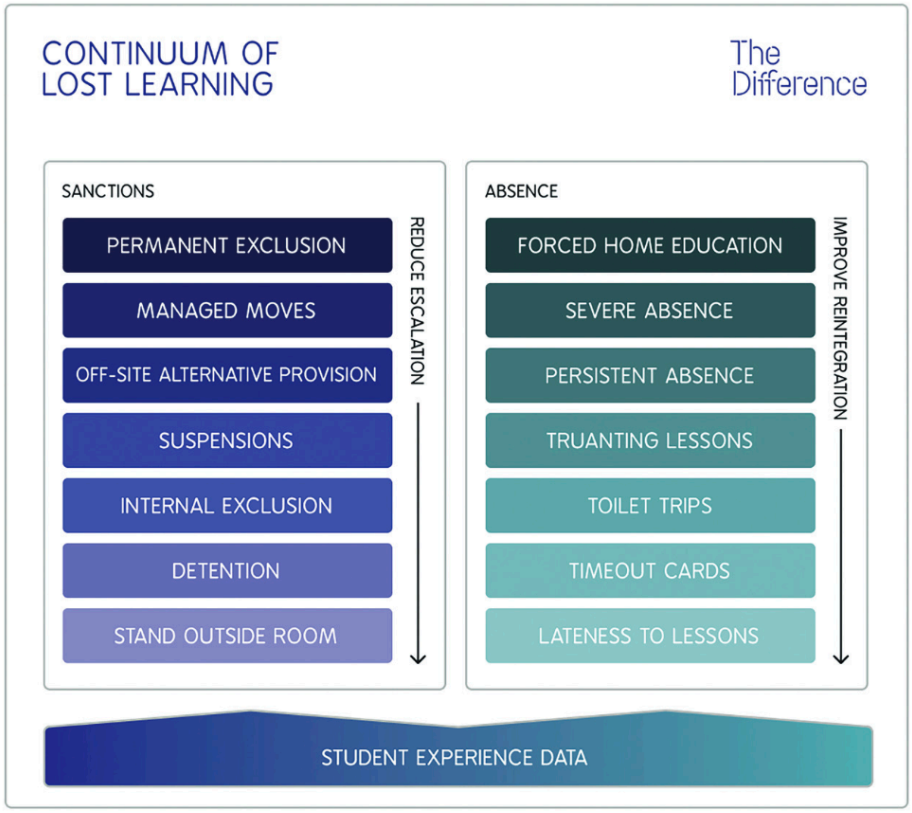
In keeping with this broad understanding of exclusion, McLean (2024) argues that school exclusion can happen within schools (‘inner exclusion’) and not just from them (‘outer exclusion’). Schools are only required to report on formal exclusions (i.e., suspensions and permanent exclusions). Therefore, it has been argued that figures paint a misleading picture of the extent of exclusion and inclusion occurring in schools (McLean, 2024, Gill et al., 2024).

AP can be compared and contrasted with other exclusionary practices, as outlined in the continuums of exclusionary practices (Figures 2 and 3; Harris et al., 2025; Gazely et al., 2013). For instance, both AP placements arranged as interventions and managed moves can entail a child or young person transitioning from one setting to another, on the basis of a shared agreement between the child, the school(s), and their parent(s) (Messeter & Soni, 2018). Collaboration has been cited as a factor that can support positive outcomes for both of these approaches (Messeter & Soni, 2018; Lawrence, 2011), with positive relationships being considered as crucial. Additionally, neither approach results in a formal record of school exclusion, which is deemed to be favourable (Power & Taylor, 2018).

Alternatively, other forms of exclusion, such as permanent exclusions, or directions off-site to improve behaviour, can be initiated by schools, without parental consent or agreement. These exclusionary processes follow formal processes, and can facilitate ongoing education through the use of AP, such as PRUs. In contrast, off-rolling is the illegal practice of a school removing the child from their school roll without following a formal exclusionary process (Done & Knowler, 2020). It is generally understood that off-rolling occurs to enhance school performance data (Done & Knowler, 2020). As such, the removal of these children has been considered in the best interests of the school, rather than the child. Recent investigations into children missing from education, including those who had been subject to off-rolling, indicated that the most frequent last known destinations of many of these CYP were that they had left the country, were in registered education, being electively home educated, or that their whereabouts were unknown and/or they were missing from education (Children’s Commissioner, 2024).

As considered by Gill et al. (2024), absence which is seemingly led by the child or their parent(s) can also be considered a form of exclusion. This draws upon their construction of exclusion, which involves any practice involving the absence of the child from their mainstream classroom. This can entail a range of absences, from lateness to lessons to more persistent school absences and forced home education (Figure 2; Harris et al., 2025). Pressure, or coercion, directed by school to parent(s) into home educating their children is a recognised form of off-rolling, when this is driven by the best interests of the school (Done & Knowler, 2020). Of course, home education in some instances is elective, and more recently, there has been a rise in flexi-schooling; an arrangement between parents and headteacher for CYP to engage in a full-time education, through a combination of home and in-school education (Richter et al., 2025).

Figure 2.
'The Exclusions Continuum' (Harris et al., 2025, p.33)



Source: The Difference

2.3.3 Where is AP situated between inclusion and exclusion?

If inclusion involves a process of actively increasing the participation and engagement of all children, and exclusion removes children from their mainstream school classroom or community, where is AP situated?

McLean (2024) and Gill et al. (2024) take a stance that AP is a form of exclusion. On their 'exclusions continuum', Gill et al. (2024) consider off-site AP to be situated in relation to other forms of exclusion, such as suspension and permanent exclusion (Figure 2). McLean (2024) considers that AP is a form of 'inner exclusion'; a space in which students are not fully engaged in mainstream school, but they are also not fully excluded either. Other forms of 'inner exclusion', according to McLean (2024), include the managed move process and internal exclusion; these forms of exclusion are connected by keeping on the 'right' side of the mainstream border (i.e., on school roll), without their inclusion in their current mainstream environment.

Gazeley et al. (2013) also consider a continuum as being a helpful way of understanding exclusion, but instead, framing this as "a continuum of provision and prevention" (p.23). AP, both within school and off-site, is considered a form of exclusion, but, a less exclusionary alternative relative to permanent exclusion or suspension, by potentially preventing permanent exclusion (Figure 3).

Figure 3.

*Exclusion and alternatives to exclusion (*Gazeley et al., 2013, p.25)

The SEND and AP Improvement Plan positions AP as an important and established component of the education system in England (DfE, 2023). The purpose of AP, as set out in the Improvement Plan, endeavours to “deal with needs early and reduce preventable exclusion” through a combination of outreach support, or “more intensive intervention or longer-term support” (DfE, 2023, p.24). Some authors have argued that this position is underpinned by an acceptance of exclusion, rather than striving towards inclusion for all CYP in mainstream settings (Pennacchia et al., 2016). Whilst inclusion involves a never-ending process of adapting to remove the barriers to the participation of all children, AP could provide a convenient way for schools to resist change, thus maintaining a non-inclusive status-quo (Pennacchia et al., 2016).

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989) stated that all children are entitled to education, a position reinforced in the SEND Code of Practice (DfE & DoH, 2015). This fundamental right to education is extended to children who have been permanently excluded from school, for whom the LA is responsible for providing a suitable education (Education Act, 1996, section 19). Additionally, as reflected in the DfE (2018) definition of AP, there are other reasons as to why a child or young person may be currently unable to attend their mainstream school, for example, due to “behaviour issues, school

refusal, or short or long term illness" (DfE, 2018b, p.15). AP may therefore provide a short-term solution for these children to access a form of participation in education, albeit, away from their mainstream school. This is in keeping with the position of the SEND and AP Improvement plan that AP should be utilised as an "intervention" and not a "destination" (DfE, 2023, p.24).

In this section, I have aimed to offer a critical perspective on the constructs of inclusion and exclusion in education. Through reflection on the literature and recent Government publications, I have suggested that AP is situated in a complex position somewhere in-between inclusion and exclusion, dependent on how these terms are understood. My personal reflections on where AP is situated are discussed in Reflective box 2.2 (Appendix A).

2.4 'Reintegration' versus 'Reinclusion'

2.4.1 Reintegration

The three-tier model of AP presented in the SEND and AP Improvement Plan prioritises the transition of CYP from AP into mainstream settings (DfE, 2023, Figure 1). The rationale behind this, as purported in the Improvement Plan, is based upon reports that 'inclusion' in mainstream settings can improve academic outcomes and a sense of belonging (DfE, 2023). Research has also suggested that reintegration into mainstream from AP can prevent risk factors typically associated with exclusion (Pirrie & Macleod, 2009), for example, later long-term outcomes of criminality ('School to Prison Pipeline', Kent et al., 2023), social isolation, or vulnerability to mental health issues (Hall-Lande et al., 2007).

'Reintegration' is the term commonly used in research (e.g. Owen et al., 2021; Atkinson & Rowley, 2019) and Government publications (e.g. DfE, 2018b; DfE, 2023) to describe the transition from an AP into mainstream school. Reintegration is defined as "efforts made by LAs, schools and other partners to return pupils who are absent, excluded or otherwise missing from mainstream education provision" (DfES, 2004, p5.). Reintegration therefore represents the process of transition of a child from AP into a mainstream school.

2.4.2 A criticism of reintegration, and the suggested alternative, 'reinclusion'

Many authors have contrasted the construct of 'integration' with 'inclusion' (Thomas, 2015; Lindsay, 2007; Pillay et al., 2013) to describe the transition between AP and mainstream education. While integration describes a commitment to educating children with additional

needs within a mainstream environment, inclusion involves actively adapting policies and practices to ensure that the needs of all children are met (Thomas, 2015; Pillay et al., 2013). Concerning the AP to mainstream transition, integration suggests that the child adapts to fit into the setting (Lindsay, 2007), whereas inclusion requires the setting to actively adapt to meet the pupil's needs (Lindsay, 2007). Thomas (2015) proposed coining the term 'reinclusion' to reflect the process of the school adapting to meet the needs of the pupil after an AP placement, thereby adopting an inclusive rather than an integrative approach.

The SEND and AP Improvement plan emphasises CYP experiencing an "intensive intervention" during their AP placement, which would enable them to be "re-engaged in education" (DfE, 2023, p.24). Little reference is made to adaptations to the mainstream school environment; therefore, the intentions of the Improvement Plan appear to more closely align with earlier discussed definitions of reintegration, as opposed to reinclusion.

2.4.3 Understanding 'reinclusion' and 'reintegration' through the lens of 'social' and 'medical' understandings of difference and disability

Inclusion in schools, which involves adapting to meet the needs of pupils by removing the barriers to their participation and engagement, draws upon a social model of understanding disability and difference (Booth & Ainscow, 2002). According to the social model, an emphasis is placed on removing or reducing any barriers that a child may encounter (Warnock et al., 2010). These barriers are understood to be situated in the child's environment (i.e. the school setting) or can arise through the interaction between the child and their context. This understanding can be applied to the earlier discussed concept of reinclusion, whereby the setting actively adapts to accommodate the needs of the child (Lindsay, 2007; Thomas 2015), by adapting policy, practice, and the environment.

This contrasts with the alternative 'medical model' of understanding, in which the difficulties or differences are understood to reside within the individual (Warnock & Norwich, 2010). As such, the individual becomes the site for change or 'intervention'. Reintegration could be understood to align more closely with a medical model of understanding disability and difference.

Following my reflections on reintegration and reinclusion (Reflective box 2.3, Appendix A), I have chosen to adopt the term 'reintegration' in this thesis to denote the process of transition from AP to mainstream education. This has been influenced by a critical stance towards my understanding of both terms and the professed purpose of AP, as well as a preference for

the phrase commonly used in research and practice, intending to increase the reach of this thesis through literature searches.

2.4.4 Psychological underpinnings of AP as an 'intervention'

AP has been described as a place for the, "Hard to reach, hard to teach, most alienated, most vulnerable" CYP (Cook, 2005, p.90). AP can provide an opportunity for CYP who are not currently accessing mainstream school to experience an alternative approach to education, as well as to "assess and address" their needs (DfE, 2023, p.25). As such, AP has been framed as an "intervention" (DfE, 2023, p.24). Research has explored the qualities of an AP placement that can act as facilitators for positive outcomes, such as educational re-engagement (e.g. Nicholson & Putwain, 2018). These qualities can be understood and explored through their psychological underpinnings.

The importance of relationships is frequently recognised and understood as being foundational for facilitating positive AP placements. Research exploring the views of CYP attending a PRU indicated that relationships were the most widely discussed enabler to the "achievement of positive outcomes in PRU" and that "feeling understood and listened to" was felt to be important (Michael & Frederickson, 2013, p.411). Similarly, the central importance of relationships during PRU placements was discussed by CYP and practitioners in Levinson and Thompson's research (2016), and Hart (2013) identified relationships (between pupils and practitioners, amongst pupils, and between practitioners and parents) as being a protective factor for CYP during their AP placements. Fostering relationships between CYP and practitioners which were trusting, caring, and respectful was constructed as an important factor for supporting educational re-engagement (Nicholson & Putwain, 2018). As such, during AP placements, research has indicated that relationships are central to facilitating experiences of supportive AP placements by CYP.

The significance of relationships during AP placements, and why these are consistently felt to be of such importance, can be understood through the application of psychological theory. Attachment theory has evolved from its early conceptualisation, which emphasised the importance of the relationship between the child and their primary caregiver in meeting their basic needs and creating a mental representation of themselves and others (Bowlby, 1969, as discussed in Fitzsimmons et al., 2021). The fundamentals of attachment theory have been extended to relationships between CYP and education practitioners (e.g. Geddes, 2006; Bomber, 2007), with secure relationships between CYP and practitioners being supportive in meeting some of CYP's relational needs (Fitzsimmons et al., 2021). APs, in comparison to mainstream schools, can provide a smaller educational setting, with greater

staff-to-pupil ratios, meaning that practitioners can be more available to invest time into relationships with CYP (Holder, 2022). Not only is there increased available, practitioners within APs base their interactions and relationships on respecting, listening to, valuing, and treating CYP with kindness and care (Malcolm, 2018), and prioritise relational approaches (Holder, 2022). In keeping with this, from the perspectives of practitioners supporting CYP on a 1:1 AP placement basis, positive relationships based upon humanistic principles of congruence (a sense of genuineness) and empathy were deemed significant for progress during AP placements (Fitzsimmons et al., 2021). As such, relationships between CYP and practitioners can qualitatively differ to those that CYP have previously experienced in mainstream school settings (Tate & Greatbach, 2017), both in terms of the availability of adults, and in their commitment and approach to developing relationships with CYP. As stated by Tate and Greatbach (2017), relationships are not only important for facilitating learning; the relationships themselves are the learning. Malcolm (2019) agrees with this view, stating that the relationships developed in AP are the "fundamental base from which all else is built" (p.85). In keeping with this, in APs, relational approaches to supporting CYP have been favoured over punitive, behaviourist approaches, due to the recognition that these approaches support CYP to experience autonomy and develop their own self-management skills (Tate & Greatbach, 2017).

In addition to exploring whether the fundamental psychological need for relatedness was facilitated or inhibited during AP placements, Nicholson and Putwain (2018) also explored how a sense of competence and autonomy could be fostered by practitioner practices. These three psychological needs form the basis of self-determination theory, which focuses on how the fulfilment of basic psychological needs supports intrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2017), which is influential for educational re-engagement (Nicholson & Putwain, 2018). Indeed, the views of CYP indicated that autonomy could be facilitated through flexibility, choice, relevance, and value of education (Nicholson & Putwain, 2018). Similarly, choices over learning and the environment were suggested to increase a sense of purpose, engagement, and independence (Tate & Greatbach, 2017). Importantly, the ability of teachers to be flexible and adapt tasks to meet individuals' interests and learning needs was valued (Tate & Greatbach, 2017). In doing so, flexibility supported CYP's sense of competence, through tasks being set at the optimal level of challenge and the availability of additional support when needed through smaller class sizes, and clear teaching expectations (Nicholson & Putwain, 2018).

To summarise, AP placements intend to facilitate an intervention by meeting CYPs psychological needs, particularly for relationships. Practitioners adopting relational

approaches and humanistic principles have been discussed as being important for this. Additionally, placements can facilitate CYP to experience a sense of autonomy and competence, which are linked with motivation and engagement. The discussion has drawn on broader theoretical frameworks, including attachment theory and self-determination theory, though I acknowledge that these do not encompass all of the psychological foundations underpinning AP.

2.5 Critically reviewing research on reintegration from AP into mainstream school

2.5.1 Existing literature and literature reviews

I will now critically review and consolidate existing literature exploring reintegration into mainstream school following an AP placement. I have encountered two existing systematic literature reviews within this topic; a published journal article (Owen et al., 2021) and an unpublished doctoral thesis (Steels, 2022). Both reviews sought to explore research on reintegration from a variety of perspectives, and both focussed on the transition into secondary school (and college, Steels, 2022). In the current review, I have adopted a wider literature search, building on the existing reviews of Steels (2022) and Owen et al. (2021) by including research into reintegration into primary school and a wider range of sources.

2.5.2 A model of reintegration (Owen et al., 2021)

In their literature review, Owen et al. (2021) created a chronological model of reintegration, consisting of a series of stages: AP support, reintegration planning, reintegration and mainstream secondary school support. Within each of these stages, the authors suggest a number of “factors that support reintegration” (i.e., facilitators), and “factors that limit reintegration success” (i.e., barriers) (p. 330-331). For example, various forms of support (social and emotional, learning development, peer) are reviewed as facilitators that support reintegration during the AP support stage. Within each stage, the absence of facilitating factors is often repeated as a barrier; for example, ‘collaboration and information sharing’ is considered a facilitator for reintegration planning, while a ‘lack of collaborative working’ is a barrier. I have reflected that a linear model of reintegration may oversimplify what is frequently acknowledged as a complex process, which could involve re-referrals into APs (Pillay et al., 2013). Moreover, understanding the first stage of reintegration as AP support ignores the child's experiences in their previous mainstream setting(s) (Levinson & Thompson, 2016).

2.5.3 An alternative, ecosystemic perspective of reintegration

Instead of a chronological and linear model of reintegration (Owen et al., 2021), I propose that an eco-systemic perspective could provide a valuable lens to review, consolidate, and critically reflect on research regarding reintegration following AP. Previous research has utilised Bronfenbrenner's Bio-Ecological Systems Theory to understand how pupils' sense of belonging is developed in school, illustrating the potential usefulness of this theory for understanding experiences in education (El Zataari & Maalouf, 2022). A connection between reintegration and an eco-systemic theory has been established in existing AP reintegration research (e.g., Atkinson & Rowley, 2019; Glazzard, 2019), and other researchers (e.g., Lawrence, 2011) have indirectly discussed their analysis by situating factors across systemic levels (e.g., individual, home, school).

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory of Human Development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, as cited in, El Zaatari & Maalouf, 2022; Crawford, 2020) is composed of the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem, often illustrated as a series of concentric circles. The model has evolved since its initial conception, with later models having included the influence of time, and focussing on the active role of the individual in their development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; El Zaatari & Maalouf, 2022). The current, Bioecological Systems model, emphasises the active role of the Person, the Processes between the individual and their surroundings, their broader systemic Context, and the overarching influence of Time (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; El Zaatari & Maalouf, 2022). This is known as the PPCT model, which encapsulates each of the systems within the 'Context', along with the PPCT elements outlined above. Research into reintegration following AP has indicated the construction of factors that could support or facilitate reintegration, and those that could hinder or act as barriers to mainstream reintegration across various systems. I have consolidated and reviewed reintegration research using this model, and various factors are discussed below.

Person/ Individual factors

A child or young person's motivation to reintegrate into a mainstream school is proposed as a facilitating factor by CYP (Atkinson & Rowley, 2019; Hamilton & Morgan, 2018) and by education practitioners (Lawrence, 2011). Additional factors associated with the individual child or young person include their emotional experiences. Pride and optimism have been regarded as promotive factors, while anger, anxiety, and loneliness are seen as risk factors (Pillay et al., 2013). A desire to succeed (Atkinson & Rowley, 2019; Lawrence, 2011) and an awareness that a mainstream education could impact this (Gibson, 2019) have also been considered influential factors within the individual level. Each of these factors, in the

bioecological model, could be considered as being an individual's 'force' characteristics (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006).

Microsystem

Factors in the child or young person's immediate environment (i.e., their microsystem) have also been discussed in research. The relationship between a child and their parent/ carer has been identified as an important factor for reintegration, by parents (Embeita, 2019) and CYP (Atkinson & Rowley, 2019, Glazzard, 2018). Additionally, a parent's hopefulness for reintegration into mainstream education have been considered as influential by education practitioners (Thomas, 2015, Lawrence, 2011) and CYP (Atkinson & Rowley, 2019). Whilst some parents have been described by practitioners as 'reluctant' (Thomas, 2015), others have been said to have unrealistic hopes for reintegration (Lawrence, 2011). Therefore, parents have been constructed as unhelpful for being too resistant or overly optimistic, suggesting that practitioners have identified an 'in-between' optimal and helpful level of aspiration for their child's reintegration. Relationships between children and setting staff have also been discussed (Atkinson & Rowley, 2019; Gibson, 2019; Pillay et al., 2013), with being 'seen and heard' by setting staff as being experienced by CYP as important in supporting a sense of connection and safety (Hulme et al., 2023). Humour and flexibility can facilitate these relationships (Levinson & Thompson, 2016). Other aspects of the microsystem that have been considered in research include the physical school environment (Hulme et al., 2023) and curriculum (Hamilton & Morgan, 2018).

Mesosystem

Communication within the microsystem (i.e., between parents, AP, and mainstream school; the 'mesosystem') is frequently cited as a factor affecting reintegration success (e.g., Atkinson & Rowley, 2019; Corrigan, 2014; Embeita, 2019; Lawrence, 2011; Pillay et al., 2013). Specifically, discussion and agreement on shared goals for the placement and cooperation has been highlighted as essential (Pilley et al., 2013; Lawrence, 2011; Embeita, 2019), which can enhance collaboration (Embeita, 2019). Regular meetings that include the child and parents have been identified as an effective means of facilitating collaboration (Corrigan, 2014). Conversely, a lack of collaboration can foster blaming and confrontational 'us and them' attitudes between AP and mainstream settings (Lawrence, 2011).

Exosystem and Macrosystem

An 'inclusive school ethos' can be considered in the context of the exosystem and/or macrosystem, as it would shape the attitudes of school staff towards inclusion and influence the school policy and practice. Indeed, the ethos of the school is frequently cited as a factor

affecting reintegration (Atkinson & Rowley, 2019; Lawrence, 2011), which, in keeping with earlier discussions of inclusivity, reflects flexibility and motivation to meet the needs of the child through making adaptations (Thomas, 2015).

Chronosystem (Time)

Reintegration takes place at a particular point in time, and research has considered timing as being an important factor. A PRU practitioner in Levinson and Thompson (2016)'s research use the term 'window of opportunity' to describe the point in time that staff recognise a pupil is ready to return to mainstream school. A timely reintegration, individualised to the child's needs, was also discussed by practitioners in Lawrence's (2011) research, and the importance of a gradual reintegration was shared by CYP in Atkinson and Rowley's (2019) research.

2.5.4 A focus on parental involvement in reintegration

An array of existing research has positioned parental engagement and involvement as a facilitating factor supporting pupil reintegration following AP (Atkinson & Rowley, 2019; DfES, 2004; Lawrence, 2011; Levinson & Thompson, 2016; Pillay et al., 2013; Thomas, 2015). Furthermore, a DfE vision paper for AP (2018a, p. 12) stated that "planning and decision-making should involve parents." However, challenges in exploring the views of parents of CYP attending AP have been noted in research, with Owen (2022, p. 73) describing this group as "hard- to- reach". In their research, Pillay et al. (2013) aimed to explore the opinions of parents of reintegrating pupils through qualitative questionnaires. However, they reported that a low return rate restricted a discussion of parental views (Pillay et al., 2013). Currently, parental voices are not prominent in research into reintegration, which has tended to focus on the views of education staff and CYP (Embeita, 2019).

It has been reported that during the reintegration process, the views of professionals are prioritised above those of parents. In the DfE (2018b) investigation, parents shared their desire for a quicker reintegration into mainstream education, yet this was dismissed by professionals. Additionally, merely 1 in 10 AP leaders stated that student or parental preferences were the leading factor in decision-making (DfE, 2018b). In keeping with this, Malcolm (2018) reported that attending AP is rarely the choice of a child or their parents. Despite legislation (DfE & DoH, 2014), government guidance (DfE, 2023), and existing research (e.g. Lawrence 2011) which all advocate for parental involvement during AP and reintegration processes, this empowerment does not seem to have translated into practice

(Jayman et al., 2024). Instead, parents of children who have experienced forms of exclusion are voiceless (McDonald & Thomas, 2003).

2.5.5 A focus on reintegration into primary school

In the literature, differences in reintegration rates depending on the school setting have been raised. For instance, AP leaders reported finding it easier to reintegrate CYP into colleges than into primary or secondary schools (DfE, 2018b). Similarly, the Timpson Review (2019) noted that there are variations in the rates of pupils returning to mainstream education based on their key stage, with a trend of decreasing reintegration rates as CYP progress through key stages. The authors suggested that this relates to the purpose of the AP placement, with younger pupils returning to mainstream equipped with coping strategies and increased resilience, whereas the focus for older pupils is on becoming prepared for adulthood (Timpson Review, 2019). An alternative explanation for the differences in the success of pupils returning to mainstream based on age may relate to the increased pressures on schools and academies subjected to competitive academic comparison and test-based accountability (Hulme et al., 2023). As Y10 and Y11 pupils have less time to achieve relative increases in exam results compared to their younger peers, this could demotivate mainstream secondary schools from including and integrating older pupils, a view that was “readily admitted” by school leaders (DfE, 2018b, p. 120). Another possible explanation may involve the differences in educational structures and systems in school settings (Rice et al., 2011). Therefore, it could be that the reasons for differing rates of reintegration based on key stage are multifaceted; nevertheless, there are disparities in reintegration dependent on the age and education stage of CYP.

There is significantly less research exploring reintegration into primary schools compared to secondary schools. While this could be seen as proportionate (given that there are proportionately less primary-aged children attending AP), the number of primary-aged children in AP is increasing (Ofsted, 2022). Furthermore, existing research indicates that the experiences of children reintegrating into primary schools qualitatively differ from those of young people reintegrating into secondary schools (Atkinson & Rowley, 2019; Jalali & Morgan, 2019). Thus, I believe that reintegration from AP into primary schools warrants further research.

2.5.6 A focus on AP as an 'intervention'

The SEND and AP Improvement plan emphasised the use of AP as a time-limited intervention, aiming to support CYP to remain in, or transition into, mainstream education or further education (DfE, 2023; Figure 1). Nevertheless, the majority of research into AP and reintegration related to pupils who had been permanently excluded and subsequently attended a PRU (e.g. Embeita, 2019; Lawrence, 2011 etc). There is considerably less research on part-time or placements which are arranged to provide a supportive 'intervention' (DfE, 2023).

Munn and Lloyd (2005) reflected on the breakdown in decision-making for children and their parents associated with permanent exclusion issued by a headteacher. In contrast, an AP placement as a supportive intervention should be jointly agreed upon (DfE, 2018a; DfE, 2018b). As such, the experiences of these placements would differ, depending on whether they had resulted from a permanent exclusion or as a supportive approach.

2.6 Exploring parental experiences of 'educational journeys' encompassing AP and reintegration into primary school

In the previous section, I summarised existing research and identified a gap in the literature that I justified as worthy of further exploration: the views of parents of children who have attended an AP as an 'intervention' approach and reintegrated into a mainstream primary school. I will now discuss my decision to explore the child's reintegration within the context of their 'educational journey' spanning points time and space.

2.6.1 Reintegration and a child's 'educational journey'

Embeita (2019) explored parental experiences of reintegration into mainstream secondary school following permanent exclusion. Whilst the initial focus of this research was on reintegration, the author shared that parents could not separate their past experiences of exclusion from their reintegration experiences. Embeita (2019) made sense of this through a conception of time as being circular and constructed in the present (whereby the past and future influence present activity), as opposed to linear understanding of time (RambollGroup, 2014).

In keeping with the above, previous research had sought parental views concerning the arrangement of their child's AP placement. Parents reported feelings of anxiousness and stigma ahead of the AP placement, also sharing that they received little information and

support in the process of moving to the AP (DfE, 2018b). Whilst experiences were generally more positive than initially feared (DfE, 2018b; DfE, 2025) it is likely that their previous thoughts and feelings shaped parental current understandings of their child's reintegration into the mainstream classroom.

As such, in order for this research to explore parental experiences of reintegration, I felt that it was important to explore parental experiences at their child's initial mainstream school, at the AP, and at their current mainstream school, as well as their transitions between. A holistic exploration was also used by Jalali and Morgan (2018), who used the term 'educational journey' to describe a child's educational placements, and the transitions between them. I have chosen to adopt the language of educational journey in this research, to represent the child's journey through AP and primary school.

2.7 Summary and rationale

To summarise, the education of CYP in mainstream settings is a current governmental priority (DfE, 2023). AP can provide time-limited placements, to support reintegration into a mainstream or alternative school setting (DfE, 2023; DfE, 2018b). There is a growing need for research on reintegration of primary-age pupils from AP. Additionally, given the important role of parents, both broadly in terms of CYP's educational outcomes (DfE, 2011), and specifically in terms of their engagement and involvement during the reintegration process, it is disappointing that parental views have rarely been sought in research and practice (DfE, 2018b; Steels, 2022). Knowing that parental voices have been disempowered, despite their value in supporting their child's education and reintegration journey, has made me want to empower the stories and experiences of parents in my research.

For these reasons, I endeavoured to listen to the narratives of parents of primary-aged children who have experienced reintegration following an AP placement. I have explored parental experiences of their child's transition between settings; therefore, my research is not restricted to reintegration, as I recognised the crucial role of prior experiences in shaping current understandings. This led to my formation of the research question below:

What are the narratives of parents whose children have attended an AP during primary school?

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Chapter Overview

In this chapter, I will discuss the journey I have taken to reach the point of conducting the research. I will explain my positionality and reflexivity, as well as the philosophical foundations of this research. I will discuss and justify my choice of a narrative methodology, combined with the Listening Guide (Gilligan et al., 2003) as the method of data analysis. Lastly, I will address quality issues pertinent to this research and explain how I adhered to each of these.

3.2 Positionality and Reflexivity

My understanding of knowledge is that it is situated in the interactions between people. In keeping with this, my role as the researcher has been central in any knowledge co-constructed during this research process. Cena et al., (2024) assert that researchers should provide the reader with context, by explaining their role in the research project. I will reflect on my positionality, that is, my worldview and my stance in relation to the research topic and participants (Savin-Baden & Major, 2022), as I recognise that this has been influential throughout the research process.

Positionality and reflexivity are interconnected concepts, as reflexivity involves the researcher "observing him or herself in the act of researching" (Hamdan, 2009, p.379). Reflexivity involves reflecting on one's social and cultural history to ensure awareness of the integral role of the researcher in selecting the research topic, participants, and any interpretations made (Bukamal, 2022). Regarding narrative research, Murray (2003) notes that the researcher plays a role in shaping narratives, potentially encouraging some stories while inhibiting others; thus, the researcher must be aware of their influence and its impact. To support reflexivity, I have kept a reflective journal throughout this thesis journey. Extracts are included in Appendix A and are referred to throughout the body of this thesis.

Positioning relates to where a researcher considers themselves in relation to their research participants (Savin-Baden & Major, 2022). 'Insiders' have researched a participant group with whom they share characteristics, whereas, 'outsiders' do not belong to the researched group (Mullings, 1999). Reflecting on this dichotomy of 'insider' versus 'outsider', I believe I adopt the position of an outsider in this research since I am not a parent or carer of a child who has experienced an AP placement. Other authors challenge this dichotomy (e.g., Milligan, 2016; Bukamal, 2022), suggesting instead that a researcher may be a continuum from 'insider' to 'outsider' depending on the situation (Bukamal, 2022), or that researchers

can actively position themselves as ‘in-betweeners’ (Milligan, 2016). Indeed, at points, I have reflected on feeling like an ‘in-betweener’; this is further discussed in Reflective Box 3.1 (Appendix A).

3.3 Ontological and Epistemological Position

Prior to commencing this research journey, it was vital to reflect on my philosophical positioning in relation to the nature of knowledge and the generation of knowledge that my research aims to construct. Before I began this doctoral research, I had not encountered the terms ‘ontology’ or ‘epistemology’ before; Reflective Box 3.2 (Appendix A) describes my relationship with understanding these concepts.

Ontology is the study of our existence in the world (Burr, 2015); it asks us, “What is there to know?” (Willig, 2013, p.12). Ontological positions can be understood as ranging from realist to relativist (Willig, 2013). An ontological positioning of realism views the external world as existing independently of our representations (Bunge, 1993). In this sense, the reality of structures and objects underpin our representations (Willig, 2013; Burr, 2015). An alternative ontological positioning is one of relativism. A relativist position holds the view that truth about reality, “Is in the eyes of the beholder” (Bunge, 1993, p. 216). Relativism emphasises that any truths are relative to the person, the social group, and historical period (Bunge, 1993), therefore, there cannot be an objective universal truth (Bunge, 1993), instead a diversity of interpretations and representations of the world (Burr, 2015; Willig, 2013).

Epistemology is concerned with the nature of knowledge and how we come to know the world (Burr, 2015). It attempts to answer the question “How can we know?” (Willig, 2013, p12). Crotty (1998) explains that there are different epistemological positionings which influence the way we approach knowledge. A stance of objectivism sees meaningful entities existing independently of our consciousness, having truth and meaning residing in them (Crotty, 1998). Positivist research adopts an objectivist positioning and asserts that objective truths and meaning are gained through careful research (Crotty, 1998). Alternatively, a constructionist epistemology sees reality as being constructed through our relational engagement with it (Crotty, 1998; Emerson & Frosh, 2009). As I have engaged with the topics of AP and reintegration, and as my understanding of epistemology and ontology have developed, my philosophical positioning has evolved (Reflective Box 3.3, Appendix A).

In the current research, the philosophical assumptions about the nature of knowledge align with an ontological stance of relativism; our representations of the world are all that we have

access to (Burr, 2015), therefore there are multiple realities. Regarding this research, my relativist positioning means that any knowledge generated cannot be understood as definite; rather, it has been co-constructed at a specific moment and within a particular context. Consequently, this research does not claim to represent any truths about parental experiences or the topics of reintegration or AP.

Overall, the current research aligns with a philosophical positioning of social constructionism. Social constructionism sees knowledge as being socially constructed through language (Burr, 2015), and social constructionist research focuses on the way that people talk with each other, through interactions about their experiences in the world (Willig, 2013; Emerson & Frosh, 2009). Social constructionism is congruent with my ontological positioning of relativism and epistemological constructionism, reflecting the view that knowledge and reality are socially constructed and dependent on the social, cultural, and historical context. In relation to concepts central to this research (i.e., AP, reintegration) I have reflected upon my research philosophy (see Reflective box 3.4, Appendix A).

3.4 Qualitative methods considered: Narrative, Thematic Analysis, and Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)

A qualitative approach is suited to research that is interested in exploring meaning and involves the interpretation of events by the participant and the researcher (Willig, 2013). As such, despite my lack of prior experience with qualitative research, I felt confident that this was the route I would take to support the exploration of my research question. Following my literature review, I considered a range of qualitative methodologies and analyses, including Narrative (Murray, 2003; Hollway & Jefferson, 2000; Emerson & Frosh, 2009), IPA (Smith & Fieldsend, 2021) and Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Clarke & Braun, 2021).

My research question aimed to explore parental experiences; therefore, IPA could have suited the exploration and analysis of these, as IPA seeks to understand how people make sense of their experiences (Willig, 2013). However, narrative methodologies can also provide an opportunity to explore research focussing on the nature of experience (Hutton & Lystor, 2021). A difference between IPA and narrative approaches is that IPA aims to construct themes across a relatively homogenous participant group (Smith & Fieldsend, 2021). Reviewing the AP literature highlighted vast variation in AP settings (Power et al., 2024) and the pupils who attend them; therefore, the sample of parents I intended to speak with was likely to be heterogeneous and not befitting of the sample needed for IPA (Smith & Fieldsend, 2021).

Unlike other methods of qualitative analysis which start by breaking down narratives into parts or 'codes' (Clarke & Braun, 2021), narrative considers the account as a whole (Murray, 2003). The Listening Guide is one such form of narrative analysis (Woodcock, 2016). Narrative can explore both the words shared (the 'told') and what may be beneath the words ('the telling') (Tolman & Head, 2021), allowing the researcher to attune to "deeper levels of psychic expression" (Tolman & Head, 2021, p.155) that may not be conscious to the individual. In contrast, Thematic Analysis focuses on the content of the text (i.e., the 'told') (Riessman, 2005). Drawing on Foucault's ideas, Sorsoli and Tolman suggest that when anyone speaks, their words are filtered through systems of power and socially constructed ideas about what it is permissible to say (Foucault, 1990, as cited in Sorsoli & Tolman, 2008). Regarding the parent participants I intended to speak with, I was aware that their voices are often silenced (DfE, 2018b), and I felt they were disempowered. Therefore, I wanted to adopt a methodology that looked beyond the content of what was told (Sorsoli & Tolman, 2008), and a narrative methodology enabled this.

Whilst it may not always be possible or desirable to synthesise analyses across multiple participants, the decision whether to include this within the analysis lies with the researcher and their interpretation of the data (Gilligan et al., 2003). This flexible aspect of the Listening Guide methodology appealed to me, as my literature review had suggested that CYP attending AP are a heterogeneous group, and that AP could be linked to a wide range of inclusive/ exclusion practices, therefore, I didn't know whether there would be any convergence between parent experiences. This methodology allowed me the flexibility to make decisions regarding the analysis, depending on the participant group and my interpretations of the data, which a more prescriptive method, such as Thematic Analysis, may not have (Clarke & Braun, 2021).

3.5 Selecting a Narrative Approach and The Listening Guide

A narrative approach is interested in the stories we tell ourselves and each other. It sees us living in a storied world, in which we understand social interactions through the stories we share (Murray, 2003). These stories, which shape our past, current, and future experiences and projections, are social constructions, making use of our everyday language (Murray, 2003). Narrative has formed the basis of therapeutic approaches (Sunderland, 2001; White & Morgan, 2006, Murray, 2003), in which the emphasis is on using storytelling to expand a person's narrative repertoire and to elicit preferred narratives which can challenge dominant plots. In research, narrative offers an alternative to traditional methods, which prioritise the

researcher's voice in testing their hypotheses (Gergen, 2015). Instead, a narrative approach prioritises participant; by focusing on their first-hand narrative account (Gergen, 2015). The interview serves as a site for data co-production (Elliott, 2005), during which narratives are co-constructed between the researcher and the participant. The participant's voice is treated with respect and the researcher takes responsibility for conveying the voices of often marginalised and unheard groups, to generate understanding and appreciation of their first-hand experiences (Gergen, 2015).

A narrative approach fits with my ontological and epistemological positioning of social constructionism; as individuals and groups construct their realities using language and social interactions. In narrative, the stories shared by participants are understood as being how they have made sense of an event (i.e., their reality), rather than being empirical truth (Parker, 2004). A narrative approach acknowledges that the researcher brings their own experiences and stories (Gergen, 2015), and encourages continuous reflexivity (Camic, 2021). Both narrative approaches and social constructionism consider the broader social, cultural and historical contexts, which are important to the current research (Murray, 2003).

Additionally, I felt that a research approach that privileged the voices of less heard groups was important following my literature review, which highlighted that the voices of parents of CYP who have attended AP are often not sought or ignored (Steels, 2022; DfE, 2018b). Often, these voices are marginalised in research due to them being "hard-to-reach" (Owen, 2022, p.53), meaning insights into their views and stories are missing in research (Aldridge, 2015). Narrative approaches prioritise participant accounts (Gergen, 2015), and the Listening Guide as a form of narrative analysis lends itself to research questions involving shame, secrecy, and/ or marginalised voices (Sorsoli and Tolman, 2008) and prioritises listening to those who may have been silenced. With this in mind, I felt that the Listening Guide was an appropriate method of analysis, and could also serve to empower the voices of the participant group.

3.6 Quality Issues in Research

Quality frameworks can be used to evaluate whether research findings are "worth paying attention to", and are therefore of value (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p.290, as cited in, Tracy, 2010, p.837). In quantitative methodologies, it is widely agreed that good quality research strives for the key principles of reliability and validity (Howell, 2016; Camic, 2021). Qualitative research offers diversity in terms of methodologies and paradigms, which can add to the complexity of demonstrating value (Yardley, 2000). Despite this, Tracy (2010)

and Yardley (2000) discuss that researchers should not be so tied to their philosophical paradigms that a shared understanding of end goals of quality research cannot be reached, and provide overviews of quality principles of qualitative research. Universal principles can provide a common framework that enables readers, who may not have expertise in specific methodologies (e.g. narrative), to evaluate the quality of the research, and therefore, whether they are of value (Tracy, 2010). Building upon the work of Yardley (2000), Tracy (2010), and others, Cena et al. (2024) published general criteria for assessing the quality of qualitative research studies. I will discuss how I have accounted for these criteria.

3.6.1 Transparency

Transparency involves an openness and honesty about the research process, through clear communication that enables the audience to evaluate the process and interpretations (Cena et al., 2024). To ensure transparency, I have kept an 'audit trail' (Tracy, 2010) in which I have documented the steps taken throughout the research process and my reasoning behind each decision point. This has been kept in a diary, and key decision points are discussed within this thesis to ensure that the reader is clear about the steps taken (either in-text or included in reflective boxes, Appendix A). Additionally, interview quotes are included in-text and transcripts are in the Appendices, with corresponding line numbers. This aims to support transparency relating to the data analysis and to allow the reader to follow my interpretative process (Yardley, 2000), through demonstrating that interpretations can be traced in the data (Cena et al., 2024).

Transparency includes ensuring methodological coherence and consistency; i.e., the fit between each of the research components (Cena et al., 2024). I have ensured coherence between the underpinning philosophical assumptions of social constructionism with the research questions, narrative methods, and throughout my analysis and discussion. In social constructionist research, the researcher plays an active role and subjectivity is recognised in all aspects of the research process, including the analysis (Cena et al., 2024). Being reflexive opens researchers up to being aware of their role and impact on the co-construction of knowledge (Cena et al., 2024). I have practised reflexivity throughout this research; in assessing my own motivations, biases and positioning. A diary has provided space for, and evidence of, my reflection on my role as the researcher. Additionally, I have used the first person throughout this thesis to make my role in the research process and interpretations explicit.

3.6.2 Rigour and Richness

Rigour and richness involve demonstrating thoroughness in data collection, analysis, and reporting (Cena et al., 2024). To plan rigorous research, Yardley (2000) provides several prompts related to data collection and analysis. Determining sample size in qualitative research involves striking a balance between being large enough to facilitate a comprehensive understanding of the research topic and being small enough to enable an in-depth qualitative analysis (Vasileiou et al., 2018). For this reason, in narrative research, a small number of participants is advised due to the depth of analysis (Emerson & Frosh, 2009). Additionally, considerations included ensuring that the research could be conducted within the time constraints of EP doctoral training and an awareness of the context of the target population being "hard-to-reach" (Owen, 2022, p.53). Some forms of qualitative analysis (e.g. IPA) stipulate a minimum number of participants, in order to support richness and rigour (Smith & Fieldsend, 2021). However, after reviewing Listening Guide literature, I am unaware of minimum sample requirements. To guide my decision making, I have reviewed other Educational Psychology doctoral research utilising narrative methodologies and the Listening Guide, and found that a range of two (e.g. Johnson, 2018), to four (e.g. Munroe Burrows, 2020) participants have been included in this analysis. Additionally, published journal articles using this methodology have featured in-depth discussion of two participants' narratives, suggesting that rigour can be achieved through richness and depth, even with a small sample (e.g., Hyde & Rouse, 2022).

Further details of the recruitment process, method of transcription and the steps of the analytical process are explained in Chapter 4.

3.6.3 Sensitivity to context

Both Yardley (2000) and Cena et al., (2024) discuss the importance of sensitivity to the study's socio-cultural context. At the start of this research, I familiarised myself with key research literature and legislation (see Chapter 2). This supported me in finding a meaningful gap in the existing literature base, which linked to current policy (DfE, 2023). Yardley (2000) invites the researcher to reflect on the power relations between the participant and researcher. Due to my sensitivity to the context, I was aware of the lack of research into parental voice in this area (Embeita, 2019) and that parents' voices are often not sought or are minimised (DfE, 2018b). This led to my choice of narrative methodology and analysis; therefore, also, supporting research coherence. Additionally, I was aware of my position as a researcher who is an outsider; I have not, and perhaps never will, share the experience of being a parent to a child who has attended an AP.

3.6.4 Transferability and impact

Qualitative research strives for depth and offers knowledge that is historically and culturally situated, which therefore cannot be used to make wider predictions (Tracy, 2010). Emerson and Frosh (2009) note that narrative research is intrinsically interested in making sense of an individual's experience, rather than using these experiences as a source to generalise. Nevertheless, when a reader feels as though the research story overlaps in some way with their own situation, they can intuitively transfer the research into their own action (Yardley, 2000). This means that the process of transferability, unlike generalisability, is performed by the reader rather than the researcher (Yardley, 2000). To support readers to experience transferability, and thus, increase the impact of the report on the audience, I have tried to support the reader's empathetic engagement with the narratives discussed.

Impact can be demonstrated by change occurring as a result of the research (Cena et al., 2024). In the current research, I hoped that for the participants, having the opportunity to narrate their stories and feel heard would be a meaningful and empowering experience. On a wider scale, I intended to disseminate the research to a range of stakeholders (e.g. LA practitioners, AP providers, EPs), to share the stories of parents. In doing so, this could have the potential to shape practitioner views towards parents/carers, and could have wider influences, for example in policy.

3.6.5 Ethics

Ethical approval was granted by the University of Sheffield School of Education (Appendix B). I ensured that I diligently followed the requirements of the ethics application and applied for an ethical amendment when necessary. The British Psychological Society [BPS] and Health and Care Professionals Council [HCPC] guidelines on ethical practice were followed throughout the research process (BPS, 2021 and HCPC, 2024).

Additionally, and more specifically concerning the Listening Guide methodology and current research topic, I reflected on the importance of adopting an ethical approach. Gilligan and Eddy (2021) consider the ethics of the Listening Guide methodology to be relational; research interviews start with a question of genuine curiosity and lead to the composition of an analysis, which must be written in a way that would be comfortable for participants to read. Prior to this, Gilligan and Eddy (2021) note that it is necessary to create trust and establish a connection between the researcher and participants.

To align with this ethically relational approach, prior to interviews, I engaged in email correspondence with potential participants, providing a space to discuss any queries and to further explain the research rationale and value. As described in research poster (Appendix C), I also offered the opportunity to arrange a pre-interview phone call with participants, in addition to or as an alternative to communication via email.

I was mindful that the interviews could involve discussion of potentially distressing, personal, and/or sensitive topics. Prior to interviews, I reviewed and reflected on academic literature providing explanations of qualitative and narrative interviews (see chapter 4.3 for further details), and considered how I could ensure that participants would feel as emotionally safe as possible to explore their child's educational journey.

One such area of reflection was on the relationship between myself as the researcher and the participants, and any potential power dynamic between us. This was especially important to consider, as my literature review had led to my understanding that often this group of parents are marginalised and disempowered. I felt it was important that participants held autonomy and decision-making opportunities. This influenced my planning, for instance, to give participants the choice of whether interviews would be facilitated virtually, or in-person. Additionally, I adopted an un-structured, narrative approach to the interview, allowing the participant to steer and lead the interviews, with my role being to listen with a genuine curiosity (Gilligan & Eddy, 2021).

Murray (2003) notes that some participants may find the experience of talking in depth about themselves emotionally difficult. I considered this during the ethics application process and reflected on how I could approach the interview to support participants in feeling as comfortable as possible to share their stories, and how I could respond if a participant became distressed during the interview. The research poster (Appendix C) provided sufficient depth to ensure that participants were informed of the topics to be explored and the format of the interview, enabling participants to make an informed decision as to whether they chose to participate. Due to my background working therapeutically, and my experiences as a trainee EP in facilitating consultations, I have developed a range of interpersonal skills to support my facilitation of potentially distressing or uncomfortable conversations. For example, demonstrating empathy and deep listening through setting a gentle pace, nodding and smiling, and acknowledging or asking about different emotions (Nolan & Moreland, 2014). Additionally, I had prepared a debrief resource (distress protocol) to share with participants at the end of the interview which included details of services that could be accessed should additional support be needed (Appendix D).

Though the focus of this research was to explore parental narratives of AP, I was mindful that this would entail a discussion of their children's journey through education. Due to these children being younger than sixteen years old, it was not a requirement as per the Ethical Approval processes (Appendix B) for formal consent to be gained from the child. However, I wished to provide parent participants with the opportunity to inform their children of the research and their participation, if parents felt that this was in the best interests of their child. I created a brief, child-friendly resource which I personalised for each parent and emailed to them immediately following the interviews. An anonymised copy of this resource is included in Appendix E.

Following my analysis of the interviews, I emailed participants a summary of the research, and again, offered to meet to discuss my analysis, and to provide a space to honour the end of the research relationship. I wanted to ensure that participants had the opportunity to read my interpretation of their narratives before they entered the public domain, and to provide a space for reflection on the research process. However, I was mindful that these would be the limits of the relationship due to the constraints of this being a time-limited doctoral research project, and therefore, was transparent about these limits when recruiting participants. This was outlined on the research poster (Appendix C) and information sheet (Appendix F).

Chapter 4: Design and Procedure

4.1 Chapter Overview

The following chapter discusses the research design and procedure. I will explain how I recruited participants, the influence of the pilot study on my approach, and how the data was collected. I will then discuss how I transcribed the interview data and explain the stages of the chosen method of analysis. Lastly, I will explain how and why I approached 'member reflections' with the participants.

4.2 Participants and Recruitment

Narrative analysis is based on the detailed investigation of a very small number of participants (Emerson & Frosh, 2009). Creswell (2007, as cited in, Tracy, 2010, p.839) advises that researchers adopting a narrative approach "focus on a single individual (or two or three individuals)". My chosen narrative analysis, The Listening Guide (Gilligan et al., 2003; Gilligan, 2015) provided a flexible framework for an in-depth and comprehensive interpretation and exploration of participant narratives. As such, I set out to recruit a relatively small sample size of three participants, as this was both in keeping with the chosen narrative methodology and analysis, and practical within the constraints of this time-limited doctoral research (as discussed in 3.6.2).

The final criteria for recruitment to this study were that the participants would be parents or carers to children who have, within the past two years:

- Attended an AP as part of an intervention approach (e.g., a proactive placement aiming to support a pupil at risk of permanent exclusion or experiencing other barriers to attending school).
- Transitioned (reintegrated) into a mainstream primary school.

My reflections on arriving at these inclusion criteria are included in Reflective Box 4.1 (Appendix A).

I adopted a pragmatic and purposeful recruitment process, which involved a phased approach. A purposive sample is "one whose characteristics are defined for a purpose that is relevant to the study" (Andrade, 2021, p.86). In keeping with this, I began by making contact with APs that offered time-limited placements to support the needs of primary-aged pupils. These placements were sometimes termed 'step-out' or 'turnaround' placements; highlighting the intention that these placements acted as a supportive intervention measure, in line with the SEND and AP Improvement plan (DfE, 2023). I initially emailed four different provisions across South Yorkshire that offered such placements towards the end of the 2023-24 summer months to explain my role and the purpose of the research project

(example email in Appendix G). I requested that my research poster (Appendix C) be shared with parents of children nearing the end of their placement at the AP, with the view that these pupils would shortly be reintegrating into their mainstream primary school, and therefore would meet the inclusion criteria for this research. At around the same time, I contacted Parent Carer Forums across the South Yorkshire Region to share details of my research (example email in Appendix G). Indeed, two parent participants expressed an interest in participating in the research following this initial participant recruitment phase.

As I had intended to speak with three participants, and I was mindful of the participant attrition rate experienced in similar research (e.g. Steels, 2022), I applied for an Ethical Amendment to expand my participant pool and recruitment approach. The amendment widened the geographical coverage to England. As recent research indicated "significant variation" in AP between the four UK nations (Power et al., 2024), and the SEND and AP Improvement Plan applies only to England, I restricted the inclusion criteria to England.

Following reflection on my research parameters, I also decided to include both full-time and part-time AP placements. This was in keeping with a current DfE (2024b) consultation on the use of Unregistered AP. I hoped that including both full and part-time AP placements would broaden the potential participant pool and make the recruitment of three participants possible within the timeframe for this doctoral thesis. Following this, I made contact via email with APs across the country, as well as with practitioners (e.g., Educational Psychologists) and again, asked for the research poster to be shared with potential participants. I utilised personal connections (e.g. Trainee EP colleagues based in different LAs) and search engine results to gain contact details of potential link contacts.

In total, three participants expressed an interest in this research. All had been sent my research poster via their child's AP and contacted me via my email address. I introduced myself by email, and sent each participant the information sheet (Appendix F) and consent form (Appendix H). Within the email body, I clarified the participant inclusion criteria. At this point, it became apparent that one of the participants who had expressed interest did not meet the criteria, due to their child continuing to attend an AP, with no upcoming plans for reintegration into primary school. My reflections on this are included in Reflection Box 4.2 (Appendix A). The remaining 2 participants met the criteria, due to their child currently attending a mainstream primary school following a placement at an AP. I continued attempting to recruit a third participant until December 2024, via the channels of communication earlier discussed. This timescale was agreed during supervision and was

restricted by the time-limited nature of this doctorate research. Unfortunately, I was unable to recruit a third participant within this timeframe.

Further details of the participants in this research are included in Table 1.

Table 1:

Parent and Reintegrated Pupil's information

Parent Pseudonym	Child Pseudonym	Approximate placement duration	Placement structure	Year group at the point of reintegration into mainstream
Christine	Ben	2 terms	Full-time	3
Sally	Jack	1 term	Full-time	5

Recruiting via stakeholders (EPs, parent carer forums) may have meant that some parents who met the inclusion may have not received details of the research. Unfortunately, due to the practical constraints of this research (i.e., timeframe, researcher access to participants, ethical considerations), I needed to adopt a practical approach to recruitment. I recognise that this could be considered a critique of the current research.

4.3 Interviews

Audio-recorded narrative interviews (Anderson & Kirkpatrick, 2016) were used as a method to facilitate participant storytelling about their experiences of their child's educational journey. In keeping with ethical approval, participants were given the choice to meet online, via video call, or in-person, at a Local Authority office. Throughout this research, it has felt important to empower participants to make decisions. The offering of both online and in-person interviews was informed by research, which has indicated that phone interviews are a viable alternative to face-to-face methods (Holt, 2010), especially considering that participants could be geographically widespread.

Elliott (2005) argues that interviews are more than just a method for collecting data; they serve as a platform for data creation. This aligns with my stance of social constructionism, which posits that knowledge is actively constructed through language and social interactions (Burr, 2015). A narrative approach to interviewing places participants at the forefront of the

research process, allowing them to “privilege the meanings that they assign to their own stories” (Anderson & Kirkpatrick, 2016, p.631). In a narrative interview, participants have the chance to tell their stories while the researcher listens, rather than enforcing a specific agenda through a question-and-answer format (Hollway & Jefferson, 2013; Anderson & Kirkpatrick, 2016), thus granting participants greater control in crafting their narratives (Murray, 2003). Tolman and Head (2021) describe a narrative interview using the Listening Guide as a way of “inviting narratives about experiences that will enable you to answer your question” (p.146). The interview should begin with an invitation to answer a question (Gilligan & Eddy, 2021) and involve the two key facets of the Listening Guide, empathy and curiosity.

Informed by Riessman (2008) and exploring previous thesis utilising narrative interviewing, I opened interviews with a statement that would invite the participant to share their story:

> “Please can you think back to when **your child** started in education. Tell me about their educational journey and your experiences relating to this. We can create a timeline to help you to remember and reflect on this.”

The interview was facilitated by allowing and encouraging participants to share their stories without my interruption (Hollway & Jefferson, 2013). Instead, I engaged in active listening and drew upon conversational practices to facilitate the participant in sharing their narrative. I did this by recycling the initial opening question in numerous ways (Emerson & Frosh, 2009), repeating aspects of what has been said to check my understanding and prompt further conversion (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000), and asking clarifying follow-up questions (Anderson & Kirkpatrick, 2016). Examples of the phrases used are included in Appendix I. In this sense, there was an entwinement between researcher and participant (Camic, 2021), and the interview was co-constructed (Riessman, 2008).

4.4 ‘Life Grid’/ Visual Timelines

I utilised a visual timeline, collaboratively created with participants, to highlight significant moments in their child’s educational journey and aid the interview process. This approach was initially inspired by ‘life grids’ (Wilson et al., 2007) and ‘life history grids’ (Elliott, 2005). Such techniques are prevalent in narrative research, often paired with interviews to evoke personal stories (Wilson et al., 2007). Similar studies, including the work of Jalali and Morgan (2018), have adopted visual methods to encourage children to depict their educational experiences and identify ‘critical moments’.

Constructing a visual and chronological record of life experiences has been deemed beneficial for enhancing participants' discussions. The life grid appears to have aided storytelling by allowing the creation of a visual representation of various life events, followed by reflection on these experiences (Wilson et al., 2007). Elliott (2005) suggests that moving back and forth between different time points triggers participants' memories. O'Connor et al. (2011) noted that life grids were particularly useful when engaging in conversations about emotionally sensitive subjects, as the visual component captivates participants and fosters a more relaxed atmosphere. Use of a visual timeline approach therefore felt appropriate for this research.

Wilson et al. (2007) describe the life grid, which consists of a horizontal line with 'birth' and 'current age' at either end. Underneath, multiple rows reflect different areas of the participants' lives, such as where they live, school/education, and family etc. According to Wilson et al. (2007), during the interview, questions are asked to stimulate discussion around the various prompts.

In preparation for the pilot interview, I adapted the life grid method, as parents would complete the life grid based on their child's educational journey (i.e., not their own life story, as the tool was intended).

After furthering my understanding of narrative approaches (Hollway & Jefferson, 2013; Anderson & Kirkpatrick, 2016, Emerson & Frosh, 2009) and research involving marginalised groups (Aldridge, 2015), I decided to delete all of the prompts on the life grid as I felt they would have steered participants narratives towards different aspects of their lives. In discussing narrative approaches, Parker (2004, p.83) notes a "need to avoid intrusion into painful private material", and Emerson & Frosh (2009) discuss that whilst the interview context empowers the researcher to ask about a particular topic, it should not disempower participants from exercising choice in what they discuss. I decided that I would enter the interviews without any prompts or preconceived structure to the timeline. Instead, I intended to co-construct this alongside the participant during the interview, with information that was willingly shared by them. I hoped that this would have the same effect in terms of facilitating storytelling (Elliott, 2005; O'Connor, 2011), without being intrusive and disempowering the participant, and ensuring coherence with my social constructionist approach. My reflections following the interviews, having utilised the visual timelines, are shared in Reflective Box 4.3 (Appendix A)

4.5 Pilot Phase

I engaged in a pilot phase to practise and reflect on the research methodology, including narrative interviewing and the use of a visual timeline to facilitate the interview. An overview of pilot participant characteristics and feedback is included in Appendix J.

As I had no prior experience of narrative interviews, it felt valuable to engage in the pilot before meeting with a participant who met the inclusion criteria. I share my reflections ahead of this pilot interview in Reflective box 4.4 (Appendix A).

Following each pilot interview, I invited participant feedback and reflected on the interview (Appendix J). The reflections and actions following the first pilot led to a second pilot in order for me to build upon the feedback and to explore an in-person, rather than online, interview.

During the second pilot, I implemented the actions recommended from the first and focused on listening to the participant's account and my non-verbal responses. At a natural pause, I suggested that we could create a visual timeline together. On paper, we recorded keywords and phrases, from birth up until the present. This facilitated the participant's narration and allowed me to wonder about particular points in the timeline.

In keeping with the ethics application, the first interview with a participant who met the inclusion criteria was also classed as a Pilot interview. Ahead of this, I informed the participant that there would be an opportunity for feedback and that, depending on this and my own reflection, the interview may or may not be included in the analysis for this research. It was agreed with the participant that this interview could be used in the analysis.

4.6 Transcription

All interviews were recorded and stored in accordance with the University of Sheffield policy, using the approved University Drive (U:Drive). It was important to remove any identifiable information (e.g. names) from the transcripts, to support the anonymity of the participants and to ensure I was compliant with the ethical approval for the research.

Before transcribing the interviews, I familiarised myself with the role of transcription in the narrative research process and different conventions to support transcription. Kvale and Brinkmann (2015) note that transcription acts as a translation from one mode of discourse (oral) to another mode of discourse (written), as such, it involves the transformation of the narrative. During the transcription process, the researcher engages in an interpretative

process of deciding which features of speech to include, and which to exclude (Riessman, 2008). Sorsoli and Tolman (2008) explain that a Listening Guide analysis goes beyond listening for content (i.e., what is told), to exploring how the content is communicated (i.e., the telling). For example, silences should be heard which may be signified by pauses, changes to tone, pitch, discursive patterns, and other non-verbal cues, which could all signify the telling (Tolman & Head, 2021). Transcription, therefore, can be understood as part of the analytic process (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015).

I explored a range of transcription notations (e.g. by Riessman, 2008; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). Kvale and Brinkmann (2015) note that narrative interview transcripts should be accessible to the reader, which fits with the quality principle of ensuring transparency (Cena et al., 2024), so that the reader can see that any interpretations are rooted in the data (Emerson & Frosh, 2009).

I transcribed the interviews by hand and used conventions based upon reflection of the above readings (Table 2).

Table 2

Transcription Conventions

Symbol	Description
(.)	Pause (shorter than a second)
(2)	Pause (length in number of seconds)
[gestures]	Description of a non-verbal event
(inaudible)	Unable to determine speech

4.7 Narrative Analysis: The 'Listening Guide'

The Listening Guide is a voice-centred, relational approach to narrative research (Brown & Gilligan, 1993). Voice is understood as being a physical, embodied entity through which we can communicate our inner thoughts and feelings (Sorsoli & Tolman, 2008). Voice is inherently relational; it changes depending on whether we are heard or unheard, and how the listener responds (Brown & Gilligan, 1993). In a Listening Guide analysis of an audio-

recorded interview, through multiple listenings the researcher can attune to a multiplicity of voices which may not be conscious to the speaker (Sorsoli & Tolman, 2008).

I actively engaged in the Listening Guide literature before selecting it as the method of analysis (e.g. Brown & Gilligan, 1993; Gilligan et al., 2003; Gilligan & Eddy, 2021; Tolman & Head, 2021; Woodcock, 2016; Hutton & Lystor, 2021; Doucet & Mauthner, 2008; McKenzie et al., 2021), to ensure that it was coherent with my research questions and philosophy. Across authors, there is a consensus that the researcher is required to be actively involved in the stages of the analysis (known as 'listenings'), which follow a basic frame, rather than following prescriptive steps (e.g. Woodcock, 2016, Gilligan et al., 2003). Based upon my critical reflection on literature discussing the Listening Guide process, I have decided to follow an assimilation of these steps as outlined by several authors, as opposed to basing my analysis on just one author's interpretation and explanation of the process. This aligns with Gilligan et al. (2011)'s intentions for the Listening Guide, as they describe that it is at the discretion of the researcher to make decisions on how to utilise each step of the analysis, based upon the narratives shared and to answer their research question. I have followed the initial three stages outlined Gilligan et al (2003), with the additional consideration of a later stage discussed by Hutton and Lystor (2021) which involves listening for broader political, social and cultural structures, before the widely agreed upon final stage of composing an analysis (e.g. Hutton & Lystor, 2021; Gilligan et al., 2003; McKenzie et al., 2021).

Whilst it is not necessary to adhere to a strict structure, I have detailed my process to support the reader in understanding my decision-making and interpretations at every stage, to ensure that I have adhered to the quality principle of transparency (Cena et al., 2024).

4.7.1 Stage One: "Listening for the plot" (Gilligan et al., 2003; Hutton & Lystor, 2021).

Gilligan et al. (2003) explain that the first stage involves two key components.
Firstly, to listen to the plot, to get a sense of what is happening, who the main characters are, the order of events, and so on (Gilligan et al, 2003; McKenzie et al., 2021; Brown & Gilligan, 1993). Additionally, to listen to any recurring words, metaphors, contradictions, absences, emotional resonance, and silences (Woodcock, 2016; Brown & Gilligan, 1993).

Secondly, to follow the fundamental principle of reflexivity (Gilligan et al., 2006) by attuning to my own responses to the listening (Gilligan et al., 2003) in terms of my social location in relation to the speaker, and my emotional responses to what is said (Gilligan et al., 2003; Gilligan et al., 2006; McKenzie et al., 2021).

Woodcock (2016, p.8) states that the Listening Guide enables researchers to take "creative liberties". I wanted to follow this step, and also ensure that I could invite reflections from the participants on the analysis. For each participant, I created a graphic representation to summarise a description of their narrative, staying close to what was said during the interview and the visual timeline constructed during the interview (Appendix K). I kept track of my reflexive notes in a column alongside the transcript, as well as highlighting in blue keywords or phrases that felt poignant (Appendix L).

4.7.2 Stage two: Listening for the voice of 'I' (Gilligan et al., 2003; Hutton & Lystor, 2021), 'they' (Woodcock, 2016), and 'we' (McKenzie et al., 2021).

In this second stage, the spotlight is put on the voice of the self (McKenzie et al., 2021) by tracing the use of 'I' throughout the transcript and stripping out the wider context. The 'I phrases' included the subject, the verb, and any accompanying important words (Gilligan et al., 2003), and were listed in order of appearance (Gilligan et al., 2017). In doing so, I was able to explore patterns of associative logic that flowed through participants' narratives, beneath the structured sentences (Gilligan et al., 2015). The intention of this stage was to discover what may be going on beneath the story (Gilligan & Eddy, 2021), taking into account the psyche's ability to push knowledge out of consciousness.

I tracked the 'I' through the reading transcripts whilst listening to the interviews, highlighting the occurrence of these in yellow. Sorsoli and Tolman (2008) note that participants may indirectly refer to themselves through a collective 'you', therefore, at points, 'you' was also considered to represent the self-voice. I then arranged these statements into separate lines and stanzas, using breaks when I felt that there was a change in direction (Gilligan et al., 2017).

Whilst tracking the I's in Christine's account, I noticed an interesting contrast between how she talked about herself (through the voice of 'I'), and how she spoke of herself in relation to others (through the voice of 'they', 'you', and a collective 'we'). Woodcock (2016) notes that the interplay of these voices can be meaningful, therefore, this stage of the analysis can be expanded to track both the voice of the self and the other. Similarly, McKenzie et al. (2021) explore the self-voice through the use of plural pronouns. I, therefore, tracked each of these voices throughout the transcripts. This is in keeping with the flexible and iterative nature of narrative research (Riessman, 2008), in adapting my process as the study unfolded in response to participant narratives.

In order for the associative logic of the self-voice to continue to be noticed in the forefront, I separated the self-voice and the voice of the other (i.e., we, they, you) into columns. This way, the interactions between the way participants talk of themselves and themselves in relation to others could also be noticed (Woodcock, 2016), whilst enabling the spotlight to remain on the voice of the 'I'. To support the reader's understanding, and to ensure transparency, I have included an extract of this aspect of the analysis in Appendix M.

4.7.3 Stage three: Listening for Contrapuntal Voices (Gilligan et al., 2003)

Prior to starting the third stage, it is advised that the research question is revisited (Tolman & Head, 2021; Gilligan et al., 2006).

The Listening Guide as an analysis takes into account that a person expresses his or her experience in a multiplicity of voices or ways, and this stage of the analysis focuses on listening to identify the different voices that speak to the research question (Gilligan et al., 2006). Gilligan and Eddy (2021) explain that these different voices are considered 'contrapuntal', as they may interact with one and other in dissonance or harmony, giving rise to the polyphonic (multi-layered) nature of voice. Reflective box 4.5 (Appendix A) explains my journey to familiarise myself with the terms contrapuntal and polyphonic that are used to describe the nature of voice (Gilligan et al., 2021).

At least two contrapuntal voices should be listened for (Gilligan et al., 2006). In keeping with my ontological position, I did not set out to find 'true' voices, instead, I recognised my role in the interpretation of the interview data, and that multiple alternative voices may have been identified (Tolman & Head, 2021). Once a voice had been identified, it was traced through the interview recording and highlighted in the transcript, to explore how the voice interacted with the voice of self ('I') and any other voices (Gilligan et al., 2006).

My critical reflection upon reading the literature had led me to believe that the participant group may have been marginalised and silenced, therefore, it was significant to recognise that their stories may be filtered through dominant societal and cultural discourses.
A methodology that recognises the polyphonic nature of voice, that participant stories are composed of multiple, sometimes conflicting voices, was important. An analytical approach that moved beyond the content of what was 'told' to explore the nuances of the 'telling' allowed for deeper engagement with the complexities of their narratives.

4.7.4 Stage Four and Five: Listening for broader political, social and cultural structures (Hutton & Lystor, 2021) and Composing an analysis (Gilligan et al., 2003)

This final stage of the analysis intends to situate participant narratives within broader social, cultural and political contexts (Hutton & Lystor, 2021). Whilst this aspect of the analysis is not included in other cited Listening Guide processes (e.g. Gilligan et al., 2003), following the literature review it felt important to understand AP and reintegration through wider ecological systems (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). During this stage, I paid attention to wider socio-cultural and political systems that were relevant to participant narratives, and highlighted these in green.

The final stage also involves synthesising all that has been learnt in relation to the research question through the previous stages and composing a written analysis (Gilligan et al., 2003). Kim (2016) explains that there are two goals in composing a narrative analysis. Firstly, to develop an effective interpretation to understand the phenomenon under study. Through the interpretative process of the Listening Guide, I felt I had developed this, as evidenced through all of the analysis's stages noted in the annotated transcripts (Appendix L.1 and L.2).

Secondly, to facilitate an understanding of the phenomenon under study for the reader (Kim, 2016). To do so, I have engaged in a process of narrative smoothing, to ensure that the presented participant stories were coherent and engaging for the reader (Kim, 2016). Narrative smoothing involves constructing participant's stories in a way that is coherent so that they are understandable and interesting to the reader (Coley et al., 2024). I was mindful of ensuring that the narratives presented represented a faithful account of what had been shared by participants (Spence, 1986, as cited in, Kim, 2016). As such, I have shared quotes and transcripts with the reader, alongside my narrative interpretation.

Chapter 5 of this thesis therefore provides a narrative synthesis of each participant's interview as interpreted through the Listening Guide; describing the plot, the voices of self (I), collective voice (we) and other (you, they), exploring the polyphonic nature of voice through the presence of contrapuntal voices, and situating narratives within wider systems, whilst being reflexive throughout.

4.8 'Member Reflections'

Inviting participant's views on the research interpretation is encouraged to support the quality principle of sensitivity to context (Yardley, 2000), and can support trust in the research (Stahl

& King, 2020). Multiple meetings can also support a longer-term relationship between the participant and researcher, which is recommended for relational methodologies (Gilligan & Eddy, 2021). One such way of facilitating this is through ‘member checks’, in which the researcher shares their analysis with participants and invites their opinions (Stahl & King, 2020). I have implemented ‘member reflections’ (Yardley, 2000), which are coherent with my relativist ontology, as this embraces that there are multiple truths and realities rather than holding a single participant’s perspective at a particular point in time as a definitive truth. Riessman (2008) rejects the idea that the participant’s truths would be valued over the interpretations of the researcher, instead, encouraging the researcher to take responsibility for the analysis.

Additionally, empowering participants has been a central thread throughout this research. As such, I felt it was important to offer the participants the opportunity to read my interpretation of their interview before anyone else.

In my research poster (Appendix C), I had explained the process of arranging an interview, which would be later followed by an optional ‘check-in’ to share my analysis. At the end of the interviews, I reminded participants that I would regain contact with them to share this, and would offer the opportunity to meet again. I positioned this as ‘optional’ as I respected the time already committed by participants to this research, and I acknowledged that participants may not wish to continue reflecting upon potentially emotionally distressing themes that had been discussed during their interviews.

Following my analysis, I created ‘member reflections’ summaries of the interviews, including a summary of the methodology and each of the stages of the Listening Guide analysis which aimed to be accessible to the readers (Appendix N). I shared these via email with participants, and invited them to meet me again, to discuss the stages of the analysis and to invite their reflections.

Chapter 5: Analysis

5.1 Chapter Overview

In this chapter, I will my present my in-depth narrative analysis for each participant, as interpreted through the Listening Guide. I will introduce participants with a narrative synopsis to give an insight into their lives and experiences in relation to AP. I will then discuss key narratives shared by Christine and Sally during their interviews. Quotes provide a heading for each narrative that will be discussed, with line numbers that correspond to transcripts in the Appendices (Appendix O and P). For example, a quote followed by (O, 32), represents that this can be located in the transcript in Appendix O, line number 32.

To note, throughout the analysis and discussion chapters, I have used the term 'home school' to refer to Christine and Sally's children's initial schools (i.e., Jack's first primary school and Ben's infant school), and 'current school' to denote the schools that Ben and Jack are presently attending (i.e., Jack's second primary school and Ben's junior school). This has been informed by 'home school' being the terminology used in recently published Government guidance on AP to represent the school that made the AP referral (DfE, 2024a), as well as to support anonymity, and for ease of reading.

5.2 Sally's story

5.2.1 Narrative synopsis

Sally is the mother of two children, Jack and Heidi. When Jack was in year 5, he attended an AP placement. He is currently in Year 6 at a mainstream primary school.

When Jack was 6 years old (in Year 1 at school), Sally's husband (Jack's Dad) was diagnosed with a brain tumour. Nine months later, he sadly died. During this time, the Covid-19 pandemic and associated lockdowns were occurring, meaning Sally was homeschooling her children whilst caring for her husband in the family home.

Sally is an experienced education practitioner, having worked previously as a maths teacher and currently as a 1:1 in a secondary school.

She talked through Jack's early experiences in education leading up to the present day. There were a number of staffing changes whilst Jack was at primary school, including his class teachers, the Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCo) and the head teacher.

During Jack's time at Primary school, Jack was seen by an EP and Speech and Language Therapist. Sally submitted a parental request for an Education Health and Care (EHC) Needs Assessment, although, this was not agreed to assess. Following multiple referrals into an 'Inclusion Pathway' made by his home school, Jack was approved for a placement at an AP. Following this, Jack returned to his home school in Year 5. Sally then sought an alternative primary school for Jack and at present, he is in Year 6 at his current school.

Sally's interview was facilitated in-person, in a private room at a Local Authority office. The interview lasted approximately 1 hour and 10 minutes. I share a reflection on how this interview felt in reflective box 5.1 (Appendix A).

I followed the stages of the Listening Guide and heard four contrapuntal voices: a knowing voice, a frustrated voice, a voice of strength, and an unheard voice. I have constructed key narratives from Sally's interview, and will discuss these below.

5.2.2 "Jump through some more hoops" (O, 264)

Sally discussed barriers to accessing services and support for her son, Jack, at various points throughout her narrative. I heard her frustrated voice when she shared, "*I can't do it. I can't do the referral. That's where it's so frustrating because, as a parent, you're like, why can't I? Do it. I can see what the needs are.*" (O, 260-262). Sally talked in a voice of knowing as Jack's Mum, explaining that she has identified what he needs. I can sense that this must feel like an overwhelming barrier, as a parent, who is also a teacher, to be reliant on Jack's school to complete a referral to access support, when she felt able to do so.

Accessing services felt like a process of 'jumping through hoops' in order to access support, and I sensed that these 'hoops' didn't feel meaningful in contributing to a shared understanding of Jack's needs, or in accessing further support. Sally shared needing to wait for educational psychology involvement due to a change in the practitioner. When the EP met Jack, Sally shared that, "*She was like, ooh 'I can see he's an anxious child', I can see, y'know, she could see traits in him, but then we start to jump through some more hoops.*" (O, 263-264). Sally seemed disappointed in the EP's involvement, and I wonder what she was hoping for, or expecting from the EP, and to what extent the EP role had been discussed with Sally prior to the involvement. I acknowledge my role in the interpretation and recognise that my experience as a trainee EP may have influenced my thinking around this narrative. She explained that after then, Jack "*had to see Speech and Language in case it was a speech and language problem. But he, he's got a fantastic vocabulary*."(O, 264-266). Again, I hear frustration and expertise in Sally's voice; her intuition and expertise tells her that Jack

doesn't have a language barrier, although, she followed the process as a means to access support.

The below voice poem talks to Sally's experiences in applying for support for Jack and the barriers she experienced. It brings to the forefront her knowing voice that is actively seeking action, and the power to delay this being held by the voice of 'they', in this instance, home school staff. I have reflected on how I have chosen to lay out this poem in Reflective Box 5.2 (Appendix A).

I think
I am aware
I'm like, "Well can we not?"

"[Well no,] We've got to jump
through this hoop'

"Can we?"

"I'm just gonna…"
"[Okay, Yes.] I will
I will apply"

We've still not
We've still not
We're still waiting

They wouldn't

[So] I've applied

We didn't get

I've not got
I only have

(O, 273-285)

In the first half of this poem, Sally talked in relation to making an application for Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) for Jack. Whilst she wanted to initiate this process, school hold the power to halt this, deciding to "*observe*" Jack for "*a bit longer*".

There is a shift when they eventually agree to the referral, however, Sally explained that the assessment appointment was “months ago”, and emphasised that the “waiting” is not over yet, as she still hadn’t received any feedback regarding a diagnosis. I sensed frustration, both towards the delayed processes, and to the school staff who lacked knowledge about the processes and seemed reluctant to submit referrals. Sally shared that school staff member was of the understanding that due to Covid, there was no longer a waiting list for CAMHS. Sally needed to explain, “*No there were huge waiting lists for CAMHS because [emphasis] of Covid*” (O, 277-278). Again, I hear a voice of frustration and knowing voice in harmony as Sally talks about these experiences.

In the second half of this poem, Sally talks about making an EHC assessment request. Similarly, she explained that school “*wouldn’t*” complete the application. This process accepts parental requests, which she acted upon by making a parental application. However, I sensed powerlessness as she explained that her application wasn’t accepted due to not having all of the “evidence” and only having the “home side” (O, 284-285). This emphasised Sally’s experience of jumping through hoops laid out by systems in order to access support, which may place less value on parental voice.

Later on in Sally’s interview, she told a story of a particularly emotionally intense time during his time at the home school when Jack “*threatened to kill himself*” (O, 528). Sally immediately acted upon the advice of school, and took action by ringing the GP, who advised her to call CAMHS. Upon talking to CAMHS, Sally was informed that a referral would need to be made by the school, and could not be made via her. In the below voice poem, Sally repeats a pattern of ‘ring’, rang’; emphasising her determination to speak with someone who could support, but her being passed between services on the phone. Sally directly addressed school staff, through the use of ‘you’. I felt that this highlighted her frustration directed towards them, and their absence of action, in contrast to her multiple attempts to follow advice to seek support for her son.

I’d got to
I’ll ring

I rang
I ring
I rang

You told me to

I spoke to

You've done nothing
You can see
You've done nothing

(O, 527-541)

5.2.3 "I raised it again" (O, 16)

Throughout Sally's narrative, she reflected an experience of being unheard, in her attempts to liaise with school staff and for others' to recognise her concerns regarding her son's development. Early in the narrative, Sally talked about when Jack was in private nursery and she communicated that she felt that there was "*something not quite right*" (O, 13), but that staff "*didn't seem concerned*" (O, 13-14). Sally went on to say that she "r*aised it again… I'm concerned that there's something*" (O, 14-15), but that "*Everybody were like, "yeah yeah yeah whatever*"" (O, 15). I sensed that her concerns had been dismissed by those she was speaking to, as explored in the below voice poem:

I felt like

I raised it

They didn't seem

I raised it again
I'm like, "I'm- I'm concerned"

I raised it again

I don't know

(O, 12-19)

The repetition of 'raised it' perhaps reflects this sense of Sally feeling that her voice holds no power in these interactions. I wonder whether the continued dismissal of Sally's attempts to raise her concerns, led to self-doubt; the poem ends with Sally stating, "I don't know".

However, there was a shift, when Jack started in reception, Sally "*raised it again*" with the teacher (O, 16), who herself had a son with Autism. I sensed that these potentially shared experiences (both as teachers and as parents) supported a connection between the teacher

and Sally, and perhaps she, for the first time, felt her “concerns” were heard. However, unfortunately, this teacher left the school with her son. Sally attributed this to a change in head teacher. My reflections on how Sally may have been feeling at this point are discussed in Reflective Box 5.3 (Appendix A).

When Jack returned to school in year one following the death of his Dad and the first Covid lockdown, Sally shared that he was “*really struggling*” (O, 35). She explained that the school staff “*put it down to bereavement*” (O, 35-36), however, she disagreed with this. I hear a frustrated voice when Sally shared, “*I'm like, no, I think this would have happened anyway*” (O, 36), and she went on to say, “*I have said from the beginning, I thought that Jack was dyspraxic with sensory processing, but as he's got older, I think he's probably more ADHD*” (O, 38-39). Sally made several attempts to give voice to her understanding of Jack’s needs, but these were not received, and her voice remained unheard. Instead, school privileged their own sense making, that Jack’s needs had developed in response to the death of his father.

Sally also talked about times when she felt that Jack had not been listened to by home school staff. She shared, “*Whenever he was trying to explain about how much he missed his dad, school would be like, “well other children miss their parents’, other children this, other children that*” (O, 52-54). She also talked about how Jack had not been seen, “*They’d always be like, “nothing happened” but it did. It did happen, you just don't see those things that did happen*.” (O, 143-144). Despite home school staff sharing that they held the view that his needs related to bereavement, there was an absence of empathy when he sought connection with them to talk about missing his Dad. This feels uncomfortable as the listener, and I can imagine, felt painful for Sally.

Towards the end of Jack’s time at the home school, Sally made attempts to liaise with a Governor. I wonder if Sally felt the Governor held a position of greater power and authority, relative to the school practitioners whom she had felt dismissed by. Nevertheless, Sally shared that the Governor also failed to respond to her communication: “*I can't like get through to them….I have written to the governor, I sent an email to the governor, but he's not responded, either. And now just like, I’ll wash my hands of that school*”. (O, 611-613) I sense that after a long battle of trying to be heard and seen, Sally has decided to dissociate herself from the school. She has since removed her son from this school.

5.2.4 "I was out of my comfort zone" (O, 397-398)

Sally speaks in a knowing voice about how she would have approached situations during Jack's time at his home school, as a teacher. She shared,

> "*I've tried to explain to the school that, y'know, little things done differently, don't give the sheet out til you want him to start, erm would make a huge difference. But, those things were not getting done. And that's where the problems lie.*" (O, 122-124).

I can hear an interplay of a frustrated, knowing, experienced, and unheard voice here. Sally is an experienced teacher and talks about her work supporting pupils with a wide range of needs. I sensed that Sally put herself in a position of expertise relative to the staff supporting Jack. Sally tried to share her expertise, but this was not acted on, and Sally is directive and clear in her view that the absence of their action was the 'problem'.

Sally asserted her experience to me, the listener, when she said, "*I've been in education longer than the head teacher and possibly the SENCo at the time… I have taught, because I'm secondary, children with a host of additional needs.*" (O, 238-240). I hear that she is a competent and confident practitioner, with wide ranging experiences of supporting young people. I share my reflections on this in relation to my own experiences as a trainee practitioner in Reflective Box 5.4 (Appendix A).

Nevertheless, Sally contrasted her role as an experienced teacher in school with her role as a mother to Jack at home:

> "*If there's a child in my classroom and they're struggling, you go, 'make your way to (1) y'know, and they'll assist'. Whereas (1) in (1) I felt like I don't know I was I think I was out of my comfort zone really because what do you do at home? When you've got nobody to pass him to 'there you go' [laughs] go to that space and those people will deal with you and it's not like that at home. It's like I'm the person.*" (O, 396-400)

I sense two things here. Firstly, the systems of support available in a school, with different practitioners feeling competent in different skill sets (e.g. academic versus pastoral support). At home, and since the loss of her husband, I wonder if Sally feels alone or isolated in supporting Jack (this is further explored in the below voice poem). Secondly, a feeling of uncertainty about her skillset to support Jack, in contrast to her confidence in her competence as a practitioner in supporting classes of children. There is a vulnerability in Sally's voice which I feel can be interpreted in the following voice poem.

I felt
I don't know
I was
I think
I was out of my comfort zone

[What do] you do at home?
You've got nobody

I'm the person

We're getting there

I'm learning

(O, 397-403)

The use of 'you' distances Sally here, but she is referring to herself within the collective 'you'. I wonder if it was too painful for Sally to speak in the first person here; 'I've got nobody' was perhaps unsayable. There is a shift in the voice poem when Sally suddenly returns to an optimistic stance through the voice of "we". I hear the strength and determination as she speaks, and I wonder whether she often allows herself time to expose such vulnerability

5.2.5 "They pushed him and pushed him and pushed him out" (O, 573)

Throughout her interview, Sally referred to the various forms of exclusion that Jack experienced during his time at the home school. She talked about this in relation to him not being permitted to go on school trips with his peers, for example, "*His old school were like, 'No he can't go on residential, he can't go on trips. Can't do this. Can't do tha*t'" (O, 481-482). This is explored further in the following voice poem.

I'm like

They wouldn't let
They wouldn't let
They've either excluded

(O, 483-485)

There is an overwhelming negativity from the voice of they, Sally voicing the perspectives of home school staff. The repetitions of “wouldn’t let” highlight the number of times that Jack was socially excluded, based upon decisions made by school staff.

Sally explained her understanding of the vicious cycle of events that were unfolding in school, in her knowing voice as a practitioner and as Jack’s Mum:

> “*You try to push him in a room and he's not ready to go, he’s not calm yet (.) and then when he's fighting against that, he's then getting excluded because he's hurt staff and that's where we kept getting to well staff have been hurt. Children have been hurt. Well yeah because you've tried to keep him in a space*.” (O, 592-595)

In Sally’s description of these events unfolding, it is apparent that she attributes the outcome of children being hurt to the decision made by school staff to keep Jack in a space, rather than directly resulting from Jack. She tells a similar story, of when the headteacher would “*try and get him in her office and then she’d end up getting hurt*”, which was likened by Sally to, “*when you’re trying to get a wounded cat in a corner and you just end up being scratched*”. (O, 586-588).

Sally talked about the impact of the social exclusion on Jack, “*I felt like he was getting more and more ostracized at school… they were saying like Jack’s hurt his friends and children are scared of him” (O, 570-571).* Sally felt that this was not true, due to Jack’s “f*riends being so pleased to see him*” (O, 572). This makes me wonder about the purpose of the school staff saying this to Sally, and whether they themselves believed it was true, or whether there was another reason for the school staff communicating this to Sally.

Sally felt that “*they pushed him and pushed him and pushed him out*” (O, 573) through various forms of social and educational exclusion. Ultimately, this resulted in suspensions and a part timetable, “*It all just fell apart from Easter. Urm they excluded him, they excluded him for seven days without any alternative provision and then they put on a part-timetable without my permission.*” (O, 64-66). Again, I can sense the injustice that Sally feels, as she knows that the school’s use of the exclusion and reduced timetable have been illegitimate. Sally’s role as an experienced practitioner perhaps empowered her with knowledge and connections to challenge this.

The following voice poem summarises Sally’s sense making of their experiences of exclusion. At the start of the poem, I feel 'they' (home school staff) hold power, in making decisions, (not) wanting and pushing. However, a spark of resolution occurs when Sally

reflects this back to the school, directly addressing them. She reclaims decision-making power and agency, in taking joint action with her son: "We'll go".

They'd decided
They didn't want
They pushed

I'm gonna

They have really
pushed

[if] you don't want

We don't want you
We'll go

(O, 572-576)

5.2.6 "I did try and fight it" (O, 46-47)

Sally explained that several referrals to a panel were required before Jack secured a placement at an AP. Once this was offered, she shared her feelings towards the placement:

> "*I did try and fight it 'cause I was like (2) I don't know. I was- I was- concerned that he wouldn't- that he'd go there for this for this 12 week block and then he'd love it there probably and then he wouldn't like coming back to school and I was concerned about all the changes because I felt like he'd had enough change."* (O, 46-49).

I hear the hesitation in Sally's voice as she pauses to reflect and stutters over her words, suggesting that she is hesitant about what to say or that she is trying to find the right words during the interview. I wonder if this is because looking back, her views on the AP have changed dramatically, and it might feel uncomfortable to reflect on this. She later shared, "*Actually the [AP name] was the best thing that could have happened to Jack*" (O, 50).

Sally's thoughts and feelings in relation to seeking the AP placement for Jack are discussed in the following voice poem.

They started the process

I didn't like
I didn't think
I felt
I felt he needed

I was really concerned

(O, 331-335)

In Sally's view, she recognised the importance of friendships and was concerned that a placement away from his school would impact these. Sally facilitated Jack in attending the local youth club to ensure that he maintained a sense of connectedness to his school cohort. Without Sally's proactive involvement, I wonder whether home school staff would have facilitated these opportunities for Jack to experience ongoing contact with his classmates.

5.2.7 "We've seen what works for him" (O, 379)

During the interview, Sally talked about her and Jack's experiences during the AP placement, "*They learnt to understand Jack…they would listen to him and respond to what he said*" (O, 51-52). In contrast to previous experiences, where 'they' was positioned as 'pushing' or 'excluding', during the AP placement, 'they' took on a role of understanding, listening and responding. This role of 'they' is apparent during the following voice poem, during which there is a distinct absence of Sally's self-voice. I wonder if this indicated that Sally did not feel that she needed to be involved during Jack's time at the AP.

They went
They've done
They just
They went
They did
They went
They did
They're always doing something

(O, 506-510)

There is a contrast between all that Jack did and went to with the AP, than with his home school, "*He'd go on so many trips in the 12 weeks he were there compared to how many trips he's been on at his other place*" (O, 497-498).

Sally shared that Jack learned about his emotions during the placement, and that this has supported both Jack's and her understanding of his experiences, "H*e's learnt about the three parts of his brain and he can tell you now, like this bit in my brain does this*." (O, 389-399) This psychoeducation had been helpful for Jack, and in turn, for Sally too "*He he has seen what works for him and we've seen what works for him*" (O, 378-379).

Sally also talked about the value of communication during the AP placement, who used an app-based system to enable two-way communication between home and AP practitioners. Sally shared that she could pass on information about 'meltdowns', and then "*the next day they would address it with Jack and he would talk to them because they're a neutral body.*" (O, 382-383).

Summarising how she had experienced the AP placement, Sally shared,

> *"If he'd not gone there, I'd of been stuck, I wouldn't of had a about a clue who to turn to when things really did go wrong. Because I've got them to turn to and their advice and they, yanno signposted me it's been absolutely brilliant and I can't fault them.*" (O, 151-153).

Sally narrated positive experiences of the AP placement, attributing this to the reciprocal communication between her and the AP practitioners, the focus on supporting Jack to understand his emotional experiences, and enabling his social inclusion.

5.2.8 "We've made it work" (O, 349)

During the AP placement, Sally needed to "*juggle*" childcare for her daughter, working, and dropping Jack off and picking him up from the AP, which was located outside of their local community. Sally's Mum was able to support with transporting Jack, "*my mum had had to bring him, erm but they did start that little bit later.*" (O, 345). Although the adjusted start time helped, this spoke to the impact of an out of area placement on the family, and the reliance on family support. Sally reflected, "*It's worked in the end, we've made it work and because we've made it work Jack has he has absolutely loved it (2) and he has worked out what works for him, he is getting better*" (O, 350-351). I am glad that Sally acknowledged her role and determination in 'making it work' in the outcome of Jack having "*absolutely loved it*".

5.2.9 "It all went pear shaped" (O, 449)

When Jack's AP placement ended, he returned to the home school. Sally shared, "*He did settle back into school quite quickly because things had not changed that much.*" (O, 342-343). I imagine that this felt conflicting, as on the one hand, a lack of change may support Jack to reintegrate due to the familiarity, however, if not much had changed, it could indicate that school viewed Jack as being the site of 'change' during the AP, rather than school also needing to implement changes.

Sally shared that during the initial transition period, staff from the AP visited Jack, and the SENCo remained consistent. However, once the SENCo left and the visits stopped, "*It all went pear shaped*" (O, 449). Sally doubted whether the school staff continued to ask the AP for support, as she maintained her own communication with them. Sally found herself in the middle of the AP and home school staff, who were not communicating with each other. She questions whom she believes; however, the statements that follow in the voice poem below indicate a strong sense of whom she aligns with:

They were like, "we've not heard"
School were like, "We've contacted the AP and we've not heard"

[who do] you believe?

I'm thinking
I contact them
I went

You can leave a message

They'll get back to you

They were always there for me

I would suspect

They would

M, 450-455

In a pivotal point during Sally's story, she talked about an online meeting, attended by her, a SENDIASS (impartial SEN advice service) representative, practitioners from the AP and Head and Deputy Head of the home school:

> "*The head and the deputy head had heard one bit and went off having a conversation over here and didn't listen to the rest. I felt like and that was when I was like, yeah, I think he needs to move" (O, 463-465).*

In keeping with Sally's earlier hesitance about moving Jack away from his friends and familiar surroundings for the AP placement, she shared that she, "*really didn't want to move him" (O, 466).* I sensed the conflict for Sally in terms of doing what she felt was best for Jack, and the immense responsibility of being a parent in making this decision.

Sally found alliances in her relationships with the practitioners from the AP. When Jack was excluded from the home school, she shared the exclusion letter with the AP staff. In doing so, this affirmed Sally's view that the school were not doing enough to support Jack, and this helped her decision-making to change Jack's school. Sally recounted the feedback from the AP upon Jack's exclusion: "*They were like, but there's so many missed opportunities. Why didn't they put something in place there, or there, or there? And it's like (1) I don't know. I don't know why*" (O, 595-596)
Voices of frustration and knowing are heard in the following segment of Sally's narrative, during which she speaks to the missed opportunities and formal exclusion at the home school:

> "*It just got to the point where it was just like (.) seriously? And like when they excluded him for his seven days (.) because of their missed opportunities and then put nothing in place after five days. It's like but you're not allowed to do that. And then put him on a part time table without my permission, but you're not allowed to do that.*" (O, 605-608)

At one point, Sally tried to be listened to and to educate the staff at the home school through her sharing of theory, "*I like (.) y'know sent them the hierarchy needs. I'm like (.) the fundamentals of teaching. I think you've forgotten them here. Here you go. Maslow's hierarchy of needs if you're not doing der der der, you're not gonna get to there." (O, 609-701)*. After numerous attempts to find solutions, often led by Sally in her sharing her expertise, there was a breakdown in the his placement at the home school.

5.2.10 "They're making a box that fits Jack" (O, 106-107)

After Jack's reintegration into his home school following the AP placement, Sally began to explore alternative primary schools. The AP belonged to an academy trust with a number of local schools, of which Jack's current school is one. In keeping with earlier narratives, a sense of connectedness and relationships was important for Sally. She shared that during a visit to the prospective setting, "O*ne of the TAs that had been up at the AP was like, 'Oh hello Jack, it's lovely to see you'*." (O, 471- 472) and "*They're like, 'Ooh I've heard how good you are' and 'I've heard that you're this and you're that and the other'. Yanno so it was so positive for him to for them to say, 'Ooh we've heard good stuff'" (O, 478-479).* During this segment of Sally's narrative, the unheard voice is absent. Instead, Jack is seen, heard, remembered and appreciated for being 'good'. Despite only being a brief visit to the school, I can sense how important it was for Sally to observe these interactions between current school staff and her son.

Sally's contrasts between the home and current school are made more explicit when discussing her experiences of meetings with school staff, "*We had a meeting and it was so different… before it was like, "Jack needs to do blardeblardyblah", they were like, "right, what do we need to do to get the best out of Jack*""? (O, 92-95). There is a clear shift in where Sally and current school staff perceive the site for change to be happening; within the wider context, rather than within the individual. This position is further explored when Sally states, "*They're looking at how to help Jack with his emotions, not making Jack fit in a box that works for them. They're, making a box that fits Jack*" (O, 105- 107). I can hear relief in Sally's voice; she had been advocating for changes in practices throughout Jack's educational journey, and finally, these were being not only heard, but led by current school staff, rather than her needing to push for them.

In the following voice poem, the voice of 'they' (representing current school staff) is presented continuously by Sally, as she recounts conversations with staff and reflects on their actions:

They were like, "...we need to do?"
They were like, "he could be, "he can be…, he can…"
They were like, "...We'll put…"
They were like, "We'll explain…"
They've just put so much

M, 94- 103

There is an absence of Sally's self voice (I), although, a presence of 'they' talking jointly through 'we'. It is unclear whether 'we' includes Sally, perhaps indicating working together with her, or whether 'we' refers to the current school staff working together. Nevertheless, Sally talks in a continuous stream of staff taking accountability and actions to support Jack. Within her narrative, she referred to the flexibility of the current school to respond to Jack's needs, and to work with him and Sally, to meet his needs.

Experiences of being listened to, heard, and unheard, have been present throughout Sally's recounting of Jack's educational journey. At the current school, she shared, "*They listen. They listen to Jack, and therefore, they don't really need to listen to me because he tells them, y'know even if it's not always through his words but they can see*." (O, 291- 293). The repetition of 'they listen' places emphasis on this; being listened to is what Sally has 'fought' for throughout Jack's education. At his current school, she speaks with relief that Jack is listened to and seen, and consequently, feels that she no longer needs to be his voice.

Inclusion on school trips and the importance of friendships had featured in the stories shared by Sally throughout Jack's education. She recounted a recent residential trip at his current school:

> "*He's made friends now as well from being away for the week and four staff went (1) erm just four staff and all the kids and they cooked for them and did all sorts and it's just such a lovely experience that he's had. It's quite (1) I don't know what the right word is (1) but like I say like (1) they went and did the cooking, they did it. So it's quite like family I suppose it feels like a family*." (516-519).

5.3 Christine's Story

5.3.1 Narrative synopsis

Christine is a mother to two children, Ben and Holly. Ben attended an AP whilst in Year 2 at infant school, and has since transitioned to Year 3 at a separate Junior School. Whilst at the AP, Ben was issued with an EHC Plan.

Christine's interview was facilitated online via a video call and lasted approximately 50 minutes.

Christine began the interview by talking about Ben's early education experiences, and the disruption caused by Covid lockdowns and teacher strikes. She described starting to notice that Ben had additional support needs and suggested that this was a turbulent time, with a mixture of "good" and "bad" days and school staff trying lots of "different things". For example, for some time, Ben was educated away from the mainstream classroom in a "nurture" provision, although he later returned to the classroom following advice from an external practitioner. Christine then explained how the placement at the AP was arranged and spoke generally positively about her and Ben's experiences of the AP placement. She talked about how this placement became extended due to concerns relating to the Infant school's ability to support Ben, and how he had since transitioned with his original peer cohort to mainstream Junior School. Towards the end of her interview, Christine talked about her motivations to participate in the research being driven by wanting to support others access support (see Reflexive Box 5.6).

I followed the stages of the LG and heard four contrapuntal voices: a tentative voice, a voice of diminished agency, a voice of relief/ hope, and a voice of stress and worry. I have constructed key narratives from Christine's interview and have discussed these below.

5.3.2 "What I would call an in-between sort of child" (P, 279-280)

Christine's narrative began with the identification of differences during Ben's early experiences of education at a preschool nursery and then at infant school. The below voice poem brings to the forefront the voices of 'I' and 'they' in relation to Christine's early experiences of making sense of what her son's needs. I have reflected on the construction of this voice poem in Reflective box 5.7 (Appendix A).

I think

I think

I was kind of

I was having to

[These aren't things] I'd not noticed

Y'know

[Don't get] me wrong

They always say
They think

I was dealing
Stress for me

What do you do?

(P, 97-105)

This poem highlights a contrast between the voice of others ('they') and the self-voice ('I'). In Christine's self-voice (I), she repeats 'think', and uses 'kind of', indicating possible tentativeness and uncertainty in her understanding. In contrast, they 'always', suggesting that 'they' (a collective voice of other people), consistently talk with a greater degree of certainty, confidence, and assertiveness. Christine does not oppose the view of others ("*these aren't things I'd not noticed*" (P, 99-100)), but experiences less certainty in her views. When Christine asks the listener, "*What do you do?"* (P, 105), I feel that she is talking to a general 'you' which includes herself, in doing so, she is asking herself, "what do I do?", but without being so direct. In asking this, she is perhaps also seeking external support or affirmation from those positioned in 'they', as Christine positions others as holding more certainty than herself.

Christine considers the role of wider disruption relating to Covid and teacher strikes in influencing her son's early educational experiences, "*...there had been so much disruption and (.) I kind of sort of took the view at the end of it that he was still only young and he needed a bit more time to kind of grow*" (P, 89-90). Here, she talks through a tentative self-voice, but also acknowledges the role of wider influences in making sense of her son's development at this point in time. I feel like this must have been a challenging and confusing time for Christine, as she formed a holistic and curious view, formulated with current socio-cultural factors in mind (e.g. Covid lockdowns), whilst also taking into account the views of staff, who "*had sort of like noticed a few sort of little anomalies*" (P, 78).

At a later point in the narrative, and in discussing the present, Christine shared that she has reached her own understanding of her son's needs: *"I feel like Ben's a bit of like what I would call an in-between sort of child.*" (P, 279-280). Christine's sense-making relates to the level of support that Ben needs to access education, talking about how he "*doesn't need special needs education all the time*", but equally "*he's not been able to just go into a class*" (P, 282).

In keeping with this, Christine indirectly refers to Ben as fitting in a group of children "*that are a little bit more (.) that need a bit more support and things*" (P, 139-140).

In making sense of her son's needs, Christine has grappled with ideas about seeking a diagnosis for Ben. She is uncertain whether this is something she "*should*" seek, and whether it is something that they "*actually need*", talking again in a tentative voice. Christine continues to refer to Ben's needs for additional support, and wonders whether a diagnosis could act as a gateway, *"If I want to get more support or get a bit more information just get a bit more help in terms of (.) is this something I should be looking into like medically in terms of like diagnosis?*" (P, 286-288). The use of 'I' perhaps indicates Christine's perception that she holds the accountability to explore the diagnosis and decide whether this is something she pursues for Ben. I wonder whether she feels solely responsible for this. Christine experiences ongoing uncertainty and questions whether a diagnosis would be absolutely necessary, "*And then you sort of question, whether it's something you actually need*?" (P, 300-301). Again, Christine uses 'you', perhaps to distance herself from the enormity of the question, or to seek affirmation from the listener.

The below voice poem speaks to the emotional intensity of conflicting voices and opinions concerning whether to seek a diagnosis, and the influential voices of others.

So do I, You know?

[If I] want

[Is this something] I should…?

"You won't get"

Y'know

"You don't really get"

You then go

Y'know

They should be

I think

I think

I say

You don't know

Y'know

Y'know

You sort of question

[If] you actually need

[The way] I look at it

I'm trying

[If] you don't

You don't

N, 286-302

Here, we can hear the interaction of the self-voice ('I') and the voice of others ('you') and ('they'). Again, Christine's self-voice talks without certainty, using questions that could indicate that she is seeking answers from others who she positions as more 'knowing'. The voices of other people are quoted, representing views that have been shared with Christine about challenges in accessing diagnostic assessments. Christine switches between talking through the voice of I, and through the collective voice of 'you', of which I feel she has included herself. This may be as a way of communicating that this is a shared experience with others who she has spoken with, and/or as a way of distancing herself from the questions. She continues to feel unsure and questioning/critical whilst talking through 'you', although when she returns to talking in 'I', she shares a personal reflection; that she is trying. Christine continues to seek a diagnostic assessment for Ben. I sense she feels responsible for doing what is right for her son, and that perhaps 'doing' supports her sense of 'trying', which sits more comfortably than the alternative of not doing.

5.3.3 "In the hands of other people" (P, 337)

At points throughout Christine's narrative, I heard a voice of lack of control, power, or, diminished agency. There were times when this voice was amplified and other times when it

was quiet. At times, the voice of diminished agency played in harmony with voices of stress and worry, whereas, at other points, these voices were dissonant, indicating an interplay of contrapuntal voices.

The two quotes below describe moments when Christine was somewhat excluded from communication, limiting her opportunities to exercise agency:

> "*I was then contacted by the school to say that the local authority'd offer him the place to go to the AP for 12 weeks*" (P, 49-50).

> "*... Even into kind of like year two were quite a stressful kind of time for me because obviously (2) I was kind of obviously hearing a lot of things from school…*" (P, 98-99)

In "hearing" things from school and being "contacted", I feel it is indicative of a one-way communication channel between Christine and school staff, whereby she is the recipient of information and the receiver of decisions that have been made on her behalf. Christine refers to this experience as feeling "stressful". I wonder whether there was an opportunity for her to be heard, to have a relational interaction with school staff, and to feel contained.

The following voice poem portrays the self-voice ('I') interacting with the voice of diminished agency, in relation to the decision to agree to Ben's placement at the AP, which was made by the infant school in conjunction with the LA.

I didn't get

I wasn't actually

I don't actually

I can only

I don't really

I'm really not sure

Nobody sort of really said

I just sort of

[The only involvement] I had was

[Finding out what] I needed to do

[Where] I needed to be

(P,124-132)

Here, I am struck by the consistent presence of 'I', the self-voice, combined with absence: Christine did not get, she was not, she does not, she did not. I wonder if Christine has ever been asked to reflect on how she felt about her, seemingly lack of, involvement in this aspect of the process, and being 'in the hands of other people'. Here, there was a change in how Christine narrated; this voice poem illustrates an extended segment of narrative during which she does not utilise "y'know". I wonder if her narrative is more unfiltered than at other times during the interview, when she may have used "y'know" as a filler word, as a means to providing her a moment to reflect on her narration.

Within the voice poem, I am struck by the sudden shift from where Christine wasn't involved to where she needed to become involved regarding Ben's AP placement. This was related to the procedural aspect of the logistics of the placement; being responsible for the dropping off and picking up of her son during the placement. My reflections on discomfort associated with this are shared in Reflective Box 5.8 (Appendix A).

Christine talked about her experiences of diminished agency in meetings with practitioners and school staff:

> "*...You just kind of go away from every single meeting that you have thinking right okay now I'm waiting for this. Now I'm going to speak to an educational psychologist. Now I'm gonna- and then today he's had a bad day and what should I read into that…*" (P, 313-315).

In this segment, I get the impression that she experienced power as being held externally by practitioners and processes. The repetition of "Now I'm.." emphasises her never-ending role as a parent, in waiting, actioning, and trying to understand their child's needs, following "*every single meeting*". I can imagine that this must feel disempowering, in relying on others' to take action, but experiencing a need to take her own action and follow others' agendas to access support.

When Christine explained what it was like for her whilst her son attended the AP, I felt that she continued to situate power externally (i.e., with AP practitioners). However, a shift had occurred in how this was positioned and experienced by Christine:

> *"They sort of took a lot of that sort of pressure away (.) y'know away from me because obviously like I said, when he was at school, I'm not there, I don't know (.) what he's saying, what he's doing, I only know what he's doing and saying at home. (.) So, I think the AP kind of (.) made that (.) y'know took sort of charge of that (.) erm and then they kind of took charge of that in terms of liaising then with his juniors and kind of helping them to understand.*" (P, 340-344)

Whilst the power is here situated with the AP staff, who "*took charge*", I sense that Christine talks with relief at handing over this responsibility. I feel that there is a shift, from being denied agency and decision-making power, to willingly having this responsibility held by somebody else, and experiencing a sense of containment in relation to this. The voices of stress and worry fade out here, and a voice of relief is heard. Christine shares that during this time, "*I actually didn't feel stressed about it because I just felt it was the place where people were wanting to support him*" (P, 325-326). I wonder if the trust that Christine placed in practitioners at the AP, who she positioned as 'wanting to support him' was what supported her to feel contained by them 'taking charge'.

Since the AP placement, Ben has transitioned to a mainstream junior school, and I sensed that there had been continuity in Christine's story of diminished agency, as I continued to hear this voice. When I asked Christine about the reintegration, she shared feeling uncertain, due to not having yet met with his current school staff: *"I've had a meeting offered with the inclusion (.) erm leads erm (.) but we've got to set that up because unfortunately I was away when they wanted to do it on a specific day"* (P, 262-263). The power in decision-making to choose the time and date of the meeting was held by the school staff, and, perhaps ironically, the "inclusion leads". I noticed that Christine remained unfazed by this; showing no sign of surprise or frustration that a mutually convenient time to meet was not arranged. This indicates perhaps that it is the norm in Christine's experience; for practitioners to communicate and make decisions without reciprocity or collaboration.

5.3.4 "We were kind of getting to a tethered end" (P, 137)

Christine reflected feeling that there was a lack of planning and coordination of support at Ben's infant school: *"I felt like it was a bit all up in the air and they were just kind of trying all*

different things all the time" (P, 140-141). She positioned this in contrast to her hopes for the AP placement, *"This was going to be a little bit more of a (.) a set approach, y'know with prop- positive strategies and things that were actually going to help" (P, 141-142).* Christine hoped that this approach would be more conducive to supporting Ben, although, I have reflected that I could have explored this further in Reflective Box 5.9 (Appendix A).

I sensed that Christine was initially hesitant about the proposed placement at the AP, but, that this was alleviated once Christine had had the opportunity to meet with the staff at the AP. This signifies the importance of relationships between parents and practitioners and the significance of building partnerships. The plan for the placement also seemed to alleviate some concerns about what was going to happen next for Ben in his current setting, with the situation feeling stuck (again, likened to a "tethered end"), and the AP serving as an opportunity to try something different.

> *"To be honest, once I'd kind of read and then been and met them, it kind of like felt like a great opportunity for him. So I was quite kind of like happy with obviously what had been offered I think I'd we were kind of getting to a bit of a (1) tethered end in terms of with like year two as to where it was gonna go, what he was going to do*" (P, 135-138)

The interaction of voices during the transition between Ben's infant school and the AP is brought to the forefront in the following voice poem. In the self-voice ('I'), Christine again talked with tentativeness, and I get a sense of feeling stuck. Her repeated reflection on how she felt, and the contradictions and remissions in this, suggest that Christine's emotions could have been heightened at this point, with her experiencing some internal conflicts in her feelings towards the situation. When something tangible was offered (the AP placement), it was accepted 'straight away'. I imagine that this gave hope that something would change.

I'd kind of

I was quite

I think

We were kind of getting to a bit of a tethered end.

I didn't particularly

feel

I felt like

They were

just

Y'know

I think

I actually felt

Y'know

Y'know

Y'know

We accepted it straight away

(P,135-144)

5.3.5 "I felt that he really flourished" (P, 152)

Despite the placement initially being "*a bit up and down*" (P, 325), Christine felt reassured that "*people were wanting to support him*" (P, 326) at the AP. Whilst Christine's perceptions of the support at Ben's infant school was not discussed, I wonder whether this contrast suggests that Christine felt that previously *people hadn't wanted to support him*. In her feeling that he was supported at the AP, the voice of stress and worry is absent, as Christine "*didn't particularly feel stressed*" (P, 325).

In reflecting on the placement, Christine explained, "*... we've kind of learnt a lot (.) got a lot of strategies, we know kind of what we're sort of doing and then just sort of moving forward really.*" (P, 233-235). The interaction between the voice of we, and the absence of tentativeness is heard here. In working together with the practitioners at the AP, Christine talked together with more confidence and assertiveness, she referred to a collective 'knowing', which, contrasted with other times where her own voice was dominated by tentativeness and uncertainty.

As well as *"strategies"* and *"learning",* Christine talked about how the AP placement had supported both her and Ben to feel more understood: "*I think he also feels that people do*

understand now and do kind of know how he is and things." (P, 247-248), in turn, this supported Christine as it "*gave me a lot of relief and just y'know erm feelings that y'know that things were a bit more understood or more accepted*" (P, 352-353). Christine connects understanding, acceptance, and relief here, which continues throughout her narrative.

Throughout Christine's narrative, she used the metaphors of Ben 'growing' and 'flourishing'. She related these metaphors to Ben's time at the AP; "*The first 12 weeks he definitely (.) erm he sort of grew, but he y'know took a bit of time (.) erm and then I think then I felt that he really flourished in the second block" (P, 151-153).* Ben's placement at the AP was extended by an additional block, due to concerns raised by his infant school about his reintegration ahead of the Key Stage 1-2 transition. The extended placement was felt by Christine to be positive, she shared that "*He was used to the people, he he you knew the strategies and I think they could kind of focus a bit more on him y'know actually getting learning out of it as well." (P, 153-154).*

At the time, when the placement was extended, Christine acknowledged that this was "*a little bit difficult*" for Ben:

> *"He had to kind of then (.) retransition at the AP with a new cohort so like with a new set of people…because there was only him and another boy that actually stayed for another 12 weeks so I think initially he found that a little bit difficult but it didn't stop him from (.) flourishing*" (P, 197-201).

Christine's description of Ben 'flourishing' continues, despite the challenges he experienced when the cohort of children changed.

Looking back, now that the placement has finished and Ben has reintegrated into a mainstream junior school, Christine shared, "*The actual time that he spent there was massively positive like it's had such a positive experience on him and (.) y'know everything that he's, he's sort of learned there*" (P, 147-148).

Nevertheless, Christine shared that in the back of her mind, and despite Ben's positive experiences of 'flourishing' during the AP placement, *"We knew it couldn't be permanent*" (P, 230-231). This highlights that AP forms a 'chapter' within a child's journey through education, and whilst the sense of feeling understood and the strategies learnt can be taken away, there is uncertainty about the future and the potential need for future placements which cannot be guaranteed. The voice of stress and worry returned when Christine talked about the future.

5.3.5 "It created a lot of logistical issues" (P, 167)

Christine briefly talked about the challenges of the AP placement, "I *felt even though it created a lot of logistical issues within (1) us family home, it actually the positiveness of it outweighed it*" (P, 167-168). Christine is a working parent, and the AP placement required parents to facilitate transport to and from the provision, which was situated away from the local community. Although, retrospectively, Christine weighs up that the positiveness "outweighed" the impact on her, that does not deny her experience of being somewhat inconvenienced by the logistical problems caused by the placement. Christine did not dwell on this point and instead returned to speaking in a voice of appreciation for the placement opportunity, and in terms of enabling Ben to 'flourish'.

5.3.6 "And I think that's why like so far I've not really had any concerns or worries" (P, 344-345)

Ben's reintegration coincided with the transition from Year 2 (at his home, infant school) to Year 3 (at his current, junior school). Therefore, Ben experienced this transition with his peer cohort from Infant school. The AP worked closely with the Junior school to support the transition: **"***The junior school really got on board and sort of really tried really made him y'know quite welcome (P, 217-218)"*

When talking about reintegration experiences, Christine talked through a collective voice of 'we', indicating a shared understanding and collaboration between her self and practitioners from the AP and school. The voice of 'we' is brought to the forefront in the below voice poem:

We've had

We knew

We were doing

We dropped him off

We picked him up

I'll know more

N, 218- 220

When speaking through voice of we, Christine talked with more action and certainty; there is absence of the tentativeness that often accompanies her self-voice. Looking into the future, Christine hoped for 'knowing' more; she hoped for an experience of more certainty, and being better informed, than perhaps she had done looking back.

Christine talked about the factors that she felt facilitated Ben's reintegration from the AP into the junior school. These included visits from AP staff, communication, and liaising with someone who was closely involved with supporting Ben:

> *"They had somebody coming from the juniors every week to see him and to sort of chat with the staff there and kind of try and just get a bit of an understanding as to kind of how he was, y'know in the setting y'know and things like that. So, that I think (.) that I think the communication side of it helped more erm because we'd have a bit more in terms of regular meetings and that erm (.) and although I did when he was in year one and year two, it was kind of a bit between lots of different kind of people, erm whereas whenever I had a meeting with the AP it was somebody that was directly involved in looking after him while he was at school." (P, 253-259).*

She felt that as a result of this, *"that's why like so far I've not really had any concerns or worries, where I've needed to speak to school, because I feel like they kind of know already" (P, 344-346).* It is apparent in Christine's narrative that communication has been key in her experience.

5.3.7 "Wondering what to do, where d'ya go, what do you do?" (P, 106-107)

Christine found Ben's early experiences of education "*just quite stressful and and y'know (.) just wondering to do, where'd you go, what do y'do, and this that and the other.*" (P, 106-107). This suggested that Christine felt lost and stressed without the support of practitioners and processes. I feel that there is a dissonance between this, and her later experiences; "*all of a sudden different people started getting involved*" (P, 284-285). Despite multiple people being involved, this was an isolating experience for Christine:

> *So it's difficult to kind of understand whose the person that then you then go to kind of get something that's a little bit more (.) erm set in terms of y'know this is how we can help this person*"
> (P, 290-292).

I got the sense that an increased number of people doesn't necessarily translate to increased experience of support for Christine, and instead, people 'suddenly' getting

involved could have caused additional stress. I hear that she sought connection and containment, in knowing who the person was that she could "go to". Additionally, Christine talked openly about the difficulties experienced by parents in navigating complex systems related to education and SEN.

Planning for Ben's future was woven throughout Christine's narrative. She shared, "*you don't know who really is going to (.) y'know provide the support erm like moving forwards*" (P, 289-299). Uncertainty about who would be providing the support was accompanied by uncertainty about a further possible opportunity for an AP. I sensed that Christine sought reassurance from formal processes, "*Ben's now got an EHCP and he is on a waiting list to (.) to be assessed by CAMHS*" (P, 298-299); "*It's kind of that made things that little bit easier in terms of, we know that (.) that support has to be in place*" (P, 235-236). Nevertheless, getting to this point has not been straightforward for Christine. She talked, in a distanced positioning, about the difficulties that parents may encounter when trying to understand and navigate the world of SEN:

> "*...there seems to be a lot of grey areas between what's classed as someone that just needs additional support at school, have got a special need or have they got a diagnosed special need that needs (.) help with, there's no kind of one set thing. Erm so I think it's quite confusing to parents*" (P, 294-296).

5.3.8 "They didn't have the support in school to look after him" (P, 41)

Throughout Ben's educational journey, Christine talked about challenges in accessing support, and she often situated this within broader legislative processes and contexts. When Ben was due to return to his home school after his initial 12-week AP placement, she shared, "*The school had a lot of difficulties at the time as his EHCP had not been granted. So they literally wanted to put a reduced timetable in place which meant he hardly would've been at school.*" (P, 55-57) Despite these challenges, Christine spoke sympathetically towards the school situation and shared her understanding from their perspective that they "*Only have so much that they can do and so much money that they get in in terms of providing that extra support.*" (P, 306-307).

In the below voice poem, we hear in interaction between the voice of 'they', and the self-voice ('I'), whilst Christine talks about Ben's experiences at his home school:

I think

I had

I think

They were struggling

They wouldn't be able

[How] they explained it

They didn't have

They couldn't give

They'd sort of

I think

They didn't want

N, 180-187

Christine talked about the actions of 'they' by using an uninterrupted consecutive series of 'not' be able to take action. The voice of 'they' and the self-voice show little interaction, I wonder if this represented an absence of communication and collaboration between her and those included in the voice of 'they'. A tentative self-voice of 'think' runs as a thread throughout this poem, meanwhile the voice of 'they' carries more assertiveness in what they were unable to do.

Christine discussed her understanding of the constraints of 'mainstream' education being "*one size (.) they want everybody to fit in one size of things" (P, 418-419).* She shared that the placement at an AP *"kind of just offered that opportunity to kids that don't necessarily fit into that one size" (P, 419-420).* She understood that the placement would both support the individual child, *"help them just to be able to cope with it more (.)",* as well as to support the school *"whether that means that they can incorporate more of that into a school I don't know" (P, 421-422).*

Christine talked with caution about the school's ability to change, understanding this as being due to financial constraints, "*it's all about money I think these days intit what you can and can't do y'know*". In keeping with Christine's broader acknowledgement of systems, she talked about the impact of academisation on how inclusive she feels that schools could be,

in terms of their power to make changes "*I feel like they've got a lot more scope to be able to implement or be more flexible with implementing things in terms of how they (.) do their education and how they're funding goes*" (P, 423-425). Towards the end of the interview, Christine talked about the relationship that Ben had built with the dog at the AP. His current, junior school, are in the process of training a therapy dog, and Christine wondered whether, this had been "*inspired by*" Ben's positive experiences with the AP dog.

Chapter 6: Discussion

6.1 Chapter Overview

In this chapter, I will discuss participant narratives in relation to one another and the broader literature, as well as situating the current research in theory. In providing a further discussion, I aim to address my overarching research question, "**What are the narratives of parents whose children have attended an Alternative Provision (AP) during primary school**?". To do this, I have explored different points of resonance, connection and intersection, as well as points of divergence, between the narratives of Sally and Christine. This includes, narratives of parenting a child who needs 'a little bit more', narratives of disempowerment by practitioners and processes, and juxtaposing narratives of individual inclusion versus systemic exclusion. In situating their narratives in wider theory and literature, I hope to bring power to Sally and Christine's individually narrated experiences. I will also construct implications for professional practice, which is especially important, as both participants explained their motivations for giving up their time to participate in the research, hoping to enable more positive experiences of education and AP.

6.2 Addressing the research question and theoretical basis for discussion

The initial focus of this research was exploring parental narratives in relation to their child's reintegration into mainstream education following an AP placement (See Chapter 2, Literature Review). However, previous research reflected that it is not possible to isolate the reintegration from parents' experiences of their child's educational journey, including experiences of exclusion (Embeita, 2019). This is in keeping with the temporal nature of narratives, which evolve over time and recognise that past experiences shape our current narrative understandings (Clandin et al., 2011). Therefore, the Research Question provided an opportunity for a broad discussion of participant narratives that have spanned across points in time and space, including, their AP placements and subsequent reintegrations.

Throughout this thesis, I have reflected on the role of the environment and wider systems on an individual's narrated experiences. This was particularly evident in my reflections following my analysis of Christine and Sally's interviews (Reflective Box 6.1, Appendix A). In keeping with my philosophical position and theoretical orientation, this discussion chapter is contextualised within Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological model (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006), which focuses on the proximal processes (interactions) between the individual and their environment. The current 'Bioecological model' has evolved from the earlier, nested

eco-systemic model which ranged from ‘micro’ to ‘macro’ systems, and “centred on the role of the environment in shaping development” (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006, p.794). The most recent iteration of the model considers the active role of the Person, Processes between the individual and their surroundings, their wider systemic Context, as well as the overarching influence of Time (PPCT) (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; El Zaatari & Maalouf, 2022).

In Figure 4, I have synthesised Christine and Sally’s narratives into a visual representation of the Bioecological model, denoting interactions between each of these and the active role of the individual (i.e., the parent). In constructing this theoretical conceptualisation of participant narratives, I needed to consider whether to position the parent (i.e. Christine and Sally), or the child (i.e., Jack and Ben), in the centre of the system. Previous research adopting an ecosystemic lens has positioned the child in the centre (e.g. Atkinson & Rowley, 2019). However, with parents’ narratives and experiences being privileged in the current research, I have centred their experiences. As such, their children, places of work, children’s primary schools, families are included in their ‘immediate environment (i.e., their microsystem), as they experience frequent proximal interactions within this system. Interactions between aspects of the microsystem (e.g. interactions between the AP and the child’s primary school), are situated in the mesosystem. The exosystem relates to wider social systems which affect the parent indirectly (e.g. CAMHS systems). The macrosystem involves the influence of social and cultural factors, such as, the influence of stigma and attitudes towards diagnoses and SEN. Interactions occur between the individual and each of these levels, denoted by double-headed arrows (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Additionally, all of these systems and interactions are understood as being situated within the passing of time (referred to as the chronosystem).

Please see Figure 4 for a visual depiction of this model. It emphasises the interactions between the person with their contexts and will provide a thread that runs throughout this discussion chapter.

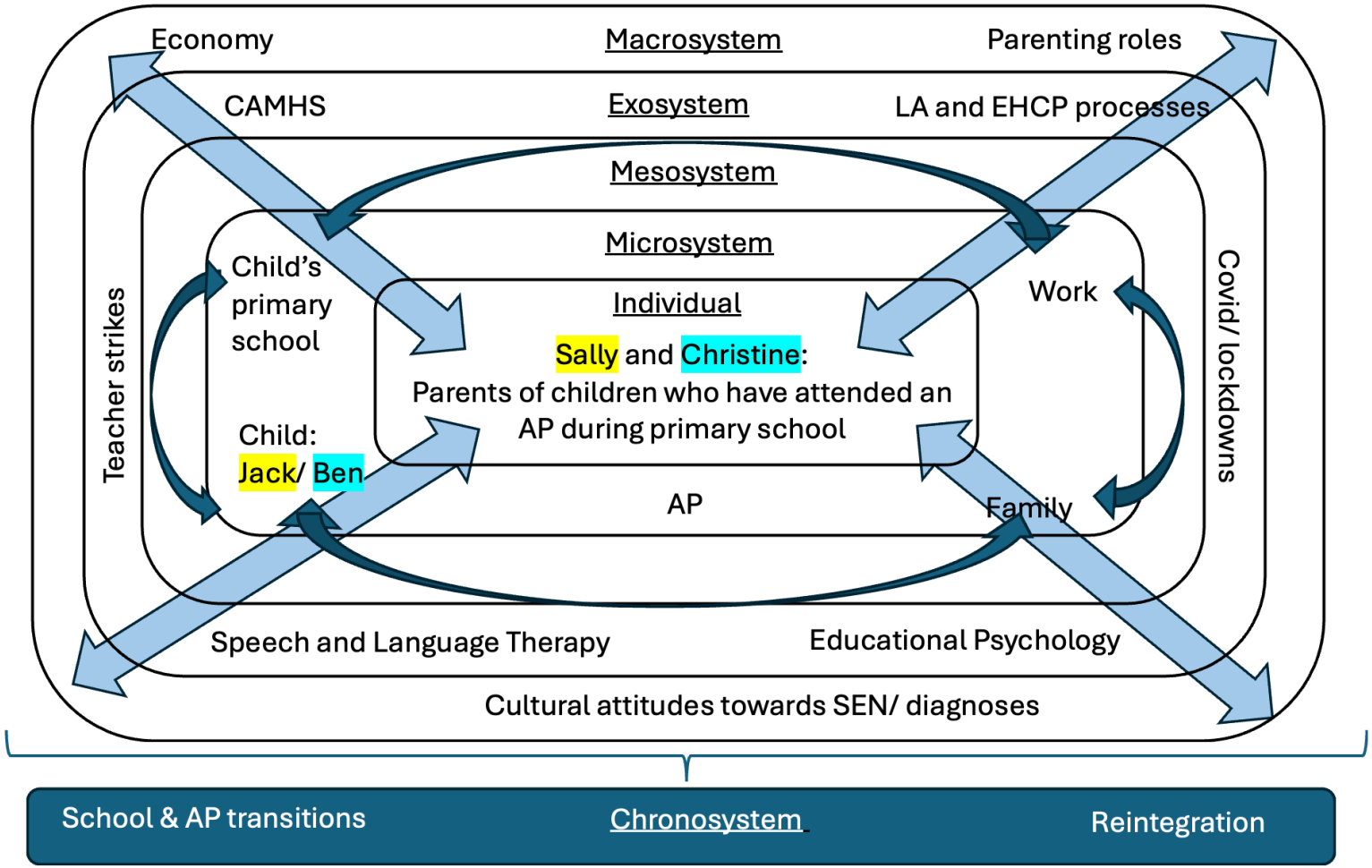


Figure 4. A Bioecological systems representation of participant narratives (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006)

6.3 Narratives of parenting a child who needs "*a little bit more*"

6.3.1 Links between SEN and AP

There was a shared experience between Sally and Christine of parenting a child who has experienced barriers to learning and/or participation in mainstream primary education. Christine used language such as, "*an in-between sort of child"* to make sense of her son's needs, and Sally described noticing that she felt there was "*something not quite right*" during her son's early years. Interestingly, neither parent explicitly labelled their child as having 'SEN' when talking about them. Concurrently, at the time of interviews, both parents described their experiences of seeking neurodevelopmental assessments and EHC plans for their children. From a social constructionist, bioecological position, it is interesting to consider how parents' sense-making of their child's needs is influenced by their interactions with wider systems. For Christine especially, seeking a diagnostic label and confirmation of SEND 'need' featured when she interacted with a system, but perhaps not in her own sense making of understanding her son's needs.

In terms of the wider context of CYP attending AP, Ofsted (2022) data reporting indicated that most pupils attending AP during primary school experience SEN, predominantly relating to their Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) needs. Christine and Sally's sense making and sense seeking, in terms of their journeys in trying to understand their children's needs, will be further explored through their narratives. In Reflective Box 6.2, I have reflected on discussing participant's sense making, whilst remaining coherent with my social constructionist positionality (Appendix A).

6.3.2. Parental perspectives on seeking diagnoses

Whilst both parents were exploring diagnoses for their children, there was a divergence in the narratives of Sally and Christine in terms of how they positioned potential diagnoses. Sally reflected on understanding her son Jack's needs through a diagnostic lens throughout his early childhood. She discussed having considered him having "*sensory processing*", being "*dyspraxic"* and, more recently, "*ADHD"*. Sally had been the driving force behind seeking the assessments for Jack, narrating her experiences of frustration relating to the systemic and relational barriers in requesting assessments. In contrast, Christine sounded more hesitant about seeking a diagnosis; she asked the listener if this is something she "*should be looking into*", and felt that there was "*a lot of stigma around the diagnosis side of things*", as well as there being different perspectives on the likelihood of accessing an assessment within the LA. The influence of cultural attitudes towards diagnosis, an

interaction between parents and the 'macrosystem' (Figure 4), therefore seemed to play a part in parental interactions with seeking diagnoses.

Wider literature has suggested that parents may seek a diagnosis to validate their concerns about their child's development, manage uncertainty about the future, and in the hope that it will unlock additional support and knowledge (Parker et al., 2016). For Sally, I felt that validation could be an important motivator for seeking the diagnosis, considering that her concerns and attempts to seek support for her son had gone unheard for so long. For Christine, I wondered whether proceeding with the referral for an assessment supported a sense of being active in advocating for her son's support needs ("*I'm trying*"), despite her initial uncertainty.

Additionally, for parents who have experienced challenges and felt blame, a diagnosis can situate the 'problem' outside of the mother-child dyad (Runswick-Cole & Goodley, 2018) and instead, within the child's brain and body. Consequently, maternal blame for the 'problem' is shifted to the diagnosis experienced by the child; however, in doing so, the child is pathologized with a psychological difference. In Sally's narrative, a diagnosis may have served to position Jack's need outside of the family system, and would serve to support Sally's early intuition that her son had additional needs, despite being dismissed by home school staff.

At the point in time of interview, Sally and Christine were awaiting the outcomes of their assessment, which has been described as being in a state of 'limbo' in terms of their understanding of their child's needs and experiencing validation of their concerns (Parker et al., 2016).

6.3.3 A social model of understanding difference and AP

In a social model of understanding disability and difference, barriers are understood to be constructed in the child's environment, or can arise through an interaction between the individual and people, policies, cultures, and social and economic circumstances (Booth & Ainscow, 2002). This contrasts with a medical model of understanding, in which individuals are identified as having an impairment which is itself disabling (Casanova & Widman, 2021). In both Sally and Christine's narratives, they considered obstacles to their child's learning and engagement as being constructed at various levels in their wider system. For instance, when school staff initially raised "*anomalies*" in her son's development, Christine contextualised these, considering the impact of Covid, teacher strikes, a lack of funding to adapt mainstream practices. Sally explicitly positioned the "*problem"* as being with

mainstream school staff who were inflexible in their approach, despite her attempts to work with staff to explain how Jack could be supported. In their narratives, both parents, therefore, viewed that their children could be supported through additional provision and an alternative approach, consistent with the social model, which proposes that difficulties can be environmentally derived (Casanova & Widman, 2021).

A placement at an AP could be one such way of adapting the environment in order to support a child's individual needs, in keeping with the goals of a social model. In contrast, AP could also be understood through a medical model of understanding, as the child is removed from their immediate environment. What seems to be crucial is where the intention for the target of the 'intervention' is situated. In a medical understanding, the individual would be the target of the intervention during the AP placement, whereas, in a social model, the education system and environment would be the target of intervention. This links with the earlier discussed (Chapter 2: Literature Review) ideas of 'reintegration' versus 'reinclusion', with a medical model arguably aligning more closely with reintegration, and reinclusion aligning more closely with a social model. Nevertheless, from a critical perspective, the process of removing a child from their home school to go to an AP, regardless of the extent to which the home school is willing to change to remove barriers to their participation, can be considered placing the 'problem' within the child. The notion of reinclusion and reintegration will be further discussed in 6.5.2.

6.3.4 Fitting children into a system of 'boxes'

Both parents narrated experiences of what their children's home school was not able to, or would not, do to support their children. Christine discussed this in relation to financial constraints, and issues such as Ofsted and teacher strikes, therefore, situating the interactions with the wider exo- and macrosystems. Sally talked in relation to the interactions between herself and home-school staff, and interactions between Jack and home-school staff, therefore, situating these interactions within the micro- and mesosystems (Figure 4). Nevertheless, there was a convergence in a sense of 'stuckness' with their children's education experiences at their mainstream home schools, which were described as following "*one size of things*", suggesting a perceived inflexibility and need for children to fit into the existing school system.

Foucault's ideas relating to categorisation and segregation due to deviations from norms resonate here. Christine described her son as a child who didn't require "*special education all the time",* yet also "*couldn't just walk into a classroom*", viewing him as an "*in-between child*". Axelsson (2016), discussing the ideas of Foucault, suggested that established cultural

practices regarding the categorisation of CYP shape our perceptions. With this understanding, Christine had constructed her understanding of Ben as an 'in-between child' as a result of existing cultural practices. In the UK education system, school settings are typically categorised as 'mainstream' or 'special', fostering social and spatial divides between CYP. For Christine, she had formulated an understanding that her son did not neatly fit into either of these constructed categories, thus constructing her own; 'in-between'. Historically, the categorisation of CYP as either 'mainstream' or 'special' has been led by assessments of a child's Intelligence Quotient, which have provided a numerical boundary for categorisation (Williams, 2013). Alternative assessments of individual needs, such as, social and emotional needs, may indicate a deviation from the constructed mainstream 'norm' for whom AP has offered a separate space for social and spatial division. This has created a system in which assessment can lead to an allocation of provision which may support the child's individual needs, but by doing so, facilitating categorisation and segregation.

Nevertheless, both of the children's current schools have shown a degree of flexibility in accommodating the needs of Jack and Ben, suggesting some adaptability within the mainstream 'box' or 'category'. For example, Sally shared, "*They're looking at how to help Jack with his emotions, not making Jack fit in a box that works for them. They're, making a box that fits Jack.".* Christine wondered whether his current-school's decision to get a school dog had been informed by Jack's positive relationship with the AP dog, and felt that in his current-school, there was more flexibility with implanting advice and allocating funding. Christine situated within a wider political and economical landscape (i.e., macrosystem) of academisation, within which there is greater autonomy, for example, over expenditure allocation (Eyles et al., 2017). However, research into school spending under alternative forms of governance (i.e., LA maintained versus Academy Trusts) has indicated that academies spend proportionately less on educational support, with greater spending on 'back office costs' (Davies et al., 2021). Clearly, this must be interpreted with caution, as there is likely to be variation within schools and academy trusts, and, within settings, in terms of allocation and resources.

6.3.5 Summary

In this section, I have reflected on parental narratives of their child's perceived difference, through exploring perspectives towards diagnoses and placements away from mainstream primary school (i.e., AP). The social and medical models of understanding have highlighted differing perspectives on understanding differences and situating the site for the 'intervention', which will be further explored later in this discussion. I have considered

parents' narratives around the construction of the mainstream 'box', and where and how CYP are positioned when they are deemed to not fit within this. Foucault's ideas on the segregation and categorisation can be relevant to the study of AP, in terms of creating (albeit temporary) spatial and social divisions between people. The capability of both current-schools to adapt has indicated hope for some flexibility in the mainstream 'box' to meet the diverse needs of CYP.

6.4 Narratives of disempowerment by practitioners and processes

There was thread of connection throughout the narratives of Christine and Sally; stories of disempowerment by SEN systems, processes, and practitioners. These will be further discussed in this section.

6.4.1. Interactions between parents and (some) practitioners: unreached and unheard, rather than 'hard-to-reach'?

Sally and Christine referred to interactions with practitioners, including teachers from their children's home schools, practitioners from the AP, and staff at their children's current schools. These interactions can therefore be understood as being situated within the 'microsystem' of the earlier discussed Bioecological model, across points in time during their child's educational journey (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Figure 4). At points, Sally fought to be heard by practitioners, whereas Christine shared feeling "*in the hands of others*" and described times when she had been a recipient of information and decisions made by others. Whilst their stories are unique, there is a convergence in their experiences of interactions with practitioners without reciprocity or collaboration, which will be elaborated on further.

When discussing her early concerns about her son's development ("*something not quite right*") with education practitioners, they seemed to dismiss or minimise these, despite Sally's multiple attempts at communication. Later on in her son's educational journey, and following the death of her husband, school staff prioritised their understanding of her son's needs, which related to the bereavement, as opposed to listening to Sally's understanding which had pre-dated this. In interactions with practitioners, Sally's views and understandings, therefore, were not heard, despite her multiple attempts to voice them. Similarly, the AP placement went ahead despite Sally sharing her concerns about the changes that Jack would experience. Moreover, later on in Jack's educational journey, Sally attempted to have her concerns heard by the Governor, who seemingly held a position of

authority within the school context. However, this interaction followed suit in terms of lacking reciprocity and relationality as they did not respond to Sally's emailed attempt at communication. As shared by mothers in Malacrida's research, regardless of the ways in which Sally tried to interact with practitioners, she experienced dismissal and an emotional experience of frustration, which was voiced at varying points throughout her narrative during interactions with practitioners (Malacrida, 2001). Runswick-Cole et al. (2024) discuss that mothers' activism was dismissed as 'madness' by practitioners. Similarly, previous research has positioned parents of children who have experienced exclusion as 'voiceless' (McDonald & Thomas, 2003). However, rather than voiceless, I would argue that Sally's attempts to voice were not heard by those she tried to communicate with, therefore she was 'unheard'.

Similarly, much of the communication Chistine described in her narrative could be understood as being 'one-way', however, for Christine, I sensed that often she was a recipient of messages and decisions delivered by practitioners. For instance, during the brokering of the AP placement, she talked about her experiences of "*hearing*" things from school and being "*contacted*", to be told about the placement following discussions between the LA and school. In keeping with this experience, some primary caregivers in Steels (2022, p.44) research were described as *"passive recipients of information*", who appeared to have accepted their lack of involvement and agency throughout their children's educational journey's, through AP and mainstream. Likewise, in wider research, Gwernan-Jones et al. (2015) consider that parents are treated as passive receptors of the expert advice of teachers through one-way communication. When talking about interactions at Ben's current school, I felt that Christine could have accepted how she had been positioned, as a recipient of information and decisions, when she shared that she had not yet met with current school staff, due to being unable to meet at the time proposed by the 'inclusion leads'. As such, I have reflected that Christine was 'unreached' in interactions with school practitioners.

The above section, has been guided somewhat by my methodology and narrative approach to research, which has informed how I have understood and discussed participant narratives. I understand listening to be a fundamentally relational act; in which being heard shapes the dynamic of the interaction and how we speak (Gilligan et al., 2011), therefore, requires reciprocity. In the literature, both children attending AP (Putwain et al., 2016), and their parents (Owen, 2022, p.53) have been labelled as 'hard-to-reach'. However, in my view, the narratives of Sally and Christine reflect quite the opposite of them being 'hard-to-reach' by practitioners, instead, they were 'unheard' (as in Sally's narrative), or 'unreached' (as in Christine's narrative).

Nevertheless, during the AP placement, there seemed to be a shift in which both parents experienced being heard and reached. Griffiths et al. (2021)'s Conceptual Framework of Collaboration can be applied to understand the difference between the experiences of parents in the interactions with practitioners at their children's home school, when compared with their narrated interactions with practitioners during their child's AP placement. The importance of collaboration between schools and parents is well-established in educational research, indicating links with a number of positive outcomes (Griffiths et al., 2021). Specifically, within the AP literature, parental involvement and engagement is a frequently cited facilitator for AP placements and reintegration from the perspectives of children and young people (Atkinson & Rowley, 2022) and practitioners (Lawrence, 2011; Thomas, 2015).

According to the model (Griffiths et al., 2021), relationship building is the foundational building block of collaboration, involving open-communication, trust and mutual respect. Christine referred to meeting the AP staff as supporting her to see the placement as a "*great opportunity*", indicating that initial relationship building with practitioners supported her to feel trust in the AP placement being a hopeful opportunity for her son. Christine and Sally emphasised communication as a strength of their relationships with practitioners during their children's placement. Christine referred to talking with someone who was always "*directly involved*" with her son, and that here were more "*regular meetings*", when compared to previous experiences at the infant school. Sally would liaise with AP practitioners via an online communication platform, which enabled an open dialogue between home and school, and she trusted that AP staff would talk with her son about any concerns, due to them being a "*neutral body*".

According to Griffiths et al. (2021), trust is maintained when everyone involved is working toward the group's shared goal and there is a common understanding of how to achieve this. For both parents, a shared goal for the AP placement was perhaps not established at their home schools, given the differences in understanding of the children's needs between home and school, and the absence of a clear plan for the outcome of the AP placement. This transpired following the need to extend Christine's son Ben's placement due to the home school's inability to implement the adaptations suggested by the AP. For Sally, it felt as if the home school was not open to discussions about adapting their practices in line with what had been successful for Jack during the placement. This aligns with the ongoing reflection throughout this discussion of whether 'reintegration' or 'reinclusion' was the goal of the placement.

Whilst working together between parents, AP, and mainstream staff is commonly referenced in AP and reintegration literature (Atkinson & Rowley, 2019; Pennacchia & Thompson, 2016; Pillay et al., 2013), there has been little attention paid to how collaboration can be achieved. This model (Griffiths et al., 2021) breaks down collaboration and how it can be applied, to ensure relational interactions which both 'reach' and 'hear' parents.

Overall, whilst in their home school's, parents narratives indicated shared experiences of being 'unreached' and ''unheard'. These contrasted with parents' experiences during the AP placement, during which they experienced open-communication channels, respect for their expertise, and building trust with AP practitioners. Griffiths et al., (2021)' conceptual model for collaboration has been a helpful tool to unpick the differences between the interactions between parents and practitioners during the AP placements versus during their children's initial school placements.

6.4.2 Interactions between parents and processes

Throughout their narratives, Christine and Sally interacted with processes, such as EHCP processes and pursuing diagnoses. These interactions can be understood as being situated between parents and the exosystem, as well as involving interactions within the microsystem (e.g., with school teachers).

Christine talked candidly about her confusion in relation to understanding SEN ("*it's quite confusing for parents*") and tentatively explored her perspective towards accessing a diagnostic assessment for her son, Ben. I heard Christine's confusion and search for reassurance in her questioning tone throughout the interview, which made me wonder whether she may feel reliant on others for guidance in supporting her understanding and decision-making. Although, this was clouded by not always knowing who she could to turn to for support, therefore, Christine may have not always felt informed in her understanding and decision-making, and a sense of isolation in 'holding' the responsibility for this. This links with the experiences of parents in Embeita (2019)'s research, who shared that a lack of information left them with diminished agency. A lack of information and confusing processes, coupled with an absence of supportive interactions with practitioners, could disempower parents.

In contrast, Sally's narrative reflected a sense that she had a confident understanding of her son's needs ("*I know what the needs are*") and the relevant processes and legislation; she drew upon her expertise in a dual role as both a mother and an experienced teacher. Research has indicated that empowering parents with an understanding of legislation

supported parents to advocate for their children (Burke & Sandman, 2017). However, despite Sally's knowledge and determination, she continued to experience systemic and relational barriers in preventing her from accessing support for her son. For instance, Sally shared that a referral into the neurodevelopmental pathway required school to complete and submit the referral, which involved her waiting for them to complete. Additionally, in Sally's view, the application for a EHC needs assessment was turned down, due to only having the home perspective (and not being supported by school). Accessing services (including speech and language therapy and educational psychology) felt unproductive for Sally; their involvement seemed to merely reaffirm what she already knew about her son's needs. Aligning with Sally's experiences, mothers in Runswick-Cole et al. (2024)'s research stated that when positioned solely as mothers, the power they held from their professional roles (e.g., as teachers) "evaporated" (p.485), and any professional status was denied.

To summarise, whilst their individual narratives contrast in relation to their experiences of EHCP and CAMHS processes, I feel that they converge in being disempowered by these processes. Whether it be through a sense that parental views are not felt to be as powerful as school practitioners (as in Sally's narrative), or a sense of confusion by the systems without support to understand these (as in Christine's narrative), the parents in this research were not supported by processes.

6.4.3 The role of (m)others

Sally and Christine share that they both are mothers to their children, Jack and Ben, who can both be understood as having additional needs. Runswick-Cole et al. (2024) discuss the continued gendered nature of caring for a child with SEN, with women continuing to carry out the majority of parenting. This can be understood as being situated as a societal attitude and ideology, therefore, in the macrosystem of the earlier discussed Bioecologoical model (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006, Figure 4). In their article, Runswick-Cole et al. (2024) use the term (m)other, in acknowledging the continued gendered nature of parenting, whilst also understanding gender as a social construct. I have shared a reflection on my decision to include this section of discussion in Reflective Box 6.3 (Appendix A).

In their research, Runswick-Cole et al (2024) discuss that (m)others views were "drained of power" and their knowledge dismissed (p.485), echoing the above discussed narratives of Sally and Christine. However, running alongside this narrative, was a need for both parents in this research to continue to co-ordinate and advocate for the support for their children. For instance, both parents talked about their responsibility for the logistical arrangements for their children's AP placements, in picking up and collecting their children from an AP

situated outside of their local community. This would have undoubtedly placed additional strain upon their family systems, although, was not dwelled upon by either Sally or Christine, perhaps due to a sense of gratitude for the support, despite the impact on their lives. Additionally, this could be understood through internalised gender roles, with m(others) accepting and internalising the responsibility of facilitating the placement, caring for their child(ren), and liaising with processes/ practitioners, whilst also working (Doucet, 2000). To note, current guidance for arranging AP placements states that the home school should consider the distance away from the AP and consider making transport arrangements if needed (DfE, 2025). Nevertheless, for Sally and Christine, 'transport arrangements' were their responsibility as parents and (m)others of their children.

Additionally, both parents narrated their seemingly endless role of being a (m)other to an SEN child, in attending meetings, wondering what to "*read into"* bad days at school and ringing services to be passed between practitioners and services. In times of austerity, Runswick-Cole and Goodley (2018) discuss that mothers are the key agents of change for their children. The socio-political climate of austerity measures since 2010 has meant that additional (i.e., SEN) support has both reduced in availability and is harder to access, with increased demand (Warnock, 2023), with an impact on (m)others and their children. This seems to position mothers in a place of disempowerment, whilst concurrently needing to be the agent of change and holding the responsibility to ensure that their child is understood and supported in education (Doucet, 2000; Warnock, 2023).

6.4.4 Power and summary

A final discussion in this section relates to the operation of power within the system. Malacrida (2001) challenged ideas that power circulates between individuals and institutions, instead finding that mothers' experienced limited influence, with power being held by practitioners and systems. This critique resonates with the narratives shared in the current study. Power was embedded in processes which were not accessible to parents. For example, as discussed, parents are not able to submit CAMHS referrals, and, as experienced by Christine, the confusing and complex nature of SEN systems and terminology can be inaccessible to parents. This positioned both parents as reliant on practitioners, who not only held formal decision-making powers (e.g. in panel decisions for EHC assessments), but also could decide whether to dismiss or not engage with parents. Thus, parents have not had equal access to power.

6.5 Juxtaposing Narratives: Individual Inclusion versus Systemic Exclusion

Christine and Sally both narrated stories of what can be constructed as exclusion, whereby their children were prevented from accessing learning or participating in the school community (McLean, 2024). During AP placements, and following reintegration into their current schools they talked about their children "*flourishing*" and accessing learning and trips with their peers. Whilst neither parent situated AP as a form of exclusion, this is the stance that is adopted in some literature (Mclean, 2024; Gill et al., 2024). This section of discussion contrasts individual experiences of inclusion within a wider system of exclusionary practice.

6.5.1 Exclusion

Both parents talked about what their child's home school couldn't, wouldn't, or didn't want to do; there was an overwhelming sense of negativity in relation to the flexibility of these schools to adapt and support Jack and Ben. Christine's voice poem constructed from lines 180-187 of the transcript, and Sally's voice poem from lines 482-485 and 569-573 of the transcript construe how exclusion was narrated by Christine and Sally. In an absence of action, these experiences therefore oppose inclusion, as discussed in the literature review, which is a 'never-ending process' of developing new ways to include all CYP (Booth & Ainscow, 2002).

Both children spent time separated away from their mainstream peers, a form of practical exclusion (Rogers, 2007). Sally talked at length about the social exclusion her son experienced during his first school, describing him as being "ostracised" and excluded from accessing school trips and spending time with his peers. Christine's son was temporarily educated in a 'nurture' group, away from his mainstream cohort. More formally, reduced timetables were featured in the narratives of both Sally and Christine. Reduced timetables can be considered a form of exclusion, in preventing children from fully engaging in their education by being removed from school (Rogers, 2007). Although statutory guidance requires parental agreement with part-time timetables (DfE, 2024a), neither Christine nor Sally were involved in the decision-making process regarding this matter, nor did they sound in active agreement; instead, the decision appeared to have been made by school staff.

Despite Sally's knowledge, expertise, and determination, Jack continued to experience exclusion, as his home school maintained their exclusionary power and did not always act in accordance with legislation, for instance, by suspending him for six days without arranging any AP. Parker et al. (2016) explored the types of 'informal exclusion' reported by parents of primary-aged children, which included: children being encouraged to stay away from school, requests for parents to collect their child, and reduced timetables. In some cases, these

forms of exclusion were perceived as a preferable alternative to a formal exclusion. The experiences of Sally and Christine were therefore echoed by parents in Parker et al. (2016)'s research, in that there were experiences which can be constructed as 'informal forms of exclusion', although, Sally and Christine were not always explicit in framing these experiences as exclusionary.

Both children were referred by their home schools to off-site AP, which is often regarded as a form of exclusion (e.g. McLean, 2024; Gill et al., 2024), albeit a preferred alternative to formal forms of exclusion (Gazeley, 2013; Timpson, 2019). I sensed that both parents were initially somewhat hesitant about their children's AP placements, with Sally explicitly talking about her worries that Jack had already "*had enough change*". This is in keeping with recent research by the DfE (2024a) which indicated that many parents share concerns about their children being placed away from the mainstream classroom. However, as were the experiences of Sally and Christine, these views were felt to change once positive outcomes were noticed (DfE, 2024a).

6.5.2 AP as an 'intervention'

This research was grounded in the SEND and AP Improvement Plan (DfE, 2023), which positioned AP as an "important aspect" of education reforms, used as an "intervention" to "create additional capacity for mainstream school leaders and staff to address challenging behaviour" (p. 24). Indeed, the narratives of Sally and Christine reflected a view that AP had served as an intervention for their child, but also intervened at other levels of their system, for example, within the microsystem, in interactions between the home-school, and AP.

In the literature, AP is described as a therapeutic environment in which emotional literacy skills can be developed (Levinson & Thompson, 2016). Sally and Christine both talked about the 'strategies' that their children had learned during their AP placement, for example, Jack had learned psychoeducation about the areas of his brain, and relayed this to his Mum at home. Additionally, relationships between the child and AP practitioners have frequently been cited as facilitators for positive experiences at the AP (Hart, 2013; Levinson & Thompson, 2016; Michael & Frederickson, 2013). Sally and Christine discussed that their children had felt listened to and understood by practitioners during their AP placement, supporting the importance of the relationships that had been developed. The AP placement therefore enabled both children to learn what works to support them, and this learning could extend beyond the AP environment to relationships with parents and current school staff, for example, Sally shared, "*We've seen what works for him*". In keeping with this, research by

McCluskey et al. (2015) discussed that parents and CYP were full of praise for the pastoral support from AP practitioners.

The relationships between parents and AP practitioners felt poignant in each narrative. Despite their differing individual experiences, both parents valued the advice and support in navigating complex systems. Sally shared feeling that, "*I've got them to turn to and their advice*", and Christine shared that "*I just felt it was the place where people were wanting to support him*". Gwernan-Jones et al. (2015) discussed how powerful effective relationships can be for parents, acting as 'lifelines', and Embeita (2019) shared that parents felt validated by the support received from external professionals. During the listening guide analysis, I heard changes in the parents' voices during the AP placements; absences of voices of stress, worry and frustration, perhaps alluding to emotional containment that they experienced in being able to trust the AP practitioners were able to support their children, and had the motivation and resources to do so. Therefore AP placement could be understood as an 'intervention' for parents too, in providing a period of relief in being able to trust practitioners to support their children.

Parents talked about interactions within the mesosystem (see, Figure 4), between the AP practitioners and the home-schools, and current school (in Christine's case). The contrast between (re)inclusion and reintegration was discussed in the literature review (Chapter 2). If the goal for the AP placement, as arranged by the home-school, was for reinclusion, then, it would be expected that the learning from the AP could be applied in the school to support the child's inclusion. Nevertheless, in the literature, school staff have reported an expectation that children would return from AP "fixed" (Lawrence, 2011, p.222), therefore, adopting a "repair and return" view of AP (Pennacchia and Thompson, 2016, p.68), in keeping with reintegration, as it situates the site for intervention being the chid.

Christine and Sally described that neither of their children were able to return to their home-school and experience re-inclusion following their AP placement. For Sally, when a reintegration meeting was facilitated with her and AP practitioners and home-school staff, she narrated an unwillingness from the home-school to listen to advice from the AP practitioners. This sounded akin to her own experiences of interactions with home-school staff (as discussed in 6.4.2). Lawrence et al. (2011, p.222) considered that the emergence of what has been termed an "them and us" attitude between schools and APs can result in blame and confrontation, which acts a barrier for reintegration. The resistance for the home-school to listen to people situated outside of their school system has been understood by Embeita (2019) through General Systems Theory. The school system's boundary needs to

be permeable in order to be open to external influence and organisational change (Issit, 2024). Without this, Jack's home school resisted changed and maintained a state of non-inclusive homeostasis ("*things had not changed that much*") (Issit, 2024). Consequently, upon his return to the home-school, Jack continued to experience forms of exclusion. Ultimately, Sally decided to remove her son from his first primary school, transitioning him instead to a school that she felt would be more inclusive. This can be understood as an assertive form of resistance (Malacrida, 2001), in which Sally advocated for her son in response to multiple incidences of exclusion. In keeping with this, Margalit et al. (2010) reported mothers who described a process of identity change from passive to more assertive in response to the realisation that they could not necessarily trust school practitioners.

Christine's son's home-school was in a period of organisational change at the point in time of Ben's proposed reintegration. Christine shared that there were high rates of staff absence following an Ofsted inspection, and it was decided between the AP, home-school and current-school that it would be more suitable for Ben to remain in the AP until he transitioned to Junior school with his cohort. Again, drawing upon General Systems Theory, introducing an external change (i.e., adapting school policy/ practice to support the reintegration of Ben) during a period of internal instability was resisted (Issit, 2024). A possible alternative angle on this is proposed by Malcolm (2024), who described that schools make use of a number of 'stalling tactics' to resist reintegrating pupils. Stalling tactics, according to Malcolm (2024), can include, requesting that an EHCP is issued, or stating that there is insufficient skills and capacity to support the young person's needs. As such, Ben's home-school may have used 'stalling tactics' to prevent their need to adapt and include Ben following his reintegration, and in doing so, not needing to adapt their practice to be more inclusive.

Previous research has constructed a period in time, termed the 'window of opportunity', during which a child is deemed able to reintegrate into a mainstream setting by school staff (Levinson & Thompson, 2016). Whilst individual interventions were narrated as supportive by Sally and Christine, I feel that a 'window of opportunity' should also apply for the reintegrating school. Their narratives have highlighted that the school also need to be willing, able, and open to make accommodations for the child, i.e., to 'reinclude' them.

Christine and Sally contrasted their experiences of their children's inclusion at their home schools to their current schools. Christine shared that Ben's current school "*really got on board*" with his transition into their setting, with regular visits to the AP from a member of school staff, and information sharing between settings meaning that she so far hasn't "*had any concerns or worries*". Sally shared that Jack's school "*is making a box to fit Jack*",;

illustrating their commitment to including Jack and making adaptations. Embeita (2019) shared that parents treasured their children's new school's efforts to include them, and I feel that this was also relevant for Sally and Christine as they spoke of their current schools with positivity and hope. In addition to a commitment to reintegration, in transitioning to new schools, both children and parents experienced a new school placement (i.e. their current schools). A 'fresh start' has been considered a factor identified in the literature for facilitating reintegration success (Atkinson & Rowley, 2019). Nevertheless, the idea of a 'fresh start' in an alternative setting to the home-school may counter the intentions of the Tier 2 AP placements as outlined in the SEND and AP Improvement Plan, which are intended to be time-limited with "the expectation of return to their mainstream school". (DfE, 2023, p.25; Image 1).

6.5.3 Individual inclusion and systemic exclusion?

Parents in this study generally narrated very positive experiences of their children's AP placements; during which their child "*flourished*", felt more "*understood*", and were able to learn "*what works"* for them. Additionally, from the parents' perspectives, I heard that they felt containment during the placement and supported by the AP practitioners. In the literature, there is a dominant stance that positions AP as a form of exclusion (McLean, 2024), albeit, a less exclusionary form of exclusion than permanent exclusion (Gazeley et al. 2013; Parker et al., 2016; Timpson, 2019). On the basis of their individual narratives, it therefore feels that Sally and Christine's stories of their children's AP placement did not reflect a perspective of exclusion, instead, an experience of inclusion during that period in time and space.

However, some argue that positive experiences of AP are merely a sad consequence of poor prior experiences in mainstream education, often involving exclusion (McCluskey et al., 2015). In this sense, if Ben and Jack's home-schools had been more inclusive initially, there would never have been a need to remove them from their local community and peer group to attend the AP. In the SEND and AP Improvement Plan, outreach support from AP practitioners is considered as being the first tier of targeted AP support (Figure 1, DfE, 2023). This may have therefore offered an alternative, more inclusionary, avenue of support for the children in this research. Nevertheless, outreach support would require the home-schools to be receptive to external advice, and to have capacity and willingness to implement any advice. The narratives of Christine and Sally make me sceptical that outreach support would have been effective in supporting the inclusion of Ben and Jack in their home-schools, as their narratives suggested limited permeability of these school systems to external ideas and changes (Issit, 2024). This raised the question of the goal, or

intention, for accessing AP support for Jack and Ben. Establishing shared goals is a key building block of collaboration (Griffiths et al. 2021), and a commitment to reintegration was considered one of the key factors constructed in Embeita (2019)'s research into reintegration.

In keeping with the perspective that AP provides an intervention (DfE, 2023) in aiming to reintegrate CYP into mainstream education, it could be expected that the prevalence of AP usage would affect rates of exclusion from mainstream education. Nevertheless, research by Power et al. (2024) compared AP and exclusion figures across the four nations and indicated that the availability of AP in England did not seem to have had an effect on 'formal' exclusions. Instead, the authors argue that AP supply creates it's own demand, due to enabling schools to maintain a non-inclusionary status quo. In the case of Ben and Jack's home-schools, they were able to refer individual children for placements, without making necessary changes to their schools and systems to include them upon their return. Even when CYP have returned to a mainstream school, Pilley et al. (2013) describe a "revolving door" effect of re-referrals into AP due to reintegration difficulties (p.311). This indicates that although there are individual stories of inclusion, the construct of AP may serve to facilitate exclusionary practices in mainstream schools.

6.5.4. Summary

In this section, through exploring Sally and Christines narratives, I have proposed that AP can 'intervene' at multiple levels of the system (Figure 4), for example, in facilitating supportive relationships between parents and practitioners. The narratives, when situated in wider literature and context, have suggested that AP placements occupy a complex position between inclusion and exclusion; whereby, the placement may be experienced as facilitating inclusion on an individual basis, during a particular period in time, whilst also perpetuating systemic exclusion. In order to support a shift towards inclusion, school systems need to be open to external influence in order to adapt to meet the diverse range of needs of CYP and support their participation and learning.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

In this final chapter, I will summarise the key conclusions from this small-scale and in-depth piece of narrative research. I will also reflect on the limitations of this research study. Lastly, and importantly, I will explore the implications for professional practice based upon the narratives of Sally and Christine.

7.1 Concluding Comments

In this thesis I set out to listen to the voices of an often unheard and marginalised group; the parents of children who had attended an AP during primary school. I hoped to explore, through a narrative approach, how two parents made sense of their children's educational journeys and the stories that they told. I heard that these parents are advocates for their children, despite being met with resistance by systems and processes which felt to counter and/or confuse their efforts to access support for their children. A meaningful finding for both Christine and Sally, was that their children's AP placement was storied in a hopeful and generally positive manner; it provided time and space for children to experience an alternative environment, and for parents to feel heard, reached, and supported by practitioners through communication and trust.

From the offset of this research journey, I felt that AP was positioned in a somewhat gloomy light, with literature and policy focussing on an exclusionary perspective (e.g. Gill et al., 2025; McLean, 2025). The narratives of Christine and Sally can provide an alternative story, which adds nuance and complexity to the wider systemic picture of inclusion, exclusion, and where AP is situated within this. On an individual basis, a change in environment and approach was crucial in helping identify 'what works' for their children in removing barriers to their participation, which, in theory, could then be extended to their current mainstream school provision, through an inclusionary transition process. What has been essential to this transition is the school's willingness and ability to adapt and implement what has found to be effective during the AP placement.

Interactions between people and processes, as understood through a systems theoretical framework (Figure 4), have been particularly meaningful throughout the educational journey's of Ben and Jack, especially during their reintegration. Nevertheless, criticisms of AP in perpetuating exclusion from mainstream schools have been considered (Pennacchia

et al., 2016; McCluskey et al., 2015). As such, individual and time-limited AP placements, regardless of their storied positivity, must be situated within wider education systems which can occupy a complex position between inclusion and exclusion.

7.2 Limitations

7.2.1 AP and PRU

Parents of the two children in this research had attended AP as a supportive intervention, whilst remaining on the roll of their mainstream setting. The participant inclusion criteria was based upon my interpretation and reflection of the SEND and AP Improvement Plan (DfE, 2023), which encouraged the use of time-limited AP placements to assess pupil's needs, with the expectation that they would return to their mainstream setting. PRUs are a type of AP, however, often children attending PRUs do so following a permanent exclusion from their mainstream school setting, or on the sixth day of a suspension. Sometimes, PRUs offer intervention placements (as outlined above, DfE, 2023). In my recruitment of participants, I contacted a range of APs (including PRUs), which offered AP placements as interventions for primary aged pupils. Some authors (e.g. Taylor, 2012), have made a distinction between AP and PRU, and advocate for them being treated separately. In the current thesis, I have included a review and discussion of literature which has encompassed PRU placements following exclusion, alongside AP being used as a supportive intervention. This has been due to the under-researched nature of AP, and the complexity and ill-defined nature of AP (Power et al., 2024).

7.2.2 Participant Recruitment and Generalisability

Whilst the original intentions were to recruit three participants, it was not feasible within the time-constrained window of this research, coupled with the challenges in recruiting parents/carers of children who have attended AP and experienced reintegration, as found by other researchers exploring this topic (e.g. Embeita, 2019; Steels, 2022). As is the case with all qualitative research, and regardless of whether a third participant had been recruited, I do not claim generalisability of any findings beyond the experiences of the two parent participants. Despite the small sample size, readers may recognise findings as transferable to their own situations and narratives. As such, if I had been able to listen to the experiences of a third participant, there may have been more scope for readers of this thesis to find transferability to their own situations.

7.2.3 Member Reflections

As discussed in 4.8, 'Member Reflections' (Appendix N) were shared with Christine and Sally following their interviews and my analysis, in March 2025. Reflections were invited via email and a follow up meeting was offered. In keeping with my position of social constructionism and my relativist ontology, I am aware that another listener to the interviews, or reader of the transcripts, would have constructed alternative interpretations. As such, it would be likely that parents may have held different understandings of their experiences, and may not be in agreement with my interpretations. Neither participant wished to provide their reflections on the analysis. I have wondered whether this could be due to their agreement with my interpretations, whether it was that they disagreed but experienced a power imbalance between participant and researcher, or whether they simply did not wish to commit further time to the research.

7.3 Implications and dissemination

This thesis has explored the narratives of Sally and Christine, and situated these within a wider discussion of AP, reintegration, and inclusionary and exclusionary practices in education. From this, I have constructed a list of questions to prompt reflection for all involved in the commissioning and arranging of the AP placements. These questions are included in an accessible two-page summary of this thesis (Appendix Q), intending to broaden the reach of this thesis.

Further to these reflective questions, I have suggested implications for different groups involved in the commissioning and facilitating AP placements and reintegration.

7.3.1 Implications for parents

Parents in this research spoke fondly of their experiences during their child's AP placement. Nevertheless, there was a sense of hesitance prior to the placement commencing, a finding that has also been suggested in wider literature (DfE, 2024a). An implication, based on the narratives of Sally and Christine, would be to ensure that all parents have an opportunity to visit the AP, meet with key practitioners who would be supporting their child and working with them, and to discuss the placement and proposed reintegration, prior to formally agreeing on the placement.

An area that requires further consideration is the impact of transport to an AP located outside of the local community on families. As stated in the DfE (2025) guidance on AP, the commissioner (i.e., in this research, the home school) should "consider" transport

arrangements in order to support the child in accessing the placement (p.27). However, “considering” transport may not be sufficient in mitigating the impact on parents’ day-to-day lives, and this should be discussed with families.

7.3.2 Implications for practitioners (mainstream and AP)

Reviewing the literature signified the fundamental importance of relationships during AP placements, and the support they can provide in educational re-engagement. In keeping with this, in the current research, Sally talked about the significance of Jack feeling listened to at the AP, and Christine talked about how AP practitioners “*wanted*” to support Ben. Due to the value of these relationships, it is important to consider how they can be honoured, when the time-limited AP placements end. It may be that there is continuation in the relationship, which could be more feasible within in-school APs or when an AP forms part of an Academy Trust (DfE, 2025). When direct contact may not be possible, endings should be planned and prepared for, perhaps including communication which supports a sense that the relationship is being ‘kept in mind’ (e.g. through post-cards or emails) by practitioners.

In addition to supporting the relational transition from the AP practitioner, it is important to either continue to strengthen, or develop new, relationships with staff at the reintegrating school. In Christine’s story, she shared how Ben’s school “*really got on board*” with the reintegration planning, and that a member of staff would regularly “*visit*” him at the AP. It is advisable that key practitioners from the AP and mainstream schools meet before, during and after the placement, in order to reflect on their practices that have supported relatedness, for instance, drawing upon humanist principles of empathy and congruence (Fitzsimmons et al., 2019).

Relationships between parents and AP staff were treasured by Christine and Sally in their narratives. Having someone to “*turn to*”, and this person being able to demystify complex SEN processes, or advocate for their children, was important for parents in this research. During the transition between AP and mainstream school, it will be important for practitioners to ensure that parents continue to have access to a key person and know who and how to contact them, meaning that the relationship is not lost during this liminal space.

Neither of the children in this research reintegrated into their mainstream primary schools, a finding that has been explored in the discussion through General Systems Theory (Issit, 2024) and Malcolm’s suggestion of ‘stalling tactics’ (Malcolm, 2024). An important implication, is for mainstream school’s commissioning the placement (i.e., ‘home schools’) to be clear on the goal for the placement, and how the child’s return to their school can be

planned for from the onset. In establishing this prior to the AP placement, AP and mainstream staff must collaborate to ensure that progress can be monitored and to plan for how the school will adapt it's environment, approaches, and policies, to support the child upon their reintegration based on what has been learned about what the child needs. With an appreciation that collaboration is required, and an acknowledgement from AP and mainstream staff that they both hold valuable skills, knowledge, and resources to support progress towards the goal, this would serve to mitigate against the 'them and us' attitudes discussed by Lawrence et al., (2011) and heard in Sally's story.

Pillay et al (2013) highlighted that disparities between AP and mainstream settings could act as barriers for reintegration. The literature reviewed, and the discussion of Sally's story, suggested differences between settings in how practitioners listened and responded to children's needs, with a more relational focus during the AP placement. This may mean that adjustments and adaptations to policy and practice are needed in the reintegrating school. Other approaches which have been found to be effective, such as those supporting basic psychological needs of competence and autonomy (Nicholson & Putwain, 2018), would also need to be transitioned from the AP to the reintegrating school to support the return of the child, thus, adopting a stance aligning more closely with educational reinclusion, as opposed to reintegration.

7.3.3 Implications for EPs

EPs are well positioned to work alongside school and AP practitioners, and with parents and CYP, to facilitate the collaboration that is needed to enable positive AP placements and reintegration into mainstream schools. Previous research has explored the use of person-centred planning (PCP) techniques during meetings to support the reintegration of pupils from AP into mainstream (Gray et al., 2022), and has found these to be an effective tool. The role of an EP, or an alternative practitioner with training in the approach, could be to facilitate these PCP meetings, throughout the child's educational journey. Doing so would support a shared understanding of the preferred future and hoped outcome and clearly identify everyone's roles and expectations. These are essential building blocks of collaboration (Griffiths et al., 2021), and are factors which have been identified in facilitating reintegration into mainstream education (Lawrence, 2011).

7.3.4 Implications for policy

At a strategic (e.g. LA/ national) level, EPs alongside other practitioners, need to consider the wider context of an education system which can, on an individual basis, foster individual inclusion, whilst simultaneously, enabling a status quo of non-inclusivity in some schools. The current research concurs with the recommendation made by Harris et al. (2025), that all pupil movements (i.e., including those out of the mainstream classroom to AP) should be formally tracked. To further elaborate on this implication, this research highlights the significance not only of recording school's referring into AP for time-limited placements, but their commitment to the return of those children to their school. As such, I advocate for bi-directional monitoring of transitions, i.e., not just from schools to AP's, but also monitoring of whether children are reintegrating into their referring schools.

There were qualitative differences in the actions and approaches taken by Sally and Christine's children's home schools in comparison to their children's current schools to enable and support their reintegration following AP. Tracking pupil movement data in and out should hold schools to account, and prevent AP acting as an enabler to preventing inclusive education reforms in schools. From a qualitative perspective, I feel that it is important to recognise the successes heard in Christine and Sally's stories, in terms of the AP placements, and their children's transitions into their current schools. Case studies (such as those included within the SEND and AP improvement Plan, DfE, 2023), which explore what has worked well to support reintegration and inclusion in education, would provide an opportunity to share best practice amongst settings and practitioners.

7.4 Closing Reflections

This research has focussed on exploring parental narratives of having a child attend an AP during primary school, including their experiences of reintegration. The topic has been situated within the broader context of inclusion and exclusionary practices in education. Throughout this research process, I have reflected on the following: can an AP placement ever be an enabler to inclusion, or, is AP a facilitator to exclusionary practices in the wider education system? Some authors (Harris et al., 2025; Gazeley, 2013), have situated AP on a continuum of exclusionary practices. However, informed by the narratives of Christine and Sally and critically reviewing wider literature, I feel that the position of AP is not static. Instead, it can be influenced by a number of factors, which can vary across time and space. These factors formed the basis of the reflective questions I urge commissioners of AP placements to consider (discussed within Appendix Q). Such factors include:

- A prior commitment to in-school inclusion by the referring school (for instance, through external agency support, such as EPs, or AP outreach services).
- Exploring the child and their parents' views on an AP placement, and ensuring that these are privileged during decision making.
- Collaboration between the referring school, parents, and the AP on the goals of the placement and how reintegration will be facilitated.
- A commitment to ensuring relationships are facilitated throughout the AP process (e.g. social connectedness to peers, relationships between parents and practitioners)
- A commitment to flexibly adapting policy, practice, and the environment on the basis of what has been learnt about what the child needs.

In my own sense making of these factors, I have visualised a metaphor of walking along 'AP tight rope', with inclusion situated on one side, and exclusion situated on the opposite. The notion of a tightrope signifies the fine line between AP being experienced as facilitating inclusion or exclusion, on an individual basis. The above factors can add weight and sway an individual's experience towards either side of the tightrope. The relative significance, or weight, associated with each factor, depends on the individual context. As such, one person's experience would differ from another's. As well as differences between AP experiences, the narratives in this research also indicate that there can be differences in the extent to which AP is experienced as inclusionary or exclusionary throughout a child's educational journey (for instance, during the AP placement versus during reintegration into the referring school). The dynamic nature of the 'AP tightrope' contests the static positioning of AP on an exclusion continuum, instead, acknowledging, that AP can, at times, foster experiences of individual inclusion. Nevertheless, while AP can serve as a positive intervention, through understanding individual needs, offering support and enabling reintegration into mainstream education, careful implementation is crucial to ensure that the fine line into exclusionary practices is not crossed.

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Appendices

Appendix A- Reflective boxes

The following reflective boxes are referenced throughout the body of this thesis, and are listed in order of appearance.

Reflective box 2.1

The Difference is an educational charity, striving for whole-school inclusion (The Difference, 2025). Throughout the course of this thesis, there have been different publications of their 'Who is Losing Learning?" paper (Harris et al., 2025; Gill et al., 2024). Within these papers, I have found constructions of an 'exclusions continuum' (Gill et al., 2024), or 'continuum of lost learning' (Harris et al., 2025) helpful in understanding different forms of exclusionary practices occurring both within and from schools, and how these can be situated in relation to one another.

Throughout this thesis, I have adopted a critically reflective approach to reading and understanding literature, including the continuums described and discussed in the above papers. Off-site AP has been situated by the authors as a "sanction", and a form of "lost learning" (Harris et al., 2025). In keeping with the positioning of AP placements in the SEND and AP Improvement Plan (DfE, 2023), I understand that placements can be intended to provide an intervention, to support the understanding of a child or young person's needs. Additionally, during placements, teaching may not adopt the curriculum and may not occur within a classroom, but this does not mean that learning opportunities are not taking place. As such, whilst I acknowledge that in some cases AP could be considered as a sanction, I am critical of this being applied as an umbrella term for all off-site AP placements. Additionally, I advocate for all forms of learning being valued, including those which take place outside of a classroom and outside of the curriculum (e.g. vocational projects or therapeutic support; Thomson & Pennacchia, 2014).

Reflective box 2.2

I write this reflective box towards the end of my thesis journey, having spent much of my time pondering where I feel AP is situated on a 'continuum of exclusion'. I can recall at the start of this thesis, aligning with the literature, and feeling a strong sense that AP provides an illusion of inclusion, to disguise a more subtle form of exclusion. However, as I have explored further literature, engaged in my own research journey and listened to parental narratives, and had conversations in supervision and with colleagues on placement, I feel that the situation is more complex. I take the view that the position of AP on a continuum of

inclusion and exclusion, is not static, and instead, is influenced by a number of factors, which may evolve over time. Examples of factors that I have reflected on could include, but are not limited to:

- The child's understanding of, and views towards, the AP placement
- The parent's understanding of, and views towards, the AP placement
- The matching of the placement to the individual child's needs and interests
- Reintegration planning
- The extent to which the referring school has ensured that the child and their parent(s) experiences a continued sense of connectedness to, and belonging at, their school throughout the placement.

Reflective Box 2.3

Upon initially reading Thomas (2015)'s argument for the use of 'reinclusion', I felt strongly that I aligned with this. I felt that it was correct that the expectation for change should be situated with the school, who would adapt to enable the learning and participation of the child, as opposed to the need for change being situated within the child. This contrasts with 'reintegration', which suggests that the child would return and adapt to the setting (Pillay et al., 2013; Lindsay, 2007). However, I have since reflected that 'reinclusion' indicates a return to inclusion; therefore, indicating that the child was previously experiencing inclusion. If this were to be the case, I wonder if an AP placement would have been needed?

Therefore, I adopt a critically reflective position towards both '(re)inclusion' and '(re)integration', as I acknowledge flaws in the use of both words to describe and define a child's transition from AP into a mainstream setting. For ease, as it is the term frequently used in literature, I will use the term 'reintegration' in this thesis.

Reflective Box 3.1

Whilst my positioning in respect of being a parent/ carer to a child who has attended an AP remained unchanged throughout the process, there were times when I felt I shared some knowledge or experiences with the participants. For example, participants discussed involvement with an Educational Psychologist (EP) during their child's educational journey. I had been transparent about my dual identity as a researcher and trainee EP throughout the process and introduced myself as such when meeting both participants. In my role as a TEP, I held knowledge about processes and legislation that were relevant to participant's experiences. At points, for example, when a participant could not recall what the acronym

‘PIP’ meant, I found myself sharing this knowledge with her. I wondered whether this was my attempt to position myself as a ‘knowledgeable outsider’ (Milligan, 2016), and thus, in Milligan (2016)’s view, an ‘in-betweener’. Similarly, I experienced a sense of discomfort when practices were shared by participants that, due to my experience as a trainee EP, I knew were incorrect. For example, both parents discussed having uncomfortable experiences with part-time timetables. This created a sense of a blurred identity between my role as a Trainee EP and a researcher, which I both noted in my reflective diary and discussed in research supervision.

Reflective Box 3.2

I have been encouraged to reflect on my philosophical position throughout my research journey. This has taken significant reflection and conscious attention, as prior to this doctorate, I was unfamiliar with these terms. Texts such as those written by Willig (Willig, 2013), Crotty (1998) and Burr (2015) have helped support my understanding of ontology and epistemology, and the application of my positionality to the current research. In this thesis, I have used aspects of different areas across all these texts in forming my own understanding and expressing this in my own writing, which in isolation, might differ to these texts.

Reflective Box 3.3

Willig (2013), describes research as an 'adventure'; and indeed, there have been a number of twists and turns with my understanding of my research philosophy during this journey.

Initially, I felt I aligned with a stance of critical realism, which seeks to gain an understanding of what is ‘really’ going on, but acknowledges that we cannot directly access this reality (Willig, 2013). I resonated with the views shared in recent theses exploring similar topics of AP and reintegration. For example, in adopting a critical realist stance, Atkinson and Rowley (2019) discuss that reintegration strategies and APs are 'real' in terms of their existence outside of human thought. This felt tangible, as in my practice as a Trainee EP I had witnessed and seen the impact of strategies, such as having an assigned key adult in school, and have visited APs which are clearly ‘real’ in the sense that they exist inside a building.

As I have interacted with literature, engaged in discussions around AP, and reflected on concepts such as AP, reintegration, inclusion, and exclusion, my understanding has been developed and shaped by what I have learnt and my understanding of these concepts. As such, my understanding of reality has been constructed by engaging with language and discourse and has changed over time. This resonates with what I understand to be a constructionist epistemology (Burr, 2015); multiple realities are created and shaped through language, and as such, are socially constructed.

Holmes (2020) states that a positionality statement may be fluid, and change throughout a researcher's project and/or career, which was reassuring to know, as I had already encountered a shift in my philosophical positioning during the early stages of this project.

Reflective Box 3.4

Burr (2015) explains that a social constructionist stance does not deny the existence of places (e.g., a city, or, in relation to this research, an AP), however, she explains that that a social constructionist researcher would question the boundary between what is and what isn't an AP (or in her explanation, a city), and explains this could be a matter of negotiation. This resonated with my interactions with the literature, with the identifying features of AP feeling complex and ill-defined, with many authors instead creating their own definitions (e.g. Steels, 2022; Power et al., 2024). Additionally, nationally, there are significant variations in AP (Power et al., 2024), indicating that there is no one understanding or shared truth about what an AP is and isn't.

Likewise, the language used to construct a young person's movement from an AP into a school or educational placement differs between authors. Reintegration is commonly adopted (e.g. DfE 2023; Steels, 2022 etc), however, other authors use 're-inclusion' (Thomas, 2015).

Reflective Box 4.1

Due to the array of provision under the umbrella definition of AP, I needed to reflect on my inclusion criteria.

I considered the impact of full-time versus part-time placements on a pupil's reintegration into a mainstream school. I felt that as a child attending AP part-time would encounter multiple 'micro transitions' into their mainstream school setting during their AP placement,

their reintegration at the end of the placement would differ from a child who attended an AP full-time. Consequently, it was initially one of the inclusion criteria for the child to have attended the AP on a full-time basis, led by my reflections on differences in reintegration experiences between part and full-time placements.

However, prompted by limited uptake in the first phase of recruitment, I reflected on my position and decided to open up the inclusion criteria to include both full and part-time placements.

Additionally, I was encouraged to reflect on the focus of my research (the 'unit of study'). Following the literature review, I considered the reasons for AP placement, and felt that these broadly fit into either resulting from permanent exclusion, or as an intervention to assess and meet pupil's needs. Due to existing research tending to focus on reintegration following permanent exclusion (e.g. Atkinson & Rowley, 2019; Embeita, 2019), and the emphasis on time-limited placements to assess pupil's needs in the SEND and AP Improvement Plan (DfE, 2023), I decided to focus on AP as a supportive intervention approach.

Reflective Box 4.2

It felt uncomfortable to turn away a participant due to them not meeting the inclusion criteria, especially as my literature review had led me to understand that parents of children attending AP are often unheard. I did not want this parent to encounter another experience of not being listened to. I raised these reflections during my supervision and discussed that due to the consideration I had given to the inclusion criteria, and the focus of the research being on the child's entire educational journey (including their reintegration from an AP into a mainstream school), it would not be coherent with the research's aims to include this participant, despite the discomfort I experienced. Additionally, from an ethical perspective, it was important to remain within the agreed remit of this research. Instead, if I had opened up the inclusion criteria for this participant, I felt that I would have needed to do the same for all potential participants, in re-advertising the research with updated, wider inclusion criteria. As such, I decided to remain within my inclusion criteria and explained this decision to the parent. I signposted the participant to local forums and offered to share a summary of the completed research project with them.

I have felt uncomfortable with not succeeding in recruiting a third participant, as had been my original intention. In Embeita (2019)'s research into secondary reintegration following AP placement, similar recruitment challenges were experienced. This led to the researcher including a third parent participant, despite their child having not yet reintegrated into a secondary school (as per the parameters of the inclusion criteria). In my research, I decided against this approach for ethical, methodological reasons as well as due to not feeling this would be coherent with the original goals of this research, which were, to explore parental experiences of reintegration following AP. Instead, I have opted for depth of analysis of the two parents who were recruited and met the inclusion criteria.

I have been reassured to find that in similar narrative research for Educational Psychology theses, the analysis and discussion has been based on two participants (e.g. Johnson, 2018; Faure Walker, 2021).

Reflective Box 4.3

When planning this research, and creating my research proposal, I felt that having a visual tool could help to facilitate and co-construct the interview. Having never conducted a research interview before, I felt comfort in knowing that the timeline provided a non-verbal means to support story-telling, and could be used if, for example, the participant was struggling to narrate their experiences. This felt particularly important, as in my experience as a trainee EP, I find that sometimes parents may find it challenging to verbalise their experiences, especially when these evoke emotional responses. In my practice, I find that writing down together, sometimes using a structure, can enable the parent time to pause and reflect on their thoughts, supporting their narration. Therefore, in addition to the reasons discussed in Chapter 4.4, I felt that the addition of the timeline would be supportive of the interview process.

Nonetheless, both Christine and Sally narrated their child's educational journeys with little need for the scaffolding of a visual timeline. I did introduce these in both interviews, and brief notes were made along a timeline, however, I did not regularly find myself needing to refer back to these to facilitate the interview, and nor did Sally and Christine.

Reflective Box 4.4

Ahead of the pilot interview, I revisited my notes on Narrative interviewing. I have found texts by Riessman (2008) and Kvale and Brinkmann (2015) especially helpful and accessible.

On the one hand, I felt reassured by my role of 'abstaining from interruptions, occasionally posing questions for clarification and assisting the interviewee' (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2014, p.178). Riessman (2008) writes that 'tell me about…' invites an open-ended account. I hoped that this, coupled with the opportunity to create an accompanying visual timeline, could act as a facilitator in co-constructing a narrative account of their experiences as a parent of a child whose educational journey has included an AP placement.

On the other hand, I was very aware that my role throughout this interview was not passive. Riessman (2008) emphasises that the interviewer's emotional attentiveness and engagement are more important than the wording of any questions posed. As such, I needed to ensure that I was consistently engaged in the interviewee's responses, allowing me to make sense of their stories so that I could 'wander together with' the interviewee (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015) and support the co-construction of the narrative.

To further prepare, I looked at the transcripts of published theses using narrative interviewing to see how the researchers navigated the interview so that they were not leading them down a certain path with their prompts and questioning.

Reflective Box 4.5

I was initially unfamiliar with the terms ‘contrapuntal’ and ‘polyphonic’. Throughout this research, I have found abstract concepts challenging to grasp, therefore, I find examples, or metaphors helpful to support my understanding. I looked at example Listening Guide analysis transcripts (e.g. Woodcock, 2016; Giligan & Eddy, 2021), and looked to where the terms originated from for further examples.

I understand these terms have musical origins, therefore, I began by researching music that can be considered to be polyphonic in nature, by being characterised by two or more simultaneous melodic lines (contrapuntal). Internet research led me to listening to ‘Ghetto Gospel’ by Tupac and Elton John and reflecting on the different musical layers. There is a contrast between Elton John’s sung chorus which is melodic in nature, and the verses rapped by Tupac which are powerfully delivered. Additionally, there is a mixture of independent instrumental layers (e.g. piano) which flow in and out during the track. The different components of the song are distinct but also connected.

Gilligan and Eddy (2021) liken voice to music; it has a tone and a tempo, and can be listened to or read. Voice is understood as being polyphonic in nature; people can speak in more than one (contrapuntal) voice. Contrapuntal voices can be in harmony or clashing/ dissonant (Gilligan & Eddy, 2021), just as I had heard in Ghetto Gospel.

Reflective Box 5.1

During Sally's interview, I felt that I did not need to say very much to say to facilitate her story-telling. I found this a relief, due to the emotional intensity of the topics covered, especially in relation to loss and grief, which I had not anticipated would feature in this research. Listening back to the interview during the stages of interpretation, I wonder whether I should have asked more questions or made more verbal contributions. However, I was also mindful of providing an empowering space for Sally to exercise choice in how she chose to tell her story (Mischler 1986, as cited in, Emerson & Frosh, 2009).

It felt natural to compare and contrast my experiences as an interviewer between Christine and Sally's interview. I felt I made significantly more contributions in Christine's interview. I was reassured by Emerson and Frosh (2009)'s reflections on narrative interviews, explaining that personal narratives may include either long or short chunks of narrations, with the role of the interviewer being to actively engage in maintaining the conversation.

Reflective Box 5.2

Throughout the interview, Sally would quote conversations she had with other practitioners. In reflecting on how to represent this in the voice poems, I have decided to position the speech under the column of the speaker. For example, if Sally was quoting herself, this is in the self-voice (I/) column, whereas, if she was quoting school staff, I have positioned this in the 'they' column.

Reflective Box 5.3

Listening back to the interview, I regret not asking Sally about how it felt when the teacher left her role and removed her son from the home school I imagine that she experienced a sense of loss, due to this being the first person who had listened to her, and their connectedness in terms of both being teachers and parents to children with (possible) neurodiversity. Moreover, I wonder whether Sally felt concerned or even perhaps

suspicious when the teacher not only left her position but also removed her own son from the school.

Reflective Box 5.4

As a Trainee EP, I often work with parents who are themselves experienced practitioners, and who hold a wealth of experience and knowledge. In these instances, I find myself experiencing dissonance. On the one hand, I value their expertise and this as a helpful resource in supporting the development of a shared understanding. On the other hand, I feel a sense of vulnerability; I am aware of the potential imbalance in knowledge and experience between us. I worry that parents doubt my professional capacity, and view me as lacking competence. As a practitioner, I use reflection and supervision to be aware of these feelings, and to ensure that my feelings do not negatively impact my practice or the relationships I form with parents. I am mindful that school staff often do not have access to supervision, and I wonder how the members of school staff felt during their interactions with Sally; whether they were aware of the knowledge/ experience imbalance, and whether this impacted on the relationship, consciously or unconsciously.

Reflexive Box 5.6

“Well I just think if it's gonna help (.) kind of future in terms of how things y’know may or may not shape how things work in schools and with alternative provisions and things but y’know I do think that the [AP name] was such a great opportunity (.) and it's just- (.) it’s just offered to so (.) little amount of kids and there’s probably a lot more kids out there that need it. Erm so if that means that that means (.) in the future they might look at doing more options like that.” (P, 401-405)

I am grateful for Christine for giving up her time to speak with me, for her vulnerability in sharing her story, and for the trust she has placed in me to interpret the interview as part of this research project. In keeping with her wishes, I feel a responsibility to ensure that Christine’s story is amplified, so that it reaches practitioners who are in a position of influence. I have kept this in mind throughout my analysis.

Reflective Box 5.7

Through constructing the voice poems, I noticed that Christine regularly said “y’know”. I needed to decide whether to include ‘y’know’ in the voice poems, to do so, I wondered about the purpose of Christine saying ‘y’know’.

The coordinated management of meaning theory encourages us to think beyond the content of what is told, to understanding how speech acts are used to perform various communicative functions (Hedman & Gesch-Karamanlidis, 2015). I wondered whether "y'know" could have served as a request for connection with me, the listener. This could be a way of inviting me to affirm Christine's understanding.

Alternatively, 'y'know' may have served as a filler word, perhaps as a tool for Christine to bide herself time to think before talking.

As I am not in a position of knowing what the purpose was of Christine's use of "Y'know", I have decided to stay true to her interview, and have kept these in the transcripts and voice poems. I hope that this also allows the reader to reflect on the function of 'y'know'. I have decided to use a grey font within the Voice poems to portray 'y'know', so that the reader can follow the flow of the voices, visually discriminating whether or not they wish to read these or not.

Reflective Box 5.8

I have reflected on how this must have felt for Christine, whose role in the process of arranging the AP placement was seemingly limited to being responsible for facilitating the practical aspects of the placement, once it had been agreed by those in positions of authority. In my training as a TEP, I have been encouraged to value parental expertise (Billington et al., 2000) and to work in co-production with parents and school staff to formulate an understanding of the child's strengths and needs and to jointly consider the support they need. Christine's lack of involvement in this process did not align with my values and practice.

Reflective Box 5.9

In hindsight, I'm not sure what Christine means by a "set approach", and I should have asked for her views on what this would involve, and why she felt that this would be a positive approach for her son. My interpretation of a 'set approach' would entail structure, fewer changes, and consistency. This contrasts with what was currently in place at Ben's infant school, who were "trying all different things", so I wonder if I shared the same interpretation as Christine, and perhaps this is why in the moment during the interview it did not feel so ambiguous. I wonder if Christine positioned the more specialist nature of the AP as having more expertise and resources than the mainstream infant school setting.

Reflective Box 6.1

In my application to train as an EP, submitted in 2021, I began my personal statement with the following quote, attributed to Alexander Den Heijer:
“When a flower doesn't bloom, you fix the environment in which it grows, not the flower”.

Listening to Sally and Christine’s stories of their children’s educational journeys, through mainstream primary school and alternative provision, the quote continues to feel poignant.

I heard that a change in environment (i.e., an AP placement) supported children to learn “what works” to support them, and how they could experience a version of education that adapted to meet their needs and enabled their inclusion in social activities and education. I heard that the relationships built between AP practitioners and parents fostered trust, alleviated stress and confusion, and provided a sense of relief and containment. I heard that a fresh start in a new mainstream school setting (i.e., a second change in environment) that could adapt to the children’s needs created a hopeful opportunity for inclusion and belonging in mainstream school.

These stories illustrate how changing the environment can support children to experience growth, to flourish, and to experience inclusion.

However, parents' stories at times reflected an understanding that is congruous with the ‘child’ (or ‘flower’ in the quote’s metaphor) being the source of change, and target of intervention. I have therefore reflected on understanding parents’ stories through theories which acknowledge individual differences, as well as the role of the environment, and interactions between the two. This discussion is therefore situated under the backdrop of Bronfenbrenner’s Bioecological model (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006).

Reflective Box 6.2

In social constructionism, it is understood that social processes and interactions co-construct our current accepted ways of understanding the world, which are situated within a particular cultural and historic context (Burr, 2015). In this sense, diagnoses such as ADHD and autism, can be understood as socially constructed ways of understanding human experiences. This does not deny the experiences of people (for instance, Sally and Christine) who may identify with these diagnoses, rather, aims to situate them within wider contexts.

My aim in this discussion, and in this research, is not to dispute the 'reality' of diagnoses, but to explore Sally and Christine's sense making and how they narrate their experiences, which I acknowledge are situated within wider social, political, cultural and historical contexts.

Reflective Box 6.3

I have not let it go unnoticed that the two parent participants in this research, as well as the additional interested participant, were all females and mothers. However, I am, hesitant to adopt a feminist lens in my discussion of Christine and Sally's experiences of balancing parenting, employment, and other responsibilities. In Sally's case, following the death of her husband, Jack's father, it has been inevitable that the responsibility for caring for the children has fallen to her, alongside her other roles and duties. While a feminist perspective critiques traditional parenting roles and advocates for shared responsibilities in both work and caregiving, single parenthood presents circumstances where this cannot be feasible.

Appendix B- Ethics Approval Letter

Downloaded: 01/04/2025
Approved: 13/06/2024

Phoebe Turton
Registration number: 220110312
School of Education
Programme: Doctorate of Educational and Child Psychology

Dear Phoebe

PROJECT TITLE: Listening to the stories of parents whose children have attended an Alternative Provision during primary school
APPLICATION: Reference Number 059767

On behalf of the University ethics reviewers who reviewed your project, I am pleased to inform you that on 13/06/2024 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 059767 (form submission date: 15/05/2024); (expected project end date: 01/08/2025).
- Participant information sheet 1137362 version 1 (12/05/2024).
- Participant consent form 1137363 version 1 (12/05/2024).

The following amendments to this application have been approved:

- Amendment approved: 29/07/2024

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

ED6ETH EDU
Ethics Admin
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 Admin (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 C- Research Poster

RESEARCH PROJECT:
LISTENING TO THE STORIES OF PARENTS' WHOSE CHILDREN HAVE ATTENDED AN ALTERNATIVE PROVISION (AP) DURING PRIMARY SCHOOL

WHAT IS THIS RESEARCH ABOUT

The aim of this research is to support a better understanding of the experiences parents have in relation to their child's attendance at an Alternative Provision (sometimes called 'step out' provision) and their transitions between the AP and mainstream primary schools. This research intends to hear parents' views, stories and experiences, with the view that these may be used to inform processes and practitioners involved with AP and reintegration.

WHO AM I?

I am a Trainee Educational Psychologist at the University of Sheffield and on a two-year placement with Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council.
As part of my course I am looking to complete a piece of research which aims to listen to the stories of parents (or carers) of children who have attended an AP and then reintegrated into Primary School.

WHO CAN PARTICIPATE?

Anyone who:

- Is a parent (or carer) to a child who:
  - Has attended an Alternative Provision
  - Transitioned from the AP into a mainstream primary school
  - Within the past 2 years

WHAT IS INVOLVED?

Optional Introductory conversation (via email/ telephone call/ in person)
- An informal opportunity to introduce ourselves and for you to ask any questions about the research.
- I will check whether you would still like to take part in the research, and if you do, we will arrange the interview.

Interview (online or in person)
- You will be invited to talk in depth about your experiences.
- We will draw a timeline to support you in recalling and reflecting on key events (e.g. in relation to your child's education placement)
- This may last around an hour, however, this would depend on the level of detail you would like to share

Check-in
- I will get back in contact with you to share my analysis of your interview (around December 2024). It is up to you whether you wish to meet, or I could share this via an email.

Interviews will be digitally recorded and this will be stored securely. Your experiences will be anonymised, therefore your identity would not be identifiable in any reporting of the research.

INTERESTED OR WANT MORE INFORMATION?

To express an interest in participating, please send me an email and I will send further information and answer any questions you may have.

My email address is: prturton1@sheffield.ac.uk

MY DETAILS

Phoebe Turton (She/her)
Trainee Educational Psychologist
prturton1@sheffield.ac.uk

Supervised by Dr Aisha McLean
aisha.mclean@sheffield.ac.uk

THANK YOU!

Appendix D- Distress Protocol

Participating in the research is not felt to have any serious disadvantages or risks. However, sometimes reflecting on our lives can be upsetting or distressing. If you feel upset or distressed throughout the research and would like further support you can contact the researcher, or you may prefer to access support through one of the following organisations:

 https://www.qwell.io/	Qwell Digital mental wellbeing support for adults across the UK No referral needed and no waiting list Online, chat based mental health support with a practitioner for up to an hour per session Qwell chat is open 12-10pm on weekdays, and 6-10pm on weekends.
 https://www.samaritans.org/	Samaritans Call 116 123, open 24/7 or email jo@samaritans.org (may take several days for a response)
 https://www.youngminds.org.uk/parent/parents-helpline/	Information, advice and support to parents and carers who are concerned about their child or young person's mental health. Call our Parents Helpline for free on 0808 802 5544, or chat online. Open Monday - Friday 9:30am - 4:00pm.

Appendix E – Information leaflet to be shared with children (Anonymised)

Hello,
My name is Phoebe.
I am studying at University to become an Educational Psychologist.
An Educational Psychologist is someone who tries to help children with their learning and wellbeing by speaking with important adults (e.g. parents/ carers, teachers).
Earlier today I met with your Mum/ Dad/ [name] to learn about your time at [school] and [AP]. It was really useful to speak with them and learn about what has been helpful and what might have been tricky. I will write about this in my University work (called a 'thesis'). I will use pretend names ('pseudonym') so that nobody knows who it is really about. We hope that this helps people (like teachers or head teachers) learn what was supportive for you and your parents, so that they can help other children like you.
Thank you,
Phoebe Turton (Trainee Educational Psychologist)

Appendix F – Information Sheet

Listening to the stories of parents' whose children have attended an Alternative Provision during primary school (29.07.24)

Thank you for expressing an interest in participating in this research. Before you decide whether or not to participate, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the below information and feel free to contact the researcher with any questions you may have.

What is the purpose of this research project?
This research is being carried out by Phoebe Turton, a student at the University of Sheffield and a Trainee Educational Psychologist at Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council. This research is being conducted as part of the requirements for the Doctorate of Educational and Child Psychology (DEdCPsy) course.

This research aims to hear the voices of parents of children who have attended an Alternative Provision (sometimes known as a 'step-out' provision) and then reintegrated into a mainstream primary school within the past two years. There is little research currently exploring parental experiences of their child's reintegration from an Alternative Provision into mainstream school, and research into the primary-aged cohort is even more scarce. The current research aims to gain a greater understanding of the experiences parents have in relation to their child's transitions between school and Alternative Provision settings. In doing so, it is hoped that these experiences can be interpreted and used to inform processes and practitioners involved with Alternative Provision and reintegration.

Am I eligible to participate?
This research is looking for 3 participants to take part. The criteria for taking part is that:
You are a parent or a carer to a child who:
Has attended an Alternative Provision placement:

As a supportive measure (e.g., may be a proactive placement aiming to support a pupil at risk of permanent exclusion or experiencing other barriers to attending school).
On a full-time basis, or on a part-time basis (e.g. 2 days per week, with the rest of their time being spent in school), for a fixed period of time (e.g. 12 weeks)
Has transitioned (reintegrated) from the AP into a mainstream primary school.
Within the past 2 years.

Participation in this research is entirely voluntary. If you do not wish to take part, there will be no negative consequences for you or your child. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep (and be asked to sign a consent form) and you can still withdraw from the research until three weeks after your interview (as the researcher will have anonymised your transcript and begun their analysis).

What would participation involve?
It would involve an optional initial informal conversation for you and the researcher to introduce yourselves and for you to ask any questions about the research. Following this, an interview would be arranged which could be carried out either through an online video call or in-person (location to be mutually agreed upon). The interview may last around an hour, however, this would depend on the level of detail you would like to share regarding your experience. The interview would involve sharing the story of your child's educational journey and your experiences of this, including their transition into an Alternative Provision and their reintegration into primary school. The study intends to use a narrative interview technique, which means that you will be asked open-ended questions and invited to tell your story and talk about your experiences. To support this process, you will be supported by the researcher to create a visual timeline of your child's educational history.

The interview will be audio and video recorded and transcribed to support the researcher's analysis of the data, in order to ensure that the ways that you have told your story are respected.

After the researcher has transcribed and analysed your interview, you will be invited to reflect upon their analysis in the form of 'I Poems' that they construct using your interview. The researcher will make contact with you via email, and you will be given the opportunity to reflect on this aspect of their analysis. Again, this can take place online or in person. It is likely that this

will be around December 2024. It is okay if you choose not to comment on this, and/or would prefer not to receive the I Poem or meet with the researcher again.

What are the potential risks and disadvantages of taking part?
This research is not felt to have any serious disadvantages at risks.
To take part, you will be asked to give up some of your time (approximately 1 hour for the interview and 30 minutes for the conversation reflecting on the researcher's analysis).
It can be difficult for parents to talk about difficulties during their child's educational journey and it is possible that you may experience a range of emotions during the interview.

What are the possible advantages of taking part?
This research will be a chance for you to talk about your experiences and contribute to a research project that aims to provide insight into parental experiences; with a view that this could improve support for children and parents' in the future.

Should I tell my child that I am taking part?
It is up to you. At the end of the interview, we can discuss how this experience could be shared with your child.
Will I be recorded, and how will the recorded media be used?
The audio and/or video recordings of your activities made during this research will be used only for analysis. No other use will be made of them without your written permission, and no one outside the project will be allowed access to the original recordings.

Will my taking part in this research be kept confidential, and what will happen to the data collected?
Any information that is collected about you (e.g. name, contact details) during this research will be kept confidential. Pseudonyms (false names) will be adopted and identifiable information redacted so that you will not be identifiable in any reports, publications or presentations that result from this research. However, it is likely that you may recognise your own story within the research. It is possible that some people who read the results of this study when it is finished, may be able to guess where the information has come from and in some rarer cases which individuals the information has come from.

All data (e.g. interview recording, transcripts) will be kept on a password protected Google Drive by the University of Sheffield. This is only accessible by the researcher and research supervisor. No one outside the project will have access to the original recordings and once these have been transcribed they will be destroyed.

The research will be written up to form the researcher's doctoral thesis. Theses from the University of Sheffield are made available to the public via the White Rose website (https://etheses.whiterose.ac.uk/). The research will be shared more widely (for example, within the Local Authority and University of Sheffield) via research presentations in order to share the learning from your interviews and the researcher's discussions.

What is the legal basis for processing my personal data?
According to data protection legislation, we are required to inform you that the legal basis we are applying in order to process your personal data is that 'processing is necessary for the performance of a task carried out in the public interest' (Article 6(1)(e)). Further information can be found in the University's Privacy Notice https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/govern/data-protection/privacy/general.

Who is organising and funding the research?
The School of Education, University of Sheffield. Please note that by choosing to take part in this research, it will not create a legally binding agreement nor is it intended to create an employment relationship between you and the University of Sheffield.

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

Who has ethically reviewed this project?
This project has been ethically approved via the University of Sheffield's Ethics Review Procedure, as administered by The School of Education. Additionally, this research is supervised by Dr Aisha Mclean.

What if something goes wrong and I wish to complain about the research or report a concern or incident?

If you are dissatisfied with any aspect of the research and wish to make a complaint, please contact Dr Aisha McLean in the first instance (aisha.mclean@sheffield.ac.uk). If you feel your complaint has not been handled in a satisfactory way you can contact the Head of the School of Education (Rebecca Lawthom, r.lawthom@sheffield.ac.uk). If the complaint relates to how your personal data has been handled, you can find information about how to raise a complaint in the University's Privacy Notice: https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/govern/data-protection/privacy/general .

What next?

If you would like to take part in this research, please contact me using the following email address: prturton1@sheffield.ac.uk. We can then discuss your potential participation and arrange a time and location for an interview.

Additionally, if you have any questions about the research, please do not hesitate to contact me using the above email address.

It is recommended that you keep this participant information sheet in case you wish to contact the ethics committee or I regarding this research at any point.

Thank you for reading this information sheet.

Contacts for further information:

Phoebe Turton (Researcher) prturton1@sheffield.ac.uk School of Education University of Sheffield The Wave, 2 Whitham Road	Dr Aisha McLean (Research Supervisor) aisha.mclean@sheffield.ac.uk School of Education University of Sheffield The Wave, 2 Whitham Road
Dr Penny Fogg (DEdCPsy Course leader and Research Lead) p.fogg@sheffield.ac.uk School of Education University of Sheffield The Wave,	Professor Rebecca Lawthom (Head of School of Education) r.lawthom@sheffield.ac.uk School of Education University of Sheffield The Wave,

2 Whitham Road	2 Whitham Road

Appendix G- Example emails to support recruitment

Example initial email to APs (personalised with AP information, gleaned from website) to support participant recruitment:

Good afternoon,

I hope you're well and having a good half term.
I'm getting in touch about some research I am involved with as part of my Educational Psychology (EP) training with Sheffield University. I'm exploring parental (/carer) experiences of having a child attend an Alternative Provision placement and then reintegrate into a mainstream primary school setting.

Your website has been really helpful in supporting my understanding of the work you do at [AP name]. I wondered if you might be able to help me with participant recruitment, by sharing details of the project with any parents/carers who would meet the inclusion criteria for this research, due to having a child who has:
Attended an Alternative Provision placement

- As a supportive measure (e.g., aiming to support a pupil at risk of permanent exclusion, or experiencing other barriers to attending).
- Transitioned (reintegrated) from the AP into a mainstream primary school (within the past 2 years)

I've attached a research poster that explains further details but I am also very happy to respond to any queries about the research. I would be very grateful for any support in passing on my details with anyone who meets the above criteria.

Thank you.
Best wishes,
Phoebe Turton
Trainee Educational Psychologist
Doctorate of Child and Educational Psychology
University of Sheffield

Example email to parent carer forms (contact details gleaned from search engine):

Dear parent/ carer,

I am interested in hearing about your experience, as a parent or carer to a child who has attended a placement at an Alternative Provision during primary school. As a trainee Educational Psychologist, I'm keen to hear parents' views, stories and experiences, with the intention that these can be used to inform processes and support practitioners involved with Alternative Provisions and reintegration. Further details are included in the attached research poster. If you would be interested in speaking with me about the research and/or would like to participate, please contact me via email (prturton1@sheffield.ac.uk). A Small number of participants are needed, and participants will be chosen based on their proximity to the inclusion criteria. Interviews can take place between July and October 2024 and can be worked around your schedule.

Thank you for reading my message.
Best wishes,
Phoebe Turton
Trainee Educational Psychologist
University of Sheffield

Appendix H- Consent Form

Listening to the stories of parents' whose children have attended an Alternative Provision (AP) during primary school

Please tick appropriate boxes	Yes	No
I have read and understood the project information sheet dated 29.07.24 and/ or the project has been fully explained to me. (If you 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 had the opportunity to ask questions about the project.		
I agree to take part in the research project.		
I understand that taking part will involve participating in an audio and video recorded interview that may last approximately 1 hour.		
I understand that the researcher will contact me after they have analysed the interview for their research and I will have the opportunity to meet again with the researcher to discuss anything that has been written.		
I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time before the interview or until three weeks after the interview without giving any reason and without there being any negative consequences. Please contact Phoebe Turton if you wish to withdraw from the research (prturton1@sheffield.ac.uk)		
I understand that my personal details (e.g. name and email address) will not be revealed to anyone outside of the research 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 agree to assign the copyright I hold in any materials generated as part of this project to the University of Sheffield.		

Participant Name:	Signature:	Date:
Researcher Name:	Signature:	Date:

Appendix I- Interview Guide

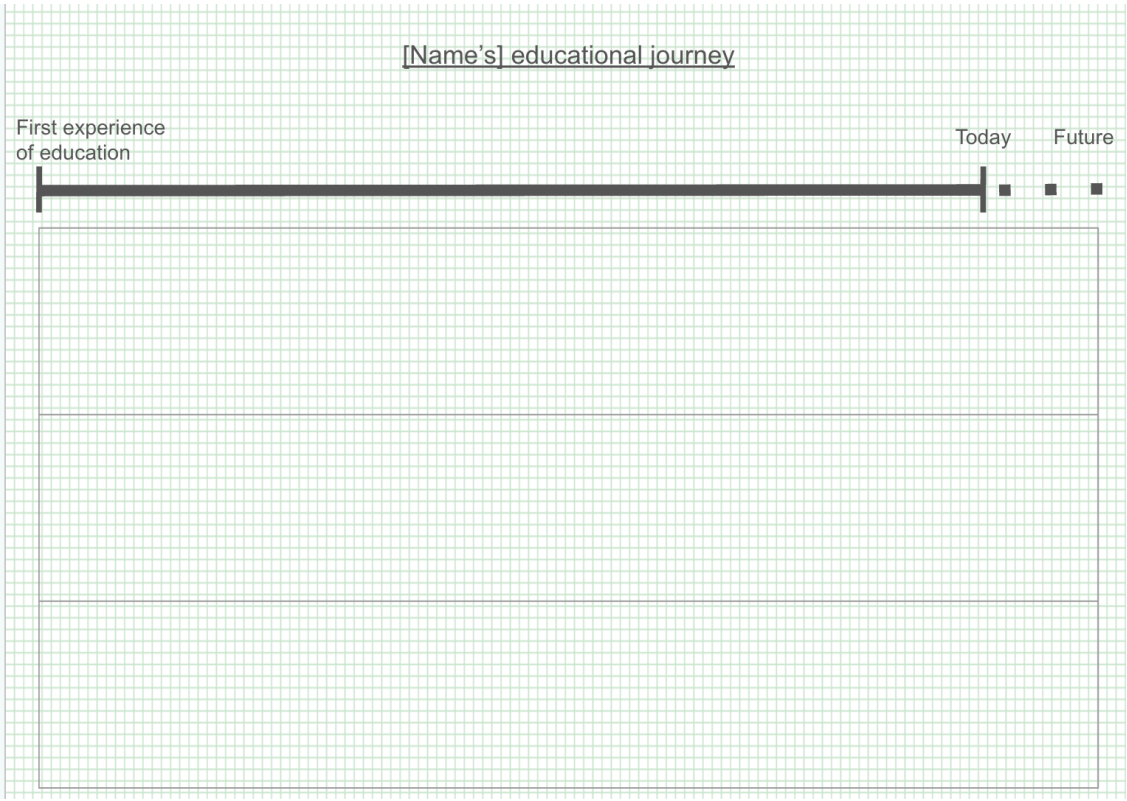
The focus of this research is to explore your experiences as a parent or carer to a child who has accessed an alternative provision during primary school. This is your opportunity to share your story; and I will follow your lead in the interview. Whilst we are talking, I may make some notes to support my understanding of your experiences.

So…..
Please can you think back to when *your child* started in education. Tell me about their educational journey and your experiences relating to this. We can create a timeline to help you to remember and reflect on this.

Prompts to guide participants in retelling their story:
“Would it be helpful if we map these important moments onto a timeline?”
"How would you describe this part of their educational journey?"
"Can you tell me about your feelings/ thoughts about this aspect?"
"What happened before/afterwards?"
“Tell me about this transition point, how was it for you, and for *”
"Who was involved at this point?"
"Have you any thoughts or ideas about how this aspect could have been different?"
“Tell me what happened when…”

If a participant appears ‘stuck’ during the interview, I would use the Life Grid as a visual support and direct their attention towards the different points in time, verbally prompting using any of the above questions.

Example life grid/ timeline template:


[Name's] educational journey
First experience of education
Today
Future

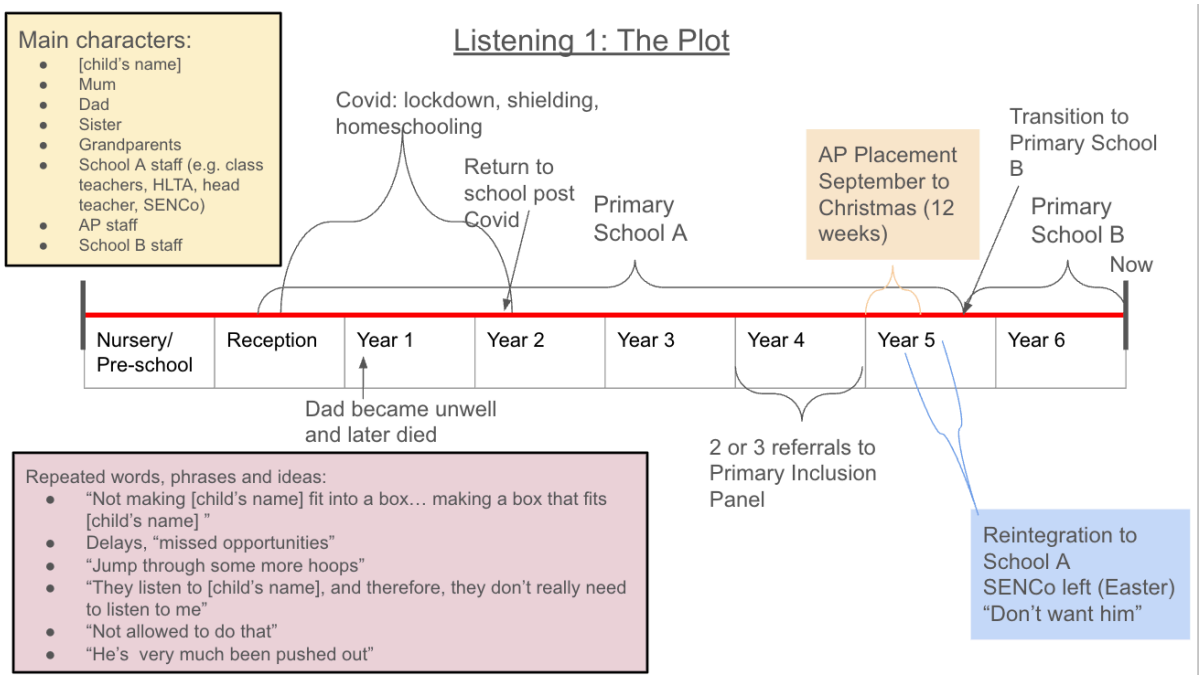
Appendix J- Pilot Participant Overview

Pilot participant	Were Inclusion criteria met?	Online/ In person	Participant feedback and personal reflections	Actions taken
1	No (colleague with personal and professional experience of AP)	Online	Review screen sharing of visual timeline and the impact on non-verbal cues (i.e., eye contact).	Explored a means of simultaneously screen-sharing and continuing to see the participant's video.
			Consider interviewing technique, in order to ensure that questions do not lead or interrupt the flow of the narrative.	Revisited key text by Anderson and Kirkpatrick (2016), who advise noting what is said and later revisiting it during a neutral pause in the conversation.
			Make it explicit during the introductions that I may make notes during the interview, and explain the reason for this.	I incorporated an explanation of the role of note-taking into my introductory script (see Appendix I).
2	No (colleague with professional experience of AP)	In person	Inviting the participant to co-create the timeline during a natural pause worked well; it did not interrupt the flow, and enabled us to revisit the	

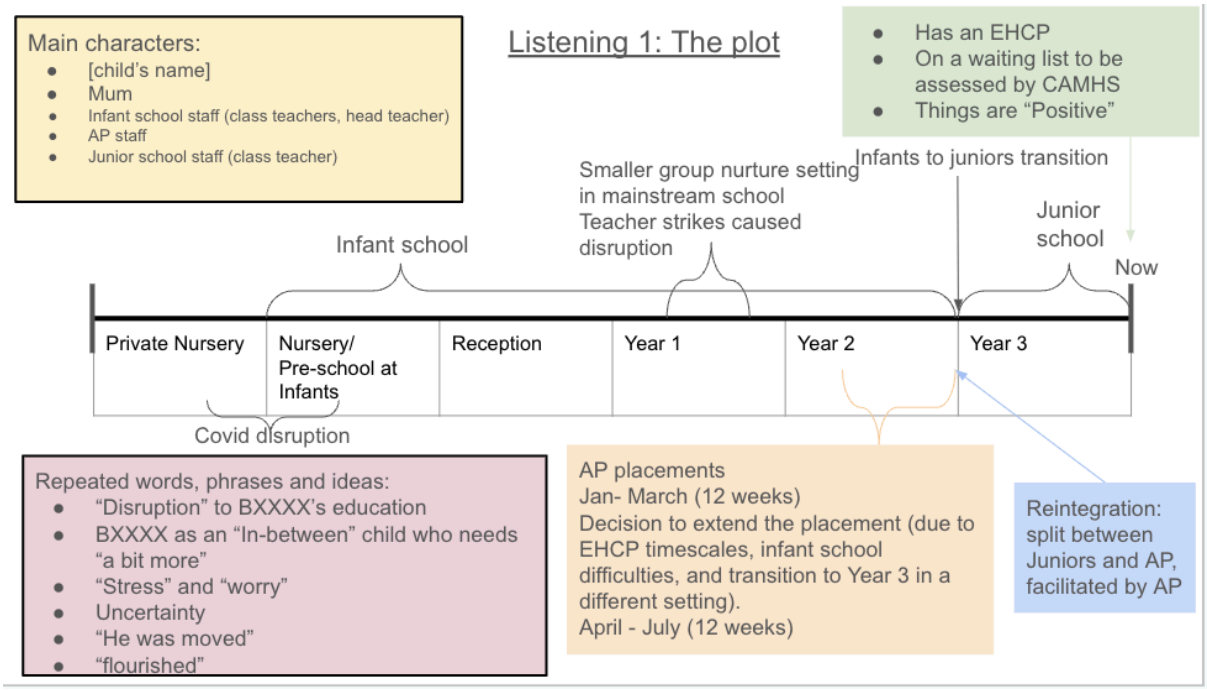
			timeline later on during the interview.	
3	Yes - Included in analysis (Sally)	In person	None provided; participant consented to their interview being included in the analysis.	

Appendix K- Graphic representations of interviews (Stage 1 of Listening Guide)

K.1: Sally



K.2: Christine



Appendix L- Sample of annotated transcripts (Stages 1-4 of Listening Guide Analysis)

L.1: Sally (Full transcript in Appendix O)

Extract of annotated transcript	Key
	Stage 1 - Reflective notes in column, key phrases in blue Stage 2 - the self voice and the voice of other I, they, we, you, Stage 3 - Contrapuntal voices: • **Voice 1- 'knowing'/ expertise voice** • Voice 2- battling/ frustrated voice • *Voice 3 - strength/ determination voice* • Unheard voice Stage 4- Listening for broader political, social and cultural structures [a line of text can includes multiple voices, ***[for example, indicated like this],***
S: Okay, So, when JACK was probably (.) about 18 months 2 years, (.) **I felt like there was something not quite right.** He was in private nursery then and I raised it with them and they didn't seem concerned. And then when he went to EYFS 1 (2) I raised it again. I'm like, 'I'm I'm concerned there's something not quite right'. Erm. And. Everybody were like 'yeah yeah	Repeated phrases: "not quite right" Sally didn't feel that her concerns were listened to/ weren't heard

yeah whatever'. And then when he started in reception, I raised it again with the reception teacher (.) and her little boy, was in the year above Jack at the same school and he had got an autism diagnosis. So, she was very much like, oh yeah, 'I'll keep an eye on him, I'll y-know'. But then the schools had several head teachers (.) um and (2) somebody had stepped in, (2) urm (2) who urm (2) wasn't (1), I don't know what the right word is but they were very strict on behaviour. They wanted to clamp down on behaviour. The teacher felt that that wasn't the right setting for her child so she ended up leaving at Christmas with her child.	The first person who listened had potentially shared personal and professional experience. I wonder how this felt for Sally when the teacher left and took her child?
P: [okay]	
S: So then they had supply in. It was all a bit hit and miss for a bit. And then he did get a lovely lovely supply lady in, who ended up (.) she worked right through up to SLT. Urm, (.) but (.) nobody really picked up (.) in that first year of reception (.) anything untoward with JACK. Then Jack went into Year 1, on the third day of Year 1, on the Wednesday, my husband got rushed to hospital (.). Um he had a brain tumour, and then in the March, we went into Lockdown.	Sally regularly uses education terminology, I wonder if she is trying to communicate her position of being herself a professional, to me as the listener.
Phoebe: [yeah]	
S: A*nd then in the June, my husband died.*	I was not expecting death and grief to feature in this research, and I can remember feeling emotionally unprepared. I was grateful that Sally spoke in an open and matter of fact way about what had happened.
Phoebe: [gosh]	
S: So Jack was 6 and 3 months when Ian died. Um and then they went back to school briefly (.) did they go back for about 3 weeks the year ones? So after Ian's funeral, he did go back	I began to hear frustration in SALLY's voice as she explains

briefly. And then in the September they went back as normal. (1) Um and Jack was okay to start off with. Then it got to Christmas and we went into lockdown again. Erm (.) And when Jack went back in the march, he was really struggling. Umm the school put down to bereavement and **I'm like, no, I think this would have happened anyway**, Umm (.) And we're still waiting for this diagnosis. So he has been tested here over the summer holidays for autism and ADHD. He's already got his dyspraxia diagnosis (.) Umm (2) and **I have said from the beginning, I** thought that JACK was dyspraxic with sensory processing, but as he's got older, **I think he's probably more ADHD** (1) um but school were very adamant, it was bereavement erm and he'd got attachment issues because of the lockdown and because of his daddy dying and I was like, it's not (.) it all started before then, we saw it at home before then. But he wasn't able to regulate the emotions in class, and he was becoming quite physical and um (.) running round school, screaming and shouting, swearing.	that she disagrees with school's perspective. The interviews were facilitated in a Local Authority premises, which is also where neurodevelopental assesments are conducted. Again, Sally repeats and reiterates that she feels Jack's needs were present before lockdown and the bereavement.
Phoebe: yeah	
SALLY: Um.. Everything took a long time because school was still adamant it were bereavement. So eventually we did at the start of-, at the end of year four, they'd said about him going to the AP and I did try and fight it 'cause I was like (2) I don't know. I was- I was- concerned that he wouldn't that he'd go there for this for this 12 week block and then he'd love it there probably and then he wouldn't like coming back to school and I was concerned about all the changes because **I felt like he'd had enough change** urm but actually the AP was the best thing that could have happened to Jack. The staff there were absolutely amazing, they learnt to understand Jack, how Jack works, how his brain works, they would listen to him and respond to what he said. I felt like school didn't listen to him. Whenever he was trying to explain about how much he missed his dad, school would be like, 'well other children miss their parents', other children this, other children that urm and he was never listened to and then because he wasn't listened to,	Sally was hesitant about the placement initially. Sally contrasts her views between Sally and school. At the AP, Jack felt listened to. This is in contrast to his experience in school.
Phoebe: Yeah	

SALLY: He wo-, his behaviour would flare up. So he ended up going to the AP last September.	
Phoebe: Yeah.	
SALLY: And he went back to school at Christmas. Urm and he settled okay for a bit but then by Easter, the lady that had him in reception who was lovely. She was the SENCo, 'cause the SENCO had left in the summer term, she took over SENCo while Jack wasn't there	Difficult to keep up with all of the staff changes/ a period of organisational change.
Phoebe: Right	
SALLY: And was still SENCo when he got back but she left at Easter and two of his little friends in his class who he was really close with. They moved to another school. Urm and it all just fell apart from Easter. Urm they excluded him, they excluded him for seven days without any alternative provision and then they put him a part-timetable without **my permission**. Urm and it was just a nightmare.	Changes happening in Jack's school, losing friendships and key staff- changes in his microsystem.
Phoebe: Yeah	
SALLY: Urm, so I was in contact with the AP, all through this.	Maintained links with AP following reintegration.
Phoebe: Yeah	
SALLY: Urm and I wanted him, they're part of erm [Academy] and I wanted him to go to [Primary school within the Academy], because that is the closest school to us, cause we're XXXXXXXX plus, he's gonna go to [Secondary school] 'cause that's where his sister is so XXXXXX some of the kids, **I know definitely** one girl that's in year six, her sister is one of (sister's) friends, so **I knew that there'd at least be a** [emphasis] child that he knew but they are full with big waiting list.	
Phoebe: Okay	

SALLY: So they the the err AP could err the staff err like Mrs. XXXX. whose the executive head, she could see that things weren't right and they found him a place at School B and he is loving it at School B. He started at School B err after Springbank last year, and he has been on residential to [UK location] last week and he is loving school.	After reintegrating from the AP into his home school, Jack transitioned to a new school belonging to the same academy trust as the AP.
Phoebe: Wow	
SALLY: erm he has a couple of wobbles but they know how to deal with these wobbles. Jack likes to run and hide, that's his go-to (.) and the school was at before didn't like that.. didn't like him running they would try and manhandling using team teach to get him back into class (.) then they would put him in an office and then he'd feel cramped and then it could all go pear shaped where as here (.) he had a wobbly day. Err one day before the summer holiday is about a week. About the week - they'd gone into transition. So bless him, he'd after Springbank, I think he's done about three weeks, four weeks and then the years sixes went up to the high school so everybody moved up here group, so he'd not in there very long, and he'd changed teacher again	Lots of change, transition to new school, then change of teacher. Sally speaks with confidence in the new school.
Phoebe: Yeah	
SALLY: And but that's the teachers he's got this year urm so he did have a really quite wobbly day urm and it happened to be the Year 6 leavers assembly (2) so erm the head erm and his year 6 teacher called me in and then erm Mrs XXXX the executive head happened to be there as it was the Year 6 leavers and we had a meeting and it was so different to the meeting we'd had in the other school, they were like before it was like, 'JACK needs to do blardeblardyblah', they were like 'right, what do we need to do to get the best out JACK'. Right. There's a male teacher erm that was at The AP that had started down with them and who does the PE and stuff.	SALLY contrasts her experiences between meetings at the previous school, and meetings at the new school. The difference is where the change is happening - with school, or with Z.
Phoebe: Yeah	

SALLY: And so they were like, “he could be, he can be in their classroom, he can take like there’s three children in year 6 that have all been to the AP. One of the girls with JACK and the boy went the term before” and they were like “right we’ll put him in their class. He he can take them out for like the sensory circuits in the morning. You know, he’ll be a regular body. We will put this in place and that in place to support him. If he runs out of school, ‘cause he'd run into the car park, they were like we’ll explain to him that he can run into the onto the field erm and it can all (1)” And they've just put so much in place that helps him. When he had sports day, he had a wobble then and they've just let him run it out, sit on the school field for a little bit and he came in and it was absolutely fine. And they're looking at how to help JACK with his emotions, not making JACK fit in a box, that works for them. They’re, making a box that fits JACK and it's so different and he's and he’s doing so well, he's thriving and he's such a bright lad. Urm and I think that was also the other problem, at his other school is that the things he used to get into trouble for it was always like when they'd not got the class teacher in. So it was a supply teacher when JACK had been, this is what really kicked it all off, it was their maths sheet. It was- they were doing equivalent fractures within equalities, now I teach maths. Or, I did. And now I’m 1:1. And JACK had got them all right, which for a Year 5 was quite impressive ‘cause I've got Year 8’s and 9’s that can't do it	The metaphor of fitting into a box is repeated, emphasising again that where the change is happening is with the school rather than with the child. Prior to the interview I did not know that Sally worked in education.

L.2 Christine (Full transcript in Appendix P)

Extract of annotated transcript	Key
	Stage 1 - Reflective notes in column, key phrases in blue Stage 2 - the self voice and the voice of other I, they, we, you Stage 3 - Contrapuntal voices: • Voice of tentativeness • **Voice of diminished agency** • *Voice of hope/ appreciation* • Voice of stress and worry [a line of text can includes multiple voices, ***[for example, indicated like this],*** Stage 4- Listening for broader political, social and cultural structures
Christine: So he did start then a nursery at his erm (.) Infant school erm which was erm then **disrupted by Covid again.** So then he actually really then only had sort of literally a few weeks erm and then he sort of then started reception erm in the infant school. Then after that (.) erm so he was (.) so he did (.) reception (.) erm (2) which was kind of like a bit of an up and down sort of (1) journey because he was sort of I think by which point this is when we started to realise that there was something (.) a bit more erm that he needed a bit more support and kind of a bit more y'know kind of a bit more additional needs in class. But at that time (.) the kind of	Disruption relating to Covid Starting to notice there was something "a bit more".... He needed "a bit more" - I am tuned into this being a repeated phrase.

reception teacher was kind of in in the view that for her kind of what she had to do she didn't really have to (.) **provide him with a structured day or a structured lesson** because obviously, he was still reception so a lot of it was like learn through play and that kind of thing, erm but then we were sort of starting to think ahead for Year One and felt that then that might be quite a tricky erm, y'know sort of like situation for him erm and then (.) once he entered into year one (.) erm (.) within a few weeks, **he'd been taken out of the mainstream (.) classroom** to kind of get more kind of support erm in a smaller group setting. So they had like a nurture provision in in the school erm (1) and erm he kind of stayed there for like of most of year one (.) so quite a lot of disruption in year one, 'cause it's **when the teacher strikes** were so at some points he had I think **he had over like a week off school because of Strikes** erm because he had additional needs **they didn't have the support in schoo**l to look after him. Erm (.) **So I had to basically keep him at home** erm (.) and then that kind of really sort of thing continued into year two	Reception class teacher shirking responsibility for Ben's needs? "He'd been taken out" - I feel like this gives the sense of being 'done to' - I wonder what agency Ben and Christine were given in this decision? Further mention of disruption; in relation to teacher strikes "I had to…" - Christine needed to step up where school was unable to.
Phoebe: Right	
Christine: Erm but that then it was a more kind of permanent set up in the nurture group for a few weeks.	
Phoebe: Yeah	
Christine: Then **he was kind of moved back** into the class classroom (.) erm because that was **on the advice from an outsourced (.) company** that was assisting the school at the time. So then **he was kind of put back** into the classroom with kind of erm (.) a teaching assistant support erm sort of during the day and that went on for kind of like er probably about sort of eight weeks until **I was then contacted** by the school to say that **the local authority'd offer him the place** to go to the AP for 12 weeks as an alternative provision erm for erm so initially it was like for the 12 weeks so it was just the kind of term after the (.) the New Year.	Repetition of "moved"; again, perhaps a decision that was 'done to' Ben("he was kind of moved…. He was kind of put." The use of "kind of" - I wonder if this is sitting uncomfortably with Christine, that her son has been subject to being

	'moved' and 'put' in places, led by others. "I was contacted" ; again, I wonder about how Christine experienced this discussion happening, seemingly, without her input/ acknowledgement.
Phoebe: Yeah	
Christine: Erm but then Ben actually continued and finished the rest of the school year there and did like 24 weeks (.) erm (.) because erm (1) **the school had a lot of difficulties at the time as his EHCP had not been granted**. So **they literally wanted to put a reduced timetable** in place which meant he hardly would've been at school. So the AP kind of erm (.) but also they were very aware that he was also going to be then transitioning into year three which was a different school.	Continued disruption - school "difficulties", EHCP. School wanting to enforce a reduced timetable - I wonder if Christine was aware of her right to dispute this? I know this due to my role as a Trainee EP, but am mindful that this is likely not common knowledge for parents/carers, and schools may use this to their advantage. I am getting the sense that the school and the Local Authority are holding a lot of the power in this dynamic.
Phoebe: Ah okay.	
Christing: So (.) **it was then kind of decided at the last minute, that he should stay in the alternative provision** to help him with the transition into Year Three erm (2) and then that's where we finish and he's now in mainstream in year three.	Lack of prior planning
Phoebe: Yeah (.) Thank you for giving me a sort of overview of what (.) Ben's educational (.) journey's been like erm I have	

just been jotting down some notes so I'm just gonna share them with you on the screen. If that's all right to check-	
Christine: Yeah. Yeah	
Phoebe: My understanding. I've done them in pencil. Does that show up? So-	
Christine: I can see those. Yeah, yeah. I can see them	Decision not to include in voice poems: see reflective diary, dated 08.11.24).
Phoebe: So Ben started off in Nursery and then preschool, but there was a lot of covid disruption.	
Christine: Yeah	
Phoebe: And then reception did you say with that that was when he started to notice that Billy had got some additional needs?	I can remember feeling uncomfortable asking this question, and did so with hesitation. I couldn't recall the exact words used by Christine, and wished I had of written them down so I could have spoken them back to her.
Christine: Erm yeah (.) I mean to be honest up and up until when he was when he was in the preschool nursery **they sort of mentioned a couple of things in his kind of initial kind of assessment** erm, to sort of say, ooh y'know we've noticed he's not very good with like adult led activities, but at that time he was only sort of two so it was just kind of finding out whether it's just (.) their age or y'know kind of like the way they are and things erm but then it was more kind of like in this short time he did nursery (2) **one of the teachers had sort of like noticed a few sort of little anomalies** where he was kind of going off and playing with himself. He got very anxious over things (.) erm but then it was more so reception because I think the sort of the pressure and the demand of being in that setting and obviously (.) it was the first time that	I notice that when talking about Ben's needs, Christine uses a lot of hesitant/ tentative language to preface it. I wonder how it felt when other people were noticing and talking to Christine about difficulties they had noticed in Ben.

he'd been had a full year in a full class with y'know all his peers. So erm I'd probably say probably yes reception's probably was the main one but there had been little bits before that as well, erm but **there'd just not been any sort of time because of covid to kind of really delve into it.** So it was kind of sort of knocked on its head or y'know, "he'll grow out of it" or he'll y'know, "we'll see have to see how things go he's still only young", that kind of thing	
Phoebe: What was that like for you when you were hearing sort of people saying things like that?	
Christine: Erm I think initially kind of erm from in sort of preschool and erm nursery sort of type thing it was a lot it I kind of (.) it did create a little bit of like worry and concern but then **there had been so much disruption** and (.) I kind of sort of took the view at the end of it that he was still only young and he needed a bit more time to kind of grow and y'know kind of mature that that kind of thing. Erm I think for reception it got a little bit more because **I had ended up having more like one-to-one chats** with his teacher in the classroom, just about sort of like certain types of his (.) behavior and things like that. Not particularly (1) massively negative it's just the way (.) that y'know the demands were affecting him in the class (1) so I think that she kind of foresaw that (.) once it came to a bit more of a structured classroom where you'd have to be sitting and paying attention and watching, and that that it'd be quite difficult.	Another mention of disruption Christine is tentative and has taken into consideration the disruption into understanding Ben's needs
Phoebe: Yeah	
Christine: Erm And so I think I think I think definitely kind of the years kind of reception (.) year one (.) even into kind of like year two were quite a stressful kind of time for me because obviously (2) I was kind of obviously **hearing a lot of things from school** and I was having to kinda (1) don't get wrong these aren't things that I'd not noticed at home as well, but obviously, because he's my child and obviously (.) y'know I've got an older (.) erm he's got an older sibling as well, it was kind of like a bit more, y'know sometimes they always say, "ooh y'know second child and all can be a bit of a nightmare" and this, that, and the other. So (.) i*n a way, it was*	Repeated mention of stress 'Hearing a lot from school'; indicates that communication was one-way/ a lack of collaboration? - school holding power/

kind of nice that school did kind of understand because they think they kind of understood a lot more about what I was dealing with but at the same time it created a lot of stress for me (.) because it's like, what do you do? Y'know that kind of thing. So that's erm (.) yeah (.) so that's probably what I'd say is (.) yeah, probably just quite stressful and and y'know (.) just wondering to do, where'd you go, what do y'do, and this that and the other. And that's kind of even with school kind of providing me with (.) support that they could, y'know **within their means**. So (3)	Uncertainty - a feeling of being lost. "Within their means" - school having limited resources to be able to support Christine

Appendix M- Extracts of voice poems and initial interpretations (Stage 2 of Listening Guide)

The following tables illustrate my process in constructing the voice poems from Sally and Christine's interviews, during the second stage of the Listening Guide Analysis. Each time 'I', 'You', 'They', or 'We' were said, I listed these under the appropriate column, in order of appearance. I noted my reflections while listening to the audio-recorded interview and tracking the I, you, we and they. These are included in purple boxes.

L.1 Sally (Full transcript in Appendix O)

Self voice (I, me, 'you')	You	They	We
I think I am aware I'm like, 'Well can we not?'			
		'We've got to…" "I'm just gonna…"	
'Can we jump through?'			
			We've still not got
			We've still not got We're still waiting
		They wouldn't	
So I've applied			
			We didn't get it

The self-voice taking an active position, but then this being overruled by the voice of 'they' (home school practitioners). A shift to narrating through the voice of we – could be interpreted as the multiple people who are impacted by the absence of not getting and waiting.			
I've not got I only have I've had I've had			
			We went
I think I said			
		They listen They don't really need	
		They can see They've got	
'They' verbs are not active; they listen, can see, and have got. There is a shift in how 'they' is narrated, dependent on who 'they' represents (here, AP practitioners).			
I think			
		They don't really know how	
I think			
I don't know I just feel			
		They don't	
I feel maybe			
Remissions in the self-voice: unsure how to feel			

		They've never had to	
I think I can see			
		They're not doing	
I know that one			
I feel like			
		They're not They were given They needed They wouldn't	
I know			
		They- they met	
I think			
		They were gonna They decided to	
I can't remember			
		They decided not to	
		They were all They'd not got it	
		They know	
I don't know			
By isolating the 'I' phrases in this passage of Sally's narrative, I hear that her thoughts are clouded; she can't remember, and doesn't know. Thus contrasts somewhat with how she recalls the actions of 'they', in terms of their decisions and 'know'ing.			

			We agreed
		They started the process	
I didn't like it I didn't think I felt that I felt he needed I was really concerned			
A continuous stream of the self-voice highlights Sally's apprehensive feelings towards the AP process, which was started by others ('they'). A lack of 'we' is apparent here, I wonder how collaborative this was?			

L.2 Christine, Full transcript in Appendix P.

Self voice (I, me, 'you')	You	They	We

I think			
	Y'know		
			We were
	Y'know		
		They had	

I think			
			We started to realise
I think [So] I had to			

I think this is the first shift in the 'I'. Initially, when talking in the first person, Christine talks very tentatively, without certainty ("I think"). At this point, she is relaying the order of events. The shift is when she took action by having to look after her son during the teacher strikes; this was definite, something she had to do. Perhaps upon the request of school ('they had'), combined with her internal need to do what was right for her son, left her no choice.

I was then contacted			
		They literally wanted They were very aware	
			[that's where] we finish
I mean to be honest I had ended up			

Here, I am tuning into the difference between the voice of the self ('I) and the voice of 'they' (in this instance, the home infant school). Whilst the 'they' feels to hold assertiveness, power, and control of the situation, in being aware and wanting to take action, the self feels a need to hold back her honesty.

		They sort of mentioned	

	Y'know		
	Y'know		
		They are	
I think the sort of pressure			

I'd probably say I think initially I kind of I kind of			
	Y'know Y'know		
I think I had ended up			
	Y'know You'd have to		

Christine talks with a tentativeness [in reference to her son's needs]. I feel she seeks reassurance from herself, and the listener, by her continued use of "you know"? I wonder if she uses this when she is lacking her own certainty. Her tentativeness shifts slightly when she said "I had ended up", at this point in the story.

Appendix N- Member reflections

The following 'member reflections' were shared via email with participants, Christine and Sally, in March 2025.

N.1: Sally's member reflections

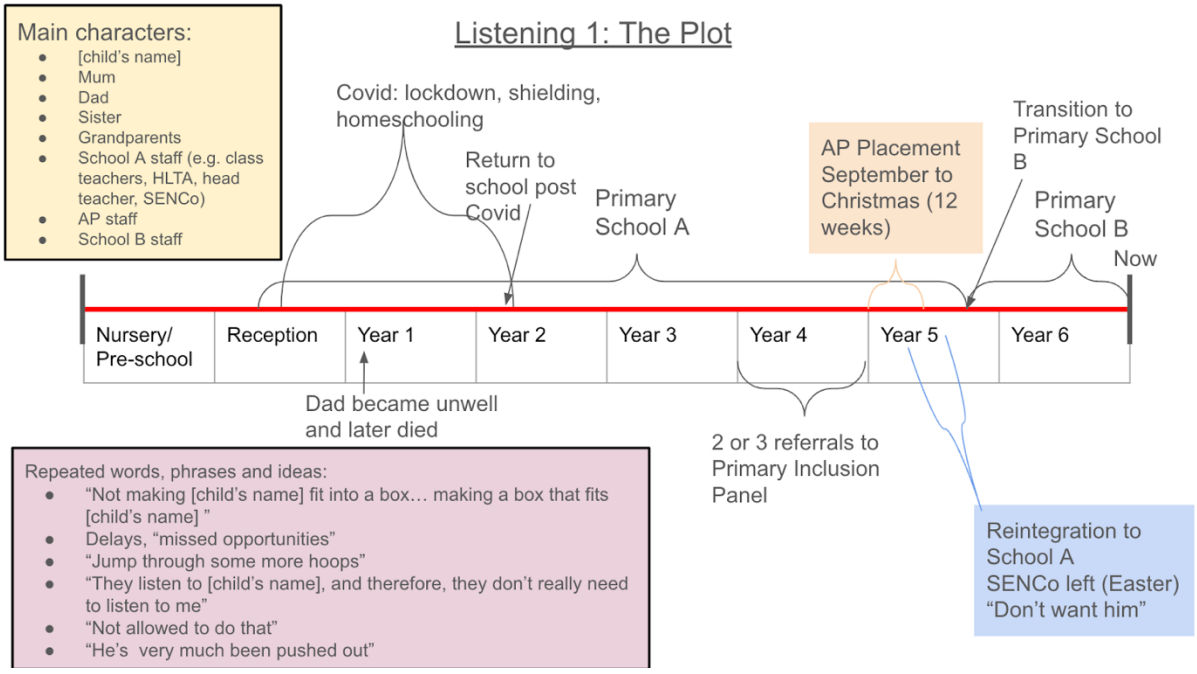
Thank you for participating in the research. As explained in the participant information sheet and at the end of the interview, I am now sharing my initial interpretation of your interview and would welcome any of your reflections.

The analysis I have followed is called The Listening Guide and was developed by Carol Gilligan and Lyn Brown. It is a qualitative form of analysis that involves a series of 'listenings' to the interview. I have included an overview of each of the stages of the analysis below.

Stage One: "Listening for the plot"

This stage involves listening to the 'plot' of the story to get a sense of what is happening, who the main characters are, the order of events, and so on. Additionally, to listen to any recurring words, metaphors, contradictions, absences, emotional resonance, and silences.

I have represented my interpretation of the 'plot' in the below graphic:



Stage two: Listening for the voice of 'I', 'they', you, and 'we'

In this second stage, the spotlight is put on the voice of the self by tracing the use of 'I' throughout the transcript and stripping out the wider context. The 'I phrases' included the verb and any accompanying important words. The phrases were kept in the order that they were said and were arranged into a poem.

I also decided to track 'they', 'we' and 'you', as these felt important throughout your interview.

I have included a selection of 'voice poems' from our interview below:

I'd got to
I'll ring

I rang
I ring
I rang

You told me to

I spoke to

You've done nothing
You can see
[But] you've done nothing

Here, you talked about all of the actions you took to gain support for your son. You made numerous phonecalls between services, emphasised by the patterned repetition of 'ring' then 'rang'. You directly addressed school staff as 'you'. I feel that this highlighted the frustration directed towards them and their absence of action, in contrast to your determination to access support.

They'd decided
They didn't want
They pushed

I'm gonna

They have really pushed

[if] you don't want

We don't want you
We'll go

.

This voice poem summarises your sense-making of yours and your son's experiences of exclusion. At the start of the poem, I feel 'they' hold power, in making decisions, (not) wanting and pushing. At the end of the poem, there is a spark of resolution, when you reflect this back to the school. I felt that you then took the power and control back, in taking joint action with your son, "We'll go".

Stage three: Listening for Contrapuntal Voices

Contrapuntal is a musical term, defined by multiple independent melodies played simultaneously. Ghetto Gospel by Tupac and Elton John is an example of contrapuntal music; there is a contrast between Elton John's sung chorus which is melodic in nature, and the verses rapped by Tupac which are powerfully delivered. Additionally, there is a mixture of independent instrumental layers (e.g. piano) which flow in and out during the track. The different components of the song are distinct but also connected. Similarly, the Listening Guide analysis suggests that people can speak through more than one (contrapuntal) voice, which can be in harmony or contradictory.

In your interview, I heard a knowing voice, a frustrated voice, a voice of strength, and an unheard voice. I traced these throughout your interview, using different coloured fonts.

A summary of what I listened for and how I defined the 'voices':

	Description of defining features of the voice:
Knowing voice	Knowing as both an experienced education practitioner and as a parent.

Frustrated voice	Battling, being met by organisational/ system barriers and resistance from practitioners.
Voice of strength	Determination, perseverance.
Unheard	Times when your communication wasn't received.

Step 4: Composing an Analysis

This stage involves pulling together what has been learned in the previous three stages into a written analysis. I have used quotes from your interview as subtitles to represent different stories:

5.2.2 “Jump through some hoops”
5.2.3 “I raised it again”
5.2.4 “I was out of my comfort zone”
5.2.5 “You’re just pushing him out”
5.2.6 “I did try and fight it”
5.2.7 “We’ve seen what works for him”
5.2.8 “We’ve made it work”
5.2.9 “It all went pear shaped”
5.2.10 “They’re, making a box that fits [child’s name]”

Next steps

I warmly invite your reflections, feedback, and/or any questions regarding the interpretation of the interview, the analysis, or the broader research. If you'd like to arrange to meet online for a discussion, please suggest a convenient time. Alternatively, you are welcome to share your thoughts via email. Please note that, in line with the researcher's positionality, your reflections will not alter the findings but are greatly valued.

Regarding the next steps for the research, I heard how important it was that your voice and experiences are heard. I am writing up the wider research as part of my thesis, and plan to

disseminate this in a condensed format with all of the Alternative Provisions and practitioners that I have contacted throughout this process. Additionally, this research will be presented to both trainee and qualified Educational Psychologists at the University of Sheffield in June.

N.2 Christine's Member Reflections

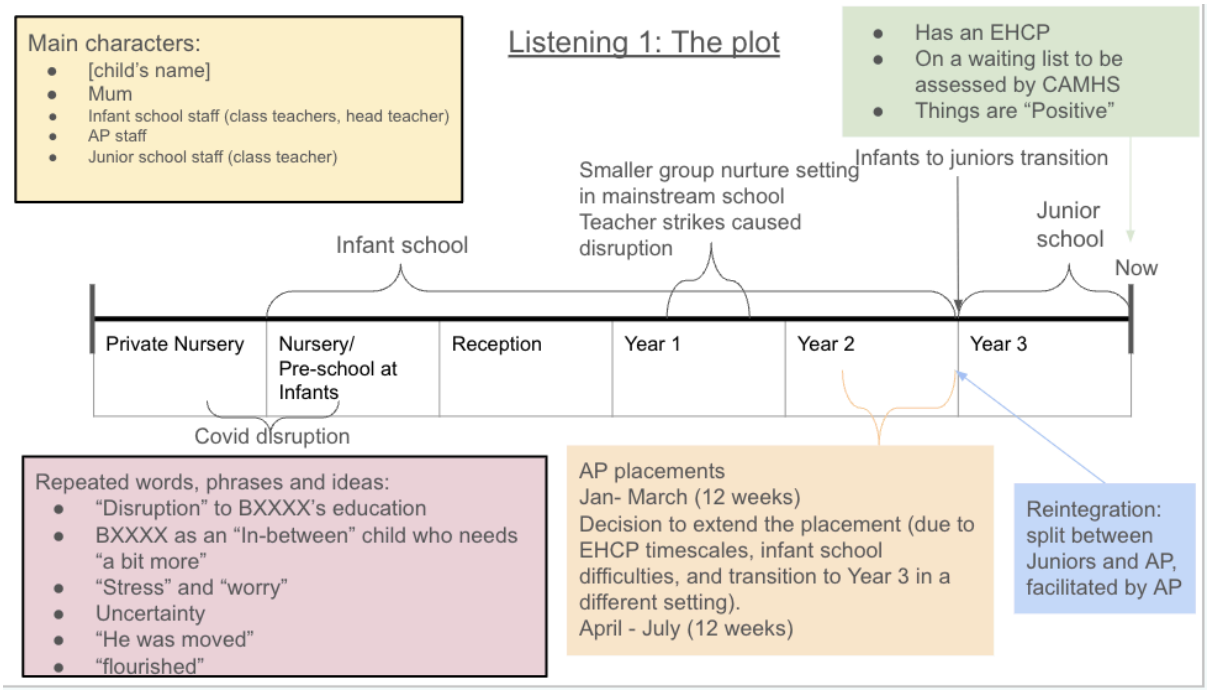
Thank you for participating in the research. As explained in the participant information sheet and at the end of the interview, I am now sharing my initial interpretation of your interview and would welcome any of your reflections.

The analysis I have followed is called The Listening Guide and was developed by Carol Gilligan and Lyn Brown. It is a qualitative form of analysis that involves a series of 'listenings' to the interview. I have included an overview of each of the stages of the analysis below.

Stage One: "Listening for the plot"

This stage involves listening to the 'plot' of the story to get a sense of what is happening, who the main characters are, the order of events, and so on. Additionally, to listen to any recurring words, metaphors, contradictions, absences, emotional resonance, and silences.

I have represented my interpretation of the 'plot' in the below graphic:



Stage two: Listening for the voice of 'I', 'they', and 'we', you

In this second stage, the spotlight is put on the voice of the self by tracing the use of 'I' throughout the transcript and stripping out the wider context. The 'I phrases' included the

subject, the verb, and any accompanying important words and were kept in the order that they were said and arranged into a poem.

I also decided to track ‘they’, ‘we’ and ‘you’, as these felt important throughout your interview.

I have included a selection of ‘voice poems’ from our interview below:

I didn’t get

I wasn’t actually

I don’t actually

I can only

I don’t really

I’m really not sure

Nobody sort of really said

I just sort of

[The only involvement] I had was

[Finding out what] I needed to do

[Where] I needed to be

At this point, you were talking about your role in arranging your son’s Alternative Provision placement. I was struck by the consistent presence of ‘I’, the self-voice, combined with absence: you did not get, you were not, did not etc. I wondered if you had ever been asked to reflect on how you felt about this aspect of the process and your involvement in decision-making.

So do I, You know?

[If I] want

[Is this something] I should

"You won't get"

Y'know

"You don't really get"

You then go

Y'know

They should be

I think

I think

I say

You don't know

Y'know

Y'know

You sort of question

[If] you actually need

[The way] I look at it

I'm trying

In this poem, you were talking about grappling with ideas around seeking a diagnostic assessment for your son. I felt that you were talking without certainty, questioning whether this was something to pursue. You switched between talking through the voice of I, and through the collective voice of 'you'. This may be as a way of communicating that this is a shared experience with others who you have spoken with, and/or as a way of distancing yourself. Throughout our conversation, and in this poem, I noticed that you often use 'Y'know'. I wasn't sure whether this served as a 'filler word' to fill pauses and allow you time to think, or whether this served to seek affirmation, or neither/ both.

Stage three: Listening for Contrapuntal Voices

Contrapuntal is a musical term, defined by multiple independent melodies played simultaneously. Ghetto Gospel by Tupac and Elton John is an example of contrapuntal music; there is a contrast between Elton John's sung chorus which is melodic in nature, and the verses rapped by Tupac which are powerfully delivered. Additionally, there is a mixture of independent

instrumental layers (e.g. piano) which flow in and out during the track. The different components of the song are distinct but also connected. Similarly, the Listening Guide analysis suggests that people can speak through more than one (contrapuntal) voice, which can be in harmony or contradictory.

In your interview, I heard a tentative voice, a hopeful/relieved voice, a voice of diminished agency, and a stressed/ worried voice. I traced these throughout your interview, using different coloured fonts.

A summary of what I listened for and how I defined the 'voices':

	Description of defining features of the voice:
Voice 1- tentativeness	Hesitation, caution, tentativeness, uncertainty, not knowing, self-doubt
Voice 2- diminished agency	Power/ control is externally situated (e.g. with other people/ processes)
Voice 3 - hopeful/ relief	Hope for the future, appreciation, alleviated stress
Voice 4- stress/worry	Concern, anxiety, stress, worry

Step 4: Composing an Analysis

This stage involves pulling together what has been learned in the previous three stages into a written analysis. I have used subtitles to represent different stories shared in your interview. Within each story, I will use these quotes from your interview:
5.2.2 "What I would call an in-between sort of child"
5.2.3 "In the hands of other people"
5.2.4 "We were kind of getting to a tethered end"
5.2.5 "I felt that he really flourished"
5.2.6 "And I think that's why like so far I've not really had any concerns or worries"
5.2.7 "Wondering what to do, where d'ya go, what do you do?"
5.2.8 "They didn't have the support in school to look after him"

Next steps

I warmly invite your reflections, feedback, and/or any questions regarding the interpretation of the interview, the analysis, or the broader research. If you'd like to arrange to meet online for a discussion, please suggest a convenient time. Alternatively, you are welcome to share your thoughts via email. Please note that, in line with the researcher's positionality, your reflections will not alter the findings but are greatly valued.

Regarding the next steps for the research, I heard how important it was that your voice and experiences are heard. I am writing up the wider research as part of my thesis, and plan to disseminate this in a condensed format with all of the Alternative Provisions and practitioners that I have contacted throughout this process. Additionally, this research will be presented to both trainee and qualified Educational Psychologists at the University of Sheffield in June.

Appendix O- Transcript of Sally's interview

Phoebe: The focus of this research is to explore your experiences as a parent or carer to a child who has accessed an alternative provision during primary school. This is your opportunity to share your story as part of this research. Throughout the interview, I'll follow your lead. There's just one sort of opening question and then it'll be more of a sort of conversation throughout the interview, if that's okay. Umm, I might make some notes and that's to support my understanding of your experiences and to reflect these back to you… and I might lay them out in a bit of a timeline to help us out with kind of perhaps revisiting some different aspects of your child's journey in your experience in relation to those.

So [deep inhale], please can you think back to when your child, is it Jack?

SALLY: [JACK]

Phoebe: started in education, and tell me about their educational journey and your experiences in relation to this?

SALLY: Okay, So, when JACK was probably (.) about 18 months 2 years, (.) I felt like there was something not quite right. He was in private nursery then and I raised it with them and they didn't seem concerned. And then when he went to EYFS 1 (2) I raised it again. I'm like, "I'm- I'm concerned there's something not quite right" (.) Erm (.) And. Everybody were like "yeah yeah yeah whatever". And then when he started in reception, I raised it again with the reception teacher (.) and her little boy, was in the year above Jack at the same school and he had got an autism diagnosis. So, she was very much like, "oh yeah, I'll keep an eye on him, I'll y-know." But then the schools had several head teachers (.) um and (2) somebody had stepped in, (2) urm (2) who urm (2) wasn't (1), I don't know what the right word is but they were very strict on behaviour. They wanted to clamp down on behaviour. The teacher felt that that wasn't the right setting for her child so she ended up leaving at Christmas with her child.

Phoebe: [okay]

SALLY: So then they had supply in. It was all a bit hit and miss for a bit. And then he did get a lovely lovely supply lady in, who ended up, she worked right through up to SLT. Urm, (.) but (.) nobody really picked up (.) in that first year of reception (.) anything untoward with JACK. Then JACK went into Year 1, on the third day of Year 1, on the Wednesday, my husband got rushed to hospital (.). Um he had a brain tumour, and then in the March, we went into Lockdown.

Phoebe: [yeah]

SALLY: And then in the June, my husband died.

Phoebe: [gosh]

SALLY: So JACK was 6 and 3 months when DXXX died. Um and then they went back to school briefly, did they go back for about 3 weeks the year ones? So after DXXX's funeral, he did go back briefly. And then in the September they went back as normal. Um and Jack was Okay to start off with. Then it got to Christmas and we went into lockdown again.

And when Jack went back in the march, he was really struggling. Umm the school put down to bereavement and I'm like, no, I think this would have happened anyway, Umm, And we're still waiting for this diagnosis. So he has been tested here over the summer holidays for autism and ADHD. He's already

got his dyspraxia diagnosis Umm and I have said from the beginning, I thought that Jack was dyspraxic with sensory processing, but as he's got older, I think he's probably more ADHD but school were very adamant, it was bereavement and he'd got attachment issues because of the lockdown and because of his daddy dying and I was like, it's not it all started before then, we saw it at home before then. But he wasn't able to regulate the emotions in class, and he was becoming quite physical and um running round school, screaming and shouting, swearing.

Phoebe: yeah

SALLY: Um.. Everything took a long time because school was still adamant it were bereavement. So eventually we did at the start of-, at the end of year four, they'd said about him going to the AP and I did try and fight it 'cause I was like (2) I don't know. I was- I was- concerned that he wouldn't that he'd go there for this for this 12 week block and then he'd love it there probably and then he wouldn't like coming back to school and I was concerned about all the changes because I felt like he'd had enough change urm but actually the AP was the best thing that could have happened to JACK. The staff there were absolutely amazing, they learnt to understand JACK, how Jack works, how his brain works, they would listen to him and respond to what he said. I felt like school didn't listen to him. Whenever he was trying to explain about how much he missed his dad, school would be like, "well other children miss their parents, other children this, other children that" urm and he was never listened to and then because he wasn't listened to,

Phoebe: Yeah

SALLY: He wo-, his behaviour would flare up. So he ended up going to the AP last September.

Phoebe: Yeah.

SALLY: And he went back to school at Christmas. Urm and he settled okay for a bit but then by Easter, the lady that had him in reception who was lovely. She was the SENCo, 'cause the SENCO had left in the summer term, she took over SENCo while JACK wasn't there

Phoebe: Right

SALLY: And was still SENCo when he got back but she left at Easter and two of his little friends in his class who he was really close with. They moved to another school. Urm and it all just fell apart from Easter. Urm the excluded him, they excluded him for seven days without any alternative provision and then they put one a part-timetable without my permission. Urm and it was just a nightmare.

Phoebe: Yeah

SALLY: Urm, so I was in contact with the AP, all through this.

Phoebe: Yeah

SALLY: Urm and I wanted him, they're part of erm the XXXXXX Academy Trust and I wanted him to go to XXXXXXX, because that is the closest school to us, cause we're [local area] plus, he's gonna go to [secondary school] 'cause that's where his sister is so [preferred school] some of the kids, I know

girl that's in year six, Her sister is one of [sister's] friends, so I knew that there'd at least be a [emphasis] child that he knew but they are full with big waiting list.

Phoebe: Okay

SALLY: So they the the err AP could err the staff err like Mrs. XXXX. whose the executive head, she could see that things weren't right and they found him a place at XXXXXXX and he is loving it at XXXXXXXX. He started at XXXXXXXX err after Springbank last year, and he has been on residential to [UK destination] last week and he is loving school.

Phoebe: Wow

SALLY: erm he has a couple of wobbles but they know how to deal with these wobbles. JACK likes to run and hide, that's his go-to. and the school was at before didn't like that.. didn't like him running they would try and manhandling using team teach to get him back into class then they would put him in an office and then he'd feel cramped and then it could all go pear shaped where as here, he had a wobbly day. Err one day before the summer holiday is about a week. About the week - they'd gone into transition. So bless him, he'd after Springbank, I think he's done about three weeks, four weeks and then the years sixes went up to the high school so everybody moved up here group, so he'd not in there very long, and he'd changed teacher again

Phoebe: Yeah

SALLY: And but that's the teachers he's got this year urm so he did have a really quite wobbly day urm and it happened to be the Year 6 leavers assembly so erm the head erm and his year 6 teacher called me in and then erm Mrs XXXX the executive had happened to be there as it was the Year 6 leavers and we had a meeting and it was so different to the meeting we'd had in the other school, they were like before it was like, "JACK needs to do blardeblardyblah", they were like "right, what do we need to do to get the best out JACK. Right. There's a male teacher erm that was at the (.) that had started down with them and who does the PE and stuff."

Phoebe: Yeah

SALLY: And so they were like, "he could be, he can be in their classroom, he can take like there's three children in year 6 that have all been to the AP. One of the girls with JACK and the boy went the term before and they were like right we'll put him in their class. He he can take them out for like the sensory circuits in the morning. You know he'll be a regular body. We will put this in place and that in place to support him. If he runs out of school", 'cause he'd run into the car park, they were like "we'll explain to him that he can run into the onto the field erm and it can all" (2) And they've just put so much in place that helps him. When he had sports day, he had a wobble then and they've just let him run it out, sit on the school field for a little bit and he came in and it was absolutely fine. And they're looking at how to help JACK with his emotions, not making Jack fit in a box, that works for them. They're, making a box that fits JACK and it's so different and he's and he's doing so well, he's thriving and he's such a bright lad. Urm and I think that was also the other problem, at his other school is that the things he used to get into trouble for it was always like when they'd not got the class teacher in. So it was a supply teacher when Jack had been, this is what really kicked it all off, it was their maths sheet. It was- they were doing

equivalent fractures within equalities, now I teach maths. Or, I did. And now I'm 1:1. And JACK had got them all right, which for a Year 5 was quite impressive 'cause I've got Year 8's and 9's that can't do it

Phoebe: Yeah

SALLY: And what he'd done while he was marking it is he had colored in around the answer box erm with his green pen and the supply teacher wanted to copy it up and ended up ripping it out of his book. And JACK didn't take well to that because he'd done the work and all he'd done was do a little doodle, round it. And erm that kicked off. And then another one was when the HLTA was teaching them and she put the maths worksheet on his desk.But she was explaining what to do, and JACK knew what to do. So JACK started it and she told him off twice, she gave him two negative points for doing his work while she was explaining. But, he was like, 'I know how to do it'. And it's that black and white in JACK's head. Like, 'I've listened to you and now I know how to do it. So, I'm doing it. But I'm getting into trouble for doing my work.' and he can't see that. And I've I tried to explain to the school that, y'know, little things done differently, don't give the sheet out til you want him to start erm would make a huge difference. But, those things were not getting done. And that's where the problems lie. They had what size fits all rule, whereas this is it just couldn't be, it's just so much better. So, because of his alternative provision, we've got to here. Which, the journey is a nightmare. I've been taking him to Breakfast Club this week because my dad's had surgery, so my mum's been at home with my dad. So I've had to leave my house in [local area], come to [current school], go all the way back around again to go to my job in [other area].

Phoebe: Yeah

SALLY: I've booked him in at after school and then I've come all the way back again, picked him up and gone back home again. So I am just driving round in circles, but he is much happier. We're just much happier. It's just everything. He's not coming home all shook up. If he, if he's had a wobble at school he's had the opportunity to do something about it. It's not - It's getting picked up before it turns into an explosion, they're giving him the space, the time, listening to him. Last week's residential his class teacher went, 'he is so lovely, we've seen a different side of him' and I'm like, he is. And this is my problem with JACK, I have, I always say, I've got two JACK's, I've got the lovely, kind, helpful one. And the nightmare one. And nothing in between.

Phoebe: Right

SALLY: And he goes from being lovely to exploding in what looks like at the drop of a hat, but he's been shook and shook and shook till he explodes.

Phoebe: Yeah

SALLY: So you don't see the little shakes. You just see the big explosion. 'Cause school like, well his old school, they'd always be like, "nothing happened" but it did. It did happen, you just don't see those things that did happen.

Phoebe: Yeah (inaudible)

SALLY: so yeah, it's just been the best experience for him. He's absolutely loving it now.

Phoebe: Yeah (inaudible)

SALLY: I mean, he moaned quite a bit when we first started and he wanted to go back to his old school n. But now, he's settled in and he's made friends.

Phoebe: Yeah (inaudible)

SALLY: And that's all come because of alternative provision if he'd not gone there, I'd of been stuck, I wouldn't of had a about a clue who to turn to when things really did go wrong. Because I've got them to turn to and their advice and they, yanno signposted me it's been absolutely brilliant and I can't fault them.

Phoebe: Yeah. Would it be okay if I just map out some of those-

SALLY: Yeah, course it is (overlapping speech)

Phoebe: -placements and changes. Erm, so and thank you so much for sharing all of that. So we've got, I've just made a little timeline.

SALLY: Yes that's fine

Phoebe: You mentioned that JACK started, he was at private nursery.

SALLY: Yeah

Phoebe: Was that when he was two?

SALLY: Yeah. So it was about 18 months, 2, not entirely sure but he wasn't. So I've got XXXXXX. And my sister's got XXXXX and XXXXX

Phoebe: Yeah

SALLY: And I didn't know whether it was a boy girl thing or what

Phoebe: Right

SALLY: but he wasn't (.) I don't know what the right words are. 'Cause he just wasn't like them? He liked to order his, put his toys in, yanno he'd sort things, he was very much a, he didn't necessarily play with things, he'd line up his Happy Land figures.

Phoebe: Yeah

SALLY: And he'd do things and everybody would be like 'ah yeah yeah yeah, that's y'know' and I'm like, it's not, it doesn't appear normal to me, it's different to what the girls have ever done. Erm and then when, when he was in reception, he would hold it together all day, and then as, literally as we walked out the school gate, he'd have a big meltdown. It was like I was his safe place.

Phoebe: Yeah

SALLY: And he'd have his meltdown, but then when DXXX was ill and died, home was no longer his safe place. So it it started manifesting in school as well, but they just put it down to bereavement. I'm like, no, you're now seeing what I've always seen and he used to say, I want to go home. And they thought that meant he wanted to go home because you would want you. But when you pinned it down, he used to say

it at home as well and I'm like, it doesn't mean he wants to go home. It means he wants things to go back to what they used to be like.

Phoebe: Okay

SALLY: So he wanted home to go back to home.

Phoebe: How it was before?

SALLY: Before, yeah. He hasn't said it for a bit, but yeah for ages. He'd say that 'I want to go home' even when he was at home.

Phoebe: Yeah. Okay. Did JACK's Dad die while he was in Reception?

SALLY: While he was in year one. So reception was an absolutely normal year.

Phoebe: Yeah

SALLY: And then he started in year one.

Phoebe: Yeah

SALLY: On the Monday, and DXXX got rushed to hospital on the Wednesday and by the end of that week, we knew that DXXX had got a brain tumor.

Phoebe: Gosh

SALLY: And then they operated on the, something, I wanna say something like the 24th of September. Erm and by the beginning of October, we knew it were terminal. So er, I knew it was terminal. Erm and they'd said 12 to 18 months but he did nine, he managed nine months, but during lockdown. So y'know, we've just got ahhh, homeschooling, N- DXXX, he ended up being upstairs because he he just lost all his mobility; it was all his left-hand side, no it was his right hand side that went. Erm and so he ended up erm in our bedroom erm, trying to home school kids downstairs I had a baby monitor [inaudible]. Nightmare.

Phoebe: It must have been so difficult, all whilst you were- [overlapping]

SALLY: No family support, because obviously the we were in lockdown. So erm I had, I talked to the oncologist and she agreed that because my mom was shielding with my dad because my dad's had a heart transplant and a kidney transplant. So, my dad was shielding and so, my mum was shielding with my dad, so because she'd not mixed, and we'd not mixed, we were like, 'can my mum come and help?'. Because they were saying like, you can have like, district nurses in and stuff and I'm like, but they've been here there and everywhere.

Phoebe: Yeah

SALLY: So we shielded, but I don't want to be in then whose been mixing everywhere. So we ended up having like my Mum, we formed a bubble before you were allowed to form a bubble.

Phoebe: Yeah. You've got to do what you've got to do.

SALLY: Yeah, erm but it was really the second lockdown. So that was in his year two. So it, so the second lockdown was the Christmas of his year two and obviously it's his first Christmas without DXXX.

Phoebe: Yeah.

SALLY: Erm, and I think it was really hard, I mean it was hard for us to understand, weren't it? But on Christmas Day we could all get together in my mum's house. But not any other day. So it was like, Christmas Day, germs, don't exist, you can all get together. Boxing Day, No.

Phoebe: Yeah

SALLY: So, think it were just a lot for him to take in on top of everything else and then when he went back in the March it was just before the Easter weren't it they went back.

Phoebe: Yeah

SALLY: erm he really started to struggle, that's when he was sssss-seven, he was seven that March. Erm and he really started to struggle then. I think he realized by Christmas that death was permanent. Erm because I think he thought if you have Father Christmas for his daddy to come back, his daddy would be able to come back and, like no, it doesn't work like that sweetheart.

Phoebe: Gosh, yeah.

SALLY: Erm, and he, and I don't think he really understood what death was because he still got all 4 Grandparents and DXXX's Dad was 90 in June erm so so he's got no experience of loss apart from his dad. I mean like the cat died when he were like six months old so he's got no experience

Phoebe: Yeah (overlapping)

SALLY: of loss. Apart from his dad. So he has, he's definitely struggled with that, but there was a lot more before that that I think that the traumas just added to it.

Phoebe: Yeah. So what was it like for you when JACK returned to school in Year 2?

SALLY: It was frustrating.

Phoebe: Yeah.

SALLY: Because (2) I've been in education (2)longer than the head teacher and possibly the SENCo at the time, she was a lady, probably my age. So I have taught, because I'm secondary, children with a host of additional needs.

Phoebe: Yeah

SALLY: And I could see traits in JACK from other the children that I've taught and I was saying Jack, I can see that, he is, I can see his dyspraxic, and not in the just clumsy way, because DXXX was dyspraxic, in the organizational way in. So, as well as the motor skills, I could see the other aspects of dyspraxia with him and I could see with his aversion to socks and shoes and clothes that are 'eerrr' in that, it was definitely something sensory and maybe was actually. But I wasn't, y'know, I wasn't, it was definitely

sensory and he chews, he chews on his clothes and he chews on his toys. Erm and you can see it when he's anxious, he chews everything but his sleep had always been, okay. I was never concerned about the sleep then. He has got, this last six months or so his sleep is It's a bit more of a battle sleep. It never was, JACK he could just he'd just fall asleep wherever he was erm so I was never really on the ADHD thing I never really thought about that. But the more I've read about ADHD, I realized that it's not just sleep and fidgeting. It is, there's a whole host of other things that go with ADHD with the emotional regulation and all that kind of stuff, and I do thing he is probably showing more signs of ADHD and a bit of sensory but his sensory stuff, apart from his chewing, does seem to be getting better. I think that's as he's got older, he's realised that you have to wear socks and shoes when you're outside [both laugh] and he's conforming to society a bit more. He knows that that's what he's got to do. So he does it with less arguing with than he used to when he was little.

Phoebe: Yeah

SALLY: But it was just the frustration because I asked them to refer him to CAMHS and they wouldn't, they were like, 'I think it's just' and I'm like, it's not, it's not just bereavement and it was like I can't do it. I can't do the referral. That's where it's so frustrating because, as a parent, you're like, why can't I? Do it. I can see what the needs are, like we had to wait for the ed psych and then the ed psych changed and then so it was ages before he saw the ed psych. And then she was like, ooh I can see he's an anxious child, I can see, y'know, she could see traits in him, but then we start to jump through some more hoops. He had to see Speech and Language in case it was a speech and language problem. But he, he's got a fantastic vocabulary. So I know some of it was age-related like y'know because he was six and seven to say how his, what his big emotions were were possibly like a language thing, but an age-related language thing, he understands a lot, I mean he understands so much. And that's the thing I think because he is so bright. And because he makes eye contact. Be- because he didn't fit in the boxes. It's like, well he's not autistic because he makes eye contact, that's not autism is, he's not autistic because he talks, but that's not all autism is. It's like

Phoebe: yeah

SALLY: And the more so I think because I- I am aware of so much more, it was so frustrating because I'm like, well can we not? Well no we've got to jump through this hoop. Well can we jump through that hoop then? Well I'm just gonna observe him a little bit longer. Well no because it just takes so long. So it was, it took them it took three months to go, 'okay, Yes. I will. I will I will apply to CAMHS'. But then she were going, 'ah there's no waiting no waiting list for CAMHS now because of Covid.' It's like, no there were huge waiting lists for CAMHS because of Covid and mental health and stuff and she were like, 'there's no waiting list'. So this were the end of year 2 and was assessed this summer when he's just finished year five and we've still not got any more feedback from that. So he was last here on the Xth of XXXX, cause that was [significant date].

Phoebe: Yeah

SALLY: And we've still [emphasis] got a diagnosis. So we're still [emphasis] waiting and they wouldn't apply for an ECHP. So I've applied for any ECHP, but we didn't get it because I've not got the evidence because obviously, I only have the home side of it and a couple of reports that I've had, I've had a report

from the Ed Psych and a report from [assessor] who did his online assessment before we went. So yeah, it's just like everything so slow, isn't it?

Phoebe: Yeah.

SALLY: And that's the frustration I think.

Phoebe: Yeah. Time and frustration. And not feeling listened too seems like.

SALLY: [overlapping speech] yeah

Phoebe: A theme up until this point.

SALLY: Yeah, and then this school, like I said, are amazing because they listen. They listen to JACK, and therefore, they don't really need to listen to me because he tells them, y'know even if it's not always through his words but they can see (1). But they've got more staff as well, and I think that's another problem with his old school as well is that they don't really know how to get funding, I think for things because my nieces old primary school had extra staff and they don't have extra [emphasis] staff. And its like, well there must be funding available for extra staff because you're all under XXXXXXXX. So where are, why aren't they getting the extra staff? Where, what are the? I don't know. I just feel like they don't. I feel maybe because it's been a XXXX primary school and they've never had to deal with so much before. Whereas, I think now there's less and less XXXX children going there and more and more local children going there. But for what I can see, they're not doing particularly well with SEND kids erm (2) I know that one of the boys (1) out of his class that went to another school is on the waiting list for a CAMHS assessment, erm and his mom worked at the office and she's worked at the office, well she used to be a HLTA, erm and she's worked in the office for [extended] and in school, probably about 18 years. But her youngest left first. And then the middle one, the one who is waiting for CAMHS and then now she's gone to another school and it's like I feel like they're not equipped to deal with SEND and it's just sad.

Phoebe: Yeah

SALLY: Because, if they were, given the help and support they needed, they wouldn't get this far.

Phoebe: Yeah. So it was and JACK's first primary school that suggested the placement at the AP?

SALLY: Yeah. It went to the, is it the PIP? The pupil independent panel or whatever it is, it's something panel intit? I know it's something panel.

Phoebe: Erm, primary inclusion panel maybe.

SALLY: That's the one.

Phoebe: So was that when JACK was [overlapping speech]

SALLY: That's how we got to the . So they they met at the the PIP erm and eventually I think they were gonna put him forward for it for the first round and then they decided to (1) I can't remember why they decided not to (1) But he went in the sum- from the September to Christmas. And actually, that's when they were all in the new building. So, it has, so it was really a lovely experience because it's a lovely new build. And and so, it has gone all really well, although before that it was in XXXXXXX, when they'd not

got it up and running, and that's where he is now. And so it so it is just they know how to work with children that with (1) I don't know. Emotionals? He just struggles so much to regulate his emotions.

Phoebe: Yeah, so was at the start of year three then that JACK went to the- [overlapping speech]

SALLY: I can't think when he went to the [inaudible]. It was September to Christmas of Year 5 he went.

Phoebe: Ah okay.

SALLY: So he'd gone to the PIP two or three times before then.

Phoebe: Yeah.

SALLY: Erm (2) so it mi- (2) just trying to think. So when he was in year two, that's what he got referred, when he was in the year three (3), that's [inaudible], trying to go round classrooms in my head. Definitely in year 4 he were referred. Maybe sort of, February time maybe. And then again. That's when we agreed he could go, so they start the process in the summer.

Phoebe: And what was it like for you when that process was started?

SALLY: I didn't like it. I didn't think it was gonna work for JACK. I felt that he needed continuity. I felt he needed t- (1) to be with his friends that school for JACK is more (1) than learning. It's like, JACK could learn anywhere. It was about the friendships he's made and I was really concerned that erm he was gonna lose his friendships, but there is a youth club erm that some of his friends went to.

Phoebe: Yeah

SALLY: And so I did make the effort to go there. So he weren't, when he started back at school, he's met the new girls that started in this class because he's met them at the youth club. So he, he wasn't completely out of it.

Phoebe: Yeah

SALLY: Erm (1) and so he did settle back into school quite quickly because things had not changed that much Yeah, so he did he did transition quite well, but that was my concern. That, y'know, he wouldn't transition well, and also the journey because it's meant my Mum's had to bring him. So, I work three days a week, my mum had had to bring him, erm but they did start that little bit later. Erm but I'm trying to think, like, I know we had to juggle like Childcare with our XXXX 'n' 'cause when he was at the one, other school, we'd just take him to breakfast club, I'd drop him at breakfast club. Whereas that (1) it was a bit of a (1) and the winter, me mum were concerned about driving through, but luckily it didn't snow. But they haven't been doing the motorway y'see! That's the way we come. So it has been a bit (1) But yeah, I mean, it's worked in the end, we've made it work and because we've made it work JACK has he has absolutely loved it (2) and he has worked out what works for him, he is getting better, not brilliant, but it is better and things from there, we've been able to implement a home like his safe space. He loves his safe spaces at school and I've been trying to encourage him to use his bedroom as his safe space, but as long as he's got a space, so he's quite often now just sat the kitchen (1) erm and I'm like, you do have your bedroom. We've done the shed, so he's got the the kids've always have their own shed. It was, instead of a play shed it was just a normal shed but it was painted a beach hut erm and it was their play shed and it had

the play kitchen in it and stuff. And as they've outgrown it, it had it did become JACK's zen den but he won't use it now because there's spiders in it. And it's like, it's winter JACK there's gonna be spiders in it erm but so he won't use that safe space but he is better at taking himself to a space but we've sometimes it might be a living room which means I end up upstairs and Heidi ends up upstairs, but he re' he knows when he needs to be on his own and we know we need to be on his own. So we kind of just give him space (1) When Heidi's not in one of her moods where she likes to wind him up because she's his big sister and she does. [higher pitched voice] 'it's not fair, he gets bla blah'.

Phoebe: [laughs]

SALLY: Yes Heidi but we've talked about why.

Phoebe: Yeah

SALLY: [laughs] so yeah when she's accommodating but she's a teenager so she lives in her room most of the time, like that, on Tiktok. [laughs]

Phoebe: So it sounded early when we were talking like JACK's placement at the centre was a bit shift.

SALLY: Yes

Phoebe: for him and for you as well.

SALLY: Yeah.

Phoebe: And could you just tell me a little bit more about what it was [overlapping speech, inaudible]

SALLY: So it was (3) it was a really good experience for JACK in that he has learned so much about himself in the ten (1) whatever it was 12 weeks he was there. Erm maybe a bit longer, but then then he had the whole time in primary (1) he's (1) the focus wasn't on his education erm JACK is incredibly bright and I knew that it didn't really matter about his learning erm it mattered about (1) his emotions (1) like regulating his emotions and (1) he has learned (1) some things I think that have helped him. He he has seen what works for him and we've seen what works for him.

Phoebe: Yeah

SALLY: And we've had the support as well because they use classdojo so I could message them and say last night, JACK had a big meltdown over X, Y or Z and then the next day they would address it with JACK and he would talk to them because they're a neutral body. And so he (1) he's (1) through them and there (1) what do they call it? (1) Happy brain my happy.

Phoebe: Yeah

SALLY: Is that it?

Phoebe: Rings a bell.

SALLY: Yeah, because we've just had a thing about it. I've managed, I've got the app, It was this week. Erm, that's what they use and he's learnt about the three parts of his brain and he can tell you now, like

this bit in my brain does this, and duh duh duh. And it's the fight or flight in him that- and I can recognize that (1) that he does (1) he wants to run and if you stop him running which is what his old primary school used to do then it turns into a fight so if y', he has to run it out

Phoebe: Yeah

SALLY: And if he doesn't run it out, then he will fight and it's that that like (1) it's learning to understand him. And I'e (1) I know (1) some things but being secondary it's very different. Like we have a team of people that like do that. So (1) if there's a child in my classroom and they're struggling, you go, 'make your way to (1) y'know, and they'll assist'. Whereas (1) in (1) I felt like I don't know I was I think I was out of my comfort zone really because what do you do at home? When you've got nobody to pass him to there you go [laughs] go to that space and those people will deal with you and it's not like that at home. It's like I'm the person (1) so trying to understand how his brain works. Understand what works for JACK.

Errm. Trying not to give him too many instructions' he doesn't do well with lists of instructions. He also tomorrow with one instruction sometimes, like 'put your shoes on' [laughs] but we're getting there. Trying to just, y'know keep it and and I'm learning how he works and he's learning how he works. And together we are getting better and erm so yeah I think yeah because of that we've made a shift in the way we do things and that's made (1) I'm not saying the home life is perfect. We had a proper wobble on (2) Sunday. (2) Yeah my Mum had come up with haircutting stuff, Sunday, while dinner was cooking, but he'd had a full week away and then we went to [UK destination] then on Saturday which probably wasn't the best thing. But we booked (1) the dates 'd not gone in my head, that he was gonna be incredibly tired. Erm but he was brilliant at [UK destination] and I thought that'd freak him out because it was busy.

Phoebe: Yeah

SALLY: But actually she was worse she was clinging to me, and he was (1) he weren't too bad actually. As soon as we sat down he were like 'I'm bored'. Seriously JACK, you've got eighty minutes. Once they'd started a Mexican wave and some [inaudible]

Phoebe: laughing

SALLY: It was like that when we watched the World Cup. Like 'cause it was the women's football we saw and it was the women's rugby we've seen. And as soon as like the when we got to the football the other summer for the wold cup Euros whatever it were they'd played like a minute and a half and he went, 'how much longer?' And I'm like 'seriously dude?!, They've played ninety seconds'

Both: Laugh

SALLY: But, he is, the guy behind him gave him a thing to clap on. It were absolutely fine. If he's making a noise and stuff, or doing a Mexican wave, he's fine. Erm so yeah, he did. Sunday weren't good but that's cause he were tired. And I can't even remember what it started over. After school club, because me Dad my mom can't run him about this week because my dad's had his operation and he's got a hospital appointment here then and everywhere. So I was saying, right starting after school clubs. [voice change] 'I don't want to go to after school clubs'. Anyway he went on Tuesday he absolutely loved it (1) he went last night, he enjoyed it and he's booked in tonight to musical theater. I don't even need him to go tonight but he was like, 'ooh can I do musical theatre?' yeah you can do musical theatre. So erm yeah (1)

he's just it's that unknown with JACK and it becomes a battle. [voice change] 'I don't want to do that.' And and I'm selfish [voice change] 'you're selfish, why do you have to go to work?' Cause if I didn't go to work JACK you wouldn't get to do all the fun things you get to do.

Phoebe: Yeah

SALLY: So yeah. It is a bit. And I'd probably go insane if I didn't go to work as well. It's like for your own mental health as well isn't it. My brain doesn't work like it used to I've probably forgot more. But yeah, we're getting there. It's just (1) and now Heidi's a teenager, she's pushing her boundaries, which means she's pushing him. And it's like, please don't push him!

Phoebe: It's tricky. Well it must be really tricky.

SALLY: But yeah. She's older sister int she. I mean, I'm an older sister and I were the same.

Phoebe: See I'm the youngest of three so I've wound my siblings up no end over the years.

SALLY: [laughs]

Phoebe: So erm, after Jack (1) you said initially that you were a little bit worried about how he would transition back into his previous school from the AP. It sounded like that one a little bit better than [overlapping speech] perhaps you were expecting

SALLY: It did to start off with. (3) I think to start off when the AP were visiting like through the transition period. Erm it was better and when the SENCo lady was there, but as soon she the SENCo left left at Easter

Phoebe: right

SALLY: And the weren't visiting.

Phoebe: Yeah

SALLY: It all went pear shaped. I don't think school were asking the to support (1) because I spoke to the and they were like, 'we've not heard from them'

Phoebe: okay

SALLY: But school were like, 'we've contacted the and we've not heard from them'. And I'm like, errr who do you believe? I'm thinking the are always there when I contact them when I went and speak to them, you can leave a message and they'll get back to you. So (2) they were always there for me, so I would suspect they would have been there for school had school really asked for help.

Phoebe: Yeah.

SALLY: So, I don't know. But the have been amazing and I can't fault them like absolutely fantastic at supporting JACK when asked. So when school asked for a meeting, they were there. They were on the um Google Meet thing or whatever it is.

Phoebe: Yeah

SALLY: Yeah. So they were three. Teams Microsoft teams. They were there doing and y'know giving advice in the meeting. But [emphasis] in the meeting. So I sat there with this SENDIASS lady.They were on the meeting. They were saying JACK needs duh duh duh duh. The head and the deputy head had heard one bit and went off having a conversation over here and didn't listen to the rest. I felt like and that was when I was like, Yeah, I think he needs to move because they're not listening and not taking advice and they're not doing. I really didn't want to move in. I felt like (2) he knew the staff he knew the kids erm and to move him (1) was gonna upset that balance (1) and he wanted to like if he wanted to be moved, he wanted to go to where my niece, his cousin went to school, but I was like that XXXXX's leaving [inaudible] XXXX's now in Year Seven. So I'm like, you won't be with XXXXX. And yeah you know the kids in that class but I don't think that I mean it's a good school and it has got fabulous support but they didn't know JACK and I felt like we'd be starting from scratch again. Whereas I felt like at least now he's known and so the staff know him. So when so the day we went to look round XXXXXXXX one of the TAs that had been up at the AP was like, 'Oh hello JACK it's lovely to see you'. Erm. And then one of the (1) so the inclusion lady she'd been up there and she's actually married to the man whose [laughs] so she already knew about him and so (1) it was like 'Ooh I've heard all about you.' and duh duh duh and so it was just so nice.

Phoebe: welcomed?

SALLY: Yeah. He is, like I say, he is incredibly bright and the're like, 'Ooh I've heard how good you are and I've heard that you're this and you're that and the other'. Yanno so it was so positive for him to for them to say, 'Ooh we've heard good stuff about ya.' He has made friends, like I knew he would. But I knew this week's residential was gonna be key because his old school were like, "no he can't go on residential, he can't go on trips. Can't do this. Can't do that" (.) erm and he's very much been pushed out because no you can't go to [UK destination] wildlife. And I'm like, they wouldn't let him go there, they wouldn't let him go to pantomime. Like there's been so much, and it's like be 'no, no, no'. And it's like. They've either excluded him the day before a trip so that he was excluded on that day. Or they've erm said, he can't, I just don't think it's safe, it's not safe. They wouldn't let him go on his residential. The AP'd said erm that he could go they would support with the residential it was a two day one it was supposed to be in November but that got canceled because the things that got messed up and they end up going in September, on the year six one because it's like the primary school was so disorganised whereas here (1) everything's in place (1) everything's y'know (1) we've just had an email that links to the calendar, so we can see when everything's happening for like right up until after Christmas. Everything's in place, you can see it all and it's just so much better organized which then works better for me and I think because things are better organized it's better for JACK.

Phoebe: Yeah

SALLY: And it's just, he, we all need to know what we're doing and I need to tell him what we're doing in advance and it's all ready in advance, it's not right you're doing that, oh no, we've pulled that we're going to do this instead. And it's so it is just so much better down at the centre he'd go on so many trips in the 12 weeks he were there compared to how many trips he's been on at his other place. They took him to play Watcher

Phoebe: I don't know what that is!

SALLY: It's like indoor bowls. I think it's like a popular old man sport but he excelled at it, he were brilliant at that. They went ten pin bowling they did erm like a mini Olympic sports day thing, with the think the XXXX school and a couple of the other special schools. They(.) where else did they go (2) ah I don't know, but they did all sorts they had a minibus and it was just like, 'can you just sign for [laughs] to say, he could go here there and everywhere.' And he did loads, and it's like while he's been here, they've been, where have they been (1) I know he's been on residential where did he go before (1) XXXX. They went to [inaudible] and they've done all sorts and y'know like the XXXX trip didn't cost us anything they just on it cost us anything. there's a magnet trip and they went to see, whatever it is, that they did, so there was just a XXXX trip and they went to sing the whatever it is that they did so they're always doing something, he's off to (1) so yesterday, virtual reality people came in and that didn't cost us. He went on to a coral reef with his virtual reality.

Phoebe: Lovely!

SALLY: Sounds amazing. Err he's doing, what's he doing. So I've got crucial crew coming up in a few weeks, there's somewhere else, there's like a list of things that I think, I'll pay for that one out of my next pay packet [laughs] but they do so much and he loves it. And it's so good for him.

Phoebe: Yeah.

SALLY: And he's like I say he's made friends now as well from being away for the week and four staff went (1) erm just four staff and all the kids and they cooked for them and did all sorts and it's just such a lovely experience that he's had. It's quite (1) I don't know what the right word is (1) but like I say like (1) they went and did the cooking, they did it. So it's quite like family I suppose it feels like a family whereas the XXXXX school that I thought would feel like family hasn't at all it did when XXXXXX started under the very first head erm but it's just lost that little community feel. Whereas here this like through the centre and the fact that that that's part of the [Academy] Trust and it its feels he supported and its it really works for him.

Phoebe: Yeah.

SALLY: And I feel supported which is (1) because I'd got to the point where it was like, ring these people, right I'll ring these people, right no, ring these people. So he had a proper meltdown at school erm when he were at [previous school] and he threatened to kill himself, he threated to hurt others, he was in a right state. School, the head teacher went, "right Sally I think you really need to contact your GP because he was in right state" so I rang my GP and my GP went "yeah, you need to ring CAMHS". So I ring CAMHS and CAMHS went, "I'm really sorry to hear that but we can't take a referral from you erm it needs to come through school". So I rang school and said, right it needs to come through you. 'Well we've already referred him to CAMHS' . Yes, that's on the neuro diverse pathway. This is a mental health team.

Phoebe: Yeah.

SALLY: Oh Okay. We'll do that. Weeks went past. "Have you referred him?" Well like but you told me to take him to- , to phone the GP. I spoke to the GP that day, you've done (1) nothing since then and it's like well but what really really frustrated me was and just before all this was happening (1) a parent of a child in his class (1) died by suicide and it's like so you can see what mental health left unchecked ends up as. But you've done nothing about him, threatening to kill himself. It's like (2) and he's not done it at all since he's moved schools because I think he's just calmer and listened to and it doesn't escalate to that point.

Phoebe: Yeah. Gosh he's been through [overlapping] different things

SALLY: [He has]

Phoebe: When you were talking earlier about erm JACK not being allowed to get on the different trips or getting excluded the day before. What was that like for you as his parent?

SALLY: It was just frustrating because I understand that they need to keep everybody safe. But I (2) he goes out all the time with me, it's not like we stop at home and they know that know that like we've got an annual pass for [UK destination] wildlife. We've had it it must be about our third year now, because my Mum went, 'what do you want for christmas?' and I'm like, 'not more tat!', I'm like we want things to do erm so she's got an annual pass so we go together and we went at the end of the summer, when my dad was still in hospital, me Dad's had sepsis over the summer, on top of everything else, he's got, cause he just likes to yanno, keep us on our toes. Erm so I booked it at the beginning of the summer, we booked two dates in our diary cause if you don't the summer holidays have gone and it's like, "right, when are you free?". So we booked these two dates in and we went at the end of the summer, we went without my Mum and the kids were like it's not the same without Grandma.

Phoebe: Awwww

SALLY: And I'm like, I know she usually buys us a cuppa doesn't she. I had to buy my own cuppa! [jokingly]. But yeah, so he's used to being out and about and doing things so it's not like (1) I (1) go "oooh" he can behave when he's out and about and yeah he gets tired and yeah he gets grumpy but (1) it's just (1) you just feel like (2) if there were things in place to support him (1) if they'd applied for any ECH, whatever it is, Education Health Care plan, used to be statement when I first started teaching. And then, he would have the support in place to take him on these things. Erm and it was always a battle always just like well he'd be alright well like pantomime he'd love the pantomime he loves, he's staying for musical theater tonight he's doing frozen in March, it's like he's right into his drama and stuff. So he'd have loved it. But they were like ooh and it's like. But it was a coach, literally a coach to sit down in the theatre, "ooh no can't facilitate that can't facilitate that" and it's like (.) You're just pushing him out.

Phoebe: Yeah

SALLY: I felt like he was getting more and more ostracized at school. It's like they were saying about his friends they were saying like JACK's hurt his friends and children are scared of him. And when we'd been to the youth club still, they're not. They were so pleased to see him and I feel like they'd decided that they didn't want JACK any more. And so they pushed him and pushed him and pushed him out. But I'm gonna be interested to see their SATs results because all the brightest kids that were in JACK's class are the ones that have left so their SATs results are not gonna be great. Erm yeah so (1) it's just if just they

have really pushed us out and it's like, well if you don't want us we don't want you we'll go elsewhere where we are. Just that it's all the way across town [laughs].

Phoebe: It sounds like that it is a real contrast to the experience at the and then at his current setting where he has been welcomed on all these different trips and opportunities.

SALLY: Yeah.

Phoebe: Which must feel very different for you.

SALLY: It does. It's very much like like his old school like JACK's choosing, JACK's choosing his behaviour, JACK's yanno. He would hurt the head teacher, but he'd hurt the head teacher because she would try and get him in her office.

Phoebe: Yeah

SALLY: And he wasn't calm. So, you know like when you're trying to get a wounded cat in a corner and you just end up being scratched. That's literally what she were like with JACK she would try and get him in her office and then she'd end up getting hurt. And things that she would do like she'd have her high heels under her desk and then he'd throw them and it's like, you don't help yourself put your shoes on your feet and then he won't be able to pick them up and throw them at you! Or don't wear high heels for school. Wear shoes you can walk in! And it's like, so many things and you've not helped yourself, you've tried to take him into (1) you try to push him in a room and he's not ready to go, he's not calm yet (.) and then when he's fighting against that, he's then getting excluded because he's hurt staff and that's where we kept getting to well staff have been hurt. Children have been hurt. Well yeah because you've tried to keep him in a space.

Phoebe: Yeah, a result of what had happened before.

SALLY: His excl- y'know how they write the report for exclusions (1) like I emailed a copy of it to the AP and they were like, but there's so many missed opportunities. Why did they put something in place there, or there, or there? And it's like (1) I don't know. I don't know why they've like it's just two of them and manhandled him into a small space and then, y'know he's kicked off and they've gone well he's hurt staff. Well yeah because you've shoved that they took him through the dinner hall like so all the kids could see him having a tantrum. And then other kids were upset. Well yeah, because you've just manhandled him through the dinner hall.

Phoebe: Yeah (2) yeah. There was missed opportunities.

SALLY: [laughs] So many. It just got to the point where it was just like (.) seriously? And like when they excluded him for his seven days. Because of their missed opportunities and then put nothing in place after five days. It's like but you're not allowed to do that. And then put him on a part time table without my permission, but you're not allowed to do that.

Phoebe: Yeah

SALLY: I said, No, I've not signed anything and I spoke to my head and she's like, but, in the school day, he's there responsibility. It's like, if if, and I can't like get through to them. I don't think they understood

what their responsibilities were and when I have written to the governor, I sent an email to the governor, but he's not responded, either. And now just like, I'll wash my hands of that school. I just. I could pass it on to OFSTED but I don't want to be that petty because I do actually like some of the staff there and I'm just like, just the leadership is atrocious.

Phoebe: Yeah. So it was towards the end of year five that you decided to-

SALLY: Yeah, we moved him out so it was the (inaudible). From Easter, everything just went pear shaped because the erm SENCO left and and then head (2) ah she just decided I think that she didn't want him. She said to me, at one point, so she'd [inaudible] the Christmas when J (.) erm (.) was it? Yeah before the second lockdown, I think it might have been that Christmas (.) she, JACK was saying that he missed his daddy and stuff and she was saying, well other children missed their daddy and y'know the children never get to see their parents. And so that's when she'd sent him home early, I think she used to do that quite a lot. She'd send him home from a reset without actually excluding him. Erm, you're not allowed to do that either [laughs]. And I did say the next morning, can you not compare erm y'know Ian's death with divorced parents and she went "Sally, you need to realize, you're not the only bereaved family." That makes it alright then. You keep comparing my husband's death to kids who get to see their dad on a Saturday. Exactly the same.

Phoebe: Gosh.

SALLY: So yeah (.) I think our relationship (.) my relationship with her started to break down, because she just wasn't understanding what I was saying at all (2) erm and then (.) JACK's relationship with, well her relationship with JACK. I think broke down as well it was just so frustrating. And it's just like, this wouldn't have happened if the supply teacher hadn't of ripped the page out of his book. You can understand why a child would be frustrated if their works, all right but somebody ripped the page out of the book because they've done a little doodle on it. Y'know and I think in secondary we would have just let that go. we would have maybe, said, Please don't doodle in your book and left it at that we wouldn't never make a child copy up right work. Y'know we wouldn't make a child, if we gave a child to work and they started it would be like, well, we wouldn't of give it until you were ready for them to start it. Y'know what I mean? It's like (.) the way the staff worked, that's not helped and it was always supply or the same HLTA. Same HLTA who used to call XXXXXX XXXX and she's never been a XXXX. She'd be like, "Mrs XXXX, My name is XXXXX". "Ah I thought you were a XXXX." No, she's never been a XXXXX

Phoebe: Yeah. So the staff's understanding but also just the staff's willingness to get to know-

SALLY: Yeah

Phoebe: the children is different now there as to what it is now at the current setting.

Is there anything that we've not spoken about so far that-

SALLY: Don't think so.

Phoebe: So JACK's currently in Year 6 at his new setting

SALLY: Yeah, yeah.

Phoebe: And he moved towards the end of Year Five.

SALLY: Yeah

Phoebe: And he's just had a really successful residential

SALLY: Yeah. He had a full week in [UK destination] and he absolutely loved it. There was one evening where (.) Tuesday night (.) where I'd not got any- so they had a blog with loads of photos on and Tuesday night there was no photos of JACK and I'm like (.) some things not right? They'd had pasta Bolognese and they'd done some drawing and I knew drawing weren't really his thing, but pasta bolognese was. I'm like, hmmm he's not on any of these photos so I knew something had happened (.) but erm the head teacher did message on the coach, on the way back to say, what a super residential he'd had and there was one little blip but he dealt with it very maturely erm 'cause I was quite uncertain because they stopped in [UK destination] and they went to the XXXXXX Museum and that's the last holiday we had with Ian when he was poorly we went when my sister was forty so we all went and stopped in [UK destination] together, in this big house beautiful house, that none of us could ever afford [laughs]. And we did some of the trips out, and I thought, if he remembers, we've been to the chip shop that where they were having fish and chips and stuff. But I think because he was five, he's not remembered a lot of that. He was like I could vaguely remember, could, y'know, I said, where did we stop? And I was like down that road, y'know where the chip shop is down that road. He was like I do vaguely remember but he remembered things that had happened in the house like he remembered it had been halloween while being there and so like they dressed up and we had like a little Halloween party and he could remember stuff like that more than he could remember like where we had actually been so I don't think it really impacted him negatively but I was a bit like, oooh what if he remembers he there with Daddy so I did let staff know. But yeah, he was absolutely fine apart from this wobble and I think it was just probably tired and because it was like the second night but once he'd got used to it he were fine. He has, he's had a brill time some of the photos they've sent of all the kids Smiling and then much better weather than we had. It's not that far away it's on the same coast but yeah, this sky's blue every day and i'm like, where have you got this weather from?

Phoebe: It's been a little bit grey here.

SALLY: So he has, he's had a lovely time and you could they did send like photos and they'd like when they were posting it's on the blog. when they were posting in the postcards, they'd took photos of the kids in pairs. So every child was on the photos and like when they had their ice creams photos of them like in groups with thir icecreams and stuff. So we had so many photos of like the kids and you could see (.) he took his XXXXX rucksack, so it's like XXX and XXXXXX but with like a XXXXXX piping on it so like because he got that on his back, even if it was the backs of them like that, I'm like, 'that ones mine!' because they've got their own raincoats for the AP and school they've all the same XXXXXX , like cagboule thing so they'd got them all over top of their coats. So sometimes it was a bit like, 'which one's mine?', but like no, bright backpack, can see, that one. So he has he's had a lovely time and they've been absolutely amazing with him.

Phoebe: Brill (2) Thank you (.) I'll glance back on my erm notes (.) Ooops ,didn't mean to fire that at you [pencil rolls across table] (2)s o I think(.) Yeah (.) Just to a sort of closing reflection as to whether there's any other thoughts around what your experience has been like and how you felt, as you've gone along, JACK's educational journey.

SALLY: No, that's about it. I was really apprehensive, but it was the best thing I've ever done. It's led to (2) a really positive year six and I felt that's what he needed.

Phoebe: Yeah. And the understanding from the from J- er sorry JACK's

SALLY: I do it all the time and I named him [laughs]

Phoebe: [overlapping speech, inaudible] has kind of followed him through to his current setting.

SALLY: Yeah. Because that's what he needed; just a certain way with him it's just listen to him really so he feels heard (.) That was the biggest thing that they pulled out from the AP just to listen.

Phoebe: Yeah.

SALLY and Phoebe: [overlapping speech]

SALLY: I did a whole thing where I like y'know sent them the hierarchy needs. I'm like (.) the fundamentals of teaching. I think you've forgotten them here. Here you go. Maslow's hierarchy of needs if you're not doing der der der, you're not gonna get to there.

Phoebe: Yeah, if he doesn't feel safe.

Phoebe: Yeah. And I'm just like, I can't believe I'm having to like point these things out to his primary school. But like y'know, teaching practice day one. The children will not learn if they don't feel (.) And it's just like (2) [laughs]

Phoebe: It's been a journey.

SALLY: It has and we've got to a really good point now and yeah okay maybe driving across [home city]. every day isn't the best but If that's what it takes, that's what it takes. And its (.) He's loving it. So that's all that really matters. I mean he has his moments where we moans but what kid doesn't moan about school.

Phoebe: And same with the residential. I'm sure he wasn't the only child that had a wob-

SALLY: No. I know there was definitely a girl who they phoned her mum because I was waiting for him to come home. I'd got the time wrong. I'd put the letter in a safe place because the dog ate the first one.

Both: [laugh]

SALLY: Yeah. So I put the letter in a safe place and I was like, I'll just go up at school finishing time and if it's not, then I'll just- I thought I'd rather be there than y'know than be late so I went up and they were like they're not back until half four and then they did keep putting on class dojo that what time it were going to be, but there was this grandma waiting for Granddaughter and she's going oh no, my daughter's

already had a phonecall about my granddaughter and I'm like ooh well I haven't had a phone call so it can't have been that bad.

Phoebe: Yeah

SALLY: Like I say he's like 2 kids he's either delightful or horrendous. There's no in between.

Phoebe: But the environment around him helps-

SALLY: Yeah

Phoebe: - helps to bring out the amazing side.

SALLY: Yeah it does. It's just when he's tired when he's hungry, when he's overwhelmed. Then you don't get the good one and we've just got to try and help with that and there's things you can do and then there are things that are just life and it does shake him a bit. It's just we're all having to learn to deal with it and he works different to other people and we just need to learn how to help him. Getting. There. Slowly.

Phoebe: Yeah.

SALLY: Yeah. JACK doesn't fit in a box.

Appendix P- Transcript of Christine's interview

Phoebe: The purpose of this research is to explore your experiences as a parent or carer to a child whose attended an alternative provision (.) so that's any form of education away from a mainstream classroom during primary school. This is your opportunity to share your story. There's just one opening question (.) and I'll follow your lead then throughout the interview.

Christine: Yeah

Phoebe: Whilst we're talking I might make some notes (.) erm (.) if we decide to make a timeline I can put the visualiser back on and we can have a look at that together so that you can see the notes that I'm making (.) erm (.) just so that we can kind of reflect on things and perhaps explore your experiences a bit further. (1) So (2) The opening question is (.) Please, can you think back to when your child started in education? (1) Tell me about their educational journey and your experiences relating to this. (1) We can create a timeline to help remember and reflect on this.

Christine: Erm (.) Okay (.) so do you mean like sorta like when he started like nursery (.) or like (.) like (1) sort of erm (.) infants like reception or just like going back to when he first completely

Phoebe: Yeah (.) if when he started nursery, if that's okay and then erm

Christine: Yeah. Yeah-

Phoebe: Just sort of talk me through.

Christine: Yeah.

Phoebe: Yeah

Christine: So yeah so erm so obviously initially (.) erm BEN went to like a preschool nursery erm so just when he was two just for a few hours a day erm (.) so that he did that for a few months, but that got disrupted by covid. So then he didn't complete the rest of that time there because it was covid so then he started sort of nursery when he was (.) erm (2) coming out of sort of lockdown (.) erm (.) so what age do they start? That is it three or four (.) can't remember now. [laughs] Three intit I think it so he would've been three.

Phoebe: Yeah

Christine: So he did start then a nursery at his erm (.) Infant school erm which was erm then disrupted by Covid again. So then he actually really then only had sort of literally a few weeks erm and then he sort of then started reception erm in the infant school. Then after that (.) erm so he was (.) so he did (.) reception (.) erm (2) which was kind of like a bit of an up and down sort of (1) journey because he was sort of I think by which point this is when we started to realise that there was something (.) a bit more erm that he needed a bit more support and kind of a bit more y'know kind of a bit more additional needs in class. But at that time (.) the kind of reception teacher was kind of in in the view that for her kind of what she had to do she didn't really have to (.) provide him with a structured day or a structured lesson because obviously, he was still reception so a lot of it was like learn through play and that kind of thing, erm but then we were sort of starting to think ahead for Year One and felt that then that might be quite a tricky erm, y'know sort of like situation for him erm and then (.) once he entered into year one (.) erm (.) within a few weeks, he'd been taken out of the mainstream (.) classroom to kind of get more kind of support erm

in a smaller group setting. So they had like a nurture provision in in the school erm (1) and erm he kind of stayed there for like of most of year one (.) so quite a lot of disruption in year one, 'cause it's when the teacher strikes were so at some points he had I think he had over like a week off school because of Strikes erm because he had additional needs they didn't have the support in school to look after him. Erm (.) So I had to basically keep him at home erm (.) and then that kind of really sort of thing continued into year two

Phoebe: Right

Christine: Erm but that then it was a more kind of permanent set up in the nurture group for a few weeks.

Phoebe: Yeah

Christine: Then he was kind of moved back into the class classroom (.) erm because that was on the advice from an outsourced (.) company that was assisting the school at the time. So then he was kind of put back into the classroom with kind of erm (.) a teaching assistant support erm sort of during the day and that went on for kind of like er probably about sort of eight weeks until I was then contacted by the school to say that the local authority'd offer him the place to go to the AP for 12 weeks as an alternative provision erm for erm so initially it was like for the 12 weeks so it was just the kind of term after the (.) the New Year.

Phoebe: Yeah

Christine: Erm but then BEN actually continued and finished the rest of the school year there and did like 24 weeks (.) erm (.) because erm (1) the school had a lot of difficulties at the time as his EHCP had not been granted. So they literally wanted to put a reduced timetable in place which meant he hardly would've been at school. So the AP kind of erm (.) but also there were very aware that he was also going to be then transitioning into year three which was a different school.

Phoebe: Ah okay.

Phoebe: So (.) it was then kind of decided at the last minute, that he should stay in the alternative provision to help him with the transition into Year Three erm (2) and then that's where we finish and he's now in mainstream in year three.

Phoebe: Yeah (.) Thank you for giving me a sort of overview of what (.) BEN's educational (.) journey's been like erm I have just been jotting down some notes so I'm just gonna share them with you on the screen. If that's all right to check-

Christine: Yeah. Yeah.

Phoebe: My understanding. I've done them in pencil. Does that show up? So-

Christine: I can see those. Yeah, yeah. I can see them

Phoebe: So BEN started off in Nursery and then preschool, but there was a lot of covid disruption.

Christine: Yeah

Phoebe: And then reception did you say with that that was when he started to notice that Ben had got some different needs

Christine: Erm yeah (.) I mean to be honest up and up until when he was when he was in the preschool nursery they sort of mentioned a couple of things in his kind of initial kind of assessment erm, to sort of say, ooh y'know we've noticed he's not very good with like adult led activities, but at that time he was only sort of two so it was just kind of finding out whether it's just (.) their age or y'know kind of like the way they are and things erm but then it was more kind of like in this short time he did nursery (2) one of the teachers had sort of like noticed a few sort of little anomalies where he was kind of going off and playing with himself. He got very anxious over things (.) erm but then it was more so reception because I think the sort of the pressure and the demand of being in that setting and obviously (.) it was the first time that he'd been had a full year in a full class with y'know all his peers. So erm I'd probably say probably yes reception's probably was the main one but there had been little bits before that as well, erm but they've just not been any sort of time because of covid to kind of really delve into it. So it was kind of sort of knocked on its head or y'know, "he'll grow out of it" or he'll y'know, "we'll see have to see how things go he's still only young", that kind of thing.

Phoebe: What was that like for you when you were hearing sort of people saying things like that?

Christine: Erm I think initially kind of erm from in sort of preschool and erm nursery sort of type thing it was a lot it I kind of (.) it did create a little bit of like worry and concern but then they'd been so much disruption and (.) I kind of sort of took the view at the end of it that he was still only young and he needed a bit more time to kind of grow and y'know kind of mature that that kind of thing. Erm I think for reception it got a little bit more because I had ended up having more like one-to-one chats with his teacher in the classroom, just about sort of like certain types of his (.) behavior and things like that. Not particularly (1) massively negative it's just the way (.) that y'know the demands were affecting him in the class (1) so I think that she kind of foresaw that (.) once it came to a bit more of a structured classroom where you'd have to be sitting and paying attention and watching, and that that it'd be quite difficult.

Phoebe: Yeah

Christine: Erm And so I think I think I think definitely kind of the years kind of reception (.) year one (.) even into kind of like year two were quite a stressful kind of time for me because obviously (2) I was kind of obviously hearing a lot of things from school and I was having to kinda (1) don't get wrong these aren't things that I'd not noticed at home as well, but obviously, because he's my child and obviously (.) y'know I've got an older (.) erm he's got an older sibling as well, it was kind of like a bit more, y'know sometimes they always say, "ooh y'know second child and all can be a bit of a nightmare" and this, that, and the other. So (.) in a way, it was kind of nice that school did kind of understand because they think they kind of understood a lot more about what I was dealing with but at the same time it created a lot of stress for me (.) because it's like, what do you do? Y'know that kind of thing. So that's erm (.) yeah (.) so that's probably what I'd say is (.) yeah, probably just quite stressful and and y'know (.) just wondering what to do, where d'ya go, what do y'do, and this that and the other. And that's kind of even with school kind of providing me with (.) support that they could, y'know within their means. So (3)

Phoebe: Yeah, and then when BEN moved into year one erm…

Christine: Yeah.

Phoebe: He was spending time in the smaller group?

Christine: Yeah yeah in a sort of nurture setting so they were trying to sort of (.) erm I suppose in a way trying to kind of get to know him, and trying to kind of try different things strategies to see (.) y'know how they could kind of tap into getting him learning and getting him into a kind of a routine. So I'd say that, y'know year one was (.) very kind of like up and (.) y'know up and down erm (2) yeah it was very kind of up and down in terms of one day to the next. Y'know one day could be a good day, bad day, good day. Erm y'know so (.) Yeah (.)

Phoebe: Yeah, and then it was in year two (.) BEN continued with the nurture group, but that was when school suggested a placement at the AP?

Christine: Yeah.

Phoebe: Can you tell me a bit more about how that placement came about and you're kind of involvement in that process?

Christine: Erm so (.) yeah so (.) he was in the nurture group then he was put back into the mainstream classroom and then to be honest with the AP bit, I didn't get kind of (.) I wasn't actually involved in that (.) I don't actually know how it came about if I'm honest. Other than I can only think it's from when I'd spoke with this educational psychologist when BEN was like in year one and whether they put that recommendation forward, I don't really, I'm really not sure because nobody sort of really said, I just sort of got a call from the headteacher and then a letter basically advising that he'd been offered the opportunity to go erm…

Phoebe: Yeah.

Christine: So the only involvement really I had was then really just kind of like get setting it up and finding out what I needed to do where I needed to be and that kind of thing. So (2)

Phoebe: And how did it feel for you? When you heard that school had got this sort of plan (.) erm for BEN to go to the AP

Christine: Erm I mean, to be honest, once I'd kind of read and then been and met them, it kind of like felt like a great opportunity for him. So I was quite kind of like happy with obviously what had been offered I think I'd we were kind of getting to a bit of a (1) tethered end in terms of with like year two as to where it was gonna go, what he was going to do and there was so much because (.) I didn't particularly feel that school were set up to deal with (.) children that are a little bit more (.) that need a bit more support and things. I felt like it was a bit all up in the air and they were just kind of trying all different things all the time. So it felt like this was going to be a little bit more of a (.) a set approach, y'know with prop- positive strategies and things that were actually going to help. So that I think I actually felt as though it was a really y'know kind of positive opportunity for him so which y'know hence, y'know we accepted it straight away. So (1)

Phoebe: Yeah (1) and then what was it like for you and for BEN during that time at the AP,

Christine: Erm so initially I'd say probably the first 12 weeks (.) erm I mean overall the kind of the erm (1) the actual time that he spent there was massively positive like it's had such a positive experience on him and (.) y'know everything that he's, he's sort of learned there. Erm the first 12 weeks I'd probably say it was a little bit up and down, but I think it was just getting used to new things. Obviously, they were trying to (.) y'know kind of unpick and (.) push him a little bit in terms of trying to kind of iron out, y'know to get some of the strategies in place. So I felt like the first 12 weeks he definitely (.) erm he sort of grew, but he y'know took a bit of time (.) erm and then I think then I felt that he really flourished in the second block that he did (.) erm the remainder of the year because I think that, obviously he was used to the people, he he you knew the strategies and I think they could kind of focus a bit more on him y'know actually getting learning out of it as well (.) erm (.) so that's y'know I think overall I think BEN was was happy, y'know was really happy there. Erm (.) so I think, he definitely took a lot away took a lot away from it (1)

Phoebe: Yeah, how did you experience the the placement?

Christine: (2) What you mean? Sorry like-

Phoebe: Just what was it like for you while BENX was there over those that first 12 week block and then the second 12 week block,

Christine: Erm (.) I mean (2) for me it was for me the only the only bit with it was just logistics really, just because he had to go there start at different times and (.) erm he had to be picked up at different times, so I think probably, It was only kind of like stressful for me in that that way (.) but (.) once we started to notice the difference in him just at home y'know coming home and he wasn't having those like outbursts and things like that as much he was a lot more (.) y'know relaxed and chilled, you could see the difference. So, y'know kind of overall, I felt even though it created a lot of logistical issues within (1) us family home, it actually the positiveness of it outweighed it so (1)

Phoebe: Yeah (2) and I'm wondering about erm because you'd said sort of the initial placement was 12 weeks but then it got extended-

Christine: Yeah.

Phoebe: Just sort of how that came about and you're experience of that, really?

Christine: Erm So (1) so (.) so part of the end of the kind of the placement, the 12 weeks, they start to sort of then prepare (.) the children for sort of going back into their school erm (.) with like a bit of a mixed timetable of kind of going to the centre going to school (.) erm (.) and people visited and outreach visiting them in the classroom and things like that. So we kinda got to a point where that sort of timetable was set up and I'd had a meeting with the AP and erm (.) the (.) school (.) erm the er the (.) home school and they and then there was kind of- at the time so the school so Ben's infant school that he was in it got Ofsted (.) Inspected around that time and things weren't looking very good (.) a lot of teachers left or went off sick but basically that's what happened and I think (.) err (1) after after I had the meeting, I think then school had basically approached The and basically said that they were struggling (.)to kind of work with the timetable erm because he'd not got an EHCP approved that they wouldn't be able to provide the support. And then how they explained it to me was that they'd have to offer him a very reduced timetable because they didn't have and they couldn't give him any sort of one-to-one support in school.

Phoebe: Yeah

Christine: Erm (.) so, they'd sort of then arranged it with the AP that he could do another 12 weeks (.), I think, from their point of view, they didn't want to then undo all the work that they'd done for the past 12 weeks. Erm (1) so that's how it came about. I mean, for me, if I'm honest, It was a bit of a relief (1) because I think I had a lot of concerns about him going back to school (.) knowing that there was a lot of things going on, but also because it was very close to the point where he was going to be transitioning to Year three (.) erm (.) so it was gonna be then two lots of transitions within the space of like a few weeks (.) erm it was just so when they actually said that he was gonna stay I actually found it (.) I was quite relieved (.) erm (.) y'know and it was kind of like the best decision (.) erm I think for BEN he found it quite difficult because I think they'd prepared him in his mind that he was going back (.) and then when he didn't (.) he er he was happy to stay but at the same time I think he felt a bit (1) drawn erm (.) torn in terms of because he'd got all set up back up to go and see his friends (.) but then he he didn't go and then so we had a couple of like ooh (.) and then he had to kind of then (.) retransition at the AP with a new cohort so like with a new set of people…

Phoebe: Right

Christine: …because there was only him and another boy that actually stayed for another 12 weeks so I think initially he found that a little bit difficult but it didn't stop him from (.) flourishing in terms of because he kind of was used to that and he'd got all his strategies in place he actually did really well out of it so

Phoebe: And (.) then so erm (.) you mentioned that year 3 is at like a different err like a junior school.

Christine: Yes. Yeah.

Phoebe: Yeah, so I'm wondering how that transitions gone from (.) erm (.)so it was the AP at the end of last academic year and now he's in Year 3

Christine: Yep. Three. Yeah that's right.

Phoebe: How's that been?

Christine: Erm it has been really good so far I'll say so good (.) Erm (.) so for like year two, erm y'know the last part when it he was at the (.) o the last few weeks before we broke up for the six weeks holidays, there was a bit of time spent in the juniors. So we spent a good couple of weeks with his time being split between the AP and juniors. Erm (.) ending with the last week, he actually then was transitioned with the rest of the juniors because they only did like three days…

Phoebe: Yeah.

Christine: Err (.) yeah so it was sort of then used to it (.) erm y'know the junior school really got on board and sort of really tried really made him y'know quite welcome (.) erm and everything erm (.) and then since he's gone back in September, at the beginning of the school year, (.) we've had that kind of plan in place. We knew what we were doing in the morning, when we dropped him off, when we picked him up and it's kinda y'know it's gone really well (.) erm y'know so far. Erm obviously I'll know more when [laughs] I've had a meeting with his teacher I guess, but I've not heard anything so I feel like it's going

alright. And y'know when speaking to BEN, it seems to be y'know (1) going better than his previous years that y'know at infants?

Phoebe: Mhhm (1) But At the end of last year, they were doing this kind of preparation?

Christine: Yes. Yeah. Yeah.

Phoebe: So (3) I'm just wondering what your thoughts and feelings were as he was sort of getting towards the end of that placement at the and what that was like for you.

Christine: Erm (.) I think (1) to be fair Ben was quite alright with it erm and I'd kind of sort of said that to them that I felt like y'know and I'd sort of said that to them that I felt like (.) because everything had been so much up and down at his previous school and then having this opportunity. But we knew that it couldn't be permanent. So obviously it was great that he had the opportunity to do the further 12 weeks. But then erm (.) I felt that (.) because we'd had this opportunity to really sort of get into the sort of transition between year three the year threes has been kind of the start of a new chapter. If y'know what I mean sort of where we've kind of learnt a lot (.) got a lot of strategies, Ikind of what we're sort of doing and then just sort of moving forward really. Erm (2) BEN's, now got an EHCP as well. So it's kind of that made things that little bit easier in terms of, we know that (.) that support has to be in place and things like that now so, erm there is that as well.

Phoebe: Yeah, yeah. So thinking back to when (.) Ben was in a reception, year one, year two, when he was spending time out of class in that (.) erm sort of in smaller group, nurture setting, I'm just wondering what's sort of changed do you think between where he is now in year three and what was (.) what it was like for him back here?

Christine: Erm yeah so I think the biggest change now is that he is actually (.) sat during the day in a mainstream classroom without any sort of (.) dramas or y'know kind of like issues whereas year one year two (.) y'know at times it was almost virtually impossible (.) erm but it created so much (.) unrest in him that y'know it'd also have knock-on effect at home and things like that. Whereas (.) like from then compared to like now he's happily in that sort of setting and (.) he's he's kind of y'know sort of getting on with it and feels that I think he also feels that people do understand now and do kind of know how he is and things. So whereas I think year one year two was still very much a learning sort of process for BEN and y'know for school as well.

Phoebe: Yeah (1) And what's helped BEN and those around him, kind of understand?

Christine: Erm I think communication definitely between erm y'know between The centre and juniors and (.) so while Ben was in the second like erm (2) block of his time at AP before he started doing the transition days they had somebody coming from the juniors every week to see him and to sort of chat with the staff there and kind of try and just get a bit of an understanding as to kind of how he was, y'know in the setting y'know and things like that. So, that I think (.) that I think the communication side of it helped more erm because we'd have a bit more in terms of regular meetings and that erm (.) and although I did when he was in year one and year two, it was kind of a bit between lots of different kind of people, erm whereas whenever I had a meeting with the centre it was somebody that was directly involved in looking after him while he was at school. So

Phoebe: Mhmm (1) Since he's been (.) back in year three, what's that communication been like?

Christine: Erm so at the moment I've not had as much but it's only been a few weeks. Erm so (.) but there is there has been plans I've had a meeting offered with the inclusion (.) erm leads erm (.) but we've got to set that up because unfortunately I was away when they wanted to do it on a specific day, but so, we've got to do that over the next few weeks. So I've got that in place (.) erm but that's kind of been it so far at the minute, erm but then I know that (.) the meeting it will be sort of over a few intervals over the year and then there's there'll be a kind of a yearly review on is EHCP. Erm (.) so but erm (.) y'know generally erm I don't really get to speak to anybody daily that's probably where I'm at the moment, but I'm kind of sort of (.) leaving it at the moment, until I feel like that's maybe what I need to do or, y'know because I'm also going to be meeting with his teacher at his parents evening in a couple of weeks, so it'll just be (.) There's an opportunity for me to kind of just ask a few more questions really just to find out a bit of day to day I've sort of been waiting for things to settle in a little bit and (.) y'know see how (1) see (1) how it's going.

Phoebe: Yeah (2). Is there anything as we've been talking (.) erm that you'd like to expand on (.) at all?

Christine: Erm (3) I don't think so because it's kind of like sort (.) of that's kind of it (.)in a nutshell, really d'ya know what I mean? Erm y'know in terms of (.) I think probably the only sort of bit I'd sort of expand on really is just kind (.) of where (1) you sort of ask me how I felt in that sort of reception year one, year two, y'know sort of felt like there was a lot of stress and worry and I think (.) I would probably expand on that in terms of saying and just in my experience it's very difficult to understand where to turn (.) when you're in that situation where erm (.) because I feel like BEN's a bit of like what I would call an in between sort of child. He perhaps doesn't need special needs education all the time (.) but at the same time it's found it very difficult in that setting but (.) so he falls [hesitation] but but at the same time he's not been able to just go into class and it's not just to be a case of ooh y'know, "let's try and just walk him in a different way" or that kind of thing, it was literally like he (.) couldn't be there. So I think erm (.) so I think that's (.) for me and that period of time it was difficult to understand, because then all of a sudden different people started getting involved erm so (.) there like was the inclusion at school then there was like erm so do I (.) you know, if I want to get more support or get a bit more information just get a bit more help in terms of (.) is this something I should be looking into like medically in terms of like diagnosis? And then you get different opinions on that in that erm (.) you won't get assessments for say like autism or ADHD or anything, it's just not done in this local authority y'know it's not really (.) y'know (1) and then you don't really get a diagnosis and then it's it's kinda- so it's difficult to kind of understand whose the person that then you then go to kind of get something that's a little bit more (.) erm set in terms of y'know this is how we can help this person or y'know this is how we feel that erm (1) that they should be diagnosed. I think that a lot there seems to be a lot of stigma around the diagnosis side of things (.) as to whether it's somebody that there seems to be a lot of grey areas between what's classed as someone that just needs additional support at school, have got a special need or have they got a diagnosed special need that needs (.) help with, there's no kind of one set thing. Erm so I think it's quite confusing to parents (.) erm because like I say you don't know who really is going to (.) y'know provide the support erm like moving forwards so erm (.) but obviously (.) from the discussions with his BEN's now got an EHCP and he is on a waiting list to (.) to be assessed by CAMHS erm but that's not easy in itself and that's kind of like y'know a long process to wait for (.) erm (.) and then you sort of question, whether it's something you actually need or and the way I look at is like I'm trying to always think for the future in terms of, if you

don't put yourself down for that support now, you don't want to be then requesting it when it's a lot later down the line and then it takes another y'know longer to get to that point

Phoebe: Yeah.

Christine: Erm so I think it's all very- it all seems like it's very up in the air erm and there's nobody that can really take charge of it because I feel like (.) in the school they only have so much that they do and so much money that they get in in terms of providing that extra support, but then they actually don't have anybody because then they have to pass it on somebody else that has to then do that. And then they have to pass it on somebody else. It's all sort of (.) all over the place whereas I feel like if it was a bit more of a set process or a bit more of a set sort of structures, this is what we should do and what avenues we need to follow, I think it would be a more- a lot less stressful.

Phoebe: Yeah

Christine: I think you just kind of go away from every single meeting that you have thinking right okay now I'm waiting for this. Now I'm going to speak to an educational psychologist. Now I'm gonna and then today he's had a bad day and what should I read into that and (.) y'know that kind of thing. So (2) erm as I like I said, with the communication that had since he then started at , it felt like a lot more (.) a lot more stress was taken out of it there's a lot more understanding and a lot more (.) erm more kind of positive direction with everything that was about y'know the program at the AP.

Phoebe: Yeah (.) that's sort of just what I was thinking to ask you about so that the stress and worry, you kind of said (.) erm identified around this point [gestures to reception on timeline] and I was wondering if that stress and worry had kind of remained consistent throughout BEN's educational journey or whether there were times when it was better when it was worse?

Christine: Yeah (.) erm I'd say definitely from kind of reception year one year two it was very much (.) y'know more stressful. And then what I found then was once BEN'd started going to the AP even though, like I said, it was a bit up and down at first I actually didn't particularly feel stressed about it because I just felt it was in the place where people were wanting to support him, that had the means to be able to do it. Erm so, I definitely feel like this year has been (.) the less the less stressful since kind of January up until now. I feel a lot more sort of comfortable with things because I feel like he's been in a position where people have been (.) y'know making a big difference on him. So (.) erm so yeah, so that initial kind of school journey very stressful but now (.) y'know a lot less stressful.

Phoebe: Yeah (2) yeah (.) Okay (.) and you mentioned something else that I've just taken out of and it was around, sort of taking charge

Christine: Yeah.

Phoebe: Do you feel like that's changed at all, like feeling like somebody or you've been able to take charge of things?

Christine: Erm (.) yeah, not so much where I've been able to take charge of things. I still feel like I'm very much in the hands of other people erm but I feel like (.) when BEN joined the AP, they sort of then took a hold of all these different things, and it didn't it didn't feel like as much for me to worry about, y'know

is it going to be like this or what's that y'know how's that gonna get sorted out and things. They sort of took a lot of that sort of pressure away (.) y'know away from me because obviously like I said, when he was at school, I'm not there, I don't know (.) what he's saying, what he's doing, I only know what he's doing and saying at home. (.) So, I think the kind of (.) made that (.) y'know took sort of charge of that (.) erm and then they kind of took charge of that in terms of liaising then with his juniors and kind of helping them to understand so that they could sort of take like him on board. And I think that's why I like so far I've not really had any concerns or worries, where I've needed to speak to school, because I feel like they kind of know already (.) erm so they're kind of obviously, forming their own kind of plan, in terms of what's gonna happen to him y'know kind of moving forward.

Phoebe: Yeah (.) and how is that for you, when you felt like some- somebody else or- or another organisation was sort of taking charge?

Christine: Erm (.) well (.) obviously just just just a bit more relieved, really that it was- that there was support there d'ya know what I mean that there was support so (.) that's what I'd say, definitely was (.) erm y'know gave me a lot of relief and just y'know erm feelings that y'know that things were a bit more understood or more accepted I guess as well in terms of the way y'know BEN is towards, y'know education and things like that (3).

Phoebe: Yeah (.) Okay (2) Is there anything else erm (.) any other thoughts that you've had around what your experience has been like, throughout BEN's journey at different points?

Christine: Errrrr (2) No, I don't I don't think so. I don't think so really, at the moment. So (.) errm (.) I think (.) at the minute I'm just more kind of (.) wanting things to stay in in a positive y'know position, really sort of like move out of the move out the negative but not really not really

Phoebe: And do things feel positive at the moment?

Christine: Yes definitely. Yeah. 100%. Yeah.

Phoebe: Yeah (3)

Christine: Whether that will stay the same or not, I don't know [laughs] (1) Erm I think it's like because I feel like I've sort of done a lot of worrying over the past like couple of years, then now, I feel like the worries of kind of (.) come down a little bit in that I feel like is he's y'know happy and everything y'know everybody kind of understands, but then obviously I've there's always going to be that in the back of my mind because obviously he is going to grow, gonna change, erm y'know as a person. But I just feel like I need to kind of worry about this step in sort of primary school at the minute and then (.) worry about the y'know hopefully worry about the rest later on (2) because obviously I don't y'know there's there might not be an opportunity to- for an alternative provision again, d'ya know what I mean so- (3)

Phoebe: Yeah (2) so that's some perhaps uncertainty about (2)

Christine: Yeah. Yeah (.) just 'cause obviously I mean I suppose my only worries at the moment (.) in terms of like moving forward is just like academically because there's been so much disruption for him for the last couple of years. It's like academically can he keep up with the kind of the year three, year four, year five, 'cause that's the kind of the sense that I'm getting from BXXX at the minute (.) that he's not (.)

but that's (.) but then that's that they're questions I need to sort of discuss with his teacher really and kind of work y'know see what we can work out from that (.) erm y'know (.) so yeah, but I think that's (.) I think that's (2) kind of like you until y- until you've (.) kind of addressed it, it's like like I said at the minute I've just kind of been letting things settle in erm but I think because of- because of all the disruption and then obviously his time at the AP obviously to move back into Mainstream obviously there's been some disruption for him academically and that's not necessarily to say that he's not capable, but at the same time he's missed a lot as well (.) in terms of because obviously (.) y'know getting through a day y'know has been quite challenging (.) erm and that and obviously a lot of the s AP erm (.) stuff is they keep up with his learning, but it's also been about kind of therapy and kind of getting it around- getting it- getting those strategies to help cope when you're in a classroom situation and things like that so it's not just about y'know writing things down on a piece of paper. Whereas with now, he's not in that where he's gonna be (.) supported in that way (.) it's more academicy type stuff.

Phoebe: Yeah (2) There's a slightly different focus now he's back in the mainstream classroom.

Christine: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

Phoebe: Okay (2) Thank you (3) Erm (.) is there anything else (.) or do you think it would be okay, (.) to (.) to-

Christine: Yeah I think that's it at the moment yeah I think yeah yeah definitely hopefully I've given you enough for y'know enough for what you need and things like that but yeah I think that's that's as much as probably I can say at the minute. Erm (.) on it (.) So yeah.

Phoebe: It's been really (.) really interesting listening to you and your experiences and BEN's experiences as well kind of throughout these different points.

Christine: Yeah.

Phoebe: Erm (.) And it is it's a real privilege to listen to parents' stories and I'm really grateful that you sort of saw my research poster and then got in touch and were willing to share some of your experiences with me.

Christine: Yeah, yeah. Well I just think if it's gonna help (.) kind of future in terms of how things y'know may or may not shape how things work in schools and with alternative provisions and things but y'know I do think that the centre provision was such a great opportunity and it's just- it's just offered to so little amount of kids and there's probably a lot more kids out there that need it. Erm so if that means that that means (.) in the future they might look at doing more options like that. I think it's y'know I think it's really good because like I said from BEN's point of view it's been it's been a massive step forward because like I said, I think he is that kind of in-between, sort of child. Like I said, he doesn't need a- a special school, but he he was struggling with the kind of the mainstream sort of side of it. So this just offered something to be able to kind of take that step back and say, right, how do we (.) put this y'know, how do we get this right or how do we implement the strategy to help you to help him with this? I think it did y'know it's had such a great impact erm on him.

Phoebe: Yeah (.) and I- I noticed that you keep on using the kind of 'in-between' to erm (.) to describe BEN, but I also wonder about in between (.) perhaps describing the kind of alternative provision, as well. It's kind of a-

Christine: Yeah.

Phoebe: Erm (.) and there've been really great links with the mainstream it sounds like erm-

Christine: Yes, yeah, yeah, definitely, yeah, definitely. Erm Yeah. Erm And I think I think just on my experience of like mainstream education. Obviously it is mainstream and it is one size (.) they want everybody to fit in one size of things. So the AP kind of just offered that opportunity to kids that don't necessarily fit into that one size, but try and help them just to be able to cope with it more (.) erm (.) so erm y'know it would, whether that means that they can incorporate more of that into a school I don't know, y'know (.) it's all about money I think these days intit what you can and can't do y'know (.) so but I do feel like so the junior school what BEN's at now they are (.) a trust primary, so they (.) I feel like they've got a lot more scope to be able to implement or be more flexible with implementing things in terms of how they (.) do their education and how they're funding goes and things like that whereas you could very much tell with the infants because they were local authority that that there was much more red tape involved with it a lot more restrictions. Erm (.) So I mean in actual fact now as it turns out because of the Ofsted, the actual trust has taken over the infants it's the same as the juniors so they're actually all going to be all under the same, all under the same one now, the same academy.

Phoebe: Yeah

Christine: Erm. So (2)

Phoebe: Yeah, so, in terms of the- the school's ability to kind of implement some of those things, erm

Christine: Yeah.

Phoebe: Yeah (2) okay (2) Was there anything else?

Christine: Er No, don't think so.

Phoebe: Thank you. Erm (1) any feedback on kind of the interview process?

Christine: Erm (1) no (1) all being quite alright (.) so no (.) quite alright.

Phoebe: I'll erm (.) start wrapping things up, is that okay?

Christine: Yeah, of course it is. Yeah.

Phoebe: I'm mindful of your lunch break. Are you alright for a couple more minutes (.) is that okay?

Christine: Yeah, I'm alright for a couple more minutes yet Yeah I'm alright.

Phoebe: Yeah, so when I sort of write up the interview and transcribe, it I'll use pseudonyms fake names for you and Ben and anyone else that you might have mentioned. I just wondered if you'd like to choose your own?

Christine: Erm (.) no, I'll let you choose. It's fine. No. [both laugh]

Phoebe: I'll send you an email over with a few attachments. So one of them is a let with some different kind of sources of support because I appreciate that some of the things we've talked about today might have been sort of difficult or emotionally distressing (.) erm and I'll also send across a let that I've made about one here and it's entirely up to you, whether you want to speak to Ben and let him know that you and I have spoken today, …

Christine: Yeah.

Phoebe: You know him best (.) so y'know that's your decision. It's a bit blurry, isn't it? [gestures to screen] But I'll send you across. And if you did want to let him know this is just one perhaps way of facilitating that conversation. Erm so I'll send it across (.) and then (.)I think (2) Yeah (.) as I said in the consent form, hopefully, in the New Year, I'll have transcribed and I'll have started to do some analysis on your interview and the other interviews that I've been doing, and once I've done that, I'll just reach back out via your email and offer to meet up again to discuss kind of where I'm at with the analysis and see whether you agree with the sort of line of thinking or whether you want to offer any feedback, but it's entirely up to you whether you take me up on that. So I'd totally respect if you said no I'd rather not, or it'd be absolutely great if we could meet up again or perhaps you could provide some feedback over email.

Christine: Yeah, no problem.

Phoebe: Erm (.) so just to say thank you (.) it's been really lovely speaking with you and hearing about BEN's experiences and what that's been like, for you.

Christine: Yeah, Yes great, thank you. Sorry my cats decided to start joining- to join us. He keeps going like that and I keep thinking his head's gonna pop up any minute. He's like trying to get on my knee.

Phoebe: Awwww.

Both: [laugh] [inaudible]

Christine: He regularly make an appearance on my work and my work teams calls. I think he's just feeling a bit lonely, aren't you? Been downstairs a while. He's actually BENX's therapy Cat.

Phoebe: Oh is he?

Christine: Not really no we just call him his therapy cat.

Phoebe: But do they have a good relationship?

Christine: Yeah yeah I think it's funny (.) So at the AP they had erm a dog called XXXXX and BEN absolutely loved him although we're not dog people we're cat people but then erm around the time when he joined I'd sort of got the idea about how animals having that impact on children. So we obtained this little kitten So (.) erm so yeah they he absolutely adores him. So both kids do been quite a nice little, nice little addition. Haven't ya?. But I'm the one that spends the most out because I'm here all day [laughs]

Phoebe: yeah, I love animals.

Christine: They always say, 'he just follows you around all the time Mum!'

Phoebe: Awww (.) Yeah, I love animals I've not met the APs dog, though. I know they've got one at erm-

Christine: XXXXX. Yeah, it's cool, he's cute. Yeah, and now the juniors they're getting a dog as well (.) called B.

Phoebe: I mean, I absolutely love pets so I'm all for that. [laughs]

Christine: Yeah, I think It's a great its a great addition to that y'know because it does I think I said I just know how much BEN loved XXXXX and he spent a lot more time with him in his second (.) cohort (.) and well he's got a picture of him in his room [laughs]

Phoebe: Awww

Christine: because he just loved him that much. So yeah, they do, I think they all say animals do make a positive impact on your mental health. So I think y'know definitely.

Phoebe: Yeah. Yeah, I think there's so many positives to being in the presence and for caring for an animal as well.

Christine: yeah. Yeah.

Phoebe: I think it brings so many positive traits (2) thank you (.) I'm glad the cat joined the call or I wouldn't have learned about XXXXX [laughs]

Christine: Yeah, so yeah. Definitely with the XXXXXX he loved him. And yeah, I don't know if that's then inspired the juniors to get because obviously they were visiting or whether it's just something they've heard but yeah so it's the inclusion (.) erm teacher she's got a a little dog that they're sort of training to be able to go into school and sorta help with the kind of the inclusion side but also just to kind of help that teaching care. This is where a sort of said where I feel like with the Academy they've just got that bit more flexibility to kind of be their own (.) thing (.) it's not a one that has to be this sort of structure and way they've just sort of doing their own thing but yeah definitely with the AP, XXXXX was a big hit.

Phoebe: Aw (.) Yeah (.) I can imagine. Thank you. I'll send those few things across and then if you've got any questions you'll have got my contact details as well. If not, yeah, I'll get back in touch around sort of hopefully New Year time.

Christine: Yeah, brilliant. Thank you for getting in touch and I hope I have been able to help.

Phoebe: Thank you.

Christine: All right. Take care. Bye.

Appendix Q – Research Dissemination Poster

PHOEBE TURTON

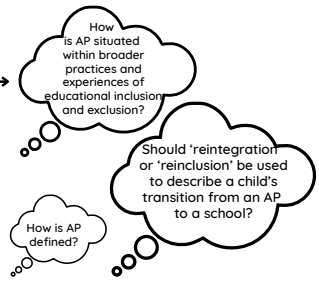
LISTENING TO THE STORIES OF PARENTS WHOSE CHILDREN HAVE ATTENDED AN ALTERNATIVE PROVISION DURING PRIMARY SCHOOL

INTRODUCTION

Alternative Provision (AP) is "education outside school, arranged by local authorities or schools, for pupils up to age 18 who do not attend mainstream school for reasons such as school exclusion, behaviour issues, school refusal, or short or long term illness" (DfE, 2018, p.15).
In 2023, the Conservative Government published the SEND and AP Improvement Plan, which proposed a three-tiered model of AP (Figure 1). The Improvement Plan emphasised the use of AP as an 'intervention', intending to support children and young people to remain in, or transition to, mainstream school or further education (DfE, 2023; Figure 1).
I felt that the Improvement plan positioned AP as an important and established aspect of the wider education system in England, and I wanted to explore the topics of AP and reintegration in my doctoral research as a Trainee Educational Psychologist at the University of Sheffield.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Upon reviewing the literature on AP and reintegration, I encountered and engaged with a number of issues and debates, which I have summarised in the thought bubbles.
I noticed that existing research had focused primarily on exploring the views of Children and Young People (CYP) and practitioners' views on AP and reintegration, and less research has gathered parental voices. Nevertheless, often, CYP (e.g. Atkinson & Rowley, 2019) and practitioners (e.g. Lawrence, 2011) highlighted parental support being a supportive factor during AP placements and reintegration. Research by the DfE (2018) suggested that parental voices have been overruled by professionals during AP and reintegration processes. I was intrigued by the research, which highlighted the importance of parental involvement, yet noted the scarcity of parental voice in the research literature and in practice. I wanted to explore parents' experiences of AP, in particular during primary school, as there are increasing numbers of primary-aged children attending AP (Ofsted, 2022). This led to the construction of my research question:



What are the narratives of parents whose children have attended an AP during primary school?

METHODOLOGY

- This was a qualitative research project; it focussed on exploring parental stories and experiences.
- I adopted a narrative approach to interviewing and analysis. Narrative approaches focus on the stories we tell ourselves and others', and how these shape our understandings (Murray, 2003).
- The research aligned with a philosophical stance of social constructionism, which sees knowledge as being constructed through language and interactions (Burr, 2015).

DESIGN & PROCEDURE

- I interviewed 2 parents (Sally & Christine) who met the inclusion criteria (to be a parent/carer to a child who has attended an AP and reintegrated into a mainstream primary school).
- I used the Listening Guide (Gilligan & Eddy, 2021) as my method of analysis. This involved a series of steps, outlined below:
  - Listening for the plot
  - Listening for the voice of I, they, we and you (Woodcock, 2016)
  - Listening for contrapuntal voices
  - Composing an analysis

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In order to answer the research question, I have summarised key areas for discussion, which have been constructed following the analysis of Sally and Christine's narratives using the Listening Guide, and are explored in relation to wider literature and theory. An in-depth narrative analysis for both participants is discussed in the research thesis.

Narratives of parenting a child who needs 'a little bit more'

Both Sally and Christine talked about their meaning-making of their children's (Ben and Jack's) needs, albeit through their individual voices and perspectives. Both parents were seeking diagnostic assessments to understand, validate and/or support their children's needs, both parents narrated a sense of 'stuckness' in their children's original mainstream primary schools, and both talked about a need for additional support and flexibility in school's approaches, as opposed to a 'one-sized' approach.

Narratives of disempowerment by practitioners and processes

There was a shared experience of being disempowered through interactions with practitioners. For Sally, despite her expertise as a practitioner and parent, her voice was often unheard and dismissed. For Christine, interactions could be understood as being 'one-way', with her often being unreached. Processes (e.g. access CAMHS referrals) disempowered parents, instead privileging practitioner involvement, and the complex and confusing nature of systems was in itself disempowering due to being inaccessible.
During their children's AP placements, interactions between practitioners with Christine and Sally shifted and fostered collaboration, providing a sense of emotional containment. The differences between these experiences have been understood through Griffith et al (2021)'s collaboration framework.

Juxtaposing narratives: Individual inclusion versus systemic exclusion

Sally and Christine talked about experiences of exclusion at their children's original schools. Some authors (e.g. McLean, 2024) would consider an AP placement a form of exclusion, however, in this research both parents narrated positive experiences of their child's individual inclusion (for example in going on trips) during the AP placement. Reintegration into their respective original schools was not possible for Ben and Jack, and this has been understood through General Systems Theory. However, at the time of interviews, both children had reintegrated into new primary school's, and the AP placement had been understood as being important in facilitating this. Wider literature raises the question of whether the availability of AP enables some mainstream schools to continue exclusionary practices (McCluskey et al., 2015; Power et al., 2024). As such, though on an individual basis, AP may support experiences of inclusion, it may also enable the prevention of wider inclusion.

CONCLUSION

This small-scale, in-depth piece of qualitative research concludes that, for two parents whose children have attended AP during primary school, they have experienced times of disempowerment through their interactions with systems and practitioners. Parents also narrated their experiences of making sense of their children's needs through grappling with diagnoses and seeking additional school support. Generally positive experiences of their children's AP placement were discussed, indicating that this was not only an 'intervention' for the child but also provided support for them (as parents), and aimed to support their child's reintegration into mainstream school.

AP is discussed as being situated in a complex position of potentially fostering individual inclusion, while concurrently enabling systemic educational exclusion. Implications for education practitioners, including educational psychologists, are presented to encourage critical reflection on the use of AP to support CYP and reintegration processes.

IMPLICATIONS

From my engagement in this research, I have constructed a list of reflective questions to be discussed when AP is being considered These are included below:

- What alternatives to an AP placement have we already considered (e.g. Targeted support in mainstream schools, 'Tier 1'- Figure 1), and what were the outcomes of this?
- What are our hopes for the AP placement?
- Where do we expect 'intervention' to happen, as a result of the AP placement?
- How have parents been involved in the discussions around a potential AP placement, what are their views, and how have these been taken into account?
- How has the child been involved in the discussions around a potential AP placement, and what are their views, and how have these been taken into account?
- How will we ensure that the child maintains a sense of connectedness to their school peer cohort and key adults during the AP placement?
- How will the child get to and from the AP placement (i.e., transport), and what support can be put in place?
- What will the duration of the AP placement be, and, how will we know that the school is ready to re-include the child?
- How regularly will we meet (AP staff, mainstream staff, parents, child) to discuss how the placement is going and what the next steps are? How will these meetings be arranged and facilitated, so that everyone's voice is heard?

FIGURES

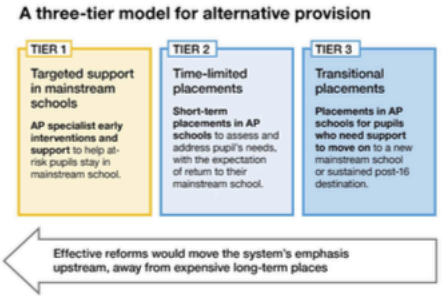


FIGURE 1. A THREE-TIER MODEL FOR AP (DFE, 2023, P.25)

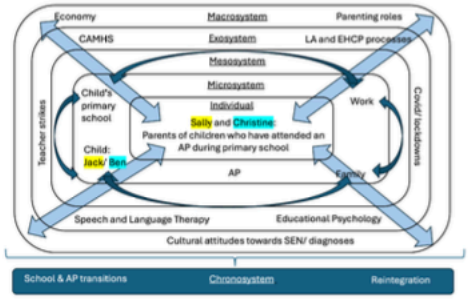


FIGURE 2. A BIOECOLOGICAL SYSTEMS REPRESENTATION OF PARTICIPANT NARRATIVES (BRONFENBRENNER & MORRIS, 2006)

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