Untold Stories: Parents' Experiences of Young People Reintegrating from Alternative Provision to Mainstream Education

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Declaration

This thesis is being submitted for the award of Doctorate in Applied Educational Psychology. I declare that this work is my own and has not been previously submitted for any other purpose. I have acknowledged where material used is the work of others.

Overarching Abstract

This thesis explores the views and experiences of parents, educational professionals and children and young people who have experienced social, emotional and mental health difficulties and their reintegration from alternative provision to mainstream education. It comprises four chapters: a systematic literature review, a methodological and ethical critique, an empirical study and a reflective synthesis.

Chapter One provides an in-depth review of five studies using thematic synthesis. The findings indicate multiple relationship and process factors that act as facilitators and barriers during children and young people's reintegration into mainstream school and college. These were understood through five broad themes: School Connectedness, Working in Partnership, Reintegration Readiness, Meeting Individual Needs Flexibly Within Context and Systemic Considerations. The findings suggest that in addition to children and young people being supported to develop their readiness for reintegrating into a mainstream setting, accountability also lies with the mainstream settings to demonstrate their readiness to receive reintegrating learners.

Chapter Two provides a discussion of the theoretical underpinnings, methodological and ethical considerations and decisions which shaped the empirical study.

Chapter Three provides a report of the empirical study which examined parental experiences of reintegration from pupil referral units to mainstream secondary schools for young people who have experienced social, emotional and mental health difficulties. A qualitative approach was taken. Three semi-structured interviews were conducted and analysed using interpretative phenomenological analysis. Three subordinate themes central to the parents' stories were developed: Reintegration Readiness, Relationships and Decision Making. The parents' stories reflect the view that young people's reintegration success is reliant on their ability to adapt to fit into the mainstream education system, highlighting the enormous expectations placed on young people during reintegration. The author argues that greater focus should be placed on providing more inclusive mainstream schooling, that enables a smoother reintegration for young people, whilst also reducing the initial need for alternative provision placements.

Chapter Four provides a reflective synthesis of professional learning during the research project and the implications both as a practitioner and researcher in the field of educational psychology and more widely within the education sector.

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Chapter 1: Systematic Literature Review

What are the Views and Experiences of Parents, Educational Professionals and Children and Young People who have Experienced Social, Emotional and Mental Health Difficulties Reintegrating from Alternative Provision to Mainstream School or College?[1]

Abstract

This study provides a systematic review of existing literature capturing the views of parents, educational professionals and children and young people who have experienced social, emotional and mental health difficulties reintegrating from alternative provisions to mainstream schools and colleges. Following the systematic searching and screening of relevant literature, five studies were selected for further analysis. A qualitative approach was employed to critically appraise and synthesise the selected studies. Five analytic themes were developed using thematic synthesis, these were School Connectedness; Working in Partnership; Reintegration Readiness; Meeting Individual Needs Flexibly Within Context; and Systemic Considerations. The themes were further understood through the development of two overarching themes, Relationship Factors and Process Factors. It was concluded that in addition to children and young people being supported to develop their readiness for reintegrating into a mainstream setting, some accountability should lie with the mainstream settings to demonstrate their readiness to receive reintegrating learners. Limitations of the review and implications for educational psychology practice are discussed.

Keywords: *reintegration; social, emotional and mental health; alternative provision; experiences; views*

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[1] This chapter has been prepared for submission to the journal 'Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties' and is therefore presented in the style of papers typically published by this journal

1.1 Introduction

This systematic literature review (SLR) aims to explore the views and experiences of parents, educational professionals and children and young people (CYP) who have experienced social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) difficulties reintegrating from alternative provisions to mainstream settings. This section provides an overview of the current context of exclusionary practice, alternative provision and mainstream reintegration within the current educational climate. Finally, a rationale for the area of research is provided.

1.1.1 Exclusionary Practices in the Current Educational Climate

Government policy endorses the inclusion of CYP with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) in mainstream schools (Department for Education & Department for Health, 2015). However, educational providers continue to face significant challenges in supporting the inclusion of CYP with SEND, particularly those with SEMH difficulties (McCluskey et al., 2015).

The terminology social, emotional and mental health difficulties was introduced by the Code of Practice in 2015 to replace the term behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. Here SEMH difficulties are described as:

> …a wide range of social and emotional difficulties which manifest themselves in many ways. These may include becoming withdrawn or isolated, as well as displaying challenging, disruptive or disturbing behaviour. These behaviours may reflect underlying mental health difficulties such as anxiety or depression, self-harming, substance misuse, eating disorders or physical symptoms that are medically unexplained (Department for Education & Department for Health, 2015, p. 98).

The removal of the term behaviour from the need descriptor, suggests behaviour difficulties are no longer considered to be a discrete special educational need (Hickinbotham & Soni, 2021). Norwich and Eaton (2015) argue the change in terminology is a political attempt to reduce the number of CYP identified as having SEND. The change in terminology may encourage a shift in perspective from CYP's challenging behaviour being viewed as a behavioural choice, to the result of an unmet need. However, the language used to define SEMH difficulties is arguably medicalised and may privilege within-child explanations of behaviour, ignoring wider eco-systemic factors at play. This highlights the importance of

considering the terminology used to describe needs within this domain to ensure it does not lead to the needs of CYP being misunderstood or oversimplified.

In recent years, there has been a shift in the UK education system towards a market-driven system. The introduction of the Academies Act in 2010 was a catalyst for the privatisation of schools (Woods et al., 2020). Academisation provides schools with greater autonomy in how they are run (West & Bailey, 2013). However, with increased autonomy comes increased pressure to demonstrate high academic standards, as schools attempt to market themselves to prospective pupils and parents. Furthermore, in 2012 the Open Data Strategy was introduced to increase transparency and the quantity of school data that is available to the public (Department for Education, 2012). These changes encourage inter-school competition, placing further performativity pressures on schools (Fuller, 2019). It can be argued that the policies intended to raise academic standards sit in contrast to inclusion agendas. Consequently, educational professionals are attempting to navigate the inherent tensions between their dual commitment to raising academic standards and supporting the inclusion of all CYP. Thompson et al. (2021) suggests CYP with SEND fall victim to the tensions that arise from contradictory imperatives, leading to some of the most vulnerable CYP being removed from mainstream education.

CYP with SEMH difficulties accessing SEND support are 3.8 times more likely to be permanently excluded than children without SEND (Timpson, 2019), highlighting the disproportionate rate of exclusion for this group of CYP. However, it is widely acknowledged that official exclusion statistics are unrepresentative of exclusionary practices that occur within the United Kingdom (UK), with Gazeley et al. (2015) describing official exclusion rates as 'tip of the iceberg' (p. 492). In the UK, unofficial exclusions take several forms, by which CYP are removed from school sites without official exclusionary measures being followed, including off-rolling and forced moves (Power & Taylor, 2020). A study in Cheshire West and Cheshire, found high rates of school moves, persistent absences and early exits for CYP who experience SEMH difficulties (Social Finance, 2020), suggesting exclusion rates of CYP with SEMH difficulties are likely to be higher than those reported in government data.

The most common reason for school exclusion is persistent disruptive behaviour (Department for Education, 2020). Given that SEMH difficulties are frequently associated with disruptive and challenging behaviour, it is not surprising that CYP with this label are vulnerable to exclusionary practices. Local Authorities are responsible for providing appropriate education for CYP excluded from school (Department for Education, 2013), which has led to a high proportion of CYP with SEMH difficulties being educated within alternative provisions (Department for Education, 2022a).

1.1.2 Alternative Provision

The Department for Education uses the term alternative provision to refer to:

> education arranged by local authorities for pupils who, because of exclusion, illness or other reasons, would not otherwise receive suitable education; education arranged by schools for pupils on a fixed period exclusion; and pupils being directed by schools to off-site provision to improve their behaviour (Department for Education, 2013, p. 3).

In 2017, over 48,000 CYP were being educated within alternative provisions, with the demand for places continuing to rise (House of Commons Education Committee, 2018). In addition to concerns regarding placement demands, questions have been raised about the quality of education provided by alternative provisions, as many CYP accessing these settings have poor academic and social outcomes (Michael & Frederickson, 2013). Alternative provisions have been criticised for providing a narrow range of subjects (Ofsted, 2016), and limited opportunities to take GCSEs or equivalent qualifications, thus reducing CYP's access to further education (Pillay et al., 2013).

In 2011, following an inspection of alternative provisions within the UK, Ofsted highlighted these settings provided insufficient challenge to CYP's learning and had low expectations of their academic performance (Ofsted, 2011). In 2016, despite there being significant improvements in the quality of alternative provisions since the 2011 inspection, Ofsted reported further improvements were still required (Ofsted, 2016). Consequently, many CYP accessing alternative provisions are being failed by the system (House of Commons Education Committee, 2018), and not receiving the quality of education they require (Michael & Frederickson, 2013).

1.1.3 Reintegrating into Mainstream Education

The term reintegration is widely used within the literature to refer to the placement of CYP within mainstream education, whereas, the term inclusion refers to CYP being an 'active participant' within mainstream learning experiences (Pillay et al., 2013, p. 321). Thomas (2015) suggests the term reinclusion should be introduced to reflect a commitment from the receiving school to make appropriate provisions to accommodate the needs of the young person. Despite recognising the value of adopting the term reinclusion within my practice to support educational practitioners in acknowledging their responsibility to provide appropriate adaptations, this research's intention is exploratory and therefore, I do not wish to assume appropriate adaptations have been made to meet the needs of the returning learners. The term reintegration will therefore be used, within this research, to refer to the process of increasing CYP's attendance within mainstream lessons, following a period of absence.

Many CYP are directed to alternative provisions for a short-term placement with the intention of reintegrating back into mainstream school. However, not all CYP who attend such settings return to mainstream school as intended; with many staying in alternative provision until the end of key stage four. Literature suggests young people leaving alternative provision aged 16 are less likely to go into education, employment or training compared to their mainstream peers (Bryant et al., 2018). Of those who do return to mainstream education, reintegration is often unsuccessful due to post-reintegration regression, resulting in a 'revolving-door effect' of CYP being re-referred to alternative provision (Pillay et al., 2013, p. 311).

In 2018, the Department for Education released a document outlining their vision for alternative provision, in which they state their ambition for 'every child to make a successful transition out of alternative provision' (Department for Education, 2018b, p. 4). However, reintegration is a complex process that can present a range of challenges for those involved. Literature suggests one of the main challenges is the lack of shared responsibility for ensuring a supportive and successful reintegration (Bryant et al., 2018). Alternative provisions are often viewed as a 'repair and return' approach, in which there is an expectation that the alternative provision will fix the young person before returning them to an unchanged mainstream setting (Pennacchia & Thomson, 2016, p. 68). This is a reductionist view that situates the problem arising within the young person, diminishing the responsibility of the receiving school, and its surrounding influential culture, to make adequate provisions to accommodate the needs of the young person. Furthermore, this perspective assumes that CYP can acquire the skills required to manage a mainstream school environment within a non-mainstream environment and apply these effectively upon their return. Levinson and Thompson (2016) argue, to successfully reintegrate CYP into mainstream education, greater emphasis should be placed on challenging the cultures of mainstream schools to accommodate the needs of the young person.

1.1.4 My Research Focus

The focus of this SLR is to synthesise current literature that explores the views and experiences of those who have participated in the reintegration of CYP who experience SEMH difficulties from alternative provisions to mainstream settings in the UK. This research aims to provide a greater understanding of what helps and hinders the reintegration process to inform policy and practice.

Previously, literature within the area has taken a narrow view of alternative provision exploring only educational provisions under the jurisdiction of the Local Authority. In my view, this does not encapsulate the breadth of non-mainstream provision used to educate CYP who experience SEMH difficulties. Many CYP who experience SEMH difficulties are

educated within special schools or resourced provisions. CYP within these provisions also experience segregation and exclusionary practices due to their additional needs, which subsequently limits their access to mainstream education. Like many alternative provisions, resourced provisions can experience challenges in reintegrating learners into mainstream settings (Pillay et al., 2013). Therefore, for this research, a broader definition of alternative provision is offered which refers to educational provisions that provide timetabled educational experiences for CYP who are not currently able to access mainstream education full-time due to SEMH difficulties.

1.2 Method

Taking a systematic approach to reviewing existing literature encourages engagement with literature outside of the researcher's prior knowledge (Mallett et al., 2012), consequently, minimising the influence of preconceptions on the review findings. The seven stages proposed by Petticrew and Roberts (2006) were followed as this process is coherent with my critical realist worldview. The stages were considered broad enough to allow multiple possibilities in terms of the type of literature and synthesis method selected, enabling a pragmatic approach to be taken.

Table 1: Petticrew and Roberts' (2006) Seven Stages of Conducting a Systematic Review

Stages	Description
1	Define the question that the review aims to answer
2	Determine the types of studies that need to be identified to answer the review question
3	Carry out a comprehensive search of the literature to locate relevant studies
4	Screen the results of the search using the inclusion criteria and establish which studies require further examination
5	Extract data from the included studies and appraise for quality and relevance
6	Synthesise the findings of the studies
7	Disseminate the findings of the review

1.2.1 Defining the Review Question and Inclusion Criteria

This SLR aims to address the following review question:

> *What are the views and experiences of parents, educational professionals and CYP who have experienced SEMH difficulties reintegrating from alternative provision to mainstream schools or colleges?*

An assumption was made that CYP, parents and educational professionals were likely to have different views and experiences of mainstream reintegration. To gain a holistic view of reintegration practices occurring in the UK, it was decided that the views of all those involved during reintegration would be included in the review. The full inclusion criteria are presented in Table Two.

Table 2: *Inclusion Criteria*

	Inclusion Criteria
Research Type	Research published in peer-reviewed journals
	Research published in English
	Empirical research published during or after 2010
	Research conducted in the UK
Population	Young people, parents and educational professionals who have been involved in or experienced reintegration from an alternative provision to a mainstream school or college.
Research Focus	Research with a focus on the reintegration of children and young people with social, emotional and mental health difficulties from an alternative provision to a mainstream school or college.
	Research that explores the views and experiences of participants.

1.2.2 Searching and Screening Existing Literature

A systematic search of the literature was carried out between October 2020 and January 2021, using the following electronic databases; British Index of Education, ERIC, Psycinfo, Web of Science and Scopus. Scoping searches of the literature were conducted to identify key terminology. The search strategy was developed using a combination of keywords and controlled vocabulary to conduct a comprehensive search of the literature (see Appendix A). The papers returned from each database were screened by title and abstract using the inclusion criteria. The databases were systematically searched one at a time until no new

relevant papers were found. Additionally, hand searches of three journals which returned papers most relevant to my research question were carried out. These journals were Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties, Educational Psychology in Practice and Educational and Child Psychology. Of the 25 papers which were read in full, five were considered to meet the inclusion criteria and were therefore selected for analysis. The number of papers returned during the searching and screening process can be seen in Table Three.

Table 3: Number of Results During the Searching and Screening Process

Electronic Database	Total Number of Search Results	Total Number of Search Results After Filtering by Year and Peer-Reviewed	Number of Papers Read in Full	Number of Papers Selected for Analysis
British Index of Education	86	82	11	3
ERIC	1048	420	5	1
Psycinfo	339	141	3	1
Web of Science	94	81	1	0
Scopus	150	82	0	0
Hand searching	-	-	5	0

1.2.3 Data Extraction

Descriptive information was extracted from the selected studies and an over view of key characteristics is presented in Table Four. Data extraction enables comparisons to be made between studies and helps inform the selection of an appropriate synthesis method (Heyvaert et al., 2017). Furthermore, this process increased my familiarity with the studies which informed quality appraisal and aided identification of gaps within the literature.

Table 4: *Key Characteristics of the Selected Studies*

Study	Lawrence (2011)	Thomas (2015)	Pillay, Dunbar-Krige & Mostert (2013)	Hamilton & Morgan (2018)	Atkinson & Rowley (2019)
Aims	To identify the main factors that influence reintegration success for secondary-aged pupils reintegrating from pupil referral units to mainstream schools. To explore current reintegration practices and consider how practices could be improved.	This study explores the views of educational practitioners on the factors that influence young people's reintegration from pupil referral units to mainstream schools in a rural Welsh authority.	This study explores the experiences of young people with behavioural, social and emotional difficulties reintegrating into mainstream schools. The research aims to inform a resilience-based reintegration programme intended to improve reintegration practice.	This study aimed to explore contributing factors to the successful reintegration of young people with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties from further education alternative provisions to mainstream colleges.	This study aimed to explore factors that young people who have been excluded and attended alternative provision consider having contributed to their successful reintegration into mainstream school.
Participants	11 members of staff from a pupil referral unit, 6 mainstream school staff and 1 member of the behaviour support service	Staff from primary schools, secondary schools and pupil referral units.	13 CYP aged 11-14, parents, mainstream school staff and the lead teacher of a pupil referral unit.	8 young people aged 16-18	9 CYP aged 10-16
Setting	A teacher centre in the UK	Wales	Various mainstream schools which the young people attended in London, England.	2 further education colleges, 1 in Greater Manchester and 1 in London.	UK
Study Design	Qualitative	Mixed Method	Qualitative	Qualitative	Q-methodology

Data Collection	2 semi-structured focus groups	Participants completed postal questionnaires and semi-structured interviews.	All young people completed a sentence task and life essay. 4 young people and 3 educational professionals took part in unstructured interviews. Parents and mainstream teachers completed qualitative questionnaires. Children's records, panel referrals and meeting minutes were also analysed.	Data was collected through semi-structured interviews. The interview format was influenced by appreciative enquiry.	Data was collected through a Q-sort activity and qualitative questionnaires.
Analysis Method	Thematic Analysis	The analysis method of the qualitative data is unclear. Analysis of pupil tracking data was also carried out. Averages and ranges for quantitative data were provided. No inferential statistics were provided.	Giorgi's steps to data analysis were followed.	Thematic Analysis.	Q-Factor Analysis

Cross-study Comparison	All five studies had a similar focus, exploring views and experiences of reintegration. Hamilton and Morgan (2018) and Atkinson and Rowley (2019) took a solution-focused approach, to look exclusively at factors that facilitated successful reintegration, whilst the other three studies explored both facilitators and barriers to reintegration. All five papers used the term successful reintegration but only Atkinson and Rowley (2019) defined what was meant by this term. Atkinson and Rowley (2019) defined successful reintegration as those who had maintained a mainstream school placement for 12 weeks or more. This could be considered an oversimplified way of defining successful reintegration, as it does not take into consideration the views of those involved. There was some variation in the type of setting the young people were transitioning to and from. Lawrence (2011), Thomas (2015) and Atkinson and Rowley (2019) explored reintegration experiences from pupil referral units to mainstream schools. Pillay et al. (2013) investigated reintegration experiences from both pupil referral units and resourced provisions to mainstream schools, whilst Hamilton and Morgan (2018) explored reintegration experiences from further education alternative provisions to mainstream colleges. Lawrence's (2011) and Thomas' (2015) samples consisted of education professionals. Atkinson and Rowley's (2019) and Hamilton and Morgan's (2018) samples consisted of young people. Pillay et al. (2013) had the greatest breadth of participants, as they explored the views of young people, parents and education professionals. Three of the selected studies were qualitative, whilst the remaining two used a mixed-method approach. A range of data collection methods was employed across the studies, with three studies using multiple methods.

1.2.4 Quality Appraisal

A quality appraisal was carried out to assess the quality of the selected studies and their relevance to the review question. Due to the dearth of literature in this topic area, quality appraisal was not conducted to exclude low-quality papers but rather to assist in meaningful conclusions being drawn from the data.

A modified version of the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) was used to appraise the studies. Despite the CASP being a qualitative assessment tool, I considered it to be appropriate for use with both qualitative and mixed-method studies. Unlike other quality appraisal tools, the CASP does not critique research based on participant voice or statistical rigour and therefore, is less likely to show bias toward either methodological design. I chose to use a modified version of the CASP tool by Long et al. (2020), as this provided greater nuance in the tool's response options and considered theoretical and philosophical coherence when appraising the quality of the studies. Before applying the CASP, I made further adaptations to ensure the tool could be applied to both qualitative and mixed method studies and considered the extent to which the papers were relevant to my research question. I have indicated where these adaptations have been made in Table Five using bold font.

Table 5: Quality Appraisal Judgements using an Adapted Version of the CASP

Criteria	Lawrence (2011)	Pillay et al (2013)	Thomas (2015)	Hamilton and Morgan (2018)	Atkinson and Rowley (2019)
1. Was there a clear statement of the aims of the research?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
2. Was the selected methodology appropriate?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
3. Was the research design appropriate to address the aims of the research?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
4. Are the study's theoretical underpinnings clear, consistent and conceptually coherent?	Can't Tell	Yes	Can't Tell	Somewhat	Yes
5. Was the recruitment strategy appropriate to the aims of the research?	Can't Tell	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
6. Was the data collected in a way that	Yes	Yes	Can't Tell	Yes	Yes

addresses the research issue?					
7. Has the relationship between researcher and participants been adequately considered?	Yes	Somewhat	Can't Tell	Yes	Can't Tell
8. Have ethical issues been taken into consideration?	Can't Tell	Can't Tell	Can't Tell	Yes	Can't Tell
9. Was the data analysis sufficiently rigorous?	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
10. Is there a clear statement of the findings?	Somewhat	Yes	Somewhat	Yes	Yes
11. How valuable is the research?	Less Valuable	Valuable	Less Valuable	Valuable	Valuable
12. Does the study answer my research question?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Overall judgement of quality	Medium	High	Low-Medium	High	High

Table Five shows the judgements made for each question and the overall quality rating. Three of the five papers were judged to be of high quality. However, Lawrence (2011) and Thomas (2015) were ranked as lower quality studies as no information was provided about the researchers' theoretical position and the credibility of the findings. Furthermore, Thomas (2015) provided insufficient information about data collection and analysis methods. Therefore, caution was taken when interpreting the findings of these papers. During data synthesis any findings from Lawrence (2011) and Thomas (2015) that could be considered outlying or contrasting to the findings of the other three papers were not included during theme development. Subsequently, no themes were developed from findings that were exclusively present in these two papers.

1.2.5 Synthesis of Findings

Various synthesis approaches were considered. The mixed-method studies contained insufficient quantitative data to undertake a segregated mixed-method synthesis. Integrated mixed-method synthesis approaches were deemed incompatible with the aims of the review and the type of data. Furthermore, the quantitative data was presented alongside detailed qualitative descriptions. Therefore, I considered the mixed-methods studies could be appropriately analysed through a qualitative approach. Despite being satisfied that the studies provided detailed qualitative descriptions of the quantitative data, I acknowledge that

this data was intended by the authors to accompany, rather than replace the quantitative data. Therefore, I cannot dismiss that some information may have been lost by exclusively analysing the qualitative data.

Thematic synthesis (Thomas & Harden, 2008) was used to integrate and interpret the data. This approach can accommodate a wide range of methodologies, which were present across the five selected papers. Thematic synthesis also enables the reviewer to go beyond the primary data to construct new meaning whilst maintaining transparent links to the primary studies. This aligns with my worldview as thematic synthesis does not assume themes emerge from the data, but rather are constructed through the researcher's interpretation of the literature.

Table 6: Thomas and Harden's (2008) Three Stages to Thematic Synthesis

Stages	Description
Line-by-line Coding	The data is reviewed line by line and codes are assigned to capture the meaning of the data that is relevant to the review question. During this stage new codes are added and previous codes are revised until all relevant data is coded. This process enables the translation of concepts across the studies.
Constructing Descriptive Themes	Similar codes are grouped to develop themes. Each descriptive theme is labelled to capture the meaning of the collective group of codes. This is an iterative process in which codes are moved between groups until distinctive themes are generated.
Developing Analytical Themes	The construction of analytical themes requires the reviewer to go beyond the original studies, by inferring meaning from the descriptive themes to answer the review question. This stage is highly subjective as it is dependent on the insights and judgements of the reviewer to develop new understandings through the grouping of descriptive themes.

In total 124 codes were generated. The codes were grouped into 12 descriptive themes, which were captured through five analytical themes. An illustrative sample of how the descriptive and analytical themes were generated is presented in Appendix B. The analytical and descriptive themes are presented in Figure One and discussed in turn in the following section.

Figure 1: *Descriptive and Analytical Themes*

School Connectedness	Staff-Student Relationships
	Peer Relationships
	Inclusive Ethos
Working in Partnership	Alternative Provision- Mainstream School Relationships
	Home- School Relationships
Reintegration Readiness	Parent Support
	Skills and Qualities of the Young Person
	The Young Person's Self-Belief and Motivation to Reintegrate to Mainstream
Meeting Individual Needs Flexibly Within Context	Emotional Support
	Academic Support
Systemic Considerations	Suitability of the Mainstream for the Young Person
	Timely and Gradual Reintegration

To ensure a rigorous synthesis approach, as recommended by Thomas and Harden (2008), the analysis was taken one step further. The five analytical themes were grouped into two overarching themes: Relationship Factors and Process Factors. Relationship factors refer to both building relationships with the young person and the importance of relationships between the adults facilitating the reintegration, whilst, process factors refer to strategies, approaches and issues that need to be taken into consideration when planning and facilitating a reintegration. Figure Two is a visual representation of how the analytical themes were grouped into overarching themes. Reintegration Readiness is central to the figure, illustrating the important role both relationship and process factors play in developing an individual's readiness for mainstream reintegration.

Figure 2: *The Development of Overarching Themes*
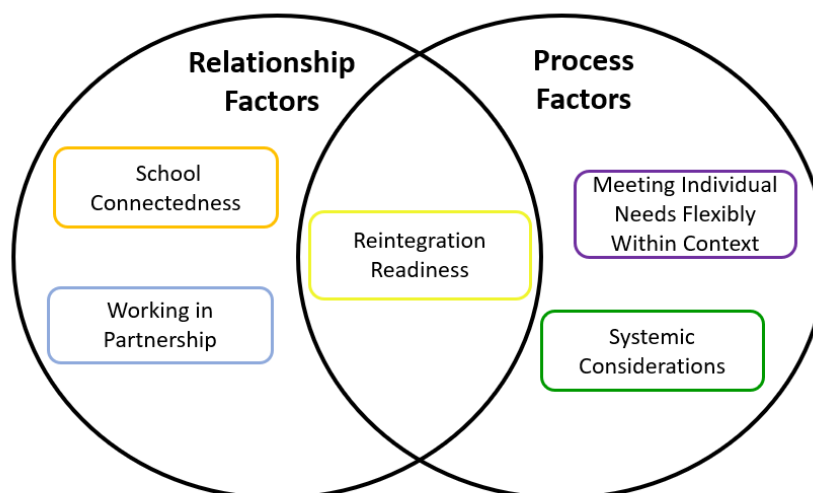
Despite thematic synthesis having three clear stages, developing codes and themes remains an ambiguous task due to the flexible and interpretative nature of the process. Qualitative analysis methods have been accused of lacking rigour and having an 'airy fairy' approach to analysis where 'anything goes' (Labuschagne, 2003, p. 100; Sarma, 2015, p. 176). When analysing the data, I grappled with the process of theme development as I questioned whether my themes were of good quality and data driven. Braun and Clarke (2013) suggest good quality themes are coherent, distinctive, work together and are relevant to the research question, which I used as principles to guide my theme development. Furthermore, to minimise the influence of personal bias, a reflective diary containing personal and professional experiences and views of school transitions was kept. When analysing the data, the diary was used to question whether the themes being developed were driven by the data or personal preconceptions.

1.3 Findings and Discussion

Within this section, each of the themes will be explored alongside the wider literature. A summary of the findings will then be provided before implications for educational psychology practice and limitations of the review are discussed.

1.3.1 School Connectedness

This analytical theme reflects the importance of relationships in supporting CYP to feel included within mainstream schools and colleges. An important aspect of CYP's experiences of inclusion was the extent to which they felt accepted and valued by staff and pupils within the mainstream setting. One young person reported "I just want to feel normal and like I belong" (Atkinson & Rowley, 2019, p. 345). Three descriptive themes related to School

Connectedness, these were: Peer Relationships, Student-Staff Relationships and Inclusive Ethos.

CYP reported varying experiences regarding peer relationships. Most CYP found making friends was important to the success of their reintegration. However, some CYP found making friends difficult, particularly when attending a new mainstream setting where they had no pre-existing peer relationships. Difficulty in making friends during reintegration led to feelings of loneliness and isolation for some CYP. Pillay et al. (2013) also found peer relationships to impact CYP's learning experiences. Participants reported positive peer relationships increased CYP's motivation to achieve in lessons, whilst peer conflict and negative peer influences caused disengagement from learning.

A consistent finding across all studies was the importance of staff-student relationships. CYP discussed building positive relationships with staff who tried to get to know them and acknowledged their potential to succeed in mainstream education. One young person stated, "There's nothing better than someone seeing something good in you and like praising you and that and like you feel good…" (Hamilton & Morgan, 2018, p. 87). It was also important for CYP to feel listened to and cared for by staff. CYP and mainstream staff shared the view that developing positive staff-student relationships is more challenging when the young person is returning to a setting they have previously attended. "Once a child has been removed from school there will be a stigma attached. It can be very difficult for some staff to accept a child coming back without some concern in the back of their mind" (Thomas, 2015, p. 203). This suggests pre-existing relationships can be a barrier to CYP having a fresh start. However, mainstream staff can also have negative expectations of CYP reintegrating into new schools due to the sharing of information between settings. The final descriptive theme is inclusive ethos, suggesting a whole school commitment to an inclusive ideology facilitates successful reintegration. Several studies discussed the importance of the mainstream school having an inclusive ethos and one study suggested the disparity between alternative provisions' and mainstream schools' ethos can create a barrier to reintegration.

The findings in this theme reflect the wider literature which suggests school connectedness requires a school environment where adult and pupil relationships are respectful and positive (Blum, 2005). It can be fostered in many ways including through collaborative learning opportunities, fair behaviour management systems and pupil participation in decision-making (Blum, 2005). The importance of school connectedness could be explained through the fundamental human need to belong and form attachments with others (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). This is likely to be even more important to young people who have attended an alternative provision. Wider literature suggests secondary school students

view relationships with peers and staff to be salient to their sense of belonging (Craggs & Kelly, 2018; Shaw, 2019).

1.3.2 Working in Partnership

Working in Partnership recognises the importance of relationships between parents, alternative provision staff and mainstream school staff. There are two descriptive themes within Working in Partnership: Alternative Provision-Mainstream School Relationships and Home-School Relationships. The key concepts running through this theme are collaboration and shared responsibility. These were facilitated through regular, clear and honest communication between all three parties.

Four out of five studies discussed the importance of the alternative provision providing ongoing support to the mainstream setting after the young person has reintegrated. However, Lawrence (2011) found that staff perceived the relationship between alternative provision staff and mainstream staff to be strained by an attitude of "them and us", which can lead to a culture of blame (p. 222). Home-School Relationships highlight the importance of parental engagement during the reintegration process. Participants discussed the need for parents to attend reintegration meetings and contribute to decision-making. However, intimidating reintegration meetings were found to lead to parental disengagement. This illuminates the importance of power differentials being appropriately managed by educational professionals. This could be achieved by reviewing the way educational professionals work with parents, to position parents as partners rather than problems (Embeita, 2019). In doing so school staff may recognise the wealth of knowledge parents have about their children and the valuable contribution they can make to supporting their reintegration.

1.3.3 Reintegration Readiness

This theme captures the narrative within the studies that the success of CYP's reintegration is influenced by their readiness to reintegrate. The studies indicate that in addition to the setting putting support in place to accommodate the young person, there needs to be a commitment from the young person and parents if the reintegration is to be successful. Reintegration Readiness includes the descriptive themes: The Young Person's Self-Belief and Motivation to Reintegrate to Mainstream, Skills and Qualities of the Young Person and Parent Support.

Participants discussed CYP's aspirations and their belief in their ability to be successful in mainstream education to be important during reintegration. Except for Pillay et al. (2013), all papers reported CYP's desire or lack of desire to reintegrate into a mainstream setting to influence reintegration success. One young person suggested, "You have to want to move

and want to succeed" (Atkinson & Rowley, 2019, p. 345). Additionally, the literature suggests, it is important parents want their children to reintegrate and support them to do so. Hamilton and Morgan (2018) made few references to the role of parents during reintegration. This study is the only one within the review to explore reintegration into mainstream college. This may suggest parental support plays a smaller role for older students.

The final theme within reintegration readiness is the Skills and Qualities of the Young Person. The studies suggest there are certain skills and qualities young people need to cope with the demands of mainstream education; these include resilience, positive self-esteem and reflective skills. However, limited consideration was given to how these skills should be developed and who might support this. Thomas (2015) acknowledges the role of parents in supporting the development of resilience and self-esteem, whilst Pillay et al. (2013) discussed school staff's responsibility in developing CYP's resilience.

Doyle (2001) developed a Reintegration Readiness Scale to support children who experience SEMH difficulties reintegrate from nurture groups into mainstream lessons. This scale consists of statements children are rated against using a Likert scale to develop a score to indicate their readiness to begin reintegration. This tool could aid intervention planning by supporting the identification of skills the young person needs to develop before reintegration. However, caution should be taken when using the Reintegration Readiness Scale to ensure it is not used to place disproportionate responsibility onto the young person to change, diminishing mainstream provisions of their responsibility to make reasonable adjustments. A further limitation of the scale is, it is designed to be completed by school staff and does not gather the views of CYP or parents. Consequently, this tool does not encourage collaborative decision-making and places school staff in a position of power to dictate when reintegration takes place.

1.3.4 Meeting Individual Needs Flexibly Within Context

Within the studies, contrasting views were expressed regarding the type and level of emotional and academic support CYP require. This indicates that a universal approach is not appropriate, and support should be tailored to each individual (Atkinson & Rowley, 2019; Lawrence, 2011). This theme contains two descriptive themes: Emotional Support and Academic Support. A consistent finding across all five studies was the importance of CYP having a keyworker within the mainstream setting for pastoral support. However, there were some opposing views regarding the member of staff's availability. CYP reported having access to a keyworker throughout the day was helpful; however, one educational professional suggested CYP can become over-reliant on their keyworker or use this channel

of support to avoid attending lessons. Additionally, CYP found opportunities for time out, a designated quiet space and a flexible approach to behaviour management helpful.

Participants recognised the young people's education had been disrupted by numerous placement transitions. Some CYP acknowledged that they found aspects of learning difficult and recognised the value of additional in-class support. Whereas others refused additional support as they placed greater emphasis on fitting in and considered support to make them stand out. Some participants preferred receiving academic support from peers during lessons, this is perhaps less stigmatising than adult support. This highlights the need for support to be negotiated on a case-by-case basis, taking into consideration the individual's needs within the context of the school or college environment.

1.3.5 Systemic Considerations

Two descriptive themes were captured under Systemic Considerations, the first being Timely and Gradual Reintegration. Three studies discussed the importance of reintegration being gradual; it was suggested to help young people settle in and feel comfortable within the mainstream setting (Atkinson & Rowley, 2019; Lawrence, 2011; Pillay et al., 2013).

> "One week I would be doing one day at school and the next week I would be doing two days and so on until I didn't really notice what was happening until I was in school for the whole of the days" (Pillay et al., 2013, p. 321).

The timing of reintegration was also an important factor. Thomas (2015) suggests the longer the young person is out of mainstream, the harder it becomes for them to return. One possible reason for this is the difference between environments. Pillay et al. (2013) discusses the difference in class sizes and ethos between mainstream settings and alternative provisions, suggesting the latter offer a more relaxed and nurturing environment and place less emphasis on attainment.

The second descriptive theme is Suitability of the Mainstream for the Young Person. This theme refers to mainstream settings' ability to provide appropriate provisions to meet CYP's needs. Some mainstream and alternative provision staff viewed mainstream settings as unable to provide the level and type of support some young people require (Lawrence, 2011; Thomas, 2015). Participants considered mainstream settings to not have the resources, nor the skills to support CYP with complex needs. Furthermore, mainstream staff discussed being given little choice in whether they enrol a young person into their setting, as decisions are often made by Local Authority panels (Lawrence, 2011). This can lead to CYP reintegrating into settings which cannot meet their needs, highlighting issues within the wider education systems and structures.

Similar reservations about the suitability of mainstream settings are held by Hart (2013) who suggests alternative provisions can provide protective factors that cannot be achieved within mainstream schools. This raises the question of how decisions are made about which CYP should be working towards mainstream reintegration. The Department for Education advises CYP should reintegrate into mainstream schools 'where this is in their best interests' (Department for Education, 2018b, p. 14), though, this is arguably ambiguous and open to interpretation.

1.3.6 Summary

The purpose of this review was to explore the views and experiences of those who have participated in the reintegration of CYP who experience SEMH difficulties from alternative provisions to mainstream settings in the UK. The findings indicate CYP, parents and educational professionals experience multiple relationship and process factors that act as facilitators and barriers during CYP's reintegration. There were varying views within the literature about the extent to which CYP should be supported to develop skills required for reintegration to enable them to cope with the demands of mainstream education and the extent to which mainstream settings should make adjustments to accommodate the needs of the reintegrating learners. However, there was a consensus across the papers that both areas are required to support successful reintegration. The findings also indicated mainstream settings are not suitable for all CYP and therefore reintegration is not always appropriate.

1.3.7 Limitations of the Review

The review findings are inevitably influenced by personal biases. I acknowledge that a researcher's values, prior knowledge and experiences influence their approach to research (Berger, 2015). Despite taking steps to minimise the impact of personal bias, I consider upholding a position of neutrality can never be fully achieved. Furthermore, thematic synthesis is an interpretive approach that relies on the judgements and insights of the reviewer (Thomas & Harden, 2008). Consequently, my values and assumptions have influenced the review findings, reducing the replicability of this research.

A further limitation is the review's susceptibility to publication bias by only searching published, peer-reviewed studies. The decision to not include grey literature was made as grey literature can be more challenging to locate and time-consuming to analyse than published literature and the quality cannot be guaranteed (Mahood et al., 2014). Consequently, this review may have excluded research that could have provided different views and experiences of reintegration and offered new, insightful understandings of the topic area.

1.3.8 Implications for Educational Psychology Practice

The findings of this review have several implications for Educational Psychologists' (EPs) practice. Firstly, the findings suggest mainstream staff can have negative perceptions of CYP before reintegration that can prevent them from being given a fresh start. EPs can support staff to reflect on the beliefs they hold about a young person and the implications these have for their practice. EPs are well placed to support staff to reframe their perceptions of the difficulties a young person faces by taking an interactionist approach to re-conceptualise within-child narratives and illuminate the eco-systemic factors at play (Bagley & Hallam, 2017). This may support staff's acceptance and respect for CYP during their reintegration to mainstream, thus supporting the development of school connectedness. Furthermore, literature suggests there is a relationship between teacher efficacy and how CYP's difficulties are understood (Gibbs & Elliott, 2015). Therefore, EPs supporting teachers to reframe the way they perceive CYP's difficulties may in turn increase teachers' efficacy in supporting the inclusion of CYP during reintegration.

Secondly, EPs can work on a systemic level to contribute to Local Authority policy and practice (Scottish Executive Education Department, 2002). EPs can help ensure Local Authority reintegration procedures are evidence-based and informed by psychology. For CYP who are not able to reintegrate into their previous school, fair access panels are often used to identify a suitable school placement (Department for Education, 2021). Lawrence (2011) suggests reintegration can fail when decisions about a young person's placement are made by panels of professionals who do not have a holistic understanding of the young person. EPs are well placed to assist fair access panels in identifying appropriate school placements for reintegrating pupils by supporting the panel to develop a greater understanding of young people's needs and circumstances.

Chapter 2: Methodological and Ethical Critique

2.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the methodological and ethical considerations that informed the development of the empirical research project. The chapter begins by considering how my interest in mainstream reintegration developed, reflecting on previous knowledge and experiences of the area. I then discuss how the findings of the SLR shaped the focus of the empirical research. My philosophical stance, the psychological theory and principles underpinning my approach to the research will then be explored. Next, a rationale for the methodological decisions made is provided. Finally, ethical considerations are discussed.

2.2 Developing a Research Focus

2.2.1 Previous Experiences

My interest in supporting the inclusion of CYP who experience SEMH difficulties was influenced by various experiences I have had throughout my career. In a previous role, I worked within a multi-disciplinary team on a Local Authority project intended to prevent the exclusion of CYP who experienced SEMH difficulties. This role provided me with insight into the lives and school experiences of CYP with SEMH difficulties. During this role, I was struck by some of the negative narratives school staff had developed about pupils and their resistance to making accommodations to support their inclusion. I had a particularly memorable discussion with one member of staff who suggested if the young person had a learning difficulty, he could have made allowances for his behaviour but because he was experiencing SEMH difficulties there was little support he could offer. This perspective is reflected in literature which suggests SEMH difficulties are viewed differently to other forms of SEND (Broomhead, 2013a). This discussion left me curious about how SEMH difficulties are understood and what could be done to challenge the stigma and support the inclusion of CYP associated with this label.

Since becoming a Trainee EP, a large proportion of my placement experiences have been focused on supporting the inclusion of CYP who are described by school staff as having SEMH difficulties. One placement experience has been particularly influential in the selection of my thesis topic. I worked alongside an EP to support a pupil referral unit to develop their reintegration process for young people leaving their setting and reintegrating into mainstream school. During my involvement in this piece of work, two considerations sat uncomfortably with me. Firstly, a primary focus of the project was developing a system to assess young people's readiness to reintegrate, placing great expectation on the young

people to change. Secondly, the young people and their families had little involvement in decision-making during the reintegration. The importance of person-centred approaches and fostering the agency of young people and their families are central to my values and the focus of many policy changes (Department for Education & Department for Health, 2015). Subsequently, matters of parental involvement have influenced the construction of some of the interview questions.

We are all 'subjective human beings' who cannot leave our histories, values and assumptions at the door (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 36). Reflexivity is a researcher's deliberate effort to 'maintain their awareness of themselves as part of the world they study' (Berger, 2015, p. 221) and is an essential aspect of ensuring quality within qualitative research (Dodgson, 2019). To be a reflexive researcher it is important to acknowledge how previous experiences have informed assumptions about reintegration and take responsibility for the influence previous knowledge and experiences have on all aspects of research from selecting a topic of enquiry to interpreting the data (Berger, 2015). To maintain awareness of how my research has been influenced by my preconceptions of the topic area, I kept a research diary of my thoughts and assumptions before and during the research project. This helped me to critically reflect on the extent to which the research is shaped by my prior knowledge and experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

2.2.2 Systematic Literature Review to Empirical Research

The SLR outlined in Chapter One revealed a dearth of research on reintegration from alternative provisions to mainstream settings. Within the literature available, parents' views and experiences were particularly under-represented. Whilst searching through the literature only one paper was identified that gathered the views and experiences of parents (Pillay et al., 2013). Pillay et al. (2013) explored the views of parents, young people and educational staff through various data collection methods. However, parents' views were underrepresented within the study due to the low return rate of parental questionnaires. Given the important role parents play in CYP's educational outcomes (Department for Education, 2011), I was left questioning why their views were rarely sought. This inspired me to undertake an empirical piece of research to address this gap within the literature, by listening to the unheard voices of parents who have experienced a young person who experienced SEMH difficulties reintegrate from alternative provision to mainstream school.

2.3 Researcher's Position

2.3.1 Philosophical Stance

Researchers need to have awareness of their philosophical stance to ensure coherence within their research. Ontology raises the question 'What is there to know?' (Willig, 2013, p. 12), as it is concerned with a person's assumptions about the nature of reality (Cohen et al., 2018). On one end of the ontology continuum lies realism, which is the belief that an objective reality exists independent of human knowledge of it, and this can be directly accessed through research (Braun & Clarke, 2013). On the other end lies relativism, the assumption that reality is constructed and cannot be separated from human interpretation and knowledge of it (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Whilst I value elements of both realism and relativism, I do not claim to position myself towards either end of this continuum. I subscribe to a view that a reality exists independent of our knowledge of it, whilst also considering there to be socially constructed dimensions of reality, that are socially and contextually dependent (Danermark, 2019).

Epistemology asks the question 'How, and what can we know?' (Willig, 2013, p. 4). It refers to the nature of knowledge and the possible ways of acquiring knowledge (Blaikie, 2009). I view knowledge as subjective and gained through interpretation of the social world. Subsequently, I do not believe there to be a single truth about reality, but rather multiple truths developed through interpretation. I believe my ontological and epistemological beliefs are indicative of critical realism and hence the research has been approached from this paradigm.

Critical realism acknowledges the existence of an independent reality, but does not assume knowledge of this reality is directly accessible (Scott, 2005). It is assumed that knowledge of the real world can only ever be partial, as what we come to understand is not a direct reflection of what is happening in the world but rather an interpretation of such (Willig, 2013). Experiences are subjective as they can only be understood through the meaning people give to them. In exploring participants' lived experiences, I aim to interpret the stories parents have constructed about reintegration and openly acknowledge what I bring as a researcher.

2.3.2 Theoretical Stance

Reintegration is shaped by the social world and therefore in exploring this process, I must consider the reciprocal relationship between the people involved and their environment. Ecological Systems Theory proposes individuals develop within a series of interrelating systems, which they influence and are influenced by (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). This theory suggests that a person's development is influenced by four key concepts: their reciprocal

interactions with their environment, their personal characteristics, context and the time in which they live (Rosa & Tudge, 2013). From an eco-systemic perspective, I believe reintegration is not merely a physical transition from one setting to another, but rather a complex social process which should not be viewed in isolation from the sociocultural and political context in which it is entangled.

The empirical study was also informed by narrative psychology. Narrative psychology assumes that people can give meaning to their experiences through storytelling (Willig, 2013). This approach proposes we live in a storied world and interpret the actions of ourselves and others through the stories we tell (Murray, 2003). Embeita (2019) suggests experiences of exclusion and reintegration are interconnected phenomena. This suggests, to understand experiences of reintegration, consideration must be given to experiences of exclusion. Therefore, I perceive experiences of reintegration to be part of a bigger story parents tell about their experience of their child's education. The interview guide was constructed to enable the participants to tell their stories from their children leaving mainstream school to their return to mainstream school; to acknowledge and allow the presence of the wider stories and in keeping with an eco-systemic view.

2.4 Methodological Considerations

2.4.1 Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

The purpose of the research was to gather detailed views and experiences of reintegration and so a qualitative approach was considered most appropriate. Various approaches to qualitative research were considered before the selection of Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), including Narrative Analysis (Riessman, 1993), Grounded Theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) and Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). These methods are concerned with exploring peoples' subjective experiences and developing new understandings through constructing themes; however, IPA was considered the most compatible with my research question, aims and philosophical stance. IPA aims to explore how people make sense of their lived experiences (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). My research aims to give voice to an underrepresented population within reintegration literature, by enabling parents to share their views and experiences as freely as possible. IPA is an appropriate method to support this as it is a participant-orientated approach, which enables participants to express themselves and share their experiences in their own terms (Alase, 2017). This approach aligns with my philosophical stance as it does not aim to produce an objective account of a person's experience, but rather explore how people come to understand and attach meaning to their experiences. IPA requires the researcher to take a double hermeneutic approach in which the researcher makes sense of the participant

making sense of their experience (Smith et al., 2009). This approach recognises that another person's experience cannot be directly accessed as experiences are not independent of the meaning people place upon them (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Willig, 2013).

2.4.2 Developing Rapport Online

IPA requires the researcher to access rich, in-depth accounts of participants' experiences, and semi-structured interviews are an appropriate method to generate this type of data (Smith et al., 2009). Due to the coronavirus pandemic, the decision was made to undertake the interviews virtually using a video conferencing platform. In addition to ensuring the welfare of participants, it was thought to provide a more convenient and comfortable method for participants to share their experiences. Foley (2021) suggests despite there being little evidence indicating that there are greater challenges in building rapport during online interviews than in-person interviews, this is an area that requires close attention. Rapport requires the researcher to implicitly communicate to participants that they perceive them as human beings with experiences and interests beyond those they intend to tap for the purpose of their research (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). Genuine rapport in qualitative research enables natural dialogue to develop and more detailed responses to be given (Duncombe & Jessop, 2012). Subsequently, the quality of the research-participant relationship impacts the quality of the data created.

Weller (2017) found online interviews to facilitate and hinder rapport building. The study found online interviews provided physical separation that alleviated 'pressure of presence' creating a more comfortable environment for participants (p. 618). However, the findings also suggest there is greater difficulty in interpreting non-verbal cues and poor audio, or picture quality can disrupt the emotional connection. Seitz (2016) suggests challenges of fostering connection online can be lessened by discussing how the interview will be conducted ahead of time. Subsequently, before each interview, the participant and I negotiated how we would work together to ensure we could effectively interact during the interview. Furthermore, I spoke to all three participants over the phone at least twice before their interview, which also provided an opportunity to establish rapport.

2.5 Ethical Considerations

Ethical protocols and standards outlined by the British Psychological Society, Health and Care Professions Council and Newcastle University were adhered to throughout this piece of research (Health and Care Professions Council, 2016; The British Psychological Society, 2021a), including ethical guidance regarding online research (The British Psychological Society, 2021b).

2.5.1 Consent

Consent is only valid if given from an informed perspective (The British Psychological Society, 2021a). To ensure participants could make an informed decision on whether to participate they were provided with written and verbal information about the research, including a copy of the pre-planned interview questions. However, Klykken (2021) argues that qualitative research is a collaborative endeavour in which the researcher and participants actively co-produce their understanding of the research as the study unfolds. Therefore, informed consent cannot be fully acquired before participation and requires ongoing discussion and negotiation between researchers and participants (Wiles, 2012). This is particularly relevant in research informed by IPA as this methodology requires data collection to be partially participant-led, requiring the researcher to follow up on matters raised by the participant (Smith et al., 2009). Consequently, the researcher is required to ask impromptu questions that the participants have not consented to. To address this issue, a debrief took place with the participants after each interview during which consent for the information shared to be included within the analysis was sought. Participants were also reminded their data could be removed prior to analysis.

In addition to being informed, valid consent also requires participation to be voluntary (Miller & Bell, 2012). It was therefore essential to my recruitment strategy that parents were able to make their own choice to participate and were not coerced or discouraged from taking part. During participant recruitment, I maintained awareness of my agenda to complete the research within a restricted time frame and the belief that an increased sample size would enhance the richness of my analysis. I attempted to prevent such considerations from influencing how I spoke to parents during the recruitment process. However, it can be argued that participation can never be entirely voluntary when power dynamics are present (Miller & Bell, 2012). It was recognised that it is not always easy to say no to participating in a study, therefore it is important to be receptive to the role of non-verbal communication in withdrawing consent (Sixtensson, 2021). Six parents provided verbal consent to participate in the study, but over time four did not return consent forms, did not respond to contact or left prolonged periods between responding to contact. These were all considered as methods of participants withdrawing consent and were therefore no longer pursued.

2.5.2 Power Dynamics

Power differentials are ingrained in the researcher-participant relationship (Dodgson, 2019), and thus require actions to be taken to mitigate the effects of power. When building rapport with participants before and during the interviews I aimed to position the participants as having 'experiential expertise' and myself as a 'naïve but curious listener' (Smith et al., 2009, p. 64). In doing so, I aimed to empower parents to recognise themselves as experts in their

own lives and to talk about their experiences in their own terms. During the research, I was mindful of the dual role I held as both a researcher and a Trainee EP. Literature suggests some parents have had negative experiences of educational professionals, where they have felt criticised for their parenting (Broomhead, 2013b). It was important the interview was a supportive experience for parents where they did not feel they needed to hold back due to fear of judgement. One principle that influences my approach to practice and research is 'everyone is doing the best they can at the time', a principle that underpins various therapeutic approaches embedded within educational psychology practice including Solution Focused Brief Therapy (Goldie-McSorley, 2020) and Video Interactive Guidance (Kennedy & Landor, 2015, p. 28). In following this principle, I was able to convey a non-judgemental and respectful stance as I listened to the participants talk about their experiences.

2.5.3 Minimising the Risk of Harm

It was acknowledged that reintegration experiences could be an emotive topic for some participants. Initially I considered taking a strengths-based approach, to exclusively explore parents who have had a successful reintegration experience to minimise the risk of harm. However, it can be argued that telling painful stories can be a liberating and empowering experience (Meretoja, 2017). Furthermore, I believed the views and experiences of those who have had an unsuccessful reintegration could provide valuable information to inform future reintegration practice. Upon initially speaking to the six parents who agreed to participate it was evident that several were continuing to face challenges regarding their child's education following an unsuccessful reintegration experience and therefore sensitivity was paramount when engaging with these participants. Data collection methods can have unintentional consequences that can be beneficial or harmful to participants (Hammersley, 2018). Subsequently, I was mindful the interview process may trigger emotional responses in participants as they engage in a process of reflection and making sense of their experience. Throughout the interview process, I remained vigilant for signs of discomfort suggesting the participants required a break or wished to end the interview early. Furthermore, during the debrief I checked in with participants to ask how they had experienced the interview process.

2.6 Conclusion

This chapter has provided a critical consideration of methodological and ethical issues that shaped the empirical research project. Previous experiences, assumptions and values that informed my approach to research were outlined to aid reflexivity and transparency. The research was informed by a critical realist position as I believe reintegration experiences can only be partially accessed through participants' interpretations of them. Reintegration has

been conceptualised as a complex social process that is entangled with the sociocultural and political context in which it occurs. A rationale for the use of IPA was provided and consideration was given to developing rapport with participants during online interviews. Ethical implications were ongoing considerations that were reflected upon throughout the research process. A detailed account of the empirical research project will be provided in Chapter Three.

Chapter 3: Empirical Study

An Exploration of Parents' Stories of Young People who have Experienced Social, Emotional and Mental Health Difficulties Reintegrating from Alternative Provision to Mainstream Secondary School [2]

Abstract

Parents play an integral role during young people's reintegration from alternative provision to mainstream school, yet their stories often remain untold. This research intends to privilege the voices of parents through an in-depth exploration of their views and experiences of young people who have experienced social, emotional and mental health difficulties reintegrating from alternative provision to mainstream school. A qualitative methodology was used. Three semi-structured interviews were conducted and analysed using interpretative phenomenological analysis. Three subordinate themes central to the parents' stories were developed: Reintegration Readiness, Relationships and Decision-Making. The parents' stories reflect the view that young people's reintegration success is reliant on their ability to adapt to fit into the mainstream education system, highlighting the enormous expectations placed on young people during reintegration. It is suggested that greater focus should be placed on the mainstream education system to develop more supportive and inclusive environments, to enable more young people to have a successful reintegration into mainstream school and reduce the need for alternative provisions.

Keywords: *reintegration; parent views; parent experiences; social, emotional and mental health; alternative provision*

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[2] This chapter has been prepared for submission to the journal 'Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties' and is therefore presented in the style of papers typically published by this journal

3.1 Introduction

This empirical study aims to explore parents' views and experiences of young people who have experienced social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) difficulties reintegrating from alternative provision to mainstream secondary school. This section provides an overview of the current context of education for children and young people (CYP) with SEMH difficulties. This is followed by a discussion of background literature on parental involvement during mainstream reintegration and parents of young people with SEMH difficulties experiences of mainstream education more widely. Finally, a rationale for the empirical study is provided.

Mainstream schools continue to face challenges in including CYP who experience SEMH difficulties, due to difficulties in managing challenging behaviours that are frequently associated with this label (Hind et al., 2019). CYP with SEMH difficulties are disproportionately excluded from mainstream schools (Graham et al., 2019). The majority of CYP educated in state-funded alternative provisions have special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), primarily SEMH difficulties (Department for Education, 2022a). The demand for alternative provision placements remains high. Consequently, many alternative provisions are oversubscribed (House of Commons Education Committee, 2018). In the 2022 SEND review, the government proposed their intentions to fund more alternative provision placements (Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 2022). Arguably, such action further encourages the segregation of young people who experience SEMH difficulties and fails to address the mainstream practices that exclude some of the most vulnerable learners. Many young people who attend alternative provision never return to mainstream school (Mills & Thomson, 2018). Of the CYP who do, many are reported to have an unsuccessful reintegration and 'bounce back' into the alternative provision system (Mills & Thomson, 2018, p. 134; Pillay et al., 2013).

Parents play an important role during reintegration from alternative provision to mainstream school. Literature suggests successful reintegration requires regular and honest communication, cooperation, and shared responsibility between educational professionals and parents (Lawrence, 2011; Pillay et al., 2013). Reintegration is most successful when parents are in support of their child's reintegration (Lawrence, 2011). Thomas (2015) found school staff to rate parental support as the most important factor during reintegration. However, many parents are reluctant for their children to reintegrate into mainstream school (Thomas, 2015). Mills and Thomson (2018) found some parents wanted their child to remain in alternative provision as they believed their child benefited from smaller classes and the individualised support the alternative provision offered. Whereas other literature suggests

parents' resistance to reintegration is due to previous negative experiences of mainstream schooling (Thomas, 2015).

Broomhead (2013b) found parents of CYP who experience SEMH difficulties, experience greater levels of blame for their children's behaviour within school than parents of children with other SEND. These findings reflect the wider literature which suggests parents are frequently blamed for the SEMH difficulties their children experience, as school staff perceive the behaviour to be a product of poor parenting (Timpson, 2019). Discourses suggest that the need for change resides within the parent, which can cause parents to disengage from schools as they feel judged and criticised (McDonald & Thomas, 2003).

Parents report their children are often stigmatised and unwanted by mainstream schools due to their additional needs (Broomhead, 2013b). Some parents report feeling pressured into removing their child from a mainstream school (Broomhead, 2013b; Smith, 2009). During their children's exclusion, parents report feeling powerless and observers of decisions that have significant implications for their children's future education as their views are not heard or valued (McDonald & Thomas, 2003; Parker et al., 2016; Smith, 2009). A factor likely contributing to the power imbalance parents experience between themselves and school staff, in matters regarding CYP's behaviour, is the authority headteachers have to sanction exclusions and direct children to alternative provisions. The House of Commons Education Committee (2018) states 'the exclusions process is currently weighted in favour of schools and leaves parents and pupils fighting a system that should be supporting them' (p. 3). Those who are perceived to be good parents are those who conform to school staff's expectations, whilst those who challenge or disagree are labelled as problematic and unable to engage in genuine partnership (Embeita, 2019; Tett, 2001).

In contrast to parents' experiences of mainstream schools, McCluskey et al. (2015) found parents to speak positively about their experiences of working with alternative provision staff, with one set of grandparents suggesting the staff to have been the first educational professionals to listen to their views about how to work with their grandchild. These findings reflect the findings of Levinson and Thompson (2016) who reported parents to have received positive comments about their children's education for the first time whilst attending an alternative provision. This suggests some parents have a more positive experience of working with alternative provisions than mainstream schools. Therefore, it is unsurprising that some parents are reluctant for their children to return to mainstream education.

The current literature regarding mainstream reintegration focuses on the experiences of CYP and educational staff. Despite parents playing an integral role during reintegration, their voices are often unheard. The purpose of this research is to provide parents with an

opportunity to share their unique perspectives and experiences of what supports and inhibits CYP's reintegration from alternative provision to mainstream school. Consequently, this study aims to address the following research question:

> *What are parents' views and experiences of young people who experience SEMH difficulties reintegrating from alternative provision to mainstream secondary school?*

3.2 Method

This section begins with a brief description of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). This is followed by an outline of the participant recruitment process. An explanation of how the data was generated and analysed is then provided.

3.2.1 Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

The research methodology was informed by IPA, which is an interpretative approach concerned with in-depth examination of personal lived experience (Smith, 2011). The approach involves a double hermeneutic, as the researcher makes sense of the participant making sense of their experiences. Through this process, the researcher attempts to develop an 'insider's perspective' of the participant's world (Smith & Osborn, 2008, p. 53).

3.2.2 Participant Recruitment

Before participant recruitment took place, ethical approval was granted from Newcastle University's Ethics Committee in March 2021. I anticipated recruitment would be difficult due to the small population from which I was recruiting. Subsequently, to ensure the research was completed within a restricted timeframe, a pragmatic approach to participant recruitment was required and therefore convenience sampling was selected. Convenience sampling is a process of selecting participants who are easily accessible and available to the researcher (Cohen et al., 2018). Despite being one of the most common sampling strategies, convenience sampling is susceptible to hidden bias (Leiner, 2017) and considered the least rigorous sampling strategy (Sandelowski, 1995).

Two phases of participant recruitment were undertaken. During the first phase, I contacted a convenience sample of alternative provisions, secondary schools and educational professionals in the Northeast of England and Yorkshire regions. Recruiting from a large geographical area was important to maintain the participants' anonymity. I asked them to disseminate a recruitment poster containing my contact details to all parents of young people who had reintegrated from an alternative provision to a mainstream secondary school in the previous two years.

During the second phase, staff from the educational settings contacted parents on my behalf to seek initial expressions of interest to participate in my research. It was assumed that parents' experiences of young people reintegrating into primary schools, secondary schools and colleges are likely to differ due to the differences in educational structures and systems (Rice et al., 2011). Therefore, to maintain a homogenous sample, as required in IPA research (Smith et al., 2009), participant recruitment was restricted to participants who had experienced secondary school reintegration as disproportionately more pupils enter alternative provision at secondary school age (Danechi, 2018).

Initially, I intended to exclusively recruit participants who had parental responsibility for a young person who had reintegrated. However, information about my research was shared with a grandparent who did not have parental responsibility but was actively involved in the young person's education in the way a parent might be. I believed the grandparent should have an opportunity to participate in the research and share their experiences. Subsequently, the grandparent was included within the final sample.

I spoke with seven people who expressed an interest in the research, to explain the aims of the research project and what participation would entail. Participants were informed that personal information, which may enable them or their child to be identified, would not be included in the write-up of the research and pseudonyms would be used. It was important we had a shared understanding of the term SEMH difficulties and parents viewed this as an appropriate term to describe their child before they agreed to participate. During initial conversations with parents, one parent did not think this term accurately described her child and chose not to participate on this basis. Information letters and consent forms were sent to the remaining parents and grandparent (see Appendices C and D); three signed consent forms were returned. Subsequently, my final sample consisted of two parents and one grandparent. Descriptive information about the young people that the participants referred to during their interviews is shown in Table Seven.

Table 7: *Reintegrated Pupils' Information*

Pseudonym	Gender	Age at the Time of Reintegration	Type of Alternative Provision Attended	Duration of Time in Alternative Provision
Amy	Female	13	Pupil Referral Unit	5 days per week for 12 Months
Ben	Male	13	Pupil Referral Unit	5 days per week for over 12 months
Adam	Male	13	Pupil Referral Unit	4 days per week for 12 weeks

3.2.3 Data Generation

Individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with each participant. Semi-structured interviews are an appropriate method of data generation for IPA research as they can elicit rich, detailed accounts of lived experience (Smith et al., 2009). The interviews were conducted online using video conferencing technology to ensure the welfare of participants during the coronavirus pandemic. Furthermore, online interviews can help 'create a nonthreatening and comfortable environment, and provide greater ease for participants discussing sensitive issues' (Creswell, 2013, p. 159). However, it was acknowledged that undertaking the interviews online can limit non-verbal cues that may enhance the richness of the data (Seitz, 2016).

An interview guide was developed and shared with each participant a minimum of 48 hours before the interview took place (see Appendix E). The interview guide was structured to enable a comfortable interaction where participants were able to share their experiences in their own words. Smith et al. (2009) suggests interview guides should be written to enable cycles of descriptive or narrative questions to be asked, followed by evaluative questions or analytical questions. This structure was adopted in my interview guide. The main eight interview questions were either descriptive or narrative questions, intended to encourage participants to talk about the events they experienced in chronological order, sharing descriptions and details of their experiences. The accompanying prompt questions were primarily evaluative questions intended to support the participants to reflect on their perspectives at the time of the reintegration and share their current perspectives.

Before the interviews, each participant was given a verbal brief, during which I talked through the information letter and consent form with each participant and verbal consent was sought. The interviews were video and audio recorded, subsequently, very few notes were taken during the interviews. This enabled me to listen attentively to the participants and ask unstructured prompts. It was recognised that the interview would cover what might be an emotive topic for some participants, therefore, I remained vigilant for any signs of distress during the interviews. Each participant was reminded of their right to withdraw after the interview and was provided with a written debrief detailing how to do so (see Appendix F). The interviews were transcribed using Braun and Clarke's (2013) transcription notation system adapted from Jefferson (2004). Data was kept securely on a password-protected computer and in a locked filing cabinet.

3.2.4 Data Analysis

The six stages of IPA outlined by Smith et al. (2009) were used to guide the data analysis. I read the first transcript alongside the interview recording to immerse myself in the data.

Whilst reading and listening to the recording, exploratory comments were noted down the side of the transcript (see Appendix G). Comments were made about the content of the data (descriptive), the use of language (linguistic) and my interpretations of the content (conceptual). A list of emerging themes was generated based on the exploratory comments. Connections and patterns across the emerging themes were identified and grouped into superordinate themes. This process was repeated for the second and third data sets. Finally, a cross-case comparison was completed to identify six recurrent themes across the data sets, which were grouped into three superordinate themes (see Figure Three). A theme is recurrent if it occurs in over half the data sets (Smith et al., 2009), therefore the final themes were included if they were present in at least two of the data sets. A master table of themes was created using quotes related to each subtheme to ensure the final themes were grounded in the data (an illustrative sample of which is presented in Appendix H).

Figure 3: Superordinate and Subthemes
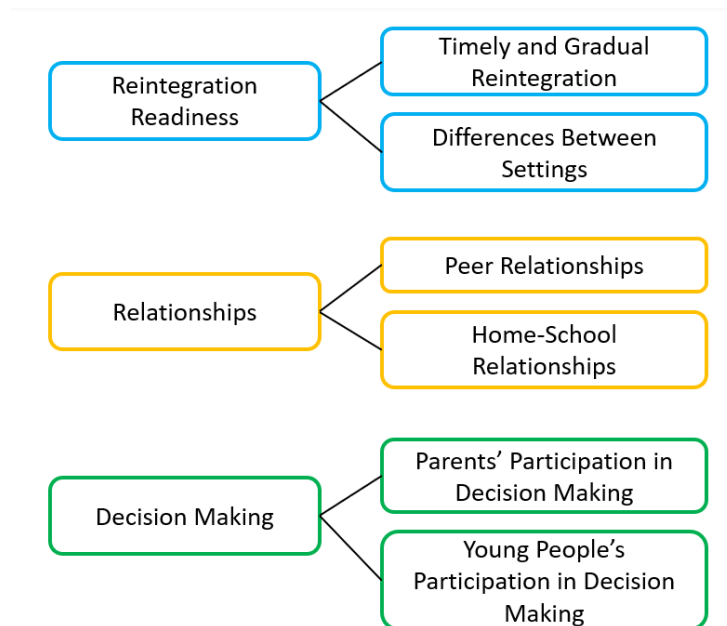
3.3 Findings and Discussion

Within this section, the themes are explored alongside the wider literature. A summary of the findings is then provided before implications for educational psychology practice and limitations of the study are discussed.

3.3.1 Superordinate Theme One: Reintegration Readiness

The importance of young people being ready to reintegrate into mainstream school was central to all the participants' stories. The following subthemes were perceived as facilitators and/or barriers during reintegration.

Figure 4: *Reintegration Readiness Themes*
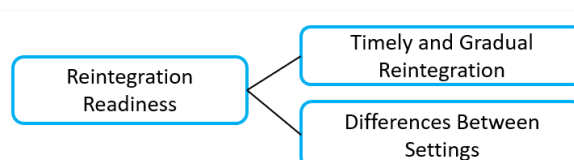
3.3.1.1 Subtheme One: Timely and Gradual Reintegration

Ben's mum spoke about the importance of Ben having a gradual transition into his new school.

> *"[key worker] did suggest that when he first went back for the first week could he just do all mornings and he did he did all mornings just to get used to it" (Ben's mum)*

However, Amy's mum spoke about the lack of gradual transition leaving her daughter unprepared to cope with the demands of a mainstream school environment.

> *"she had like one visit and then she was basically just like chucked in" (Amy's mum)*

Adam's grandma reported her grandson did not receive a gradual reintegration into mainstream school; however, unlike Amy's mum, Adam's grandma did not perceive this to be a barrier during reintegration. One possible explanation for Ben's and Amy's parents placing greater importance on their child having a gradual transition is because Amy and Ben reintegrated into different mainstream schools, whilst Adam returned to his previous school. Therefore, Adam would have likely already developed relationships with staff and understood the school routines which Ben's and Amy's parents believed a gradual transition provided. These findings align with previous research in which young people perceived having a gradual reintegration supported them to settle into a new mainstream school (Atkinson & Rowley, 2019).

Amy's and Ben's parents discussed their children being in the alternative provision for a long time. Amy's mum perceived this negatively, suggesting Amy was there for too long causing her to become acclimatised to the alternative provision environment, making reintegration

more difficult. Whereas Ben's mum suggested the extended placement in the alternative provision prepared Ben for mainstream and increased his desire to return.

> *"she wasn't prepared properly for going back cos she had been there that long" (Amy's mum)*

> *"he was there a long time but then one by one his friends started going to different places and he was still stuck doing the same work… he felt like he had to be doing more like more school work, proper school work so for him to say that he was ready to leave [alternative provision] he had his like time there" (Ben's mum)*

Levinson and Thompson (2016) suggest there is a 'window of opportunity' in which young people should reintegrate (p. 31). Staff reported if young people reintegrate too early this can lead to an unsuccessful reintegration, but young people remaining in the alternative provision for too long can lead to a regression in behaviour. Amy's mum's view that Amy's alternative provision placement had lasted too long may suggest the window of opportunity had passed, creating additional barriers to reintegration. The concept of a window of opportunity highlights the problematic nature of fixed-term placements. Adam attended the alternative provision on a fixed 12-week placement; it could be suggested that Adam's reintegration was not timely, and he was not yet ready to leave the alternative provision, which contributed to his difficult reintegration. Levinson and Thompson (2016) do not suggest there to be an ideal timescale for reintegration but rather that there is merit in taking a flexible, individualised approach to ensure a young person's reintegration is timely.

3.3.1.2 Subtheme Three: Differences Between Settings

All parents spoke about the differences between alternative provision and mainstream school. Two parents held opposing views on how the differences between the settings affected their child's readiness to reintegrate. Amy's mum suggested the differences in the settings made it more difficult for her daughter to reintegrate as she wasn't prepared for the structure and expectations of a mainstream school.

> *"it's all for naughty kids really [alternative provision] and like ah just don't think it's anything like normal school so I think Amy was so out of routine" (Amy's mum)*

However, Ben's mum believed the alternative provision's nurturing pedagogy and higher adult-to-pupil ratio provided her son with the support he needed to develop the academic skills required to cope with the academic demands of a mainstream secondary school.

> *"when he went to the PRU the work that they were giving him and he got a lot of praise like they would always give him praise like and he would come home with like certificates what he hadn't had for years" (Ben's mum)*

> *"I could see them like saying to him like oh you're doing well Ben this is a good bit of work and even probably even the tiniest bit of work that he did they would build him right up to think that that was great and he wanted to go back and do more (work) obviously in big schools they've got big classes haven't they they cannot sort of baby like each (student)" (Ben's mum)*

Ben's mum's comments suggest the staff's teaching style helped develop Ben's academic self-concept and increased his motivation to learn. Ben sought more challenging work than he was being provided with at the alternative provision and he developed a strong desire to attend mainstream school so he could work towards sitting his GCSEs. Ben's mum's account reflects the wider literature which suggests young people having a desire to reintegrate and believing they can achieve in mainstream school are factors that facilitate successful reintegration (Atkinson & Rowley, 2019; Lawrence, 2011).

Adam's grandma also reported a change in Adam's attitude and behaviour during his time in alternative provision. She attributed this change to smaller classes providing Adam with more academic support. However, such changes were not sustained during his reintegration. Adam's grandma believes Adam's regression in behaviour during reintegration was intentional as he enjoyed his time in the alternative provision and believed this would lead to him returning.

> *"I think he truly believed if he played up again they would send him back to [alternative provision] but course it dunt work like that" (Adam's grandma)*

This suggests that the supportive environment of the alternative provision that enabled Adam to reengage with learning also reduced his desire to return. Levinson and Thompson (2016) argue alternative provisions need to create an environment that differs from mainstream schools to support the holistic wellbeing of young people, though they recognise that doing so can create a barrier to reintegration.

3.3.2 Superordinate Theme Two: Relationships

Relationships were important to the participants' stories, with peer relationships and home-school relationships playing a key role.

Figure 5: Relationship Themes
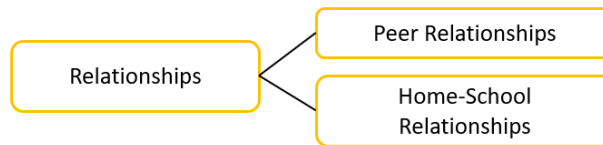
3.3.2.1 Subtheme One: Peer Relationships

Some parents report peers to have negatively influenced their child's experience of mainstream school. Amy's mum spoke about how her daughter tried to befriend certain peers who mistreated her. She attributed responsibility to Amy for her negative experience, suggesting she made herself a "target" by trying to be friends with peers she was advised to stay away from.

> *"there was a few problems with a few girls that go there erm and they were basically like top girls in the school" (Amy's mum)*

> *"maybe if Amy hadn't tried to get in with these [girls] maybe her time there may have been different" (Amy's mum)*

Adam's grandma discussed her grandson's vulnerability to peer influence. She spoke about Adam experiencing pressure from mainstream peers to be the "school fool". Adam's grandma's story suggests Adam experienced pressure to uphold a reputation in front of his mainstream peers. This pressure was removed whilst attending the alternative provision and interacting with a different peer group but returned upon returning to the same mainstream school.

> *"I think it was because they weren't the pressures from other children [in alternative provision] you see I think he gets a lot of pressure to play the fool and disturb a class" (Adam's grandma)*

This suggests that reintegrating to a previous mainstream school where Adam had pre-existing relationships with peers, who were a negative influence, hindered his reintegration. Amy's mum and Adam's grandma explained how peer relationships affected their child's access to education. Adam's grandma spoke about how Adam's concerns of being judged by peers prevented him from seeking academic support during lessons, whilst Amy's mum referred to peer relationships deterring her daughter from attending lessons altogether.

> *"A few times they were waiting after school for her so it made her think like that she didn't want to go [to school B] and she just refused to go into lessons" (Amy's mum)*

"it was a lot easier for Adam to disturb a class and play the fool than actually ask a question he would worry that maybe a couple of lads already knew and thought he was stupid for asking" (Adam's grandma)

The need to belong and form connections with others is widely recognised and researched (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Maslow, 1954). Therefore, it is not surprising that peer relationships were important to the participants' stories. Bagley and Hallam (2015) found social acceptance to be of greater value to young people than learning when transitioning to a new school. Pillay et al. (2013) suggest a young person's need for peer acceptance can lead to CYP seeking out relationships with high-risk peers. This suggests Amy's desire to develop friendships with negative consequences could be explained through a desire for social acceptance.

Peer relationships can act as both a facilitator and barrier during reintegration (Pillay et al., 2013). Positive peer relationships can enhance emotional wellbeing and engagement in learning (Bagley & Hallam, 2015). Whilst negative peer relationships can lead to peer pressure and academic encumbrance (Pillay et al., 2013). Adult facilitation to develop peer relationships was not mentioned in the participants' stories but was found to be valued by young people during managed moves (Craggs & Kelly, 2018). Further consideration should be given to the use of organised peer support to facilitate social inclusion when young people reintegrate into a new mainstream school. However, supporting young people who are returning to a previous mainstream school to develop positive relationships can be particularly challenging, due to pre-existing peer relationships.

3.3.2.2 Subtheme Two: Home-School Relationships

The participants spoke positively about their relationship with staff at the mainstream schools during their child's reintegration. Ben's mum also spoke about her relationship with staff at the alternative provision who continued to support her after Ben left the alternative provision. Both parents discussed the importance of staff being available to them as a supportive feature of the home-school relationship.

"I felt as though they was always on end of a phone if we needed to talk" (Adam's grandma)

"I always felt like Sarah was there you know if something was going wrong that I could give her a ring" (Ben's mum)

Both participants spoke about valuing regular communication from the school to keep them informed on how their child is managing. The comments made by Ben's mum and Adam's

grandma suggest there was a collaborative working partnership between themselves and mainstream school staff.

> *"I feel as though we get a lot of support as well as we support them" (Adam's grandma)*

> *"if he's been really naughty I will get a phone call off a teacher and say and they have put us on the phone to him before where they are like and I just say to him like come on Ben and then he seems alright" (Ben's mum)*

Adam's grandma's relationship with the mainstream school was strengthened by attributing blame to Adam for the negative reintegration experience. By positioning the problem as within-child, Adam's grandma positioned the school as having little control over the success of Adam's reintegration, alleviating the school of their responsibility to make adjustments to support Adam's reintegration. These findings align with Embeita (2019) who found parents who attributed behavioural difficulties to the child reported positive home-school relationships compared to parents who attributed difficulties to the school.

> *"they just seem to have been very fair with him to be fair it's him what's a little bugger and incompliant"* (*Adam's grandma*)

Many young people have very negative experiences of mainstream education before attending alternative provision, including feeling isolated, misunderstood, and mistreated by peers and staff (Levinson & Thompson, 2016). Additionally, many parents feel judged for their child's behaviour (McDonald & Thomas, 2003; Parker et al., 2016). Consequently, some parents do not want their children to reintegrate into mainstream school (Leyser & Kirk, 2004). Ben's mum was initially reluctant for Ben to attend a mainstream school as she was concerned he would have a similar experience to his previous school. Therefore, for Ben's mum, one function of the home-school relationship was to reassure her that the staff were doing everything they could to ensure previous experiences of mainstream school would not be repeated. This was achieved through frequent communication and responding to issues immediately when they arose.

3.3.3. Superordinate Theme Three: Decision-Making

Decision-making was considered an important element of the participants' stories, particularly in relation to the parent's and young person's involvement in decision-making.
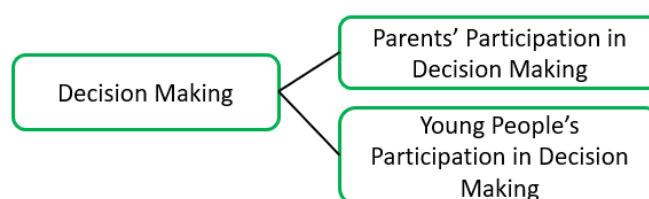
3.3.3.1 Subtheme One: Parents' Participation in Decision-Making

Amy's mum and Adam's grandma reported having limited involvement in decision-making processes. The parents were positioned as passive recipients of information rather than actively involved in decision-making processes. Amy's mum and Adam's grandma appeared accepting of their lack of involvement, explaining there were reintegration procedures in place that were out of their control.

> *"Well not really that much involved to be honest, it was all put to panel and they made the decisions and then it was just like, the decision was made that was the school that would take Amy" (Amy's mum)*
>
> *"we just went along with what the school said" (Adam's grandma)*
>
> *"I don't think you have a choice in it that's just the protocol of it all" (Adam's grandma)*

However, Ben's mum reported a more individualised reintegration process where parental involvement was not inhibited by set protocols. Resultantly, Ben's mum had greater influence over the reintegration process. She spoke about selecting a school and deciding on transition support as a collaborative endeavour between herself, Ben and educational professionals.

The legislation reforms introduced by the Children and Families Act in 2014, aimed to enhance pupils' and parents' participation in decision-making processes regarding young people's education. The findings of this study suggest Ben's mum's views informed the decisions made and helped shape the reintegration process. This was not the case for the other parents. Parents have unique knowledge of the young person's circumstances and the wider ecological factors that may impact the reintegration and support required. Lawrence's (2011) findings suggest when decisions are made by professionals without a holistic understanding of the young person reintegration can fail. This highlights the importance of parents being included in decision-making processes.

Parents who reported feeling less involved in decision-making appeared accepting of their lack of role, indicating low parental agency amongst the participants. One possible explanation for this is the parents viewed educational professionals to be best placed to make decisions about their child's education, not recognising the valuable contribution they could provide. Further consideration should be given to how parents are positioned within the reintegration process to ensure they are active partners in planning and facilitating the reintegration.

3.3.3.2 Subtheme Two: Young People's Participation in Decision-Making

The participants' stories suggest the young people had varying levels of involvement in decision-making processes. Ben's and Amy's parents spoke positively about their child having a role in selecting the school to which they reintegrated. Amy's mum spoke about her daughter being asked to provide a list of school preferences, whilst Ben's mum reported Ben's preferred school was approached based on his desire to attend.

> *"he was adamant he wanted to go to [school B] so we just thought we will give him a chance it's his chance to get in" (Ben's mum)*

Amy's mum believed that Amy was given too much control over the reintegration process because she was allowed to select when and how many transition visits to attend. Consequently, Amy decided to attend just once before starting full-time.

> *"she was given the opportunity herself to pick days that she wanted to go in because they still had kids in at [School B], erm like to settle, to get settled in before like everybody was going back after lockdown. But again, like I don't think Amy should have been given that choice" (Amy's mum)*

Additionally, it was agreed Amy would be accompanied during her first week at the mainstream school by a member of staff from the alternative provision. However, at Amy's request, the staff member left part way through the first day and did not return. Amy's mum's story suggests Amy wasn't supported to authentically participate in decision-making regarding her reintegration but rather was given the choice to reject reintegration support offered to her.

The Code of Practice proposes young people should be given the information and support required to share their views and participate in decisions regarding their education (Department for Education & Department for Health, 2015). One way this can be achieved is through person-centred planning. Person-centred planning requires continually listening to what is important to someone and acting upon this in collaboration with the people important to them (Sanderson, 2000). Corrigan (2014) used person-centred planning with young

people who had experienced exclusion to plan and facilitate their reintegration into mainstream school. The findings suggest person-centred planning made the young people feel heard and enhanced their engagement and ownership during the reintegration process.

3.3.4 Summary

One of the main factors parents spoke about affecting reintegration success was the young people's ability to adapt to a mainstream school environment. The participants' stories focused on developing the young people's readiness for mainstream, with little discussion of the mainstream schools making adaptations to accommodate the reintegrating learners. This view positions the problem as within the individual rather than the wider educational system. It can be argued that this perspective is reinforced by the repair and return rationale upon which many alternative provision placements are commissioned (Pennacchia & Thomson, 2016, p. 67). Furthermore, all participants described their child as having experienced SEMH difficulties, a term that arguably endorses a within-child perspective (Hickinbotham & Soni, 2021). Despite many revisions of this terminology to reduce pathologizing CYP, I argue further revisions are required that place less emphasis on dispositional factors and raise awareness of the wider contextual factors that influence CYP's presentation.

A further reason for participants holding this view was a lack of understanding of their rights and the school's responsibility to make reasonable adjustments to support the young person's inclusion. It was evident from the interviews that participants held some insightful views on the functions of the young people's behaviour and the type of support they benefited from. However, the parents had low expectations of the level of support the mainstream school and alternative provision should provide during the reintegration. Burke and Sandman (2017) found when parents are more knowledgeable about their rights and the educational services and systems, they were better able to advocate for their children. Therefore, if we are to empower parents to have their voices heard and recognise the valuable contribution they can make during reintegration, we must first provide them with the knowledge upon which to develop an informed view of the situation.

The study's findings highlight the enormous expectations placed on young people during reintegration to fit into a schooling system that has previously not worked for them, with very little support. Therefore, it is unsurprising that two of the three participants reported the reintegration to have been unsuccessful. I argue greater focus should be placed on the mainstream education system to develop a more supportive and inclusive environment, by challenging mainstream cultures and practices that alienate young people who experience SEMH difficulties. Furthermore, there is a need to reconceptualise how alternative provisions are perceived, to move away from a repair and return model and towards a partnership

approach where alternative provision staff work with the mainstream school to develop their inclusive practice (Pennacchia & Thomson, 2016). Not only would this enable a smoother reintegration into mainstream education by narrowing the gap between the practices of alternative provisions and mainstream schools, but it would also address wider issues of exclusionary practice that are driving the demand for alternative provisions. However, a shift in mainstream school cultures is unlikely to happen whilst government agendas continue to reduce the purpose of education to measuring outcomes (Levinson & Thompson, 2016). In the current socio-economic and political climate, government policies endorse meritocracy, standardisation and individual accountability, which could be argued to sit in contrast to inclusion and equality agendas (Stanbridge & Mercer, 2022). Thus, responsibility should not fall solely on the shoulders of mainstream providers to support the inclusion of CYP who experience SEMH difficulties. Further support is required at a government level to reduce inter-school competition and performativity pressures (Thompson et al., 2021) and make the inclusion of all CYP a priority.

3.3.5 Implications for Educational Psychology Practice

The findings of the study suggest that young people and parents are not always authentically included in planning and decision-making during reintegration. Person-centred approaches can facilitate young people and their family's participation in planning and decision-making during times of transition (Bason, 2020). Educational Psychologists (EPs) are well placed to support educational practitioners in embedding person-centred practices (Corrigan, 2014). By supporting educational practitioners to incorporate such approaches, EPs can help to ensure reintegration is shaped by the young person's and parents' circumstances and needs, consequently, making reintegration an empowering experience for young people and parents by ensuring they remain at the heart of the process. EPs can provide training and coaching on the use of person-centred approaches to ensure it is embedded into reintegration practice on a Local Authority level (Corrigan, 2014).

The findings suggest, during the participants' reintegration experiences, great expectations are placed on young people to adapt to mainstream schools, whilst the receiving schools made limited adjustments to meet the needs of the young people. By working at an organisational level, EPs can support mainstream schools to be more inclusive of young people who experience SEMH difficulties. EPs can apply their knowledge of psychological theory to offer alternative perspectives to within-child explanations of young people's behaviour, by considering the eco-systemic factors at play. In doing so, EPs can help to reduce the responsibility placed on young people to change and increase the responsibility of mainstream schools to make accommodations to meet the young person's needs. Furthermore, EPs could apply their knowledge of ecological systems to inform the language

and content of Local Authority policies. Stanbridge and Mercer (2022) suggest the language used to describe CYP's behaviour affects how their behaviour is understood and responded to. EPs can contribute to the writing of policy to ensure the language reflects contextual and systemic interpretations, to encourage holistic understandings of reintegrating learners to be constructed.

Within this section, the implications this research has for educational psychology practice have been explored. In the next section limitations of the study are discussed.

3.3.6 Limitations

One limitation of this study is the recruitment strategy employed. The final recruitment strategy did not align with the intentions of the research. My research intended to provide an empowering experience for parents by providing them with an opportunity to tell their stories. However, due to initial recruitment difficulties and time constraints of the research, two of the three final participants were asked directly if they would like to participate. Despite steps being taken to ensure consent was obtained, this recruitment method indicates less autonomy on behalf of participants than initially hoped for. Furthermore, by asking for educational staff's assistance in contacting parents, I cannot rule out the possibility that the parents contacted were selected based on their relationship with the setting which may have influenced their view of the educational setting's approach to reintegration.

This study used a small number of participants and therefore cannot make broad claims of generalisability to the wider population. However, this does not suggest that the findings of this research have no relevance to individuals beyond those who participated. The ideographic nature of IPA research requires an in depth examination of the particular, through exploring experiences of specific populations in specific contexts (Smith et al., 2009). Smith et al. (2009) claim 'delving deeper into the particular also takes us closer to the universal' (p. 31). This suggests, despite each participant having a unique set of circumstances and experiences, at the deepest level, individual experiences have potential to shed light on shared and communal understandings of social phenomena. Therefore, it is hoped that despite the findings of this study being context specific, they still have potential for transferability to other contexts and populations.

IPA research subscribes to the concept of theoretical generalisability, which is the process of coming to a judgement on the transferability of the research findings. Theoretical generalisability is achieved by the reader considering the research findings alongside their prior professional and experiential knowledge to assess the relevance of the findings to other situations (Smith et al., 2009). The reader is encouraged to consider the extent to which the

findings make sense considering what is already known. To aid this process the write-up of this study contains contextual details, rich interpretations and ample use of quotes.

3.4 Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to privilege the voices of parents and provide insight into their views and experiences of young people who have experienced SEMH difficulties reintegrating from alternative provision to mainstream secondary school. The findings highlighted the importance of the young people's and parents' involvement in decisions made about reintegration and the young person's readiness for reintegration. Home-school relationships and the young person's peer relationships were also found to be key aspects of the parents' reintegration experience. The parents' stories focused on building the young people's capacity to adapt to a mainstream school environment, with little discussion of the mainstream settings making adaptations to accommodate the reintegrating learners. The parents' stories reflect the enormous expectations placed on young people to change to fit into an unchanged mainstream education system. It is argued that greater focus should be placed on the mainstream education system to develop a more supportive and inclusive environment, by challenging mainstream cultures and practices that alienate young people who experience SEMH difficulties. Through this, it is hoped that more young people can successfully reintegrate into mainstream schools and the demand for alternative provision placements is reduced.

Chapter 4: Reflective Synthesis

There is a range of implications to any piece of research across several different levels. Within this reflective synthesis, I explore the implications for myself as a practitioner and researcher. This chapter begins by exploring the implications of the research findings for reintegration practice and policy, followed by wider implications for my practice as an EP. Then my intentions for disseminating the research findings are outlined. Next, is a discussion on how I have developed as a researcher, followed by considerations for future research.

4.1 Implications for Practice

4.1.1 Implications for Reintegration Practice and Policy

I believe the greatest implication this thesis has for my future practice is supporting work at an organisational level to reform Local Authority reintegration practices and policy.

In 2014, the Children and Families Act made it a statutory requirement for CYP and parents to be consulted regarding matters that affect CYP's lives, such as decisions about their education (Gray & Woods, 2022). However, the findings of this thesis indicate this is happening inconsistently during young people's reintegration. This research has raised my awareness of the importance of my role in supporting school staff to reflect on how they are positioning young people and parents during reintegration and to what extent they are empowering them to participate in decision-making. By working systemically, I hope to embed person-centred approaches into reintegration practice and policy. Person-centred practice can support a shift in power and control, repositioning young people as equal partners during reintegration (Corrigan, 2014); and ensuring they remain at the centre of decision-making and planning (Gray & Woods, 2022). Having a reintegration policy underpinned by person-centred practice will allow personalised reintegration plans to be constructed in partnership with parents and young people. The findings of the research illustrated some young people reject support offered to them during reintegration. Therefore, they must be supported to engage in discussions about how they would like to be supported during reintegration. As an EP, I hope to support the implementation of person-centred practice through training, coaching and supervision (Corrigan, 2014).

In the 2022 SEND review, the government has presented their intentions for a single SEND and alternative provision system (Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 2022). The review proposes a need for more robust standards for reintegration, implying issues in current reintegration practices. Furthermore, the recently revised guidance on behaviour in schools highlights the importance of schools having clear reintegration strategies for pupils who have

attended off-site provisions (Department for Education, 2022b). However, little guidance is provided within these documents about what reintegration should entail. Given the government's intentions to hold Local Authorities accountable for adhering to the new national SEND standards (Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 2022), it is timely to look at how I could support reintegration practice at a Local Authority level.

Within my current Local Authority placement, there is little support for young people reintegrating from the pupil referral unit to mainstream schools. The EPs working with the pupil referral unit have identified reintegration practice as an area that requires attention. In the future, I would like to engage in work alongside Local Authority professionals and staff from the pupil referral unit and mainstream schools to revise the current reintegration system and accompanying policies. I believe my understanding of psychology and reintegration literature will allow me to provide an evidence-informed perspective on reforming reintegration practice and policy.

In Chapter One, the SLR concluded for reintegration to be successful a two-pronged approach is required. Where CYP are given the support to develop the skills to cope with the demands of mainstream education, whilst the mainstream schools make reasonable adjustments to accommodate the needs of the individual. However, in Chapter Three, the empirical findings suggest that this does not always happen in practice and disproportionate expectations are placed on young people to develop skills to manage the mainstream school environment. Through working at an organisational level, I aim to use my knowledge of psychology and research to support others to reframe how alternative provisions are perceived and currently used, by shedding light on issues regarding the repair and return narrative associated with alternative provisions. I hope to revise Local Authority policies to reflect the need for mainstream schools to demonstrate commitment to making reasonable adjustments to support reintegrating pupils.

4.1.1 Wider Implications for Practice

Undertaking this thesis has provided me with insights into supporting young people with SEMH difficulties and working with parents, both of which have implications for my practice more widely. The Local Authority where I am currently on placement has more CYP with a primary need of SEMH than any other type of SEND. Subsequently, supporting the inclusion of CYP who present with SEMH difficulties in mainstream schools has been a key part of my role as a Trainee EP. Previously, I took a narrow view that responsibility for including young people who experience SEMH difficulties rested almost exclusively with school staff. However, through engaging in this research, I have acknowledged the level of pressure schools are under to demonstrate academic attainment, and the effect this has on inclusive

practice. Therefore, at times, the decisions taken by schools are attempts to navigate the inherent tensions between their dual commitment to raising academic standards and support the inclusion of all CYP. When working with schools I must be mindful of the pressures staff are under. Whilst also supporting school staff to recognise their moral responsibility to support the inclusion of all CYP and empowering them to think creatively about how this can be achieved, within the constraints of the resources at their disposal.

When collecting the data for the empirical study, I found the participants had low expectations of the alternative provisions and mainstream schools and most participants were content with the limited support provided. This led me to question the parents' knowledge of their rights, the rights of their children and the responsibilities of educational settings. Having access to this information is important if parents are to advocate for their children (Burke & Sandman, 2017), highlighting the important role parent forums and family support services play.

4.1.3 Research Dissemination

After writing up the research, the next logical and ethical step is to disseminate the research findings to help advance the field of study (Boland et al., 2017). Many young people have had an unsuccessful reintegration into mainstream school (Pillay et al., 2013), therefore it is important the findings of my research are shared widely to help inform reintegration practice and policy. At the time of writing, I have presented the research findings to the EPs who I work with. They were interested in the findings of my study and requested a further session to discuss the implications for our practice. During the second session I intend to discuss further opportunities within the Local Authority for disseminating my research findings. Additionally, I also have an upcoming opportunity to share my research with a group of professionals within a different Local Authority, to help inform their reintegration practice and policy.

It is also important that my research is shared with educational settings. My current intention is to develop a short handout summarising the key research findings that can be shared with staff in schools and alternative provisions. Furthermore, to reach a wider audience, I also intend to submit my research for publication in an academic research journal.

4.2 Implications for Research

4.2.1 Development as a Researcher

EPs conduct research to extend the profession's knowledge base and skills (The British Psychological Society, 2019). Undertaking this thesis has enabled me to develop a range of research skills to enhance my competence in carrying out research. During the SLR and

empirical research, I developed skills in constructing researchable questions, designing research, synthesising data and writing up research in the style of a selected journal. The SLR also required skills in navigating different databases and translating searches to identify relevant literature, systematically screening literature, and assessing its quality. Whilst the empirical study required skills in participant recruitment, data collection and transcription.

Before undertaking this thesis, I had limited experience in conducting semi-structured interviews. Subsequently, I underestimated the level of skill required to ask unstructured prompts to elicit rich, detailed responses and explore topics raised by the participants. Facilitating dialogue whilst ensuring I was actively listening and paying attention to the participants' body language required me to manage multiple demands simultaneously. With each interview, I believe my interviewing skills improved, enabling the interviews to run more smoothly.

Throughout the research journey, a key skill I have developed is criticality. Whilst conducting the quality appraisal aspect of the SLR, applying critical reading skills was crucial to assessing the value of the work reported (Wallace & Wray, 2021). I approached this task with 'reasonable scepticism' to consider whether I was satisfied with the evidence the authors presented to support their claims (Wallace & Wray, 2021, p. 5). Furthermore, throughout this thesis, I developed my critical writing skills by presenting a coherent, warranted argument for the claims made and recognising the limits to the claims I can make, based on the information available.

4.2.2 Future Research

Literature suggests collaboration and shared responsibility are important aspects of reintegration (Lawrence, 2011). However, within the literature, there remains little clarity on how the roles and responsibilities of young people, parents and educational staff are perceived during reintegration. Within the empirical study, parents spoke of their expectations of the young person and educational staff, although how they perceived their roles and the roles of others was not explored in depth. Further research is required to explore how parents, young people and educational staff conceptualise their role, and the roles of others, during reintegration to provide greater clarity on how they can work in partnership.

The second area of research that requires further exploration is reintegrating from alternative provision to mainstream primary school. Primary school reintegration has had considerably less focus within the literature than secondary school reintegration. Primary schools and secondary schools have different systems, structures and expectations (Rice et al., 2011). Future research should explore how pupil age and the type of mainstream setting affects

reintegration experiences. This research would give a greater understanding of how reintegration policy and practice could be adjusted to support the reintegration of primary-age pupils.

4.3 Summary

In this chapter, I have discussed how I have developed as a researcher and how undertaking this research has influenced my thinking and approach to educational psychology practice. Furthermore, I have illustrated how I intend to disseminate the research findings and use them to support the development of reintegration policy and practice. In doing so, I hope the knowledge generated from this thesis can contribute to supporting more young people to have a successful reintegration from alternative provision to mainstream school. Moreover, I hope this research can support developments in mainstream practice that are more inclusive of young people with SEMH difficulties and reduce the need for alternative provisions.

Undertaking this thesis has been an interesting and insightful journey that has supported my development as a researcher and practitioner in many ways. The experience has enabled me to understand the contribution I can make to supporting the inclusion and reintegration of young people with SEMH difficulties in mainstream education as I begin my career as a qualified EP. Furthermore, this experience has enhanced my passion for promoting social justice as I have been enlightened to some of the inequality issues present within the UK education system.

In embarking upon this research journey, I aimed to illuminate some of the issues and challenges surrounding reintegration practice, through exploring the lived experiences and privileging the voices of those who have experienced reintegration. It is hoped that this thesis provides a thought-provoking read for those working within the education sector and invites the reader to contemplate what the findings mean for them and their practice.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Search strategy used in British Index of Education

Search Terms	Number of Hits
(DE "RE-entry students" OR DE "MAINSTREAMING in special education") OR reintegrat* or re-integrat* or reentry or re-entry or "return to school" or transition* AND	9238
(DE "ALTERNATIVE schools" OR DE "ALTERNATIVE education" OR DE "PUPIL referral units" OR DE "SPECIAL education schools" OR DE "EXCLUSION from school" OR DE "STUDENT expulsion" OR DE "STUDENT suspension") or "alternative education" or "alternative provision*" or "alternative school*" "alternative learning" or AP or "education other* than at school" or EOTAS or "pupil referral unit*" or PRU or "resource* provision*" or "resource* base" or "learning support unit*" or "nurture group*" or "nurture class" or exclu* or expulsion or expel* or suspen* or disciplin* or "special* school" or "special* provision" or "special* setting" AND	12,734
DE "PARENT attitudes" OR DE "TEACHER attitudes" OR DE "STUDENT attitudes" OR DE "CHILDHOOD attitudes" OR DE "COLLEGE student attitudes" OR DE "SCHOOL employee attitudes" OR DE "COLLEGE teacher attitudes" OR DE "CAREGIVER attitudes" OR DE "TEENAGER attitudes" OR DE "TEACHERS' assistant attitudes" OR DE "GRADUATE teaching assistant attitudes" OR DE "FATHERS' attitudes" OR DE "EDUCATORS' attitudes" OR DE "ATTITUDES of mothers" OR DE "FAMILY attitudes" or View* or experience* or perspective* or voice* or perception* or attitude* AND	87,616
DE "PRIMARY schools" OR DE "TRADITIONAL schools" OR DE "JUNIOR schools (Great Britain)" OR DE "SECONDARY schools" OR DE "INFANT schools (Great Britain)" OR DE "FIRST schools (Great Britain)" OR DE "SECONDARY education" OR DE "PRIMARY education" OR DE "FURTHER education (Great Britain)" OR DE "COLLEGES of Further Education (Great Britain)" OR DE "SIXTH form education" OR DE "SIXTH form colleges" OR DE "SIXTEEN to nineteen education (Great Britain)" or "Mainstream school*" or "mainstream educat*" or "mainstream class*" or "mainstream lesson*" or "mainstream setting*" or "mainstream provision" or "secondary educat*" or "primary educat*" or "secondary school*" or "primary school*" or "junior school*" or "infant school*" or "mainstream college*" or "FE college*" or " further education college*" or "sixth form college*" or "post-16"	68,624
Full search strategy	86
After filtering by year and peer-reviewed journals	82

Appendix B: A sample of codes and themes developed using Thematic Synthesis

Analytic Themes	Descriptive Themes	Codes
Reintegration Readiness	Parent Support	Education staff view parental support as a key factor to reintegration success
		Realistic parental expectations of CYP is a facilitator/ low or unrealistic expectations are barriers
		CYP feel supported when parents take an interest in their education and school experiences
		Parents' ability to provide CYP with academic support is a facilitator
		Parents wanting their child to reintegrate into mainstream school is a facilitator/ parents against reintegration is a barrier
		Parents' perceptions, attitudes and aspirations are influential on CYP's perceptions, attitudes and aspirations
		Parents unable to accept CYP's needs is a barrier
		A difficult parent-child relationship is a barrier
		Poor communication between parent and child is a barrier
	Skills and qualities of the young person	The extent of the young person's SEMH difficulties affects reintegration success
		A young person's ability to reflect and learn from previous experiences is important
		Young people being disruptive to other pupils learning in receiving school is a barrier
		Young people's level of resilience to overcome challenges was seen as important
		Achieving academically was motivating for young people during reintegration
		Young people's vulnerability to peer influence (easily led by others, easily provoked by peers)
		Social and emotional difficulties impact young people's ability to form relationships
		Young person accepting support offered to them facilitates reintegration
		Young person applying learnt strategies facilitates reintegration
	The young person's motivation and self-belief to return to mainstream	Young person viewing education as valuable
		Young person feeling ready to reintegrate
		Young person's perception of their academic ability
		Young person's motivation to achieve academically
		Young person having a positive attitude toward mainstream education
		Young person's desire to reintegrate as a facilitator /lack of desire as a barrier
		Young person's belief they can be successful in mainstream
		Young person having goals and aspirations
		Young person's anxiety/worry before and during reintegration is a barrier
		Young people's optimism about their future

Appendix C: Participant Information Letter

Dear Parent/Carer,

My name is Rebecca Steels. I am a doctoral student at Newcastle University and a Trainee Educational Psychologist at East Riding County Council. As part of my studies, I am carrying out some research which aims to explore parents' experiences and views on their child's transition from an alternative educational setting to a mainstream secondary school. In doing so, I would like to speak with parents of young people who have experienced social, emotional and mental health difficulties and have transitioned from an alternative educational setting to a mainstream secondary school within the previous 2 years. By carrying out this research I aim to gain a greater understanding of what helps and hinders children and young people's transition to mainstream school, which I hope can be used to better support children and young people's transitions in the future.

The research would involve taking part in a one-off virtual interview which would be carried out through a video call. The interview will last approximately 30 to 60 minutes, depending on how much you would like to share. The interview would involve sharing your experience of your child's transition and your views on what you believed was supportive and unsupportive during the transition. The interview will be recorded to support my analysis of the data.

This research has received ethical approval from Newcastle University and will be supervised by Emma Miller from the university. Participation in this research is entirely voluntary and participants have the right to withdraw at any point before or during the interview without providing a reason. If for any reason participants would like a break during the interview, they can request this at any time. Participants can also withdraw their data from the research up to the point of data analysis. Once the data has been collectively analysed, individual data sets cannot be identified. The raw data will be kept on a password protected laptop and will only be accessible to the researcher and the research supervisors. Upon completion of the research, the raw data will be destroyed. All data collected will be confidential and anonymised using an ID number, meaning your name and the name of any person or school discussed during the interview will not be included in the write-up of the research. If you chose to take part in the research you can, if you wish, have access to a copy of the completed research report and a handout summarising the key findings.

If you would like to take part in my research, please complete the attached consent form and return it to me via email, using the following email address r.j.steels2@newcastle.ac.uk. Additionally, if you have any questions about the research, please do not hesitate to contact me using the above email address. Any concerns about this research should be addressed to the School of Education, Communication & Language Science's Ethics Committee at Newcastle University via email to ecls.researchteam@newcastle.ac.uk. 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.

Kind Regards,

Rebecca Steels
Trainee Educational Psychologist
Newcastle University

Appendix D: Participant Consent Form

1) I have read and understood the participant information letter.
2) I understand that participation in this study will involve taking part in a semi-structured virtual interview that will be audio and video recorded and transcribed.
3) I understand that participation in this study is voluntary, and I have the right to withdraw at any point before or during the interview without providing a reason. I am also aware that I can withdraw my data after taking part in the interview, up to the point of data analysis.
4) I understand that information I provide will remain anonymous and confidential.
5) I understand that my data will be kept securely and will only be accessible to the researcher and the research supervisors.
6) I understand that my data will be written up into the researcher's thesis which may be submitted for publication. I am also aware the key themes that emerge from this research project will be reported to educational professionals working within the North East of England and Yorkshire regions.
7) I, …………………… have read the above information and give consent to take part in this study.

Participant Signature ……………………………….   Date …………………

Appendix E Interview Guide

Questions	Prompts
1.How long did your son/daughter attend [name of alternative provision] for?	
2.How old was your son/daughter when he/she returned to mainstream school?	
3.After your son/daughter's placement at [name of alternative provision] did he/she return to their previous school or a different school?	
4. If it is okay, I would like to talk about your son/daughter's placement in [name of alternative provision]. Can you tell me a bit about that?	• What led to your son/daughter attending [name of alternative provision]? • What sort of things did he/she do there?
5. Can you tell me how it came about that your son/daughter would be leaving [name of alternative provision] and reintegrating into mainstream school?	• When were you first aware of this? • What did you think about your son/daughter returning to mainstream school? • How involved did you feel in decisions about the reintegration?
6. I would like to move on to talk about the time when your son/daughter began to return to mainstream school. Can you tell me a bit about what that was like?	• What happened? • Was there anything or anyone that made the reintegration easier? • If so, how did that/they help? • Was there anything that made the reintegration more difficult? • If so, what could have made it better? • How involved were you during the reintegration process? • Could anything have been done to help you be more involved?
7. What is school like now for your son/ daughter?	• Why do you think that is?
8. Is there anything else you would like to tell me that I haven't asked about?	

Appendix F: Participant Debrief Sheet

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this study, your contribution is greatly valued.

The aim of this study is to explore parents' views and experiences of children and young people who experienced social, emotional and mental health difficulties reintegrating into mainstream school following attendance at an alternative educational setting. It is hoped that this research can help inform reintegration practices to support more young people to have a successful transition back into mainstream school. If you would like a copy of the completed research report or a handout summarising the key findings, they are available upon request.

I hope you found taking part interesting. If you would like further information, guidance, or support regarding your child's education, I would encourage you to contact your child's school who will be able to direct you to the most appropriate member of staff to speak to.

As discussed, your data will be kept securely. If for any reason, you would like to withdraw your data before the data has been collectively analysed you can do so on request.

If you would like to speak with me again regarding your participation, please contact me at r.j.steels2@newcastle.ac.uk

Thank you again for your participation.

Kind Regards,

Rebecca Steels
Trainee Educational Psychologist
Newcastle University

Appendix G: A Sample of the Developing Emergent Themes Table

Emerging Themes	Transcript	Exploratory Comments
Length of time in alternative provision-positive School A perceived mainstream as unsuitable Seeing the young person's potential Young person's desire to return Increased confidence Change in young person	Interviewer: How long did Ben attend [alternative provision] for? Participant: Well he was supposed to only be going for a little time until he went to a different- I think it was like the PRU over at [location] but then he ended up being there like over a year, he wasn't supposed to be there that long but they ended up keeping a hold of him because they were trying to get him in to mainstream school when he got threw out of [school A] they said he wouldn't be allowed to go back to mainstream and they sort of just classed him as like this naughty kid and didn't want to be there but when he went to [alternative provision] they kept a hold of him because they thought he had more to offer and that they could get him back in to- (.) like we didn't really know where he was going to go they didn't know if what sort of school but Ben was adamant he wanted to go back to senior school so they worked with him to get back into like a senior school like a mainstream (.) so he was there for over a year but I mean they worked wonders with him there they were great with him he he went in there like a really naughty kid like that's what I thought and when he came out of there he was like ya had this big confidence boost like as though (.) he was good enough to go into - almost- like when he was in mainstream school he would rather like be in erm like it was called the house when he was naughty he would get put into a like sort of a house and it	He was at the alternative provision for more than a year He was at the alternative provision for longer than intended In the PRU for longer because the aim was to reintegrate into mainstream "ended up" and "keeping a hold of him" suggest this was the choice of the alternative provision, not the parent or young person School A told the parent her son "wouldn't be allowed to go back to mainstream" this is a big claim for school A to make, school A is suggesting mainstream school isn't suitable for Ben rather than school A isn't suitable for Ben. Labelled as a "naughty kid" by school A is this school A placing responsibility on Ben for his difficult experience? Alternative provision staff saw Ben's potential Adults were unsure about what type of provision would be suitable for Ben Ben wanted to return to mainstream school. "Adamant" is a strong adjective suggesting his desire to return to mainstream school was high Alternative provision supported Ben to return to mainstream "worked wonders", "they were great" suggests parent is grateful for the support alternative provision provided The parent perceived Ben to be a "naughty kid" Why was this? Was this view influenced by School A's view? Alternative provision built up his confidence

Increased academic motivation	was easier for him to be in there in no lessons than it was to be in classes (.) but when he went to the PRU they sort of built him up where he wanted to be back in school he wanted to do more work he wanted no just be like doing wordsearches and quite easy work he wanted to go on to like a- he wanted to do his exams and stuff so (.) they did do really wonders with his at [alternative provision] they were really good with him. Interviewer: And when you said he had more to offer what did you mean by that?	"Built him up where he wanted to be back in school" Alternative provision increase Ben's desire to return to mainstream. Perhaps his confidence, motivation, self-efficacy to achieve in school? Alternative provision increased Ben's motivation to do more work and harder work. Wanted to challenge himself
Teaching approach in alternative provision was different	Participant: Like Ben had more to offer because he was just sort of- he didn't want to be at school he hated it he hated the work he hated going he hated everything about it but when he went to the PRU the work that they were giving him and he got a lot of praise (.) like they would always give him praise like and he would come home with like certificates what he hadn't had for years do you know what I mean and I think that was like giving him like	Ben previously hated school Hated repeated 4 times, to emphasise Ben's previous dislike of school Got lots of praise in alternative provision which increased his confidence
Increased confidence	a confident boost and he thought 'oh I can do this I can do this bit of work' and it wasn't like the hardest work in the world it was quite easy and basic but he- it was giving him (.) like this confidence and I could see him and he wanted to go back to mainstream school so he could try and do exams and stuff where before he wasn't bothered about exams he wasn't bothered being at school he wasn't bother about the work but when he was there it give him this sort of like confidence where he felt that he wanted to go back into mainstream if you know what I mean	"Oh I can do this I can do this bit of work" suggests increased self-efficacy, belief in his academic ability.
Young person's desire to return		Increased confidence Ben wanted to return to mainstream to sit exams
Increased motivation		Previously wasn't bothered about school, previously unmotivated? A shift in Ben's motivation, and desire to work hard at school

Appendix H: A Sample of the Master Table of Themes[3]

Subordinate Themes	Recurrent Themes	Participants Quotes
Relationships	Peer Relationships	Amy's Mum: "maybe if Amy hadn't tried to get in with these [girls] maybe her time there may have been different"
		Amy's Mum: "she sort of made herself a target by like trying to be friends with these girls"
		Amy's Mum: "the headteacher had said like not to like try and be friends with them, but obviously Amy did and it didn't work"
		Amy's Mum: "there was a few problems with a few girls that go there erm and they were basically like top girls in the school"
		Amy's Mum: "a few times they were waiting after school for her so it made her think like that she didn't want to go [to school B] and she just refused to go into lessons"
		Adam's Grandma: "I think it was because they weren't the pressures from other children you see I think he gets a lot of pressure to play the fool and disturb a class"
		Adam's Grandma: "no sorry they are not your friends because if they was your friends they wouldn't be doing it they would be encouraging you to be a good lad"
		Adam's Grandma: "it was a lot easier for Adam to disturb a class and play the fool that actually ask a question he would worry that maybe a couple of lads already knew and thought he was stupid for asking"
	Home-School Relationships	Adam's Grandma: "everything what goes on they are straight on the phone to me to let me know"
		Adam's Grandma: "I felt as though they was always on end of a phone if we needed to talk"
		Adam's Grandma: "I feel as though we get a lot of support as well as we support them"
		Adam's Grandma: "I think overall the school has been very good with him and they have been very patient with him"
		Adam's Grandma: "they just seem to have been very fair with him to be fair it's him what's a little bugger and incompliant"
		Ben's Mum: "I always felt like Sarah was there you know if something was going wrong that I could give her a ring"
		Ben's Mum: "she would send like a random text is everything going alright or I would let her know"
		Ben's Mum: "if he's been really naughty I will get a phone call off a teacher and say and they have put us on the phone to him before where they are like and I just say to him like come on Ben and then he seems alright"

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[3] Please note some quotes have been excluded from this table to protect the anonymity of the participants.