

“They’re teaching you for the real life, I understand that... but... it’s not always the best way to teach people, by being so stern”: A Narrative Analysis, Exploring the Experiences of Primary-to-Secondary School Transition from the Perspective of Excluded Secondary School Age Pupils.

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Summary

This Doctoral Thesis is comprised of the following three chapters: Part I: Literature Review, Part II Empirical Study and Part III: Reflective Account.

The literature review explores the relevant theories, academic literature and grey literature (e.g., government papers, national statistics) in relation to the topic area of primary-to-secondary school transition. This review highlights the vast amount of mainstream literature available and recognises the limited emphasis on exploring the views of marginalised Children and Young people (CYP) during this transition stage, especially those that are at risk of exclusion from school. Alongside this, the literature review highlights the rise in exclusion and the negative implications of exclusion for CYP, that is emphasised in the empirical literature-base linked to school exclusions. The literature review further highlights how the primary-to-secondary transition stage is an important area to continue research into, especially with a focus on exploring the relationship between this transition point and school exclusion. The exploration of the literature emphasises the gaps in understanding how vulnerable CYP, that are at risk of school exclusion experience their primary-to-secondary school transition.

The empirical chapter presents a Narrative Analysis (NA) study, which aimed to gather a rich and in-depth understanding of the lived experiences of three Young People (YP) who experienced primary-to-secondary transition from a mainstream primary to a mainstream secondary school, followed by a subsequent exclusion from their secondary school, post transition. Narrative Analysis was utilised to present an overarching 'Re-storied Narrative' which encapsulates the 'journey' of the YP's transition experiences, these narratives were captured over multiple semi-structured interviews, and through completion of a timeline activity in interview two. These narratives highlight the value of a relational and trauma-informed approaches at the time of transition into a new school, alongside the complex and multi-dimensional changes that occur during this transition stage, and how these affected transition for these three YP. The implications for professional practice and further research are discussed in light of these findings.

The final reflective chapter provides an account of my journey as a researcher throughout the project. This chapter explores my personal and professional experiences and ethical reflections as a TEP researcher at each stage of the project.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AP	Alternative Provision
AP	Assistant Psychologist
ADHD	Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
ASD	Autism Spectrum Disorder
BPS	British Psychological Society
CAMHS	Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service
CIN	Child In Need
C&I	Communication and Interaction
C&L	Cognition and Learning
COP	Code of Practice
CP	Child Protection
CYP	Children and Young people
DFE	Department for Education
DOH	Department of Health
EHENA	Education, Health and Care Needs Assessment
EHCP	Education, Health and Care Plan
EP	Educational Psychologist
FSM	Free School Meals
FTE	Fixed Term Exclusion
HCPC	Health, Care and Professionals Council
LA	Local Authority
MMT	Multiple and Multi-dimensional Transitions
NA	Narrative Analysis
NLR	Narrative Literature Review
PEX	Permanent Exclusion
PRU	Pupil Referral Unit
SEMH	Social, Emotional and Mental Health
SEN	Special Educational Need
SEND	Special Educational Need or Disability
SLCN	Speech, Language and Communication Needs
TEP	Trainee Educational Psychologist
TRF	Transition, Reintegration, Facilitator
YOS/YOT	Youth Offending Service/Team

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PART I: LITERATURE REVIEW

OVERVIEW

Transition from primary-to-secondary school is often characterised as a phase of heightened vulnerability for children and Young People (CYP), this has remained the consensus of researchers for many decades (Spernes., 2022; Beaston et al., 2013; Demkowicz et al., 2023). The transition from primary-to-secondary school, although not the first school transition for many CYP who attended pre-school, is considered one of the first complex life stages, where academic, social, emotional, physical, and environmental changes occur simultaneously (Jindal-Snape & Foggie, 2008; Jindal-Snape & Miller, 2008; Jindal-Snape & Cantali, 2019). It is, therefore, understandable that research on school transitions is well-established in the field of psychology, aimed at ensuring professionals in the field, understand how to support CYP and make this experience as positive as possible for them. Recent research efforts have expanded the study of the primary-to-secondary school transition, focusing on the effectiveness of interventions during this period, as well as identifying factors that make some CYP particularly vulnerable. For instance, CYP with Special Educational Needs (SEN), such as those with Autism (e.g., Makin et al., 2017), and children at risk of school exclusion due to behavioural concerns (e.g., Farouk, 2017) that are considered especially vulnerable during this time.

Initial readings of the vast amount of research in the field of primary-to-secondary transition was found to focus generally on the 'mainstream' population of secondary-school age CYP, focusing on their views of this transition stage, as well as the views shared by their parent/carers, and key secondary school staff and professionals (e.g., Dillon & Underwood, 2012; Tobin et al., 2012). As this is a well-researched area, this has led me to focus my literature review on how primary-to-secondary transition is experienced by the less dominant groups in society, such as CYP that are marginalised at this stage due to their behaviour and risk of exclusion. This specific focus also speaks to the theme across larger systematic literature reviews of primary-to-secondary transition that identify the gap in research exploring views from marginalised groups (e.g., Beaston et al., 2023).

To establish why it is important to focus on the specific 'marginalised' group of CYP that are excluded/risk of being excluded, simultaneous initial readings of literature around exclusionary practices, and how this is experienced by CYP in UK schools was undertaken. From exploring the smaller field of research looking into the lived experiences of exclusion, this led to understanding the dearth of literature focused on the specific topic of primary-to-secondary transition. Furthermore, pertinent literature exploring more general views of experience amongst CYP that are excluded (e.g. Farouk 2017), has further enhanced the understanding among researchers and education professionals, that the theme of transition

often appears in this field of literature, and therefore has led me to explore both the fields of primary-to-secondary school literature alongside exclusion literature in this review.

From exploring the vast literature base on primary-to-secondary school transition, as well as the vast exclusion literature base in the UK, there is an increasing understanding around the prevalence of SEND for CYP at the time of primary-to-secondary school transition, and what they need for this transition to be well-supported (e.g., Makin et al., 2017). Alongside the increased understanding of how SEND affects the primary-to-secondary transition stage, SEND is also relevant to the population of excluded CYP more generally, due to the increased level of SEND among PRU/AP pupils, compared to the mainstream population (Department for Education [DfE] 2019; DfE., 2023b).

This identified vulnerability for pupils in PRUs having difficult primary-to-secondary transitions, led to the decision to undertake a Narrative Literature Review of both the empirical and legislative literature related to this transitional stage. This review included the literature relevant to children and young people (CYP) with either 'identified' or 'non-identified' SEN, as well as those at risk of exclusion.

This literature review is structured into sections. Firstly, definitions of key terms are provided as they underpin the governmental context for CYP with identified and nonidentified SEND in England, and the prevalence of CYP with SEND attending schools within the current context (SEND Code of Practice: 0-25 Years Department for Education and Department of Health [DfE/DoH], 2015). This is important as it is a prominent feature of Educational Psychology (EP) work and how as a profession, we (EPs/TEPs) work to support CYP at risk of exclusion and CYP, with 'unidentified' SEND more broadly at times of primary-to-secondary school transition. It is useful to understand the categorisation of CYP with 'identified' and 'nonidentified' SEND and how it can impact on support offered and how school-life is experienced. Following this, the review focuses on further defining what it means to be a CYP excluded from education in England, exploring national legislation, guidance and recent statistical trends from the Department for Education (DfE). After defining this context for CYP with SEND and CYP at risk of school Exclusion, some grey literature (e.g., government papers and findings) and academic literature outlines the phenomenon of primary-to-secondary school transition further, including statistical trends, such as the rise of exclusion rates at this time in comparison to other stages of education (DfE 2019; Graham et al., 2019a; DfE 2023b).

Due to the inclusion of grey literature within my review, methodological literature relating to different types of literature review, refers to Narrative Literature Reviews (NLRs) being well-placed for synthesising grey literature alongside academic literature (Baumeister

& Leary., 1997; Ferrari., 2015; Greenhalgh et al., 2018), and therefore this has been considered the best fit in terms of style and format. The final section of the review focuses on the challenges associated with this transition stage for CYP, considering empirical studies concentrating on different factors e.g., social, emotional, academic challenges, and examining and synthesising this literature base to serve as a foundation to understand how CYP with SEND, and/or CYP categorised as at risk of permanent exclusion (with nonidentified SEND), are particularly vulnerable to challenges during this time. Further literature exploring systems theory has been identified and is reviewed to help understand transition as a phenomenon through systems frameworks. Exploring this evidence base identifies trends in research and the potential gaps in the literature, highlighting possible directions for future research and potential primary-to-secondary school transition policy changes. To conclude, key findings are summarised, and consideration of future implications for EP practice, both at a local and national context as well as establishing gaps in literature and opportunities for empirical research in this area.

INITIAL SEARCH STRATEGY

A decision was made to provide a Narrative Literature Review (NLR), as opposed to a full systematic review, as NLR can offer flexibility in the way it supports synthesis of a broader array of research and grey literature (e.g., government papers and findings). Furthermore, NLR can offer a flexible yet rigorous structure for synthesising diverse and complex bodies of knowledge, particularly suited to fields of research where theoretical 'nuance' and researcher reflexivity are valued (Baumeister & Leary, 1997; Ferrari, 2015). This therefore differs from systematic reviews, which prioritise rigorous and exhaustive searches and appraisal tools, narrative reviews can provide a more interpretive exploration of themes, tensions, and conceptual frameworks across varied sources, which was considered the best way to support my initial search across two topic areas, that heavily relied upon grey literature (primary-to-secondary school transition and secondary school exclusion). The narrative method of reviewing literature, allowed for a comprehensive review of literature surrounding primary-to-secondary transition experiences, paying particular attention to the underrepresentation of marginalised pupil voices, such as those who experience exclusion. Following guidance around the use of NLR, (Baumeister & Leary., 1997; Ferrari., 2015) this process involves clearly defining the review purpose, systematically searching for and thematically organising relevant studies, and adopting a critical and reflexive stance throughout the synthesis. This approach therefore supports the development of a nuanced and contextually grounded understanding of the literature surrounding primary-to-secondary transition and excluded pupils, which directly informs the gap in literature, and the subsequent study design and proposed research questions. This

process is integral to understanding exclusion literature and transition literature together and making meaning of key theoretical perspectives alongside themes arising, as well as considering the gaps and need to address them through further research.

During the initial searches of academic literature, the process included university library searches, that explored the EBSCO database. This was followed by searches of the PsycINFO and Scopus databases. In keeping with the narrative review, some additional searches were carried out via search engines (e.g., Google Scholar) and exploring journals relevant to the practice of EPs and school transitions (e.g., Educational Psychology in Practice and International Journal of Transitions in Childhood).

To start to build an understanding of the literature base, I decided to initially use broad search terms to find literature relating to school exclusion, separate to literature focusing on primary-to-secondary school transition. Initial search terms for exclusion literature included:

- "School exclusion",
- "Permanent school exclusion",
- "Inclusion in secondary education"
- "Exclusion in secondary schools",
- "Factors influencing school exclusion" AND SEN"

The following search terms for transition literature were used:

- "School transition",
- "Primary to secondary school transition".

The initial search yielded over 700,000 international academic articles, highlighting the extensive body of literature on the transition from primary-to-secondary school over the years. To focus these results, clear inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied as a next step, taking into account context such as being based in England. The search was narrowed to peer-reviewed, UK-based articles written in English and published from 2015 onwards. The 2015 cut-off was chosen deliberately, not only to manage the sheer volume of literature spanning decades but also because of the significance of the SEND Code of Practice (DfE, 2015). Introduced in that year, this code underpins the statutory duties of Educational Psychologists (EPs) and marks a key moment in UK educational policy. It directly influences the role of EPs in supporting CYP with SEND, making literature from this point forward particularly relevant to my search.

After applying this inclusion and exclusion criteria, the search results were reduced to a more manageable number of articles (approximately 4,350). This allowed me to observe

that literature on school transition is more widely researched than exclusion, with approximately 1,270 articles related to the broad term 'School transition.' However, only around 28 articles specifically addressed 'Primary-to-secondary-school transition.' In contrast, 571 articles related to 'School exclusion,' but only 9 of these focused specifically on 'Permanent school exclusion,' highlighting a significant gap in UK-based literature on permanent exclusion over the past decade. Additionally, 81 articles explored 'Inclusion in secondary education,' a notably smaller number than those related to transition.

From this smaller pool of articles, I began by reviewing those linked to exclusion and transition. For transition, I concentrated initially on large systematic reviews, identifying key articles and notable studies from these. In some cases, I extended my scope to include international literature if it was deemed 'essential' for understanding the primary-to-secondary school transition. By essential, this meant, it was an international study found to be relevant to the context of schooling in the UK. For exclusion literature, I began by analysing the search results and then expanded my review to include studies conducted prior to 2015 and relevant international research, ensuring consistency with the narrative approach, as well as continuing to search up until completion of the thesis to ensure new research integral to findings had not been missed. I also broadened my search to include thesis findings, so that I could understand what TEP researchers have contributed to this field of research and grow my own study from this basis.

CYP WITH SEND IN UK SECONDARY SCHOOLS

In this section, definitions and understanding within the current literature base in relation to CYP with 'identified' and 'nonidentified' SEND is discussed. This is to highlight how SEND is situated within literature around primary-to-secondary school transition, as well as literature exploring secondary school exclusion.

1. DEFINITION AND PREVALENCE OF SEND IN EDUCATION

In context of prevalence, the Timpson Review (DfE, 2019) supports the consensus that pupils in AP/PRU settings, are more likely to have SEN, and in particular, have a need related to social, emotional and mental health (SEMH). Furthermore, in accordance with the DfE's "Special educational needs in England: January 2023" report (DfE., 2023a), a significant proportion of pupils in PRUs are identified as having SEND. This is contrasted with the lower percentage of SEND in mainstream secondary schools, highlighting the notable disparity between the different educational settings.

When defining whether a CYP has a learning difficulty or disability within an educational context, I focus on the definitions provided by government policy. The term SEND has been the recognised legislative term in the English education system since 2015.

In this literature review, I adopt the definition of SEND outlined in the SEND Code of Practice (DfE/DoH, 2015) as a framework for defining and encompassing what is meant by 'learning difficulty,' 'disability,' or 'areas of need.'

The SEND Code of Practice (CoP) (DfE/DoH, 2015) was introduced in relation to Part 3 of the Children and Families Act (2014). It defines a CYP as having a 'learning difficulty or disability' if they 'have significantly greater difficulty in learning than the majority of others of the same age' or 'have a disability which prevents or hinders them from making use of facilities of a kind generally provided for others of the same age' (SEND CoP, p. 16). In accordance with this legislation, the SEND CoP outlines four main areas that provide an overview of a CYP's needs and how these should be addressed. These areas include Communication and Interaction (C&I); Cognition and Learning (C&L); Sensory and/or Physical; and Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH).

I have chosen to explore literature related to policy documents alongside the most current government-published statistics, such as the number of CYP with identified Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and the prevalence of school exclusions for these CYP in the UK (Graham et al., 2019). Understanding this context not only connects to the environment in which EPs currently operate but also supports the argument that it is relevant to review literature on both exclusions and primary-to-secondary school transitions together.

When I initially started to draft my literature review in June 2023, national statistics indicated a rising number of pupils identified with special educational needs (SEN) in England. According to the latest government data published by the DfE in June 2024, a year on from then and the number of pupils with SEN continued to grow (DfE., 2024a). Relevant to January 2024, approximately 1,673,205 pupils in England were identified as having SEN, this shows an increase from the previous year. Of these, 1,289,093 pupils were receiving SEN Support without an Education, Health and Care (EHC) Plan, representing a 4.5% increase compared to January 2023 (DfE., 2024a). Additionally, 517,231 pupils had an EHC Plan (EHCP), reflecting a 3.2% increase from the previous year (DfE, 2024a). These figures continue a consistent upward trend in the identification and support of pupils with SEND since 2016. The most identified primary type of need remains autistic spectrum disorder (ASD) among pupils with an EHCP, and speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) remains the most common among those receiving SEN Support without an EHCP (DfE, 2024a). This is particularly relevant as research shows that CYP with communication and interaction as their primary SEN are more vulnerable during the transition from primary-to-secondary school (Makin et al., 2017). Furthermore, empirical research suggests that a

significant percentage of excluded pupils have language and communication needs as their primary SEN (Clegg, 2004; DfE., 2023a).

According to the SEND Code of Practice (CoP) (DfE/ Department of Health [DoH], 2015), upon transitioning from primary-to-secondary school, 'SEN support should include planning and preparation for the transitions between phases of education.' It emphasises that 'to support transition, the school should share information with the school, college, or other setting the child or young person is moving to.' Schools are also encouraged to collaborate with parents and pupils to determine the information that should be shared during this planning process (DfE/DoH., 2015, p.102). Additionally, the CoP highlights the importance of joint commissioning arrangements among partners, such as CYP and adult social care services or between paediatric and adult health services, during transition points, including 'between early years, school, and college.' These arrangements aim to make the best use of all available resources in a community to improve outcomes for CYP in an efficient, effective, equitable, and sustainable manner. The goal is to provide 'personalised, integrated support that delivers positive outcomes for children and young people, bringing together support across education, health, and social care from early childhood through to adult life' (DfE/DoH., 2015,p. 39). However, aside from these general statements, the SEND Code of Practice does not outline any form of mandatory transition policy for the primary-to-secondary school phase. Consequently, the implementation of transition support is left largely to individual schools and practitioners, leading to variability, ambiguity and inconsistency in practices (Hughes, 2020; Ofsted, 2021; Norwich et al., 2018).

The significance of this work is accentuated by recent statistics indicating that children with SEND are more likely to be permanently excluded from educational settings, highlighting the theme of unsupported primary-to-secondary transition that has been captured in qualitative studies exploring the views of CYP, parent/carers and school staff in PRUs/APs who have been excluded (Beaston et al., 2023; Farouk., 2013; Farouk., 2014; Farouk., 2017). Additionally, CYP with SEMH needs who do not have an EHCP are significantly more likely to face fixed-term exclusions (FTE) (DfE, 2019). The most likely reason pupils are excluded is due to 'persistent disruptive behaviour' which is most commonly attributed to an SEMH and/or SLCN need, highlighting the vulnerability children with these needs have at the time of primary-to-secondary transition (DfE., 2024a).

CYP EXCLUDED FROM UK SECONDARY SCHOOLS

To introduce this section, it felt pertinent to include contextual information around current exclusionary practices that are guided by national government definitions of exclusion in England, and the reasons for exclusion from mainstream school. This section

also explores definitions of inclusionary practices, and how these are also guided by government and academic literature in the field.

1. DEFINITION OF UK INCLUSION AND EXCLUSION

In England, national level statistics inform us of trends in school exclusion rates. Higher rates of exclusion have occurred in secondary schools in comparison to primary schools, which has been the case for decades (DfE., 2019; DfE., 2022; DfE., 2023b; DfE., 2024b).

Due to the change of educational context over periods of transition, exploring the attitudes towards inclusion of staff supporting CYP in secondary schools, is another area that has been heavily researched. Researchers have focussed on staff attitudes to understand how CYP are included in a new school system, after primary-to-secondary school transition (Boyle et al., 2013). The Boyle et al., (2013) study of teacher inclusiveness, interestingly argues that overall, teaching staff were 'pro-inclusion', however this was conditional on adequate support and resources which may go some way to explaining the relatively high levels of exclusions in the system when compared to teacher attitudes to inclusion. An orientation to inclusion (although the definition of inclusion continues to be widely debated in research e.g., Ainscow, 2020) has been argued by many researchers over the decades as being key to successful schooling, and as being distinctly different to what it means to be 'integrated' within a school context (Ainscow, 1995; Ainscow, 2020). Ainscow adopts the ideology that integration is defined as making specific and limited arrangements that support an individual child with additional needs. Adjusting to CYP needs and accommodating for them, requires wider systemic adaptations to develop and create an inclusive school system. Ainscow's definition of inclusion as opposed to integration, implies that for inclusion to take place that the changes need to be evident within the structural systems of a school, to allow for all CYP to have their needs met within mainstream educational settings. This concept of inclusion means that schools as organisations, rather than individuals, should be held accountable for systemic change, (Frederickson & Cline, 2015). Ainscow (2005) later suggests that inclusion encompasses a moral obligation that ensures those CYP most at risk of underachievement, exclusion and/or marginalisation, are appropriately supported to be fully present, achieving and participating within their education system (Ainscow et al., 2006). Arguably, this view is presented to some degree within government level documents e.g., school inspection handbooks (Ofsted., 2023), highlighting this as a way of inspecting the inclusive nature and culture of a school, however the word 'reintegration' is often utilised within the educational system when supporting excluded pupils in PRUs back into mainstream school. Inspectors should be able to understand how schools clearly identify those disadvantaged, with additional needs or otherwise having barriers to

learning, and understand how the school acts to ensure their needs are met so that they have positive school life learning experiences, can positively engage with their curriculum, and achieve positive outcomes (Ofsted, 2023). Inclusionary practices embedded in school policies is considered an agreed aim for educators at national and local legislative levels. Internationally, the Salamanca statement (UNESCO, 1994) and nationally (in the UK), the SEND CoP (DfE/DoH 2015) demonstrate the importance of inclusion shared by many educators, stating that all CYP have a right to education within their local mainstream school. Given the national and international aims for inclusion, the phenomenon of school exclusion is a heavily researched area, whereby exclusion is termed across the literature as individuals being actively removed from schools, rather than schools adapting to the needs of these pupils (McCluskey et al., 2019).

Furthermore, school exclusion has been identified by many researchers as damaging to academic, emotional and social outcomes, with significant negative outcomes into adulthood (e.g. Levitas et al., 2007). This is a well-evidenced area of research that has been captured further in subsequent systemic literature reviews and national reports such as the Timpson Review (DfE, 2019) which found that certain groups of CYP, such as those with SEND, eligible for Free School Meals (FSM), male, and pupils from specific ethnic minority backgrounds (notably Black Caribbean) have been disproportionately represented in exclusion statistics over a long period of time. The review also highlighted that many of these exclusions could have been avoided with early intervention, improved behaviour support and management plans, alongside stronger multi-agency collaboration. This has led to many researchers endeavouring to explore the phenomena of school exclusions further, by studying shared concepts of 'inclusion' and 'exclusion' and how they are experienced by individuals within the education system. A vast amount of research in this field focuses on aiding better definitions of inclusion and how inclusive practices can be successfully implemented for all CYP, as well as aiding better understanding of experiences of less explicit exclusionary practices such as off rolling and internal isolation (Graham., 2019b; Thomson., 2019).

2. FORMAL EXCLUSIONARY PRACTICES

Since the 1990s, school exclusion has been identified as a problem within education (DfE, 2019; Parsons, 2018). Currently, this continues to be a pertinent issue and has only seemed to increase since my initial literature review searches in June 2023. In the 2021/22 academic year, England recorded 6,500 permanent exclusions, a notable increase from 3,900 in 2020/21. However, the 2020/21 figure was influenced by COVID-19 restrictions, which limited school attendance to key workers' and vulnerable children which explains the lower number of exclusions taking place. Although the 2021/22 total was lower than the pre-

pandemic year of 2018/19 (7,900 exclusions), more recent data indicates a continual rise since then. In the autumn term of 2023/24, there was a 39.98% increase in suspensions and a 35.48% rise in permanent exclusions compared to the same term in the previous year (DfE., 2024b). This trend gives weight to the growing concerns about school exclusion and suspension practices post-pandemic, highlighting the need for enhanced support structures for all stakeholders (pupils, parents school staff, and external professionals) especially during critical transitions like moving from primary to secondary education.

The government guidance titled 'Suspension and Permanent Exclusion from maintained schools, academies and pupil referral units in England, including pupil movement' (DfE, 2024c) defines exclusion as a situation where 'a pupil is no longer allowed to attend a school' (unless the pupil is reinstated). The guidance states that a decision to exclude a pupil permanently should only be taken in response to a serious breach or persistent breaches of the school's behaviour policy; and where allowing the pupil to remain in school would seriously harm the education or welfare of the pupil or others such as staff or pupils in the school' (DfE, 2024c, p. 13). This updated government guidance complies with the current government policies linked to behaviour policies and is defined as a 'companion piece to the Behaviour in Schools guidance (DfE, 2022)', which advises headteachers, trust leaders and school staff how to implement a behaviour policy which 'creates a school culture with high expectations of behaviour'.

Looking at statistics and changes in guidance and legislation over the past few years is useful for gaining a better understanding of this in the context of school transition. Exclusion rates during the 2021/22 academic year were presented for each year group. The statistics presented '0.02' as a percent of excluded pupils at the end of primary school in year 6 (aged 10) and '0.10' for CYP in year 7, at the start of secondary school (aged 11) (DfE, 2023b). These figures capture a steep rise in exclusions from Year 6 to Year 7, coinciding with the primary-to-secondary transition period. The 2021/22 data trends also highlight the level of exclusions exponentially increasing by age of CYP throughout secondary school years 7-9, (age 12 '0.19', age 13 '0.25'), and then falling again over years 10 and 11 (age 15 '0.09', age 16 '0.01'). Importantly, the highest percentage increase when studying trends across the national data sets for permanent exclusion, is from aged 10 (0.02) and age 11 (0.10) (DfE, 2023b). At the stage of writing this literature review, more recently publicised data from the DfE does not include specific percentages per school age yet, however general statistical trends can be observed, that provide insight into overall trends, such as a comparison of 2022/23 and 2023/24 data, presenting a 35% rise in permanent exclusions in secondary schools (2,679 to 3,608). Further data trends suggest

the suspension/exclusion rate for pupils aged 13-14, in year 9, increasing from 25.6% in 2022/23 to 28.6% in 2023/24, marking a 12% rise (DFE., 2024a).

From exploring literature around exclusionary practices such as PEX (Permanent Exclusion), and how pupils experience this, pertinent findings in this area illuminate the importance of researchers continuing to study this area in the future. Findings have identified the lived experience of pupils that have experienced PEX to link to feelings of stigma and marginalisation (Wood., 2012), as well as feelings of rejection, self-perception and aspirations (Thacker., 2017). Often post PEX, pupils attend PRUs, with the expectation of eventual 'reintegration' back into mainstream school afterwards (Wood., 2012; Atkinson & Rowley., 2019) and therefore studies exploring how this phenomenon is experienced is also helpful to highlight the key aspects of formal exclusionary practices in the UK education system. Atkinson and Rowley's (2019) study aimed to capture the perspectives of secondary aged pupils who had experienced exclusion and then reintegration back into a mainstream setting. Through Q methodology, the research identified key factors of successful reintegration that included positive relationships, individualised support and a pupil-centred plan incorporating the CYPs voice. Recent findings highlight educators' views that there are significant barriers to effective PRU provisions within the PEX discourse model, including having adequate mental health support for pupils made available, and managing peer-group influences (Kaip et al., 2024). This study calls for researchers to provide further thought around how best to manage exclusion for pupils and setting staff, while also highlighting the necessity for adults supporting PRU pupils, to be using trauma-informed approaches, due to both school-based trauma experienced, as well as trauma experienced outside of school. Research highlights the post-exclusion trajectories for YP that have been excluded from PRUs and/or special schools infers even more heightened risks of prolonged time out of education, poor health outcomes, including mental health, as well as an increase in criminal involvement (Pirrie et al., 2011).

Research linked to exploring pupil views on the PRU placement experience, has also highlighted the impact of exclusion on self-identity, relationships and future aspirations (Sangha., 2019). Findings from Sangha., (2019) also highlight the challenges in the system of 'reintegration', their research exploring lived experiences of pupils where it has taken a lot longer for reintegration back to mainstream school to occur, indicating a pattern of later reintegration to mainstream or returning to a PRU placement again in future (multiple PRU placements). Alongside this, pupil voice captured from this study shows us inner conflicts, generally linked to a desire to 'leave' the PRU and 'go back to' mainstream school as well as pupil's attributing their exclusion to their behaviour, or their perceived self-concept e.g. linked to their 'anger' or linked to their diagnosis. Implications and links to future research calls for

more pupil voice studies to take place, exploring gaps in understanding lived experiences from specific populations such as girls or those 'at risk' of exclusion that have not yet been excluded from mainstream school (Sangha., 2019). Due to the overlap of identified SEN needs for pupils that have been excluded, e.g. SEMH needs, research suggests that future exploratory studies incorporate the use of multiple interviews to ensure rich and in-depth understanding is gained from this participant group (Hingley., 2021; Sangha., 2019).

THE TRANSITION FROM PRIMARY TO SECONDARY SCHOOL

This section explores the definition of primary-to-secondary school in England, relating to the consensus of what this transition means for CYP, in relation to the age of CYP when this transition occurs. Alongside the definition of this transition stage, this section also addresses the vast literature-base that has developed over time that seeks to explore how this life event is experienced by CYP and what we have learnt from this so far.

1. DEFINITION OF TRANSITION FROM PRIMARY TO SECONDARY SCHOOL IN ENGLAND

In England, CYP typically transition from primary to secondary school at age 11, in accordance with national education policies and legislation. This is shaped by educational law, government policies, and various national initiatives. The following sections explore the empirical literature on this topic.

2. CHILDREN VULNERABLE AT TIMES OF TRANSITION AND FINDINGS FROM TRANSITION INTERVENTIONS THROUGHOUT TIME

Identified in the qualitative and quantitative literature base is a shared understanding that transition from primary-to-secondary school is a landmark moment in a child's life (Bagnall et al., 2020; Evangelou et al., 2008; Zeedyk et al., 2003). This period of transition has positives associated with it, such as feelings of excitement, routines, new friends, and opportunities (Coffey, 2013) and for the majority of CYP is associated with a short-term apprehension and long-term positive experiences of being in a new school. However, for some CYP there are long lasting feelings of anxiety and apprehension linked to this time that have longer lasting negative effects (Makin et al., 2017).

Throughout the literature base, research findings within this domain are commonly associated with large scale pre-post questionnaire data, and although these have been useful offering an empirical generalisable evidence-base, have not offered in-depth narrative accounts from children themselves associated with transition experiences (Dillon & Underwood, 2012; Tobin et al., 2012). Recent findings highlight a key limitation in most transition studies: that they often fail to capture in-depth, first-hand accounts from CYP. As a result, the existing studies often overlook the individual experiences and personal impact of

the transition process at the child level. This focus misses opportunities to consider individual characteristics such as child-rated levels of anxiety or sensory responsiveness as shared by the children themselves (Makin et al. 2017). Makin et al (2017), further highlights this as a limitation and a recommendation for future research to build upon their transition research. More recent literature that has explored the perspectives of children identified with 'vulnerability' either socially e.g., socio-economic disadvantage and classified as being eligible for Free-School-Meals (Garner & Bagnall., 2024), or from having identified SEND e.g., recognised neurodiversity (Sideropoulos et al., 2024) at the time of primary-to-secondary school transition. Findings have further supported professional understanding that for children with identified vulnerabilities the transition stage is much more challenging, with heightened levels of anxiety and social pressure, the authors discuss the need for more tailored support mechanisms in place, as well as advocating for earlier systemic approaches to support, beginning in year 5 to ensure preparedness for change and recognition of SEN.

The primary-to-secondary school transition is recognised in the literature as a significant period in a child's life, during which academic attainment may be at risk of stagnation or even decline (Cooper et al., 1996; Galton, 1997). Early studies from the 1990s provide valuable insights, many of which focus on how transition interventions are implemented to ensure a positive impact on academic achievement. For instance, empirical data indicating a decline in academic achievement, particularly in literacy among 11-year-olds during their first year of secondary school, led to the introduction of literacy summer schools as a government initiative in England in 1997, these aimed to boost literacy levels. Subsequent research by Sainsbury et al. (1998) examined the pilot programme and found that pupils' literacy levels, measured through national tests taken before and after the transition (in May and September), declined significantly, with no notable difference between those who attended summer school and the control group. Although limitations are evident in capturing this data and controlling for matching the control group, it is useful to consider this as one of the only studies of its time interested in eliciting a quantitative analysis of attainment issues post-secondary school transition. This has been a useful study in that it highlights the relevance of studying transitions further and exploring factors that challenge pupils at this time. Criticality can also be applied when analysing such studies that have utilised secondary performance data, such as the Galton study (1997), as it is likely influencing factors of academic performance testing, such as emotional and social stressors, (e.g., level of teacher support), have not been fully considered in the findings. This is pivotal to more recent studies, interested in understanding how to support not only CYP with cognition and learning needs (such as literacy needs), but also children with needs associated with communication, interaction, social, emotional and/or mental health needs, as

it is increasingly recognised in the literature (Garner & Bagnall., 2024; Sideropoulos et al. 2024). This is prevalent to keep in mind considering the most identified area of need for children with an EHCP in England is Autism, followed by SLCN.

Since the 1990s, research has progressively expanded the knowledge base on facilitating successful transitions to support academic achievement, while also identifying ways to better support the emotional and social aspects of this process. Researchers have inferred that alongside low academic achievement, there are other factors affecting children at times of transition (Anderson, 2000; West et al., 2010) including being from a minority culture, having behaviour issues at primary school (Lochman & Wells, 2004), socio-economic factors, race and gender (Harris et al., 2024). Harris et al. found that children with multiple minority identities face additional challenges at this transition stage, which impacts on self-concept and mental health, heightening their risks of exclusion. Other studies have also focused on factors that affect transition and have sought to understand transition interventions and their efficacy (Van Rens et al., 2018). The van Rens systematic review of successful transition facilitation, highlights how studies in the 2000s, infer age alone is not a factor that influences transition success/challenges (e.g., summer born), however factors such as self-confidence and academic support factors are associated with positive transition outcomes (McGee et al., 2004).

Overall, the above research highlights how difficult it is to generalise findings of effective transition across schools, due to the complex systemic factors and influences that play a role in the success and challenges CYP face at this time. A recent systematic review emphasises this point further (Beaston et al., 2023). Looking into past research presents an argument that primary-to-secondary school transition, is a time of multiple and substantial changes in a CYP's developmental, physical, organisational, social, and pedagogical environments, and therefore it is a very complex area to study and produce transferable and generalisable findings. It is also evident that for CYP, adjusting to such changes can be challenging, and difficulties with transition can have 'serious and wide-ranging long-term consequences' (Beaston et al., 2023). The current body of research does not yet provide clear pointers for educators, policy makers, researchers, and EPs in relation to the best 'programs and practices' to support children during this time. Nor are there findings that signify the most 'efficacious and feasible to deliver' programs for all students, including inclusive programs for pupils at an individual level, considering those from different populations and with different vulnerabilities.

The smaller literature base exploring systemic models of transition, shows that intervention and planning for transition is considered important by parents and staff for

transition success (Jindal-Snape & Foggie., 2008) and when reviewed, this is something both parents and school staff consider important for children to be best prepared for the primary to secondary transition. The 'My New School' intervention (Bunn & Boesley, 2019) is a way of supporting children with their primary-to-secondary school transition, however arguably there is limited generalisable findings attributed to the approach due to small sample sizes. Strong and trusting relationships between teachers and pupils has been highlighted in various studies as something CYP, parents and school staff agreed was important for reintegration (Graham et al., 2019).

Evident within the literature, is the theory that the transition from primary to secondary school can elicit social and emotional challenges for CYP (Jindal-Snape & Cantali 2019; Bagnall et al., 2020; Jindal-Snape et al., 2021; Spernes., 2022). There is also a shared understanding that for some individuals, for example CYP with SEN, in particular Communication and Interaction needs, and/or Social Emotional and Mental Health needs, transition from Primary-to-Secondary school is an even more challenging experience (Fayette & Bond, 2018; Hebron, 2018; Makin et al., 2017). There remains a scarcity of policy documents and evidence-based transition documents to support their transition needs and additional or different to those of other children (Beaston et al., 2023).

It comes as no surprise that exploring pupil perspectives of transition is a well-established field of inquiry within doctoral thesis literature. The process of reviewing some of the thesis literature on this, has helped develop an understanding of the areas already explored, and the potential implications and further recommendations for future research. When exploring factors influencing successful transitions for year 7 pupils, findings from one earlier thesis highlighted that while many pupils adapt well, the aspect of increased independence, for those with independence needs, is overwhelming. Highlighting further need for a tailored support system to manage pupil needs (Thackeray., 2014). Furthermore, these studies have explored the school support mechanism, e.g., 'nurture' support and its effectiveness for CYP considered socially and emotionally 'vulnerable' at the time of this transition (Parsons., 2013). Parsons (2013) suggests a similar trend in their findings, compared to other studies that emphasise the importance of relationships and suggests a 'flexible, yet principled' approach to nurture can effectively support CYP at this stage. It is however difficult for schools to accurately address which pupils are deemed vulnerable when there is not always an obvious identified need at the time of transition and this calls for research to delve into how we explore effective practice for CYP that are harder to identify as needing help e.g., having nonidentified SEN need. In more recent thesis studies, researchers have aimed to explore the voices of CYP, for example utilising grounded theory to explore the transition experiences from the perspective of year 8 pupils (Grant., 2020).

This thesis study introduces the theory called ‘the clockwork theory of secondary transition’ and findings illuminate the significance of early intervention, fostering agency and self-identity as key themes among pupil experiences of success. Furthermore, pupil voice has also offered insight relating to the importance of offering a ‘child-led’ perspective to transition support, including the CYP as much as possible (Doerr., 2020). Aspley’s (2023) thesis research utilised participatory research methods to delve into lived experiences of transition from primary-to-secondary school, for CYP that had identified SEMH difficulties. Again, their findings emphasised the need for relationships and inclusive practice at this pivotal life stage, it also found that fostering a sense of safety was also key for these pupils to have a successful transition into their new school. These are highly valuable findings and provide avenues for future research to explore gaps, e.g., how to support CYP with nonidentified vulnerabilities.

EXCLUSION AND TRANSITION

The reasons for high secondary school exclusion rates have been long debated. Graham et al., (2019) highlights the common themes in research that have aimed to provide a reason for the differential exclusion rates between primary and secondary school. Research so far suggests that this is very complex, involving many systemic factors. Overall, there is an understanding that there are different school cultures and practices between primary and secondary schools. Depending on the systems in place, transition management, and demands of school competition of exam results, and managing increasing SEND demands, are factors that may be influencing the exclusion rate in recent years (Farouk, 2017; Levinson, 2016; House of Commons Education Select Committee, 2018). In turn, published DfE statistics show that most registered pupils in AP (that include: PRUs, AP academies and AP free schools) are in Years 10 and 11 (DfE, 2018).

Findings reported within the Timpson Review of School Exclusion (DfE 2019) have considered various studies and government statistics and the report aimed to address and explore how exclusion was experienced by CYP and what the long term affects and outcomes are. The Timpson Review also aimed to identify different areas affecting and, in some cases, attributing to exclusion amongst CYP in schools. One area which the Timpson Review (DfE, 2019) focuses on is school transition, ‘many identified the need for support programmes at certain times in a child’s education. Parents, carers, and teachers raised with me that moving schools, particularly the transition from primary to secondary school, is a key point where children with additional needs are at heightened risk of exclusion’ (DfE, 2019, p.71), the review also highlights that ‘While higher rates of exclusion in secondary may be accounted for by other reasons, such as children behaving differently in a secondary environment or as they reach their teenage years, the steep rise in exclusion around

transition is notable' (DfE, 2019, p.71). Within the executive summary section, transition support is mentioned as an area to further improve and make suggestions such as the DfE establishing 'a Practice Improvement Fund' of sufficient value, longevity and reach to support LAs, mainstream, special and AP schools to work together to establish effective systems to identify interventions for them' e.g., 'transition support at both standard and non-standard transition points and across all ages' (DfE, 2019, p. 13). This is pivotal when considering the systemic role of EPs working with key stakeholders including CYP, schools, parents.

Farouk's (2017) narrative research, as mentioned within the Timpson Review (DfE, 2019), offers findings in the area of conceptualising both experiences of exclusion and primary-to-secondary school transition. Although the aim of this research was to explore how excluded CYP could explain and justify their position of behaviour at different times in their school life, talking about their transition experiences from primary to secondary school through autobiographical memories, was found to be a significant narrative shared among almost all participants. Farouk (2017) highlights the difference between the child-centred and personalised culture of primary school and the institutionalised and impersonal culture of secondary schools. This cultural shift between primary and secondary school is similarly noted in other research (Carrington & Elkins, 2002; Demkowicz et al., 2023). Other larger bodies of literature and international studies have aimed to quantify this change of culture by measuring structural, social and teacher support mechanisms (Margetts & Kienig, 2013). For example, Bru et al, (2010), conducted a quantitative study, that explored how pupils' perception of teacher support changes over time, progressively perceived as reducing in secondary schools as students get older. This is useful as it offers a large sample size and a different methodology to further generalise the findings found in qualitative studies.

Trotman et al., (2015), similarly to Farouk (2017), offer small scale qualitative findings that signify a perceived link among CYP, between negative primary-to-secondary school experiences and subsequent exclusion. Trotman et al. (2015) is a relevant study to consider, as it addresses a correlation in exclusion and transition challenges with a plea for researchers to look into this further. The study includes 49 children aged 13-14 who were interviewed alongside 8 behaviour coordinators working in secondary schools and Alternative Provision (AP). Of the children interviewed for the study, half of the pupils had been excluded and the theme of 'unaddressed transitional difficulties' was found to have led to some pupils falling behind academically, and transition challenges were perceived to link to 'problematic behaviour and amplified difficulties' in the first three years of secondary school (when exclusion rates peak as per government exclusion statistics and when the most pupils are registered into PRUs/APs) (DfE, 2018, Graham et al, 2019). What these

studies argue is that themes emerge about transition when speaking to CYP, and their parents about their experiences of school, as found from the Adoption UK, survey, (2017). Transition has not always been the target interview question and yet findings continue to highlight it as an emergent theme emphasising a gap for this piece of research to address within the empirical section.

Curson et al. (2019) sought to understand the child's experience of transition within a UK context, developing two core themes using interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA). Their analysis interprets the worry experienced by pupils at this time, anxiety being described as building over the summer before starting their new school and continuing into the first year of secondary school. They also present pupils views within two overarching themes, the first being 'the role of Friendships' and the second being 'Family Support', however, additional themes also emerged that include 'Bullying, Teacher Style, Independence and Responsibility, Homework, and Mindset'. Possible implications for schools and policy makers are detailed and areas for future research discussed, such as the differences of transition for children with siblings already at secondary school and those going without siblings there. Although not quantifiably measuring the efficacy of interventions, there are useful recommendations for future consideration that has been gained through IPA, such as ensuring interventions supporting transition are in place during the final year of primary school and continue well into secondary school (e.g., Curson et al., 2019).

RESILIENCY LITERATURE

From exploring literature related to primary-to-secondary school transition, there is a consistently highlighted theme of pupil resilience, as a critical factor in facilitating a successful transition from primary to secondary school. Resilience refers to a pupil's ability to adapt positively in the face of challenges or stress (Luthar et al., 2000), such as the stresses posed to CYP during the shift to a new school environment. A growing theme among transition research indicates that resilient pupils are better equipped to navigate the social, emotional, and academic demands of secondary school, often resulting in improved outcomes.

Niesel and Griebel (2005) for example contributed significantly to this understanding by examining how resilience helps children cope with the uncertainties and pressures of their primary-to-secondary school transition. Their research relating to resilience emphasises the point that pupils who demonstrate greater emotional regulation skills, social competence, and problem-solving are more likely to adjust smoothly during this critical period. Niesel and Griebel (2005) have further argued that fostering these skills in the final years of primary

education can play a key role in ensuring a more positive transition, both academically and emotionally. By building resilience, schools can support both academic achievement and emotional well-being, ultimately reducing the likelihood of negative outcomes such as disengagement or exclusion.

While resilience is often regarded as crucial for a successful transition to secondary school, this view has attracted criticism over time, particularly from research that is socially constructivist in nature. Being critical, it is argued that framing resilience as an 'inherent trait' children possess, risks promoting a "within-child" narrative, which places the responsibility for overcoming challenges solely on the pupil (Ungar, 2005). This approach can also lead to obscuring the impact of wider social, environmental, and systemic factors that shape a child's experience of transition. For example, Ungar (2005) further highlights how resilience is shaped by the interaction between individuals and their environment, arguing that it is not simply a personal or inherent trait, but one that can be fostered by systemic factors such as supportive relationships, school structures, and community resources.

Research by Howard and Johnson., (2000), also supports this perspective, showing that resilience in children is strongly influenced by external factors, including school culture and teacher relationships, which can either facilitate or hinder their ability to cope with the demands of transition. These findings challenge the notion that resilience can be fixed or "within-child", instead suggesting that it can be dynamic and shaped by social and environmental experience. Internationally (e.g. Akos et al., 2015; Kwarikunda & Okwakol., 2021), further studies have highlighted the need to establish "transition cultures" throughout a whole school system to ensure success and that by focusing too narrowly on resilience as an individual characteristic, the literature risks shifting the responsibility away from educational systems, and towards children and parents. Future research as highlighted by previous studies, should address the potential structural barriers affecting transition and also exclusionary practices.

Recently, (Bagnall et al., 2024) have found that longitudinal intervention, highlighted "emotional well-being", "coping efficacy", and "excitement towards transitions" significantly increased when a structured and skill-based programme was implemented and was started in Year 5, a year prior to the transition year. This highlights the need for a gradual, long-term approach rather than short-term interventions and supports the notion of a structural and systemic outlook on successful transition rather than an innate "within-child" one.

THE ROLE OF THE EP

1. THE ROLE OF THE EP DURING THE TRANSITION FROM PRIMARY TO SECONDARY SCHOOL

The role of the EP has changed and is continually subject to changes due to the social and political discourses EPs operate within, and how these discourses infer policy and practice changes within education (Kelly et al., 2008). The core role of EPs has however stayed relatively the same and Fallon et al (2010), argue that changes to the role reflects changes and pressures from the wider political systems and financial constraints LAs. Currently, there is an added pressure in that there is a shortage of EPs in the workforce, as indicated by DfE research (Lyonette et al., 2019). This pressure in how the EP role can be best utilised has instigated a debate as to whether EPs work at an individual child level or at a broader systems level to implement effective change (Boyle & Mackay, 2007). This therefore builds context as to how EPs can support issues such as exclusion and transition difficulties for individuals, as well as staff and parents that are also considered an integral part of the system for children at this primary to secondary transition phase (Jindal-Snape, 2019).

At an individual child level, EPs support with identifying SEND prior to transition, this may include the use of individual psychological assessment tools in accordance with the SEND CoP (DfE/DoH., 2015). Keay et al, (2015) highlights ways in which EPs are useful at a multi-systemic level, building on the existing empirical evidence base (Bloyce & Frederickson, 2012; Hamm et al., 2011; Slater & McKeown, 2004) that acknowledges how appropriately facilitating peer relationships and teaching social skills, through an evidence-based programme, assists children to 'settle' into a new school and make academic progress. with this in mind there are evidence-based interventions EPs can support schools to deliver, at a whole-school, whole-class and individual system level, that draws upon such findings.

Within current legislation such as the SEND Code of Practice (DfE/DoH, 2015) and the Equality Act (2010), gaining CYP voice is of imperative importance and feeds into the increase in the past decade of researchers finding new ways to incorporate the voices of those most vulnerable at times of transition. Considering some of the key paper findings as highlighted above, it is suggested that to move forward with supporting this stage of school transition, staff relationships with CYP is paramount, for example staff supporting and providing emotional support for vulnerable children at points of transition (Farouk, 2017). Here the role of the EP is fundamental as EPs facilitate staff to do this through disseminating research findings, offers of training, and evidence-based interventions, that can support emotional wellbeing in schools.

2. THE ROLE OF THE EP IN THE STATUTORY CONTEXT

The role of the EP is ever evolving and although the five core functions, coined by the Currie Report (Currie., 2002), are consistent across UK contexts, there are differences in relation to systemic and Local Authority agendas that mean EPs work in a multitude of ways. Within the current context, the demand for EPs has increased dramatically in recent years, this is noted within the 2023 report from the Department for Education that highlighted several key issues affecting EP services (DfE., 2023c). Notably, the demand for EPs has risen sharply due to an increase in Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs), the number of qualified EPs remains significantly below the number required to support the statutory EHCNAs (DfE., 2023c). Many EPs work within local authorities (LAs) and these LAs also report difficulties in EP recruitment, “attributing this to a lack of applicants and competition from private providers”. Furthermore, the report highlights the perception among EPs that their EP training does not effectively meet the ever-evolving demands of the role in context. Within the report, a theme expressed by EPs is that statutory work (with the increase in EHCNAs) dominates and compromises the role of engaging in early intervention, systemic and advisory work. This is key to understanding the context around EP capacity to support schools with areas such as primary-to-secondary school transition and exclusion, to be most effective given the current climate. The research report (DfE., 2023c) also notes that EPs face challenges in terms of ‘visibility’ working in schools. Key stakeholders do see EP services as a valuable resource, however there is an inconsistency in how the EP role is understood by these stakeholders, including parents and school staff. Importantly, this confusion can lead to underutilisation of EP skills which jeopardises the use of EPs at early intervention support for issues such as transition and exclusion.

3. FRAMEWORKS COMMONLY USED WITHIN EP PRACTICE AND EP TRAINING

The Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bronfenbrenner., 2005; Bronfenbrenner & Morris., 2007) has become an integral part of the EP profession and over time has been redeveloped to acknowledge changing contextual concepts of systems theory (Tudge et al., 2009; Rosa & Tudge, 2013). Rosa and Tudge (2013) explore how Bronfenbrenner progressively emphasised the role of the individual child at the centre of the theoretical approach and evolved the theory to incorporate the impact of time (chronosystemic) factors on child development. Ecological systems theory is therefore argued to be an applicable theory to incorporate when studying the socio-cultural phenomenon that is experienced by individuals interacting within their ‘context’, for example experiencing a period of school transition or exclusion from school. Bronfenbrenner (1979) further argues that the relationship between an individual and their context is an ‘intertwined

system' which in turn denotes human development, thus outlining how the developing individual is influenced by a range of ecological systems (termed microsystemic, mesosystemic etc). The literature, therefore, denotes that EPs are able to adopt a 'meta-perspective' (Beaver, 2011, p.16) of these systems due to the role of an EP existing outside the immediate systemic contexts in which the CYP is surrounded by (home, school), thereby allowing them to gain a holistic view. As such, EPs are skilled at understanding CYP at different developmental stages and due to them not being affiliated within the school systems, allows a richer opportunity for research from EPs to support further inquiry into contextual issues such as exclusion and transition challenges. Many studies (Bagnall et al., 2024; Beaston et al., 2023; Bunn & Bosely., 2019; Carrington & Elkins., 2002) have shared the next steps as finding ways to support transition through legislation and policy holders, EPs are another part of the wider educational context that can promote an evidence-base for best practice.

FRAMEWORKS WITHIN TRANSITION LITERATURE

Jindal-Snape et al, (2019; 2021) has further developed a systems theory approach named MMT (Multiple and Multi-dimensional Transition) that has drawn upon past research about transition challenges and supporting factors at times of transition. The MMT model encompasses beliefs and experiences about 'transitions, relationships, discourses and support systems' available to an individual from their environment. The theory, similarly, to the Ecological-systems theory, aims to address how the interaction across multiple and complex contexts, enables an individual to develop. In the case of MMT, Jindal-Snape et al (2019) argue that individuals navigate periods of transition through their 'dynamic social-psychological-educational-cultural resources'.

Within the literature base there are recent studies that have utilised Bronfenbrenner's bioecological Process-Person-Context-Time (PPCT) model (Bronfenbrenner., 2005) to explore school transitions. A large international study utilised the model to analyse self-reported questionnaire responses, and findings highlighted how social support is relevant to educational performances and proposed that for interventions to be successful they require social relationships to be built (Lin et al., 2024). Furthermore, studies have utilised the PPCT model within EP research of transition, including a recent thesis (Clifford., 2021) exploring the importance of resilience in the transitional process. Explicitly exploring how it affects 'children with a visible difference' at an individual level e.g., having a cleft lip and/or palate. Findings highlight the importance of the social and developmental context of the child, their immediate "microsystems, including the home (family), and school (peers)", namely embedded within the broader "mesosystemic layer" of the PPCT model. These findings are therefore similar to those shared by Lin et al., (2024) highlighting the significance of social

network. Additionally, utilising the Bronfenbrenner framework (Bronfenbrenner 1979; 2005), it has helped researchers to explore the different cultural and educational practices between primary and secondary schools (as part of the mesosystem). Consistent in peer reviewed and published research and thesis findings illustrate how changes in a child's learning environment and relationships during this time affects academic and social progress (O'Toole et al., 2014; Knight., 2013; Roberts., 2020). Furthermore, Roberts (2020), has highlighted through use of the Bronfenbrenner model how transition is impacted at a greater and more inconsistent level for children subject to a Child in Need Plan (CIN) or Child Protection Plan (CP), and therefore ways to support this 'vulnerability' for children in future may require more planning to ensure a successful transition.

Large international studies have also utilised the Bronfenbrenner bio-ecological model as a way to understand perspectives around educational transition. Strnadova et al. (2023), highlights through use of the Bronfenbrenner bio-ecological model and Kohler et al.'s 'Taxonomy for Transition Programming 2.0' model (2016); how important it is that transition planning takes place early, highlighting the need for the process to be person-centred including active involvement from the child at the centre, alongside effective collaboration between the primary and secondary school. The Taxonomy for Transition Programming 2.0, developed by Kohler et al. (2016), is primarily a framework that is established and utilised within the United States and therefore there are potential generalisability complications adapting this to a UK context. Core aspects of the model include five key areas: focusing on "student-centred planning", "skill development", "interagency collaboration", "family involvement", and systematic organisation supporting the journey from school into post-secondary life. Although useful to note, it is difficult to know how this model could be directly utilised within UK schools.

Interestingly an English study has utilised the ecological approach to critique the person-centred approaches of primary-to-secondary school transition for those with disabilities. It instead advocates for an ecological, public health approach that focuses on whole-system planning (Small et al., 2013). Conducted in Bradford, England, the study involved 43 young people from diverse ethnic backgrounds, utilising two interviews and the use of Talking Mats to track changes in the young people's social networks across the transition year. Findings again highlight the importance of family and school systems, however, revealed limited engagement within leisure and work for those moving on from school. The study recommends that starting transition planning by mapping the individual's surrounding systems and prioritising areas needing intervention will be a successful way forward, using Bronfenbrenner's ecological model of human development to underpin their analysis. Findings since have explored the use of Person-Centred Reviews further and

found it to be a model that is a “collaborative, constructive and reassuring process for families”, whereby information can be shared openly in a relaxed and structured meeting. Young People were found to be positive about this process and implications for good practice utilising the model and adapting this is shared, particularly emphasising the role of the EP (White et al., 2016).

Alongside the Bronfenbrenner framework, Keay et al., (2015) presented a framework for EPs, that was developed from thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews involving a small by representative sample of English secondary school staff. Findings highlight similarities shared by staff about the need for peer relations at transition, however differences shared about school strategy and processes to facilitate transition. With this, Keay et al., put forward the following strategic 5 steps within a framework that EPs can follow to facilitate the transition process. These are to: foster a shared understanding among stakeholders (pupil, staff, family etc), “promoting resilience in pupils”, “creating supportive school environments”, “addressing systemic factors”, and “tailoring interventions to the specific needs of vulnerable groups”.

Another model that has been developed from the research literature base around school transition is the aforementioned Jindal-Snape Multi-dimensional Model of Transition (MMT) (Jindal-Snape., 2010). This framework focuses on multiple factors influencing the process of transition, highlighting four key dimensions: as the “Social, Institutional, Curricular, and Personal”: It recognises that each child experiences transition uniquely, with personal characteristics influencing their resilience and success. Overall, the Jindal-Snape MMT model draws attention to the need for a holistic, multi-dimensional approach to transition, considering the social, institutional, curricular, and personal aspects that shape pupils’ experiences.

CRITIQUES AND GAPS IN LITERATURE

This literature review has found that as research has progressed in this area over time, it has focused more and more on the emotional and social factors during primary-to-secondary school transition and the potential vulnerabilities to be aware of at this stage. This is an area that is often evaluated on a large scale, mainstream population, with questionnaires measuring pre/post effects. Many studies focus on CYP in the mainstream population, without identified SEN and make this known in their sample criteria. It is still considered useful to evaluate these mainstream studies as they draw attention to the academic and social/emotional factors that make transitioning to secondary school an on-the-whole challenging experience for a large cohort of CYP. This has led to a smaller, growing, literature base that seeks to centre the experiences of CYP that are part of specific

marginalised groups, e.g., CYP with identified SEN, socio-economic disadvantage (in receipt of FSM) or vulnerable due to their family's engagement with a CIN/CP plan. Some studies in more recent years have focused on pre/post measures of social, emotional factors on successful transition to secondary. Such studies highlight how CYP with SEN are considered more vulnerable to challenges during this time (Makin et al., 2017) which makes it even more important to establish more findings from CYP about this. As a Trainee EP that works with a multitude of CYP that have 'vulnerability' for a myriad of reasons e.g., identified or non-identified SEN or significant difficulties managing school, this presents a gap in literature that is relevant to supporting transition for pupils that are harder to identify as 'vulnerable'. These pupils may present with behavioural concerns, however the root cause is not understood, whether that is linked to unidentified SEN, or unknown/hidden social trauma e.g. domestic/cultural challenges.

Within the large international literature base, there is not an emphasis on defining transition among stakeholders, Jindal-Snape's systematic mapping review (2021) highlights 14 literature reviews focusing on primary-secondary transition over the past 20 years. The systematic mapping review of prior literature reviews, published internationally between 2008 and 2018, found that research demonstrated a clear lack of conceptualisation of transition as a phenomenon either by researchers or participants. (Jindal-Snape et al., 2022). This review focuses on the importance of spending time defining transition as a phenomenon for a shared construct of transition among participants, as well as understanding the ontological position of researchers involved in studying this phenomenon. Jindal-Snape (2022) argues researcher ontology around what transition is, and how it is defined, has informed their conceptual framework to explain the multi-faceted processes surrounding the point of primary-to-secondary transition. Previous frameworks drawn upon in prior research papers, include the 'Stage-Environment Fit Theory (Eccles et al., 1993), Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), Life Course Theory (Elder, 1998) and Self-determination Theory (Ryan and Deci, 2000)'. From Jindal-Snape's (2022) review, it is apparent that a 'shared ontology' is not considered within the literature base, as they argue that no previous researchers 'have systematically analysed primary-secondary school transition ontology, (i.e., the researchers' worldviews, theories/models and frameworks that have guided their research) (Jindal-Snape et al., 2022). Furthermore, analysis of prior research has identified a predominantly negative discourse surrounding transitions. Jindal-Snape et al, 2019, highlight that only two of the 96 papers systematically reviewed focused on positive aspects of transition. Jindal-Snape's Multiple and Multi-dimensional Transitions (MMT) Theory (2021) is another model that has since been utilised to make sense of how transition is experienced by individuals in systems. This can be attributed to primary-to-

secondary transition, whereby CYP experience multiple transitions at the same time, in multiple domains (e.g., academic, social, physical) and multiple contexts (e.g., school, home). This argues transitions are not seen as linear but ever-evolving (e.g., Jindal-Snape and Foggie, 2008; Jindal-Snape, 2016; Jindal-Snape et al., 2019) and emphasises how multiple transitions can impact and trigger transitions for other people (e.g., friends, parents, teachers)' and vice versa, meaning that transition overall is a multidimensional process. Other systemic layers to the MMT model are highlighted as contextual, policy, government, curriculum and the pandemic.

It must be acknowledged that there is an overrepresentation of specific groups within the extensive transition and exclusion literature-base. There is a systemic imbalance in studies frequently overrepresenting the Global Minority (White) and underrepresenting Global Majority ethnic groups, which means the transition and exclusion experiences of ethnic Majority groups is not as well-researched (Cunningham et al., 2024; Javed et al., 2025). Alongside this remains an overrepresentation of Global Majority ethnic groups being excluded and attending PRU settings, which is captured through statistical data via the DfE Timpson Review (DfE., 2019). Ethnicity is often unreported and there is a gap in research around Global Majority experiences, this is a critique of the current literature base and something to be acknowledged within future research (DfE., 2024b; Ethnicity Facts and Figures., 2023; DfE., 2019).

A further critique of existing literature explored within this review around transition and exclusion, extends beyond issues of generalisability, and raises questions around representation and equity of participant groups within this field of research. For example, historically large and influential studies such as Galton study (Galton et al., 1999), has arguably shaped the trajectory of transition support at the time, however it is notable that the study overwhelmingly reflected Global Minority pupils, without identifying any explicit considerations around themes of ethnicity or structural inequities that may have formed part of the experience of transition for Global Majority pupils.

CONCLUDING REMARKS: CRITICAL THEORY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE: 'WHY IS THIS AREA SO IMPORTANT TO CONTINUE RESEARCHING?'

As mentioned above, the common school of thought in the literature base so far, is that primary-to-secondary transition is a challenging experience, that may in some cases lead to high levels of anxiety, with long-term negative impacts on mental health and wellbeing. Despite the quantity of research, as mentioned above, current school transition interventions are varied, and generally ineffective as previous research has lacked focus on the experience through the child's eyes (Curson et al., 2019).

Although there is a small field of research emerging that aims to explore the experiences of transition from the perspectives of CYP, such as Curson et al., (2019), Farouk., (2017) and Trotman et al., (2015). The main aim of many studies previously, has been to explore interventions and support systems for the mainstream population, with findings linked to attainment, friendships and bullying experiences, rather than exclusionary experiences or challenges for pupils with SEN, or at risk of finding transition particularly challenging due to other individual characteristics that lead to marginalisation. Studies within this field so far, shed light on areas of limited research exploring the link between 'inclusion', 'exclusion' and 'transition'.

Although there is a growing literature base exploring views of excluded pupils, there is space for the subject of transitions to be explored further with excluded pupils and those 'at risk of' exclusion, as it is often a theme that is identified during pupil voice research (Farouk., 2017; Trotman et al., 2015) and more recently in thesis findings (Higley., 2021). In the landscape of dominant quantitative studies, utilising a multiple-interview approach, participatory approaches and/or a Narrative Inquiry approach is also found to be a way in which CYP views can be captured in a meaningful way (Thacker., 2017; Higley., 2021). Pupil-voice from CYP that have been excluded are marginalised within our society, and this is captured within the dearth of literature including pupil-voice from this cohort. Therefore, there remains a gap in the literature, in capturing the voices of pupils that experienced a mainstream school culture and were excluded from it.

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PART II: EMPIRICAL PAPER

ABSTRACT

Government data trends have consistently shown the high levels of suspensions and exclusions occurring in UK secondary schools when compared to data related to primary schools and post-16 settings. There is a large body of research attributed to primary-to-secondary school transition literature, that has explored the views of Children and Young People (CYP), parents and staff, as well as looking more widely into systems and factors relevant to CYP at the time of primary-to-secondary transition. Previous findings suggest that views mainly derive from a majority group mainstream sample, and although there is a small growing body of research dedicated to exploring pupil's voices, past research focuses less on understanding the lived experiences of pupils that have been permanently excluded from their secondary school environment. It is therefore likely that their voices are missing when understanding the phenomenon of primary-to-secondary school transition and including their thoughts and ideas around how best to support this time of transition to secondary school.

This study was conducted with an aim to explore the voices of CYP, with a lived experience of the 'mainstream' primary-to-secondary school transition, alongside school exclusion. Semi-structured interviews were conducted, following a narrative design, to explore the experiences of primary-to-secondary school transition, of 3 CYP who had also experienced permanent exclusion from their mainstream secondary school (post primary-to-secondary school transition). These CYP are all from one large Local Authority within England and attended the same Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) setting. Using Narrative Analysis, a multi-interview study design took place, whereby participants were invited to complete a second interview and participate in a timeline activity to help further co-construct their 'stories'. 2 of the 3 participants engaged in both interviews. The findings explore the unique aspects of each narrative as well as the shared themes across the 3 narratives.

Findings from these accounts were jointly interpreted within the discussion section, implying the importance of understanding Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) needs linked to behaviour and what these CYP considered to be supportive and unsupportive to them at an individual level. The accounts imply the impact of systemic factors, alongside a loss of relational and trauma-informed approaches in secondary schools compared with their primary and PRU experiences. Additionally, the discussion of these findings explores the potential role of multi-professional working and how Educational Psychologists could support CYP with vulnerabilities at transition. Further findings suggest there is both a role in using narrative approaches and timelines in the future, as well as attributing person-centred approaches to support CYP, in future work around primary-to-secondary school transition.

INTRODUCTION TO EMPIRICAL CHAPTER

Primary-to-secondary school transition is considered a prominent life stage for CYP, and a time of heightened vulnerability (Bagnall et al., 2023; Jindal-Snape et al., 2020; Jindal-Snape et al., 2021). Research has drawn a key link between heightened vulnerability for CYP at this stage of transition, and belonging to a marginalised group, such as having a Special Educational Need or Disability (SEND) and/or being considered 'at risk of exclusion' due to misunderstood behavioural concerns (Department for Education [DfE], 2019; DfE., 2023a; DfE., 2024a). Exclusion from school, is a well-researched phenomenon, and it is identified that exclusion heightens the risk of poorer social, academic, health and well-being outcomes for CYP (DfE., 2019; Joseph & Crenna-Jennings., 2024; Pirrie., 2011; Trotman., 2015), and therefore lowering exclusion and prioritising inclusion, is a shared aim among professional groups supporting CYP. To further support lowering exclusion rates, professionals must aim to better understand the vulnerabilities that lead to 'the risk of exclusion the first place (DfE., 2019; Graham et al., 2019; Joseph & Crenna-Jennings., 2024; Trotman., 2015). Exclusion rates in secondary schools are incrementally rising over time (DfE., 2024b), and CYP who are attending PRUs, are underrepresented in the field of primary-to-secondary transition literature (Demkowicz et al., 2023; Lawrence, 2011; Smith., 2023), therefore gaining insight of their experiences of this transition stage, and what can be learnt from this cohort is often overlooked. The PRU population of CYP are known to represent a higher number of CYP with SEND, than mainstream schools (DfE., 2019; DfE., 2023a; DfE., 2024a), which also highlights the potential heightened vulnerabilities faced by them at their primary-to-secondary school transition stage. When SEN such as Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) is left unsupported, misunderstood as bad behaviour and/or unidentified as an SEN need, this can attribute to exclusion (DfE., 2019; Graham et al., 2011; Ford et al., 2020). This phenomenon is also shown through statistics representing the high number of exclusions occurring within the first three years post-transition (DfE., 2019; DfE., 2023d). This is relevant to future research within the field of Educational Psychology, due to the role of EPs in supporting CYP with heightened vulnerabilities, aligned with statutory and professional guidance, such as the SEND Code of Practice and Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC), Standards of Proficiency (DfE., 2015; HCPC., 2023). The below sections will address a general overview from the literature review that helped formulate a rationale for this project based on identified gaps in the research area.

From exploring and considering prominent academic literature alongside the grey literature (e.g., government papers, national statistics), within the Narrative Literature Review, this has been valuable in highlighting the prevalence of school exclusions over time and the importance of continuing to explore the topic of primary-to-secondary school

transitions (DfE, 2019; DfE., 2023a; DfE., 2024a). Focusing on permanent exclusion and suspension rates, secondary schools are representative of a significant proportion of these, (DfE, 2019; DfE 2023a; Graham et al., 2019). Importantly, the highest percentage increase in exclusion rates, when studying trends across the national data sets for permanent exclusion, is from age 10 and age 11. This rise in permanent exclusion coincides with the ages of CYP at the time of primary-to secondary school transition. Although there is a rise in primary school exclusions (Feingold., 2023) and a peak rate of exclusion for year 9s, the overall data trend shows a steep incline in exclusion rates from primary to secondary school (DfE, 2023a; DfE., 2023b; DfE., 2024a; DfE., 2024b). This topic is relevant, addressing the aim of furthering professional knowledge to reduce exclusion where possible, whilst also considering what can be done to support CYP excluded from school, or at risk of exclusion.

1. PRIMARY-TO-SECONDARY SCHOOL TRANSITION

A review of the literature on primary-to-secondary transition over time, starting from the 1990s, has highlighted the dominant focus of realist approaches in this area, promoting outcomes and findings generalisable to the mainstream population, some of these are large-scale international studies (Bru et al., 2010; Carrington & Elkins, 2002; Demkowicz et al., 2023; Margetts & Kienig, 2013). There are large-scale survey studies exploring pre-post measurable data, the majority of which focus on the general population. Although useful for evaluating the general needs and challenges of CYP during this life stage, it perhaps misses out on opportunities to explore how this time affects CYP with identified/unidentified SEN, or CYP at increased risk of vulnerability and exclusion for other individual characteristics such as belonging to a minority group, or multiple minority groups (Harris et al., 2024; Lochman & Wells., 2004). Interestingly, recent transition literature shares findings that pupils with identified SEN (specifically language and communication needs) are particularly vulnerable at this transition stage, (Makin et al., 2017) and urges future research to explore CYP views in more depth, for CYP with a formal diagnosis, and for those without.

2. EXCLUSION AND PRIMARY-TO-SECONDARY SCHOOL TRANSITION

Government commissioned research has been completed to explore the phenomenon of exclusion, such as the DfE (2019) Timpson Review (referenced above) (DfE, 2019; Graham et al., 2019). The Timpson Review (DfE., 2019) has identified areas affecting and, in some cases, attributing to exclusion amongst CYP in schools. One area which the Timpson Review focuses on is school transition, sharing that; “many identified the need for support programmes at certain times in a child’s education. Parents, carers, and teachers raised... that moving schools, particularly the transition from primary to secondary school, is a key point where children with additional needs are at heightened risk of exclusion” (DfE, 2019, p.71). Transition support is mentioned in the Timpson Review (DfE,

2019) as an area to further improve, implementing “a Practice Improvement Fund of sufficient value, longevity and reach to support LAs, mainstream, special and AP schools to work together to establish effective systems to identify interventions for them...transition support at both standard and non-standard transition points and across all ages” (DfE., 2019, p. 13). Themes of transition affecting exclusion are notable in the findings of qualitative studies (e.g., Adoption UK, 2017; Farouk, 2017; Trotman et al., 2015). Trotman et al., (2015), similarly to Farouk (2017), offer small scale qualitative findings that signify a perceived link among CYP, between negative primary-to-secondary school experiences and exclusion. Of the CYP interviewed in the Trotman et al., (2015) study, half had been excluded and the theme of “unaddressed transitional difficulties” was found to have led to some pupils falling behind academically, and transition challenges were perceived to link to “problematic behaviour and amplified difficulties” in the first three years of secondary school (when exclusion rates peak as per government exclusion statistics). What these studies argue is that themes emerge about transition when speaking to CYP, and their parents, about their experiences of school, (as found from the Adoption UK (2017) survey). Transition has not always been the target interview question and yet findings consistently highlight it as an emergent theme.

3. NATIONAL AND LOCAL CONTEXT AND PRIORITIES

At a national level, exclusion rates have been explored for decades and continue to be a priority. This has become more relevant due to statistical data trends highlighting inequalities, showing certain groups of CYP being more likely to be excluded from school, both for a suspension and permanent exclusion (such as CYP with SEMH and Speech, Language and Communication Needs [SLCN]) (Department for Education (DfE), 2023a; DfE 2023b; DfE 2024a; DfE 2024b). Most significant to the rationale of including pupil voice from excluded pupils in this study, is the continual rise in exclusion rates, whereby data from 2016 shows an incremental increase, among secondary school pupils, post primary-to-secondary school transition (DfE, 2023b; DfE, 2024b). Alongside this rise, is the lack of literature seeking to explore the experiences of primary-to-secondary transition from the marginalised group of permanently excluded (PEX) CYP. Most recent guidance for management of suspensions and permanent exclusions (DfE, 2023d), identifies that there is still variation in exclusion rates and “it is important that schools, local authorities and local partners work together to understand what lies behind local trends” (DfE, 2023d, p.23). Furthermore, this guidance states that local leaders should work to identify any gaps, “they are in a position to act to ensure those who work with children have the training, services and support they need to address these” (DfE, 2023b), suggesting the need for further research into exclusion and transition, to further explore the phenomena together.

4. ROLE OF THE EP

An underpinning aspect of the EP role is to work collaboratively with CYP, and other key stakeholders (e.g., parents and school staff), at times of change. This is notable in the Health, Care and Practice Council (HCPC, Standards of Conduct, Performance and Ethics-SoCPE, 2024) guideline to “Demonstrate knowledge of theoretical and research perspectives on organisations, systems and the process of organisational analysis and change, and work in collaboration with fellow professionals to bring about change, through policy and systems development”. School transition and exclusion are considered by previous researchers as notable periods of change for CYP and key stakeholders (Bagnall et al., 2020; Dockett & Perry, 2021; Margetts & Kienig, 2013) and therefore supports the rationale as a TEP researcher, to continue research in this area. Due to the understanding that primary-to-secondary school transition is often characterised as a phase of heightened vulnerability for CYP, understanding how best to address and support these vulnerabilities aligns with the EP role (Beaston et al., 2023; Demkowicz et al., 2023; Spernes, 2022).

RATIONALE SUMMARY AND RESEARCH AIMS

As discussed above, previous research has focused on gaining a general understanding of parental, staff and CYP views of transition, and has highlighted that primary-to-secondary school transition is considered a major life event (e.g., Bagnall et al., 2020). This research addresses the continuing research gap around how this life event is experienced by CYP vulnerable at this stage due to their risk of exclusion, understanding their experiences in-depth (Bagnall et al., 2020; van Rens et al., 2018). Understanding that the primary-to-secondary-school transition can be particularly challenging for CYP with SEN and/or those at risk of exclusion, highlights both the relevance of this issue to the current educational context in which EPs operate within. This supports the call for future researchers to further explore the links between exclusion and school transitions (Bagnall et al., 2020). It is felt that exploring the perspective from pupils that have already been excluded would meet the research aims to explore this topic, as they have experienced the phenomenon of primary-to-secondary school transition and a subsequent exclusion, and hearing their experiences would lead to a better understanding. This research will therefore explore the experiences of primary-to-secondary school from the perspective of permanently excluded (PEX) secondary school pupils. This research aims to capture CYP voices, without the incorporation of other key stakeholders such as parent/carers and school staff, therefore justifying the rationale to advocate for the voice of the CYP to be heard.

EXPLORATORY RESEARCH QUESTIONS

I found that the notion of ‘Big’ and ‘Little’ ‘Questioning’, tended to be a common feature within qualitative study design, aligned with an ‘exploratory’ nature (Berger &

Luckmann., 1966; Savin-Baden & Major., 2013; Willig., 2013). In relation to studies framed by a social justice element, I noticed this style of questioning was also in alignment with a Socially Constructionist paradigm, and this felt in keeping with the researcher positioning and study aims. Keeping a broad overarching question 'The Big Question' supports the exploration of narratives led by participants. The additional questions around significant people and events 'The Little Questions' helps the researcher to further co-construct narratives with participants over time. The third question was decided as an addition, to support the construction of what can be learnt across participant stories, particularly pertinent to my researcher role as a TEP.

How do excluded secondary school pupils view their experiences of primary-to-secondary school transition?

1. What do secondary school pupils, who have been excluded, identify as significant events during their primary-to-secondary school transition period?

2. Who do secondary school pupils, who have been excluded, name as significant people involved during their primary-to-secondary school transition period?

3. What can be learnt about the primary-to-secondary school transition period, from the experiences of pupils excluded from secondary school?

ONTOLOGICAL AND EPISTEMOLOGICAL POSITIONING

Ontology considers the ways in which reality is understood, whereas epistemology is concerned with the way in which knowledge about that reality is acquired. Both concepts of ontology and epistemology are important in the shaping of research design (Richards, 2003). A broad area within existing literature on school exclusion and primary-to-secondary transition adopts a realist perspective (e.g., Dillon & Underwood, 2012; Tobin et al., 2012). This realist 'truth' around the number of exclusions is further exemplified by national government statistics (DfE) that seek to quantify recorded exclusions (e.g., DfE 2023b; DfE, 2024b). This prevalence of statistical data reflects a dominant ontological realism within society, whereby statistics are important to national understanding of a phenomenon such as exclusion. This dominant framing leaves a gap for social constructionist research to explore how marginalised individuals, who are often reduced to DfE statistics, experience such life events and construct knowledge about their own realities and experiences of school. This study therefore seeks to delve beneath statistical representations by engaging with the narratives of secondary-aged pupils who have experienced both primary-to-secondary school transition and permanent exclusion, to understand their lived experiences.

This research adopts a relativist ontology which assumes that reality is subjective and co-constructed through social interactions and individual experiences (Guba & Lincoln,

1994). Unlike realism, which infers that a single, objective reality exists independent of human understanding, relativism suggests that knowledge is shaped by the way individuals interpret their experiences, and that we can learn about, and acquire knowledge through human interactions. In the context of this study, “primary-to-secondary transition” as a phenomenon, can be understood as a longstanding process, with this comes a well engrained shared societal meaning, or ‘truth’ that moving from Year 6 to Year 7 is a structured and widely recognised educational progression. From a realist perspective, year group classifications can be objectively observed and measured. However, the lived experiences of transition, particularly for those who have been permanently excluded, are not captured in statistical datasets, and there is so much we don’t know about how this event has been experienced. Experience and knowledge about this transition period can be constructed through further exploring personal narratives, as well as understanding the social and educational contexts they are positioned within. Within the wider social and educational context, post-transition time, secondary school exclusions and suspensions are on the increase, and therefore it is essential that these experiences are better understood.

This study aligns well with a social constructionist epistemology, seeking to explore how knowledge about primary-to-secondary transition is co-constructed through individual and social narratives. Social constructionism asserts that meaning and knowledge can emerge through the use of human qualities, e.g., language, discourse, and social interaction, rather than being objectively measurable (Burr, 2015; Gergen, 1999; Shotter, 1993). Dewey’s (1938) perspective further supports this epistemological framing, emphasising the role of human experience, alongside reflection, when constructing newfound knowledge. Dewey has also argued that meaning is derived from interactions between individuals and their environments, which reinforces the notion that educational experiences, such as school transitions, are shaped by both personal and social narratives. Dewey’s work aligns with social constructionism, recognising that knowledge can be dynamic and shaped through time and discourses, human experience, and interpretation, rather than just existing as an objective truth.

By centring the voices of pupils who have been excluded, this gives space for individuals typically represented and reduced to statistics, to share their views. Therefore, this study aims to challenge dominant narratives and seeks to amplify the perspectives of a smaller and more marginalised group of individuals situated within the education system. In doing this, a social justice dimension is introduced. This also aligns well with the social-constructionist epistemological position in recognising the value of narrative inquiry/analysis as a means of uncovering alternative understandings of school transition, beyond institutional frameworks. By exploring how pupils construct meaning from their own

experiences of primary-to-secondary school transition, this study contributes to a wider understanding of how reality is shaped through social interactions and discourse, rather than simply accepting transition as a fixed, objective event.

NARRATIVE RESEARCH AND SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONISM

The social constructionist epistemology of this study means that Narrative Inquiry or Narrative Analysis are fitting methodological approaches to undertake, in that narrative research has been previously used to provide in-depth insights of lived experiences from people in less dominant positions within their societal contexts. It has been used as a platform to explore the voices of people, that are often marginalised; and is therefore fitting for exploring experiences of permanently excluded pupils. Narrative research is often used in critically exploring perceptions of dominant societal discourses, such as medical and educational discourses, that are often dominated by mainstream discourses (Gay., 2018). Gay's (2018) study, for example, adopted Narrative Inquiry to delve beneath teacher experiences navigating the school system, with a focus on understanding the position and lived experiences of teachers and students from less dominant cultural communities. From adopting this approach, in depth findings highlight challenges faced and help explore ways in which schools can become more culturally responsive to support people from less dominant cultural groups in the future.

Narratives are fundamental to how individuals make sense of their experiences, and they can provide insight into how reality is personally and socially constructed (Bruner, 1991). Bruner argues that human thought is largely organised through our storytelling, it is inherently human to structure our experiences in a narrative form and argues that we continually use this approach to construct and communicate meaning to others. In the context of this study, individual stories of primary-to-secondary transition and exclusion offer a way to better understand how these individuals position themselves within, and respond to, the dominant societal discourses about education.

Narrative research methodology is also relevant to this study because it recognises the role of discourse in shaping identity and experience (Riessman, 2008). Social constructionism suggests that knowledge is created through social interactions, and narratives can function as a fundamental way to share and co-construct meaning; within cultural and institutional contexts. In this study, excluded pupils' narratives exist within a broader educational discourse that myself as the researcher also operates within (during my present and previous job roles). Within the educational discourse, there is a dominant narrative that 'exclusion' rates from secondary school are on the rise, and this is due to a failed primary-to-secondary school transition and a failure to conform to normative

expectations, this is negatively portrayed through statistical data. By focusing on the narratives of individuals that have been excluded from a mainstream secondary school, this study seeks to challenge dominant and reinforced understandings of transition and exclusion, that rely on statistical representations rather than lived experience.

Furthermore, within the education system, discourse and language play a fundamental role in constructing meaning around pupil identity, success, and failure (Gee, 2014). Schools function as sites of discourse construction, reinforcing norms and dominant narratives around behaviour, academic ability, and inclusion. The excluded pupils that are a part of this study have been subject to labels such as "permanently excluded" or "at risk," of exclusion, which carry social and institutional meanings that can shape their self-perception. Narrative research allows for an exploration of how these pupils accept, resist, or reconstruct these presumed identities through their own storytelling. In doing this, the approach aligns with the study's broader social justice aims, providing a platform for marginalised voices that are typically absent from dominant educational narratives that have been explored previously.

By engaging with pupils' narratives, this study contributes to a social constructionist understanding of school transition from YP that were at 'risk' of exclusion at the time of transition, acknowledging that experiences are shaped through interaction with discourse, social understanding, and personal meaning-making, rather than viewing transition as a static and objectively measurable event, that is the same for everybody that experiences it. Narrative research in this instance, hopefully allows space and empowers these pupils to better make sense of their realities within the education system they are situated within, and which myself as a researcher works within. Understanding the unique and shared pupil experiences, will aid understanding of areas that can be further supported by the education system and Educational Psychologists.

THE CURRENT STUDY

METHODOLOGY

1. DESIGN

As highlighted by Creswell & Poth (2018) research can have 4 categorised purposes: "explanatory, emancipatory, exploratory and evaluative". This study considers the purpose as "exploratory" in its approach, hoping to gain understanding by exploring narratives (Robson & McCartan, 2016). This has led to a qualitative design being a best fit, utilising a Narrative Analysis as detailed by Clandinin & Connelly, (2000) and Josselson and Hammack, (2021) to further explore this topic area. In line with the social constructionist paradigm, a qualitative method utilising Narrative Analysis enables co-construction of

meaning, between myself as the researcher and the participants involved in the Narrative processes, thus allowing for a nuanced exploration of individual experiences within their social and educational contexts. It can be hard to find a clearcut definition of 'Narrative' approaches and in literature it is both conceptualised as a 'product' and a 'process'. The 'product' refers to the narrative that has been conveyed through interviews or discourse analysis and the 'process' refers to the engagement in the storytelling activity, and the meaning derived from this, which is momentary and a shared process between the researcher and participant (Creswell & Poth., 2018; Kramp., 2004). Narrative Inquiry emphasises the act of 'storytelling' which is considered the way in which individuals can connect with their own identities, actions and meaning of their role within a wider social context (Josselson and Hammack., 2021). Further research supports the importance of the storytelling aspect, for example Reese et al., (2017) suggests that adolescents that were able to tell their personal stories, explaining why events happened, and how this had further influence on them personally, were able to make sense of their experiences through storytelling, helping them to develop a stronger and more positive sense of self. When designing a method to support YP in PRUs to share their experiences, it felt central to the research aims, to include a methodology that focuses both on the narratives shared (as a product of interviews with a researcher), as well as the process of sharing personal stories, so that meaning is sought for the young people involved, supporting their sense of self as a part of this. The storytelling process means that the 'storyteller' (in this case the participant), uncovers a sense of self and identity through the structure and function of the process, this in turn actively constructs meaning to their personal experiences (Robson & McCartan., 2016; Hiles et al., 2017), this meaning-making process informs researchers to conduct in-depth knowledge and analysis of the stories shared (Smith., 2020).

Furthermore, applying Narrative Analysis to explore the perspectives of pupils in PRUs is particularly fitting, relevant to the educational discourse surrounding them. PRUs often support YP who may have experienced challenges in mainstream educational settings, and their unique perspectives are central to understanding their educational journeys. By employing narrative design, researchers can facilitate a platform for these YP to share their stories, gaining a deeper understanding of their identities, challenges, and hopes, which in turn helps them make sense of their own lived experiences (Byrne., 2017; Mertova & Webster., 2020).

Within the field of Narrative research, the notion of 'stories' is very relevant in the sense that we often voice our lived experiences to others in the form of a 'story', whereby our events are connected through a plot, with characters and a constructed beginning, middle and end (Sarbin, 1986). Polkinghorne (1995) further emphasised the use of

sequencing to help provide structure to our storytelling and help provide meaning of lived experiences. Integrating timelines into narrative research, is a methodological design choice that helps to structure the exploration of participants' lived experiences by providing a chronological framework. This links to the Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) three-dimensional space approach to narrative research, in that timelines allow researchers and participants to map experiences across different time frames, exploring patterns and key turning points. This supports the 'Temporal' elements of the Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) three-dimensional space, exploring past-present and future (see Table 1).

Placing personal events onto a physical timeline, can also highlight how interactions with other people 'characters' in your story influenced your experiences over time, and this can support the social dimension in the three-dimensional space theory (personal and interpersonal space). Timelines can support the third dimension of 'place', in that it is a way to capture the role of settings over time. For example, the role of primary vs. secondary school, home vs. PRUs etc). For YP in educational settings such as PRUs, the use of timelines alongside a narrative approach, can serve as a tool in which interviews can be scaffolded. The use of timelines has been used in the past to help individuals explore complex subjects within interviews (Sheridan et al., 2011; Kolar et al., 2015). The use of timeline mapping has also been utilised to aid self-expression, voicing opinion and sharing experience in research settings (Abildgaard and Kallestrup., 2023). Incorporating timelines into narrative research therefore allows structure and the analysis of the temporal dimensions of personal stories, enriching our understanding of how individuals construct meaning to their life's experiences over time.

Table 1: Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) Three-Dimensional Space Framework (adapted from Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002)

Interaction		Continuity			Situation
Personal	Social	Past	Present	Future	Context
<i>Look inward to internal conditions, feelings, hopes, aesthetic reactions, moral dispositions.</i>	<i>Look outward to existential conditions in the environment with other people and their intentions, purposes, assumptions, and points of view.</i>	<i>Look backward to remembered experiences, feelings, and stories from earlier times.</i>	<i>Look at current experiences, feelings, and stories relating to actions of an event.</i>	<i>Look forward to implied and possible experiences and plot lines.</i>	<i>Look at context, time, and place situated in a physical landscape or setting with topological and spatial boundaries with characters' intentions, purposes, and different points of view.</i>

2. PARTICIPANTS

RECRUITMENT PROCESS

The participants for this study were gained via a small purposeful sampling recruitment method (Robson., & McCartan., 2016). This was for two reasons, one reason it was purposeful was regarding ethical consideration, for example ensuring participants had not incurred a recent transition or found it particularly challenging to meet with new adults. The second reason for a small sample, aligns with the narrative design of expediting rich and in-depth findings to better understand the lived experiences of individuals (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Reissman., 2008). A small sample size has been considered as the most appropriate way to build a co-construction with each participant to understand their experiences of primary-to-secondary school transition and reflect on the interactional socially constructed space between participants and researcher (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Reissman., 2008). Furthermore, a qualitative design, utilising Narrative Analysis does not have a main aim to find generalisable findings that can fit the needs of a wider population, whereby you would require a much larger sample size, instead the aim is to uncover the lived experiences of those within marginalised groups within society, giving space and power through their voices, so that we can learn from their experiences and personal stories, of a common educational phenomena (school transition).

The inclusion criteria for pupils to participate in this study meant that they were a secondary school-aged pupil (who had experienced the primary-to-secondary school transition through the mainstream schooling system in England). They also experienced Permanent Exclusion (PEX) from their mainstream secondary school and attended a Pupil Referral Unit/Alternative Provision (PRU/AP), within a large region of England, at the time my study took place.

A large region in England, was chosen as an area to research within, due to this being the locality area in which I was training in as a Trainee Educational Psychologist (TEP), aligning with the researcher reflexivity that is required for a narrative research design. This also helped to allow for a manageable research pool. Due to research aims and the extensive number of headteacher gatekeepers who would be required to explore the views of excluded pupils in all secondary schools across the region, and potential ethical challenges in defining 'exclusion' within schools, it was decided that exploring the views of Permanently Excluded (PEX) pupils would help provide a definitive pool of potential participants to share their views. Recruitment was not prioritised due to any individual characteristics such as sex, age, race, as these are not main aims of the study, and a narrative research approach allows for participants to comment on their own individual characteristics if they want to. Time of permanent exclusion was considered, and pupils that

have been permanently excluded very recently e.g. within the past month, were not to be recruited, due to the anticipated period of distress and transition, and the chance that relationships with staff in their setting were not yet well established.

Participants were recruited into the study via support and consent via their on roll educational setting (Alternative Provision/PRU placement). The headteachers of educational settings, across the region of England, defined as Alternative Provision settings or PRUs, were contacted during the initial recruitment stage, whereby initial information was shared about the study with the headteachers. The headteachers of the schools interested to partake in this, acted as my gatekeepers and their approval meant that YP in their setting could take part in this study once consent and parent/carer consent was provided for each individual.

From the initial recruitment emails sent out to twenty-three AP/PRU settings, found via my own search strategies including links via local government websites or googling educational settings that match these search terms in the region, I received four responses to say they would be interested to meet and find out more about the study. I contacted all four, however initially only met with three of these headteachers via face-to-face meetings or Microsoft Teams calls (one face-to-face and two online); to provide knowledge of the study and space for any questions. I also used these meetings to further discuss the role of the 'Link Contact'(s) and how this would work for their school (Appendix A). To provide some context on the Link Contact role, this was established as a part of this study due to the ethical considerations regarding a vulnerable participant group meeting a researcher alone. An interview environment, talking with an unfamiliar adult in school about personal experiences, may have evoked some stress for these pupils, therefore the researcher checking in with a consistent key and trusted adults as the communicator between myself and the participant seemed most appropriate. More about the ethical considerations and potential limitations of this are referred to in the reflective chapter. Incorporating a Link Contact was anticipated to help create a safe space for participants to share their views and to align with local and national safeguarding protocols keeping the participant and researcher safe. The best way to share research adverts and recruitment presentations in school, was negotiated via the Link Contact, for example shared in person with the researcher presenting in school or looking through the electronic copies of the recruitment advert. Initial information shared with headteachers also stated the relevance of a Link Contact to support with the logistics of carrying out this research with participants within their school, also stating the need for two available staff members that could take on the role of 'Link Contact' within the school system. The idea of including a Link Contact was to help aid the contact prior to the interviews and share any questions or research queries pupils

express about the study and how to take part, so that their informed consent was sought. The role of the Link Contact was to help arrange the best times and spaces for interviews to take place in school, and to attend the interview processes alongside the participants as a form of support. It was made clear that only the participant views will be recorded for the purpose of the study and the views of the Link Contact will not be sought.

Once headteachers had provided their gatekeeper consent, I initiated the next steps in participant recruitment. I received headteacher and head of service gatekeeper approval for two PRU settings that were part of the same service, within one local authority, this meant I could recruit participants across their two settings that supported secondary age pupils. I also gained gatekeeper approval from a headteacher in another local authority for one AP secondary school educational setting, however communication did not get to the Link Contact stage for this setting, and no participant consent forms were signed and returned from this setting, therefore they did not partake. For the two PRU settings in the same service, email correspondence and Microsoft Teams calls took place with the nominated Link Contacts. Link Contacts shared the recruitment poster and presentation with pupils in the settings and were asked to share participant information and consent forms with any pupils that were interested in the study. Following this, participant consent forms and parental consent was received via email correspondence for three pupils at one of the PRU settings, via one key Link Contact. Consent for two more pupils was sought much later in my recruitment process via the Link Contact at the other PRU setting. Following necessary processes to ensure informed consent was provided for pupils to participate in this study, three participants opted to take part in interviews.

INTERVIEW PROCESS

In line with the narrative approach, the study was designed to ensure in-depth data was collected from a small participant group. This meant that multiple interviews per participant would allow for trust to build between the participant and researcher and encourage detailed storytelling and opportunities to clarify and order information over time. Due to the context of exploring mainstream experiences of pupils that have also experienced exclusion, an iterative process felt appropriate, to build a trusted rapport to openly share their experiences. The participants were offered a two-phase interview process. This included phase 1 which was an initial hour-long interview in school (with researcher and Link Contact present), the hour was held as unstructured time, to allow for breaks, rapport building and initial questions about their primary-to-secondary school transition. Phase 2 included a second interview, whereby a timeline was co-constructed (see Appendix I for timelines), to help chronologically order events that were revealed throughout the initial

interview so far, relevant to the pupil's primary-to-secondary transition story. The timeline was also a well-considered interview aid for the second interviews. in the sense that it invited participants into a reflective space and provided a tool to facilitate conversation and allow participants to lead this (Kolar et al., 2015; Guenette et al., 2009; O'Brien & Hardy. 2018). Participants were reminded of the timeline interview activity at the start of the initial interview and informed consent was gained verbally at the start of the second interview. Out of the 3 participants, 2 engaged in both an initial interview and a second interview with the timeline activity. This meant a total of 5 interviews took place. 1 participant completed their initial interview and consented for this to be included as part of my study findings, however it was not appropriate to continue with a second interview due to an imminent school move that occurred after the first interview. A summary of the relevant information, participant demographics, chosen pseudonyms, gender, and year group, as well as a summary of their involvement in the study is represented in the below table (Table 2). All of the three participants went to the same setting and the same Link Contact was present for their interviews.

Table 2: Participant Information

Participant	Interview Phase 1	Interview Phase 2 (including timeline)
Participant 1 (James): male, year 9, on roll at PRU educational setting.	Completed: Transcript 1	Completed: Transcript 2
Participant 2 (Dr Pepper): female, year 11, on roll at PRU educational setting.	Completed: Transcript 3	Completed: Transcript 4
Participant 3 (Louisa): female, year 9, on roll at PRU educational setting. <i>(Due to an imminent school move at the time of data collection, the second interview did not take place).</i>	Completed: Transcript 5	Not completed.

Important ethical considerations were made in relation to Participant 3 (Louisa) who chose to take part in only one interview. As part of the multi-interview design, each interview was structured with a psychological 'beginning' and 'ending,' explicitly contracted with participants, thus aligned with a narrative design. This approach enabled a containing and safe space which reinforced interviews as being discrete events rather than an ongoing commitment. It was made clear that participants could continue for a second interview if those chose to and that this would be booked in after liaising with the Link Contact. The use of a Link Contact within the school was particularly important in this instance, as it aided participant choice. The Link Contact as a trusted adult provided a space for participants to discuss future interviews outside my presence, thereby ensuring that decisions about continuing with the study were informed and autonomous. In practice, this meant that Participant 3 was able to engage in one interview but decline a second, which illustrates the importance of participant choice and autonomy within the study's ethical framework. These measures were consistent with the principles of respect, and autonomy as outlined in the *British Psychological Society's Code of Human Research Ethics* (BPS, 2021), and were explicitly approved through the university's ethical review process.

3. DATA COLLECTION METHODS

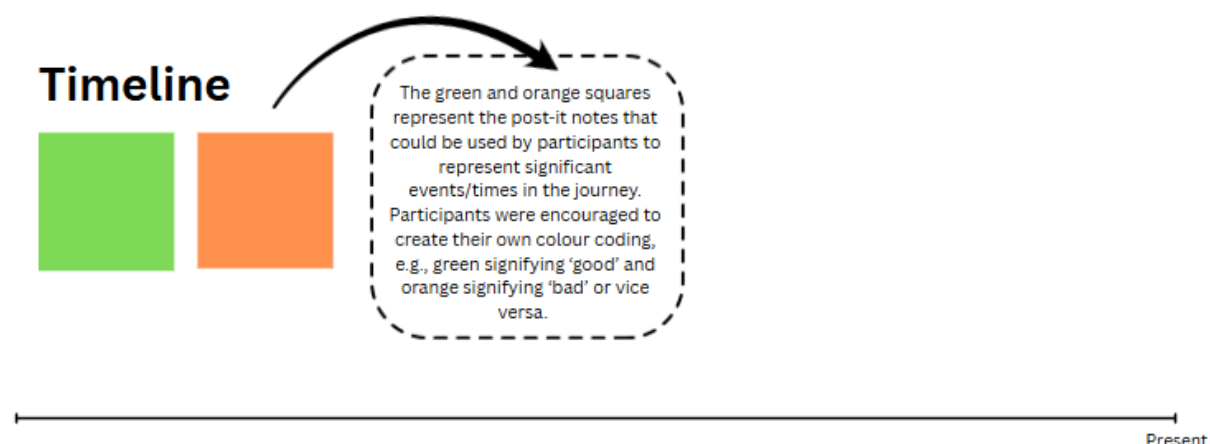
Use of semi-structured interviews were considered the most appropriate way to generate rich and detailed data, allowing for exploration of key issues based around the topic of primary-to-secondary transition experience. Due to this being the topic area brought to the attention of the participant, it did not make these completely unstructured interviews, and allowed for a loose structure, therefore semi-structured rather than structured interviews (Holmes., 2009; Horton et al., 2004). The topic was informed by the literature review and design stage (please see Appendix B for an excerpt of semi-structured interview questions that were used during initial interviews). The questions were referred to as a guide for participants to share their narratives about their experiences, using their own words.

Narrative interview principles as stated by Schütze (1977), help to guide unstructured accounts and promote interviewees to engage in uninterrupted accounts of their experiences, which allows for their use of language to hold more influence over the conversation, minimising interviewer influence. To further support the structure of narrative interviewing, interviews were conducted with the following principles as outlined by Jovchelovitch and Bauer (2000), to provide a flexible and unstructured discussion to elicit storytelling. The principles include the researcher engaging in questioning that is flexible and open it's approach e.g., "*tell me a little bit more about X*", the researcher approach is to provide the initial discussion topics to the interviewee but also include space so that interviewees can think through their responses uninterrupted, therefore aiding the

emergence of core narratives. The other principle is for the interviewer to engage in active listening, therefore holding in mind the use of interviewee language and the emerging narratives to produce further questions that aim to expand the interviewees narrative discussion point.

At the start of their second interviews, the 2 participants who took part in this stage of the process were introduced to the concept of a timeline activity and were invited to add and code their own events relevant to the primary-to-secondary transition process, up until the 'present day' (day of the interview). Participants were shown a blank drawn out timeline on a large piece of flipchart paper (see figure 1), that had a beginning and an ending point, the ending labelled as the 'present'. The participants were encouraged to code their own starting point on the timeline relative to their personal primary-to-secondary school experiences. The participants were also shown two sets of coloured post-it notes, that they could use in the way they wanted to code different events e.g., orange being a good/negative event and green being the opposite to that, or vice versa. Participants were encouraged to write their own events onto the timeline, to reflect the use of their language which is pertinent to narrative design. Both participants felt comfortable to write their own events. It was explained to participants that this would be another recorded interview to capture the nuances of their experiences and that the timeline would act as an aid to support the chronological ordering and meaning making of their story of transition. It was shared that they could place events on their timeline that felt significant for them in their narrative. Participants were asked to start at the beginning of their timeline and talk through the events that occurred at each point, prompts were used at times, such as "*Tell me about when you were in Year...*" (please see Appendix B for an excerpt of semi-structured interview questions that were used during the second interview). Linking to the 'post-it note' coding, participants were also asked "*What makes that event a green/orange event, what does that mean to you?*" to talk further about events they found positive or negative (depending on how they coded) at different stages throughout their education. As our conversations progressed during the second interview process, participants noted events in more detail, such as their permanent exclusion, and looking to future events, such as leaving school or going back to mainstream school, these events were not discussed in as much detail in the initial interview process. Both participants that took part in the timeline activity, consented for a picture to be taken of their completed timeline and for recordings to take place during their timeline activity.

Figure 1: Blank timeline (see Appendix I for original participant timelines, and Figures 2 and 3 below for co-constructed timelines as part of the re-storying process)



The length of the initial interviews ranged from 15 to 31 minutes. The length of the second interviews ranged from 38 to 41 minutes. The longitudinal design of meeting within 2 weeks to follow up with the second interview enabled for the narrative discussion to deepen and provide richer understanding of their stories.

4. DATA ANALYSIS

The term 'Narrative Analysis' is arguably a semantic phrase to group together different qualitative methods that seek to retell people's 'stories' providing a greater meaning. These methods share common features in that they focus on the structure of the story, as well as the content and function of the story (Riessman, 2008). Further argued by Riessman (2008), is that there is no universal one-size-fits-all approach for Narrative Analysis, and therefore researchers have been encouraged to explore various approaches, which they may modify or combine to suit their research objectives, which is aligned with the socially-constructed epistemology landscape that this research tends to sit within. There is no set format to transcription, and the researcher decisions regarding the detail included, really depends on the research's aims and theoretical positioning. For this project, Narrative Analysis as a method of data analysis has been adopted from that outlined by Josselson and Hammack (2021) and Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) 'Three-Dimensional Space Framework', this is therefore a combined approach to aid analysis, similar to the approach carried out by Jackson (2023). The idea of chronologically ordering events felt important to provide a readable structure to restorying, similar to another thesis that utilised the 'Three-Dimensional Space Framework' to aid restorying for permanently excluded primary pupils (Feingold., 2020).

Josselson and Hammack's (2021) table of reading stages (see Table 3), links to earlier work that encourages researchers to focus on associations and links across an entire story, these are otherwise known as 'stanzas' (Lieblich et al., 1998; Hiles & Čermák., 2008). The 'stanzas' are specific excerpts taken from the overall narrative that help to illuminate the story as a whole. Recordings of the participants' interviews were transcribed, in line with the Josselson and Hammack (2021) reading stages outlined below. Firstly, paying attention to the overall structure 'gestalt' and the initial theming of larger emerging patterns of meaning across the whole narrative shared by the YP's 'Stanzas'. Although the initial reading was very time consuming, it aided familiarity with the data and developed an understanding of the participants' narratives. Key voices and characters were further established during the second reading phase. These initial phases helped the later 'restorying' aspect in phase 3 and 4, whereby researcher interpretation interplays with the established patterns found. Linking them to theoretical principles and other literature to develop meaning further.

Table 3: Overview of the Narrative Analysis Process (adapted from Josselson & Hammack, 2021)

Reading	Goal	Procedure
1	Identify initial thematic content and overall gestalt (i.e. structure).	Listen to the audio/video recording alongside reading the transcript. Annotate with initial ideas and write analysis memo (i.e. initial impressions, list of thematic content, preliminary gestalt and reflexivity section).
2	Identify the voices, discourses and master narratives with which the text is in dialogue.	Read transcript with an eye towards voices of others (e.g. a parent, ideologies, cultural stories or events). Annotate transcript and add to analysis memo (impressions, any new thematic content and list of voices).
3	Identify patterns and unity in the narrative.	Read transcript and review annotations to identify larger units of pattern and meaning in the text. Annotate transcript and add to analysis memo summarising impressions.
4	Identify links between text and theory.	Read transcript and analysis memos and draw links to relevant theories and frameworks (adding links between data and theory into analysis memo).
5	Situate narrative in relation to others collected in the study.	Compare and contrast findings of this analysis with others in the study. Write memos as cases are grouped that share similar patterns and make note of discrepancies.

For this stage, the transcripts were read alongside listening to the audio recording of the interviews, the immersion in the data was pivotal for the multiple 'readings' as detailed by the Josselson and Hammack (2021) guidance and inputted into the Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) 'Three-Dimensional Space Framework'. As per the outlined process, annotations in the form of 'memos' were constructed at this initial stage and focused on:

- the overall tone of transcript, including rapport build between myself and the participant.
- How the data 'best-fits' into 'Personal, Social, Past, Present, Future and Context' parts of the overall Three-Dimensional Space Framework. An example of this is shown in Appendix C.
- The chronological order of significant events, emergent story surrounding the primary-to-secondary school transition.
- Initial theming of transcript content, e.g. repetitive content.

Reading 2

An excerpt of the initial reading memos from Reading 1 and 2 are highlighted in Appendix D. During the second reading, the transcript was read without the audio, this was a quicker process paying attention to the key voices, discourses and master narratives throughout the transcript. Josselson and Hammack (2021) describes the researcher's need for reflexivity and reflections as you delve deeper into uncovering the implicit meaning. For example, my second reading memos are more reflective and questioning in tone, aligning with the researcher reflexivity:

"READING 2: MEMO: implicit meaning? Researcher interpreting as 'right mindset' being different to personal participant mindset which is described as having the 'wrong mindset'... Indicates a right and wrong way of having a mindset and this affecting school success. Is this also interlinked with the ADHD discourse as they are often mentioned by the participant together, as well as the social discourse of influencing factors from peers/crime etc?"

Analysis memo journalling was kept throughout the reading stages, where my thoughts after each stage were captured in prose. This helped to provide a space for a reflexive account of each reading and my supplementary thoughts, reactions and potential biases (see Appendix E for a sample extract).

Reading 3 and 4

At this stage in the process, the transcripts are heavily annotated, and multiple memos provide further detailed analysis about the impressions of meaning implied from the content that emerged.

Based on the reading guidance for readings 3 and 4 Josselson & Hammack's (2021) steps, these next stages involve the identifications of 'Stanzas', in other words, the overarching, larger patterns of content that unify the whole transcript and provide overall meaning integral to a participant's story. At this point the process of 're-storying' based upon these Stanzas and the Clandinin & Connelly's (2000) three-dimensional space framework, allowed for 're-storying' to take shape, to support the chronological aspect of presenting this as a 'beginning, middle and end' story of events, capturing participant language throughout. This enabled the transcripts and physical timelines to structure the story into past, present and future experiences/events (keeping in mind the core patterns integral to the overall meaning throughout and the 'three-dimensional space' factors). A core part of Reading 4 is to identify links between text and theory, and shift from a 'highly inductive' analytic mode, to a more deductive one. An excerpt of this stage of analysis, is shown in Appendix F.

5. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical approval to complete this project was received from the University of East Anglia's Research Ethics Committee in June 2024. Please see Appendix G. When considering key ethical decisions, The British Psychological Society's Code of Human Research Ethics (BPS., 2021) informed the processes. These processes were guided by the principles of 'respect, integrity, and social responsibility', committed to promoting benefits and minimising potential harm. Consideration was taken to ensure the YP involved in this study were fully informed about what is involved in taking part, and the needs of participants were paramount importance at all stages of the study. The Link Contact was also an essential part of ensuring participants felt safe, comfortable, fully informed and able to ask any questions in school to be passed onto me when I wasn't there. The support from the Link Contact and the Headteacher-gatekeeper must be acknowledged as an integral point of communication between myself as the researcher and the participants involved, as well as supporting the facilitation of information shared with other potential participants. The recruitment presentation shown in (Appendix H) was felt most appropriate to share with potential participants, to introduce them to the project and support the general understanding of the project aims and what is expected. The offer to come in to present this was shared. The Gatekeeper and Link Contact were involved throughout the recruitment process, and although this supported the recruitment process, reminders from myself prompted them to

share this widely among pupils, so not to 'handpick' certain individuals over others. Multiple Microsoft Teams calls between myself and the Link Contact helped to answer any initial questions posed about the research, whereby further information could be shared to help participants make an informed decision. Appendix H details the participant information forms. Signed consent forms from the pupils and their parent/carers were obtained for the participants that took part in the study, showing that they understood the purposes of the study and said it was ok to speak to me, take part in a timeline activity and for these interviews to be recorded, all 3 participants also consented to photographs being taken of their finished timelines. Another two potential participants had signed the pupil consent forms; however, the parental form was not completed for one of them in time for data collection, and the other participant did not agree to their voice being recorded, therefore aligned with ethical guidance this could not go any further, this was communicated back to the potential participants via the Link Contact.

Following the initial interview, participants were invited to their second interview, this process involved consistent check ins to establish informed consent to carry on to the next stage, at the end of the first interview, in between the initial and second interview (by checking in via email with the Link Contact) and at the start of the second interview. For one of the participants, it was not felt ethically appropriate to continue with the second interview, they did not withdraw their consent verbally or in writing, however, they were imminently moving schools. This was shared via communication through the Link Contact. Due to the school life drastically changing for this participant at the time of data collection, it felt my 'social responsibility' to minimise any possibility of harm, and a second interview at such a time of upheaval would not be in keeping with this ethical approach. Due to their consent during the initial stage and initial interview, this has been included in the study findings alongside the other two participants. More information about this ethical decision is shared within the reflective account.

My data collection and analysis processes were conducted in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation (European Union GDPR., 2016) and the University of East Anglia's Research Data Management Policy (2019). It was integral to the project that the participants were at the centre of the process, therefore signed consent, verbal consent (sought at additional times throughout the process), and even non-verbal and behavioural cues were taken into consideration, for example ceasing the second interview for a participant experiencing a school move. Participants were reminded of the research aims at each interview stage and encouraged to ask questions if they needed to at any point and use the language, they felt comfortable with. It was also reiterated to them at the end of each

interview, that their transcripts could be withdrawn from the study completely, up until the point of data analysis.

To ensure ethical measures were taken to establish respect, trust and safety, a number of procedures were taken along the way, these included the incorporation of the Link Contact in school to ensure their care and protection, and a familiarity to engage with an unfamiliar researcher in school. The Link Contact was also considered the best way to communicate any queries or ways of ensuring comfort and logistics, e.g. the space in school where participants felt comfortable (see Appendix A for information on the role of the Link Contact). Anonymity was thought about carefully and it is acknowledged that by encompassing a Link Contact, meant that the views shared by participants were heard not just by the researcher but also the Link Contact. With this in mind, it was made very clear that no information would be shared beyond the interview room by the Link Contact, unless it was a safeguarding matter that meant the young person, or anyone else was at risk of harm. This was all explained at the contracting stage at the beginning of each interview. The Link Contact was reminded that their role was to be a familiar adult in the room to aid safety, a sense of trust and rapport, and not to share their own views at any stage during the interviewing process. Due to the very small sample size, significant care was taken to ensure that any information posing a risk of identification of participants was redacted, for example names of previous schools and place name areas. This meant that the descriptive narratives and experiences specific to certain locations and settings was omitted from the write-up, e.g. the name of towns and schools, as it was anticipated this could potentially risk anonymity of the participant, and it was deemed unethical to name specific school settings without their consent to do so.

Throughout my recruitment, data collection and analysis process, I remained mindful that the primary-to-secondary school 'journey' may have been a time in life that was difficult for the participants, and that being asked questions that link to a school where you were permanently excluded could be emotionally charged and some memories could be difficult to recount. With this in mind, information was thought about and added into my ethical processes, and I had a list of relevant support services to signpost participants to if this was needed (e.g. signposting to a key staff member as organised by the researcher via Link Contact set up, parent/carer or external agency (e.g., Childline, Shout) to talk to about any negative feelings). I found that participants were much more open, eager and comfortable in the interview space to share their experiences than anticipated, and this was therefore not required at the time.

Completing Narrative research expects the researcher to be involved in a very active process of reflection and reflexivity throughout the process, I found that I was often reflecting on the ethical elements due to the nature of the methodology used to seek pupil views. I found that my own biases, individual characteristics and my dual role of researcher and Trainee Educational Psychologist (TEP) were considered very carefully throughout, and I had to explicitly acknowledge the associated facilitators, and challenges I faced at varying points during the data gathering and analysis. I will discuss these points further in the reflective chapter.

6. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

INTRODUCTION

The below findings are presented in the form of Narrative Analysis in 2 phases. For each YP that participated, their over-arching narrative, referred to as their 'Re-storied Narrative' is central to the research and offers us insight into their lived experiences around their primary-to-secondary school transition, therefore this is presented as phase 1 of analysis. Interview questions were structured around the topic of transition; therefore, narratives link to this primary-to-secondary experience. Interviews were not structured with questions that directly sought to delve into aspects of exclusion, early life events or events outside of the school experience, however throughout the process, core messages emerged that are deemed meaningful and relevant to the participant's overall story. This alongside the reflexive interpretative process of Narrative Analysis in line with the Josselson and Hammack (2021) guidance, means that highlighting other narratives is pertinent to the overall story. These are threaded throughout the plot line and considered valuable as they have relevance when considering the overall research aims to understand lived experiences, these are therefore presented in phase 2 of the findings, (presented below the 'Re-storied Narratives'). The following sections present the 3 individuals 'Re-storied Narratives', before then exploring the ways in which they are connected, through shared experiences and dominant storylines. This also gives space to identify the unique storylines that appear too.

Aligned with the Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) 'Three-Dimensional Space Framework' and the Josselson and Hammack (2021) 'Guide to readings' each individual story is analysed with an aim to uncover meaning, there is both an awareness and appreciation that some narratives are unique to a single participant and others may be shared across the small cohort of participants. This also allows for relevant theories and outside literature to guide further meaning making, in line with researcher interpretation of the implicit meaning made and the group of stories analysed. The 'Re-storied Narratives' are

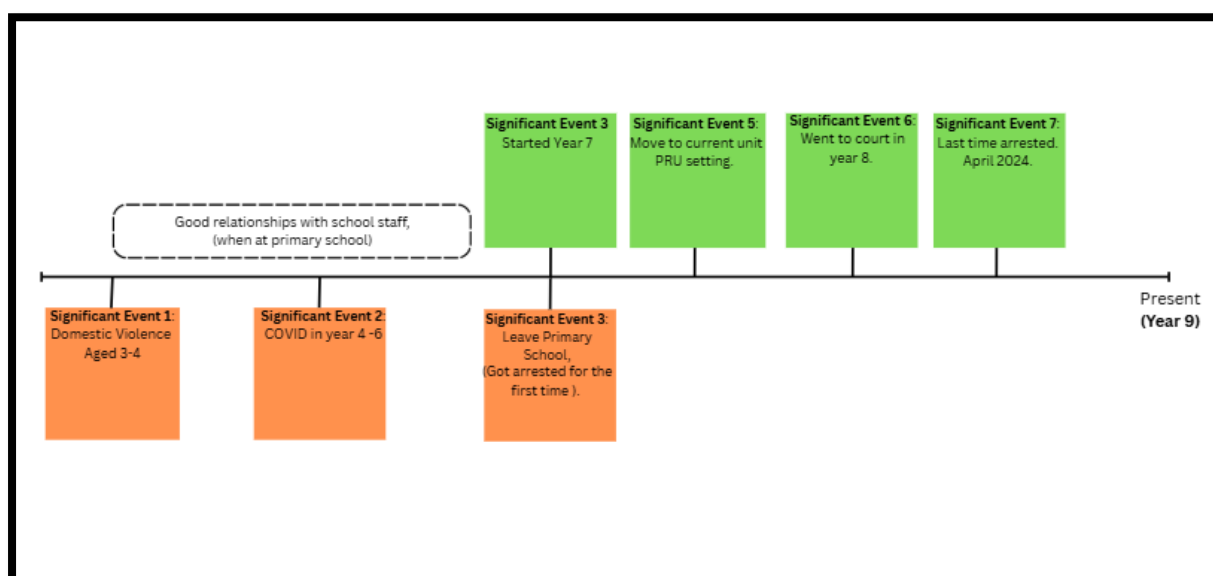
shared with a beginning, middle and ending structure, relevant to the Clandinin and Connelly's Three-Dimensional Space (2000) framing.

The findings per participant are followed by a 'cross-case analyses' (Reading 5 of Josselson & Hammack's 2021 guide), which draws together the shared patterns found across the individual stories, linking this to theory and external literature where relevant.

PHASE 1: RE-STORIED NARRATIVES

1. JAMES'S STORY

Figure 2: James's Timeline of Significant Events (Orange- represents negative life events, Green- are more positive ones)



CHALLENGING EARLY YEARS

James's story starts when he was age 3-4. Things in his home life at this time were challenging for him, due to witnessing Domestic Violence towards his mum. Looking back on this time in his life, James can see that this affected how he was in primary and secondary school, as this made him 'angry at the world'. James can look back on this being a response to the trauma he experienced as a very young child.

PRIMARY SCHOOL WAS 'GOOD'

James remembers his overall primary school experience fondly. James talks about the place where his primary school is situated as a nice place. James remembers the good relationships with school staff, they understood him well and were able to calm him down when he got angry and mad about things. James remembers that he had a good group of best friends and was involved in football which he liked. James could spend time out of the classroom if it got too much for him in the classroom, and people understood what he needed. On some occasions, James remembers that he kicked all the school-reception doors and kicked at his teachers out of anger, but then his teachers would help him afterwards, even though his behaviour was angry. Looking back on his primary school experience, James remembers his mum being really good and someone

who has supported him throughout his life. James also remembers lots of adults being involved, he can see that his teachers, social workers, and counsellors helped him talk through his emotions and this is why he is used to talking to new adults and is able to talk to them so well now.

WHY NO DIAGNOSIS?

Looking back, James finds it confusing how nobody sought to diagnose him with ADHD when he was a young child in primary school, due to the way he would act and behave. James said he was really mad as a kid, and this diagnosis would help prove to people he wasn't really mad, he just had a condition. James thinks this would of helped people understand the way he was. Looking back, James cannot understand why this did not happen earlier for him.

IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

When James was in year 4, 5 and for some of year 6, the world was affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. James remembers the day everyone had to leave school... they all got their bag and left, and they didn't come back again for a long time. James was given a laptop and lots of different adults were telling him he needed to complete his learning on there. Sometimes these would be Zoom calls and James remembers only going to a couple of them because he did not care much about school at this time. James would eat pot noodles and play on the Xbox most days as this was much more appealing compared to school Zoom sessions. Looking back, James thinks that this time was a pivotal time in his education that has affected his whole schooling trajectory, as he essentially missed a big chunk of about 2 years to the Covid pandemic. James feels that during this time, he did very little learning and had limited time to socialise with others.

THE SUMMER OF YEAR 6-YEAR 7

James' story begins to shift during the summer holidays before he started secondary school. James remembers during the 6-week break from school, his mindset was not in the right place, and he started to hang around with some other kids who lived near him, a similar age to him and older ones too. James can see now that they were up to silly things, things that were not good for him to be involved in, and some of these people were not the best influence on him and his behaviour. James remembers that he kept on getting in trouble for things, and he kept on stealing things from the shops, and robbing people. He remembers that it built up and up, and he kept doing more and more

things like this. Before starting year 7, lots of people including James's mum, and her friends told him that he wouldn't like secondary school, but "it's just something you have to get on with". James heard from his mum about her experiences of secondary school, and she did not like it at all.

STARTING YEAR 7 AND HATING IT...

James felt that his change of schools was a really big thing that impacted the rest of his education, and this is where his story becomes more negative. James' school was in a different location, closer to his home but further away from his primary school. James remembers parts of the induction day, but his memories are not as clear. What sticks out in his memory most about that first day was that loads of people were there. James knew a lot of these people as everyone knows everyone on the island where he lives. James knew a lot of people, but he hadn't seen them in ages. James thinks back to that time and thinks he was probably a bit anxious about the people there, and he had the impression that loads of people had been told he was coming up to join the school. Overall, when he started secondary school, James wasn't worried about any problems occurring at school, he was most worried about who was going to be there. James remembers thinking there were hundreds more people than there were at his primary school and this made him anxious. James hated his secondary school from the get-go. He thought it was 'just like a prison', where you must walk around the building one way, and there is only one way to get around the whole school, this reminded him of the way a prison is set up and it is not the way James likes to be worked with. James remembers his teachers were rude and stern. Another big thing James remembers from starting year 7 was the strict uniform and having to wear ties. When everyone got their ties, James found this stressful and could feel the stress ready to come into his life over the next 5 years.

James remembers hating the classrooms and having to do his work in them. He thinks this way of learning does not suit the way his brain thinks or works at all, and looking back, he links this to his ADHD tendencies. James remembers occasions where there were no LSAs in the classroom, so there was just one teacher in the classroom. James felt frustrated because more often than not, they couldn't teach him that well... or show him enough attention. James does not consider himself to have specific learning needs, because he could understand the work and what he needed to do, but he did not feel he had anyone to talk to, or anyone that understood him. James remembers trying to sit in

a class of 30 and itching to get out of his chair and walk out, which he often ended up doing.

James remembers not liking being told what to do, especially by male teachers.

THE FIRST ARREST

Eventually the trouble James was getting into outside of school, led to him being arrested by police when he was 12, part way through year 7. James remembers this day very vividly and it was a big thing for him to manage at the age he was then, he thinks the experience of his first arrest has stuck with him. James got arrested for two attempted robberies. He remembers when he was arrested, he was asleep in his bed, and he then got dragged out of bed naked at 7 o'clock in the morning by police officers in his room. James describes the madness at the time. He remembers that the police then took all of his tracksuits, took his phone and other stuff from his room. James was arrested, experienced going to a police station and was put on bail. James considers this a significant event in his life, that led to subsequent events. James reflects now that once you have experienced going to the police station, you can't go back from that experience, and he feels it shouldn't really be experienced at a young age.

NOT IN THE RIGHT MINDSET

Around the same time of his first arrest, James quit football. He did not talk to his primary school friends anymore either. James also remembers he started chilling with the wrong people and with older boys more and more. Since his arrest, James remembers it just made him want to get more 'bad'. At this time, in year 7, James remembers the people he was chilling with, were people he knew were not good people to chill with, because he would end up getting arrested again, but he did not care about the consequences and continued to do the same things that got him into trouble. James describes this as his head not being in the right mindset at the time. He remembers that he just did not care. James could also recall stealing things and selling them on, which he thinks links to a business mindset, but the way he was going about things was all wrong at the time.

James's mindset at this time hugely affected James's behaviour in school too, and James describes how he was the 'naughty kid'. James remembers the routine he established at this time, he used to go into school at 10 O'clock, and then, at 10 minutes past 10, it was the year 7 breaktime, so he used to get as much food from the cafeteria as he could,

he would spend all the money that he had on things from the cafeteria, like sausage rolls. After this, James was never where he was meant to be, he would walk around the school instead, doing lots of 'mad things', like setting off fire alarms, getting into fights and 'dashing' food at other kid's heads. One day, James remembers 'dashing' a full bottle of something fizzy at a teacher's head, and it bounced right off it. James can look back at this memory and find it funny, but at the time it was not funny at all, and he got shouted at...the teacher went mad at him. James remembers he would only last one hour in school before getting shouted at and told off, so it became part of his routine then. James remembers that he did not care about getting told off by his teachers and offered the teachers out for fights all of the time. James remembers on occasion he was made to sit outside the headteachers office, but he just did not care. If he was suspended, he would say 'ok, see ya later' and walk home. Some of the time, James would get into trouble by standing up for himself if he felt a teacher was being unfairly rude, like shouting in his face or being rude to one of his pals. James remembers being suspended loads of times, and it became such a frequent thing that he cannot even remember how many times exactly. He does seem to recall that after being there for 6-7 months he had over 200 detentions recorded, because they kept building up. In the end he couldn't care less.

THE EXCLUSION

Eventually, James recalls that it all got too much, and his secondary school just had to get rid of him. So, he got 'kicked out' of there and sent to the Pupil Referral Unit he still attends today.

THE UNIT

James talks fondly about his experience moving to the Unit at the end of year 7/start of year 8. He expresses his love for the Unit, because there are people there that understand him well. James compares this experience to his primary school and thinks it could be the reason he gets along a bit better, because it's set up to be more like a primary school in some ways. James thinks the Unit is laid back, much smaller and there are never more than 100 people there at one time, which suits him. James prefers that there are way less kids in each classroom, because he's been getting that 1-1 learning time and it works so much better for him.

THE SUMMER OF YEAR 7-YEAR 8

During the summer break, James recalls how more trouble occurred. James continued to engage in things outside of school such as involvement in ongoing theft from shops and motorbikes.

EXPERIENCE OF COURT AND YOUTH OFFENDING SERVICE

James experienced subsequent arrests for his above actions, and this meant he experienced going to youth court for the first time. James remembered the court experience well, it was very professional and just like you see on TV, where the judge is wearing a wig. James remembers it was very proper, but he was only in there for what felt like a minute, and it wasn't that bad, they just told him what he had done. He had a solicitor and a youth offending worker.

James remembers his Youth Offending Team (YOT) worker fondly, as a good person, who helped to get him out of the house. James sees that YOT was again, pivotal in his story, and helped provide some good in his life again. James recalls the experiences that YOT provided him with, they opened up new aspects of his life that have stuck with him until today. James remembers he first did community service with someone called John (anonymised name), at the time James was annoyed because he would rather be doing something else with his time, but he began to grow fond of John and realised that this helped to get him out of the house, in the end James didn't mind doing this. James remembers that his YOT worker and John used to give him free cans of coke to drink. James remembers he was working with YOT for around 9 months (he had just come off his programme at the time of meeting me), and during this time he was offered many opportunities, to go out and experience different things, the number of opportunities that James had with YOT, he thinks were really good.

From his work with YOT, James thinks this helped him get in contact with other agencies like CAMHS (Child, Adolescent, Mental Health) workers, and since he has worked with CAMHS, they are putting him forward for an ADHD assessment, which has been accepted. James recalls at previous points in his life, ADHD assessments were refused.

For James, working with YOT has been a turning point in his life. Looking back, he has many questions about this, and why people like him have to get in trouble first to get all these opportunities. James doesn't understand why help and support can't be offered

at an earlier point, when people can see someone going down the wrong path, before they actually go down it.

LAST TIME ARRESTED

James can recall the last time he got arrested as April 2024, he remembers the date clearly as it coincides with the positive turning point in his life, he does not want to get arrested again.

THE SUMMER OF YEAR 8-9

James remembers when the summer fayre was on, he got involved in a massive fight. James remembers he was in a group of about 5, fighting against a group of 20 other boys that were older, maybe in year 11. James describes it as a mad day. James remembers that this happened in the summer holidays, and that bad things always happen when it is the summer, because he doesn't have the same routine. James hears his mum say, 'the summer is a curse', she also sees that bad things happen for James over the summer break.

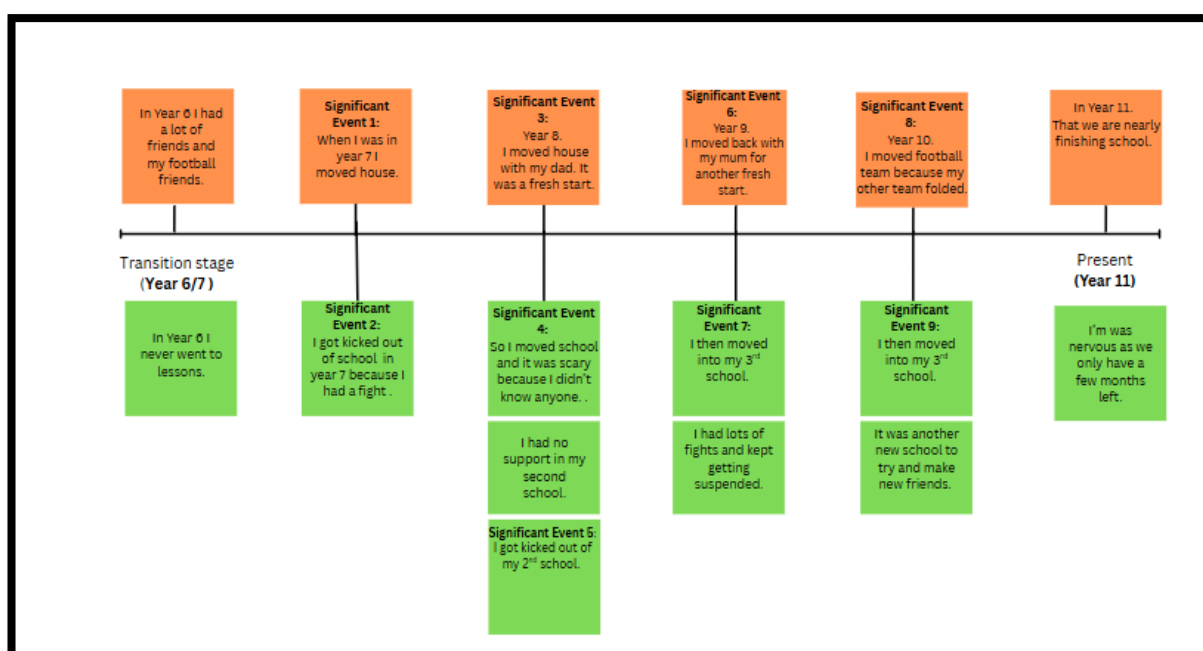
THE FUTURE

James would like to stay at his current Unit for the rest of his school-life if he could, but he knows that this wouldn't be the best plan for him. He also believes that this will set him back academically as he wants to get good GCSEs and Units like his don't offer that in the same way. James thinks it would be way better if they did and it could help kids like him who are smart and can learn. James is conflicted about his transition back to secondary school. He is looking forward to it on one hand, because he misses it, and dreading it on the other hand, he thinks as soon as he starts back, he will be hating it.

James does not see any more arrests in his future, he does not want to be arrested ever again.

2. DR PEPPER'S STORY

Figure 3: Dr Pepper's Timeline of Significant Events (Orange- represents positive life events, Green- are more negative ones)



PRIMARY SCHOOL

Dr Pepper had multiple school moves throughout her primary school experience. Dr Pepper remembers one of her primary school teachers, called Miss Evergreen (Anonymised). She used to take Dr Pepper out of lessons on a one-to-one basis to teach her. In relation to remembering primary-to-secondary school transition, her story starts in year 6 of primary school. This is the time she remembers things getting much harder, so she stopped going to her lessons. It ended up becoming so difficult at the end of year 6 that she never used to go in the end. Dr Pepper remembers that in year 6, she had a lot of friends and was part of the football team, these memories are good. Dr Pepper remembers that her mum used to drop her off at primary school each day.

LEAVING YEAR 6 AND STARTING 'BIG' SCHOOL

Dr Pepper has fond memories of her year 6 leavers day; she even has a photo at home that she has kept from this day. The photo shows her and her friends in leaver's t-shirts and for her this is something that reminds her of that time, 'going up to the big school'. One of the friends in the photo didn't go to the same secondary school as her in year 7, but they are still friends now.

The Covid pandemic affected year 6. The lockdown period meant that Dr Pepper had to miss her year 6 prom, but she didn't mind because she didn't want to go to that anyway.

Dr Pepper joined year 7 with some of her friends from primary school, she remembers this was alright, she continued to have a friendship group and partake in football, similar to her year 6 experiences. One of the biggest and significant changes she remembers at this time was having to make her own way into school without her mum. Dr Pepper remembers that it was scary at first, being the youngest in the new school, and you don't know where you're going, and you don't know everyone there. There were also a lot of people in the classroom. This feeling got better for her over time, because she got used to it, and knew where to go and the year 11s didn't look at her anymore.

YEAR 7 SUPPORT

During the start of year 7, Dr Pepper remembers the support she received from one Teaching Assistant in particular, she was called Miss Appletree (Anonymised). She sticks out in her mind as someone nice that would support her in her lessons, she would sit with her one-to-one within the classroom. The teachers were nice at this school which meant transitioning up from primary school felt ok.

GETTING INTO TROUBLE

Part way through year 7, Dr Pepper remembers being involved in a fight at school with another pupil, her understanding of this at the time was that the school wanted to 'kick her out' afterwards...

MOVING HOUSE IN YEAR 7

Simultaneously to the occurrence of the fight, Dr Pepper and her mum moved house. This meant that she was going to start a new school in the new area they moved to. This was towards the end of year 7, so she had to wait until year 8 to properly start her new school.

NEW SECONDARY SCHOOL

After moving house, entering year 8 meant entering a brand-new school for Dr Pepper, in a new place. This time starting a new secondary school felt different because at her old school she had loads of friends, because she lived round the corner from the school at the time. When joining this new school, she didn't know anyone when she started, she didn't have friends there. She remembers she used to go back to the town she knew

before to hang out with people because she didn't know anyone in the new place. Dr Pepper remembers this school was not a good school, and this was a well-known view about the school shared by her mum and others in the community around her. She recalls not having much support to help her and this meant she found it increasingly difficult to attend lessons, she ended up walking the corridors and this is when she started getting into more and more trouble, and fights with other pupils. Towards the mid-point of year 8, Dr Pepper was excluded from this school, she remembers this as being 'kicked out'.

DIFFERENCES AT HOME WITH MUM, MOVING IN WITH DAD

When things were becoming more difficult during year 8. Dr Pepper was getting into increasingly more troublesome behaviours, things between her and her mum at home were also much more difficult. Dr Pepper remembers that they used to argue a lot and they would fight. Eventually the police became involved, and Dr Pepper had to move in with her dad for a while for what she describes as 'a fresh start'.

ANOTHER SCHOOL MOVE

For the rest of year 8, Dr Pepper was moved to her first Pupil Referral Unit placement. The move to this unit was alright at first but it was a bit scary because the other kids that went there had their own SEN needs, this used to impact on Dr Pepper, and she found it difficult to connect and make friends with any of these peers. This ultimately led to fights between her and her peers and suspensions. This continued into year 9 and things didn't feel like they were going right for her there.

MOVING IN WITH MUM AGAIN

Part-way through year 9, Dr Pepper moved back into her mum's house as another 'fresh start', at the time this felt like a good thing. Shortly after moving back to her mum's her mum gave birth to her baby brother.

MOVING TO ANOTHER UNIT

In year 10, Dr Pepper made her fourth secondary setting move, into a second PRU Unit. This is the Unit she still attends now. This move meant she had to try and make new friends at another new school, which felt like a negative thing to have to do at the time. This time the other pupils seemed different; they were older. Dr Pepper thinks of the

people in her setting in basic terms, and describes them as either being her friends or not.

NEW FOOTBALL TEAM

Dr Pepper also remembers that in year 10 her football team folded, which meant she had to move to a new team. When remembering this time, she felt this was a good time in her life, and she didn't mind moving to a new team because she enjoys her football. This is something she enjoys today, and it has been a consistent hobby and interest of hers for over 9 years now.

YEAR 11

When starting year 11, Dr Pepper felt nervous because it meant that she only had a few months before her GCSEs. She felt positive about the fact she is nearly leaving school and starting a life beyond school.

3. LOUISA'S STORY

YEAR 6

Louisa's primary-to-secondary school transition story starts for her in year 6. Louisa remembers her excitement in year 6. Louisa was 'good' during her primary school years, she remembers she used to swear a lot at primary school, but her teachers managed this well for her. Louisa remembers that at the end of year 6 she went on two transition days to visit her secondary school; on these occasions she had to partake in lessons alongside the other year 6s. They were shown around the school building as well. She remembers these days being weird and the school was massive. There were 7 different buildings at the school and a 'fat' field. She remembers there being so many stairs as well, a lot more stairs than she had at primary school.

*Louisa remembers that her sister was already in year 7 when she was in year 6, as there is a year's age difference between them, Louisa recalls her sister telling her how s*** the school was. Louisa formed a view in her mind that she probably wasn't going to be at the school for very long.*

STARTING YEAR 7

When joining year 7, Louisa remembers at first, she didn't know where anything was, there were loads of people around and lots of rude staff. Louisa remembers the excitement she had, quickly faded, and she realised that the reality of the school was

not as good as her expectations. The school was so big. Louisa remembers it taking a long time to walk to her different lessons and she missed how all her lessons were in one room at primary school. Louisa's secondary school felt far away, and she had to get the bus everyday to school, which was something she never had to do before when she was at primary school.

BREAKING THE SCHOOL RULES

Louisa remembers her secondary school uniform being a big thing, she said there were specific tops, skirts, socks, shoes, jumpers and blazers that you had to wear at that school, to be in-keeping with the uniform policy. Louisa often broke the uniform policy because she found the clothes uncomfortable and itchy. She also remembers losing lots of the items and this is something you would also get in trouble for doing. The uniform rules really frustrated Louisa, as she likes to choose her own clothes to wear. On some occasions, she would come into school in leggings, or with trainers on, and her teachers would go 'mad' at her, and she was sent to isolation for this. Louisa felt going to isolation over her clothes was over the top and unfair and she often would refuse to go, which escalated her school punishments even further.

Louisa would also get into trouble for swearing at teachers and using her phone which she also found unfair. Louisa is not always aware of her use of frequent swear words, she told me that a teacher at her current PRU setting said to her she uses them 'like punctuation', and she agrees, she uses them without consciously realising. This leaves her feeling unfairly treated when she is constantly told off for something she feels she can't help. At home in her community swearing is more accepted, if she swore, then the adults around her would make her aware, or ask her not to, whereas at secondary school she could end up in isolation for this.

Louisa often became frustrated due to the rudeness she endured at school, from staff and other pupils and the punishments over her uniform, phone usage and use of swear words. So, she would bunk off her lessons every day. She remembers walking round the school and becoming more and more angry, she remembers she would go 'mad' if someone even looked at her funny. Eventually Louisa remembers occasions where she started to throw tables and chairs at teachers and other pupils. She remembers that she never got this angry at primary school, because she does not recall ever throwing things then. She vividly remembers when she was asked to hand in her phone, and this made her so angry she threw her phone at the teacher, and it broke their nose.

Louisa describes her experiences of isolation as going into a room, like a classroom, but all the tables facing the walls. She remembers the lady in the isolation room fondly because she used to be so nice to her. Louisa remembers she would be allowed to use her phone in there, and she could do word searches instead of proper work. This meant she didn't mind going in there that much.

BECOMING RUDE- ESCALATION OF BEHAVIOUR

Louisa remembers that there was only one teacher at her secondary school that helped her. She can't put into words what it was about her that helped her, and many adults have asked her in the past what it was that she did, she doesn't know how or why, but she just helped. Louisa describes herself as always being 'naughty' and not being able to help it, and that this teacher understood that when the others didn't.

Louisa remembers the rest of her teachers and peers being rude to her. Because she felt people were rude, she decided to become rude herself. In year 7 she remembers this is when she became rude to everyone, and she would recommend other YP transitioning to do the same, because if you're rude to someone first, they can't be that rude back.

END OF YEAR 7 AND BEYOND

Towards the end of year 7, Louisa was excluded from her secondary school and moved into the PRU she attends today. Louisa is now in year 9 and she thinks her current placement is better because there is no uniform. She is adamant that if the PRU bring out a uniform policy then she will not wear it because she likes to choose what she wears everyday. Louisa also likes that the PRU she attends now is much smaller with less people in it so that 'everyone knows everyone'.

PHASE 2: OVERARCHING PATTERNS, UNITY AND DISCUSSION OF THEORY

1. UNIQUE FINDINGS ACROSS EACH STORY

JAMES:

In terms of its basic form, James's overarching narrative assumes a 'descent and gain' or 'redemptive' gestalt (gestalt referring to the shape, configuration, structure of the overarching story) (Josselson & Hammack., 2007). In Narrative literature, a redemptive storyline signifies a state of transition over time from a generally negative state into a generally positive one. Or a good beginning, followed by a downfall and a rise back to a good ending (descent and gain). This is often a journey of 'sacrifice, recovery, growth, or learning (McAdams., 2006). For James this is clear as he shared the generally 'good'

beginnings at primary school, followed by 'bad' negative times at secondary school and, better times for the future.

In James's case, learning and growth are core themes within his plot line, described as a 'change in mindset' and a sense of 'maturity' increasing over time, from years 6 and 7 to his current year 9 state of mind. James's timeline was examined alongside his interview transcript, and I have interpreted this meaning, due to his use of colour coding with the post-it notes on the timeline, alongside his voice captured at the time of the placement on the timeline and when referring to different experience spanning across year groups. James has labelled the first 3 significant life events as orange (post-it notes), according to James, in reference to the timeline, use of orange symbolises overall negative life events, and includes 'Domestic Violence' witnessed at age 3-4, 'Covid' impacting school-year 4-6 and 'Leave primary and get arrested' in school year 6-7, occurring in alignment with the primary-to-secondary transition phase. Green (post-it notes) signify the less negative events, and these are placed after the orange ones, assuming the 'redemptive' storyline. These green events are 'Starting year 7', 'Move to (current PRU setting)', 'went to court' in school year 8 and 'last time got arrested almost a year ago- April 2024'. Interestingly the tone used by James to describe the different social events and experiences at play during primary school is mostly positive, as interpreted by listening back to the transcripts. This is the case, even though on the timeline these events are coded orange, similarly the overall tone describing the social experience and remembered events during his secondary school transition in year 7 is overall negative, however this is labelled green.

James was engaging and talkative, he appeared extraverted and able to articulate himself through his use of words very well, which aided the interview process greatly and allowed for a positive rapport to build between him as the interviewee and myself as the interviewer. James was able to self-reflect that he can talk to others well and that he is 'smart', I believe both things too, as part of the overall co-constructed observation through the duration of our time together. James was forthcoming with his narrative of events and required very little prompting or effort from the interviewer to generate his views. James appeared to be open about major life events with me, something that other people may require a stronger trust and rapport to talk about. I was struck by this, alongside his ability to reflect on core issues and events that impact not just him but those around him. I did reflect that James has spoken to many workers in his life and perhaps this experience was new to him, in the sense it was a recorded interview process, but similar to other occasions where he would have talked through life experiences e.g., in counselling sessions, with YOT workers and social workers. In his second interview, when asked if he had completed an activity like the timeline before, James shared that he had done something similar in

counselling, the only difference being this one was recorded. As a researcher, I must be mindful that James' attitudes to discussing private life events with an unfamiliar person may have impacted on the richness that was developed in comparison to other YP that may not have experienced the same discussions with 'many workers' in the past. For example, James was able to identify significant early childhood events that were prevalent to his narrative such as witnessing domestic violence in his home at a very young age, and the absence of his father in his life. James also openly expressed his identity with his former self as being angry and 'mad at the world', which he was able to link to having experienced early childhood trauma.

In relation to unique patterns and unity within James's story, I analysed and interpreted meaning, utilising select 'Stanzas' to help identify these. These are captured below.

A CHANGE OF AN INDEPENDENT SELF AND MINDSET, THROUGH MATURITY AND GROWING UP, LEADING TO POSITIVE BELIEFS AND A REDUCTION IN ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOURS

As a core narrative theme structured throughout James's account, he explores his sense of 'mind-set' and how this was transient and affected at key points in his life, such as the primary-to-secondary school point compared to now. In year 7, James talks about not having the 'right' mindset and how this ultimately led to the cycle and routine of trouble he got himself into at school (persistent and disruptive behaviour). This indicates self-reflection and insight into a 'right and wrong' mindset., and the understanding that he feels in a better mindset about school now. This also links to the overarching 'redemptive' storyline.

"Cause it was all about my mindset. I was waking up and I just did not care. I would go home and go out with my mates, and it will be well more fun then chilling in school".

"Like, I think at the time I didn't have... like, the right mindset. I was going out, getting arrested and stuff like that. Going out, doing stupid things, at a young age and I just didn't care. I weren't in the right mindset. I didn't care for it, I weren't mature enough to care and I think... yeah... it is hard, it's hard, that transition, for people with ADHD and mental health issues, it is hard".

In comparison to the above mindset, James shared his current mindset as being able to make a positive change to his school life and community experiences, to go and reach his full potential.

"like, because now I got to go back and change it and I'm still young, I'm still learning. I've not learnt properly what I'm doing with myself, like... do

you know what I mean... and I still got to go back and change it otherwise I'm going to ruin my life and not get GCSEs and stuff".

"I'm dreading going back to a mainstream school, but I've gotta do it cause if not I've gotta stay here and I might not get to reach my fullest potential and stuff like that... but if they had schools like this, that could allow me... people like me, and stuff like that, to go and do the same, and get the same amount of gcse's and do the same amount of subjects... to the kids that, to the same schools that are doing it, like over there... in mainstream schools... I think it would be so much better. Like, I would stay here, 100%... for the rest of my school. I love it here... like, I think it's a good school".

"... like... even now, I still do bad at school sometimes, but I know deep down that I'm not doing the same things that I used to do. So it's down to something else, do you know what I mean, because there's many factors, there is, it's all... it's all mad what goes on in people's brains and stuff. Cause you never really know what's going on inside your brain, or your brain... you never really know, cause everyone's works different... but, like... you can get a rough understanding if you know what I mean".

"I'm not involved in nothing... I'm not actually... I'm not... at risk of getting arrested I don't think... at all. Whatsoever.

Linked to psychological theory and literature, there is connection between James's narrative of 'mindset' and 'maturity' and Growth Mindset models (Dweck., 2006). Dweck argues that with the right support and positive relationships, alongside experiences of success and specific praise, CYP can mature cognitively and emotionally. This maturity is otherwise understood as a 'growth-mindset' whereby life challenges are reinterpreted by the CYP, not at 'fixed' indicators of their ability and potential failures, (Fixed-Mindset), to opportunities for learning and further growth. In the context of James's narrative around 'mindset' and not being 'mature' at the time of his transition, parallels can be drawn with Dweck's model. For James, the challenges he faces now in relation to getting GCSEs and reintegration back into mainstream school, are seen as opportunities to grow and reach his full potential, despite the feeling he has about this being difficult and the 'dread' it conjures up. James mirrors this when talking about his support and opportunities with YOT, that have changed his mindset around being arrested. He can positively state his desire is not to get arrested again. This marks a shift from a negative or fixed mindset (e.g., "I'm not good at this, so there's no point in trying... I may as well keep doing things to get in trouble") to a positive or growth mindset (e.g., "I can improve with practice and support").

Importantly, in terms of primary-to-secondary transition, it is interpreted here that this was made more difficult due to his 'fixed' mindset at the time.

"...feel like, on a long, and like small thing of it, its like... it is that transition. That transition is just like yeah, I just didn't agree with it. I dunno, it just

didn't... it was probably my mindset as well because at that time I was getting arrested and stuff, I was doing loads of things, but not even bad things, I was just doing silly kid things and I must of just... yeah... It just didn't agree with my mindset at the time..."

CONTEXTUAL ISSUES AND THE IMPACT OF THESE ON JAMES AT TIMES OF CHANGE

James openly shared throughout his story, how wider contextual issues such as, the impact of the Covid pandemic, and changes in community location (e.g. location of primary school vs. secondary school) impacted on his primary-to-secondary school transition, and his schooling journey more broadly. He also shared how the influence of others throughout his life shaped his subsequent behaviours. He chose to begin his story by sharing how his early traumatic life experiences of witnessing domestic abuse at age 3, shaped the trajectory of his school-life, alongside the influences of other peers in his community in terms of his mind-set and becoming 'angry', 'mad' and 'naughty' in school. These reflections align with the Ecosystemic Models (Bronfenbrenner., 1979; 2005), alongside the recent Multiple and Multi-dimensional Transitions (MMT) framework, that acknowledges the systemic impact of the pandemic along with other systemic changes at this stage of transition (Jindal-Snape, 2022).

"but I dunno like, going into school I think the main thing was, for me, was, I was chilling with the wrong crowd. I went from being a good kid, playing football... I was always a bit naughty... like, had anger issues growing up, I had domestic violence happen when I was young, about 3, 4 years old... in my house happening between by mum and dad, when I was young. And then, that probably affected me in some sort of ways, with some sort of trauma or something, that made me angry against the world so much when I was young. But, as I matured and I got older, the anger kind of stopped, I got easily led... 100%. It took me a while, for me to realise..."

"I had a whole group, I had best friends for years... like... and I went to year 7 and I didn't even speak to them, like... whatsoever. So then... so then, I was chilling with the (PLACE NAME 2) boys now. I always did chill with (PLACE NAME 2) boys, but I had this other side at school, do you know what I mean?"

"I think the starting bit... really... yeah... I think it starts off from Covid, like, Covid I think, was the first thing that hit my school life a bit because it were a big, it was a big hit... like, people didn't realise that. I remember the day when we all just left... we all got our bag and we left and we didn't come back for however long... like... and people... the whole time I was in during covid, they were telling me... giving me laptops, to do zoom calls... doing a couple of them or whatever, but I did not care... I was just on Xbox every

day. That is not learning... I am doing 'not learning' for two years, or however long I'm meant to, I'm meant to go school for..."

James's reflection here allows insight into the complexities of how his behaviour was influenced by others, especially peers in his community ("chilling with the wrong crowd") and how he became "easily led." This aligns closely with Bandura's Social Learning Theory (1977), which proposes that behaviour is learned through our observations, imitations, and modelling, of others, particularly those significant to us.

In terms of modelling, James likely observed and internalised behaviours from a young age, and this was exacerbated at the time of primary-to-secondary transition due to the different peer group. Those that influenced him may have expressed anger, defiance, or disengagement with school and in the community. The reinforcement aspect of the social learning theory presents the argument that these behaviours may have been reinforced for James through peer acceptance or avoidance of other stressors. James's later realisation shows a level of self-reflection that he was "easily led". Here he is highlighting how he can see the how his cognition interacts with his environment and behaviour. As recognised in the literature-base around the development of CYP with lived experiences of complex trauma (e.g., Cook et al., 2005; Perry & Szalavitz., 2017), CYP that experience trauma from a young age, are thought to adapt trauma-responses, that can impact on their emotional regulation, cognition, and behaviour. These adaptations are considered to provide a form of protection within traumatic contexts; however, they can be misinterpreted, misunderstood within structured environments such as mainstream schools. This literature further emphasises the need for CYP like James to be supported by a trauma-informed approach to behaviour management (Geddes., 2006; Bomber., 2007; Bomber., 2011).

The Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner., 1979; 2005) is also illustrated vividly within this except stanza. James shares the multi-faceted influences on his primary-to-secondary transition life-stage, including traumatic early childhood experiences at home (considered his Microsystem), social/community peer-group pressures (at a Mesosystemic level), as well as broader cultural and structural factors like the Covid-pandemic (Jindal-Snape, 2022) and the physical move from one community to another during the primary-to-secondary transition (Exosystemic factors). During the change of setting from primary-to-secondary school, James talks about the merging of peers from his community system outside of school into his secondary school system, which wasn't the case for him at primary school, as he could present an 'other side' when he went to primary school, due to the influence of those peers not being there.

JAMES'S SECONDARY SCHOOL EXPERIENCES OF MISUNDERSTANDING, LACK OF COMMUNICATION AND AUTHORITARIANISM.

James's shared memories from year 7 indicate a pivotal shift in his narrative, from a sense of positivity, understanding and things being 'good' at primary school, to a much more 'bad' negative and authoritarian space at secondary school, described by James 'like a prison', and not how he liked to be 'worked with', when comparing it to his primary and PRU experiences. James shared his experience of feeling misunderstood, and felt he did not have avenues to talk to anyone. James created this as a dominant narrative throughout his story, that adults in his secondary school would shout at him and were rude towards him and other children.

"Like I dunno, with my primary school, I had a good relationship with the teachers, like they knew me well, they knew how to handle me. I had, I had yeah... like, I had anger issues and stuff, like bad anger issues. You know, I would go a bit mad, and they knew how to calm me down and work with me well... so it was good. Like I could of stayed there for the whole time I was at school, and then, er... I must of gone into secondary school, and it... yeah I just hated it. Just the teachers, they're so rude. I just felt like it was prison, you have to walk around one way, around the whole school, and stuff like that. All that stuff. Like, it's just not how I like to be worked with. "Yeah, and that one, that one... er... I just hated from the get-go. Just, I thought it was like... just like a prison, really, I just felt like it was".

"...but I think if I had someone I could speak to, and maybe could of worked with a bit better, instead of getting shouted at in the face by teachers, headteachers shouting at me, like, sitting in his office all day and all that stuff. It's just... yeah... you don't really get that conversation, do you know what I mean?"

This ideology of school systems being institutions akin to 'prison', resonates as a strong narrative, and has been addressed in discourse literature before, for example by Foucault (1977). Foucault's ideology argues that schools are disciplinary systems (institutionalisations), whereby behaviours are tightly managed and controlled, which empowers the school system and disempowers the pupils within it.

Alongside this powerful discourse, diminished sense of connection and communication of behaviours is highlighted by James 'you don't really get that conversation'. This arguably highlights the different behaviourist vs. relational discourses he observed between primary and secondary school. Symonds, & Hargreaves (2016) argue that the loss of the relational approach, such as the close relationships with trusted adults, during the

transition to secondary school can have a significant emotional impact and reduce engagement.

James's description of his secondary school as "just like a prison" may be reflective of more than metaphor here, it reveals how strictly regulated and depersonalised environments can remove aspects of autonomy and belonging, as previously referred to in Foucault's discourse analysis. Further UK-based research (Evans et al., 2020; Symonds & Hargreaves, 2016) has shown how such transitions, if unsupported, can create environments where vulnerable pupils become misunderstood and marginalised. As exclusion rates rise among pupils who struggle to fit rigid behavioural frameworks (Parsons & Platt, 2013), James's narrative here, becomes figurative of a wider systemic failure. A lack of planned emotional support, key adult relationships, or adaptations during the move to secondary can lead to a breakdown in engagement (Holland & Mann., 2018). James's wish for "someone to talk to" is echoed across transition research that emphasises relational continuity as a protective factor (Coffey., 2013; Farouk., 2017; Lin et al., 2024; Parsons & Platt., 2013).

PRIMARY-TO-SECONDARY SCHOOL TRANSITION AND THE LOSS OF RELATIONAL SAFETY FOR JAMES

Alongside James's strong narrative about the institutionalised structure of his secondary school, is the more nuanced narrative around the need for relational empathy and understanding.

"Nah, secondary school... the support was not there. The support was not there so much... it was there... but they just didn't do it.... do you know what it is... there are a lot of people at secondary school".

"To do that transition, because the primary school is much different to the secondary school I think. Like... the reason I might get along a bit better here is because it's more like a primary school in some ways, like... because... yeah, it's just a bit more laid back. I think all the... they're teaching you for the real life, I understand that... but... it's not always the best way to teach people by being so stern, I don't think. Like, I dunno... I only experienced just one secondary school, I've not experienced it from all of them across the UK, or whatever, but I just know that, yeah... from my experience I just went to secondary school and it just didn't work what-so-ever"

James's narrative here, paints a powerful sense of being understood by adults at his primary school and at his current PRU, with the gap in understanding being at secondary school with the staff there. He talks to the fact that staff were there in numbers, but the support was not the same and alludes to a 'stern' behaviourist perspective as opposed to a

relational one. This guides implicit meaning into the relational approach being a feature of school that is important to James, and without this school does not work for him.

James's narrative highlights the importance of relational safety during the primary-to-secondary school transition. His reflections suggest that his experience of secondary school was marked by a perceived absence of support, structure without empathy, and a feeling of disconnection from staff. This aligns with research suggesting that transitions can be experienced as an "abrupt loss of familiarity, routine, and relationships", particularly for pupils with heightened sensitivity to relational contexts (Symonds et al., 2020).

This excerpt from James's narrative, also resonates from an attachment theory perspective. The move to secondary school created the disruption of his secure base relationships that were established in primary school (Bowlby, 1969;1982). The staff that supported James at his primary school, likely provided him with attachment-like functions, as these are often present within relational primary school approaches more broadly "providing safety, attunement, and emotional regulation" (O'Connor & McCartney, 2007). The larger, more impersonal nature of secondary schools can threaten these established relational dynamics, particularly for pupils who are more reliant on adult attunement for regulation and engagement (Geddes, 2006). This is likely the case for James, due to vulnerability given his early childhood experiences of trauma. The loss of relational safety at transition points can be particularly damaging for students with "prior relational trauma or unmet emotional needs", further reinforcing feelings of marginalisation or failure (Bomber, 2007; Dray & Wisneski, 2011). James's emphasis on "understanding" and the failure of a "stern" approach also connects with trauma-informed education models, which argue that predictable, safe, and nurturing relationships are foundational to learning, and this is particularly relevant for pupils who have experienced adverse life experiences (Brunzell et al., 2016). A relational approach is not considered a "soft option" but rather a psychologically attuned practice that meets the needs of the whole child.

JAMES'S ACTS OF RESISTANCE IN THE FACE OF DISEMPOWERMENT

In the face of disempowerment and lack of relational understanding within his secondary school experience, James appeared to acknowledge moments of resistance throughout his narrative. As earlier argued, Foucault's (1977) conceptualisation of power within institutions, prompts acts of resistance over time, from those that are 'oppressed' and living in a system without agency.

"...I was suspended loads of times... I don't even know how many times...I had like... I was there for like... I don't even know like 6 or 7 months or something... and maybe a bit longer than that and I think I had something

like... maybe like over 200 detentions or something. Yeah, but if you have like loads of detentions, they just build up."

"Yeah... I set off the fire alarms loads... like... I told a teacher, come on let's fight... everything... like... loads of fights... done loads of mad things, loads of stuff that you just can't do... and eventually they had to just get rid of me. And they just... yeah, they kicked me out and sent me here".

"I have had teachers shouting in my face... and just because I'm too big headed and I don't actually care... I am shouting back in their face... but any other kid wouldn't be... like... teachers make kids cry... and I see it, in secondary school, they try... what it is, is they try and teach kids too early how to be like... an adult... cause in year 7, you're still young... when you get to year 9, year 10, year 11... I think that when you get to year 9, you need to be taught, like you need to somehow... if you're still being loads of naughty in year 9, you need to sort yourself out for when you get into year 10... and stuff... but, I think teaching kids so early, to be an adult...like... I dunno... you got girls in year 7 and boys in year 7 doing all mad things like..."

James's vivid accounts of behaviour in his secondary school, including numerous detentions, suspensions, and confrontational interactions, can be interpreted through the Foucault discourse lens (1977) as "acts of resistance" in the face of his perceived relational and institutional disempowerment. Rather than pathologising these behaviours, James's narrative features unmet emotional needs and a misalliance between his perceived developmental readiness (as a year 7 CYP) and institutional expectations (to follow the behaviour policy).

Furthermore, a critical perspective highlighted by Burman (2008), suggests that behaviour can be a form of resistance against systems perceived as oppressive or invalidating. James's references to being repeatedly punished ("over 200 detentions"), as well as his escalating behaviours ("set off the fire alarms... told a teacher, come on let's fight"), can be read as expressions of his autonomy within a context where he felt powerless otherwise. These behaviours/actions serve as a voice when the relational dialogue is not present. This understanding that every behaviour has a route communication, is echoed in trauma-informed approaches, which act to reframe 'challenging behaviour' as a CYP communicating their of unmet emotional or psychological needs (Brunzell et al., 2016; Perry & Szalavitz, 2017).

This narrative also aligns with Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000), which considers autonomy, competence, and relatedness, fundamental psychological needs. When these needs are impeded, individuals may disengage or react defensively. James's narrative reveals compromised relatedness ("teachers shouting in my face"), lack of

autonomy (“teachers make kids cry”), and an absence of emotionally supportive regulation. His behaviour is therefore understood as an attempt to reclaim agency and control.

Moreover, James’s commentary about how schools expect young adolescents “to be an adult” reveals a developmental mismatch, where institutionally they year 7 expectations exceed the perceived emotional and cognitive capacities of pupils at that age, especially those with vulnerabilities. This reflects Eccles and Midgley’s (1989) Stage-Environment Fit Theory, which argues that when there is a poor fit between adolescents’ developmental needs and school environments, negative outcomes such as disengagement and oppositional behaviour are therefore more likely at this stage. James’s perception that Year 7 pupils are still “young” stresses his awareness of this mismatch, and his critique reflects an insightful understanding of the emotional expectations placed on CYP at this transition stage. Additionally, James’s reflections on his peer and teacher dynamics (“teachers make kids cry... they try and teach kids too early how to be like an adult”) parallels findings that suggest adolescents being “highly sensitive to social hierarchies and emotional cues”, and that perceived lack of respect or relational safety at school can amplify defensiveness and oppositional behaviour (Pekrun & Linnenbrink-Garcia., 2014). James’s acts of defiance appear as psychologically and socially meaningful strategies, that act not simply as disruptions but reveal his resistance to an environment that he perceived as emotionally unresponsive and unsafe, developmentally inappropriate, and relationally impoverished.

THE ROLE OF SUPPORTIVE PEOPLE IN JAMES’S STORY AND THE TIMING OF SUCH SUPPORT

As expressed by James throughout his story, there have been people that have been significant in his life, supporting his ‘redemptive’ overarching narrative. A particularly prevalent factor in this is the timings of support.

“If I had... if there were people about, to speak to kids. I think they should have something put in place for kids, before they can... when they can see someone going down the wrong path... cause I bet people could see me going down the wrong path but no-one really helped me except from my mum”.

“Like say I, I had youth offending, like YOT... I just come off that... but the amount of opportunities that I had with YOT yeah... it was good, like they used to take me out, doing things, stuff like that, but I had to get in trouble first, to go and get that experience. Do you know what I mean?”

“My YOT worker was good, she... she was really sick, YOT was good for me I think, got me out of the house, stuff like that... I used to go do community service with... its called (REDACTED NAME), but I used to go and do that, with some geezer called (REDACTED NAME), it was alright”.

James's story clearly highlights how meaningful the relationships with those supportive adults in his life have been (including his mum, and youth offending team worker [YOT]). However, he also draws attention to the delayed timing of external support, which only became available after he had already experienced significant school exclusion and criminalisation. This dynamic is reflective of patterns documented in UK-based research, which also identifies how early intervention often arrives too late for young people experiencing compounding adversities (e.g., school exclusion, family difficulties, or unmet mental health needs). James's narrative echoes the findings within the Timpson Review of School Exclusion (DfE, 2019), which has emphasised how excluded pupils often present with complex needs that were visible years earlier, yet interventions were delayed or insufficient at the time. Similarly, Anderson et al. (2020) highlighted how pupils often encounter a "reactive" rather than preventative system, particularly when support is tied to thresholds of "risk" rather than need. James's quote "I had to get in trouble first, to go and get that experience" aligns with these critiques.

This narrative also connects to research around the importance of trusted relationships. In UK contexts, studies have shown that relational consistency and emotional availability from adults can act as protective factors in educational and social outcomes (Gill, 2017; Cameron & Maginn., 2009). James's appreciation for his YOT worker, and his view of her as "really sick" (i.e., very good), speaks to the significance of relational attunement and non-judgemental support, even within statutory systems such as Youth Offending. His views about her suggest that the relationships themselves (not just the service) were the transformative component in his storyline, a theme that is pertinent in research by Crean & Lomas (2023), which found that young people at risk of exclusion respond best to adults who demonstrate empathy, stability, and emotional honesty.

LABELLING 'ADHD', THE MEDICAL VS. SOCIAL MODEL OF SUPPORT

Throughout his overarching narrative, from primary school through to present day (year 9), James shared how his 'ADHD' has impacted on different aspects of his life, and how this is something that he considers key to understanding how his primary-to-secondary school transition went wrong for him. James includes a strong sense of injustice when he reflects on how he has not received a diagnosis for years, and had a diagnosis rejected before, even though adults have told him he has many 'traits'. He includes how he perceives 'ADHD' as a fundamental part of his life, that have made certain aspects difficult such as sitting in a classroom with 30 other pupils. Interestingly James attributes difficulties with managing the environment of mainstream secondary school due to his mental health and ADHD difficulties, rather than considering how the environment is to blame for his difficulties.

"I have like ADHD and stuff... I'm not diagnosed with ADHD, but I know I've got... like... ADHD, yeah it's just... yeah..."

"Like, and the thing is with me... even though I had a good relationship with my primary school, I never really... even they should of pushed for me to have an ADHD diagnosis, or, some sort of diagnosis, or referred to the lighthouse, to see... to just have a look... like... cause I was mad as a kid. Like, screaming... like I've put, at my primary school, I've put my fists through all the reception doors, like, kicked teachers in the face and stuff, like, when I was kid, like when I was younger.... and it is like... it is mad to be honest, how I stayed there, but I, really in my head, how have they not thought to get that kid diagnosed with something... or, sort him out, some sort of help, cause it was mad".

"But I think that is what you really need if you wanna prove to people... you don't need anything... cause you're never gonna need it, but it will prove to people that you're not really just mad... you, you've got some condition. The same way someone has I dunno... a hernia, or something, it just comes about, like you got it. I mean, you can kind of get rid of a hernia but you can't get rid of this..."

James's narrative depicting a journey and desire for an ADHD diagnosis, also points to the tension between the medical and social models of disability perceived in society more generally. The medical model conceptualises ADHD as an individual 'within-child' neurological deficit, and a condition that needs to be individually treated or managed (e.g., through medication, behaviour management plans). In contrast, the social model argues that the barriers lie in the environment, for example in inflexible teaching approaches, lack of relational approaches/understanding, rigid expectations, and deficit-framed school policies (Norwich, 2014; Cooper, 2008; Cooper et al., 2013).

James's struggle to "sit in a classroom with 30 other pupils" powerfully reflects how mainstream secondary schooling may be ill-equipped to support neurodiverse learners, particularly when the approach is rooted in compliance, routine, and standardisation. From a social model lens, it is the structure of schooling that disables James, rather than ADHD itself. Armstrong (2012) critiques the pathologisation of ADHD within the educational discourse, arguing that CYP like James are often viewed through a 'deficit' lens, which marginalises their individuality and profile of strengths. This leads to what Graham (2008) describes as "disciplinary inclusion", whereby CYP are technically present in school but subjected to restrictive behaviour regimes that undermine their autonomy and belonging.

THE IMPACT OF UNSTRUCTURED TIME AND NO ROUTINE IN THE SUMMER HOLIDAYS

A key moment of reflection occurred for James during the interview process and helped to reveal a core narrative to his education journey which encompassed the role of the summer holidays. Specifically, naming that these breaks in school structure and routine, coincided with points of 'chaos' and going 'awol' for James.

"Yeah... that's my worst thing... that's my worst thing. In the summer... summer gets me. I don't know what happens, in the summer... My mum actually tells me, it's like a curse. Like... in the summer... In the summer, it's always bad things that happen, trust me... I dunno why... like, yeah... all these bad things happen in the summer. Yeah... it's like I go awol. But I ain't gonna do that this time..."

Findings from data that explored the UK Millennium Cohort Study, indicates that CYP's mental health can worsen over the summer holidays. Kromydas et al. (2022) found that socio-emotional well-being, as measured by the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ), declined following the summer break, particularly among children from disadvantaged backgrounds. This suggests that the lack of school structure during holidays may exacerbate the existing inequalities and challenges within the education system. This aligns with James's narrative of feeling 'awol'.

"I think routine... routine helps me, but I think none actually likes thinking that routine is gonna help them... like, no one likes to say it cause no one wants to be in a routine, when you could go off like... if I could stay at home everyday, then obviously I would but I think it does keep you sane... like for me, I got ADHD and stuff. That just keeps me sane. 100%".

James shows a level of self-reflection and awareness of the impact of the summer break now and shows a willingness to not let this happen again ('I ain't gonna do that this time'). Interestingly James can acknowledge routine and structure benefiting his behaviour, however he also attributes this to his ADHD, rather than the potential systemic influences in his Ecosystem at play during these times (Bronfenbrenner., 1979; 2007). Findings linked to research in CYP with a diagnosis of ADHD, do align with what James is arguing here as well, in that a transition from the structured school term, into a less structured summer holiday can cause disruption to the routines in place that help to regulate behaviours and attention, this in turn increases the vulnerability of difficulties with impulsivity and self-regulation (Johnson & Mash., 2001).

DR PEPPER:

The overall gestalt of Dr Pepper's story is one of 'displacement' and 'unrest' (Josselson & Hammack., 2007), due to the reference to constant movement over time, and a significant amount of movement being something out of her control as a decision enforced by a school or parent. This is embedded in the 'kicked out' narrative she uses to frame some of her school moves, but also the 'fresh start' one that features as a theme throughout the story, encapsulating moves to and from her mum and dad's houses. Dr Pepper presented as guarded and candidly shared information around the topic being addressed (primary-to-secondary school transition) therefore some contextual information relevant to her story may not be captured. Overall, I considered this to mean that Dr Pepper felt they could only share what was safe to share with a new and unfamiliar person, or what was most aligned to the topic of transition from primary-to-secondary school. My impression was that the second interview offered a subsequent space to build rapport and trust, and this can be implied in Dr Pepper's account, when talking in more detail about her move to her dad's house. Dr Pepper often sought clarity from me, by saying 'what do you mean?' which meant that questions were often rephrased to help aid meaning for her. I felt that Dr Pepper kept her responses factual and relevant to the topic of primary-to-secondary transition, with very little deviation into other lived experiences or narratives. The use of the timeline seemingly supported Dr Pepper to talk more about her experiences, as there was something concrete to refer to, that also offered a structure and flow to the conversation, they were confident to add and write down events on their timeline. There seemed to be an air of reluctance to share everything openly and holding back on some elements of the story, which led to me structuring and restructuring questions and repeating back core messages to co-construct the core narrative.

Dr Pepper adapted a personalised style when noting events on her timeline, where she added the year group to her timeline in conjunction with the events for that year. Dr Pepper chose to code the more positive life events as 'orange' and added these to the top of her timeline, this indicates the high points in her life. She has chosen to signify the less positive events as 'green' using the post-it codes. These events indicate the low points in her life as she has added them to the bottom of her timeline. Interestingly there are high and low points indicated at each year group stage on her timeline, there is no year that has just one 'high' or 'low' significant event, this accentuates the 'displacement' and 'unrest' as a general gestalt framing. Just from looking at the timeline piece, it can be implied that from year 8, more 'low' events are captured (3 compared to 1 high), this continues to be the case for year 9 and 10 (2 compared to 1). This helps the reader understand that year 8 may have been a

particularly troublesome year for Dr Pepper, followed by two more years of unrest and turbulence before petering out more in year 11.

CONTINUAL MOVEMENT FOR DR PEPPER THROUGHOUT SCHOOL HISTORY

Dr Pepper's narrative shows insight into her significant number of school moves, otherwise known in research literature as 'school-mobility' (Fantuzzo et al., 2012; Grigg., 2012; Temple & Reynolds., 1999; Rutter., 1979). One of Dr Pepper's school moves occurred towards the end of her primary-to-secondary school transition year. School-mobility during this transition year is considered to have an impact on outcomes for CYP and can for some children be a 'detrimental' time for school-mobility to occur, when compared to other year groups (Grigg., 2012). Rutter (1979), further argues, in the context of 'school mobility', that each move on its own may not be catastrophic, however, in combination with other risks (e.g. low Socio-Economic-Status (SES), parental mental health issues, housing instability), the cumulative load can significantly disrupt a child's development and resilience. For Dr Pepper, we cannot assume her parental mental health or SES, however we do know that she experienced school-mobility alongside housing changes due to breakdowns in relationship between her and her mum. During this time, she also moved house, therefore when considering this in terms of systemic influences, the Bronfenbrenner Ecosystemic model can be considered here (Bronfenbrenner., 1979; 2005). The factors within Dr Pepper's home and school environment changed (Microsystem and Ecosystems), as well as her connections and relationships with the people around her changing (Mesosystemic).

"Yeah... so... I left primary, and then I went to this school in (PLACE NAME 1- SECONDARY SCHOOL 1), and then, we moved house... to (PLACE NAME 2)... Yeah, It was all new... I moved to (PLACE NAME 2), so I didn't know anyone".

"So I was only in (SECONDARY SCHOOL NAME 1), for a few months and I left in year 7, and then I went to (SECONDARY SCHOOL NAME 2) at the end of year 7 and a few months of year 8, and then I went to (NAME OF PRU UNIT 1) for the rest of year 8, till... year 9.... end of year 9... and then I went to this school year 10 and 11".

Researcher: ok so you 'moved school', and this is your 4th move (referring to event written onto timeline), is that right? And did your moves happen in primary school the same, or...

Dr Pepper: yeah... I think I moved like... 2 or 3 times".

This shows us the complete systemic shift she encountered at this time, and at other times in her life, due to primary moves as well. Dr Pepper's reflections ("only being in year 7 for a few months"), helps to understand that her primary-to-secondary school was affected

by school-mobility and therefore unique in the sense that her narrative does not follow the usual arc of one primary school, and then one secondary school there-after.

CHANGES OF SUPPORT SYSTEM AT HOME AND IN SCHOOL

The Bronfenbrenner Ecosystemic model (Bronfenbrenner., 1979; 2007) can be drawn upon to further understand the meaning shared by Dr Pepper about her school-mobility and house moves. Not only are these moves changing her physical context and the Ecosystem around her, but Dr Pepper's narrative also sheds light on how her support systems with people around her changed at these times. Otherwise known as the Mesosystem, and the impact this had on her end of year 7- start of year 8 transition.

"I dunno. I had to walk in...make my own way into school.

Researcher: mm hmm. And how was that different to primary school?

Dr Pepper: when I was young, my mum used to drop me in school..."

"... my mum policed me... cause we used to always argue, and fight... and then policed me to my dad's, and I lived there... and then I moved back with my mum and then moved back with my dad. And now I'm back with mum"..

"So then we went (SECONDARY SCHOOL NAME 2), and obviously It weren't really a good school... and... there weren't that much support, so mum like moved me out and like... I got kicked out at the same time cause obviously I didn't go to lessons, I started walking the corridors... then I went to (UNIT 1)... and then I was living with my dad by then... Then... yeah... I went to (UNIT 1)... got kicked out of there, and then I went to this unit".

Dr Pepper shares her experiences of living with her mum and walking to school each day when she was at primary school, this changed at secondary school, as she had to make her own way to school, which she shared as a significant difference between primary and secondary school. When Dr Pepper remembered her move to her dad's it offers insight into the relationship between her and her mum becoming fractious over time, resulting in a breakdown and her subsequent move. When thinking of Bronfenbrenner's Ecosystemic model (Bronfenbrenner., 1979), here this relates to the mesosystemic shifts and the impact these would have had on Dr Pepper in years 7 and 8.

The below stanza shared by Dr Pepper, powerfully captures how the change in her mesosystem at this time in year 7 and 8 impacted both school and home life for her, including a distance between her and her formed friendships and family (cousins), as well as the narrative of having to 'try to make friends' in a new school.

"PLACE NAME 1- SECONDRY SCHOOL 1) one because obviously I had loads of friends, and most of my football team there, and most of my football

team went to that school... and like my cousins went to that school... and that”.

“Yeah It was all new... I moved to (PLACE NAME 2), so I didn’t know anyone.

On her timeline, and during her spoken narrative, Dr Pepper shared that year 8 was the year where the most significant changes happened in her life, and one of the potentially hardest school moves, due to the lack of support and relationships (mesosystemic support) around her at this time, This can be captured in the above stanza about there being ‘it weren’t really a good school...there weren’t that much support’, as well as the accumulation of green (post-it note) events added to her timeline at this stage.

“In (PLACE NAME 1- SECONDRY SCHOOL 1) it was just better... you had more 1-1s and that”.

“hmm. Miss (REDACTED NAME).. I think. Yeah. She would have been... she was just like... one of my year teachers (At primary school)... I dunno... she used to take me out... on like... one-on-ones to like... teach me.

“Err Miss (REDACTED NAME) ... that was at the (PLACE NAME 1- SECONDRY SCHOOL 1) one. Erm, she used to be like the TA in the lesson. Yeah... she would like just sit there and like... one-on-one... but like in the classroom with everyone”.

When considering the significant people that supported Dr Pepper throughout her primary-to-secondary transition, she remembered early support she had in primary school and mentioned one of her primary school class teaching staff members. She also mentioned the support she got during her transition into year 7 at her first secondary school, she remembered this being ‘alright’ and could name a staff member that would support her one-to-one in the classroom. Dr Pepper did not appear to talk about her primary-to-secondary school transition experience in overly negative terms, suggesting that she felt supported at this time. On the contrary when describing her second secondary school setting, this is where more negative language was used, alluding to the loss of adult support.

In relation to Attachment Theory (Bowlby., 1969) and the concept of the ‘Secure Base Model’ this can be applied to Dr Pepper’s shared narrative, to provide further meaning of her experiences of ‘movement’ and ‘transition’, not only in the relation of physical places, but with people as well. The ‘Secure Base Model’ has been applied to educational contexts, whereby key and consistent adults in the school setting may become important attachment figures for CYP over time (Geddes., 2006; Scofield & Beeke., 2018). If a child is continually moving, such as the case for Dr Pepper, they may lose connection and attachment to key adults in their school placements. Further research has explored the impact of disruptions to the school ‘secure base’ and argues that this can impact on a child’s ability to regulate their emotions, and be ready to learn (Bomber., 2007; O’Connor & Colwell., 2002). In relation to

her first secondary school, it is inferred from Dr Pepper's narrative that a key adult was around to build trust and consistency, which she felt was 'better' than not having the same level of support built into her second secondary school placement.

INADEQUATE SUPPORT IN SCHOOL, LEADING TO AVOIDANCE

Integral to Dr Pepper's narrative, is the sense that as things became difficult for her in relation to learning (implied by her remembering that year 6 is when 'things' got harder), support was perhaps not pitched at an appropriate level for her to be able to engage in this learning environment, which in turn led to her 'not going' to her lessons. In addition to her school-mobility, her continual school moves may also have made it harder for schools to gain an accurate learning profile about her and provide a well mediated programme of support (Feuerstein et al., 2010).

"Erm... year 6... Erm. Because that's when it all got harder and I never went to lessons..."

"... I got kicked out at the same time cause obviously I didn't go to lessons, I started walking the corridors..."

Dr Pepper's sense of 'being kicked out' for not attending lessons and 'walking the corridors', implies that she was not where she needed to be and an obvious result of this is to be 'kicked out' or excluded.

BEING 'KICKED OUT' AND SYSTEMIC DISEMPOWERMENT

Highlighted throughout Dr Pepper's narrative is the sense that she got 'kicked out' of each of her secondary schools, and the first PRU she attended. The use of language here implies a powerful meaning, that she did not leave on her own terms being 'kicked out' implies this is a decision made by the setting, purely on their terms, and talks to the sense of exclusion.

"I moved house... obviously when I got kicked out of that school... I moved house as well... so during that time I got kicked out".

This aligns with the ideology of Systemic Disempowerment in Foucault's (1977) institutionalised model, referenced above in James's story, as well as Freire's (2005) model of 'pedagogy of the oppressed'. The idea that being repeatedly excluded or moved between schools, without consultation or support, may lead to experiences systemic disempowerment and the notion of being "acted upon", without feelings of control or agency over key moves and decisions. Similarly, Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological model highlights how decisions made in the Ecosystem, by parents (in Dr Pepper's case, mum and dad), schools, or policy (behaviour policies in this case for Dr Pepper) can marginalise a YP's voice. This lack of Dr

Pepper's participation is notable, throughout the language used throughout the narrative, 'kicked out'. Furthermore, research from Lundy (2007) argues that key principles of children's rights require their participation in key decisions like this, while the application of negative labels given to a YP may in turn, contribute to a cycle of exclusion and diminished agency (Becker, 1963). This cycle of exclusion is vividly displayed throughout Dr Pepper's story, by the number of references to being 'kicked out'. She has also referred to 'being moved' by her mum at the end of year 7, at the same time as being 'kicked out'. This alludes to a parental decision to move her, potentially avoiding the formal exclusion process, although this can only be loosely implied.

CONSISTENCY OF FOOTBALL FOR DR PEPPER

Shared throughout Dr Pepper's narrative is the positivity of football, and this is present throughout her school life from primary, to secondary and the present-day, spanning over 9 years.

"because obviously I had loads of friends, and most of my football team there, and most of my football team went to that school... and like my cousins went to that school... and that".

"Yeah I was playing for about 9 years...well obviously my friends that went to school were in it... and it was like after school and that... and I had friends with football, which is obviously what I like doing".

"Erm...I moved football team... Erm, good thing, because like... my old team folded".

In comparison to other moves in her life, Dr Pepper talks about moving football team as a good thing that happened in her life. This is also coded via her timeline, alongside her home moves which are also coded as good and a 'fresh start' in comparison to her school moves which are coded more negatively.

Aligned with the earlier Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systemic model (1979; 2005), here football is something that has been described as being within Dr Pepper's life as part of her Mesosystem for years. This in turn has provided her consistency and supported the development of relationships, and something she enjoys. This arguably links to the 'Secure-Base Model' of Attachment Theory (Bowlby., 1969) described above however the consistency has been provided via her football involvement as opposed to school. This helps to emphasise that for Dr Pepper, access to football has been meaningful in her life, providing her an accessible and culturally relevant resource, that supported her emotional regulation, social bonding, and identity construction. She also mentioned how going up to secondary

school, her football friends all went to that school, so it linked her community mesosystem with the school one.

LOUISA:

Louisa could not take part in the second timeline interview, due to nonattendance and other systemic issues that occurred around the time of data collection. I reflected on whether this is more broadly linked to her overarching narrative presented in her initial interview.

Although Louisa only took part in one interview, some of her excerpts offer great insight into her experience of primary-to-secondary school transition. Overall, Louisa's tone when asked about school was agitated and frustrated, but this was confounded with her wanting to share her views so others could hear them. Although Louisa provided consent to partake and share her views, Louisa's tone was not always as warm towards me as I first anticipated it would be, which meant I had to check-in with her verbally to ensure she was happy to carry on, this potentially limited the rapport build between us. I felt that some of Louisa's responses were shared to elicit shock in me as the interviewer, e.g. when describing characteristics of her past teaching staff and fellow pupils (e.g. pupils with identified SEN such as autism and down syndrome), and I wondered if it would be difficult to build a shared rapport with her, due to our opposing views and use of language.

Louisa still identifies with her 'naughty' self strongly, and said she doesn't feel any different to the person she was back then (at time of primary-to-secondary school transition), the only difference is that she has 'got bigger'. I found this comment especially telling of her overall state of mind and identity with the education system as a 'naughty' YP. I felt that the overall gestalt to Louisa's narrative is one of a "Tragic or Dysfunctional Plot" (Polkinghorne., 1995). In Narrative literature, Polkinghorne describes stories with an overarching plot whereby the characters are trapped in recurring cycles of failure, betrayal, loss or constant misunderstanding, with very limited agency or redemptive solutions, fitting of a 'tragic gestalt'. Although I found it very hard coming to terms with this being Louisa's overarching plotline, due to my bias towards listening to 'redemptive' narratives within YP accounts, for her this does fit the overarching gestalt of her story as told during the interview. This is due to the unresolved tension, frustration and anger about school she still holds. Some of this I felt projected towards me at times during the interview, as the interviewer and I felt the connection and rapport build with her was challenging to establish at times. I wondered if this was reflective of my role as someone 'in' the education system, that she feels so strongly powerless in currently.

POWER, AGENCY AND RESISTANCE

Louisa suggests through her narrative, that she had limited agency and power at the time of her primary-to-secondary school transition and the external systems were potentially in place to overpower her, which she fought back against, leading to her exclusion from secondary school and subsequent move to the PRU. What was interesting, throughout the narrative, was how Louisa talked about uniform, in terms of hating the fact she had no choice over what she wore at her mainstream school, this was a very prominent feature that came up multiple times throughout her story. Even adults in her home life that impose power on Louisa, is noted, for example her mum telling her to do something like clean her room, this is something Louisa reacts strongly to and is therefore such a core part of her story in both home and school life, and notably at that transition stage as well. Louisa goes on to share how having autonomy and choice over what she wears in the PRU is important. The importance of autonomy for Louisa, can be linked to Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000), whereby autonomy is one of the core functions of self-motivation.

Louisa also talks about the difference between the rules and expectations in primary school compared to secondary school, and how this impacted on her transition. Louisa shared how in year 7 there was arguably less flexibility and lenience 'in year 6, they just told me to stop', compared to year 7, where isolation was experienced.

"Yeah, but that's the thing, the more times someone tells me to do something, I'm less likely to do it. So like cleaning something, if my mum is like 'clean that', I won't do it..."

"In year 6, they just told me stop. But, in year 7, they say 'no, go to isolation', 'get out of the class', and I'll be like 'no I'm not'... because in my head I honestly thought I didn't say anything."

"Right, so if you were naughty or not wearing the right uniform... it's not really like you get put in a box or nothing, but it's like, there's this whole room..." "no it was, loads of kids, given detention in the same room, its just like a classroom but all the tables are like around the wall, and she'd get you a chair and she'd give you a work book and it's in bare silence..."

"oh nah, cause if I done something yeah... wrong... where like I'm not wearing the right uniform, and they put me in there for that... then I'm like, that's unfair and I start going mad ...But I did chuck some leggings on and I know they then would go mad. And, if I put trainers on, you get put in isolation. I never used to go to isolation though".

"Yeah... and if this school comes out with a uniform, I'm not wearing it... yeah... because I can choose what I can wear".

This again points to the frustration with the external school system, and the potential agency and power she has gained from being able to choose her own uniform now. Perhaps Louisa's use of strong language is another way she seeks to gain power over others in an otherwise powerless system.

"I dunno... like, apparently boarding school is so bad... but that school is probably worse than boarding school".

Arguably, Foucault's (1977) theory and Freire's (2005) ideologies of power 'over the oppressed' applies to Louisa here, as she explains through her narrative how institutions (like her school) had set rules to regulate individuals, this is core to her likening of her school to that of a boarding school. The uniform, restricted movement, timetables, and behaviour systems are all forms of 'normalising power' in reference to Foucault.

"So when I had done something wrong... then I wouldn't really care. So like swearing at someone or chucked something that hit someone".

*"But, in year 7, they say 'no, go to isolation', 'get out of the class', and I'll be like 'no I'm not'... because in my head I honestly thought I didn't say anything...Because, they would just sit there and be talking to you, and not doing s***, and then you'll end up doing something wrong then, and they just go mad about it".*

Louisa also refers to the difference between being disciplined for something she had done 'wrong' like 'swearing at someone or chucked something that hit someone' as accepted by her, and she would go to isolation, however for something like 'wearing the wrong uniform' this was not justified the same discipline in her opinion. She also refers to a mismatch in her understanding of a behaviour that needs to be disciplined and staff's understanding.

ROLES OF OTHERS

Louisa implies through her narrative that swearing is something that features commonly within her home life and is now something commonplace in her use of language. Louisa talks about the role of others in relation to her swearing, and shared that her dad, primary school staff, and PRU staff are more understanding of her use of language, in comparison to secondary school staff in year 7.

"Oh... I was just bare rude to people, because in my head I was like... cause when I grew up with my dad, and he was like 'oh alright', but the second I meet new people... it's now just how I speak to people generally like... I really don't mean to be rude; I just do it out of... unconsciously"

"Yeah... cause... no... it's like a daily thing... like... I'll say it as, oh how did my teachers say... I use it as a comma... like I'll say it almost every single sentence, it's so bad".

Overall, Louisa remembers her secondary staff to be 'scatty' and 'rude'. Louisa remembers a small number of 2-3 staff members that have been helpful throughout her school life, and from her narrative it is suggested that these staff offered her something other than the school's authoritarian approach, and something more akin to a relational approach. For example, this can be inferred from Louisa's mentioning of her teacher in isolation. She also mentions a teacher that she got on well with at secondary school. Louisa found it difficult to describe the explicit ways in which this teacher helped her and from her narrative of them getting 'sacked' for helping her, it suggests that the way in which she may have been supported was not aligned with school policies, rules or expectations. This may also imply a narrative of non-conformity, similar to Louisa's. The teacher Louisa 'loved' offered her flexibility in being able to use her phone for example.

"there is a teacher in there... and I loved her, she was so lovely to me... but actually she used to let me go on my phone and... erm.. and the work I had to do were like word searches..."

"I just know that I cannot stop myself from being naughty, but it wasn't me trying to be naughty and she understood that. She actually understood me and she got sacked for helping me."

Within Louisa's narrative there is a strong sense that other's perceptions of school impacted on her own. For example, the voice of her sister who is a year older than her and was already at the secondary school prior to her transition. This relates to the Bronfenbrenner Ecosystemic model (1979; 2005) in that influencing factors within Louisa's Mesosystemic relationships may have influenced her view of secondary school, before she even experienced it for herself. This also correlates with the Curson et al., (2019) study findings that emphasise the need to recognise the impact of this transition point for CYP with siblings already at the school.

*"So, my sister was there... yeah... and she just kept going on about how s*** the school was and that.. I was like 'I'm going secondary and I'm not going to be there that long anyway'..."*

SELF-PRESERVATION, RESISTANCE AND IDENTITY

Louisa's strong and defensive tone and gestalt throughout her narrative, alongside some of her past behaviours which lead to her permanent exclusion, can arguably be applied to the model of 'resistance' described by Giroux (1983). Giroux's ideology builds upon that shared by Foucault (1977) and (2005), that student misbehaviour can serve as a

form of resistance rather than simply deviance. For some excluded pupils, defying uniform rules or answering back becomes a symbolic act of reclaiming power in a context where their autonomy feels stripped away.

“Erm. I Dunno to help them?.. be rude to everyone, because then no one can be rude to you...”

“It’s just if someone even looks at me a bit funny, I just go mad. And then... everyone thought I was rude, so I just thought... ‘ok, I’ll actually be rude to you’... so that’s when I started just being bare rude to everyone...”

“Oh no, that’s when I started being a bit more like ‘I don’t care’ and that...”

“like, I had one mate there and she was lovely. But no... I did have mates, it was more like... it wasn’t like I was popular or anything, cause everyone knew who I was cause I was either horrible to you, or you’d have seen me do something wrong.”

“Researcher: So, do you feel like a lot has happened since year 7 and year 6 for you?”

Louisa: No... not really, I just got bigger...”

In relation to an implied identity here, Louisa’s ‘Just be rude, so people can’t be rude back’, may have developed as a self-protection identity, due to experiencing repeated school exclusions and institutional control. In relation to this, further research suggests this phenomenon can occur when YP develop a sense of learned helplessness (Seligman, 1975), where efforts to assert agency are met with punishment, removal or dismissal (Schwarzer & Jerusalem., 2021). Over time, this can result in school disengagement or ‘acting out’ behaviours, not due to inherent defiance, but as a learnt response to cope with chronic disempowerment and a perceived lack of control over one’s environment.

2. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS ACROSS THE STORIES

As mentioned throughout the three narratives, pertinent to the time of primary-to-secondary school transition, are references to different aspects of change at the time of transition, including the change in social, structural and personal factors. This aligns with models that seek to explore each multi-faceted change at times of transition, such as the MMT (Multiple and Multi-dimensional Transition) by Jindal-Snape et al (2019; 2021) as well as the Bio-Ecosystemic framework (Bronfenbrenner.,1979; 2005) that can be applied to systemic change. Utilising the Bronfenbrenner Ecosystemic model, as used to support findings within unique storylines for the three young people, it can also be applied to overarching themes of similarities found across the three storied narratives.

BRONFENBRENNER- AS AN ECOSYSTEMIC MODEL TO HIGHLIGHT SHARED FINDINGS

At the “Exosystemic” level, each of the three accounts infer that the change of physical school placement, relationships and social environment during the time of primary-to-secondary transition in year 7 was impactful to them in some way. This is something that is captured within the transition literature already known (Clifford., 2021; Jindal-Snape., 2022; Knight., 2013, Lin et al., 2024; Roberts., 2020; Strnadova et al., 2016; O’Toole et al., 2014) and therefore is aligned in the accounts shared by the participants. Each account provides a particular focus on the change from being the ‘oldest’ at primary school to being ‘the youngest’, the change in building size from ‘small’ to ‘big’ and the change of rules, regulations and behaviour policy, as well as a shared sense of teachers being ‘rude’ (shared by James and Louisa). In relation to James and Louisa’s accounts, the multiple Exosystemic changes at this time are linked to their negative accounts of heightened feelings, getting ‘angry’ or not ‘agreeing’ with the way it was, which infers fundamental breakdowns in their school placements at the time of primary-to-secondary school transition.

*“It was different, because obviously it’s a bigger school and a lot of surrounding... a lot of kids... and when I started it was like... loads of year 11s in there, and obviously you’re the youngest one in there”. **Dr Pepper.***

*“There was a lot of people in one class, and... like... and you had big kids and the little kids, kind of thing”. **Dr Pepper.***

*“There was like way more people and bare older people. Like... you literally go from being the oldest in the school, to being the youngest”. **Louisa***

*“Because I think it was just... like... more people, and it was all weird and when people are so rude, I get so angry, and I can’t help it”. **Louisa***

*“I feel like, on a long, and like small thing of it, its like... it is that transition. That transition is just like yeah, I just didn’t agree with it. I dunno, it just didn’t... it was probably my mindset as well because at that time I was getting arrested and stuff, I was doing loads of things, but not even bad things, I was just doing silly kid things and I must of just... yeah... It just didn’t agree with my mindset at the time, but I think if I had someone I could speak to, and maybe could of worked with a bit better, instead of getting shouted at in the face by teachers, headteachers shouting at me, like, sitting in his office all day and all that stuff. It’s just... yeah... you don’t really get that conversation, do you know what I mean?” **James***

*“To do that transition, because the primary school is much different to the secondary school I think. Like... the reason I might get along a bit better here is because it’s more like a primary school in some ways, like... because... yeah, it’s just a bit more laid back”. **James***

"I think... some of these schools yeah... it's a big building... yeah... but you walk around and there's so many people around you, it's like you're in London... it's like you're walking down the streets of London, and it's stressful. I don't like it... I don't like it... here, you're walking down one corridor and it's 100 people in the school and it's not even 100 people in the school at once normally..." James

At the "Mesosystemic" level, addressing the question linked to the significance of people at the time of primary-to-secondary school transition, the shared findings across the three narratives imply a 'lack of support' and/or 'understanding' from their secondary school staff, when compared to their primary school staff and PRU staff. The exception lies within Dr Pepper's story, where she mentions the support being 'alright' at her initial secondary school setting, with a 1-1 support in class, aiding her transition, in comparison to her second secondary school setting that did not support her in the same way. Louisa also mentioned significant staff at her mainstream secondary school who helped her, however also mentioned that they were 'sacked' implying the staff members potential misalignment with the overall school ethos, system and/or policy. The narratives shared among the three stories, ultimately align with the lack of support exacerbating the breakdown of the mainstream secondary school placement. Louisa and James both identified through their narratives the shift in staff attitude and used language to describe secondary school staff as being 'rude' and 'stern'. The number of staff at secondary school is significant as well, as highlighted in the below quote by James "20 or so teachers, or whatever... for each class", the size difference impacts on the amount of people and staff, and this impacts at a mesosystemic level. Louisa shared how in the Unit 'everyone knows everyone' and this is a shared factor across each narrative that is thought to be supportive at their current placement.

"yeah I just hated it. Just the teachers, they're so rude". James

"I had... one time... this teacher, he was so rude. One of my pals... he was getting rude to one of my pals... like that... telling them off, and I must of said to him, got in his face and said like, yeah... tried to do loads of mad things... and yeah, I was... just like a naughty kid..." James

"Like... the reason I might get along a bit better here is because it's more like a primary school in some ways, like... because... yeah, it's just a bit more laid back." James

"...and maybe here at this unit, it's better because, there's more people that actually understand you, if you know what I mean... like no one really understands you in that type of place because there are so many kids and there's so many... like if there's a (inaudible) or something in school and there's only so many, 20 or so teachers, or whatever... for each class, or for each errr, for each subject, it's hard, because you're not gonna get... that's

*why, that's why obviously they're bringing workers in, like SEN workers and stuff like that, to schools and stuff... sencos... but, yeah it's hard, like, cause you don't get that conversation, and I don't think every student ever gets conversation, they're just doing it because they need to do it, like everyone knows they need to do it, but the kids that are like me... that f*** it up, and they don't end up doing it, like, that's the hard thing, like, because now I got to go back and change it and I'm still young, I'm still learning. I've not learnt properly what I'm doing with myself, like... do you know what I mean... and I still got to go back and change it otherwise I'm going to ruin my life and not get GCSEs and stuff". **James***

*"They're rude. Oh no, actually I had one teacher I bare liked, but she got sacked". **Louisa***

*"Miss (REDACTED NAME) ... that was at the (PLACE NAME 1- SECONDRY SCHOOL 1) one...she used to be like the TA in the lesson. Yeah. She would like just sit there and like... one-on-one... but like in the classroom with everyone". **Dr Pepper***

Addressed within the research findings around supporting primary-to-secondary transition for vulnerable pupils, is the emphasis on the mesosystemic support at the time of transition being especially important to foster positive relationships, and understanding, highlighting the need of incorporating a 'flexible' yet 'principled' relational approach with the YP's needs at the centre (Aspley., 2023; Doerr., 2020; Parsons & Platt., 2013; Thackeray., 2014).

When considering the "Microsystemic" level across James and Dr Pepper's narrative accounts, the shared themes align with 'vulnerabilities' that would anticipate a more challenging primary-to-secondary school transition, when compared with their general peer-group. As found in previous research, defining CYP as 'vulnerable' at this time might be attributed to CYP due to experiences of domestic issues at home (Roberts., 2020). For example, James shared his early childhood experiences of trauma within his family home (witnessing domestic violence towards his significant caregiver), and how he deemed this significant to his education journey, including his primary-to-secondary school transition. James's narrative further reflects the emotional regulation needs potentially exacerbated because of his early childhood trauma, and how these were present throughout primary and secondary school (him being angry and mad, and linking this in his own account to unresolved trauma). James is reflective of how this was managed and understood better at his primary school and PRU and his narrative highlights the distinct differences in approach when starting his secondary school, compared to the more relational approach taken by his primary school staff. Linked to James's microsystemic trauma was his dislike of being 'shouted' at by male staff, meaning that this transition stage felt particularly difficult as there was a higher prevalence of discipline occurring via male staff. Dr Pepper shared her

microsystemic vulnerability at the stage of transition, due to her school-mobility throughout her education journey leading up to her primary-to-secondary school transition. The literature around school-mobility highlights this as an area of ‘vulnerability’ for CYP (Fantuzzo et al., 2012; Grigg., 2012; Rutter., 1979; Temple & Reynolds., 1999).

“I had domestic violence happen when I was young, about 3, 4 years old... in my house happening between by mum and dad, when I was young. And then, that probably affected me in some sort of ways, with some sort of trauma or something, that made me angry against the world so much when I was young” James

“So I was only in (SENCODARY SCHOOL NAME 1), for a few months and I left in year 7, and then I went to (SENCODARY SCHOOL NAME 2) at the end of year 7 and a few months of year 8, and then I went to (NAME OF PRU UNIT 1) for the rest of year 8, till... year 9.... end of year 9... and then I went to this school year 10 and 11.” Dr Pepper

At the “Individual” level of the Ecosystemic model, Louisa and Dr Pepper shared within their stories, their perceived mismatch between themselves and the peer-group they were put into at points within their educational journey.

“err. Things like, that it was scary cause it weren’t with normal kids, they were all special basically...” Dr Pepper

*“Er, f***** because I used to refuse isolation and all that, they used to put me in some room... with some big, weird lady... And when they put me in that room, I never used to go to that room, because it was a bit weird. It was meant for like autistic kids and that and I didn’t want to be in there...”*

Louisa

Both Louisa and Dr Pepper’s narratives allude to their perception of the peer-group having more specific and identified learning needs or requiring specialist support that was different from the support they felt they required at the time. From both narrative accounts, this led to a breakdown in that provision working for them, and led to a transition into the current PRU setting. These findings across Louisa and Dr Pepper’s narratives touch on an issue discussed wider, in the context of UK secondary schools, around the appropriateness of support for CYP with a presentation of SEMH needs (as an identified area of need) vs. CYP with specific learning needs (Kaip et al., 2024). Research in this area also highlights the “pressing need” for more effective and tailored provision plans and support systems for CYP with SEMH needs, as distinct from those with specific learning difficulties. It is further argued that to address these challenges requires systemic changes, again signalling the impact of interpreting the issues within an ecosystemic modelled view. To help support this issue, research prompts to need for better training for educators, increased funding, and in relation to SEMH needs, a more integrated approach to supporting individuals (Kaip et al., 2024).

Interestingly James's account also shares his perceived mismatch, between his individual characteristics (perceived neurodiversity) and the mainstream secondary school setting he was in. James mentions his affiliation with having 'ADHD' throughout his narrative, even without a formal diagnosis, and it can be implied through his narrative and use of language that this is an important part of his self-identity. James often said 'because of my ADHD' which signifies his identity with this. James also shared his perception of himself and other YP at the PRU being 'smart' and that their individual difficulties with school are likely down to individual factors such as mental health needs 'mental stability'.

"Half the kids that are here, in this unit, they're not bad kids... they've got problems with... they maybe had one fight and they left the school... or they had like things like mental health problems, and they don't want to... but they ain't bad kids. They're smart, they know what they're doing, I think they are kids that are actually smart... like... loads of them. They just... it's all about their mental stability, like... and their mental health and if they want to... and one day they wake up and they're thinking 'go away'... I don't want to speak to teachers now, I want to go off with my mates'... cause I did the same thing. But... if they... yeah... if there were people to get through to kids a bit more, I think... but it's hard... it's a really hard subject to get through to them cause they don't know you... they think you're against them..." James

"I weren't mature enough to care and I think... yeah... it is hard, it's hard, that transition, for people with ADHD and mental health issues, it is hard".
James

"I dunno... I have like ADHD and stuff... I'm not diagnosed with ADHD, but I know I've got... like... ADHD, yeah it's just... yeah... I think the wrong mindset. If I had, if there were people about, to speak to kids. I think they should have something put in place for kids, before they can... when they can see someone going down the wrong path... cause I bet people could see me going down the wrong path but no-one really helped me except from my mum." James

Shared in the literature, is a sense that for individuals with 'neurodiversity' (e.g. ADHD, Autism), the primary-to-secondary transition can be much more challenging than it is for their 'neurotypical' peers, further contributing to a heightened vulnerability at this time (Dillion & Underwood., 2012; Hebron., 2018; Makin et al., 2017; Tobin et al., 2017).

FEELINGS OF SYSTEMIC OPPRESSION, DISEMPOWERMENT AND RESISTANCE

Shared throughout each narrative, was the emphasis on being 'kicked out' of the mainstream secondary school system or moved into the unit without autonomy or partaking in the decision process. The same narrative is shared in each account when referring to

being 'sent to' isolation, suspended and/or excluded. James shared in his narrative the likening of his mainstream secondary school to that of a 'prison' and Louisa shared that her school was worse than what she could imagine a 'boarding school' to be like. The language used here in these accounts, "prisons" and "boarding schools" constructs an association with structure, control and potential disempowerment (linked to a prison). As discussed throughout the unique findings, there was an alignment with Foucault (1977) and Freire's (2005) ideologies of power 'over the oppressed'. This is also pertinent to other studies exploring the views of excluded CYP with lived experiences of a school system (Edwards., 2023; Humphreys., 2022). Edwards (2023) discusses how 'relational pedagogy' as opposed to "compliance-driven" models, can support empowering YP that have experienced the mainstream school environment, been excluded from it and are facing their reintegration back in.

ADDITIONAL PSYCHOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES

Although not discussed in depth within the findings or the theoretical psychological lens outlined above, other psychological theories can also be meaningfully applied to the three stories within this study. The narratives strongly align with Rotter's (1966) concept of locus of control, whereby pupils' perceptions of whether their outcomes are determined by internal factors (e.g., effort, ability) or external factors (e.g., teachers, school structures) shape their experiences of transition. Additionally, the narratives linked to belonging resonate with Baumeister and Leary's (1995) hypothesis of belongingness. This highlights how social connection and acceptance is a human need. Although these theoretical frameworks have not been central within my focus of analysis, they can provide additional interpretive lenses that may deepen our psychological understanding of these narratives and the ways in which pupils navigate their mainstream primary-to-secondary school transition experiences.

METHODOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS AND LIMITATIONS

1. IMPLICATIONS

In light of the current issues around secondary school exclusions, in the UK, with figures showing an increase in the rates of permanent exclusion and suspensions (DfE., 2023b; DfE., 2024; DfE., 2024a), the storied narratives from this study add to an emerging understanding of pupil voice around the challenges of primary-to-secondary school transition and the potential implications of this time being left unsupported.

Alongside the exclusion rates, is an increasing demand and pressure to provide psychological support and intervention for CYP with SEN at times of transition, LAs are increasingly in need of exploring ways to support schools from excluding their pupils and

instead providing alternative avenues that will better meet the needs of CYP with complex, and hard to define barriers to learning. Counteracting that, schools are perhaps under an increasing pressure to address behavioural concerns as per the updated guidance defined as a 'companion piece to the Behaviour in Schools guidance' (DfE 2022), this may mean that the underlying cause of such behaviour is not fully understood or addressed on all occasions of exclusion.

Appropriate consideration needs to be made when conducting research in AP and PRU settings, due to the amplified ethical complexities, which demand heightened sensitivity. These young people should be supported to share their voices; however, an approach that adapts well to these ethical considerations is important. This is why the literature base is slowly growing and there is a dearth in literature capturing pupil voices in AP and PRU environments. Young people attending these settings have often encountered exclusion, trauma, and fragmented school experiences. For some methodological study designs such as a narrative approach, ethical safeguards can be put in place to ensure positive outcomes for the pupils and the researcher, however it is important for researchers to apply extra thought around these safeguards if embarking on future research in this area. Research further highlights these complex and nuanced vulnerabilities within AP and PRU settings, and how best to address ethical safeguards in future practice (Kaip et al., 2024). The high level of social, emotional and mental health challenges for AP/PRU pupils, highlights the need for practitioners and future researchers to embed trauma-informed and relational approaches so that wellbeing and emotional safety is prioritised. Further researchers have highlighted that educational system that includes the use of APs and PRUs can unintentionally perpetuate the feelings of isolation and exclusion, leading to feelings of loss of control and disempowerment for pupils within them, therefore, research should focus on ways to empower pupils (Maher., 2024).

The findings from this study adds to a small but growing body of literature highlighting the importance of gaining individualised information about pupils upon their primary-to-secondary transitions (Atkinson & Rowley., 2019; Bagnall et al., 2020; DfE, 2019; Farouk., 2017), to further support the more nuanced vulnerabilities, that are faced by marginalised CYP groups, such as those with SEMH needs 'at risk of' exclusion (Anderson, 2020; West et al., 2010; Lochman & Wells, 2004; Harris et al., 2024). Furthermore, as highlighted by these individual accounts, understanding whether a YP has experienced multiple school moves (school-mobility), childhood trauma (e.g., Domestic Violence), or self-identifies with neurodiverse needs but does not have a diagnosis, is relevant to how to support them appropriately at the primary-to-secondary stage, as they are likely to have even more heightened levels of vulnerability, as was the case for participants in this study group. Often,

as addressed in previous exclusion literature, when it is too late and exclusion has occurred, CYPs and their parent's voice the impact of this transition point, highlighting the inadequate support available (DfE, 2019; Farouk., 2017), as was echoed throughout the pupil's narratives in this study. As each participant in this study faced exclusion from school within the first 2 years of mainstream secondary school, this further implies that from exploring the shared narratives in this study, multiple vulnerabilities could have been better understood for each participant at the primary-to-secondary transition stage, or at the end of the first term or second term in mainstream secondary school, potentially reducing their risk of exclusion. This further implies that a richer understanding could be gained from professionals utilising therapeutically aligned techniques such as narrative timelines, to co-construct meaning relevant to that individual CYP, such as the approaches used in this study. Furthermore, utilising person-centred planning approaches for individuals at this stage is something that is echoed in the literature-base, as a planning tool to aid successful transition for vulnerable CYP (Small et al., 2013; White et al., 2016).

The use of timelines was considered effective in aiding the unstructured interviews with the two participants that completed the timeline activity in their second interviews, and they were felt to complement the narrative approach to interviewing as well as support autonomy over the restorying process. James's feedback in particular, from using the timeline was positive offering a prompt for both myself as the researcher and the interviewee to co-construct his narrative, which he found useful to him, mirroring the therapeutic alliance underlying such an approach (Bremner., 2020; Henderson et al., 2007; Sheridan et al., 2011). Whilst the timelines provided a structure to the interviews, the overall structure of the interview was determined by the participants themselves, reflecting on elements of their story that were most meaningful to them. There is a very small growing body of literature (worldwide), that is considering the use of timelines a way to facilitate and structure interviews in education, as well as offering a therapeutic approach to interview which is aligned with narrative inquiry/analysis research. This approach is often used with adults in health and medical studies, exploring the phenomenon of living with chronic illness over time, therefore a limitation can be how we understand the success of transferability across the education domain with CYP. This study only accounts for three narratives, and one did not partake in the timeline activity, therefore generalisability of the approach and its success is limited here.

When understanding the context of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and exclusions it is crucial for EPs and TEPs (Educational Psychologists and Trainee Educational Psychologists) to understand the proposed benefits, as stated in the literature-base, of staff supporting those vulnerable at the time of transition adopting

relational and trauma-informed approaches (HCPC. SoPs., 2023). The importance of this approach is further implied from the voices captured in this study, recognising the lack of support and relational approach within their own experiences transitioning into secondary school. When working in schools and conducting statutory work to support individual children and young people (CYP) with SEND, this aligns with HCPC Standards of Proficiency, particularly those requiring EPs and TEPs to understand the psychological impact of trauma (HCPC SoP 14.16), apply psychological models to diverse contexts (HCPC SoP 13.3), and to adapt practice to evolving needs and contexts (HCPC SoP 1.5). The ability to draw on trauma-informed literature also reflects the importance of using evidence-based approaches to guide interventions important at the primary-to-secondary transition stage (HCPC SoP 6.1) and promote relational, inclusive practice in transitional periods for vulnerable CYP. This also aligns with the BPS Code of Ethics and Conduct (2018), which promotes respect, responsibility, and integrity in practice, especially when working with vulnerable groups. In addition, BPS professional practice guidance for EPs and TEPs (2019) alongside the DECP's position paper on Emotionally Based School Avoidance (DECP., 2023) emphasises the importance of systemic, trauma-informed, and relational approaches, reinforcing the EP's role in fostering psychologically safe and inclusive school environments at this transition stage, to help advocate for vulnerable CYP, as well as support key stakeholders with the transition stage and reducing exclusions.

Furthermore, EPs are well-placed to deliver training for educators, highlighting the importance of prioritising organisational and systemic work aimed at supporting the school as a system during times of transition. This stance aligns with the HCPC SoPs (HCPC. SoPs., 2023), particularly those highlighting the EP's ability to deliver training and apply their knowledge of teaching, training, and supervision (HCPC SoP 2.7). In addition, the importance of effective communication and supporting organisational development (HCPC SoPs 6.2, 8.3) is central to the EP's role in facilitating systemic change. This approach also resonates with the BPS Professional Practice Guidelines for Educational Psychologists (2019), which emphasise the EP's role in systemic, organisational change through training and collaboration with educators, particularly relevant during critical transition periods. The BPS Code of Ethics and Conduct (2021) further reinforces the ethical obligation to contribute to improved practice and outcomes through training and development initiatives. The significance of this work is accentuated by recent statistics indicating that children with SEND are more likely to be permanently excluded from educational settings than other YP, and the EP role at supporting CYP with SEND. Additionally, children with Social, Emotional, and Mental Health (SEMH) needs who do not have an EHCP are significantly more likely to face fixed-term exclusions (DfE, 2019), and as highlighted in the shared narratives in this

study, mental health is a core feature of the restoried narrative. The most likely reason pupils are excluded is due to 'persistent disruptive behaviour' which is most commonly attributed to an SEMH and/or SLCN need, that has not been addressed alongside the behaviour in a trauma-informed way. This implies the role of an EP could be supporting staff at the time of primary-to-secondary school transition, exploring the understanding of behaviour as a form of communication, in alignment with trauma-informed research (Pirrie et al., 2011).

The significance of providing early Intervention is also shared within the narrative accounts within this study. The theme shared across narratives is that support at the primary-to-secondary transition stage is not always provided early enough, and the lack of preparation potentially heightened participant vulnerabilities at this stage. This implies that supporting schools to provide support at an earlier stage needs to be looked into, and this is echoed across other research findings in the field (e.g., Bagnall et al., 2024) suggesting this support is initiated in year 5. Furthermore, as adopted by Local Authorities such as Oxfordshire, the introduction of a screener to be utilised by primary schools in year 5/6, is intended to highlight significant vulnerabilities at an early stage so that transition can be better managed (Oxfordshire County Council, 2023).

2. STRENGTHS, LIMITATIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

When considering the nature of narrative research, there is an associated procedural uncertainty and lack of shared understanding, that should firstly be acknowledged when reflecting on this research and the findings comprised. The subsequent complexity and challenge in analysing narrative data, alongside the researcher's close involvement in co-constructing the core meaning-making, are often cited as well-known critiques and limitations of the approach (Polkinghorne., 2007). This is something acknowledged within this research, as a 'novice' narrative researcher paying close attention to uncovering implicit meaning, and co-constructing alongside participants, as well as recognising the 'messiness' of data analysis during the initial stages. Polkinghorn (2007) and Squire, (2013) also argue that research associated with this high level of 'co-construction' means that the meaning made cannot be argued as 'truth', which limits the generalisability and potential validity of study claims.

Arguably, the strengths of such an approach to data analysis, relates to the flexibility and creativity that are considered core to the principles of narrative methodology and analysis, enabling for rich and in-depth conversational flow, for example the use of multiple-interviews and incorporating timelines as a tool to aid an interview process and align with therapeutic principles of interviewer/interviewee engagement (Reissman, 2008). As argued by Josselson & Hammack, (2021) the engagement of the researcher in a reflexive and

conscientious process of narrative analysis is considered a way to alleviate potential risks associated with narrative research, and enhance the transparency of the research, by making the reader aware that the researcher has followed a set process of steps 'readings' and at each stage has been mindful of their interpretive stance. This approach to narrative analysis was grounded in the steps outlined by Josselson & Hammack, (2021).

Narrative analysis is an approach considered well-suited to research involving marginalised groups, as it privileges participant voice, with an emphasis on recognising the importance of lived experience in meaning-making (Riessman., 2008). For CYP who have experienced exclusion or educational marginalisation, narrative methods, such as this, offer a space for them to articulate their own stories in their own terms, rather than being reduced to externally defined categories (Andrews et al., 2013). Unlike more reductionist or thematically driven approaches to data analysis, narrative analysis seeks to preserve the complexity and 'messiness', as well as the used language within individual accounts, supporting both the relational nature of storytelling and the contextual embeddedness of experience (Squire., 2008). Narrative research seeks to align with social justice paradigms, which can also be argued a strength when understanding lived experiences of individuals, by providing a space for accounts that challenge the dominant discourses (Phoenix., 2008) and promotes reflexivity in researcher-participant relationships, this is essential when working across systems marked by power imbalances, and allows participants opportunity to feel empowered (Goodson & Gill, 2014). As such, narrative analysis can be considered a context-sensitive, powerful and ethical form of methodology when exploring the experiences of CYP navigating transitional and exclusionary moments within an education system.

It is acknowledged that the dual role of the researcher, as a TEP, and as someone that worked to support pupils reintegrate back into mainstream school from PRUs in a previous role, may potentially present a number of complexities and tensions to the project. This duality brings complexities, especially around elements of social justice ideologies and pupil voice advocacy that are core to the role of the researcher. On one hand, this allowed for a way in which participant voices can be empowered, arguably a strength to research such as this. On the other hand, this dual role is something that has been noted in narrative approaches in the past (White & Epston., 1990) as philosophical underpinnings may shape how participants were engaged with and how their stories have been interpreted by the researchers. The potential limitations of this are considered in relation to this study and the developing understanding of narrative approaches. The flexibility and creativity that narrative approaches can offer in research, was well considered and contributed to the argument for using such an approach which allowed for interesting and enlightening account of the participants' experiences, which is thought to provide a unique contribution to this growing

body of literature. Narrative researchers also urge for it to be utilised more, as a blended approach, combining key concepts such as participatory methods and analysis frameworks that fit the research aims (Shaw & Crowther, 2023), for example the use of both the Clandinin & Connelly, (2000) framework and the Josselson & Hammack, (2021) framework as fitting for this research methodology and analysis.

The role of the Link Contact, as part of the study design, potentially aided rapport and interaction during the interview stage with the researcher and participant, and this is therefore a potential limitation and bias within the current study. It is hard to know if more or less information would be shared by participants during interviews with or without their Link Contact present, for example did they hold back on sharing a view, due to the Link Contact being present. It is hard to fully interpret the role the Link Contact played within the study, it was reflected on as a useful aid to the ethical and relational requirements of the study, during the setting up stage and therefore had potential strengths that could be considered in future research of this domain. Furthermore, the lack of a clear and predetermined/defined narrative interview methods and techniques could be considered a potential limitation of the research project. It is acknowledged that the semi structured nature of the interviews could have impacted on the narratives that emerged. However, the role of the researcher is integral to narrative research and arguably a melding of semi-structured interviews and narrative interviewing principles to guide questioning, is an anticipated combination that is embedded in the literature (Hermanns., 1991). Hermanns, further argues that the main role is to remain ethical and reflective throughout the process, and this part of the design was well-considered, predetermined and defined throughout. Furthermore, the researcher drew upon principles of narrative interviewing and was conscious to maintain an open and flexible approach to the interviews.

The multi-interview design was embedded into the study, following on from previous suggestions in the literature-base that encourage the use of multiple interviews to build co-constructed meaning over time (Hingley., 2021; Sangha., 2019). Overall, it was felt this was successful in eliciting the narratives and stories of participants in a meaningful and open way, that led to a built rapport and 'flow' within the second interviews that occurred for James and Dr Pepper (Flowers., 2008; Hampshire et al., 2014).

A potential limitation and a considered implication for future research, is that it did not consider the viewpoints of participants struggling currently, and at risk of exclusion from their mainstream setting. Although there was a firm argument presented in the literature to find out the views from this cohort of individuals, as well as excluded individuals, it was felt that exploring the views of those still in mainstream school would present with ethical

complications, for example the identification of 'at risk' pupils and exploring gatekeeper approval across a vast number of schools in comparison to a much smaller number of PRU/AP settings. It was felt this would lead to an opportunity sampling approach in its design, for example only recruiting from one LA or a much smaller domain of schools. It was also felt that pupils excluded from mainstream secondary schools, have experienced the marginalisation in their education system, and allowing them to talk about their experiences would offer an empowering platform for their stories to be heard and learnt from. With this in mind, it is important to note that all participants were from the same PRU, and therefore, even though the design was not set up as an 'opportunity sample' one capturing views from just one school, this ended up being the only school setting gatekeeper approval and participant/parent consent was provided during the research timescales.

DIRECTIONS FOR EPS SUPPORTING TRANSITION

It is important to review implications for practice in Educational Psychology. To best summarise, I have outlined these at an individual level and at a wider context level, to align with Bronfenbrenner's ecosystemic lens in which findings have been discussed and to also aid EP understanding of how to embed these findings into wider practice (see Appendix J for a visual representation and resource for EP practice). This aligns with the Health and Care Professions Council's (*HCPC*, 2023) Standards of Proficiency, which highlights the importance of working across contexts and promoting wellbeing at multiple levels for CYP.

For better practice at an individual level, EPs can support CYP transitioning from primary-to-secondary school during casework opportunities. Applying the timeline tool as a way in which to gain deeper, person-centred understanding of significant events, people as a way to explore transition difficulties. EPs are arguably highly skilled professionals that are well placed to use these narrative aligned tools (Hobbs., 2012).

At a systemic level, there is a way in which EPs can support transition as part of a multi-disciplinary team around the child. EPs are well placed to support early intervention work and wider systemic change work with both primary and secondary school settings. It is important that schools treat transition as a joint partnership and not solely the role of either primary or secondary settings. EPs are well-placed to manage and facilitate this joint approach.

Furthermore, systemic support in the form of training around trauma-informed approaches is another way in which EPs can offer their skills and expertise to prioritise successful transition, as this has been widely implied in the research base already. As key to pupils that are risk of school exclusion, whether it be internal or external exclusion, the use of restorative justice approaches is considered a way of ensuring CYP autonomy and

understanding of behavioural policies and expectations. This is important as it was a key narrative that was brought up within the study as well. Another key narrative from this study, linked to CYP autonomy, control and identity was around the importance of school uniform, EPs should act to advocate for CYP when highlighting the importance of this with secondary staff colleagues.

As transition literature continues to grow, it is important to acknowledge wider practices and implications when supporting CYP, families and multi-professional colleagues with primary-to-secondary school transition, for example certain use of transition tools. The Oxfordshire guidance tool for transition is an example of a way in which professionals are urged to think beyond SEND and to think about other potential 'vulnerabilities' of transition, e.g., the CYP's social context.

CONCLUSION

This research aimed to explore the experiences of 3 YP who had been to a mainstream primary school, and then transitioned to a mainstream secondary school, before their subsequent permanent exclusion and move to a PRU. The study topic was focused on how these excluded pupils experienced the primary-to-secondary transition, to elicit rich and in-depth participant-led stories, that offer insight into the experiences of this time, including the understanding of significant events and people at this point in their lives, and how this linked to other life stages of their education (before and after the transition).

It is hoped that the narrative approach here, helps to meet a gap in the research base, calling for an empowering approach to explore the voices of excluded CYP, and what they have to share about the primary-to-secondary transition stage, without the merging of parent/school-staff voice (Curson et al., 2019; Farouk., 2017; Trotman et al., 2015).

The underpinning frameworks considered throughout the re-storied narratives, link to the multi-layered systemic aspect of the transition via the Eco-systemic model (Bronfenbrenner., 1979; 2005) and Foucault's (1977) theory and Freire's (2005) ideologies of power 'over the oppressed'.

Particularly pertinent to each narrative are the positives linked to an implied relational and trauma-informed approach (at primary and the PRU, or by particular secondary staff members), compared to negative events being linked to a lack of preparation, reduced relational support and understanding of need at the time of transition. This echoes previous findings (Symonds, & Hargreaves., 2016). Similarly, findings across the narratives highlight the inadequate and 'mismatched' support for SEMH needs more generally, and a distinct feeling of needing something tailored and different to the support offered for pupils with

specific learning difficulties. These present findings align with those already established in the growing literature base (Kaip et al., 2024).

The present findings have interpreted the alternative stories and unique ways in which YP utilise and make meaning of the primary-to-secondary school process, highlighting the value and empowerment of exploring the phenomenon from their perspective. It is hoped these findings will inform future developments in theoretical understanding of this life stage for pupils that resist the behaviour policies within UK secondary schools, and prompt educators to explore what their behaviour is communicating, utilising relational and trauma-informed approaches. The findings also support the utilisation of narrative approaches in professional practice and future research, as a way of capturing pupil voice and enriching the literature-base (Riessman., 2008). The present research has meaningfully addressed its aims and research questions, highlighting the necessity to talk to those excluded about their experiences of primary-to-secondary transition, to better align support at this stage for future pupils with similar vulnerabilities, as well as utilising narrative approaches to further explore pupil voice in a rich and meaningful way, aligned with social justice issues.

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PART III: REFLECTIVE ACCOUNT

INTRODUCTION

Research is considered an important aspect of the Educational Psychologist (EP) role and is listed as one of the 5 core functions of EP practice (Currie., 2002). This focus on research is interwoven into the doctoral training programme and is an integral puzzle piece when considering the journey from Trainee Educational Psychologist (TEP) into EP, it therefore requires a high level of researcher reflexivity and reflection throughout the thesis journey. I found this aspect of the training course both daunting and compelling, due to the considerable weighting the thesis research holds over course programme success. Arguably, the importance of research is mirrored within the world of Educational Psychology in practice, and the pertinence of research supports the profession's ever-evolving literature-base, ensuring that improved outcomes for the Children, Young People (CYP) and key stakeholders we work with, are in keeping with a current evidence-base (Mahdi., 2020; Topping & Lauchlan, 2020). Considering my position currently as a TEP, my training requires me to demonstrate my evolving competency as a reflective practitioner (British Psychological Society [BPS], 2019, 10.2). Therefore, my account below outlines my core reflections at each stage of the research, and how they influenced my overall thesis journey.

1. RATIONALE AND POSITIONALITY

To introduce this section, I considered the start of my thesis journey as a key point of reflection, as it conjured many opportunities to reflect at an individual level and a wider level. These points of reflection aligned with my personal experiences in professional practice, (as a TEP and prior roles), combined with the initial literature review process (Chapter I). In my best attempts to understand the topic and explore the most appropriate research questions, this required a high level of researcher reflectivity and reflexivity. This is in keeping with "The British Psychological Society's Code of Human Research Ethics" (BPS, 2021) principles and values applicable to all research contexts. Thus including "respect for the autonomy, privacy and dignity of participants" (2.1), "scientific integrity" (2.2), "social responsibility" (2.3) and "maximising benefit and minimising harm" (2.4), which helped to inform my decision making.

1. PREVIOUS PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCES

During my previous job roles, as a TEP, Assistant Psychologist (AP), and as a 'Transition and Reintegration Facilitator' (TRF), issues of school transition and reintegration were apparent across my field of work, and strategies to support CYP, parents and school-staff appeared to be inconsistent at times, leading me to reflect on social justice issues. My role as a TRF was a fixed term contracted project role within the Local Authority I worked in at the time and was in place to support pupils at Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) across the LA, whereby a two-term placement plan was desirable before reintegrating back to mainstream

school. The role of the TRF was to support the CYP and key stakeholders (parents and relevant school staff at both the PRU and mainstream setting) to promote 'reintegration' back into their mainstream primary/secondary schools, as aligned with the 'Alternative Provision' guidance from the Department for Education (DfE, 2013). This role allowed for my deep and personal reflections in relation to the idea of 'inclusion' and 'reintegration' and their distinct differences (Ainscow., 1999), as well as considering how vast and complex these terms are to define, within the already complex operational LA and national systems whereby acts of exclusion are also permitted (e.g. Suspensions and Permanent Exclusion guidance) (DfE, 2023c). These practices forced me to reflect on how AP/PRU and Specialist placements worked alongside overarching guidance, legislation and advice for the education system to promote 'inclusivity' (DfE, 2015; Equality Act., 2010; Children and Families Act., 2014; UNESCO., 1994; United Nations., 2006).

Furthermore, reflecting on how the funding streams and behavioural policies in place at mainstream schools and Academy Trusts, may at times clash with this over-reaching aim for 'inclusivity', with the term 'inclusivity' being a strongly debated one (Ainscow., 2020; Florian., 2014). Often the role of TRF was met with inconsistencies dependent on the need of the CYP, and the support systems in place at either the PRU and/or mainstream school. I often thought about the individual CYP experiences upon their entry back into a mainstream school from a PRU, and how success of this transition back, was influenced by many complex systemic factors, and not one 'stand out' thing on its own. This meant that my role at times, felt conflicting in its aims and highlighted inequalities and injustices for CYP that had been excluded, due to the complex systemic issues at play for each individual I worked with, I often found their stories and views incredibly powerful, however also noted that they were rarely considered meaningfully during decision making processes e.g. school movement. Furthermore, over the course of my year working as a TRF, I reflected on the weighted caseload I had, whereby I had more secondary school pupils than primary school pupils on my caseload. Interestingly the secondary school pupils were often on a longer PRU placement (beyond the 2 terms), and this encouraged me to think more about why this may be, and what systemic complications may be impeding the inclusion practices for secondary 'reintegration' to be as supported and successful as the primary ones.

At the time of my role, the Timpson Review (DfE., 2019) was released and was influential in that it highlighted some of the issues related to 'prolonged' PRU stays and urged for better 'reintegration' strategies. I often felt that the CYP and families I worked with had so much to say, and due to being excluded for behavioural concerns, they were often pre-judged, and their voices overlooked. For me, this invoked a social justice issue that highlighted the void in justice for pupils in secondary school PRUs. Often my involvement

was most valued by parents, staff and CYP themselves at points of transition and this therefore led to reflections about this time, and how it was inconsistently supported across the different schools I was working in, I was struck that there was limited statutory guidance and support at a national level, so that these inconsistencies could be addressed and provide a better facilitated process for CYP vulnerable to exclusion.

Furthermore, during my experiences as an AP and TEP, I found that a striking theme across pieces of casework for psychological support, was capturing complexities due to the transition stage from primary-to-secondary school. I noticed that these issues have been raised to me at a wider and more systemic level, for example by school (secondary school Senior Leadership Team [SLT]), as well as at an individual level, for example a parent bringing this to my attention during consultation for an EHCNA. The issue of primary-to-secondary school transition is considered a time of heightened vulnerability for CYP with SEND at a local LA level, and this is significant when ensuring timely and well-managed support for CYP whilst they wait for an Education, Health and Care Needs Assessment (EHCNA). It is therefore one area where multi-professionals across the LA's Education and Special Educational Needs (SEN) service are promoting multi-professional support, aligned with priorities from the SEND Code of Practice (DfE., 2015).

2. REVIEWING LITERATURE TO DEFINE THE TOPIC

Informed by my previous reflections and experiences from professional practice, I felt it was important to consider the social justice dimensions of my TEP role when engaging with my literature review. Social justice is recognised as a pertinent aspect of research axiology within the Educational Psychology profession (Fallon et al., 2010; Gill et al., 2021; Lee & Woods., 2017). Aligned with these reflections, the topics of school transition and exclusion emerged as key areas closely associated with this ethical and professional stance, and relevant to my own reflections drawn over time. Throughout my TEP role, I reflected on the ways in which EPs are encouraged to work systemically, such as “working in partnership with others, including inter-agency and inter-professional teams, to support service users” (HCPC Standards of Proficiency [SoP] 9.6), and “understand the structures and dynamics of organisations, including schools and local authorities” (HCPC SoP 13.8) (HCPC (Health and Care Professions Council [HCPC]., 2023). This therefore helped advocate for a research topic exploring a systemic phenomenon such as primary-to-secondary school transition and exclusion together.

I felt that the statistical trends in exclusion and suspension rates in mainstream secondary schools spoke volumes (DfE., 2023b; 2024d), by highlighting a systemic issue that is only increasing over time. This was compounded by the statistical trends highlighting

the increase in CYP with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP), or awaiting ECHNA, which in practice has become a prominent point of discussion among my fellow TEPs and EPs (DfE., 2023a; DfE., 2024b).

I often reflected that CYP with SEND but without a recognised level of support via an EHCP, were considered vulnerable at the stage of primary-to-secondary transition by primary school staff such as Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators (SENCOs). SENCOs tended to reach out for support for CYP in years 5 and 6, in preparation for their 'vulnerabilities' at secondary school transition to be best supported. With this I considered a perception that primaries can be 'flexible' and 'inclusive' of these needs, and this is not always the case in larger secondary settings. Often, I felt that the year 5/6 CYP discussed at consultation, or worked with during assessment, did not necessarily require long term support (e.g. for a severe and/or persistent need), and instead the support they often require is around how best to document their potential 'vulnerabilities' so that they are well-understood at their transition stage, ensuring individualised adjustments and adaptations are in place to best meet their needs. This in turn supports SENCO, and parent anxiety in ensuring support is well communicated and therefore well-managed by the next school. SENCOs also reflected that this is required even more so now than ever before, and it led me to be curious as to why this is, I therefore reflected on the broader societal trends of the 'medicalised model' as opposed to the 'social model' of disability (Oliver & Barnes., 1998) and whether this is a pertinent factor to consider when schools, and multi-agency professionals are under pressure to support SEND with limited funding, and whether this creates a dominance for 'diagnosis' and 'pathologisation' of need for CYP at the point of primary-to-secondary transition. It also led me to further reflect on what happens to those most vulnerable, where need is not identified by primary staff or parent/carers, and they 'slip through the net' at this stage instead. This hypothetical question led me to reflect on another theme across my casework, which was a rise in 'behavioural concern' in year 9, highlighting the possible challenges of an unsupported need at transition, 'rearing its head' to a point where CYP are unable to cope once they hit year 9. This is potentially reflected in the national figures presenting exclusion rates hitting their peak for CYP in year 9 (DfE., 2024d).

After considering the grey literature (defined as the government data and government policy and reports) I conducted a literature review of both primary-to-secondary school literature, and exclusion literature together to discover what was out there already. Reflexivity at this stage felt essential and the 'Code of Human Research Ethics' (BPS; 2021) was referred to for guidance. This encouraged me to let the literature base lead me as opposed to going in too strongly with a biased proposed line of inquiry. This is aligned with "scientific integrity" (2.2) (BPS., 2021). From my initial searches, considering a thesis

exploring the issues of primary-to-secondary school transition felt incredibly overwhelming, amid the vast amount of studies already saturating the literature base, here I found the inclusion and exclusion criteria very important to my overall search. What I found key to my continued search in this area, was the predominant focus on generalised mainstream populations, or in relation to academic outcomes for CYP at this transition stage, as opposed to exploring the systemic and social-emotional implications marginalised individuals face at this time. There was a lack of pupil voice for children specific to the group of excluded pupils (experiencing mainstream primary-to-secondary school transition and exclusion from mainstream secondary school). I found a large number of studies that only included questionnaire data, or CYP voice merged and intertwined with that of teaching staff and parents. For me this urged me to explore qualitative data that would aim to capture the voices of CYP marginalised and most disempowered within the secondary school system. Within systematic literature reviews already undertaken, this was also the consensus, and this led me to explore the gaps in understanding pupil voice from marginalised groups (Bagnall et al., 2020a).

3. PROPOSED RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Defining my proposed research questions, meant further reflections and refinement around my position and my areas of knowledge and researcher axiology. For example, to ensure advocacy for CYP and gaining views from marginalised CYP at a social justice level, meant that the aim of my research should be ‘exploratory’ in nature, to best empower the voice of the CYP I wished to involve. Due to further understanding the phenomenon of primary-to-secondary school transition, I felt that this must be the focus of the questions, alongside an openness and flexibility for CYP to share what they felt most pertinent. This felt most aligned with the “social responsibility” (2.3) (BPS., 2021).

“How do excluded secondary school pupils view their experiences of primary-to-secondary school transition?”

<i>The above question was the overriding exploratory question (The big Q), with the beneath questions acting as the following questions (Little Q).</i>

<i>1. What do secondary school pupils, who have been excluded, identify as significant events during their primary-to-secondary school transition period?</i>

<i>2. Who do secondary school pupils, who have been excluded, name as significant people involved during their primary-to-secondary school transition period?</i>

<i>3. What can be learnt about the primary-to-secondary school transition period, from the experiences of pupils excluded from secondary school?</i>
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4. RESEARCH PARADIGMS AND FITTING EPISTEMOLOGICAL POSITIONALITY

I found that the notion of ‘Big’ and ‘Little’ ‘Questioning’ (Berger & Luckman., 1996; Savin Baden & Major., 2013; Willig., 2013)., helped me reflect on my role and positioning of knowledge that would likely influence the social construction of findings, for example my knowledge of SEND at a professional level. I reflected that in relation to understanding SEND, I am perhaps ‘consciously competent’ (Howell., 1982) due to my statutory role working in accordance with legislation such as the SEND CoP (DfE., 2015). I felt that this would influence my research stance somewhat and that this would need to be made transparent in accordance with principles (2.1), “scientific integrity” (2.2) and “social responsibility” (BPS., 2021). I considered my positionality important as my findings would therefore be interpreted through an ‘Trainee Educational Psychology/SEND Professional lens’ as opposed to any other lens associated with the primary-to-secondary school transition. Equally important to the marginalised group of excluded pupils is the high congruence with SEND, and therefore my researcher axiology felt well-aligned with the focus and study aims of eliciting the voice of excluded pupils (DfE., 2023c). Empowering pupil voice also led me to consider an open-ended approach to research questioning, whereby social constructionism felt the best fit to enable CYP to share their experiences of primary-to-secondary school transition. Consequently, I adopted a “*meta-perspective*” (Beaver, 2011, p.16), which enabled me to reflect critically on both the research process and my own positionality within this, which is an essential part of social constructionist approaches to research.

5. FITTING METHODOLOGICAL APPROACHES

To help me consider the different research methodologies that suit an interpretive research design (Petty et al., 2012) and their pros and cons for the research aims identified, I created the below table. I considered two other methodologies most in-keeping with the Social Constructionist epistemology (Mertens., 2015), before deciding Narrative Analysis would be the best fit to capture unique participant stories (shown in Table 4: below):

Table 4: Methodological Approaches (Pros and Cons reflected upon)

	<i>Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)</i>	<i>Thematic Analysis</i>
<i>Pros</i>	<i>IPA is an appropriate approach to use among a homogenous group of CYP, to explore their experiences of a shared phenomenon. For example</i>	<i>As a ‘novice’ researcher, TA can act as an adaptable method to use across epistemological domains, it is</i>

	<i>CYP that have experienced mainstream Primary-to-secondary transition and subsequent exclusion. (Smith et al., 2009)</i>	<i>made accessible to researchers at all levels (Braun, & Clarke., 2006).</i>
Cons	<i>The anticipated participant group for an IPA study is between 4-6 CYP. This was considered a limitation in the current research aims, as ethical considerations meant that CYP in PRUs and APs may find engagement in the study challenging, thus impacting the potential for multiple interviews per participant, and impacting the number of participants recruited. I felt worried that the number of participants would not be reached.</i>	<i>Similarly to IPA, TA requires a larger data set of participant voice, to be able to identify patterns and themes across the group (Braun, & Clarke., 2006). Rich and in-depth Participant 'stories' were felt to be the most important aspect of sharing experiences from a marginalised participant group, the structure of stories was important to capture this life event, therefore TA, could potentially 'deconstruct' some of these stories and structure of the story, or impact the 'richness' of language and experiences shared by participants (Reissman., 2008).</i>

2. DATA COLLECTION

For me, data collection was an area for deep thought and reflection, paying close attention to “respect for the autonomy, privacy and dignity of participants” (2.1), “and “maximising benefit and minimising harm” (2.4) (BPS., 2021). This was compounded with my epistemological desire to explore CYP stories in a rich and insightful way (via social constructionist means), that appeared limited in the field of literature already out there. Narrative Analysis paves the way for multiple and in-depth interviews to take part between a researcher and participant, and this was a way of collecting ‘data’ that felt most at ease and empowering for CYP sharing their stories, as well as the best way to collect rich and in-depth insights from a small group of participants. Important to my decision to incorporate a narrative research design, was the significance of “relationship, context and community” in influencing thinking, action and meaning (Hobbs et al., 2012). These factors were considered highly relevant to the research study aims of ‘transformational’ and ‘exploratory’ findings (Mertens & Ginsberg., 2008; Mertens., 2017), heavily interwoven with social justice

and facilitation of social change, as opposed to findings related to 'generalisable' and/or 'universal' truth claims that are realist in their epistemological and ontological positioning.

I felt that a gap in the literature was considering CYP voice, without the influence of other parties/voices (e.g. parents, staff, mentors). This itself presented challenges at the recruitment stage, as I was concerned about CYP uptake and participation. Narrative Analysis allowed me to pair back this anxiety about recruitment as it values the in-depth and rich accounts from each CYP and unlike other methodological paradigms, does not argue for a 'best-fit' sample size. This felt much more aligned with social constructionism, as I did not feel pressurised to interview more CYP 'just for numbers'. The design of my research did however present a number of complex professional and ethical issues, and careful consideration and self-reflection was required at each point of the data collection and analysis process. During the interviews, in particular, I recognised the impact of my 'dual role' as a researcher and TEP. For me this was an ongoing area of contention due to the level of interpersonal and highly analytical skill required of a Narrative researcher (Josselson & Hammack., 2021). I found the developed level of competency TEPs have in relation to active listening and principles of rapport are both a blessing and a curse when it came to Narrative interviewing. In respect of providing a space for CYP to feel comfortable and empowered to share their stories in their own words, my TEP skills strengthened this process. However, I found that in relation to interpretation of accounts shared in interviews, I had to recognise and consistently check-in on the potential wormhole I could go down if I were to rely too heavily on my 'core consultation skills' such as, 'hypothesising' or 'reframing' my own interpretation of the CYP accounts. Due to this recognition early on, I was careful to ensure my own interpretation and language did not overly lead or guide the direction of the interviews, as they potentially could in my other professional role as a TEP e.g. during 'consultation' or 'assessment', which follows a similar format, such as asking questions to explore a shared understanding (e.g. when hypothesising).

Ethical considerations around the involvement of the Link Contact are discussed earlier in the empirical chapter. Due to interviews taking place during the school day, when considering the most effective and ethical away to ensure participant safety, alongside my own safety, ("maximising benefit and minimising harm" (2.4) (BPS., 2021), the involvement of a trusted adult from school, felt the most feasible way to go about this and was an essential part of the ethical make-up of the interview process. However, this did mean that instead of just considering participant-researcher anonymity and confidentiality, I had to reflect on the additional issues the incorporation of a Link Contact could bring to the study. I reflected that this would potentially limit some of the stories and experiences shared, especially about the PRU placement itself, as the Link Contact was from their current setting.

I felt that as the experience of the current PRU setting was not the main topic focus, this would not be too much of an issue and I considered how the confidentiality and anonymity could still exist for the CYP in respect of the overall study aims. This thought process about the Link Contact was built into my ethical application and ensured that my information about the Link Contact role was made explicitly available to all, throughout the process. One way I ensured this, was highlighting the CYP at the centre of the research priorities, explicitly explaining at each interview that the study is designed to ensure their comfort and trust, and the role of the Link Contact is purely to aid that, as opposed to sharing any of their views, or influencing the process at all. Although impossible to irradicate all influence of the Link Contact being in the room with us, it was made clear that the purpose was to ensure they felt safe enough with an unfamiliar adult, to be able to share as much of their story as they felt able to.

At the point of recruitment past gatekeeper approval stage, autonomy and choice for participants felt hugely important to the nature of a narrative design. I hoped that by sharing my recruitment presentation, this provided a 'CYP friendly' overview of the research process, introducing myself and the study aims, alongside an opportunity to discuss this with their parent/carer and Link Contact. The Link Contact would act as the communication between myself and the potential participant if any questions arose and I felt this was essential to allow their informed consent and co-construction instead of the idea that research was 'being done to them', respecting the autonomy and rights of the YP. This was aligned with "respect for the autonomy, privacy and dignity of participants" (2.1), "social responsibility" (2.3) and "maximising benefit and minimising harm" (2.4) (BPS., 2021).

The recruitment stage was particularly challenging and at times I felt very anxious about the prospects of meeting my proposed deadlines due to my recruitment hurdles. Often interviews had to be rearranged to meet the needs of the CYP on the day, and due to the nature of participant wellbeing taking paramount importance, this did present me with many organisational issues. This was time-consuming and due to interviews being face-to-face, my travel time to and from the participant's school placement, meant that on multiple occasions I would travel to the school and come away without an interview (due to CYP absence and the need to rearrange). This itself was telling of the chaotic and sporadic attendance profile that the participants had at their PRU placement. These challenges also created ethical conundrums related to the inclusion of a participant's interview when they had only completed one initial interview and not both like the other participants in the sample. Ethically this CYP provided consent for her initial interview to be a part of the study and this was not withdrawn at any stage, therefore it was a reflective decision to include her story even though she did not partake in the second interview (due to her unforeseen school

move). I reflected that this was in accordance with “social responsibility” (2.3) (BPS., 2021), to share her views, as they were meaningful to the overall study findings and discussion too.

Part of my initial interview design was to ask participants to bring in an object or picture that reminded them of their primary-to-secondary transition, and this could be brought with them to either their initial interview with me or the second (after being reminded at their first interview). This did not go to plan, and I reflected on why this was. I think that this was potentially too much of an ask of the participants, to remember to bring something in from home, as well as engage in their interview. One participant spoke about their ‘leavers day photo’, even though they did not bring the physical object in that day, but the other two participants found it incredibly difficult to even think about an object that would represent this time for them, and therefore I made the decision to omit this from the subsequent write-up.

Although participant names were pseudonymised to protect anonymity, throughout the data collection phase, further issues of anonymity were reflected on, in light of the small sample size and incorporating participant language as much as possible to retell their stories. This was something I discussed with my research supervisor as well, and it was felt that by keeping language exactly the same, in respect of the true location names and place names, (even of the specific region of England they were from) could heighten the risk of participant identification, as well as the mainstream secondary school placement and PRU placement identification. Although this risk was perhaps slight, I felt anonymisation of place names was required throughout, to minimise and protect against CYP being identified via their shared narratives. The anonymisation of place names felt a pertinent issue to me, as the context of location and LA positioning would potentially illuminate understanding of participant stories even more, adding even further insight and richness to their narrative. This decision to carefully consider anonymity at each phase, was felt to respect and act in the ‘best interests’ of the CYP (Health Care and Professionals Council [HCPC] SoP 2.1.) (HCPC.,2023). Throughout the data collection phase, I considered the ongoing reflective process an underpinning aspect of approaching and conducting ethical research. Considering the role of power, trust, professional expertise and my social responsibility as central to the process. This mirrors my responsibility in my role of TEP, and the wider role of EPs to promote equality, diversity and social justice (HCPC SoP 2.2) (HCPC., 2023).

3. DATA ANALYSIS

I felt deeply privileged to hear these insightful and reflective accounts shared by the participants I worked with; it felt emotionally overwhelming at times when listening back over the recorded interviews, especially when hearing themes of disempowerment across the 3 accounts. The accounts also made me reflect on my own pre-judgements at the time of the

interviews, for example I did not anticipate that the 2 participants that took part in the timeline activity would be so invested in the process or be so willing to write down and structure their own accounts, for example, I had prepared how I would write on the timelines as they dictated to me, but this was not required in the end due to their engagement. This also led to my reflections around other occasions in their life whereby professionals, shared these same biases and pre-judgements, and this had limited their involvement in the past, or overlooked their potential to contribute towards rich and meaningful conversations. Here I appreciated my narrative design, which allowed for CYP autonomy over their interviews and timeline activities and provided the flexibility and creativity for these accounts to be shared naturally. I also acknowledged my potential pre-judgment around the level of contextual insight the participants provided, and this meant that when their narratives were listened back to, I had the upmost respect and gratitude for the participants that took part, listening to the transcript highlighted their in-depth and nuanced understandings, which in turn added pressure on me to 'do them justice' in my write up.

As mentioned previously, to provide transparency within the empirical chapter, I have been reflective throughout my research journey around my 'novice' and developing skillset in relation to Narrative Analysis. As the task of Narrative Analysis requires the researcher to be very close to the dataset and remain highly analytical, by nature the task it felt incredibly overwhelming and led to my own fear of failure, this is something I felt compelled to overcome when constructing the narratives of the CYP I had worked with.

1. CONSTRUCTION OF NARRATIVES

To support my analysis process, I found that initial reading around narrative research, in particular Narrative Analysis (Howitt., 2010; Reissman., 2008) helped me understand the 'vagueness' alongside the flexibility of the approach. Furthermore, I found that a shared argument in the field of literature discussing qualitative approaches such as Narrative Analysis, urges researchers to adapt their methodological design to best fit the study design, this is something that is valued within the field of socially constructed research design (Burr., 2015; Roller., 2022).

At the stage of analysing my interview transcripts to start 're-storying' and co-constructing the three narratives, I felt pressure to get this right, which felt compounded by the added pressure of having a potentially 'vaguer' approach than other forms of analysis I had knowledge of e.g., use of the highly structured Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) (Braun and Clarke., 2006). Narrative research approaches, however, offer flexibility in accordance with the socially constructed aims of my study, and therefore there is often 'vagueness' in terms of creating the best and most personal form of analysis that meets the

needs of the researcher and participants (Maxwell., 2013; Roller., 2022). As a TEP researcher, learning whilst using this approach for the first time, I found comfort in the Clandinin & Connelly's (2000) three-dimensional narrative inquiry framework, which refers to the interaction (personal/social), continuity (past/present/future), and situation (place) and highlights these as integral meaning-making factors that are involved in the re-storying process. This alongside the process of 'readings' by Josselson and Hammack (2021), helped guide me through each step of the analysis, and helped prompt me to keep close attention on implicit meanings and interpretive stances. I found this incredibly useful to aid my anxiety and overwhelm, as well as it addressing the research aims.

2. METHODOLOGICAL INTEGRITY OF RESEARCH

Levitt et al. (2017) further argues that what matters when considering methodological integrity of qualitative research design, such as Narrative Analysis, is that choices are '*justified, transparent, and well-aligned*' with your aims. As discussed in both the empirical chapter, and throughout this reflective chapter, is the transparency that my role as a researcher is pertinent to the design of Narrative Analysis and its underpinning paradigm of social constructionism. I considered this a well justified approach here, due to the 'exploratory' research aims of the study, and the empowerment of 'restorying' (Robson & McCartan, 2016). However, this approach to research has been debated as both a strength and limitation in relation to research 'integrity' and 'validity', as the researcher's role is integral to the co-construction of narratives, introducing the potential for subjectivity (Crossley., 2003). Reflexivity is a valued aspect of this approach, and this suited my own epistemological positioning as a reflective and reflexive practitioner. Narrative Analysis often focuses on the rich and in-depth analysis of individual cases, which was considered an important aspect here, given the specific participant group's marginalisation, and allowing them adequate time, resource and empowerment to share their story. This small participant group can limit the generalisability of findings due to the idiographic approach. However, the main aim of idiographic research is not to generalise widely and allows for exploration of 'uniqueness' of each narrative instead (Frost., 2011). For this reason, I felt this was well-aligned with the social justice aims, to provide space for participants to share their unique experiences.

4. CONTRIBUTION TO PERSONAL & PROFESSIONAL KNOWLEDGE AND SKILL DEVELOPMENT

Undertaking this research project, has allowed for a high level of self-reflection as part of the learning process. This has strengthened my capacity to engage thoughtfully and reflexively with complex ethical issues. The above-mentioned HCPC SoPs and the BPS Code of Ethics, underpinned my reflections at each point of the process (BPS, 2021; HCPC.,

2023), allowing me to reflect on the core aspects aligned with the psychologist-researcher role, as well as the EP role. While I recognised the importance of professional codes in guiding reflective practice in research, it became evident that my personal engagement with the project often prompted me to reflect. This process enabled me to respect and acknowledge my development as a reflective practitioner, strengthening my confidence in navigating complex professional issues in practice, and how competence in this skill is relevant to all 5 of the core functions of EP work (Currie., 2002). This experience has strengthened my understanding of conducting ethical research and enhanced my ability to promote equality, inclusion, and social justice. These skills will be vital to my practice as an EP post-qualification.

Linking back to the literature base, the dominant focus on ‘mainstream-education’ experiences has meant that much of the existing research captures the perspectives of CYP transitioning within mainstream contexts, generalised to the broader population (Mumford & Birchwood, 2021; Jindal-Snape et al., 2020). It is hoped that the powerful narrative accounts elicited from this specific marginalised group (identified as under-represented within the current literature) will contribute to a richer understanding of how the phenomenon of primary-to-secondary school transition is experienced. Reflecting on the powerful stories shared, the exploratory nature of this project seeks to promote a more inclusive research base, focusing less on generalisation and more on empowerment by capturing the unique viewpoints of CYP who have experienced marginalisation through exclusion. This approach directly addresses some of the gaps identified in the systematic literature reviews that informed my initial exploration of the field (Bagnall et al., 2020b; Cunningham et al., 2024).

I have reflected on the key findings explored in relation to the multi-layered Ecosystemic model (Bronfenbrenner., 1979; 2005) and the potentially powerful application and implication into professional practice, not just at an EP level, but at a multi-systemic level. I reflected on the ‘Chronosystem’ (Bronfenbrenner., 1979; 2005) and its relevance to the research, and considered it extremely relevant now, due to the immense and increasing demands services are under, including the SEND system, education system and CYP services more generally. It is hoped that these findings will align with government initiatives that recommend professionals work together more. Throughout my thesis journey, I have reflected on this and the key findings through the lens of Bronfenbrenner’s multi-layered ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 2005), considering the potential implications for professional practice not only at the level of Educational Psychology (EP) practice, but across wider multi-agency systems. Reflections occurred due to the role of the ‘chronosystem’, in relation to multi-systemic working (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 2005). This level of the model felt particularly pertinent given the significant and ongoing pressures on

services, including the SEND system, educational provision, and wider support services for CYP. It is hoped that the findings of this research align with the national picture, and other research initiatives that emphasise the importance of multi-agency collaboration to better support CYP and families (DfE 2022; DfE & Department of Health and Social Care [DHSC], 2023).

Although the findings are not intended to provide any claims of certain 'truth' or generalisability, the hope is that they will advocate for marginalised CYP at the point of primary-to-secondary school transition and provide support for the key stakeholders supporting CYP at this time, to hold in mind the core principles of relational and trauma-informed approaches at this significant time (Bagnall., 2019; Dodds., 2022; Hadley., 2022). A multi-interview approach, alongside the use of a more participatory model of the timeline activity, aided CYP involvement in this study, and this strongly resonated with me. It made me further reflect on how professionals could use similar approaches to engage marginalised CYP in the future, and that professionals should not limit their expectations of participation. These participatory approaches could support future research activities, but potentially at other points of professional involvement with CYP as well. For example, the timeline activity could be used as a tool to facilitate rapport build and understanding of the CYPs previous experiences, upon their transition, and could be used as a person-centred planning exercise carried out by a staff member at their new school. This is to be explored further with tentative understanding and criticality about the best use of participatory models of involvement (Cuevas-Parra & Tisdall, 2019; Maynard et al., 2019; Graham et al., 2023; Larkins et al., 2024).

5. DISSEMINATION OF FINDINGS

In respect of research dissemination, my best hope is to highlight the contribution and potential impact of this study in a number of ways. Firstly, by providing the CYP participants with a one-page summary of the study findings. As part of my ethical considerations, I added onto the CYP and parent/carer consent forms a question "Would you like to receive feedback about the overall results of this study?", to this, all participants ticked 'yes', however no parent/carers ticked 'yes'. I therefore plan to share the one-page summaries with the CYP, sending this via the Link Contact. Secondly, I plan to share the findings of my research within the EP Service I work, at a research CPD day, so that discussions can take place in regard to how EPs can work to provide the support outlined at individual and multi-systemic levels. Thirdly, I envisage sharing my research with wider platforms, for example, via presentations to professionals outside of my EP system, such as other LA SEND professionals within the CYP department, School staff (at both primary and secondary school provisions). Lastly, I consider the possible publication of my study would

help to contribute to the wider discussion within the literature-base around primary-to-secondary school transition, and how to support vulnerable CYP even better, exploring avenues of change relevant to transition guidance for schools, so that a well-considered and consistent approach to transition is embedded for every CYP.

CONCLUSION

This reflective chapter offers an overview of my research journey, from the starting point, through to end point, whereby the unique contributions of findings and plans for dissemination are discussed. Throughout my thesis journey, I have felt a mixture of feelings, ranging from complete overwhelm to feelings of empowerment and passion in exploring an avenue of social research close to my heart. I have felt well aligned to the social constructionist paradigm and narrative design, and this has been my compass guiding me through the journey. I found that working with the CYP that participated, was extremely powerful, and by using Narrative Analysis, their voices are the centre of this piece of research. My hope is that this reflective account provides the transparency and justification underpinning the research at each stage of the design, alongside the approaches taken to limit any potential ethical issues, as well as illuminating the potential tensions and limitations that are present in any form of exploratory research like this. In closing, I am drawn to the shared views around the use of stories (Bruner, 1990; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Riessman, 2008; White & Cartwright, 2007), in that they can be humanistic tools that people use to make sense of their lives and relationships, actively shaping their realities through narrative accounts. It has been a true privilege and honour to 'walk alongside' participants in this process, offering a glimpse into their lived experiences and the rich, powerful alternative narratives they so generously shared.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: LINK CONTACT INFORMATION

LINK CONTACT: PLEASE READ

Information detailing the role of the Link Contact*

- Due to the ethical nature of working within PRU/AP settings, to ensure a relational approach, a trusted adult that is part of the school staff team will be present during all contact the researcher will have with participants. This has been carefully considered and given the level of pupils with Social, Emotional, Mental Health needs in these types of settings, seems ethically appropriate for this study.
- The role of the Link Contact is not to add any of their own views as part of this research, but to act as a trusted member of staff who can liaise with the researcher and ensure interviews take place at an appropriate time during the school day and in an appropriate space in the school building.
- As this deviates from the usual recruitment method of pupils directly contacting the researcher and remaining anonymous to all staff members, in this case, the Link Contact will know the pupils that take part. It is felt that ethically to ensure safety measures are in place this is needed. Other than this one other person knowing participant identities, anonymity principles remain in place as no names, or identifying characteristics of pupils, staff or schools will be reported.
- The researcher feels it will be ethically appropriate to have 2 Link Contacts available to potential participants, in the chance that there is a less positive relationship with 1 staff member. These staff members will be decided during initial discussions with the researcher and headteacher during initial gatekeeper discussions and then shared with the pupils and parent/carers at the recruitment stages.
- Pupils can approach the Link Contact sharing their interest about the research or the researcher directly. The Link Contact will keep in contact with the researcher if any potential participants have any queries about the study.

APPENDIX B: EXCERPT OF SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR THE INITIAL & SECOND INTERVIEWS

Proposed Interview Schedule

Each interview will begin by re-emphasising that this is a voluntary interview and that the right to withdraw is accepted by the researcher up until the point of data analysis, when all respondents are anonymised. The main purpose of the study will be explained; exploring the experiences of secondary school aged pupils that have experienced primary-to-secondary transition in mainstream schools, followed by a permanent exclusion from their secondary school. The aim is that these stories will support adults that work in schools, to know how to better support future pupils with primary-to-secondary school transitions, if they are also at a risk of exclusion. This explanation will be adjusted by the researcher so that is appropriate to the CYP's developmental stage and levels of understanding and left open as per Narrative design.

Initial rapport building questions, safeguarding and setting the scene (at the start of session 1 and 2):

"Please could you confirm that you are happy with this interview being recorded, audio only?"

"How are you today? How has your day been so far?"

"Please could you tell me a little bit about yourself, such as your name, how old you are, current year group?"

"During this interview, there are no right or wrong answers, I'm only interested in finding out more about your views and experiences. However, if you do say something that concerns you or someone else being at risk of harm, I will need to tell an adult in school to ensure safety. Are you happy to continue?"

Focused Interview Questions for session 1:

"Please tell me your story of moving from primary school to secondary school and your permanent exclusion from secondary school from the very beginning."

"What were the significant events that stand out in your mind at this time?"

"Who were the significant people you can remember from this time?"

The researcher will introduce the Timeline (session 2):

"To help you to tell me your story, we can use this timeline. The idea is that this timeline will help you order and plan your thoughts and what you would like to tell me about your primary-to-secondary school transition".

"This timeline is meant to represent the significant events of school transition, it is blank at the moment and throughout this interview time, we will add to it, the post its can be used to help represent any significant events or experience that have also occurred and play an important role in your story. There are different colours, you can use how to use these.

"why have you chosen the (green/orange colour?) What does it mean to you?"

"Why have you placed that (above/below) your timeline, what does that mean?"

"The dates will help us order the timing of your story, so the events that happened at the start of your story will go at the start of your primary-to-secondary transition story, and and your most recent events will go in the last part of your story".

Additional questions or prompts as necessary:

"What words, titles or phrases come to mind?"

"Who comes to mind as significant people involved during certain events on your timeline?"

"What else can you tell me about that/this event?"

"Which of these events in your story are considered most/least significant?"

Checking in questions to be said during the interview sessions as deemed appropriate by the researcher picking up on verbal and non-verbal cues from the participant:

"Just checking, are you ok?"

"Would you like a break?"

"Are you happy to continue?"

Closing the interview:

"Shall we go over this, is there anything you would like to change? Are you happy for me to include your views as part of this research?"

"How have you found this timeline exercise and how does it feel looking back over these events and experiences?"

"What is the most important part of your story that you wish to share with others?"

"Have we missed anything? Is there anything else we need to add to your story?"

APPENDIX C: EXAMPLE OF MAPPING ONTO THREE-DIMENSIONAL SPACE FRAMEWORK.

James's Story: interview 1: initial emergent theming.

Personal	Social	Past	Present	Future	Context
Like, I think at the time didn't have... like, the right mindset. I was going out, getting arrested and stuff like that. Going out, doing stupid things, at a young age and I just didn't care. I weren't in the right mindset. I didn't care for it, weren't mature enough to care and I think... yeah... it is hard, it's hard, that transition, for people with ADHD and mental health issues, it is hard.	Like I dunno, with my primary school, I had a good relationship with the teachers, like they knew how to handle me... I had, I had yeah... like, I had anger issues and stuff, like bad anger issues. You know, I would go a bit mad, and they knew how to calm me down and work with me well... so it was good. Like I could of stayed there for the whole time I was at school, and then, er... must of gone into secondary school, and it... yeah I just hated it. Just the teachers, they're so rude. But I think that's because I didn't have a teacher there that...	Yeah well, when I was in... I think it was about year 5, it was that year... between the transition from year 4 and 5... and I think it was even still going on, during coming up to year 6, it was Covid. So that took a big bit out of my schooling probably. Probably... yeah like it did. Because when I was going home and getting on zoom calls and stuff, I weren't really doing the zoom calls. I couldn't really do it, I didn't really care about it, and then we went back to school, towards year 6... I'm pretty sure... and I done good in year 6, to be honest. I done good. Carried on, I was just like playing football and stuff, and then... yeah, yeah that was it.	Like... the reason I might get along a bit better here is because it's more like a primary school in some ways, like... because... yeah, it's just a bit more laid back, and maybe here at this unit, it's better because, there's more people that actually understand you, if you know what I mean... like...whereas in the school, maybe now there's probably about... I dunno how many kids, probably a hundred, whatever... total. But they're all coming here at different hours... whatever... there's less kids in each classroom... way less obviously, but you're getting that 1-1 learning and it does work so much better with me... like... I would not want to	like, because now I got to go back and change it and I'm still young. I'm still learning. I've not learnt properly what I'm doing with myself, like... do you know what I mean... and I still got to go back and change it otherwise I'm going to ruin my life and not get GCSEs and stuff. I'm dreading going back to a mainstream school, but I've gotta do it cause if not I've gotta stay here and I might not get to reach my fullest potential and stuff like that... but it they had schools like this, that could allow me... people like me, and stuff like that, to go and do the same, and get the same amount of gcse's and do the same amount of subjects... to the kids that, to the same schools	I went to a primary school in (REDACTED name of area 1)... I live in (REDACTED name of area 2). I moved, I moved ... like, to a when I went to secondary school. I... er, I, er... went to a school in (REDACTED name of area 2)... (REDACTED name of school). Yeah, and that one, that one... er... I just hated from the get-go. Just, I thought it was like... just like a prison, really. I just felt like it was prison, you have to walk around one way, around the whole school and stuff like that. All that stuff. Like, it's just not how I like to be worked with.

Yellow= Past

Blue= Present

Green= Future

Red= Personal/Social

Pink= Place/Situation

Rachael Clark (EDU - Postgraduate Researcher)

PINK: place/situation: as going out eludes to a place context that is separate to school context.

05 April 2025, 14:21

Reply

Rachael Clark (EDU - Postgraduate Researcher)

This is reflective of something past and potentially present... If educational was affected by something in the past... Referring to 'my educational world was much harder and slower'

Reply

Rachael Clark (EDU - Postgraduate Researcher)

Place relevance of home.

Reply

Rachael Clark (EDU - Postgraduate Researcher)

Place relevance of school. 'back to school'.

Reply

Rachael Clark (EDU - Postgraduate Researcher)

Positives in the past.

APPENDIX D: EXAMPLE OF THE NARRATIVE ANALYSIS MEMOS AT INITIAL AND SECOND READING STAGE

Reading 2: identify the voices, discourses, and master narratives with which the text is in dialogue.

- Read the transcript with an eye towards voices of others, including individuals (e.g. parent), ideologies, cultural stories about events or social categories.
- Annotate the script.
- Write an analysis memo including impressions based on this reading, any new thematic content that emerged, detailed list of voices and reflexivity section.
- **Reflective process:**
 - o Pay close attention for implicit meaning: this reading typically requires the application of a hermeneutics of suspicion.
 - o Familiarize yourself with the possible ideologies and cultural narratives relevant to the personal narrative.
 - o Be mindful and transparent about your interpretive stance according to your experience or identities.
 - o Be mindful of the interview itself as co-constructed and performative.

Reading 2:

“The voices we identify in personal narratives may be of significant characters in the life story, such as the parent... or they may be the voices of teachers, mentors or community leaders”.

Thematic Cluster	Voices
Movement	- Getting kicked out at the same time of ‘moving’. Were the amount of school moves purposeful/parental choice? - Movement between mum and dad’s homes. - Movement away from one area where there were lots of connections/friends to a new one without people she knew.
Contextual factors	- Friends linked to a particular place where they grew up. (primary and start of secondary school)- this changed when moved out of area. - When moved to second secondary school in year 7, ‘not a good school’, didn’t support, as told by mum- mum moved them out of this school and out of area.
Power of relationships, friendship and belonging	- Friends from primary school, friend in photo is still a friend today. ‘going to the big school’. - Mum used to drop off at school. (stopped at secondary school) - Key staff remembered are 1-1s, TAs that would take them out of the classroom or support in the classroom. - Loads of older people (at secondary)- you’re the youngest. - Football team- a lot of friends.

	- Lack of support in second secondary school, meant getting into more trouble.
Being 'Kicked out'.	- Being kicked out for having fights. And not going to lessons, so started to walk the corridors. - Kicked out of the first unit because everyone was different, scary. - Second Secondary school 'kicked out' and 'sent' to the first unit. - Then 'kicked out' of unit 1 and sent to second unit.
School becoming harder over time.	- Things feeling scary, linked to older people/ different people and not knowing people. - Acknowledging that things got harder in year 6/7, this is when they started to get in trouble more for being out of lessons, not going to lessons and walking the corridors. At the second secondary school there was not support, so 'got kicked' out for not going to lessons and walking corridors, at the same time their mum moved them out. - Feeling nervous about the future and the rest of year 11. - Year 8 being a peak time of stress, (9 and 10 being stressful as well, compared to other years)

APPENDIX E: EXCERPTS OF MEMO JOURNALLING, (NARRATIVE ANALYSIS REFLECTIVE RESEARCHER ACCOUNT)

Reading 1: Journaling process memo:

How the initial transcripts and timeline helps to guide James's storyline:

- In terms of its basic form, James's timeline assumes a 'descent and gain' or 'redemptive narrative' (Josselson & Hammack., 2007). In Narrative literature, a redemptive storyline signifies a state of transition over time from a generally negative state into a generally positive one. This is often a journey of 'sacrifice, recovery, growth, or learning'. In James's case, learning and growth are core themes within his plot line, described as a 'change in mindset' and a sense of 'maturity'. James's timeline was examined, and I have interpreted it to mean this due to the use of colour coding with the post-it notes, alongside his voice captured at the time of the placement on the timeline. James has labelled the first 3 significant life events as orange, according to James, in reference to the timeline, use of orange symbolises overall negative times and include 'Domestic Violence' at age 3-4, 'Covid' in school-year 4-6 and 'Leave primary and get arrested' school year 6-7. Green post-it notes signify the less negative events, and these are placed after the orange ones, assuming the 'redemptive' storyline. These are 'Starting year 7', 'Move to (current PRU setting)', 'went to court' in school-year 8 and 'last time got arrested almost a year ago- April 2024'. Interestingly the tone describing the social events at play during primary school is mostly positive, even though on the timeline it is coded orange, similarly the overall tone describing the social experience and remembered events during his secondary school transition in year 7 is overall negative, however this is labelled green.
- James was engaging and talkative, he appeared extraverted and able to articulate himself through his use of words very well, which aided the interview process greatly and allowed for a positive rapport to build between him as the interviewee and myself as the interviewer. James was able to self-reflect that he is able to talk to others well and that he is smart, I believe both of these things to be true as a co-constructed observation through the duration of our time together. James was forthcoming with his narrative of events and required very little prompting or effort from the interviewer to generate his views. James appeared to me to be open about major life events that others may require a stronger trust and rapport to talk about as openly as he did, and I was struck by this, alongside his ability to reflect on core issues and events that impact not just him but those around him. I did reflect that James has spoken to many workers in his life and perhaps this experience was new to him, in the sense it was a recorded interview process, but similar to other occasions where he would have talked through life experiences e.g., in counselling sessions, with YOT workers and social workers. In his second interview, when asked if he had completed an activity like the timeline before, James shared that he had done something similar in counselling, the only difference being this one was recorded. As a researcher, I must be mindful that James' attitudes to discussing private life events with an unfamiliar person may have impacted on the richness that was developed in comparison to other people that may not have experienced the

same discussions with 'many workers' in the past. For example, James was able to identify significant early childhood events that were prevalent to his narrative such as witnessing domestic violence in his home at a very young age, and the absence of his father in his life. James also openly expressed his identity with his former self as being angry and 'mad at the world', which he was able to link to having experienced early childhood trauma. James' narrative has an overall 'coming-of-age' type gestalt (shape, configuration, structure). In that his overarching story progresses from 'not being in the right mindset' and a lack of perceived maturity, influenced by social and contextual experiences around him, to acquiring a present sense of growth, maturity and self-reflection and discovery. James presented with a confident energy which made the interview process flow and allowed us to build a rapport, and it felt easy to communicate with each other, James rarely needed questions reworded and was able to engage in a flow of thought.

Reading 2: Journalling process memo: identifying master narratives:

- Initial impressionistic content as interpreted as a golden thread throughout James's narrative is the **reference to ADHD**, and a diagnosis being sought for this, this came across as if key characters in his story did not pursue this diagnosis which James deems as important' and everyone... worker... that I've been with, like... they've said yeah, 'you got side effects of ADHD', not just ADHD, but signs of other things as well like... but no one'.. The impression inferred by the researcher is the medical model vs. social model, for example James refers to his counselling, but the real thing he felt he needed was a diagnosis, as 'proof'. James openly talks about how he is now 'being put forward' for an ADHD diagnosis through his connections made via the Youth Offending Service. He shared that first came Youth Offending, then CAMHS help and then support to explore ADHD. James's ADHD is referred to as a significant reason why classrooms do not work for him,
- James also mentioned the **impact of COVID** throughout his narrative, as a catalyst 'the start of it' and the transition from primary-to-secondary school being affected.
- **Social aspects are key at the time of school transition**, highlighted by James in numerous ways throughout, e.g., the move of location and where his primary school and secondary schools are situated in the social landscape... the influence of 'the wrong crowd' and key to the transition from primary-to-secondary school, characters enter the narrative scene that James describes as 'bad', and the friends that had been close to him at primary school he 'never' talks to again. In relation to adult relationships in school, James shares how adults in primary school were good and helped him, they understood him, and that this is why his current school is also good for him as they are 'like a primary school' setting, however adults in his secondary school are not remembered positively. James shared some vivid memories that describe teachers 'go mad' and 'shouting' in his face. James also talks about the differences in the physical spaces of secondary school being massive and like 'the streets of London' where it is hard for adults to provide pupils with the attention they need. James' current setting supports him as it is smaller and quieter, like his primary setting was, with less emphasis on classroom work which he hates, and the adults get to understand him better there.

- James talks about his **school future with an element of conflict** in the story as if it is not fully resolved yet. He talks about his current setting positively, but he knows he wants to 'go back' to a mainstream school again to make the most of his academic abilities and to get good qualifications, James referred to 'missing it' when thinking of mainstream school but also thinking he will be 'hating it' as soon as he is back there. He shared that if a school like his current one could support him academically, he would want to stay there for the whole of his schooling.
- Overall, James refers to **court and his past experiences with crime as another catalyst** that affected his schooling post-secondary school transition but also he is able to distant this time from his identified self today, this links to that 'maturity' thread that is so clear throughout the story line, maturing and developing his 'mindset'. James is clear that he does not wish to get arrested again.
- In context to times of year, **summer was a time of year that was referred to multiple times and a key part to James' plot line with crime**, as the context of summer linked to events that meant James ended up arrested. James explored this and a co-construction of summer being another key plot line in his story became clearer as the interview progressed, almost like an 'aha' moment, which is captured on the recording transcript. James also linked this to his mum saying 'summer is a curse' for him and that bad stuff always happens over the summer.

MEMO on feedback from James about the timeline:

James found that the use of the timeline activity in the second interview helped him to remember what has actually happened in his life. James shared with m that he found the process '100% helpful' and that he wouldn't have done this if he didn't think it was helpful to him.

Reading 2:

"The voices we identify in personal narratives may be of significant characters in the life story, such as the parent... or they may be the voices of teachers, mentors or community leaders".

Thematic cluster	Voices
1. Ideologies and discourses	'Mainstream school' vs. other. Ideology of mainstream being better for academic achievements e.g. 'having to go back' for GCSEs, 'otherwise I'm going to ruin my life'. Behaviourist approach e.g. reward and punishment, Getting multiple suspensions, detentions and exclusions. Relational approach e.g., conversation and understanding ADHD diagnosis, medicalised model of more support identified and communicated for someone with a diagnosis. Understanding Mental Health and behaviour (also funding for support). Filtered down view that he won't like school, but you just 'have to do it' from mum, mum's friends, teachers, social workers. Child development and maturity at time of school transition. Impact of trauma on school experiences. Neurodiversity model, 'so my brain ain't gonna work the same as his brain, or her brain'.
2. Positive relationships/institutions	Primary school teachers- taught to deal with anger. People at 'the unit' (current educational setting) that <u>actually</u> understand, unit feels easier. Small and unstructured environment
3. Negative relationships/institutions	Secondary school teachers being 'so stern', 'rude' and headteachers shouting. Secondary school feeling like a prison. Very large and structured environment. Feeling outcast like he doesn't 'fit in' to a mainstream environment.
4. Sources of influence	Social media

The screenshot shows a digital interface for feedback. It contains five comments from 'Rachael Clark (EDU - Postgraduate Researcher)'. Each comment has a 'Reply' button below it. The comments are as follows:

- Comments 1 and 2: 'Readings 3 and 4: Link to theory'.
- Comment 3: 'Reading 3 and 4: medicalised model vs social model, have to reference researcher viewpoint on this. And that it may be a different perspective to the participant and other'.
- Comment 4: 'Reading 3 and 4, unpick links to theory.'
- Comment 5: 'Link to theory'.

Each comment also includes a timestamp: '09 April 2025, 13:54'.

APPENDIX F: EXCERPTS FROM READING STAGES 3 AND 4

Readings 3 and 4: Patterns and Unity

In this stage as referenced by Josselson and Hammack., 2021, it is about how all of the voices and the thematic content they produce, creates coherent patterns within the narrative.

The first pattern is the most frequently occurring pattern... **Reading 3 and 4**

In this stage as referenced by Josselson and Hammack., 2021, it is about how all of the voices and the thematic content they produce, creates coherent patterns within the narrative.

The first pattern is the most frequently occurring pattern...

PARTICIPANT 2:

1. Continual movement throughout school history.	Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979; 2006) Cumulative Risk Theory (Rutter., 1979; Sameroff et al., 1993). School Mobility (Fantuzzo et al., 2012; Grigg., 2012; Temple & Reynolds., 1999). Continual moves may make it harder for schools to gain an accurate learning profile about them and provide a well mediated programme of support (Feuerstein et al., 2010)
2. Changes of support system.	Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979; 2006) Attachment Theory (Bowlby., 1969)
3. Inadequate support leading to avoidance and bad behaviour.	Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, not being connected with others because doesn't know anyone, and does not have support to meet learning needs. (Maslow., 1943). Those from marginalised backgrounds or with unmet SEND needs, may be labelled as 'troublemakers' or 'disengaged'. Such labelling can result in exclusionary practices, perpetuating cycles of academic failure and behavioural issues. (School-to-Prison-Pipeline, Labelling theory., Becker., 1963). Year 8 being a peak time of stress, (9 and 10 being stressful as well, compared to other years). Linked to more generalisable findings recognising year 8 as a catalyst year for further mental health needs in adolescents (Tereschenko et al., 2023).
4. Consistency of football	Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979; 2006) Attachment Theory (Bowlby., 1969) Ungar's Social-Ecological Model of Resilience (2008; 2011). This emphasises that resilience is not just about internal traits but about

	access to resources in meaningful ways. Football for Dr Pepper provides an accessible and culturally relevant resource to her, that supports emotional regulation, social bonding, and identity construction.
5. Being 'kicked out' – Systemic Disempowerment.	"Oppression through education". The ideology that inequality is reproduced by treating CYP as passive recipients rather than active participants. YP. Like Dr Pepper who are frequently excluded or relocated/moved are often denied agency, and their experiences may mirror Freire's idea of being "acted upon" by those in power (e.g. teachers, schools, institutions, parents). Also, can refer to Bronfenbrenner again here, to explain support systems, CYP like Dr Pepper are vulnerable to decisions made in the mesosystem and ecosystem e.g. legal systems, school behaviour and exclusion policies or parental decisions to move school placements/home address. This is something which they have little or no control over as a child. Powerlessness arises when the child's voice is excluded from these interrelated systems.

In this stage as referenced by Josselson and Hammack., 2021, it is about how all of the voices and the thematic content they produce, creates coherent patterns within the narrative.

The first pattern is the most frequently occurring pattern...

PARTICIPANT 3:

Power, Agency and Resistance	Michel Foucault's theory of power explains how institutions (like schools) discipline and regulate individuals through strict rules, surveillance, and routines. The uniform, restricted movement, timetables, and behaviour systems are all forms of normalising power that shape what is considered "acceptable." A pupil resisting these rules — by talking back or defying dress codes — is reclaiming agency in a system that renders them passive and compliant. "School is like a boarding school" — this speaks directly to Foucault's ideas about institutionalisation and the panopticon effect, where constant observation leads to self-surveillance. Critical Pedagogy (Freire)
-------------------------------------	--

	Paulo Freire’s concept of education as oppression suggests that traditional schooling often treats students as empty vessels (the “banking model” of education), stripping them of voice and agency. When a young person refuses to comply, it can be interpreted as a form of critical consciousness or resistance to dehumanising practices. Resistance Theory (Giroux, 1983) Henry Giroux builds on Freire and Foucault to argue that student misbehaviour can be political — a form of resistance rather than simply deviance. For excluded pupils, defying uniform rules or answering back becomes a symbolic reclaiming of power in a context where their autonomy is stripped away. Lundy’s (2007) work on Article 12 of the UNCRC argues that children must have the space, voice, audience, and influence to participate in decisions affecting their lives. When school systems exclude them from these rights, children may assert agency in informal ways — such as rejecting imposed norms or rebelling against control. Learned compliance... learned helplessness? Bronfenbrenner and how this relates to the different systems e.g. primary, secondary and PRU.
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Stanzas from text:

Yeah, but that’s the thing, the more times someone tells me to do something, I’m less likely to do it. So like cleaning something, if my mum is like ‘clean that’, I won’t do it...

“In year 6, they just told me stop. But, in year 7, they say ‘no, go to isolation’, ‘get out of the class’, and I’ll be like ‘no I’m not’... because in my head I honestly thought I didn’t say anything.”

- This is highlighting the differences in responses to the same patterns of behaviour at primary and secondary school, which further reflects the change in setting.

: I dunno... like, apparently boarding school is so bad... but that school is probably worse than boarding school. – talking to the institutionalisation here.

Because, they would just sit there and be talking to you, and not doing s***, and then you’ll end up doing something wrong then, and they just go mad about it.

“Right, so if you were naughty or not wearing the right uniform... it’s not really like you get put in a box or nothing, but it’s like, there’s this whole room...” “no it was, loads of kids, given detention

in the same room, its just like a classroom but all the tables are like around the wall, and she'd get you a chair and she'd give you a work book and it's in bare silence..."

"oh nah, cause if I done something yeah... wrong... where like I'm not wearing the right uniform, and they put me in there for that... then I'm like, that's unfair and I start going mad..." ...But I did chuck some leggings on and I know they then would go mad. And, if I put trainers on, you get put in isolation. I never used to go to isolation though".

"it's better because there's no uniform". – Referring to the current Unit.

"So... there shouldn't be a uniform, because it's all itchy erm, and I lose it like everyday" - talking about what would make it better.

Yeah... and if this school comes out with a uniform, I'm not wearing it.

Researcher: Ok... so you feel more comfortable in your own clothes?

Louisa: Yeah... because I can choose what I can wear.

"So when I had done something wrong... then I wouldn't really care. So like swearing at someone or chucked something that hit someone..." – here talking to the behaviours Louisa understands being punished for vs things she does not agree with punishment for e.g. wearing the wrong uniform.

Yeah... I was still like... used to swear at the teachers but I didn't used to throw s*** at teachers and that, but, yeah I wasn't like throwing s*** the same yeah, primary teachers, if I wanted them to just shut up, then they would shut up... but in secondary they just argue with you...

. There was like way more people and bare older people. Like... you literally go from being the oldest in the school, to being the youngest.

Because I think it was just... like... more people, and it was all weird and when people are so rude, I get so angry, and I can't help it.- Here stating the difference between primary and secondary school.

you are, you get bare excited, and they you're there for like... a week and it's just s***.

In year 6, they just told me stop. But, in year 7, they say 'no, go to isolation', 'get out of the class', and I'll be like 'no I'm not'... because in my head I honestly thought I didn't say anything.

All the scatty teachers. they are just bare rude.

"right, so it's just cause in general, focus is s*** easy to be fair, but like if I don't want to do the work then I wont do it." – here referring to being in control.

Roles of others

Bronfenbrenner and how this relates to parental/community expectations and rules and those in the school.

Implicit- researcher interpretation here of relational approach vs. behaviourist as well, where there have been rebalances of power, and rapport build with staff in the past, the exceptions.

Cultural use of language and appropriateness. Home vs. school culture.

Stanzas from text:

“Oh... I was just bare rude to people, because in my head I was like... cause when I grew up with my dad, and I was like ‘oh alright’, but the second I meet new people... it’s now just how I speak to people generally like... I really don’t mean to be rude, I just do it out of... unconsciously...” role of language and influence from home and community, met with resistance in a school setting. Yeah... cause... no... it’s like a daily thing... like... I’ll say it as, oh how did my teachers say... I use it as a comma... like I’ll say it almost every single sentence, it’s so bad.

“and there is a teacher in there... and I loved her, she was so lovely to me... but actually she used to let me go on my phone and... erm.. and the work I had to do were like word searches...” – Here talking to the conflict between the role of a relational approach from one teacher in isolation. “I just know that I cannot stop myself from being naughty, but it wasn’t me trying to be naughty and she understood that. She actually understood me and she got sacked for helping me.”

“So, my sister was there... yeah... and she just kept going on about how s*** the school was and that...”.

Researcher: Is there anything that you would of found more helpful in year 6, before you went to year 7?

Louisa: F*****, getting me to go to the school more, instead of only going there twice... and see all what it looks like and s***... I dunno.

Self-preservation and Identity

A YP like Louisa saying ‘Just be rude, so people can’t be rude back’, may be they have been experiencing repeated school exclusions and institutional control, which has in turn developed a sense of learned helplessness (Seligman, 1975), where efforts to assert agency are met with punishment or dismissal. Over time, this can result in disengagement or “acting out” behaviours — not due to inherent defiance, but as a response to chronic disempowerment and a perceived lack of control over one’s environment.

Stanzas from text:

“Erm. I Dunno to help them?.. be rude to everyone, because then no one can be rude to you...”

“It’s just if someone even looks at me a bit funny, I just go mad.”

“And then... everyone thought I was rude, so I just thought... ‘ok, I’ll actually be rude to you’... so that’s when I started just being bare rude to everyone...”

“Oh no, that’s when I started being a bit more like ‘I don’t care’ and that... I was like ‘I’m going secondary and I’m not going to be there that long anyway and I’ll just shove your head against the wall’...”

“like, I had one mate there and she was lovely. But no... I did have mates, it was more like... it wasn’t like I was popular or anything, cause everyone knew who I was cause I was either horrible to you, or you’d have seen me do something wrong.”.

Researcher: So, do you feel like a lot has happened since year 7 and year 6 for you?

Louisa: No... not really, I just got bigger...

APPENDIX G: ETHICS APPROVAL

University of East Anglia

Study title: Exploring the Experiences of Primary-to-Secondary School Transition from the Perspective of Excluded Secondary School Age Pupils

Application ID: ETH2324-1559

Dear Rachael,

Your application was considered on 17th June 2024 by the EDU S-REC (School of Education and Lifelong Learning Research Ethics Subcommittee).

The decision is: approved.

You are therefore able to start your project subject to any other necessary approvals being given.

This approval will expire on 8th May 2025.

Please note that your project is granted ethics approval only for the length of time identified above. Any extension to a project must obtain ethics approval by the EDU S-REC (School of Education and Lifelong Learning Research Ethics Subcommittee) before continuing.

It is a requirement of this ethics approval that you should report any adverse events which occur during your project to the EDU S-REC (School of Education and Lifelong Learning Research Ethics Subcommittee) as soon as possible. An adverse event is one which was not anticipated in the research design, and which could potentially cause risk or harm to the participants or the researcher, or which reveals potential risks in the treatment under evaluation. For research involving animals, it may be the unintended death of an animal after trapping or carrying out a procedure.

Any amendments to your submitted project in terms of design, sample, data collection, focus etc. should be notified to the EDU S-REC (School of Education and Lifelong Learning Research Ethics Subcommittee) in advance to ensure ethical compliance. If the amendments are substantial a new application may be required.

Approval by the EDU S-REC (School of Education and Lifelong Learning Research Ethics Subcommittee) should not be taken as evidence that your study is compliant with the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018. If you need guidance on how to make your study UK GDPR compliant, please contact the UEA Data Protection Officer (dataprotection@uea.ac.uk).

I would like to wish you every success with your project.

On behalf of the EDU S-REC (School of Education and Lifelong Learning Research Ethics Subcommittee)

Yours sincerely,

Victoria Warburton

APPENDIX H: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEETS, CONSENT FORMS AND RECRUITMENT MATERIALS

Research Exploring Primary to Secondary school Transition

Project Overview

Dear Headteacher,

My name is Rachael Clark, I am a second year Trainee Educational Psychologist at the University of East Anglia.

I am contacting you as I have received ethical approval from UEA and seek to recruit participants for my thesis research. My proposed research is to **explore the experiences of primary to secondary school transition, from the perspective of pupils that have also experienced permanent exclusion from their secondary school**. This is an important research topic that aims to further understand secondary school exclusions. By exploring the lived experiences of the primary to secondary school transition and school exclusion, the hope is that the findings can support staff members involved in the primary to secondary school process in order to support children and young people at risk of exclusion better in the future.

Providing access to potential participants for this project...

This is a key part of the project recruitment. I am contacting education providers, such as yours, that I believe will have pupils attending that match the criteria for participating in this project. If your school supports children that are secondary school age (11-16), who have been permanently excluded from secondary school before coming to your setting, then you can decide whether you would like to provide me access to recruit potential participants from your school. If you decide to provide access, then please email your interest back to me on this email address rachael.clark@uea.ac.uk as an initial starting point.

There are a few points to note below, before providing access:

- Ensure that the Headteacher of your school replies to confirm gatekeeper permission for the researcher to access potential participants in your school.
- The researcher and Headteacher will negotiate the role of a 'Link Contact' to support the logistics of carrying out this research with participants within your school. There should be 2 available staff members that can take on the role of 'Link Contact' in your school system. Link Contacts will keep in contact with the researcher to discuss research queries and share if pupils have expressed interest about the study and how to take part. The role of the Link Contact staff members is also to arrange the time and space for interviews to take place in school and to attend the interview processes alongside the participants as a form of support. Only the participant views will be recorded for the purpose of the study.
- If the researcher has permission to access potential participants in your school, and participants have come forward to take part in the study, there will be an expectation that interviews take place with the researcher, and Link Contact (staff member) on school site, during the school day.

Please email any queries about the study you may have before making a decision e.g., expectations for pupil participants, staff Link Contacts and study timescales. If you decide you would like your school to provide access to potential participants for the study, I will send through participant information and research advertisement including a study poster. I can come into your school to discuss this further with you and with pupils in your school. Please note that in the research write up, all school details will be anonymised and all pupil/staff names mentioned will be turned into pseudonyms so that pupils remain anonymous.



Researcher:

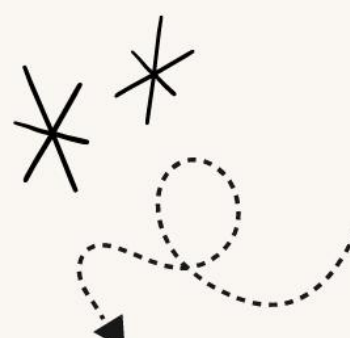
Rachael Clark- Rachael.Clark@uea.ac.uk
Postgraduate Researcher and Trainee Educational Psychologist

Research Supervisor:

Dr Andrea Honess (Associate Professor)- Andrea.Honess@uea.ac.uk



Recruiting RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS



About the researcher

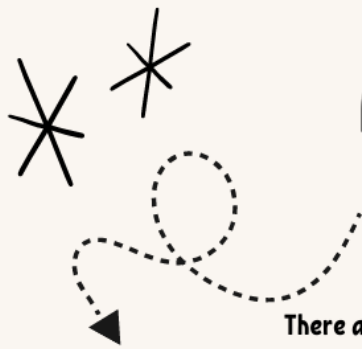
My name is Rachael Clark, and I am a year 2 Trainee Educational Psychologist at University of East Anglia.

As part of my training to become an Educational Psychologist, I am conducting research relevant to Educational Psychology.

An Educational Psychologist is somebody who works with children and young people in schools, colleges and other educational settings, and helps with aspects of learning, wellbeing and development.

As part of my research, I am interested in understanding your experiences of transition from primary to secondary school.





About the school 'Link Contact'

There are up to 2 Link Contacts in your school, these are staff members that act as the link between school and researcher during the research process.

Your Link Contacts will be made known to you, you can email the researcher directly to express your interest in this study, or talk with your Link Contact, who will then let the researcher know.

The Link Contact will accompany you in through the interview process that will take place in school.

PROJECT TITLE: EXPLORING THE EXPERIENCES OF PRIMARY-TO-SECONDARY SCHOOL TRANSITION FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF EXCLUDED SECONDARY SCHOOL AGE PUPILS

PROJECT AIM 1

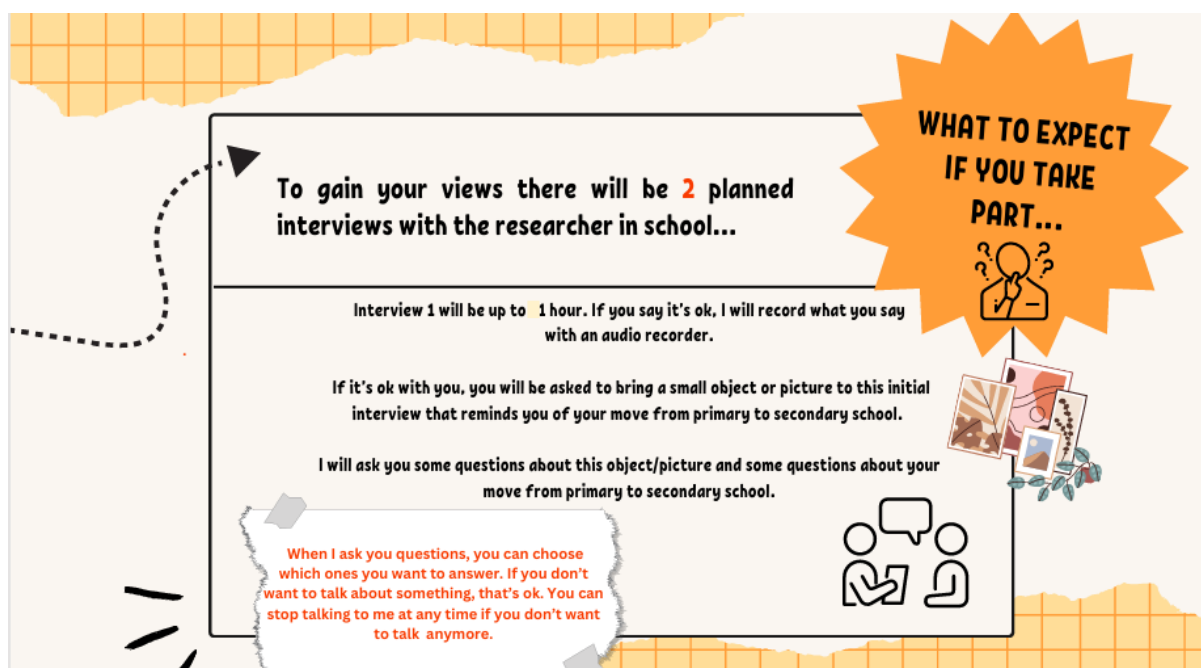
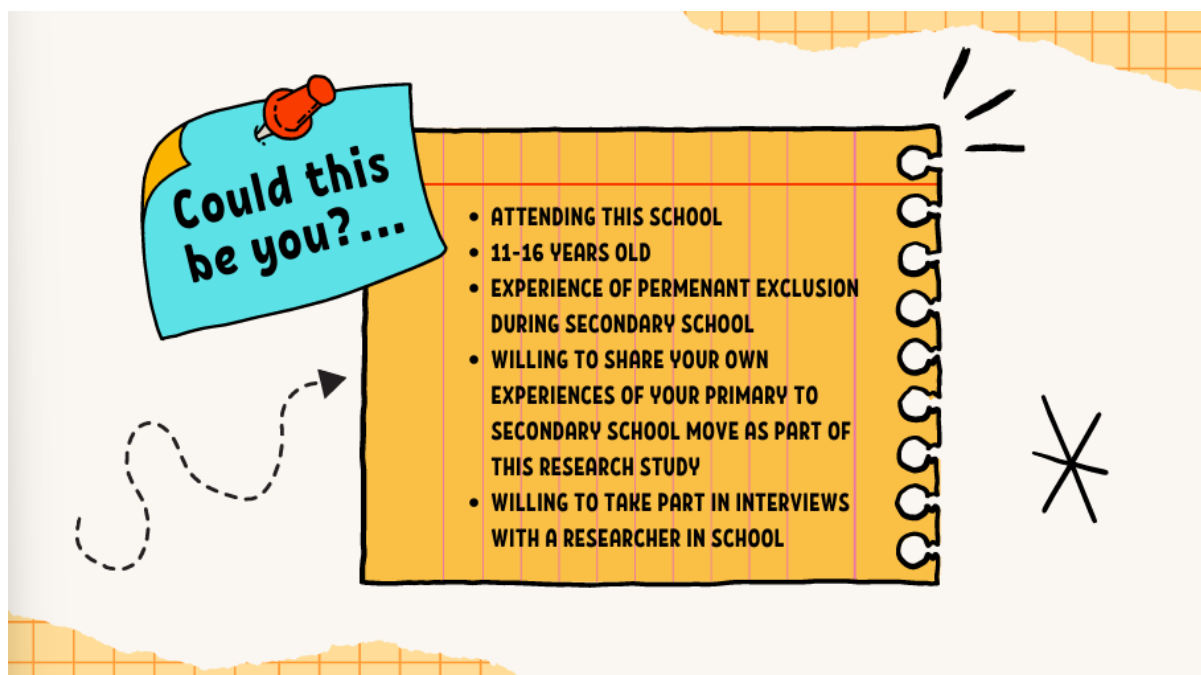
1. What do you identify as significant events during your move from primary-to-secondary school?

PROJECT AIM 2

2. Who do you think were the significant people that were involved during your move from primary-to-secondary school?

PROJECT AIM 3

3. What can be learnt about the move from primary-to-secondary school, from your experiences?



To gain your views there will be 2 planned interviews with the researcher in school...

The second interview will be up to 1 hour long and will be recorded if you say it is ok.

I will ask you some more questions about your move from primary to secondary school and carry out a timeline activity on paper.

This activity will be explained to you in the session, and you can decide if you want to take part. If it's okay with you, I will take photos of the timeline at the end (no photos will have you in them, or your school in them).

When I ask you questions, you can choose which ones you want to answer. If you don't want to talk about something, that's ok. You can stop talking to me at any time if you don't want to talk anymore.

**WHAT TO EXPECT
IF YOU TAKE
PART...**





timeline of events

Who will be there in the interview room?

The interview will be between you and the researcher but the Link Contact from your school will be in the room.



you and 'Link Contact'
from school



Researcher

**WHAT TO EXPECT
IF YOU TAKE
PART...**



Example QUESTIONS

“Please tell me your story of moving from primary school to secondary school and your permanent exclusion from secondary school from the very beginning.”

“Who comes to mind as significant people involved during certain events?”

What else to expect?

Remember involvement is completely voluntary, you are not obliged to take part just because your school has agreed for pupils to take part.

- 1 I WON'T TELL ANYONE ELSE WHAT YOU SAY TO ME, EXCEPT IF YOU TALK ABOUT SOMEONE HURTING YOU OR ABOUT YOU HURTING YOURSELF OR SOMEONE ELSE. I MIGHT NEED TO TELL SOMEONE OUTSIDE OF THIS STUDY IF I AM WORRIED ABOUT YOU OR SOMEONE ELSE BEING HURT, AND THIS WILL BE NEEDED TO KEEP YOU AND OTHER PEOPLE SAFE.
- 2 ALL THE INFORMATION THAT YOU SHARE WITH ME DURING THIS STUDY WILL BE STORED IN A SAFE PLACE AND I WILL LOOK AFTER IT VERY CAREFULLY.
- 3 AT THE END OF THE STUDY, I WILL WRITE A REPORT AND SHOW IT TO OTHER PEOPLE, BUT THIS IS ANONYMOUS, THIS MEANS I WON'T PUT YOUR NAME IN THE REPORT, AND NO ONE WILL KNOW THAT YOU WERE INVOLVED.



RESEARCH OPPORTUNITY



UNDERSTANDING THE MOVE FROM PRIMARY-TO- SECONDARY SCHOOL



ARE YOU 11-16 YEARS OLD?

**HAVE YOU EXPERIENCED A PERMANENT
EXCLUSION FROM SECONDARY SCHOOL?**

IF YES...

**WOULD YOU BE WILLING TO
PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH
EXPLORING YOUR EXPERIENCES
OF THE MOVE FROM PRIMARY
TO SECONDARY SCHOOL? ...**



HOW TO FIND OUT MORE?

*More information can be provided for you, please ask someone in school who your Link Contact is for this research, look at the research presentation for more detail, or email the researcher.



Contact your school Link Contact*, and/or the researcher if you have any queries.

Researcher's email:

Rachael.clark@uea.ac.uk

Research Supervisor details:

Dr Andrea Honess- UEA

Andrea.Honess@uea.ac.uk

Study Information Sheet

Exploring the Experiences of Primary-to-Secondary School Transition from the Perspective of Excluded Secondary School Age Pupils



Hello. My name is Rachael Clark, and I am a Trainee Educational Psychologist at the University of East Anglia.

I am doing a study to find out more about the move from primary to secondary school, from talking to those that have experienced a permanent exclusion from their secondary school.

I am asking you to be in my study because you have experienced the move from primary to secondary school and also permanent exclusion from your secondary school (before attending your current school). I need your help to see if we can help adults that work in schools, understand the experiences of the move from primary to secondary school better, and see how this could help other children in the future that are moving up to their secondary schools.

You can decide if you want to take part in the study or not, it's up to you.

This sheet tells you what I will ask you to do if you decide to take part in this study. Please read it carefully.

If you decide you want to be in the study and then you change your mind later, that's ok. All you need to do is tell me that you don't want to be in the study anymore. We will remove any information you may have already provided. You or someone who looks after you can email me rachael.clark@uea.ac.uk.

If you have any questions you can speak to me during the study or someone who looks after you. If you want to, you can contact me on rachael.clark@uea.ac.uk.

What will happen if I say that I want to be in the study?

After reading the advert in your school and/or hearing about the study in school, if you decide that you want to be in my study, I will ask you to do these things:

- You will need to tell someone in your school and your parent/guardian at home, so that they can let the Link Contact* in your school know that you would like to take part.
- Once your parent/guardian has provided written consent via the consent form, your Link contact from school will contact me to let me know. I will talk to your school contact to find a time for us to meet for an initial interview. This will be a time that suits your school timetable, so you don't miss anything important in your school day.

**The Link Contact is a member of the school staff team that has taken on the role of communicating with me about the best time and place for interviews to take place in school, they will also be present during interviews to help you feel more supported meeting me. The Link Contact will know you are taking part in the study as they will be present at interviews, but they will not say anything in the interview because I am only interested in recording your views.*

Ethics ETH2324-1559

- **You will be consenting to two separate interviews if you take part in this study. The first interview session will be up to 1 hour.** It will be in a room in school, with myself and a Link Contact from school. If you need breaks or longer/shorter meeting times, please let me know before we plan to meet. If it's ok with you, you will be asked to **bring a small object or picture to this initial interview that reminds you of your move from primary to secondary school.** I will ask you some questions about this object/picture in our first meeting together. When I ask you questions, you can choose which ones you want to answer. If you don't want to talk about something, that's ok. You can stop talking to me at any time if you don't want to talk to me anymore.
- **If you say it's ok, I will record what you say with an audio recorder and transcription software (via Microsoft teams on my laptop).** I will record the audio of all interview sessions; this will be a recording of our voices during our time together (this is not a video recording), so that we can listen back and read the transcript of what was said to check it is ok and you are happy for me to use this in my study. There will be time within the session for us to check over the transcript at the end.
- **If you are happy to meet with me again, I will arrange a second interview with you via the Link Contact in your school.** If you change your mind after the interview, and do not want to carry on with the study that is fine, let your parent/guardian or someone in school know so they can contact me. You can withdraw from this study at any time up until the time the study is completed. This means nothing you shared will be included in the study.
- **The second interview session will be up to 1 hour.** It will be in a room in school, with myself and a Link Contact from school. **If it's ok with you, I will ask you some more interview questions about your move from primary to secondary school and carry out a timeline activity on paper.** This activity will be explained to you in the session, and you can decide if you want to take part and can ask to stop at any time. If it's okay with you, I will take photos of the timeline at the end (no photos will have you in them, or your school in them). This session will also be audio recorded.

Will anyone else know what I say in the study?



Only the Link Contact and I will hear what you say in the interviews.

I won't tell anyone else what you say to me, except if you talk about someone hurting you or about you hurting yourself or someone else. Then I might need to tell someone outside of the study to keep you and other people safe.

All the information that I have about you from the study will be stored in a safe place and I will look after it very carefully. I will write a report about the study and show it to other people, but I won't put your name in the report, and no one will know that you're in the study. I may also share your information with other researchers and use it for teaching and outreach purposes, but I will take out your name.

How long will the study take?



Interview 1 = up to 1 hour

Interview 2 = up to 1 hour

(total time for you, max 2 hours 30 minutes)

(Some time before the study will be required to talk about what is expected and read/sign relevant consent forms. You will also need some time to think about what object/photo you would like to bring to the initial interview. This should not take any longer than 30 minutes of your time in total and is likely to take a lot less time than this).

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Are there any good things about being in the study?



You may find you won't get anything for being in the study, but you will be helping me do my research. You will be part of a piece of research to benefit future children moving from primary school to secondary school. You will have time in school to talk to somebody about your past experiences and through the activities you may learn some things about yourself and find this a useful experience to make sense of your story.

Are there any bad things about being in the study?



This study will take up some of your time, I will need to hear about your past school experiences, some of which may not have been positive for you. It is possible that you experienced some negative events when you moved from primary to secondary school, these experiences are helpful for me to hear for the purpose of the study, but I do appreciate being reminded of past negative events can be hard for some people. You will be signposted and able to talk to trusted school staff about any negative feelings you may have around what we talked about in the study.

Will you tell me what you learned in the study at the end?

Yes, I will if you want me to. There is a question on the next page that asks you if you want me to tell you what I learned in the study. If you circle Yes, when I finish the study, I will tell you what I learned.

What if I am not happy with the study or the people doing the study?



If you are not happy with how I am doing the study or how I treat you, then you or someone who looks after you can:

- Tell me during the study.
- Email me rachael.clark@uea.ac.uk.
- Contact my supervisor *Dr Andrea Honess* – Andrea.Honess@uea.ac.uk
- Email my Head of School: *Yann Lebeau*, Y.Lebeau@uea.ac.uk

How do I know that this study is ok to take part in?



All research I undertake is checked and approved by an Ethics Committee at the University of East Anglia before I can start it.

What if I want to know more about the information collected on me in the study?



When we talk in the study, I will collect some information which is unique to you. I can only collect this information if I have a reason to do so. My reason to do so for this study is because the study is in the public interest.

This information is stored by me within the University of East Anglia. They help me protect your information and look after it.

If you want to know more about the information collected about you, you can email me rachael.clark@uea.ac.uk or you can email the University's Data Protection Officer (dataprotection@uea.ac.uk) who helps to protect your information. The Information Commissioner's

Office (ICO) helps to protect everyone's information. If you are unhappy with mine or the University Data Protection Officer's responses about your information, you can speak to the [ICO](#).

Further information



This sheet was last updated on 9th June 2024. I will update you if I make any changes to this sheet.

This information sheet is for you to keep.

Participant Consent Form (First Copy to Researcher)

If you are happy to be in the study, please:

- **write** your **name** in the space below.
- **sign** your **name** at the bottom of the next page.
- put the **date** at the bottom of the next page.

You should only say 'yes' to being in the study if you know what it is about and you want to be in it. If you don't want to be in the study, don't sign the form.

I, [PRINT NAME], am happy to be in this research study.

In saying yes to being in the study, I am saying that:

- ☐ I know what the study is about.
- ☐ I know what I will be asked to do.
- ☐ Someone has talked to me about the study.
- ☐ My questions have been answered.
- ☐ I know that I don't have to be in the study if I don't want to.
- ☐ I know that I can pull out of the study at any time if I don't want to do it anymore and it will be possible to remove any information I have already provided.
- ☐ I know that I don't have to answer any questions that I don't want to answer.
- ☐ I know that the researchers won't tell anyone what I say when I talk to them unless I talk about being hurt by someone or hurting myself or someone else.

Now I am going to ask you circle 'Yes' or 'No' to tell me what you are happy to do or not do in the study.

Are you happy to **speak just to me?** Yes No

Are you happy for me to **audio record** your voice? Yes No

Are you happy to come **take part in a timeline activity with me?**

Yes No

Are you happy for me **to take photographs of the finished timeline** at the end?

Yes No

Do you want me to tell you what I **learned** in the study? Yes No

.....
Signature

.....
Date

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Participant Consent Form (Second Copy to Participant)

If you are happy to be in the study, please:

- **write** your **name** in the space below.
- **sign** your **name** at the bottom of the next page.
- put the **date** at the bottom of the next page.

You should only say 'yes' to being in the study if you know what it is about and you want to be in it. If you don't want to be in the study, don't sign the form.

I, [PRINT NAME], am happy to be in this research study.

In saying yes to being in the study, I am saying that:

- ☐ I know what the study is about.
- ☐ I know what I will be asked to do.
- ☐ Someone has talked to me about the study.
- ☐ My questions have been answered.
- ☐ I know that I don't have to be in the study if I don't want to.
- ☐ I know that I can pull out of the study at any time if I don't want to do it anymore and it will possible to remove any information I have already provided.
- ☐ I know that I don't have to answer any questions that I don't want to answer.
- ☐ I know that the researchers won't tell anyone what I say when I talk to them unless I talk about being hurt by someone or hurting myself or someone else.

Now I am going to ask you circle 'Yes' or 'No' to tell me what you are happy to do or not do in the study.

Are you happy to **speak just to me**? Yes No

Are you happy for me to **audio record** your voice? Yes No

Are you happy to come **take part in a timeline activity with me**?

Yes No

Are you happy for me **to take photographs of the finished timeline** at the end?

Yes No

Do you want me to tell you what I **learned** in the study? Yes No

.....
Signature

.....
Date

Rachael Clark
Trainee Educational Psychologist

09.06.2024

Doctorate in Educational Psychology
School of Education and Lifelong
Learning

University of East Anglia
Norwich Research Park
Norwich NR4 7TJ
United Kingdom

Email: rachael.clark@uea.ac.uk
Web: www.uea.ac.uk

Study Information Sheet

**Exploring the Experiences of Primary-to-Secondary School Transition from the
Perspective of Excluded Secondary School Age Pupils**

PARENTAL/GUARDIAN INFORMATION STATEMENT

(1) What is this study about?

Your child is invited to take part in a research study about the experiences of the move from primary to secondary school, from the perspective of children that have then been excluded from their secondary school. It is hoped that this study will help us better understand the experiences of those at risk of school exclusion.

Your child's school is a setting that supports children that have been permanently excluded in the past. Your child's school has agreed for children in their school to be potential participants, this means your child will have access to study adverts and information, however, participating in this study is entirely voluntary. This Participant Information Statement tells you more about the research study. Knowing what is involved will help you decide if you want to let your child take part in the study. Please read this sheet carefully and ask questions about anything that you don't understand or want to know more about.

Participation in this research study is voluntary. By giving consent to take part in this study you are telling us that you:

- ☐ Understand what you have read.
- ☐ Agree for your child to take part in the research study as outlined below.
- ☐ Agree to the use of your child's personal information as described.
- ☐ You have received a copy of this Participant Information Statement to keep.

(2) Who is running the study?

The study is being carried out by the following postgraduate researcher: Rachael Clark who is a Trainee Educational Psychologist at the University of East Anglia.

This study will take place under the supervision of - Dr Andrea Honess; Associate Professor. Email: andrea.honess@uea.ac.uk.

(3) What will the study involve for my child?

- Your child will need to tell their school Link Contact* that they want to be involved in this research and have parental consent. The Interview process consists of two interviews which will take place in school during usual school day hours.

**The Link Contact is a member of the school staff team that has taken on the role of communicating with me about the best time and place for interviews to take place in school, they will also be present during interviews to help you feel more supported meeting me. The Link Contact will know you are taking part in the study as they will be present at interviews, but they will not say anything in the interview because I am only interested in recording your views.*

- To provide your child with parental consent, you will need to read this parent/guardian information sheet and provide opted-in written consent.
- Once consent is gained, I will discuss with the Link Contact a suitable time for your child to meet me for an initial interview. This will be a time that suits your child's school timetable, so they don't miss anything important in their school day.
- **The first interview session will be up to 1 hour long.** It will be in a room in school, and your child will attend with the Link Contact (The Link Contact will not be part of the discussion, this will be between me, the researcher, and your child). Your child will be asked to bring a small object or picture to this initial interview that reminds them of their move from primary to secondary school. I will ask them some questions about this object/picture in our first meeting together.
- When asked questions your child can choose which ones they want to answer. If they don't want to talk about something, that's ok. They can stop talking to me at any time if they don't want to talk to me anymore. Their interview data will be removed from the study if they want to withdraw their involvement. If your child has a learning need or disability, please let me know before the interviews take place so I can consider flexible access arrangements appropriate to meet their needs (e.g., shorter interview timings, breaks).
- If your child says it's ok, I will record what they say with an audio recorder via Microsoft Teams, using Microsoft Teams will allow me to access a transcription of what is said during the meeting. I will record the audio of all interview sessions; this will be a recording of our voices during our time together (this is not a video recording), so that I can listen back and remember what has been said and check it alongside the written transcript of the audio, your child will have time at the end of each interview for us to go over the transcript and ensure they are happy with what has been captured.
- At the end of the initial interview, your child will let me know if they would like to meet me again in school for a follow up interview. If they are happy to meet with me again, I will arrange a second interview with them via the Link Contact the same way as before. If they change their mind after the interview, and do not want to carry on with the study that is fine, they can withdraw at any time.
- **The second interview session will be up to 1 hour long.** It will be set up the same as the first interview. This time I will ask them some more questions about their move from primary to secondary school and carry out a timeline activity on paper to help structure our discussion. This activity will be explained to your child in the session, and they can decide if they want to take part and can ask to stop at any time. If it's okay with your child, I will take photos of the timeline at the end (no photos will have your child, or your child's school in them). This session will also be audio recorded and transcribed, your child will also be given the opportunity to go over the transcription with the researcher.

(4) How much of my child's time will the study take?

All involvement in the study will take place during the school day. The time taken to be a part of this study is as follows:

- Time to read over participant information and consent forms and think about and organise object/photo prior first interview = max 30 minutes (as mentioned above, if access requirements are necessary, timings below may vary to meet the needs of the child involved).
- Interview 1 = approx. 1 hour
- Interview 2 = approx. 1 hour
- Total time, max 2 hours 30 minutes.

(5) Does my child have to be in the study? Can my child withdraw from the study once they have started?

Being in this study is completely voluntary and your child does not have to take part. Your decision whether participation happens will not affect your current or future relationship with your child's school, the researchers, or anyone else at the University of East Anglia now or in the future.

If you decide to let your child take part in the study and then change your mind later (or they no longer wish to take part), they are free to withdraw from the study at any time and, you can withdraw your consent up to the point that your data is fully anonymised. You can do this by emailing the researcher rachael.clark@uea.ac.uk, talking to the Link Contact in your child's school.

(6) What are the consequences if my child withdraws from the study?

- Your child is free to stop the interview session at any time.
- Unless you say that you want us to keep them, any recordings will be erased and the information your child has provided will not be included in the study results.
- Your child may also refuse to answer any questions that they do not wish to answer during the interview.
- Your child is free to stop the research activities within the interview process (including talking about their object/picture in the first interview and the timeline activity in the second interview) at any time.
- Unless you say that you want us to keep them, any materials (e.g. images, recordings, text) will be erased and the information your child has provided will not be included in the study results.
- Your child may also refuse to take part in any of the activities that they wish.
- If you decide at a later time to withdraw your child from the study your information will be removed from our records and will not be included in any results, up to the point we have analysed and published the results.

(7) Are there any risks or costs associated with my child being in the study?

This study will take up some of your child's time in school, I will need to hear about your child's past school experiences, some of which may not have been positive for them. It is possible that your child experienced some negative experiences when they moved from primary to secondary school, these experiences are helpful for me to hear for the purpose of the study, but I do appreciate being reminded of past negative events can be difficult for some people. Your child will be signposted to available external support for any negative feelings and will be able to talk to a trusted adult in school about any negative feelings they may have around what we talked about in the study.

(8) Are there any benefits associated with my child being in the study?

Your child will be part of a piece of research to benefit future children moving from primary school to secondary school, which is an important part of research to better support the education of pupils like your child.

Your child will have time in school to talk to somebody about their past experiences and through the activities your child may learn some things about themselves and find this a useful experience to make sense of their own life events during the transition from primary-to-secondary school.

You may find your child won't get anything from being in the study, but your child's story about their experience will be helping me do my research.

(9) What will happen to information provided by my child and data collected during the study?

Data storage and Confidentiality

The interviews will be confidential, between me (the researcher), school Link Contact and your child. This means I won't tell anyone else what your child says to me, except if your child talks about someone hurting them or about them hurting themselves or someone else. Then I might need to tell someone outside of the study to keep your child and other people safe.

All the information that I have about your child from the study will be stored in a safe place and I will look after it very carefully. I will write a report about the study and show it to other people, but I won't put your child's name in the report, and no one will know that your child has taken part in the study. I may also share your child's information anonymously, where it is relevant to the study, with other researchers and use it for teaching and outreach purposes, but I will take out your child's name.

Your child's personal data and information will only be used as outlined in this Participant Information Statement, unless you consent otherwise. Data management will follow the Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA 2018) and UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR), and the University of East Anglia's [Research Data Management Policy](#).

Your child's information will be stored securely and their identity will be kept strictly confidential, except as required by law. Study findings may be published and may also be used for other scholarly and educational purposes such as in teaching. Although every effort will be made to protect your child's identity by anonymising all names/school details, there

is a small risk that they might be identifiable due to the nature of the narrative study and the small sample size. The data will be kept for at least 10 years beyond the last date the data were used. The study findings may be deposited in a repository to allow it to facilitate its reuse. The deposited data will not include your child's name or any identifiable information about your child, but there is a risk that your child might be identifiable due to the nature of the study and/or results.

(10) What if we would like further information about the study?

When you have read this information, the researcher will be available to discuss it with you further and answer any questions you may have about the study. If you are happy for your child to take part, you can fill out the consent form below and send it back to the researcher. You can also send it via the Link Contact in school who will then forward it to the researcher.

(11) Will my child be told the results of the study?

Your child has a right to receive feedback about their individual sessions, a debrief letter and summary of what was captured during our interview sessions will be sent to your child to look over. Once your child is happy with this summary, the researcher will add it to their thesis research as part of the study. Your child's name and school will be anonymised throughout.

You can tell us that you wish to receive feedback by expressing this interest to the researcher rachael.clark@uea.ac.uk or the headteacher at your child's school.

(12) What if I have a complaint or any concerns about the study?

If there is a problem, please let me know. You can contact me or my research supervisor via the University at the following address:

Rachael Clark (Trainee Educational Psychologist and Postgraduate Researcher) and/or Dr Andrea Honess (Associate Professor and Research Supervisor)
EdPsyD programme,
School of Education and Lifelong Learning
University of East Anglia
NORWICH NR4 7TJ
Rachael.clark@uea.ac.uk

If you or your child are concerned about the way this study is being conducted or you wish to make a complaint to someone independent from the study, please contact the Head of the School of Education and Lifelong Learning, Professor Yann Lebeau, Y.lebeau@uea.ac.uk,
University of East Anglia
NORWICH NR4 7TJ

(13) How do we know that this study has been approved to take place?

To protect your safety, rights, wellbeing and dignity, all research in the University of East Anglia is reviewed by a Research Ethics Body. This research was approved by EDU S-REC (School of Education and Lifelong Learning Research Ethics Subcommittee).

(14) What is the general data protection information my child needs to be informed about?

According to data protection legislation, we are required to inform you that the legal basis for processing your data as listed in Article 6(1) of the UK GDPR is because this allows us to process personal data when it is necessary to perform our public tasks as a University.

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Our processing of your personal data will be based on Article 9(2)(j), which relates to archiving, research and statistics purposes, and Schedule 1, Part 1(4) of the DPA 2018, which relates to research.

In addition to the specific information provided above about why your child's personal data is required and how it will be used, there is also some general information which needs to be provided for you:

- The data controller is the University of East Anglia.
- For further information, you can contact the University's Data Protection Officer at dataprotection@uea.ac.uk
- You can also find out more about your child's data protection rights at the [Information Commissioner's Office \(ICO\)](#).
- If you are unhappy with how your child's personal data has been used, please contact the University's Data Protection Officer at dataprotection@uea.ac.uk in the first instance.

(15) OK, I am happy for my child to take part – what do I do next?

You need to fill in one copy of the consent form and return this to the researcher and/or the Link Contact at your child's school. Please keep the letter, information sheet and the second copy of the consent form for your information.

(16) Further information

This information was last updated on 9th June 2024.

If there are changes to the information provided, you will be notified by email or contact from the link staff member at school.

This information sheet is for you to keep

PARENTAL/GUARDIAN CONSENT FORM (First Copy to Researcher)

I,[PRINT PARENT'S/GUARDIAN'S NAME],
consent to my child [PRINT
CHILD'S NAME] participating in this research study.

In giving my consent I state that:

- I understand the purpose of the study, what my child will be asked to do, and any risks/benefits involved.
- I have read the Parental/Guardian Information Sheet and have been able to discuss my child's involvement in the study with the researchers if I wished to do so.
- The researchers have answered any questions that I had about the study and I am happy with the answers.
- I understand that being in this study is completely voluntary and my child does not have to take part. My decision whether to let them take part in the study will not affect our relationship with the researchers or anyone else at the University of East Anglia now or in the future.
- I understand that my child can withdraw from the study at any time.
- I understand that my child may stop the interview at any time if they do not wish to continue, and that unless I indicate otherwise any recordings will then be erased and the information provided will not be included in the study results. I also understand that my child may refuse to answer any questions they don't wish to answer.
- I understand that my child may stop the research timeline activity at any time if they do not wish to continue, and that unless I indicate otherwise any materials (e.g. images, recordings, text) will then be erased and the information provided will not be included in the study results. I also understand that my child may refuse to take part in any of the activities that they wish.
- I understand that the results of this study will be used in the way described in the information sheet.
- I understand that personal information about my child that is collected over the course of this project will be stored securely and will only be used for purposes that I have agreed to. I understand that information about my child will only be told to others with my permission, except as required by law.

I consent to:

Audio-recording of my child YES ☐ NO ☐

My child reviewing transcripts YES ☐ NO ☐

The data collected in this study may be deposited with a repository to allow it to be made available for scholarly and educational purposes, but the data will only be used in the way that it is described in the information sheet.

I consent to: Deposit of data in a repository YES ☐ NO ☐

Would you like to receive feedback about the overall results of this study?
YES ☐ NO ☐

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If you answered **YES**, please indicate your preferred form of feedback and address:

☐ Postal: _____

☐ Email: _____

.....
Signature

.....
PRINT name

.....
Date

PARENTAL/GUARDIAN CONSENT FORM (Second Copy to Parent/Guardian)

I,[PRINT PARENT'S/GUARDIAN'S NAME],
consent to my child [PRINT
CHILD'S NAME] participating in this research study.

In giving my consent I state that:

- I understand the purpose of the study, what my child will be asked to do, and any risks/benefits involved.
- I have read the Parental/Guardian Information Sheet and have been able to discuss my child's involvement in the study with the researchers if I wished to do so.
- The researchers have answered any questions that I had about the study and I am happy with the answers.
- I understand that being in this study is completely voluntary and my child does not have to take part. My decision whether to let them take part in the study will not affect our relationship with the researchers or anyone else at the University of East Anglia now or in the future.
- I understand that my child can withdraw from the study at any time.
- I understand that my child may stop the interview at any time if they do not wish to continue, and that unless I indicate otherwise any recordings will then be erased and the information provided will not be included in the study results. I also understand that my child may refuse to answer any questions they don't wish to answer.
- I understand that my child may stop the research timeline activity at any time if they do not wish to continue, and that unless I indicate otherwise any materials (e.g. images, recordings, text) will then be erased and the information provided will not be included in the study results. I also understand that my child may refuse to take part in any of the activities that they wish.
- I understand that the results of this study will be used in the way described in the information sheet.
- I understand that personal information about my child that is collected over the course of this project will be stored securely and will only be used for purposes that I have agreed to. I understand that information about my child will only be told to others with my permission, except as required by law.

I consent to:

Audio-recording of my child YES ☐ NO ☐

My child reviewing transcripts YES ☐ NO ☐

The data collected in this study may be deposited with a repository to allow it to be made available for scholarly and educational purposes, but the data will only be used in the way that it is described in the information sheet.

I consent to: Deposit of data in a repository YES ☐ NO ☐

Would you like to receive feedback about the overall results of this study?
YES ☐ NO ☐

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If you answered **YES**, please indicate your preferred form of feedback and address:

☐ Postal: _____

☐ Email: _____

.....
Signature

.....
PRINT name

.....
Date

APPENDIX I: PARTICIPANT TIMELINES

Original timeline:

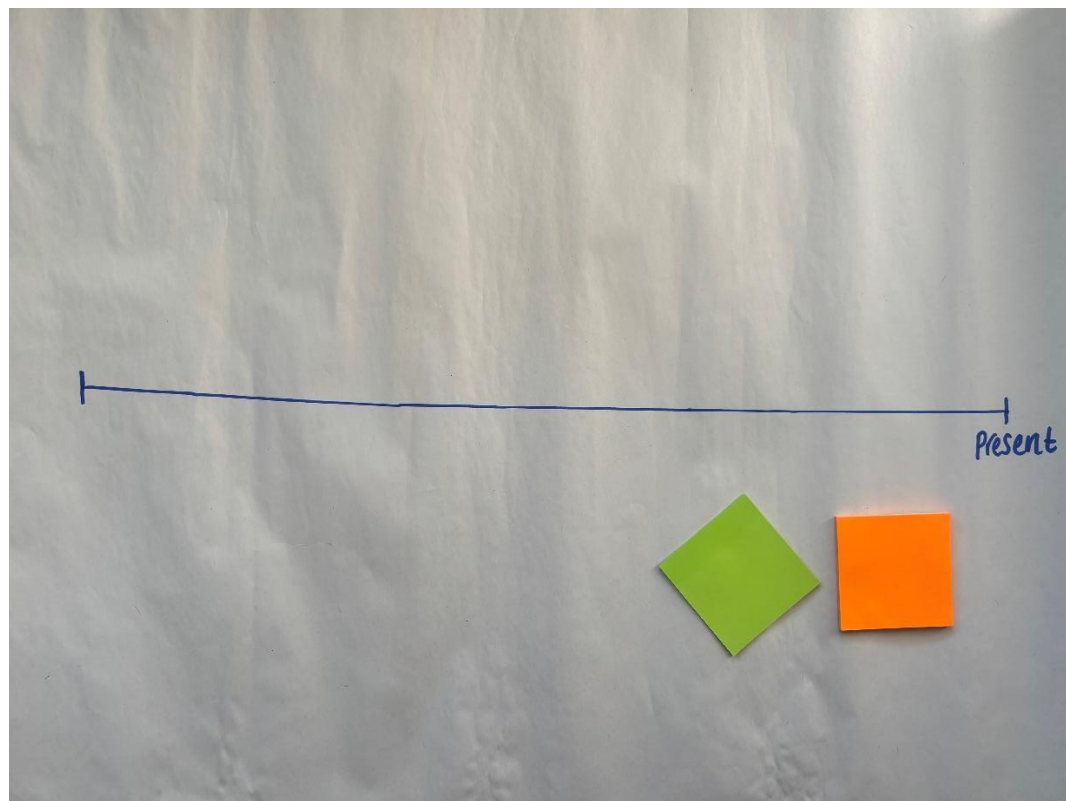


Figure 4: James's completed timeline from second interview

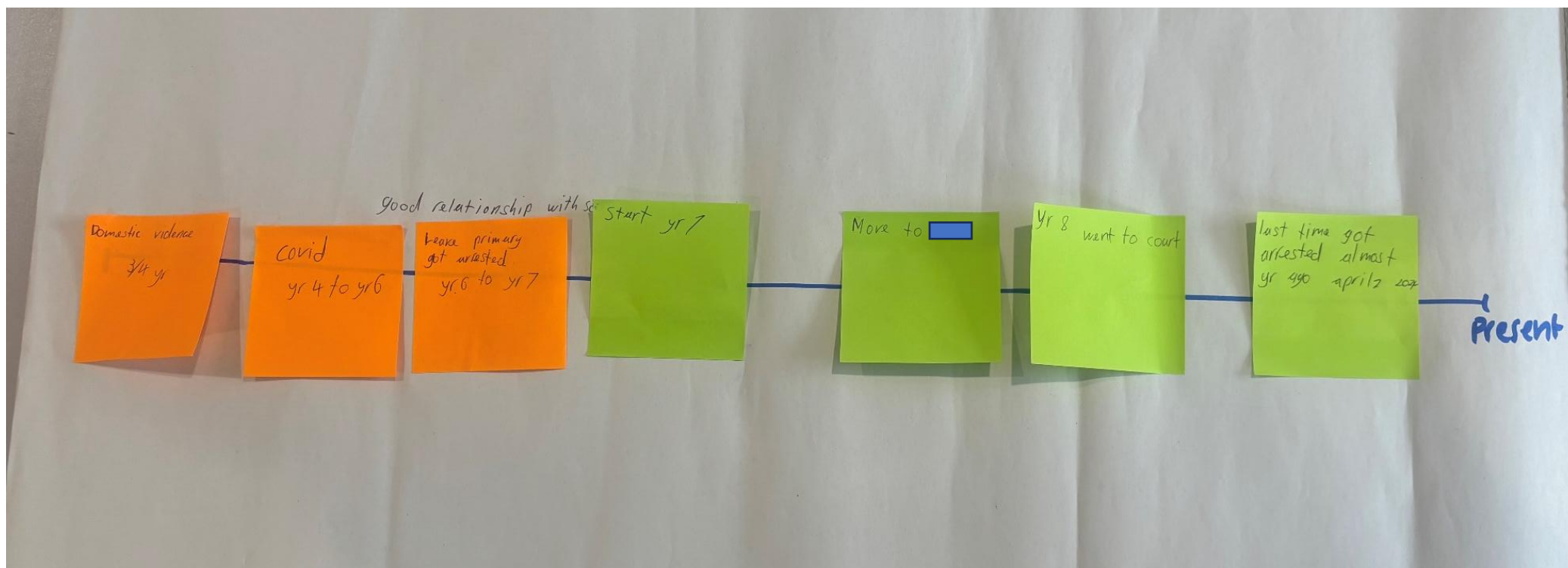


Figure 5: Digital version of James's Timeline

Orange- represents negative life events, Green- are more positive ones.

YP 1: James

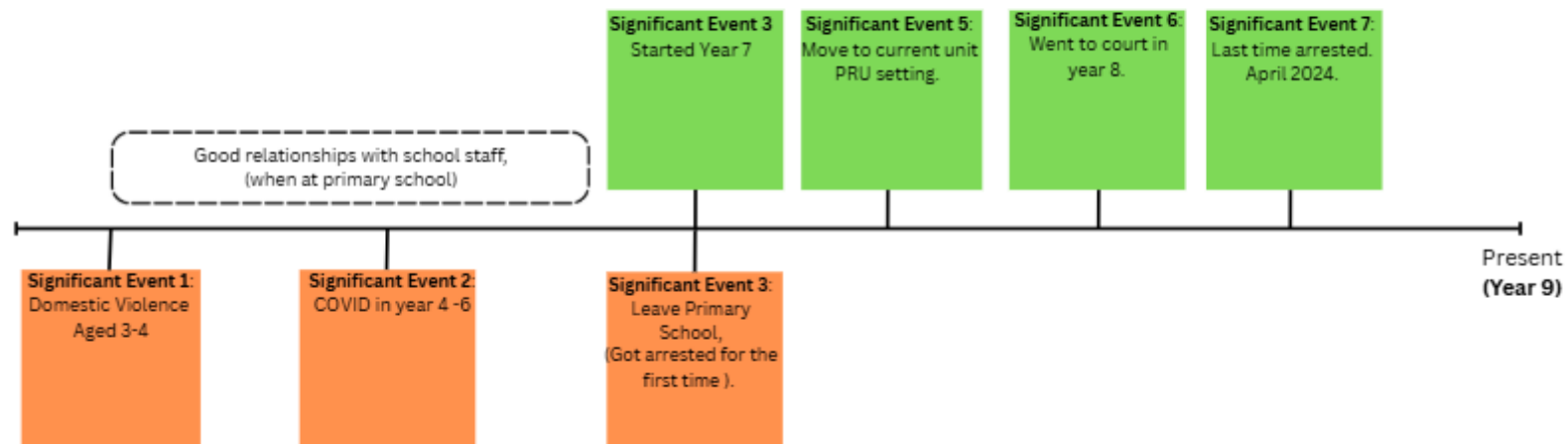


Figure 6: Dr Pepper's completed timeline from second interview

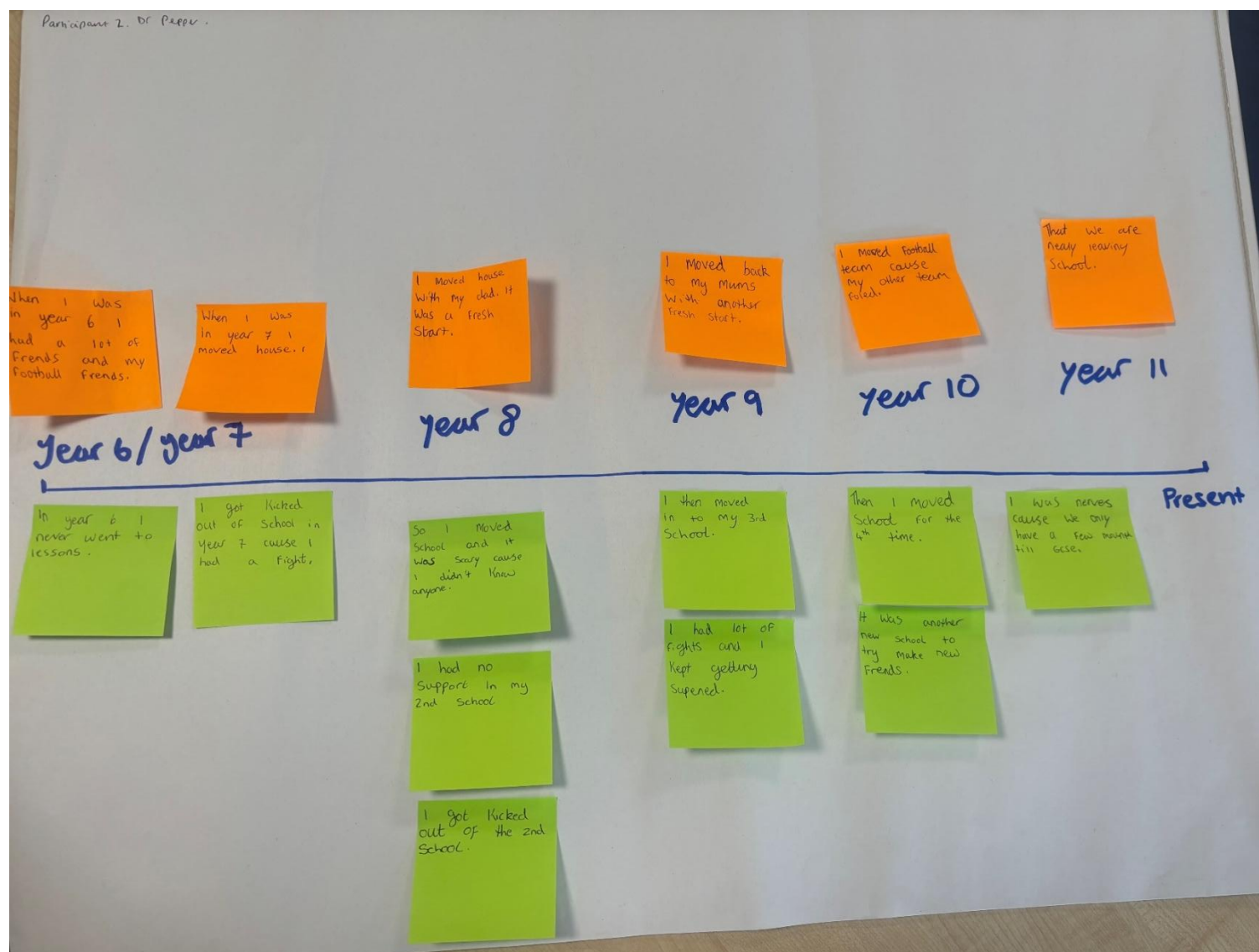
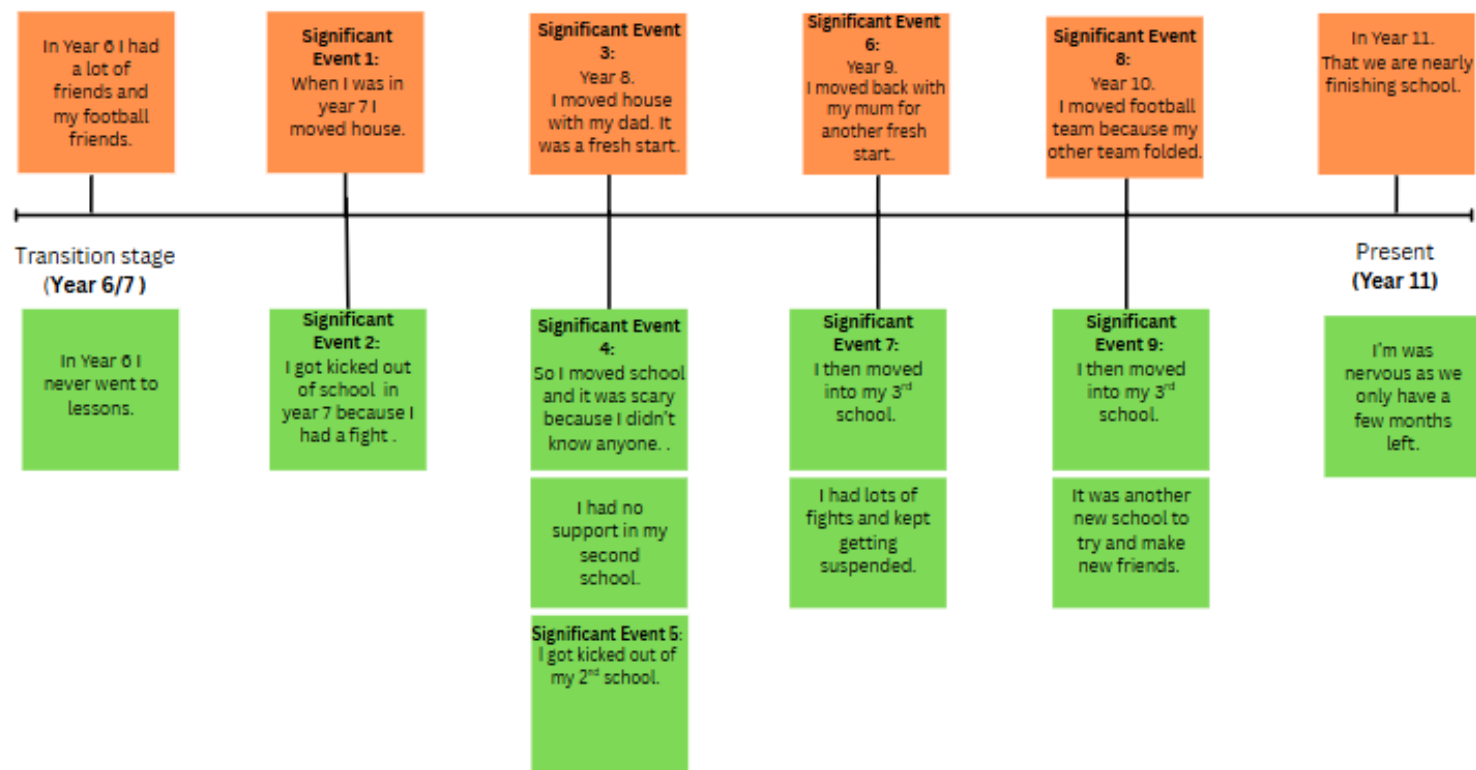


Figure 7: Digital version of Dr Pepper's Timeline

Orange- represents positive life events, Green less positive/negative.

YP 2: Dr Pepper



APPENDIX J: DISSEMINATION OF IMPLICATIONS FOR EPS



Top Ten Tips for EPs Supporting Transition



1 **At An Individual Level...**
When supporting with casework involving transition difficulties, supporting the CYP to share their views via use of a timeline as a tool. (We are skilled to facilitate this).



2 **Utilising Narrative tools...**
Tools like timelines offer a flexible approach and therefore can be co-constructed between the EP and the CYP, allowing for person-centred practice.

3 **At A Group Level...**
Apply psychologically informed ways to facilitate meetings with CYP, parents and school staff at times of transition.

4 **Restorative Justice**
Punitive behaviour policies can limit autonomy for CYP, this was shared within my participants narratives.

5 Consistently share the message that transition is a 'joint' responsibility, this does not fall solely upon primary staff to prepare pupils, or secondary school staff to manage any difficulties.

6 Within Secondary schools, EPs can support behaviour policies that reflect RJ values.

7 **Systemic Working...**
EPs are well-placed to promote early intervention and support with systemic change. This links to our HCPC Standards of Proficiency.

8 **Trauma-Informed**
Transition literature promotes trauma-informed whole school approaches, to support successful transition.

9 As highlighted within my thesis findings, there are often complex narratives that can affect successful transition for CYP. Understanding these at a systemic level is important. Guides and toolkits such as the Oxfordshire guidance for transition help professionals to consider these.

10 **Uniform!**
 We can raise with schools just how important uniform, can be for CYP! ✨

