

A Narrative Oriented Inquiry into emotionally based school avoidance: hearing the voices of young people and their parents

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Abstract

The majority of research into Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA) has sought the views of adults and professionals, meaning the current understanding of the phenomenon is largely shaped by adult interpretations (Baker & Bishop, 2015). An emerging research base has begun to explore the pupil and parent voice regarding their experiences of EBSA and their perceptions of the future, however, this base is limited and predominantly utilises semi-structured data collection methods, therefore, potential depth and detail in the accounts of this vulnerable group is minimised.

The present study used an adapted version of Hiles and Cermák's (2008) model of 'Narrative Oriented Inquiry' (NOI) to explore the stories told by young people and their parents in relation to their individual experiences of EBSA, and their perceptions of the young person's future. Guided narrative interviews (Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2000), supported by a visual life path tool (Wilson et al., 2007), were undertaken with two secondary-aged young people and three parents, all of whom were experiencing EBSA at the time of the research.

A broad approach to analysis was adopted, informed by the exploratory research questions. Narratives were analysed using Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach & Ziber's (1998) holistic-form analysis, used to consider the narrative plot lines (Gergen & Gergen, 1986) and the overall form of the stories; and categorical-content analysis to explore themes interpreted within the stories.

Participants reflected upon the pupil's transition to secondary school, where the young people experienced a deterioration in their mental health and emotional wellbeing. Key themes were interpreted within the narratives in relation to their experiences of EBSA: difficult emotions and poor mental health; negative perceptions and influences of the school environment; poor school connectedness; the importance of peer relationships and family interactions; parents feeling unheard and blamed. Further key themes were interpreted in relation to the perceptions of the young person's future: academic aspirations; hopes to re-engage in education; understanding the

needs of the young person; the importance of emotional-regulation and self-management; and hopes for positive peer relationships.

The research has implications for current practice when supporting young people exhibiting EBSA and their families for LAs, Educational Psychologists and secondary settings, including enhancing school connectedness, relatedness, autonomy and competence; providing training and psychoeducation to support young people and parental awareness of SEMH and EBSA; potential development of an EBSA pathway to support professional understanding and consistency in response; and using pupil voice and person-centred approaches to support academic aspirations. Areas for future research are also highlighted.

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Chapter 1: Introduction and Literature Review

1.0 Introduction to Chapter 1

This chapter provides an overview of the school non-attendance (SNA) literature. It begins by discussing the importance of attendance and reflects on the current context of attendance in the UK Education System. Conceptualisations of school attendance difficulties are then discussed. The literature then critically explores theoretical perspectives and factors relating to SNA. The importance of pupil and parent voice is then considered. A summary of the literature is provided to support the rationale for the systematic literature review, presented in Chapter 2.

1.1 The importance of school attendance

School attendance is viewed as important for the holistic development of pupils, given the role of school in supporting the academic, emotional and social outcomes of pupils (Finning et al., 2019). The short- and long-term impacts of low attendance varies dependent upon the individual characteristics of a pupil and whether they have engaged in interventions to support their attendance difficulties (McShane et al., 2004; Gulliford & Miller, 2015).

1.1.1 Impacts on academic attainment

A strongly held view in the literature is of the impact low attendance has on academic outcomes. In their study across seven local authorities (LAs) Malcolm et al., (2003) found that irrespective of the length of absence, teachers perceived pupil absence to contribute to underachievement and be disruptive to a pupil's learning (Malcolm et al., 2003). UK government documentation supports this view, suggesting that persistent absentees are at a "considerable disadvantage": of those who miss more than 50% of school only 3% manage to achieve five A* to C grades at GCSE (DfE, 2011). The long term consequences of low attendance include being at risk of becoming

'NEET': not engaging in any education, employment or training following secondary education (Taylor, 2012), having reduced life chances (Thambirajah et al., 2008) and being at high risk of long term unemployment (Attwood & Croll, 2015).

1.1.2 Impacts on social and emotional development

Attendance has also been associated with social and emotional development. Malcolm et al. (2003) found that teachers perceived absence to impact a pupil's confidence and self-esteem, their ability to make friends and their long-term socialisation. Pupils with an emotional basis to their attendance difficulties are reported to avoid contact with other children and can quickly become confined to the house (Thambirajah et al., 2008). Therefore, low attending pupils can become socially isolated (Kearney et al., 2001) and lose out on age appropriate socialisation and peer relationships (Thambirajah et al., 2008).

Long-term impacts of low attendance indicates poor attenders are at greater risk of mental health difficulties in later life (Flakierska-Praquin et al., 1997). Specifically, anxiety disorders, depression and suicide attempts are understood to correlate with attendance difficulties (Kearney, 2008b). Such mental health needs are said to be precipitated by the onset of adolescence, social anxiety and prolonged absences (Thambirajah et al., 2008).

1.2 Current context of school attendance

The UK government publish absence data three times per year (DfE; Department for Education, 2019a). Within the publications, two types of absence are identified: 'authorised' (permission granted from school, e.g. pupil illness) and 'unauthorised' (without permission from school, e.g. truancy) (DfE, 2019b). At the time of writing, the national statistics from the DfE for absences between 2017 and 2018 highlight an increase in overall absence from the previous year: unauthorised absences were at their highest since government records began (DfE, 2019b).

The government statistics also record ‘persistent absenteeism’; defined as pupils who miss more than 10% of their possible school sessions, accounting for 32.4% of all authorised absence and 54.1% of all unauthorised absence (DfE, 2019b). Attempts are made within the descriptive statistics to identify pupil characteristics within absence rates, falling under the categories of gender, free school meals eligibility, first language, year group, special educational needs (SEN) and ethnic group. However, further analysis is not provided and therefore the attendance rates within these groups cannot be established.

Gathering statistics and setting out guidance on school attendance (DfE, 2018) implies some attempts are being made to reduce absence rates at the government, Local Authority (LA) and school level. Here, it is argued that the simplified categorisations of ‘authorised’ and ‘unauthorised’ absences fail to acknowledge the vulnerable groups that may fall within the descriptor of persistent absence, such as those who exhibit emotionally based school avoidance (EBSA) behaviours. Pupils can experience difficulties attending school for numerous reasons (Thambirajah et al., 2008). The complexities associated with such difficulties are not reflected in the government documentation. The simplified definitions of non-attendance arguably place schools in a position where they must rely on a medicalised model and ‘within-child’ factors to determine their criteria for authorised and unauthorised absences. Therefore, a restrictive view of absence is promoted, conferring blame onto the individual pupil rather than reflecting wider systemic factors that may be influencing the pupil’s behaviour.

1.3 Defining and conceptualising school attendance difficulties

1.3.1 Issues with conceptualising school attendance difficulties

The conceptualisation of school attendance difficulties is widely debated (Finning et al., 2019), reflective of the complexities often associated with such behaviours. ‘School non-attendance’ is used as a broad umbrella term,

encapsulating all pupils who fail to attend school (Thambirajah et al., 2008). Occasional absenteeism is perceived as 'non-problematic' and often short-lived, however, focussed and individualised assessment and intervention is required for 'problematic' absenteeism (Kearney, 2008a).

Distinctions are made between 'wilful non-attenders', such as truants, and those who have an emotional basis to their non-attendance (Gulliford & Miller, 2015; Thambirajah et al., 2008). Truancy refers to pupils who are absent from school without parental knowledge or consent (Heyne et al., 2018) and are not considered to experience anxiety or fear in relation to attending school. Truants are perceived as disinterested in the curriculum, unwilling to conform to the expectations of school and as preferring to engage in activities outside of school, such as anti-social behaviours (Elliott, 1999). These features of truancy constitute different reasons for non-attendance (Havik et al., 2015) and allow for distinctions to be made from pupils who are considered to have an emotional basis to their non-attendance.

Despite the suggested need for distinction across the spectrum of attendance, the literature is lacking a shared consensus on terminology to describe each group (Shilvock, 2010). Therefore, it is important to apply criticality when consulting the existing literature on school attendance difficulties, as the terms used to define pupils with such needs may differ greatly.

1.3.2 Dominant discourse and conceptualisation of school non-attendance

The terminology used to describe SNA is understood to have become more complicated as further categories of non-attendance have been identified (Heyne et al., 2018). Terms such as 'school refusal' (Egger et al., 2003; Thambirajah et al., 2008), 'chronic non-attendance' (Lauchlan, 2003), 'school phobia' (Johnson et al., 1941) and 'extended non-attendance' (Pellegrini, 2007), as well as others identified by Heyne et al. (2018), have been used interchangeably by various authors, with each term differing dependent upon the authors definition and their aims (Pellegrini, 2007). The variation in terminology is also dependable on the professional identity and orientation of

the authors (Kearney & Graczyk, 2014). More commonly used terms will be discussed in further detail next.

1.3.2.1 School refusal

Historic and contemporary authors have frequently adopted the term 'school refusal' to describe those who are reluctant to attend school for emotional reasons. The term was first operationalised by Berg et al. (1969; Figure 1) and remains highly referenced in the literature, suggesting it is a widely accepted term. Thambirajah et al. (2008) suggest that the use of 'school refusal' implies an emotional basis to the non-attendance, and reflects a description, not a causality to the behaviour. The authors go on to suggest that the level of emotional distress can vary significantly between individuals and can thus impact upon the severity of a pupil's SNA, as represented in Figure 2. Although widely cited, 'school refusal' does not have a universal shared meaning (Shilvock, 2010), with some using it as an umbrella term for all non-attendance behaviours.

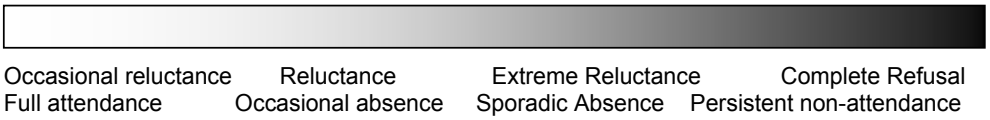
Figure 1.

Berg et al's. (1969) operational definition of 'school refusal'.

1) **Severe difficulty in attending school**, often resulting in prolonged absence.
2) **Severe emotional upset** which presents itself in the form of symptoms such as excessive fearfulness, complains of feeling ill without obvious organic cause.
3) **Staying at home with the knowledge of their parents**, when they should be at school.
4) **Absence of significant anti-social disorders** such as juvenile delinquency, disruptiveness and sexual activity.

Figure 2.

From Thambirajah et al. (2008). The spectrum of school refusal.



1.3.2.2 Extended school non-attendance

'Extended school non-attendance' is proposed as an alternative to 'school refusal' (Pellegrini, 2007). The neutrality of this term is suggested to divert attention to the systemic influences on non-attendance, such as school-based factors, as opposed to 'within-child' influences (Pellegrini, 2007). 'Extended school non-attendance' is a broad term encompassing 'school refusal' and 'truancy' behaviours.

1.3.2.3 School refusal behaviour

Kearney & Silverman (1990) advocate for the use of the term 'school refusal behaviour', emphasising the need to examine the underlying functions of the attendance behaviours (Figure 3). Kearney's work (Kearney & Silverman, 1990; Kearney & Silverman, 1996) describes 'child-motivated' reasons for difficulties with school attendance and is inclusive of those with and without emotionally-based difficulties. The use of 'school refusal behaviours' is contested in light of the implication that non-attendance is a wilful behaviour (Pellegrini, 2007). Furthermore, the linearity of a functional approach potentially restricts the consideration of holistic factors which may contribute to SNA (Thambirajah et al., 2008). Whilst this limitation will vary by the professional stance of those applying the functional analysis to school refusal behaviours, it does suggest that the functional approach is predominantly within-child.

Figure 3.

Developed by Kearney and Silverman (1990). The functions of school refusal behaviour.

1) To avoid the experience of severe anxiety or fearfulness in relation to specific elements of the school setting e.g. the corridors.

2) To avoid social situations that are feared or cause anxiety such as problems with peers and negative social experiences.

3) To seek attention or reduce separation anxiety, which may be reinforced through positive experiences when staying at home.

4)To enjoy rewarding experiences outside of school, e.g. engaging in preferred activities, sometimes with peers which can lead to antisocial behaviours. This is the group usually referred to as truants.

1.3.2.4 Emotionally Based School Avoidance

West Sussex Educational Psychology Service (EPS) adopt the term 'Emotionally Based School Avoidance' (EBSA; West Sussex Educational Psychology Service, 2018) within their guidance supporting educational professionals, families and young people exhibiting such behaviours. This references a "*broad umbrella term used to describe a group of children and young people who have severe difficulty in attending school due to emotional factors, often resulting in prolonged absences from school*" (pg. 4), recognising the emotional reasons that can underlie a pupil's non-attendance. The term is not restrictive to the severity of the SNA behaviours or to those who do not have a diagnosed mental health condition (Pellegrini, 2007).

It is felt the term EBSA is clearly defined and reflective of the focus of the current study and my personal interest in pupil's who have an emotional basis to their attendance difficulties. Therefore, EBSA is adopted as a term used within the current study. It is chosen to neither judge nor attempt to attribute attendance behaviours to a specific cause. Instead, the hope is to explore the sense which young people and their parents make of their experiences and to reflect the multiple influences upon these experiences. For pragmatic reasons

and to respect the professional identity of cited authors, alternative terms will only be used in reference to the literature that employs them.

1.4 Prevalence of attendance difficulties

Given the discrepancies in terminology used to describe attendance, it is difficult to establish prevalence figures of pupils who experience attendance difficulties (Elliott, 1999). This is complicated further by variation within individual LAs on how attendance is monitored and recorded (Baker & Bishop, 2015). The literature reports that SNA is not specific to any particular population (Pellegrini, 2007) and is equal across genders (Fremont, 2003; King & Bernstein, 2001). In the UK, the prevalence rate for 'school refusal' is estimated between 1-5% (Katz et al., 2016). When considering truancy behaviours within the statistics, this estimate increases to between 5-28% (Kearney, 2001).

Onset of SNA is perceived to be gradual (Gulliford & Miller, 2015), though it is largely cited that non-attendance behaviours are likely to occur at key transition ages, between 5-6 years and 11-13 years (Pellegrini, 2007). Minority groups, pupils with disabilities and pupils from lower socio-economic backgrounds are also perceived as more likely to experience attendance difficulties (Gee, 2018). However, minority groups are frequently marginalised in non-attendance research due to research samples predominantly reflecting ethnically white participants (Lyon & Cotler, 2007) therefore, data and statistics on SNA are unrepresentative of such groups, making it unclear how prevalent such behaviours are in these populations.

1.5 Theoretical perspectives and risk factors associated with school non-attendance

In likeness to the literature regarding SNA terminology, the factors associated with SNA are equally complex. The heterogeneity of SNA behaviours means causal explanations are difficult to ascertain due to the bi-directional nature of factors influencing a young person. Dominant theoretical perspectives identified within the literature are critically considered next.

1.5.1 Within-child factors associated with school non-attendance

The notion of within-child difficulties as an explanation for SNA has been historically dominant. Research in this area suggests that young people exhibiting SNA are more likely to experience emotional and mental health difficulties, such as anxiety disorders and depression (Ek & Eriksson, 2013; Finning et al., 2019; Havik et al., 2015), both of which are understood to be the most prevalent diagnoses in the SNA population (Egger et al., 2003; Fremont, 2003).

Clinical samples have identified a high prevalence of anxiety conditions, depression and oppositional defiance disorder (ODD) amongst pupils exhibiting SNA (Egger et al., 2003; Kearney & Albano, 2004). In a review of the literature, Ek & Eriksson (2013) claim that of the young people who 'refuse' to attend school, encompassing both 'truancy' and 'school refusal', approximately 90% have a diagnosable psychiatric disorder, such as separation anxiety, depression and social phobia. Incorporating 11 studies across six countries into their systematic literature review, Finning et al., (2019) found evidence to support Ek & Eriksson (2013), suggesting associations between unexcused absences/truancy and anxiety symptoms, social anxiety disorder and generalised anxiety disorder (GAD). Furthermore, evidence suggested that school refusal may be associated with separation anxiety disorder, GAD, social anxiety and phobia. In a further systematic review, Finning et al. (2019) found evidence for associations between depression and SNA, although the authors note the studies included were of poor quality, implying further rigorous evidence is needed.

Although reliable, the findings from these studies should be generalised with caution. The use of clinical samples and diagnostic questionnaires may be considered deterministic (Egger et al., 2003; Kearney & Albano, 2004), thus providing linear perspectives on factors associated with SNA. This is reinforced in the findings from the systematic literature reviews (Finning et al., 2019; Finning et al., 2019), which aimed only to explore specific mental health difficulties associated with SNA. The findings therefore exclude other relevant systemic factors, promoting a restricted view which may negatively impact on the overall societal perceptions of SNA.

1.5.2 Family and home factors associated with school non-attendance

Aspects of the family and home, such as changes within the family, mental health problems, domestic violence and parental disputes (Katz et al., 2016), have been associated with SNA behaviours.

In their large-scale study exploring the perceptions of pupil absence, Malcolm et al. (2003) found professionals to link poor attendance to complex home environments, poor parenting skills and disorganised lifestyles. Additionally, Gren-Landell et al. (2015) explored teachers views of the risk factors for SNA, finding familial factors such as alcohol abuse, mental health problems and lenient parental styles to be rated highly as the most important causes of SNA. These findings suggest school professionals are likely to place blame onto parents for a pupil's attendance difficulties. Gren-Landell et al. (2015) conclude that this may indicate the difficulty teachers experience in identifying deficiences in their school context, instead deflecting responsibility onto factors outside of their control.

Parents themselves have been suggested to feel powerless to factors they perceive as outside of their control that prevent regular attendance (Dalziel & Henthorne, 2005). In their study examining the role of parental self-efficacy (PSE), defined as an individual's appraisal of their competence in the parental role, Carless et al. (2015) found that parents of school refusing adolescents had significantly lower PSE levels in comparison to parents of adolescents who attended school. These parents perceived themselves to neither have the skills or knowledge to support their child. However, the importance of PSE as a predictor of school refusal reduced when the researchers considered adolescent and parental depression and family dysfunction (Carless et al., 2015). The findings provide some support for the literature suggesting the significant influence of family factors on SNA. Despite this, the small sample size used in the study impacts its validity. Furthermore, the self-report measures utilised raises questions for the reliability of the findings. Longitudinal research is needed to establish further understanding of interactions between SNA, familial mental health and family dysfunction.

1.5.3 School factors associated with school non-attendance

Recent research has identified key aspects of the school environment to be associated with SNA. 'School climate', referring to disciplinary policies, high prevalence of bullying and poor management systems, and 'school connectedness'; incorporating teacher-pupil relationships (Kearney, 2008b; Lauchlan, 2003), recognising diversity and feeling respected, valued and safe (Kearney, 2008b), are some of the systemic aspects said to influence SNA. Positive teacher-pupil relationships are understood to act as a protective factor against feelings of stress and negative emotions in young people (Murberg & Bru, 2009). In light of the association between SNA and anxiety and depression (see section 1.5.1), it is implied that poor teacher-pupil relationships may contribute to negative emotional experiences, thus posing a risk to SNA behaviours.

Adaptations to the school context have been proposed to support pupils to overcome attendance difficulties (Finning et al., 2018). Examples include individualised support programmes, providing emotional support and promoting shared responsibility between school and parents (Finning et al., 2018). These findings are supported by Nuttall & Woods (2013). Exploring factors associated with successful reintegration after EBSA, the authors found teacher approaches, peer connections and the whole school context were prominent factors to address when supporting pupils with EBSA (Nuttall & Woods, 2013). The findings support the theoretical argument that aspects of the school environment significantly impact SNA, particularly those with EBSA. Despite this, the reliability of the findings can be questioned as the accounts were reliant on the participants' retrospective experiences and therefore are not representative of events as they unfolded. Furthermore, the case-study design means the findings cannot be generalised.

The discussed research highlights the need to understand the views of those with direct experiences of SNA, to ensure responses are reflective of and respectful to an individual's perspective of their school experience. Consideration of pupil views on an individual basis is important, as the context of school settings can differ greatly within and between LAs.

1.5.4 The interaction of factors on school non-attendance

Research has identified a complex interplay between bio-psycho-social-cultural factors in the development of school attendance difficulties (Tonge & Silverman, 2019). This refutes the idea that within-child factors can be used to explain the majority of 'school refusal' cases (Elliott & Place, 2019). If we are to understand EBSA as a phenomenon, it is necessary to consider the systems within which a young person exists. This includes acknowledging the dynamic interactions between systems in relation to the young person's experiences (Lyon & Cotler, 2009), their own sense of agency (Darling, 2007) and the influence of within-child factors.

Previous SNA literature has largely represented the interpretations of educational professionals and researchers. Given the significant influence of the family and home environment, it is imperative to gain a professional understanding of the parent/carer perceptions and experiences of SNA, to support outcomes for young people. Additionally, the focus on professional interpretations of SNA suggests an absence of pupil and parent/carer voice in the literature. The importance of parent and pupil voice will now be explored.

1.6 The importance of pupil and parent voice

1.6.1 Pupil voice in research

Every young person has the right to have their views heard on matters that affect them (UNCRC, 1989). Educational policy and legislation has reflected this notion (*Children and Families Act*, 2014; DfE, 2015), recognising pupils as being the most well-placed to suggest what works for them (Atkinson et al., 2019). There are varying degrees to pupil involvement, some considered more participatory than others (Hart, 1992). Tokenism describes instances where pupils are 'given' a voice, but minimal consideration has been given to the appropriateness of the subject matter or the pupil's desired communication methods (Hart, 1992), reflective of a potential power imbalance. Nevertheless, fearing tokenism should not prevent the inclusion of young people's views, as any information gathered from pupil participation is perceived as valuable (Lundy, 2018). This implicates research to consider empowering and anti-

oppressive practices to elicit the views of pupils (Sewell, 2016), utilising these in a way most beneficial to the pupil, professionals and the wider educational context.

Pupil involvement has psychological benefits, such as supporting well-being (Graham et al., 2018) and increasing social, personal and emotional skills (Halsey et al., 2006). It is also perceived to benefit student learning and engagement, teacher-pupil relations and has potential to build stronger school communities (Barber, 2009; Fielding, 2015; Mannion et al., 2015). Atkinson et al. (2019) support this notion in their pupil-participatory research, investigating student involvement in a school-based mental health initiative. The authors highlighted the importance of pupil responsibility and ownership, concluding that educational professionals' interpretations of pupil experiences are not enough to authentically understand the school and wider contextual pressures pupils face (Atkinson et al., 2019). This implies going beyond tokenism and advocates the need to develop pupil autonomy and agency.

1.6.2 Parent voice in research

Eliciting the voice of parents is also reflected in educational policy and legislation (*Children and Families Act*, 2014; DfE, 2015). Parents play a vital role in their children's education. In a synthetisation of nine meta-analyses, Wilder (2014) found results indicating a positive relationship between parental involvement and pupil academic achievement. Parental involvement is also said to improve parent-teacher relationships, parental confidence, behaviour and mental well-being in children, and school attendance (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). Goodall & Montgomery (2014) note a disparity between parental 'involvement' and parental 'engagement', suggesting both are interlinked with school and parental agency. Finding a balance between the two is suggested to promote shared responsibility between school and home and is most beneficial to pupils (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014). This infers the complex nature of involving parents in their child's education, but one that is necessary for pupil development.

Factors on various levels, including societal, familial, parent-teacher and the individual child, can act as barriers to parental involvement (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). A parent's perceptions of their role in their child's education, the willingness of the school and their own self-belief and psychological wellbeing are perceived to influence involvement (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). Disadvantages associated with social class and ethnicity minority groups are suggested to play a significant role, as reflected in the dominance of white, middle-class voices in parental involvement research (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). To negate the influence of such barriers and inequalities, the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) has provided support for education settings to promote parental engagement. These include: flexible approaches to fit parents' schedules, a welcoming ethos, and practical support and advice to support parent confidence (EEF, 2018). Here, it is hypothesised that supporting parental engagement and involvement will enable the parental voice to be elicited and thus address any current power imbalances and inequalities that may be implicit within research and education.

1.6.3 Voices within vulnerable groups

'Vulnerable groups', referring to young people and families who are marginalised in society to have their voices heard on issues that affect them (National Foundation for Educational Research, 2020), are often overlooked in research. These include, but are not limited to, learners with SEN, Looked after children (LAC), those at risk of exclusion, minority ethnic groups, and persistent absentees. Young people with additional needs are less likely to be involved than those without (Franklin & Sloper, 2009), as their opinions are rarely asked for (Harding & Atkinson, 2009). Vulnerable pupils are perceived as able to reflect constructively on their educational experiences, providing invaluable insights that are impactful on decision making and legislative changes (Prunty et al., 2012). Therefore, to understand a particular phenomenon within the vulnerable population, we need to understand the perspectives of those with direct experience (Prunty et al., 2012).

Negative experiences of vulnerable groups have been suggested to shape their perceptions of their future. For example, excluded pupils reported feeling

out of control of their lives, lack self-belief and have few expectations or aspirations for themselves (Daniels & Cole, 2010). Furthermore, when compared to mainstream pupils, PRU (Pupil Referral Unit) pupils have been described as pessimistic about their futures and prospects, indicating that these pupils had a lack of internalisation of possible future options (Mainwaring & Hallam, 2010). By hearing the views of vulnerable pupils and gaining an understanding of their experience, it seems possible to intervene and minimise the negative effects of their prior educational experience, thus supporting pupil aspirations and overall development.

The context of the home environment is viewed as influential on the experiences and perceptions of pupils, particularly given young people's lives are often played out between home and school settings (Pellegrini, 2009). Gutman & Akerman (2008) suggest pupil aspirations begin to form in early childhood and are modified by environment and experience. They imply a strong relationship between parent aspirations for their children and aspirations of the children themselves, which are mitigated by factors such as the pupil's academic abilities, family income, socio-economic status, ethnicity and gender (Gutman & Akerman, 2008). In view of the increased likelihood of such factors being influential in the lives of vulnerable groups, it can be suggested that parents from such groups may have lower aspirations for their children, which in turn, may impact their academic achievement (Hattie, 2008). Therefore, gathering the views of parents appears highly important to the experiences and future aspirations for young people from vulnerable groups. This understanding may promote the development of systemic interventions to support vulnerable families in achieving best possible outcomes.

1.6.4 Concluding on the voice of vulnerable groups

Research, policy and legislation have recognised the importance of hearing the voices of pupils and parents from vulnerable groups and how such experiences and perceptions can impact education, aspirations and the future. In light of this, the current research will employ a systematic literature review (SLR) to identify studies that have incorporated pupil and parent views in the context of EBSA. Specifically, the SLR will seek qualitative research on:

- The experiences of pupils and parents who have experienced EBSA;
- The perceived futures, hopes and aspirations of pupils and parents who have experienced EBSA.

Chapter 2: Systematic Literature Review

2.0 Defining a systematic review

A systematic literature review is a process of identifying, appraising and synthesising studies about a particular topic (Petticrew & Roberts, 2006). Studies are considered individually to see how they can collectively answer a specific research question and are judged based on the quality and relevance of the evidence (Gough, 2007). Therefore, a systematic review can provide useful insights into the current evidence-base and highlight what may need to be explored in future research (Petticrew & Roberts, 2006).

2.1 Method of the systematic review

This section outlines the type of methodology I adopted, the aims and research question, and the process of the current SLR. Key decision points are justified to ensure transparency.

2.1.1 Method overview and rationale

A qualitative review was implemented, seeking to gain insight into experiences. A meta-ethnographic approach was undertaken to aggregate the current literature on pupil and parent voice in EBSA. Proposed as an alternative to meta-analysis (Noblit & Hare, 1988), meta-ethnography enables rigorous synthesising of qualitative research, offering rich description of methods and more formalised interpretive analysis of existing findings through third order interpretations (Cahill et al., 2018; Major & Savin-Baden, 2010). Therefore, the aim of meta-ethnography is to generate novel interpretations by combining the outcomes of primary studies into a new whole (Major & Savin-Baden, 2010).

2.1.2 Aims of the systematic review

To support the direction of the current research, the review identified research that has sought to gather the views of pupils and/or parents/carers in relation to EBSA and their perceptions of the future. The following question informs the systematic search:

What do we know from studies that have explored the voices of pupils and parents/carers in relation to their experiences of emotionally based school avoidance and their perceptions of the future?

2.1.3 Systematic review process

A systematic search strategy is of key importance in a qualitative research synthesis (Major & Savin-Baden, 2010). Therefore, the first step in the process was to set the inclusion and exclusion criteria based on the aims and review question (Table 1).

Table 1.

Inclusion and exclusion criteria within the SLR

	Inclusion criteria	**Exclusion criteria**
Language	English	Not available or not written in English.
Sample	• Pupils of school age and who have experienced or are currently experiencing difficulties with attendance due to perceived emotional difficulties. • Parents/carers of pupils who have experienced or are currently experiencing their child's attendance difficulties due to perceived emotional difficulties.	• Pupils of non-school age. • Studies that only include professionals. • Studies exploring truancy/truants. • Studies that have not clearly defined their sample.

Focus of study	• Incorporates views of pupils and/or parents/carers in relation to their experiences of/perceptions of attendance difficulties and/or • Incorporates views of pupils and/or parents/carers in relation to the future, hopes and aspirations.	• Studies that exclusively focus on professionals' experiences/perceptions of attendance difficulties. • Studies only identifying what helped with reintegration back into education following attendance difficulties. • Studies not focussing on experiences of/reasons for attendance difficulties.
Research outcome	• Element of pupil views and/or parent/carer views thematically presented in relation to experiences of attendance difficulties and/or reasons for attendance difficulties. • Rich qualitative data.	• No separation of participant voices where studies have included participants additional to parents/carers and/or pupils. • Data is presented in an incoherent way.
Study design	Qualitative or mixed methods research.	Research with only quantitative data or secondary research.
Type of publication	Published and unpublished literature.	Other publications (i.e. reviews, books, book chapters)
Date of publication	Published after 2009	Published before 2009

2.1.4 Rationale for inclusion and exclusion criteria

2.1.4.1 Language

It was important to ensure that as the researcher conducting the review, I could understand the content of the research to make an informed decision as to whether it would meet the inclusion criteria and be relevant to the review question. Therefore, only studies available in English were included.

2.1.4.2 Sample

The views of pupils and parents/carers were sought for the current review. As school attendance difficulties have been highlighted to be more likely at key transition points (Pellegrini, 2007), school-aged participants, across primary and secondary age were included.

Due to the variation of terminology used to describe attendance difficulties in research, I applied a broad inclusion criterion. The purpose of this was to incorporate studies where attributions around attendance difficulties may be unclear or purposefully not stated. I made a decision not to include studies with an explicit focus on 'truancy', due to my interest in those who are perceived to have an emotional basis to their non-attendance and to support the direction of the current research. Additionally, studies were not included where they had not clearly defined what the authors considered as difficulties with attendance.

2.1.4.3 Focus of study

The review sought to identify research that had explored the reasons for and experiences of attendance difficulties in pupils and parents/carers and research that had explored their perceptions of the future. Studies that incorporated such views on some level were included. I included studies where pupils and/or parent/carer views were explored alongside the views of professionals when views had been analysed separately. This was to ensure themes could be identified relating only to the perceptions of pupils and/or parents. I excluded studies where only professional experiences were explored.

The current review sought to discover the experiences of attendance difficulties and perceptions of the future. Therefore, I excluded studies where they exclusively explored experiences of reintegration into an educational setting following a period of non-attendance.

2.1.4.4 Research outcome

I included studies where the experiences of attendance difficulties and/or perceptions of reasons for attendance difficulties and/or perceptions of the future had been explored and thematically presented. This was to ensure the studies related to the review question and the findings could not be misinterpreted. Therefore, the studies required thick description and clear analysis. I excluded studies where the data was presented incoherently and there was no thick description.

2.1.4.5 Study design

Only qualitative or mixed methods research designs were included to ensure studies were relevant to the exploratory review question.

2.1.4.6 Type of publication

The decision was taken to include grey literature in the review, as well as published articles, as grey literature often includes valuable rich, thick description, perhaps absent in published research.

2.1.4.7 Date of publication

Studies conducted within the last 10 years were included in the current review. This was to ensure any outcomes of the research were relevant to the current educational context.

2.1.5 Search strategy and terms

Evidence for the systematic review was collected in November 2019. Simple search terms were used to capture a broad range of literature, with some adjustments made to some terms to ensure relevant studies were captured. Consistent terms were used across all databases. The search included the terms “voice”, “experience*”, “perspective*”, “perception*” and “view*” to elicit results relating to the voice of pupils and parents/carers. The terms “school

refus*", "non-attend*", and "school phobi*" were used to capture the expansive terminology relating to SNA that may be used within the literature. To capture literature related to the future, hopes and aspirations of pupils and parents/carers, the terms "future*", "hopes", and "aspirations" were used. Terms were combined using 'OR' and 'AND' in each database (see Appendix A for a list of search terms). The databases *Web of Science, SCOPUS, PsycINFO (Ovid)* and *ERIC (EBSCO)* were used. Grey literature was obtained through https://ethos.bl.uk/.

2.1.6 Search outcomes and study selection

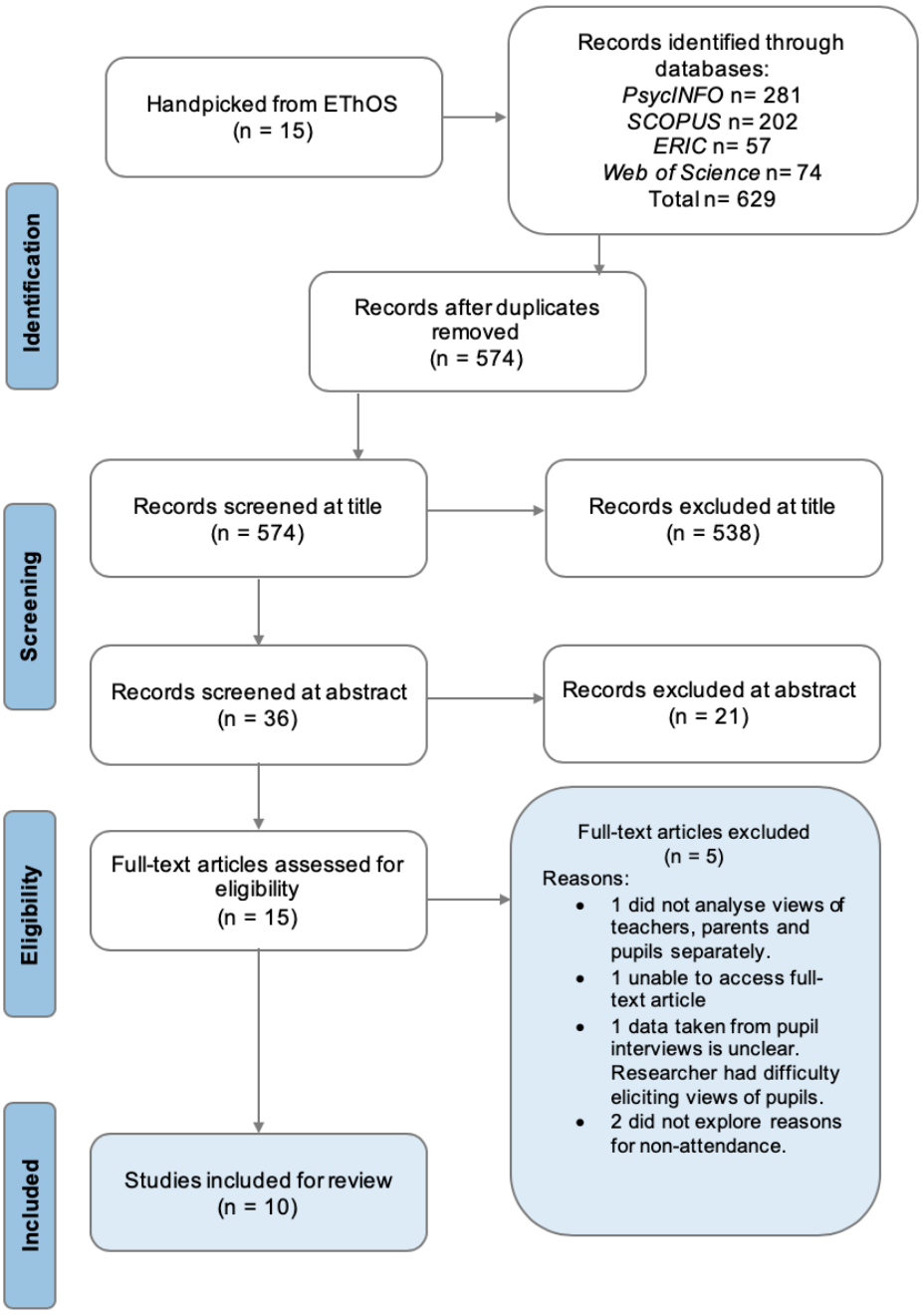
Electronic searches highlighted 614 studies and 15 studies were hand-picked from grey literature, totalling 629 studies. The grey literature was selected based on a review of the title and its relevance to the research question. After duplicates were removed 574 remained. Studies were reviewed at titles and abstracts, leaving 15 studies remaining. 5 studies were excluded at full-text analysis, due to not meeting the inclusion criteria (Figure 4 and Appendix B). The reasons included:

- Being inaccessible as full-text;
- Not including exploration of reasons for non-attendance;
- Unclear presentation of the findings or no themes explicitly presented;
- Making no distinction between pupil, parent and professional views at analysis.

This left 10 studies included in the review.

Figure 4.

Flow diagram to illustrate outcomes of the systematic review.



2.1.7 Summary and quality appraisal of included studies

The included studies were summarised. I extracted key information from each study including the sample, topic, methodology and data collection used and the main concepts/themes as identified by the researcher/s in the studies. I then assessed the studies for their quality. Whilst there is a large number of

tools used to critically appraise quantitative research, which are typically placed in a hierarchy and assessed in comparison to a ‘gold standard’, there is no single preferred method for appraising qualitative studies (Petticrew & Roberts, 2006). The subjective insights in qualitative studies mean that no such hierarchy or standard is applicable.

The current review used guidelines recommended by the EPPI-Centre (2003) to critically appraise the included studies. This allowed for each of the studies to be evaluated individually on the extent to which they contributed to the review question, based on eight areas (Table 2). Each criterion was given a classification and an overall weighting for each study can be found in Table 3. Appendix C outlines the overview of the process.

Table 2.

Quality appraisal criterion based on EPPI-Centre Review Guidelines for Extracting Data and Quality Assessing Primary Studies in Educational Research. Version 0.9.7. (2003)

Criterion	Description	Weighting
1	Focus on the exploration of reasons for attendance difficulties.	
2	Clear justification for study and methodology	
3	Explicit aims and objectives	
4	Clear description of context	A *no/few flaws* B *some flaws*
5	Description of sample is clear	C *significant flaws*
6	Description of methodology	D *untrustworthy*
7	Reliability and validity considered and acknowledged by the researcher/s	
8	Presentation of data is clear and rational links have been drawn between raw data and researcher interpretation	

Table 3.

Summary and Quality Appraisal of studies included in the systematic review.

Author/Year/Country/Type of publication	Sample	Topic (Relevant to review question)	Methodology and Data Collection	Main themes/concepts identified by the authors	Quality Appraisal
Baker & Bishop (2013) **UK** **Research article**	• 4 secondary aged pupils (11-16 years old, 2F, 2M) • Attendance difficulties lasting at least 1 school term.	Exploring participants' perceptions of the causes of their non-attendance and the attributions of others.	Semi-structured interviews and IPA analysis.	• Initial school experiences • Participants' perceptions of the causes of non-attendance • School and other support experiences • Punishment, blame and control • Friendship and belonging • The future • Impact on the child's phenomenon	B (some flaws)
Beckles (2014) **UK** **Thesis**	• 12 secondary aged pupils (Yr 8 & 9, 6M, 6F) • 87-77% unauthorised absences.	Aimed to gain an understanding of the perceptions and experiences of secondary school non-attenders during their early stages of attendance difficulties.	Semi-structured interviews and Thematic Analysis. Utilised Personal Construct Psychological visuals and Solution Focused Brief Therapy tools.	• Lesson enjoyment and understanding of work. • Thoughts and emotions about school and attendance. • Effects of absence. • Impact of family and friends. • Communication and relationships within the school context. • Gaining and acknowledging pupil views.	A (no/few flaws)

Browne (2018) **UK** **Thesis**	• 5 parents of pupils aged between 13-15 years.	Exploratory research aiming to reveal the lived experiences and impact of EBSNA on the family.	Semi-structured interviews and IPA analysis	• 'It turns your life upside down' • Power and the battle to be heard • Loss and grief • Retrospective clarity	A (no/few flaws)
Clissold (2018) **UK** **Thesis**	• 10 participants in total. • 3 Pupils (1M, 2F, 15-16yrs old), 4 parents (4F) and 3 staff (3F). • All White British.	Aimed to identify how young people, parents/carers and educators constructed the reasons for extended school non-attendance.	Unstructured interviews and discourse analysis. Interviews conducted alongside other tools to facilitate participants in talking about reasons for ESNA. (All About me, School timeline and Grid elaboration method).	*Pupil* • Negative school experiences. • Lack of understanding which included mental health difficulties, readiness for reintegration, ASD and professionals. • Support and provision. *Parents* • Anxiety. • Depression and self-harm. • Parental view of education.	B (some flaws)
Gregory & Purcell (2014) **UK** **Research article**	• 5 parents (all mothers), 3 pupils.	Explored the participants experiences of primary school, their current situation and hopes for the future.	Semi-structured interviews and IPA analysis.	• Medication and medical conditions. • School experiences. • Emotions, lack of confidence and self-harm. • Child's voice not being sought or heard. • Future plans.	B (some flaws)

Havik, Bru & Ertesvåg (2014) **Norway** **Research article**	• 17 parents (15 mothers, 2 fathers, 48.1 mean age). • 17 pupils (9M, 8F, 14.7 mean age).	Explored parents' perspectives on the role of school factors in school refusal.	Semi-structured interviews and Thematic Analysis.	• Demanding factors in school. • Teacher support emotionally and academically. • Support from other students. • Other school level supportive factors.	B (some flaws)
How (2015) **UK** **Thesis**	• 5 low attending pupils in Year 11 (3M, 2F). • Attendance rates between 78% and 89% across whole school year in Yr 10.	Aimed to explore the participants' lived experiences.	Semi-structured interviews and IPA.	• Social and relational experiences, with peers and teachers. • Being passive and lacking in control. • Impact on own values, beliefs, motivations and priorities. • Personal competence, agency and control. • Impact of school systems and the establishment. • Emotions.	A (no/few flaws)
Orme-Stapleton (2017) **UK** **Thesis**	• Pupils with 85% attendance or lower or had difficulties attending. • 4 families in total (3 primary, 1 secondary). • 3 primary parents, 1 secondary parents and 2 primary children.	Explored the lived experience of persistent non-attendance for children and families.	Semi-structured interviews and Thematic Analysis	• Impact on the life of the parents, child and family unit. • Physical and mental health. • ASD. • Unmet needs. • The learning environment. • Relationships with peers/teachers.	B (some flaws)

Shilvock (2010) UK Thesis	• 3 secondary-aged females (Yr 7 & 8) all had young carer roles. • 15%-25% authorised absence.	Explored the lived experiences of three girls with emotionally-based non-attendance.	Semi-structured interviews and Thematic Analysis. Utilised PCP tools to support elicitation of pupil views.	• The role as a young carer • Ambivalence relating to whether to go to school or stay at home. • Anxiety. • Returning to school and the factors associated with this. • School factors. • Protective school factors.	A (no/few flaws)
Wilson (2012) UK Thesis	• 4 pupils (Yr 11 & 12; 3M, 1F, 15 and 17 year olds). • Attendance had been below 85%.	Explored accounts of looked after children who had previously exhibited school refusal behaviour.	Semi-structured interviews and Grounded Theory for analysis.	• Instability during adolescence. • Impact of relationships with people who matter. • School factors. • Individual factors.	A (no/few flaws)

2.2 Review outcomes

2.2.1 Research settings

The majority of the studies were based in the UK, with the exception of Havik, Bru, & Ertesvåg (2014) which was based in Norway. Predominantly, participants were of a secondary school age, or were parents of secondary school aged pupils. Orme-Stapleton, (2017) was the only study to use primary and secondary aged pupils.

2.2.2 Research design

2.2.2.1 Data collection

All of the studies employed qualitative designs. Nine utilised semi-structured interviews. Shilvock (2010) and Beckles (2014) supported their semi-structured interviews with Personal Construct Psychology (PCP) visual tools, and Beckles (2014) used Solution Focussed Brief Therapeutic tools. Clissold (2018) utilised unstructured interviews alongside other tools. These consisted of an 'All About Me' worksheet, a school timeline and the Grid Elaboration Method, a PCP technique.

2.2.2.2 Data analysis

Beckles (2014), Havik, Bru & Ertesvåg (2014), Orme-Stapleton (2017) and Shilvock (2010) analysed their data through Thematic Analysis (TA). Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was utilised by Baker & Bishop (2015), Gregory & Purcell (2014), Browne (2018) and How (2015). Wilson (2012) used Grounded Theory and Clissold (2018) used Discourse Analysis.

2.2.3 Research findings

2.2.3.1 Methods to elicit the Pupil Voice and Parent Voice

Havik, Bru & Ertesvåg, (2014) and Browne (2018) completed interviews with parents of children who have experiences of EBSA. Baker & Bishop (2013), Beckles (2014), How (2015), Shilvock (2010) and Wilson (2012) all interviewed pupils only. Clissold (2018), Gregory & Purcell (2014) and Orme-

Stapleton (2017) interviewed both parents and pupils. Seven of the studies elicited the views of pupils who were currently not attending (Baker & Bishop, 2015; Beckles, 2014; Clissold, 2018; Gregory & Purcell, 2014; How, 2015; Orme-Stapleton, 2017; Shilvock, 2010), whereas Wilson (2012) explored experiences of LAC who had previously experienced extended non-attendance. The themes I collated from the studies will now be discussed individually.

2.2.3.2 Theme 1: Transitions and moving schools

Four studies referred to transitions and moving schools. All four participants recalled difficult feelings relating directly to their transition to secondary school in Baker & Bishop (2015). Similarly, Clissold (2018) found that both parents and pupils reported negative experiences of transition to secondary school, which attendance difficulties were directly attributed to. Three of the five families in Gregory & Purcell's (2014) study mentioned moving schools as an experience which was perceived to have led to a "prolonged period of absence or upheaval" (p. 44). Wilson (2012) reported school transitions as a key theme due to changes in living placements for the LAC participants.

2.2.3.3 Theme 2: Negative social experiences

Six studies referenced negative social experiences. Bullying was explicitly referred to as a pupil experience. Parents in Havik et al's study (2014) spoke about their child's experiences of peer conflict, being ignored and being socially excluded from peer groups as a reason for their child's school refusal. Browne (2018) discussed one pupil's experiences of bullying, as mentioned by the parents in their study. Beckles (2014) and How (2015) discussed pupils fearing being bullied if they went to school or attended certain classes. The participants suggested that school staff were not supportive of their experiences and that this became a barrier to their attendance. Two participants in Baker & Bishop's (2015) study referenced either being socially isolated or being bullied. Finally, having limited social interactions was a theme elicited in Gregory & Purcell's (2014) study, however the authors suggested that it was unclear whether these social interactions were a contributory factor to the pupils' non-attendance or whether this was as a result of the non-attendance.

2.2.3.4 Theme 3: Importance of friendships

'Friendships' was a theme in seven studies. Friendships were referred to as a protective factor in the participants' experiences of EBSA (Baker & Bishop, 2015; Beckles, 2014; Havik et al., 2014; How, 2015; Shilvock, 2010; Wilson, 2012) as these offered a reason to attend school (Baker & Bishop, 2015; Shilvock, 2010; Wilson, 2012). How (2015) discussed how friendships acted as "a protective factor or buffer against negative school experiences" (pg. 59) for their participants, whilst Beckles (2014) suggested friendships were a positive aspect of the school experience and a source of emotional support. The majority of the participants in Baker & Bishop's (2015) study viewed friendships as a positive aspect of school. Browne (2018) suggested a loss of friendships and social isolation being a result of EBSA.

2.2.3.5 Theme 4: Emotions and mental health and well-being

The most prevalent themes to arise across the studies were those of emotions and mental health and well-being, identified in eight of the studies. Specifically, anxiety was referred to in seven of the studies (Baker & Bishop, 2015; Browne, 2018; Clissold, 2018; Gregory & Purcell, 2014; How, 2015; Orme-Stapleton, 2017; Shilvock, 2010). In five studies, where the prior reasons for attendance difficulties had not been specified, anxiety was referred to as a factor perceived to contribute to the pupils' non-attendance. In Orme-Stapleton's (2017) study, the parents and pupils perceived anxiety as a cause of EBSA, which then impacted on a pupil's confidence and self-esteem. Similarly, the pupils and parents in Clissold's (2018) study included anxiety in their discourses, however there was variation in the extent to which anxiety was constructed as a precipitating or a perpetuating factor. Anxiety was suggested to be a cause of the non-attendance for three of the participants in Baker & Bishop's (2015) study, as well as other mental health experiences such as depression and Obsessive Compulsive Disorders for two of the participants. Parents in Browne's (2018) study discussed their experiences of their children's anxiety, a common theme across parent participants, and the pressure to manage the emotional and mental health needs of the children within the home.

Two of the three participants appeared to experience anxiety in situations that involved large numbers of people in How's (2015) study, which the author

labelled as social anxiety. Gregory & Purcell (2014) also referenced participants as disliking large groups of people. The authors, however, did not use a label of social anxiety, and instead referred to this as underlying anxiety for pupils.

Depression was another aspect of EBSA noted in three of the studies. Browne (2018) briefly referred to this and Baker & Bishop (2015) referred to depression for one of their participants. Clissold (2018) identified depression in both the pupil and parent discourses, with one of the pupils naming depression as a contributory factor to their EBSA. One pupil was reported as experiencing particularly severe depression, which impacted on their sleep, suicidal ideations and regular engagement in self-harm. Two of the parents in this study also construed depression as a contributory factor to the pupils' EBSA. Two participants in Gregory & Purcell's (2014) study also discussed self-harm. Beckles (2014) explored thoughts and emotions about school.

2.2.3.6 Theme 5: Teacher-related factors

Teacher characteristics, teaching styles and the importance of teachers appeared as themes in six of the studies. In three of the studies, pupils stated how they disliked teachers who they perceived were 'bossy', 'strict', 'controlling' or 'unfair' (Beckles, 2014; How, 2015; Wilson, 2012). Additionally, the mood and characteristics of teachers were perceived to directly impact on the enjoyment of lessons (Beckles, 2014; How, 2015). Three of the pupils in Gregory & Purcell's (2014) study reported fear of a particular teacher. Beckles (2014) referred explicitly to teacher explanations and teaching approaches: some participants suggested that the speed of teaching meant that they were unable to understand or complete the work. Furthermore, participants discussed teaching styles that positively influenced their enjoyment and willingness to attend, suggesting particular methods of teaching supported their understanding. These included interactive, kinaesthetic and visual learning, and opportunities for paired learning and a choice of who they could work with.

A large number of the parents in Havik et al., (2014) study reflected on the importance of teachers being available to pupils as an emotional support. They

also discussed how teachers showing pupils respect, appreciation and taking the time to build personal relationships and trustworthiness positively changed their child's perceptions of school. Wilson (2012) identified how teachers can be a positive influence, caring and a necessary part of school. For some participants in particular, school staff were perceived to be a "safe-base for the young people" (p. 67). This need for safety is also reflected in Havik et al's (2014) findings, as parents discussed the need for continuity and stability amongst teaching staff, as this was understood to threaten the predictability and safety of the school environment for pupils.

2.2.3.7 Theme 6: Pupil's perceptions of learning

Seven studies referred to the pupil's perceptions of learning as an influencing factor (Beckles, 2014; Clissold, 2018; Gregory & Purcell, 2014; Havik et al., 2014; How, 2015; Shilvock, 2010; Wilson, 2012). Beckles (2014), Shilvock (2010) and Wilson (2012) suggested that boredom in lessons impacted upon attendance. Beckles's (2014) study identified use of strategies such as faking an illness to mask lack of motivation to attend lessons. Some, not all, participants in How (2015) suggested that the school system was not aligned to their personal motivations to learn. Gregory & Purcell (2014) report, in brief, that two participants referred to education as being unimportant.

The parents in Havik et al's (2014) study perceived their child's perceptions on learning in a slightly different way. They perceived their children to worry about academic demands, feeling a pressure to achieve and experience situations where they may have to perform in front of peers.

2.2.3.8 Theme 7: School-based systemic factors

Systemic factors were prevalent themes in eight studies. Four referred explicitly to the behaviour management strategies adopted within the schools (Beckles, 2014; Gregory & Purcell, 2014; Havik et al., 2014; How, 2015): parents and pupils suggested poor behaviour management strategies impacted upon the participants' perceptions of school and thus contributed to non-attendance. How (2015) suggested ineffective and meaningless school sanctions were influential on attendance. Parents in Havik et al's (2014) study attributed non-attendance to students' lack of feelings of safety and the

unpredictable classroom environment. Classroom size and the noise levels of the environment were discussed by participants in three studies (Beckles, 2014; Orme-Stapleton, 2017; and Wilson, 2012), with larger environments and higher noise levels appearing to negatively impact attendance for participants. Finally, Beckles (2014) discussed pupils' perceived value of receiving support to understand the curriculum, whereas Shilvock (2010) and Wilson (2012) suggest the relevance of the curriculum as a significant factor in pushing pupils away from school, as similarly noted in Theme 6. The parents in Havik et al's (2014) and Orme-Stapleton's (2017) studies, reflecting similar experiences, referred to the curriculum content and a lack of support offered to pupils as contributing to non-attendance, indicating some concordance between pupil and parents' views within the review. School factors were not named by parents as specific causes for EBSA in Browne (2018).

2.2.3.9 Theme 8: Understanding the needs of the pupil

Six studies discussed the importance of understanding the needs of the pupil. Commentary included: disbelief of the EBSA by staff members and teachers, who attached negative labels to pupils as a result (Baker & Bishop, 2015); professionals guessing at need rather than assessing appropriately (Browne, 2018); staff members and other professionals lacking in understanding of school refusal (Browne, 2018; Havik et al., 2014); the impact of mental health difficulties (Clissold, 2018); or not seeking opportunities to understand the pupil's perception (Baker & Bishop, 2015; Beckles, 2014; Gregory & Purcell, 2014). Gregory & Purcell (2014) suggested that there appeared to be a "within family perspective" (p. 44) of non-attendance, with parents being blamed for their child's behaviours, also noted by Browne (2018). Additionally, Baker & Bishop (2015) concluded that many of the experiences of the pupils appeared to have been shaped by the adults' interpretations for a pupil's non-attendance, as opposed to directly listening to the pupils themselves.

Browne (2018) discussed the parents' own confusion around their child's needs and how retrospection allowed them to identify possible 'clues' for the root cause, allowing them to make sense of the EBSA. Furthermore, some parents suggested how labels such as autism supported their clarity on their child's difficulties.

2.2.3.10 Theme 9: School and peer responses to EBSA

A further collated theme from six of the studies was that of the responses to EBSA from school staff and peers. Some experiences reflected there being no support offered from school staff, thought to be due to a lack of understanding of the pupil's needs (Baker & Bishop, 2015); a delay in the support and thus a need for earlier intervention (Baker & Bishop, 2015; Clissold, 2018); or inappropriate support (Browne, 2018), such as pressure to come back to school too early or unsuitable provision (Baker & Bishop, 2015; Clissold, 2018). Parents also identified issues with support and provision as a contributory factor to EBSA (Clissold, 2018). Punitive responses were also referenced by both groups of participants, noting school staff use of legal actions (Beckles, 2014; Gregory & Purcell, 2014) and encouragement of punishment at home, in the form of removing desirable items for one participant (Baker & Bishop, 2015). Browne (2018) explored parental experiences of their knowledge and experience being ignored by professionals and ongoing battles with 'the system' and losing trust in professionals.

2.2.3.11 Theme 10: The future

Three studies found that participants discussed the future of pupils who had experiences of attendance difficulties. How (2015) noted that the importance of success at school was seen as motivating for pupils towards a specific future goal. Future aspirations were also a motivator to attend school (Shilvock, 2010): pupils expressed the value of education in relation to these.

The parents in Browne's (2018) study discussed fears for the future. They highlighted concerns about how their children would 'cope' in the adult world, that they would grow up differently to their peers and how their anxiety and/or depression would impact on relationships and the capacity to function. The family as a system was discussed by one participant in how they will have to manage as a unit.

2.2.4 Critical review of the methodology

The current review will be critiqued using Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria for evaluating qualitative research; credibility, transferability, dependability and

confirmability. Firstly, the review drew heavily on unpublished literature, meaning that there has been no opportunity for the research to be peer-reviewed. This influences the credibility of the findings of the review. Additionally, thesis research is typically conducted by a sole researcher, meaning that there may be idiosyncratic interpretations of some findings. This indicates that there may be a lack of dependability within the review's outcomes, due to the predominant use of thesis literature. Finally, the review incorporated research from international settings (e.g. Havik et al., 2014) and some used specific populations, such as young carers (Shilvock, 2010) and LAC (Wilson, 2012). Therefore, the transferability of the outcomes of the review is limited.

2.2.5 Review summary

The review aimed to explore what we currently know from studies that have elicited the voices of pupils and parents/carers in relation to their experiences of EBSA and their perceptions of the future. It found both within-child and systemic factors to be prevalent across all studies. Emotions, mental health and well-being were factors that appeared frequently in the experiences voiced by both parents and pupils, indicating concordance between the two participant groups. Therefore, emotional and mental wellness may be a significant factor in EBSA that requires further understanding to support young people in the earlier stages of EBSA.

Themes also reflected influences from the microsystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Friendships and negative social experiences were identified in over half of the studies, indicative of the importance of social connectedness in the experiences of EBSA. This may be influenced by the ages of pupils within the studies, as peer and social influences are suggested to become more important in secondary-aged pupils (Somerville, 2013). A further microsystemic influence was that of teacher-related factors. This theme was identified by pupil participants, which is perhaps reflective of the direct school experiences of pupils. Therefore, as parents indirectly experience school through their children's perspective, parents are judged as less likely to suggest teacher-related factors in their experiences of EBSA.

Finally, the review found few studies that incorporated views about the future. The voices of pupils in two of the studies indicated that future aspirations and academic success acted as a protective factor in their school attendance. Alternatively, parents discussed their fears for the future. This suggests that future aspirations and perceptions of the future are important to both pupils and parents' experiences, and further understanding of these perspectives may support the re-integration of pupils with EBSA.

2.3 Rationale for the current research

Young people exhibiting EBSA are an important group to research for a number of practical and ethical reasons. Despite previous research seeking to identify possible causal factors related to EBSA, the voice of pupils in this regard is notably lacking, as highlighted by the few studies identified in the SLR. As previously noted, the research base has sought the views of adults at the expense of children and young people who have direct experience of EBSA. Thus, the current understanding of EBSA is largely shaped by professional discourse. Therefore, further research relating directly to the experiences of young people with EBSA is necessary.

Previous literature has highlighted the lack of parent voice within EBSA research. The views of parents feel particularly pertinent in this area, given that parents receive the direct legal consequences when school and LA's take action to address the issue of SNA. Previous research has indicated EBSA to be multi-faceted and influenced by familial factors, therefore, it seems important to hear the views of those who exist within the systems influencing a young person. Dependent on the severity of the pupil's EBSA, their life may predominantly be played out in the home, unavoidably impacting the home dynamics. Therefore, the parent's lives become directly impacted by EBSA, and gaining an understanding of this may support appropriate assessment and intervention on a multi-systemic level.

Negative outcomes have been associated with SNA, as discussed. Given this, there is a dearth of research exploring how the experiences of EBSA have shaped pupils and parents' perceptions of the future. It seems imperative to

understand how these groups construe the future after experiencing EBSA, not only to gain an understanding of the perceived long-term impacts of EBSA, but to strengthen knowledge on how interventions can work preventatively to ensure the future hopes and aspirations of the young person are best supported.

Finally, the methodology used within previous research has predominantly used semi-structured interviews to elicit the voices of pupils and parents. Although effective in eliciting themes associated with EBSA, the structure fails to allow freedom over the narratives of those who have directly experienced EBSA. Therefore, potential depth and detail in the accounts of such individuals is minimised. Alternative methodologies, such as narrative approaches, would allow for the experiences of individuals to be captured and understood without imposing structure. Narrative enables an exploration of how individuals *'impose order on the flow of experience to make sense of events and actions in their lives'* (Riessman, 2008; p.2), meaning the methods are often exploratory and inductive. By utilising narrative methods to elicit the voices of parents and pupils with regards to their experiences of EBSA and their perceptions of the future, we can draw comparisons between their stories to capture broader and deeper understandings of the complexity of EBSA, thus benefitting the future direction of assessment and intervention for this vulnerable group.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the methodological approach to the current research. The chapter opens with an explanation of the research aims and discusses my epistemological position as researcher. Rationale for the chosen research design and justification for methodological choices are considered. Data collection methods and participant recruitment procedures are explained, alongside ethical implications arising from the research. An outline of the adopted analysis framework is provided.

3.1 Research Aims

The aims of the research were twofold: first, to explore the educational experiences of pupils with EBSA, alongside their hopes and expectations for their future. Second, to explore the parental perspective of their child's EBSA, alongside their hopes and expectations for their child's future. Specifically, the research aimed to answer the following questions:

1a. What are the types of stories told by the young people exhibiting EBSA in relation to their experiences and how are these stories told?

1b. What are the types of stories told by the parents of young people exhibiting EBSA in relation to how they understand the young person's experiences and how are these stories told?

2a. How do the young people understand their experiences of EBSA?

2b. How do the parents of the young people understand their experiences of their child's EBSA?

3a. What are the young person's perceptions of their future?

3b. What are the parent's perceptions of the young person's future?

3.2 Ontological and epistemological position

3.2.1 Ontology

Ontology refers to the nature of reality (Mertens, 2010). The paradigm adopted by the researcher will depend on their ontological position, i.e. whether they believe that one or multiple realities exist. The post-positivist paradigm emphasises the importance of objectivity and generalisability in research, believing in one reality that is understandable and based on probability, rather than certainty (Mertens, 2010). Therefore, post-positivists primarily adopt quantitative, experimental research methods.

A constructivist paradigm assumes that reality is socially constructed by people who are active in the research process. The ontological stance suggests that multiple realities exist based on varying socially constructed realities. A constructivist's goal is to understand the social constructions of meaning and knowledge (Mertens, 2010) by attempting to understand lived experiences from the viewpoints of participants who have lived it (Schwandt, 2000). To this end, qualitative research methods are predominantly used within this paradigm.

3.2.2 Epistemology

Epistemology refers to the nature of knowledge (Mertens, 2010). A researcher's epistemological position determines the methodology and data collection used, as the researcher asks, 'how is knowledge produced?' (Willig, 2013). Post-positivists consider the researcher and participants to be independent of one another, maintaining a high level of objectivity within the research (Mertens, 2010). Researchers maintain objectivity by remaining neutral and following rigorous, prescriptive procedures (Mertens, 2010).

The constructivist paradigm views the research as an interactive process between researchers and participants, therefore utilising more personal, interactive data collection methods (Mertens, 2010). The concept of confirmability is preferred to objectivity (Guba & Lincoln, 2005): transparency in how inferences and interpretations are drawn from the data is important.

3.2.3 Ontological and epistemological positions within the current research

The focus of the current research was to illuminate how young people and their parents have made sense of the events that have led to the young person's EBSA, and how they separately construe the young person's future. Therefore, I adopted a constructivist paradigm, with an ontological perspective that reality is socially constructed. This perspective allowed me to acknowledge how the participants and I influence each other during the interview process (Mertens, 2010). I adhered to the epistemological perspective through the transcription of my vocalisations as interviewer and ensured explicit tracking to the original source of data was undertaken to portray the logic used to assemble the interpretations (Mertens, 2010). My aim in the research was to hear the voices of the participants, therefore I chose a narrative methodological approach as fit for purpose. This is explored next in further detail.

3.3 Current research design

3.3.1 The field of Narrative Psychology and defining Narratives

> "Narrative pervades our everyday life. We are born into a narrative world, live our lives through narrative and afterwards are described in terms of narrative." (Murray, 2015, p.85)

Narrative psychology focuses on the self and identity, suggesting that we live through the stories that we, and others, tell about us (Murray, 2015). Through our ability to think narratively, we shape and are shaped by stories, helping us to make sense of our reality (Hiles & Cermák, 2008). Narratives told by individuals, according to this perspective, are either written or spoken as a way of communicating stories of lived experience, by explaining the past actions of ourselves and others, providing a commentary on current circumstances or anticipating the possibilities of the future (Hiles et al., 2017). Narratives are said to offer a sense-making process that is vital to the understanding of human reality (Hiles & Cermák, 2008). When put simply, a narrative can be defined as *"an organised interpretation of a sequence of events"* (Murray,

2015, p.87), which helps us bring a sense of order to the perceived disorder in our world (Murray, 2015). Narratives enable individuals to infer causal links between events and attribute agency to characters within the narrative, whilst offering the opportunity to create a definition of ourselves and our identity (Murray, 2015). By researching narratives, we aim to produce knowledge in how people make sense of their experiences through weaving them into meaningful stories, irrespective of whether the stories told by participants are objectively 'true' or 'false' (Silver, 2013).

3.3.2 Narrative analysis

Narrative analysis is a methodology utilised across a number of disciplines, such as sociology, health and psychology (Hiles et al., 2017). Within psychology, narrative analysis is used to collect stories as a means of understanding how people construct their experiences, which are then analysed to comprehend such experiences (Silver, 2013). Narrative analysis is considered to be reasonably new (Hiles & Cermák, 2008) and given its relative infancy within psychological research, a complete consensus regarding definitions and processes is yet to emerge (Howitt, 2016).

Narrative analysis is perceived as an umbrella term used to describe a wide variety of methods that can be utilised to study and interpret storied texts (Howitt, 2016; Riessman, 2008). Despite this, there are few methodological models available for researchers to draw upon (Howitt, 2010). Existing approaches range from collecting stories and categorising them into genres, to more in-depth analysis that involves breaking down stories into episodes and analysing the sense-making process (Hiles & Cermák, 2008). Given my interest in eliciting the stories of young people and parents who have experienced EBSA, I felt it was important to seek out an appropriate model of narrative analysis that fits best with the aims of the current research.

3.3.3 Narrative Oriented Inquiry

The current research draws on an adapted model of Hiles and Cermák's (2008) model of 'Narrative Oriented Inquiry' (NOI; Figure 5), which is considered to be inclusive and pluralistic, as opposed to exhaustive and

definitive. NOI is proposed by the authors as a methodological approach that incorporates a number of interpretive approaches to narrative analysis. By doing so, the authors advocate for the model to be used flexibly, allowing researchers to select analyses that are most helpful in answering their research question. The interpretive approaches within the NOI model can be used either singularly or in combination, as noted by Hiles and Cermák (2008).

A combination of two dimensions, taken from the work of Lieblich et al. (1998) are incorporated into the NOI model. The first, holistic-categorical, refers to whether the unit of analysis is the story as a whole, or is analysed as individual themes/categories that make up the story. The second dimension refers to content: what is included within the story, and the form, that is, how the story is retold. From these dimensions, Lieblich et al. (1998) propose four approaches to analysis: holistic-content, holistic-form, categorical-content and categorical-form. The four approaches are described in Figure 6 and are each suggested to be connected to different types of research question, modes of text and sample size (Hiles & Cermák, 2008).

Figure 5.

Adapted version of Narrative Oriented Inquiry Model (Hiles & Cermák, 2008) used in the current research.

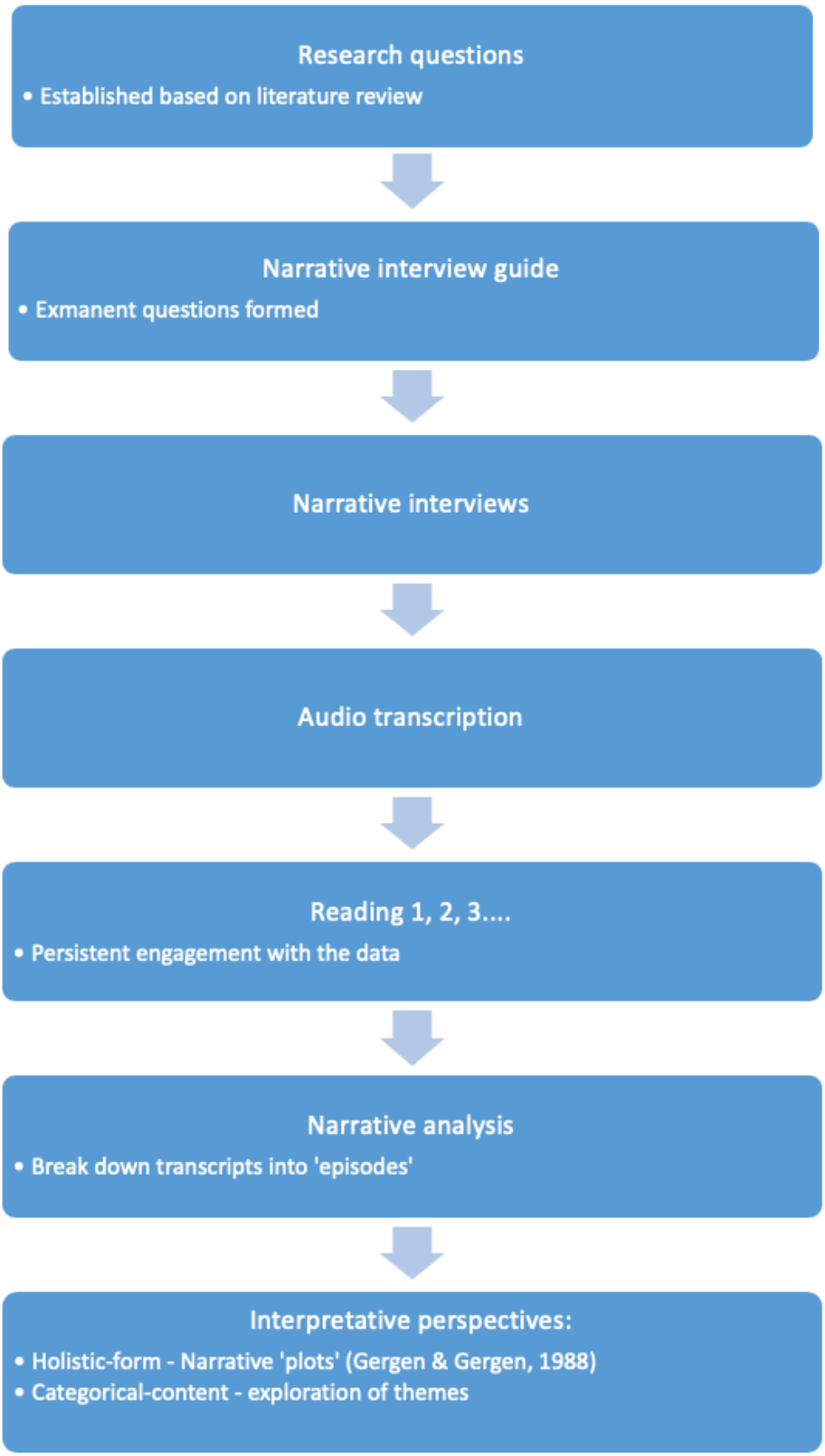


Figure 6.

Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach and Ziber (1998) Four modes of analysis, after Howitt (2010)

Holistic-content perspective uses the complete story and seeks to identify major parts of the narrative and how these link to the 'core narrative', i.e. the overall story told.
Holistic-form perspective refers to the overall plot or structure of the narrative. Hiles and Cermák propose four major categories of narrative: romance, comedy, tragedy and satire.
Categorical-content perspective involves the researcher identifying themes, informed by their research question. Rather than being imposed by the researcher, these themes are closely grounded in data.
Categorical-form perspective involves identifying a particular aspect of the narrative and considering how this relates to the general form of the narrative. E.g. stylistic or linguistic features.

3.3.3.1 Narrative plots and the Holistic-form perspective

As referenced in section 3.3.1, a narrative is defined as *"an organised interpretation of a sequence of events"* (Murray, 2015; p.87). Within a narrative, events are sequenced, and linked temporally and with personal meaning (Hiles et al., 2017), resulting in the formation of a plot. The narrative plot adds coherence and context to a story, supporting the understanding of key features of the narrative, such as events, relationships, goals and morals (Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2000).

Hiles and Cermák (2008) draw on the work of Gergen & Gergen (1986) to support plot analysis, which is embedded within the holistic-form perspective. According to Gergen and Gergen (1986) every story, spoken or written, can be characterised by the progression of the plot, as identified through plot analysis. By analysing the structure of a story through plot analysis, we seek to identify the progression of the narrative, meaning how the plot develops

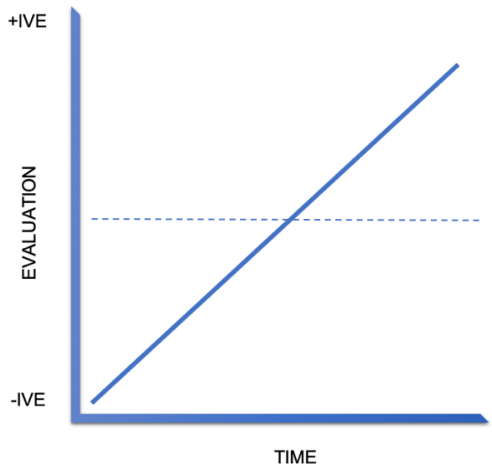
over time, and thus generate more understanding of how an individual constructs their experience (Lieblich et al., 1998).

All plots can be converted into a 'plot line' (Gergen & Gergen, 1986), representing the link between events occurring over time and evaluative movements towards or away from valued goals. As an individual nears a valued goal, the plot line becomes more positive, and a movement away becomes negative. Gergen and Gergen (1986) suggest three forms of narrative in which a plot progresses over time. Each will be described and graphically represented below.

- **Progressive narrative**: a steady increase in the plot line representing events over time moving towards a valued goal.

Figure 7.

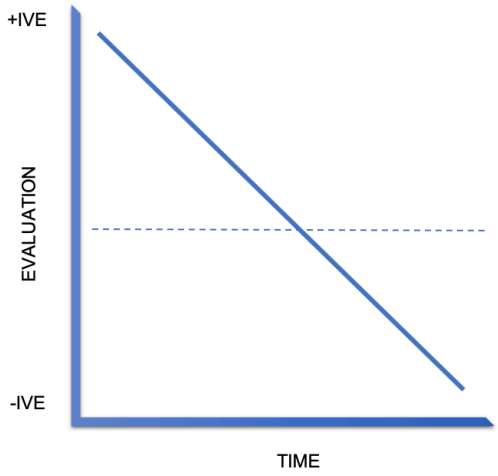
Progressive plot line



- **Regressive narrative**: a steady decline in the plot line whereby events over time move away from a valued goal.

Figure 8.

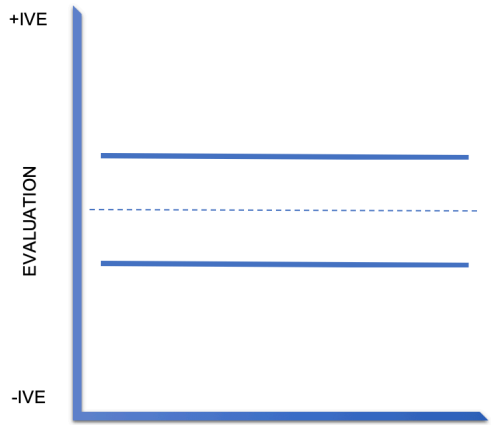
Regressive plot line



- **Stability narrative:** a steady plot line whereby the individual remains unchanged in respect to their evaluative position, neither progressing nor declining towards or away from their valued goal.

Figure 9.

Stability plot line (Gergen & Gergen, 1986)

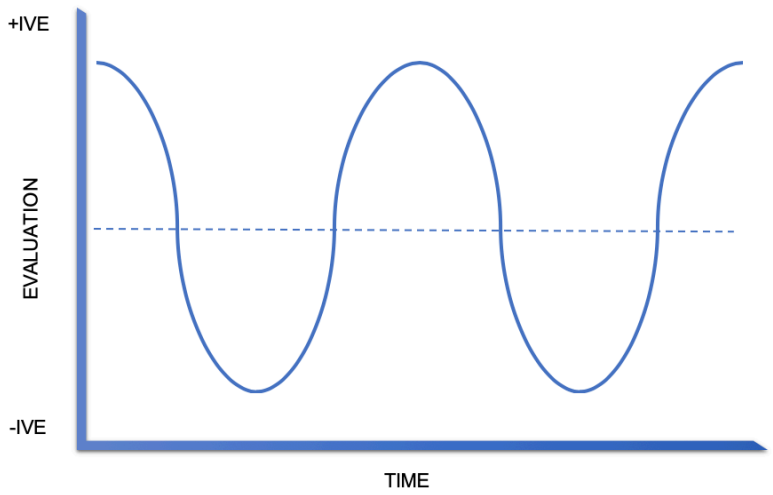


Gergen & Gergen (1986) have also identified four classic typologies of narrative, which are said to reflect human experiences. These are used in conjunction with the plot lines described above, allowing for more complex plots to be established (Cermák, 2004). Each are described and graphically represented below.

- **Romantic saga**: a series of regressive and progressive phases representing episodes of challenges, with a happy ending.

Figure 10.

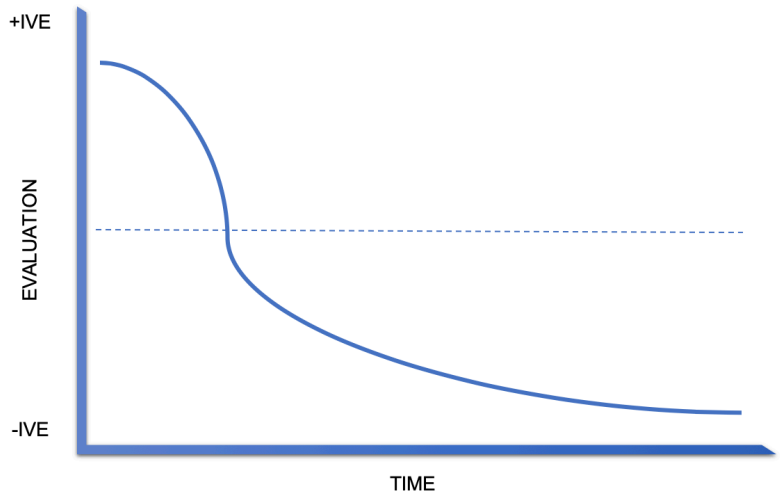
Graphical representation of a 'Romantic saga'



- **Tragedy**: a progressive narrative followed by a rapid regression. Typically involves a rapid decline after a high.

Figure 11.

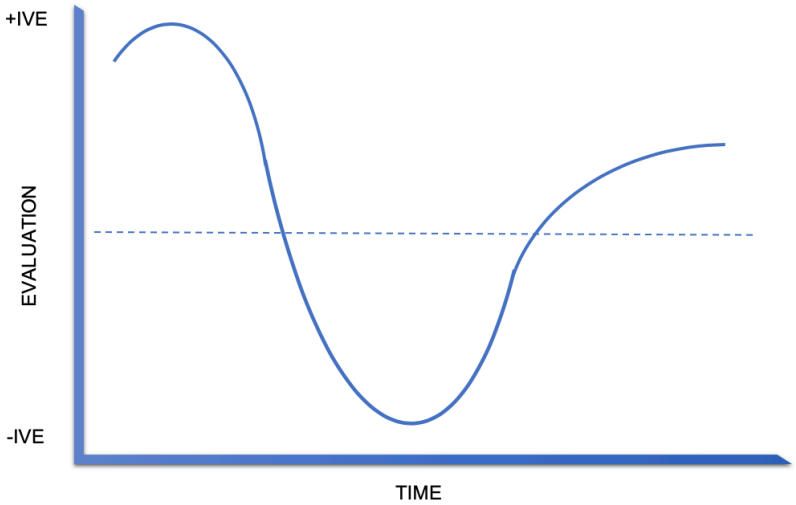
Graphical representation of a 'Tragedy'



- **Romantic comedy**: a regressive narrative followed by a progressive narrative. Episodes within the narrative become problematic before happiness is achieved.

Figure 12.

Graphical representation of a 'Romantic comedy'



3.3.4 Critique of Narrative analysis

The critiques of using narrative analysis have been considered. The methodology could be criticised for being highly interpretative and at risk of favouring the researcher's viewpoint, due to the interactive data collection processes and the re-constructions of the participant's stories. For example, it could be suggested that as the researcher, my understanding and construction of the stories may not reflect the unique perspectives of the participants. I have attempted to avoid over interpretation of the participant's narratives by using an adapted model of NOI to add structure and coherence in the data collection and analysis processes. Within this, I have ensured the analysis and re-telling of the participant's stories remains transparent and centred on the participant's words by demonstrating clear links between the raw data and my analytical interpretations. Additionally, I have adopted a reflexive stance throughout the study (Willig, 2008), showing a conscious awareness of my potential impact on the research. Transparency and reflexivity with the current research are discussed in further detail in section 3.7.3.

A further critique of narrative analysis has been suggested by Atkinson & Delamont (2006). They propose that the re-construction of participant's experiences is not a clear representation of the participant's 'reality', as the nature of telling stories and the representations of these are constructions themselves (Atkinson & Delamont, 2006). The epistemological position of the current research acknowledges this through recognising the interactive processes within the methodology: what is told by the participant is influenced by a number of factors including the relationship and interactions between the researcher and the participant, the environment and the aspects of the participant's experience which they are able to recall and choose to share in that moment. Furthermore, the interpretations and conclusions drawn from the data represent my re-telling of the stories, as opposed to portraying the objective 'truth' of the participant's experiences (Silver, 2013).

3.3.5 Other methodological approaches considered

Alternative methodologies, such as Discourse Analysis and Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), were considered. Discourse Analysis

focuses on identifying ways in which language is used within an interaction in a particular setting (Wiggins & Potter, 2017) through analysing the construction and function of language (Howitt, 2016). An extensive focus on discursive language within this methodology was not felt appropriate, given the exploratory nature of the current study and as such was discounted. IPA was also discounted as a methodology. Although its focus is on the examination of lived experience (Eatough & Smith, 2017), it was felt that the integration of common themes across transcripts and analysing the similarities and differences between these (Eatough & Smith, 2017) would diminish the individuality of experience within the EBSA population. Contrastingly, Hiles et al. (2017) suggest that the use of NOI allows researchers to do justice to the story as a whole for individuals. Therefore, narrative analysis was felt most appropriate in the current research.

3.4 Research participants and setting

3.4.1 Context

The research took place in a city within the East Midlands region. The city is one of the most deprived LAs within the UK, according to the measures in the most recent Index of Deprivation (Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government, 2019). The city's population is made up of 65.4% White British, and 34.7% Black and Minority Ethnicity (BME).

The city has a total of 116 schools; 83 primary, 27 secondary and 6 specialist provisions. The overall rate of absence for secondary settings in the city in the year 2018-2019 equated to 5.4%. Persistent absence rates, as defined in section 1.2, equated to 14% in the same year, 0.3% above the overall rate for England state-funded secondary settings (GOV.uk, 2020).

3.4.2 Selection Criteria

A purposive sample was used whereby young people and parents/carers were identified as possible participants for the research based on their known experiences of EBSA.

The inclusion criteria of the participants were as follows:

- Pupils aged between 11 and 16 years, as school non-attendance is perceived as more likely in secondary settings (Department for Education, 2018a).
- Pupils who currently have missed 10% or more of their school sessions; in line with the government document on pupil absences (Department for Education, 2018a).
- Pupils who are perceived to have an emotional basis for their non-attendance. This was defined using Berg et al's (1969) definition:
    - Pupils who experience difficulty attending school;
    - Pupils with emotional upset and complain about symptoms of such, e.g. report feeling ill without this being proven as genuine;
    - Pupils who primarily stay at home with parental knowledge. This was to avoid the possibility of recruiting those who may be defined as 'truants' as per the definition given by Thambirajah et al. (2008).
    - Pupils with no known anti-social behaviours (e.g. delinquency).
- Pupils with no additional needs such as a speech and language difficulty that requires professional involvement.
- One parent/carer who has experienced their child's EBSA.

3.4.3 Identification and recruitment of participants

At the time of the research, I worked as a Trainee Educational Psychologist (TEP) for the LA EPS. I approached EPs within the service and asked whether they were currently working with pupils who have EBSA based on the above selection criteria. Initially, I had planned to directly contact the young person's school via a letter (Appendix D), explaining the research and asking for their support with the recruitment process. In practice, it felt more appropriate for the EP currently working with the young person and their family to directly approach them, due to the EP already having a rapport with the family. Furthermore, potential participants may have a difficult relationship with their school and therefore approaches or communications from school staff may have been less fluent.

When the EP made contact with the family to ask if they would be interested in the research, both the young person and the parent(s) were provided with an information sheet (Appendices E and F). If they confirmed they were interested in participation, they were asked for verbal consent to pass on their contact details to myself. Once verbal consent was obtained, I made contact with the parent to arrange an initial home visit, with both the parent and the young person, to explain the research in further detail and to provide them with an information sheet and consent form (Appendix G). Further detail upon ethical procedures is given in section 3.6, below.

3.4.3.1 Initial home visit

During each initial home visit, both parent(s) and the young person were present. I introduced myself and the purpose of the research and talked through the information sheet with each participant. I then gave potential participants the choice of whether they would like a follow-up home visit at a convenient time, to allow them time to consider their participation in the research. This second home visit was not necessary for any participant, as all agreed and signed written consent forms (Appendix G) during the initial home visit. With the permission of the participants, the pupil's school was then contacted to make them aware of the family's participation in the research.

3.4.4 Stakeholder engagement

Approval for the research was received from my host EPS. There is an ongoing issue with EBSA within the LA. EPs have identified that they increasingly see EBSA as part of their casework and this is therefore a priority area across education services.

The Special Educational Needs and Disability Co-ordinators (SENDCos) of the schools where each pupil was on roll were made aware of the young person's participation in the research, as the school settings were viewed as stakeholders. I contacted the SENDCo of each setting via telephone (Appendix H). The SENDCo was assured that the anonymity of the school and all pupils would be maintained.

The parents of the young people and the young people themselves were also viewed as stakeholders. As participants, they are directly impacted by the research and have an explicit role in the outcomes of the study and its implications. In total, three families were contacted to participate in the research. Two families agreed to the initial home visit, and the parents and the young person consented to taking part.

3.4.5 Final participant sample

Participants from two families made up the final sample of five participants who met the criteria outlined in section 3.4.2. Table 4 provides information on the participants.

3.4.5.1 Recruitment of final participant sample

One family were recruited through an EP within the LA, as described above. During the initial home visit to this family, they expressed that they knew of another family who may be interested in participating in the research. I left contact details for the first family to pass on to the other potential participants, leaving it optional for the second family to make contact if they were interested in participating. A parent of the second family then contacted me via email to express an interest in the research. Having checked that the participant met the criteria outlined in section 3.4.2, I arranged a home visit. During the initial visit, the mother, father and young person were present. As both parents expressed an interest in participating in the research, I made a decision to include both parents in the study. Ethically, I felt that it would have been unfair to not allow one parent the opportunity to have their voice heard, especially given the lack of parental voice in the EBSA literature, as earlier discussed. The two parents and the young person in the second family consented to participate in the research during the initial home visit.

Table 4.

A table illustrating key information on participants in the study.

Family	**A**		**B**		
Pseudonym	'Emma'	'Victoria'	'Leo'	'Michelle'	'Oliver'
Parent or young person	Young person	Parent	Young person	Parent	Parent
Sex	Female	Female	Male	Female	Male
Age of young person	15 years, 5 months		14 years, 11 months		
School year	10		10		
Educational provision	Pupil Referral Unit (PRU). On roll at mainstream secondary setting.		Hospital and home education. On roll at mainstream secondary setting.		
Attendance rate at the time of the study	75% (at PRU, although had stopped attending at the time of interviews)		0% (at mainstream setting)		
Ethnic origin	White, British	White, British	White, British	White, British	White, British
Diagnoses of young person	Autism; Oppositional defiance behaviours		Autism, ADHD; Anxiety		
Other external agencies involved	Social Care; Autism Team; Paediatrician; EPS; MST; OT; Disability Outreach Service		Social Care; Autism Team; Paediatrician; Clinical Psychologist; Disability Outreach Service; BEHMS		

3.5 Research process

Interviews were chosen as the method of data collection, in keeping with the qualitative research design and exploratory purpose of the research. I conducted an 'informant' style interview (Powney & Watts, 1987), enabling the

participants to respond freely and provide information that they chose, rather than having pre-set fixed questions imposed by myself. An interview guide (Appendix I) supported the interview process, with the order and wording of questions being used flexibly during individual interviews based on information provided by the participant (Braun & Clarke, 2014).

Interviews were conducted individually in the participant's home or at an alternative location of the participant's choosing. For the young people, a trusted adult, such as a parent/carer remained nearby in case they needed to access them. All interviews were audio recorded. The interviews for the young people lasted between 30-45 minutes and interviews with the parents lasted between 30-90 minutes. To avoid participant fatigue, two interviews were conducted on separate visits, the first focussing on school experiences leading to the current circumstances, and the second focussing on the future. This allowed for a clear separation between the past and future narratives.

3.5.1 The narrative interview

The narrative interview, as noted in section 3.5, takes the form of an unstructured interview to allow for spontaneity in the narratives of the participants, avoiding the imposition of any form of language by the researcher. A narrative interview differs from semi-structured and structured interviews in a way that facilitates participant voices to be heard, in their own words, thus enabling authenticity within the experiences and narratives shared. Question-response modes typically impose structures by selecting a theme and topic, ordering the questions and wording the questions in the language of the researcher (Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2000). Conversely, the narrative interview enables the chronological sequence of events and the unfolding of the plot to be dictated by the participant.

The narrative interview was conducted following the phases outlined in Jovchelovitch & Bauer (2000; Table 5). To elicit rich data, Jovchelovitch & Bauer (2000) propose rules as guidance to the interviewer: a full description can be found in appendix J. Each stage of the narrative interview will now be explained further.

Table 5.

Narrative Interview Phases taken from Jovchelovitch & Bauer (2000)

Phases	Rules
Preparation	Exploring the field Formulating exmanent questions
Initiation	Formulating the initial topic for narration Using visual aids
Main narration	No interruptions Only non-verbal encouragement to continue story-telling
Questioning	Exmanent into immanent questions
Concluding talk	Stop recording Why-questions allowed

3.5.1.1 Preparation

A review of the literature on EBSA was undertaken prior to conducting the narrative interviews, in order to inform the initial central topic for the interviews, supported by identifying gaps within the literature. The initial central topic of focus was chosen based on the experiences of the participants, ensuring that this was personal to the participant to enable a rich narrative. The exmanent questions (those based on the interests of the researcher) were informed by the initial reading of the literature. In turn the exmanent questions would be transferred to immanent questions (those drawn from the narrative using the language of the participant) during the interview (Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2000).

3.5.1.2 Initiation

The interview was introduced to the participant by explaining its purpose and contents. A visual aid was then employed, an adapted version of the 'Life path' tool (Wilson et al., 2007), as explained in section 3.5.2. I explained that this could be used as a timeline to facilitate the telling of their story. Prior to beginning the interview, the participant was invited to separate the timeline into chapters that they felt made sense to them, if they wished.

3.5.1.3 Main narration

To initiate the 'main narration' (Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2000), I asked an opening question to facilitate the telling of the participants' narrative. Other than giving non-verbal gestures and minimal vocalisations to encourage continuation in the narrative, the narrative was uninterrupted. Jovchelovitch & Bauer (2000) suggest that the interviewer should pay close attention and make note of any language used by the participant. The purpose of this is to inform the immanent questions during the 'questioning' stage of the interview process and to ensure the narration is not imposed by language that has not been formed by the participant. I used the visual aid to record direct quotes and key words, to facilitate the next stage of the interview.

3.5.1.4 Questioning

Once the participant signalled an end to their narrative, they were invited to add anything further. Using the participant's original words, I then translated the exmanent questions to immanent questions, in order to fill any gaps within the participants stories, for example: *'You mentioned X, can you tell me a bit more about that?'*. The purpose of these was to clarify points, timeframes and meanings of language used, and encourage further detail on key aspects of the narrative.

Following the immanent questions, the participant was asked to identify any moments that they perceived to be critical to their stories. A critical moment was defined as an event that is perceived by the participant as having important consequences for their lives and identities (Thomson et al., 2002). Therefore, the participant was asked whether they could identify any critical moments that they felt led to the current school non-attendance.

3.5.1.5 Concluding talk

At the end of the interview, the audio recording was stopped, and brief discussions were held with the participants in the form of 'small-talk' (Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2000). Any key features of the small-talk that appeared to add further detail to the participants narrative were noted in my reflective research diary (Appendix K).

3.5.1.6 'Future' interviews

The second interview with each participant focused on the future, following the same interview structure. The visual aid used in the first interview was used again to facilitate the participant's 'future' narrative. Hopes for the future were explored in relation to short-term and long-term outcomes.

3.5.1.7 Member checks

I made a decision not to complete member checks with the participants (Creswell et al., 2007). Personal narratives are suggested to be continuously fluctuating and shifting (Hiles et al., 2017), meaning that key information shared within a narrative retelling reflects aspects of the participant's life that the participant perceives to be important within the specific moment (Fivush & Buckner, 2013). Therefore, stories are perceived to change and grow as time moves on, meaning member checks would be redundant. Applied to the context of the current research, the young people were experiencing ongoing difficulties in respect of school attendance at the time of the research, meaning their experiences of EBSA were likely to be continually changing. I also felt that asking participants to revisit their stories would be unethical, with the possibility of difficult memories and experiences being revisited.

3.5.2 Life path tool

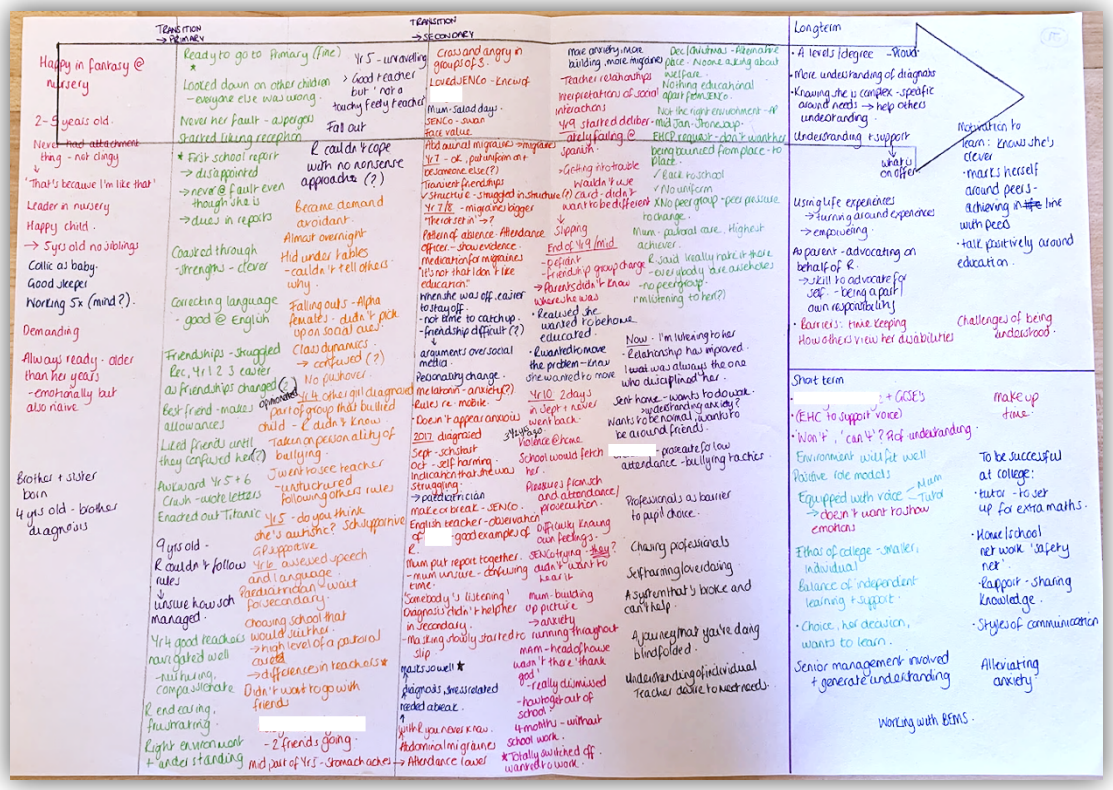
As noted, the current research utilised a visual life path tool during the interview process (Figure 13). This was an adapted tool based on the Life Grid: a tool used in interviews to co-construct a concrete visual representation of the participant's recollected life events (Wilson et al., 2007). The use of a visual aid is suggested to promote engagement from the participants, supporting the telling of narratives (Wilson et al., 2007). Furthermore, I felt that a visual aid would allow for sensitive topics to be explored in a less intensive way than the sole use of oral responses, aiming for the interview process to feel more relaxed.

To give ownership over their 'life path', participants were given the choice to map details themselves or have me to do this for them. As described (section 3.5.1.2), I also invited the participant to separate the 'chapters' in their story.

Overt categories are typically used within the Life Grid, however a decision was made to not include these to minimise imposition onto the narratives. The majority of the participants chose to separate their stories into school years, however two preferred not to impose a structure onto their path. During the course of the narration, I recorded key phrases and events that supported the clarification questions to be asked later in the interview process.

Figure 13.

Example of annotated life path.



3.6 Ethical considerations

The ethics within the study were informed by The British Psychological Society, (2014). Approval from the University Ethics Committee was also gained (Appendix L).

3.6.1 Informed consent

Voluntary and informed consent was obtained individually from the parents and young people. During the initial home visit (refer to section 3.4.3.1), the intentions of the research were clearly explained to the participants and it was made clear to all that the research would not influence the young person's current educational circumstances or experiences. All participants were provided with an information sheet (Appendices E & F) and a consent form (Appendix G), which I explained verbally. All participants were invited to ask further questions or contact myself at a later date should they have any further questions after I had left the home. Participants were asked about their preference for the location, date and time of the interviews. Consent was considered as an on-going process within the current research, as participants were given repeated opportunities to ask questions, give opinions on or withdraw from the research project.

3.6.2 Confidentiality and data protection

All participants were assured of confidentiality and anonymity. Audio recordings were stored in an electronic password protected file. These recordings will be deleted on completion of my doctoral training. All transcriptions were anonymised and stored securely alongside the audio recordings. Any identifiers, i.e. school name, teacher name and name of the participant and their family members were replaced with pseudonyms or omitted during transcription. All participants were made aware that safeguarding procedures were adhered to throughout the research, and that in circumstances where disclosures were made and the safety of themselves or others became a concern, I would have had to have acted on this information.

3.6.3 Potential for harm

Although there was perceived to be minimal risk of harm to the participants within the study, I was mindful that there may have been potentially sensitive topics discussed within the interviews, due to the nature of EBSA. This may have provoked upset, stress or the recall of unpleasant memories for

participants. To account for this, I advised participants, prior to beginning the interview, that they could stop the interview at any time. Participants were also reminded of their right to withdraw, throughout the recruitment and data collection process. A debrief (appendices M & N) was given to participants after each interview, including my contact details and those of my research supervisor, and a list of sources for support in case of any emotional distress during the research process.

3.6.4 Power

Issues of power have been addressed in the current research, given the potential for a power imbalance between researcher and participants. I adopted a non-hierarchical, facilitative and reflexive approach to support participants. All were provided with information regarding their role within the research and how this may contribute to the evidence base and help other young people and their families in the future. To further reduce the power differences, I spent some time building rapport with the participants (Beaver, 2011), both during the initial meeting and before each interview. Additionally, utilising a narrative interview process that was participant-led enabled participants to share as much or as little about their stories that they wanted to. It is hoped that this helped to equalise the power differential within the interviews (Riessman, 2008), empowering participants to select and share what they perceived as the most important aspects of their experiences (Elliot, 2005).

Finally, I recognised that my dual role as TEP for the LA and as a researcher at the university could influence the power dynamics. I aimed to address this by explicitly discussing each role with the participants and reaffirming my position as a researcher during the initial meetings with all participants. It was made clear to participants that I would not be involved with or have influence over the educational provision of the young person, as previously noted. Further reassurance was provided to participants that any information they shared within the interviews would not be shared with the young person's school or any other professionals within the LA.

3.7 Validity and trustworthiness

A vast range of qualitative research methods are available within the field of psychology, each of which is built upon different assumptions and philosophical groundings (Yardley, 2015). Consequently, evaluating qualitative research can be a challenge to researchers, who have recognised the need for specific criteria to evaluate the quality of such research (Yardley, 2015). To this end, Yardley (2015) has outlined a framework that sets out four core principles to evaluate qualitative data, suggested to be both flexible and applicable to a wide range of qualitative methods. Yardley's (2015) criteria is detailed below and is applied to the current research.

3.7.1 Sensitivity to context

Yardley (2015) suggests that qualitative studies should contribute to the existing relevant theoretical and empirical literature, to ensure researchers are mindful of the existing research around their area of study and the chosen methodology. Additionally, Yardley (2015) recommends that good qualitative research is sensitive to the socio-cultural contexts of the participants and that the researcher is ethically sensitive in how they engage with participants.

During the design phase of the current research, I completed an extensive search of the existing literature and theoretical understandings around EBSA and the field of narrative analysis, ensuring the study is sensitive to the context it falls within. This allowed me to identify gaps within the literature, seeking for the aims of the research and the methodological approach adopted to be relevant to the wider understanding of EBSA.

When considering the socio-cultural influences, I engaged in wider reading around the current policies within the UK relating to school attendance. Additionally, current prevalence rates for persistent absenteeism were researched. This enabled me to gain a deeper understanding of the socio-cultural context of attendance within the UK.

The current research was also informed by ethical considerations specific to the participants. Given perceptions of persistent absentees as constituting a vulnerable group, a sensitive approach was adopted throughout. Participation

in the interview was voluntary and informed. The interviews were conducted in a comfortable setting chosen by the participants, and I ensured that I built empathy and rapport throughout the process. All participants were also made aware of the separation between my dual roles of TEP for the LA and a researcher for the university. Potential power imbalances were addressed, as described in section 3.6.4.

3.7.2 Commitment and rigour

Yardley (2015) indicates that researchers must show commitment and rigour to their topic area through interest and analysis that has sufficient breadth and/or depth in order to add to the existing knowledge in the topic. Commitment may also be demonstrated through the researcher's personal interest or an in-depth engagement with the research area (Yardley, 2015).

I demonstrated commitment and persistent engagement in the literature throughout the research process. Recruitment of participants from a hard to reach population that had not been extensively included in previous EBSA research also illustrated commitment to elevating voices so far unheard.

The study aimed for rigour through explicit adherence to the narrative methodology. Given my novice experience of narrative analysis, the use of a clear and coherent methodological approach was important, with a systematic and exploratory use of the adapted NOI framework supporting my competence. I immersed myself in the data through multiple readings of the interview transcripts.

3.7.3 Coherence and transparency

For a study to be considered as coherent, Yardley (2015) suggests that the write up should be clear, understandable and the basis of argument presented be convincing. Transparency refers to there being a clear link between theory and method, clarity in all aspects of the data collection and analysis procedures and an acknowledgement of the impact that a researcher has on a study (Yardley, 2015).

In order for the current research to be considered to have coherence and transparency, I applied a methodological approach that has foundations in narrative psychological theory. Additionally, I aimed for clear communication on the data collection and analysis processes in the write up of the study. Data extracts, such as sample transcriptions and example analysis tables are included in the write up and the appendices to demonstrate clear links between the raw data and analytical interpretations.

Throughout the study, I have adopted a reflexive stance, which is essential to qualitative research (Willig, 2008). 'Reflexivity' refers to the explicit consideration of how the researcher is likely to have influenced the study through the impact of their own opinions or perceptions (Yardley, 2015). I demonstrated conscious awareness of my potential impact throughout the interview process, the construction of each narrative and during data analysis. I completed a research diary (Appendix K) throughout the research process to support my reflection on any factors which may have impacted the research.

3.7.4 Impact and importance

Yardley (2015) states that research can have theoretical, practical and socio-cultural implications, all of which have the potential to make a difference and make research impactful and important. Therefore, the current research seeks to address a gap within the current literature that explores EBSA. It does so by providing further understanding as to the stories and experiences of the EBSA population and the perspectives of their parents, promoting the voices of such groups. At a national level, persistent absenteeism is of interest to the UK government and within my current LA setting, which emphasises the relevance of the current research.

3.8 Data analysis using NOI

As described in section 3.3.3, the current research used an adapted version of Hiles & Cermák's (2008) Narrative Oriented Inquiry (Figure 9). This model supports the methodological approach I adopted and also gives guidance in data analysis. The analytical process adopted within the current research will now be discussed.

3.8.1 Analytical process

3.8.1.1 Transcription

One of the perceived strengths of narrative research is how it conveys an individual's experience in its depth, messiness, richness and texture, using the actual words spoken by participants (Murray, 2015). With this in mind, Hiles et al. (2017) recommend that the interviews are transcribed verbatim and should not be 'tidied up'. Therefore, all researcher and interviewee vocalisations were transcribed, a sample of which can be found in appendix O. The process of transcription supported the data analysis by allowing for increased familiarisation with the data.

3.8.1.2 Initial readings

Once the transcriptions were complete, I familiarised myself with the stories by reading and re-reading them several times. The purpose of this was to build a picture of the stories as a whole to support later analysis, reflecting on the participants overall tone and content of their story. Crossley (2007) recommends six readings of transcripts, however in practice the number of reads far exceeded this.

Hiles et al. (2017) suggest producing a working transcript after the initial readings by breaking down the narratives into a numbered sequence of self-contained episodes. The episodes depicted signified a move in the telling of the story (Hiles & Cermák, 2008) of either movement in time, topic, perspective or theme. An example of a working transcript is shown in Figure 14.

Figure 14.

Example of working transcript.

1. M: He started at C Primary in the nursery school... and he... he was always a kid who, you know, he didn't want to join in necessarily straight away,	Story episode 1 Start of school. Reflection on social interactions/confidence
2. so I suppose some of the writing on the wall although he was so young, so it was difficult to know if he was just shy or he had some challenges and I think at the time, we kind of... I kind of felt that it, things were difficult erm, but I had time off with him.	Story episode 2 Movement in perspective. Deterministic. Reflection on social behaviours. Started out difficult.
3. So he used to go, we used to go to gymnastics class, or... erm I dunno like play football but he was never one to just run out and go and do it, he'd always want me there so I think he was always quite cautious.	Story episode 3 Movement in topic. Reluctant participation in social groups
4. You know, and looking back now it is much easier to understand that things would have been so overwhelming for him, but I just kind of figured he just was, you know, more tense about joining in with things so...	Story episode 4 Movement in time. Current reflections on emotional experiences of YP

3.8.1.3 Holistic-form perspective

The holistic-form perspective (Hiles & Cermák, 2008) was utilised to fulfil the first research questions:

> 1a. What are the types of stories told by the young people exhibiting EBSA in relation to their experiences and how are these stories told?
>
> 1b. What are the types of stories told by the parents of young people exhibiting EBSA in relation to how they understand the young person's experiences and how are these stories told?

The holistic-form perspective focuses on the form of the story by identifying the 'plot' that threads through the narrative (Hiles et al., 2017). To complete this stage of analysis, I employed a staged approach, as outlined by Lieblich

et al. (1998). The first stage is to **identify a focus for the plot**, such as a theme or issue. I made a decision to focus on school and home. The rationale behind this is based on the recognition that for those who experience EBSA, their lives are played out both in school and at home, and as such, both contexts likely become part of the narratives of the young people and their parents.

The second stage of analysis was to **identify plot dynamics**, which are inferred from particular forms of speech. The inferences included reflections and evaluative comments, and key components of the narrative that were indicative of turning points, progression or stability. I used the self-contained story episodes to support this stage of analysis, due to the episodes reflecting movement in the story.

The final stage involved **producing a graphic representation** of each narrative. Lieblich et al. (1998) recommend the use of a structural graph to present large amounts of narrative data, providing a clear visual representation of the narrative plot. To support this process and increase transparency in my interpretations, a descriptive and interpretive summary table was produced for each participant, an example of which can be found in figure 15 and appendix P. The first step was to identify a beginning, middle and end to the story (Murray, 2015) and provide a summary of my interpretations for each section. I identified key evaluative excerpts to support my interpretations, which were taken from the uninterrupted narrative and the clarification questioning stage in the interviews. The final step was to note comments and reflections that related to specific themes and tones within the evaluative excerpts.

On completion of the descriptive and interpretive summary tables, individual graphs were produced for each participant to support later comparisons. Key extracts from the transcripts were added to the graphical representations. The illustrated plots were then visually compared to the plot lines as suggested by Gergen & Gergen (1986).

Figure 15.

Example of Summary table.

Phase	Summary	Evaluative excerpts	Comments
Beginning (Primary to Year 6)	***School/Education*** Emma did not remember much from primary school and appeared to list key memories for her. Overall, Emma stated that primary 'wasn't bad and it wasn't good', which implied that there are no significant emotions attached to her experiences there. The only feeling Emma discussed was feeling stressed in SATs	***School/Education*** I remember going to nursery and obviously the first few days of nursery being upset when my mum left me (1) We had a teacher who left in year 1 and I liked her (2) (Year 6) I had my own solo in Year 6 in the school play, I remember that, school plays were just fun (6) Then like doing SATs that was such a stressful time (7) I remember being really stressed about SATs (7) (Choosing secondary) I ended up going to OW but I was worried because it was just so far away (10) Yeah school was alright in primary like it wasn't bad but it wasn't good (66)	***School/Education*** First memories of nursery – feeling upset at separation from Mum Positive memory of teacher Enjoying elements of latter years of primary school Regression: stress in SATs Worry about transition Stability in narrative re. primary school

3.8.1.4 Categorical-content perspective

The categorical-content perspective was utilised to support the aims of the research and sought to answer research questions 2 and 3. The research aims, as described in section 3.1 were twofold: The first, to explore the educational experiences of pupils with EBSA, alongside their hopes and expectations for their future. The second, to explore the parental perspective of their child's EBSA, alongside their hopes and expectations for their child's future. The research questions sought to be answered by the categorical-content analysis were as follows:

> 2a. How do the young people understand their experiences of EBSA?
>
> 2b. How do the parents of the young people understand their experiences of their child's EBSA?
>
> 3a. What are the young person's perceptions of their future?
>
> 3b. What are the parent's perceptions of the young person's future?

The categorical-content perspective involves analysing the self-contained story episodes through analysis described as 'thematic' by Hiles & Cermák,

(2008), or as ‘content analysis’ by Lieblich et al. (1998). Lieblich et al’s. (1998) process was selected as it allowed for themes to be interpreted from the participants’ narratives that related directly to the research aims and questions. Lieblich et al., (1998) outline four stages to this analytical approach, each of which will be discussed in the context of the current research.

The first stage of a categorical-content analysis is the **selection of the subtext**. This involves identifying relevant sections of the narrative that relate directly to the research questions, thus becoming the focus of analysis. The research questions in the current study were broad and exploratory in nature, therefore, a decision was made to submit the whole narrative to analysis, in keeping with the research aims.

The second stage of the analysis is to **define the content categories**. This involves identifying themes or perspectives within the narrative (Lieblich et al., 1998) and placing them into ‘clusters of meaning’, as suggested in the NOI model. These can be defined in two ways. I opted for a more open method of interpretation, by reading the text and defining the categories as they were identified, as opposed to being theory-led and predefining categories based on theoretical application (Hiles & Cermák, 2008; Lieblich et al., 1998). This was a circular process that involved repeated, careful reading of the text, suggesting categories, organising the text into subcategories and generating additional categories or refining existing ones (Lieblich et al., 1998).

The iterative process within the second stage of analysis supported the third stage proposed by Lieblich et al. (1998) to **sort the material into categories**. Units of analysis, such as phrases, utterances and story episodes were assigned into the identified clusters of meaning, and a principal sentence was used to represent each category. Lieblich et al. (1998) recommends focussing on principal sentences as opposed to complete text, due to the rich elaboration and repetition often seen in narratives. Therefore, the principal sentence was selected based on it best representing the category it fell within. Figure 16 gives an example of the principle sentences and categorisation. A further example can be found in appendix Q.

The final stage proposed by Lieblich et al (1998) within a categorical-content analysis is to **draw conclusions from the results**. This stage of the analysis will be discussed in detail in Chapter 4.

Figure 16.

Example of Principle sentences and categorisation.

Principal sentence	Category Subcategory	Comments
	Young person's experiences	
So, by the time we got there, well me and a lot of my classmates were a bit confused with like all the stuff, mainly because we haven't learnt a lot of it. Especially in maths, well mainly in maths because we didn't know much (L1.4)	Young person's perceptions of learning	During his narrative, Leo reflects on his perceptions of the quality of his learning experiences, as well as the subjects he enjoyed whilst he was attending school. Leo does not appear to reflect positively on the teaching he received at primary school, as he suggests that he did not learn a lot (L1.1). Leo appears to believe this negatively impacted upon him on his transition to secondary school, as he describes himself and his peers to feel 'confused' (L1.4), due to not having learnt what they should have in primary school. Within his narrative, Leo describes his attitude towards his learning and his behaviour at school, which seemingly changes overtime. Leo describes his behaviour as seeming to worsen as he progresses through secondary school, as he receives more behaviour sanctions such as detentions. Leo's behaviour in school appears linked to his attitude towards his learning. Throughout the narrative, Leo repeatedly uses the word 'stressed' when he describes how he felt about the amount of school work and his progression through the school years as he headed towards his GCSE's. Specifically, Leo highlights the homework as being particularly stressful for him ('The homework was the biggest thing, that was stressful for me' (L1.48)).
I just kept getting in a cycle like that, where my mindset was like 'I can't be bothered any more, I can't be bothered with you shouting at me, I can't be bothered with the work' (L1.45)	Young person's attitude towards learning and behaviour at school	
And then that's where it was like all bad because my mindset changed dramatically. And that's probably the main thing, why I didn't want to go to school because my mindset changed. Like drastically, it was horrendous (L1.46)		
I got more stressed like going on in the years because it was getting closer to my GCSEs, I'd get so much more tired and exhausted at the end of the day (L1.8)		
So I'm going to have to be learning and revising in Year 11 which is going to be hard and stressful (L1.26)	Emotions related to school	

Chapter 4: Findings

4.0 Introduction to Chapter 4

This chapter portrays the narratives of the young people and parents who participated in this research. The first section presents the holistic form analysis and plot line typologies used to interpret how the stories of school and educational experience and home experiences are told. The second section focuses upon the way participants have understood the young person's EBSA and how they perceive the young person's future. Clusters of meaning are presented and supported with illustrative excerpts.

4.1 Holistic-form analysis: How are the stories of young people exhibiting EBSA told by the young people and their parents?

Descriptive and interpretive summary tables were created for each participant (Murray, 2015) supporting the holistic-form analysis (see Appendix P for example). Those relating to school and educational experience, and home and parental experience, where relevant to the participant's narratives, are discussed below.

4.1.1 Emma's story

Figure 17 displays graphical representation of Emma's school and educational experience and her perceptions of the future.

4.1.1.1 School and educational experience commentary

Emma's plot line appeared stable throughout primary school, with little shift in her narrative until Year 6. Then, some regression is noted: Emma used terms such as *'stressed'* (E1.7) to describe her SATs experience. This continued in the transition to secondary school; Emma emphasised her negative experiences through terms such as *'worried'* (E1.10) and *'scary'* (E1.14).

Initially in Year 7 and 8, a progressive tone occurred in Emma's narrative, where she described making *'loads of new friends'* (E1.15) and having *'fun'*

(E1.17). A sharp regression then occurred when Emma started to get into trouble at school and experiencing bad migraines, impacting on her attendance. This regression continued into Years 9 and 10. Continuing to get into trouble, Emma realised she wanted to move school. By Year 10, she attended school for one week, after which she *'school refused for months'* (E1.46).

After transitioning to an alternative provision (AP), the narrative stabilised, although remaining negative. Emma described her AP as a *'really s*** environment'* (E1.52), where she appeared to find the social aspects difficult as she *'didn't want to speak to anyone'* (E1.52). Emma again wanted to move schools as a result.

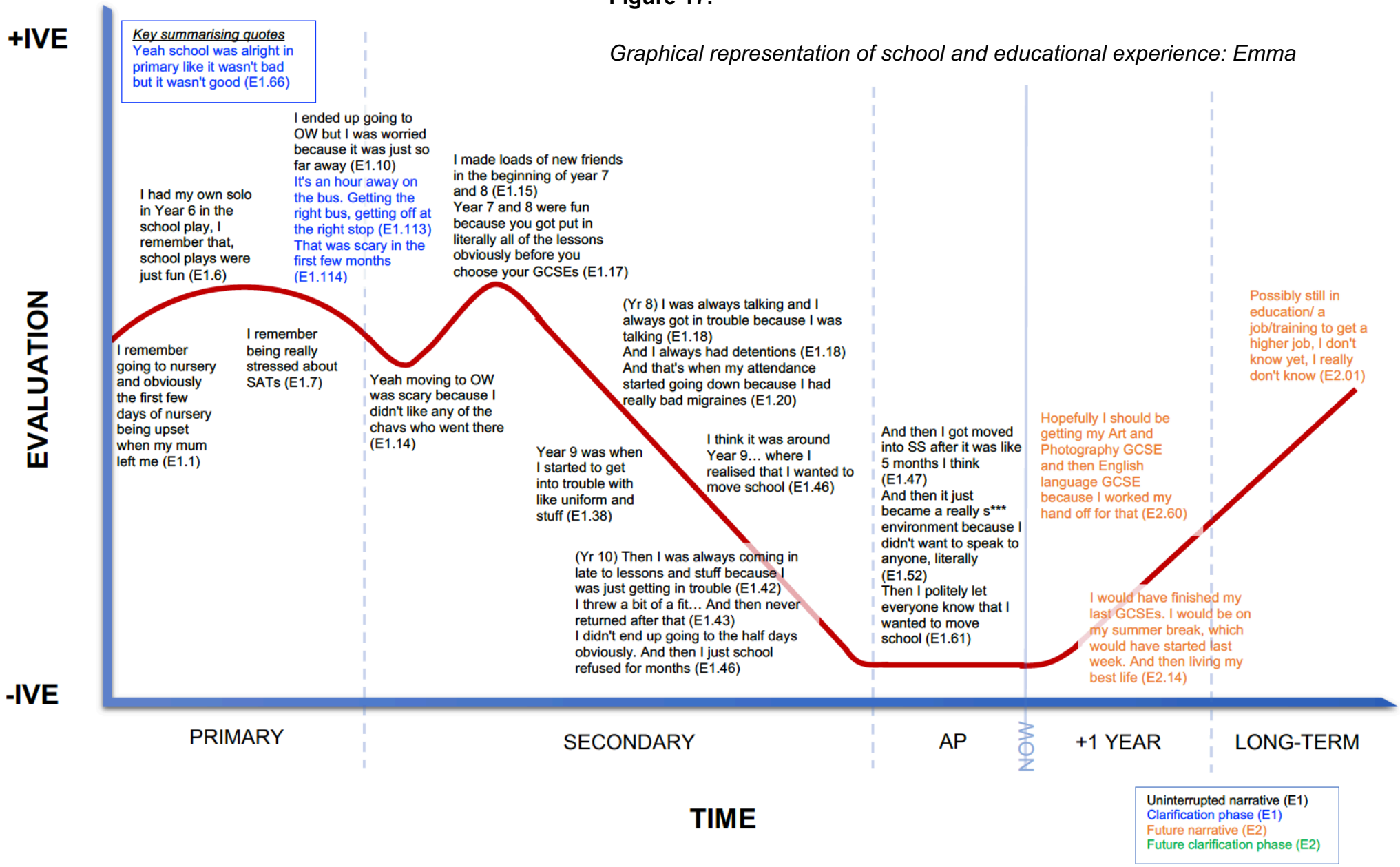
Looking to the future, a progressive tone occurred when Emma described the academic achievements she hoped for. At the time of the interview, Emma was about to move educational provisions and had sat some GCSE's a year early. As such, the progressive tone is reflective of her hopes to complete her GCSE's and have a more positive, stable future.

4.1.1.2 Typology reflections

The plot line relating to Emma's school experience appears consistent with a '*romantic comedy'* (Gergen & Gergen, 1986) trajectory, characterised by a regressive narrative followed by a progressive plot, resulting in a happy ending, as depicted by Emma's perceptions of her future. The initial regression occurred as Emma's behaviour and attendance deteriorated. Emma felt she *'always got in trouble'* (E1.18) and *'always had detentions'* (E1.18). The lowest point in Emma's trajectory occurred when she began to school refuse in Year 10. This continues as Emma transitioned into the AP, where she experienced difficulties with the environment. A progressive trajectory appeared to be predicted by Emma when she discussed her future, as she expressed hope for her academic achievements in her new provision.

Figure 17.

Graphical representation of school and educational experience: Emma



4.1.2 Victoria's story (Emma's mother)

Figure 18. displays graphical representation of Victoria's perceptions of Emma's school and educational experience and her perceptions of Emma's future. Figure 19. displays graphical representations of Victoria's perceptions of the home and parental experience and her perceptions of the future in relation to this.

4.1.2.1 School and educational experience commentary

From Victoria's perspective, Emma's school and education experience begins on a positive, stable trajectory. Victoria reflects on Emma's enjoyment of the early years of primary school and Emma's academic strengths. Victoria also perceived the teacher's *'nurturing and compassionate'* (V1.31) characteristics to work well for Emma. A regression occurred in the plot in the latter years of primary school, when Emma started to have stomach aches, coinciding with Emma's reduced attendance and a stricter teacher.

Stability is noted in Emma's transition to secondary school. Then a sharp regression occurred: Victoria described Emma's migraines to worsen, impacting further on Emma's attendance. Victoria perceived the migraines to relate to Emma's anxiety, which she felt Emma was able to mask until this point. The regression continued as Emma's *'masking'* (V1.106) of her anxiety *'slowly started to slip'* (V1.106), perceived as a catalyst for the significant deterioration in Emma's attendance. This coincided with a deterioration in Emma's behaviour: everything *'started just slipping, slipping, slipping'* (V1.118), emphasising the regression in the plot.

Victoria described Emma to have voted *'with her feet'* (V1.124), as Emma chose to no longer attend her mainstream setting. A progression in the plot then occurred when Emma transitioned to the AP, which Victoria described as *'great'* (V1.164). A sharp regression then occurs when Emma expressed disliking the AP and started *'school refusing again'* (V1.174).

A progression in the plot is represented in Victoria's future narrative. Victoria described how she hoped that the new provision for Emma will *'fit her well'* (V2.19) and that, in the long-term, Emma's academic strengths will enable her

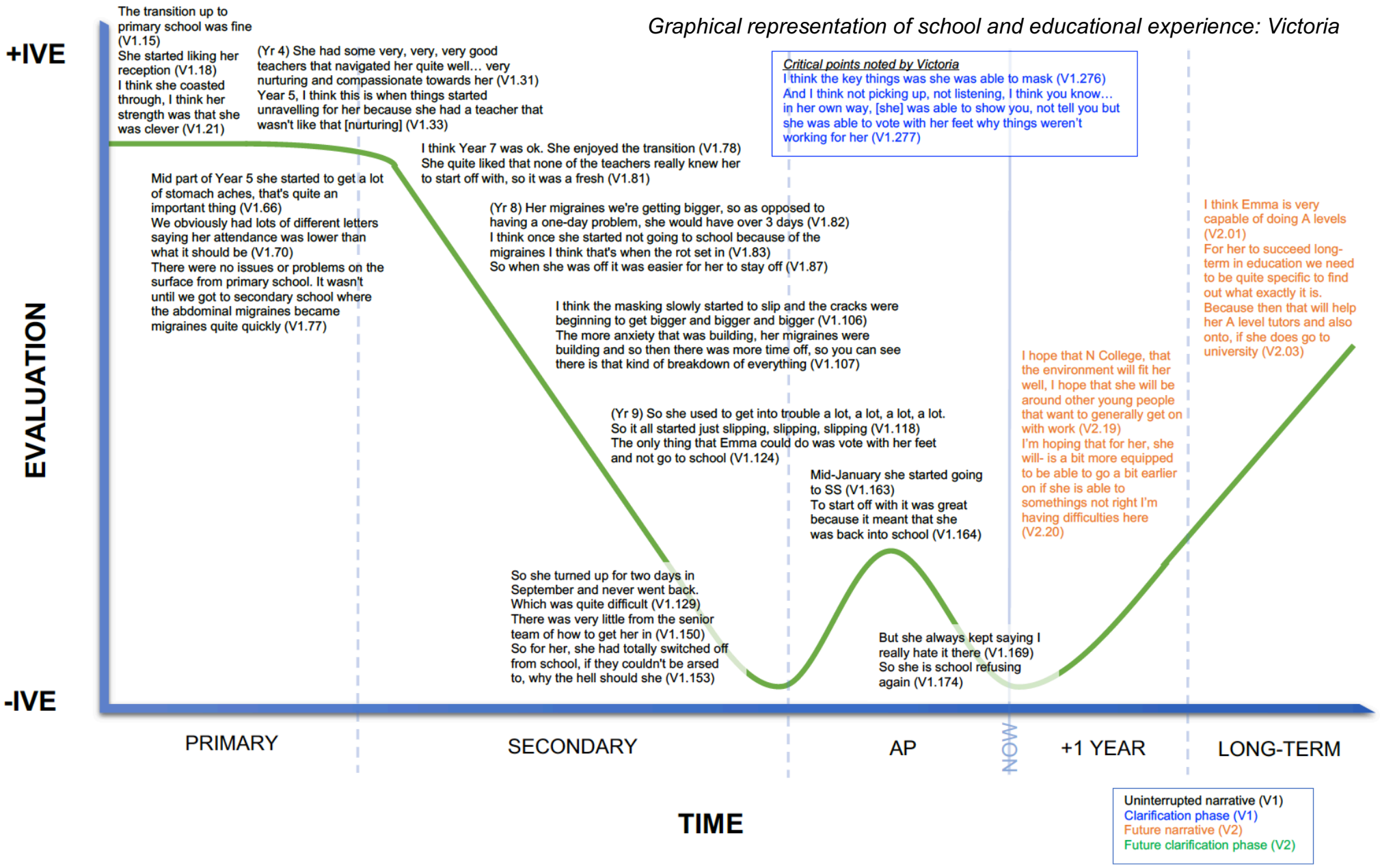
to achieve in education. Within this progression, Victoria emphasised the need to further understand Emma's SEN.

4.1.2.1 Typology reflections

Victoria's plot line appears to follow a *'romantic saga'* (Gergen & Gergen, 1986) trajectory, characterised by the peaks and troughs that Victoria described. Victoria's narrative begins with a stable, positive trajectory, which quickly turns into a regressive trough after Emma's transition to secondary school. The difficulties faced by Emma, as described by Victoria, co-occurred, representing a series of challenges that resulted in Emma's non-attendance. A slight peak is then noted with Emma's transition to the AP. A regressive trough occurred when Emma started *'school refusing again'* (V1.174). To end, Victoria anticipated overcoming current challenges to enable Emma to achieve in her future education.

Figure 18.

Graphical representation of school and educational experience: Victoria



4.1.2.3 Home and parental experience commentary

The home and parental experiences Victoria described appeared stable in primary school, regressing slightly when Victoria recognised Emma had *'something different'* (V1.29) about her. Victoria did not appear to have had a full understanding of Emma's SEN and reflected in hindsight on the behaviours Emma presented with.

Year 7 is represented by the continued stability in the narrative as this was not described by Victoria. A regression then occurred in Year 8 when Emma started to self-harm. The sharp regression continued: Emma's violent, self-harming and risky behaviours increased, which Victoria described as a *'scary time as a parent'* (V1.121). This coincided with an increase in Emma's anxiety, which Victoria viewed as a reason for Emma's violent behaviours towards her.

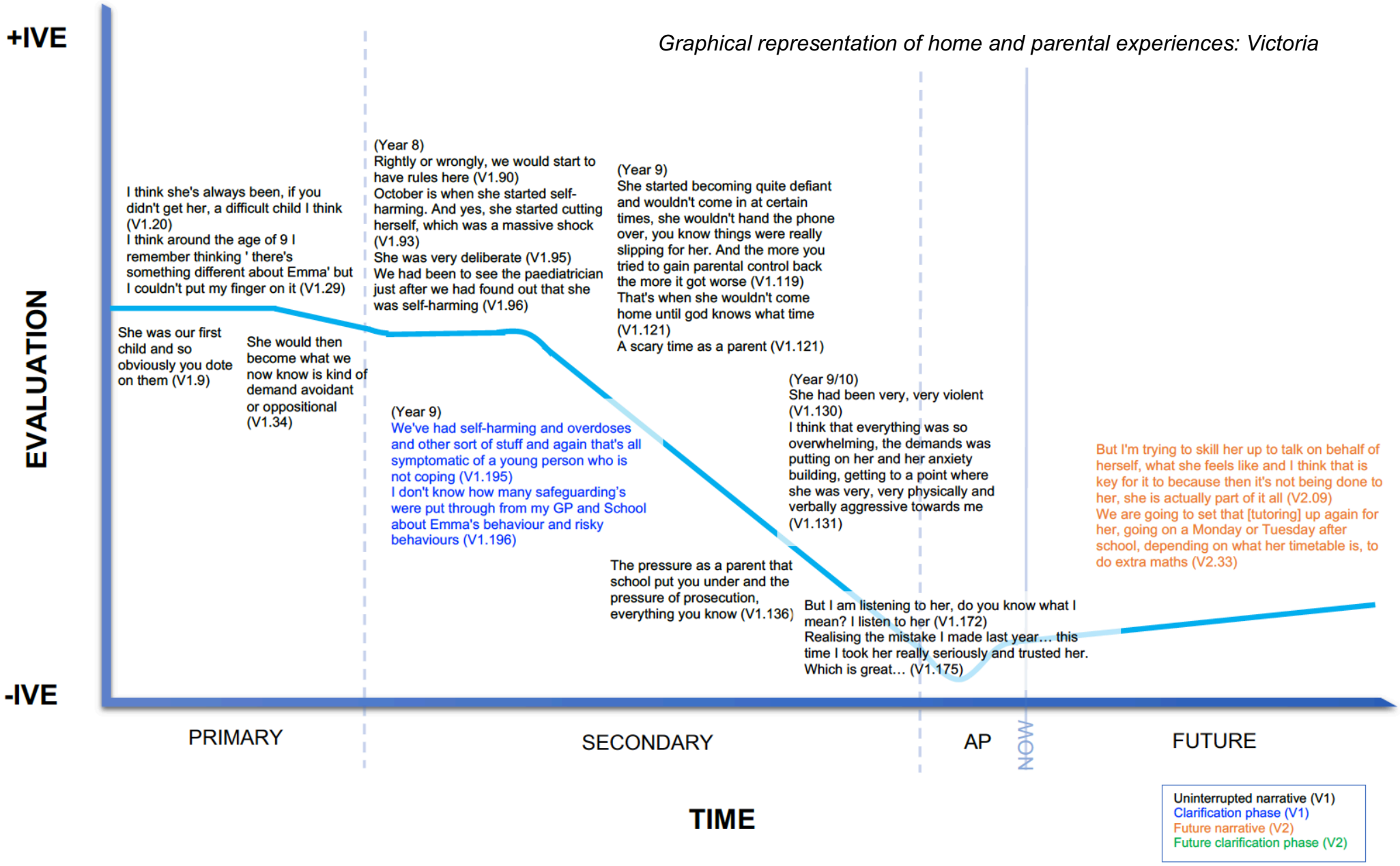
A progression occurred when Emma moved to the AP. Reflecting on her previous mistakes, Victoria described now having listened to Emma when she expressed not liking the AP. The narrative plot then progresses steadily into the future. Victoria hoped to *"skill her [Emma] up to talk on behalf of herself"* (V2.09) and to set up home-tutoring to support Emma's maths skills.

4.1.2.4 Typology reflections

Victoria's plot line appeared consistent with a *'romantic comedy'* (Gergen & Gergen, 1986) trajectory, depicted by an initial phase of stability, followed by a regression of challenge before a potential positive ending. The regression in Victoria's narrative appeared to coincide with Emma's self-harming and defiant behaviours in the home. Victoria described this as a challenge as she struggled to *'gain parental control back'* (V1.119). A further regression occurred when Emma's violent behaviours increased at home and Victoria experienced pressure from the school and threat of prosecution for Emma's lack of attendance at school. A progression then occurred when Victoria started to listen to Emma. The potential 'happy ending' comes when Victoria described her hopes to advocate for Emma and support her education in the future.

Figure 19.

Graphical representation of home and parental experiences: Victoria



4.1.3 Leo's story

Figure 20. displays graphical representation of Leo's school and educational experience and his perceptions of the future.

4.1.3.1 School and educational experience commentary

Leo's narrative appeared stable until his transition, where it regressed slightly. Leo described his primary school not to have *'wrote very nice things'* (L1.50) therefore he perceived his secondary not to have expected *'the greatest things'* (L1.53) from him. Leo's narrative progressed in Year 7, as he described enjoying meeting new people and the challenging work. Leo reflected positively on his academic achievements here (*'I still did quite a bit of work in Year 7, I was in the top of my classes'* (L1.54)).

A sharp regression then occurred. Leo described getting *'more stressed'* throughout secondary school and experienced more negative emotions such as anger and stress. In Year 9, Leo described his attendance to become inconsistent. Leo's motivation deteriorated as he *'couldn't be bothered with anything'* (L1.75). The regression continued when Leo *'flat out pretty much stopped going'* (L1.34) in Year 10. Leo attributed this to being *'too tired'* (L1.35) and stressed. Leo described his home and school experiences to impact one another negatively, which he perceived as *'terrible'* (L1.37). Leo's narrative stabilises when he started home-schooling.

A regression then occurred when Leo described feeling *'Stressful. Sad. Depressing'* (L2.14) when he was put back an academic year. The narrative then progressed when Leo talked about his future. Leo described going back to school and appeared motivated to academically achieve. A further progression is noted when Leo described his future aspirations to attend college and university. Leo hoped for better peer and familial relationships.

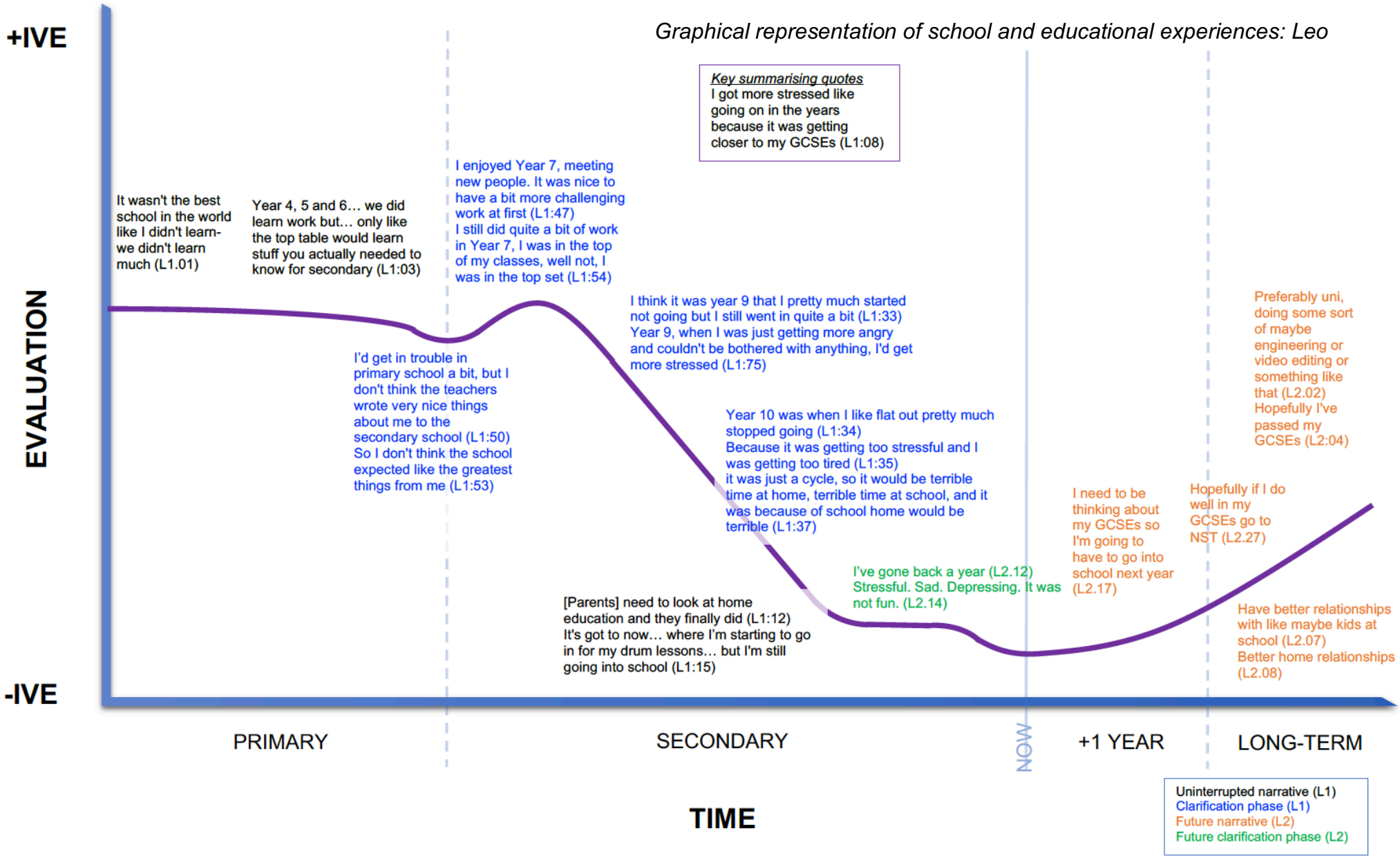
4.1.3.2 Typology reflections

Leo's plotline appeared consistent with a *'romantic comedy'* (Gergen & Gergen, 1986) trajectory, characterised by an initial phase of stability, followed by a regressive challenge, before progressing to a potential positive end. The regressive stage of Leo's narrative appeared when Leo experienced negative

emotions (*'I was just getting more angry'* (L1.75)*, 'I'd get more stressed'* (L1.75)) and a significant reduction in his attendance at school. Leo's home experiences contributed to this regressive phase. A turning point occurred when Leo discussed his future and re-engaging in education (*'I need to be thinking about my GCSEs so I'm going to have to go into school next year'* (L2.17)). Leo's potential positive end included having *'better relationships with… kids at school'* (L2.07)*, 'better home relationships'* (L2.08) and academic achievements.

Figure 20.

Graphical representation of school and educational experiences: Leo



4.1.4 Oliver's story (Leo's father)

Figure 21. displays graphical representation of Oliver's perceptions of Leo's school and educational experience and his perceptions of Leo's future. Figure 22. displays graphical representations of Oliver's perceptions of the home and parental experience and his perceptions of the future in relation to this.

4.1.4.1 School and educational experience commentary

Oliver's story started relatively stable, with a slight regression in Year 5. Leo started to *'get really anxious'* (O1.19) and expressed that he did not want to go to school. A slight progression occurred when Oliver stated that Leo *'seemed to start OK'* (O1.32) in Year 7, however this quickly turned regressive when Oliver perceived Leo to start experiencing anxiety again. This regression continued as Leo began to *'express his anger at school'* (O1.69) and experienced a negative incident on social media with school peers, which Oliver described as a *'turning point'* (O1.115) where Leo began to fear going to school. A further point of regression is reached when Oliver observed a deterioration in Leo's mental health and started to avoid school in Year 10 (*'He's basically not really been this year'* (O1.41)).

A slight progression occurred when Oliver described his hopes for Leo's future, which then appeared to stabilise. Oliver reflected on Leo's academic strengths, hoping these would enable him to complete his GCSE's and go to university (*'He is bright, so I always feel when he's ready or he is mentally able to go back into some form of education, he will be able to do it'* (O2.112), *'Where I would like to see him is university. Because I think he's bright enough'* (O2.01)). The narrative stabilised when Oliver expressed his reservations about Leo re-engaging in education (*'I think our expectations of that [GCSE results] are low'* (O2.91)).

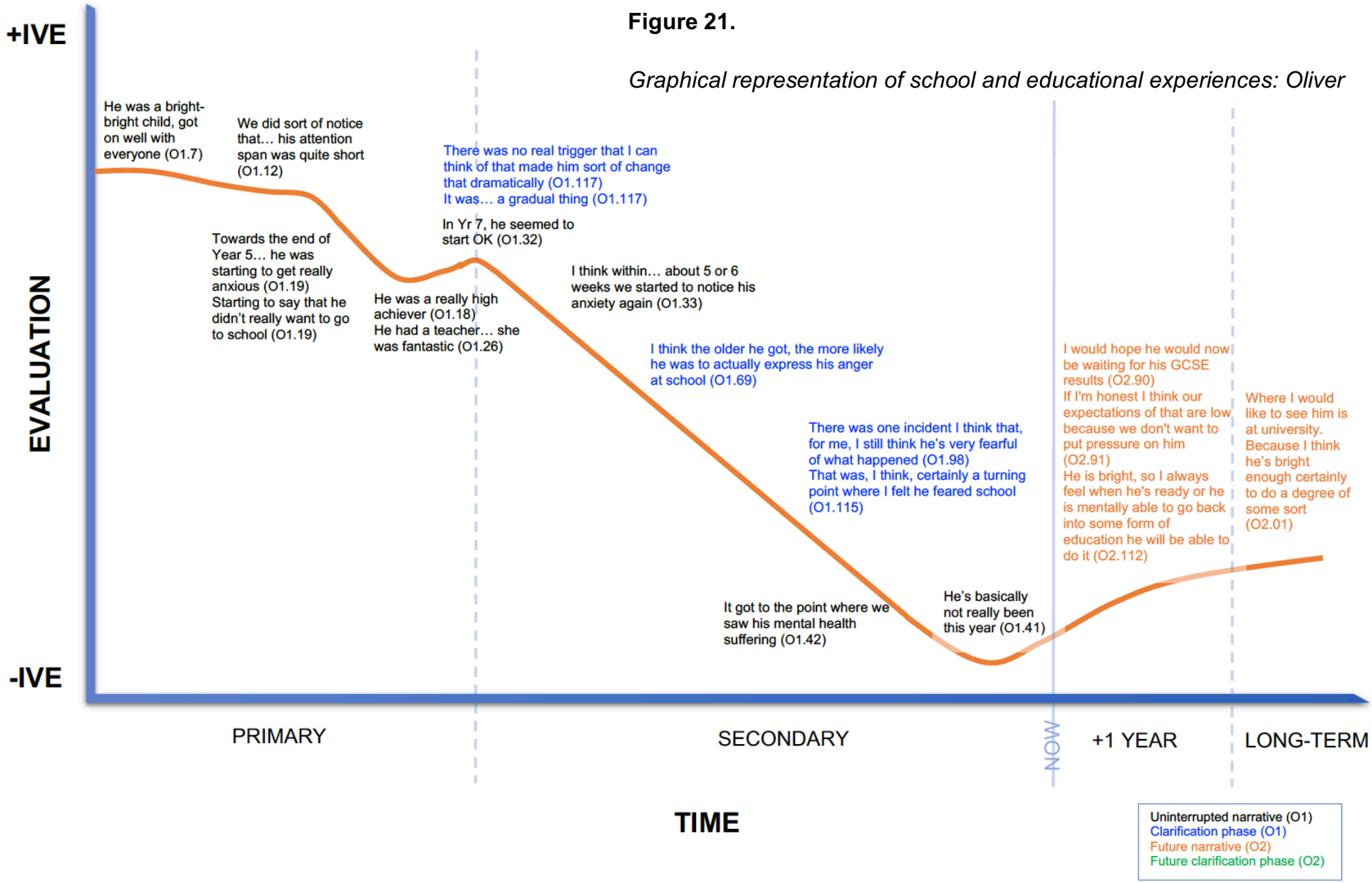
4.1.4.2 Typology reflections

Oliver's plot line appeared consistent with a *''romantic comedy'* (Gergen & Gergen, 1986) trajectory, characterised by an initial stability, followed by a regressive challenge, before progressing to a possible 'happy ending'. The regression appeared to occur due to Leo's increased levels of anxiety, anger

and a deterioration in his mental health, until he no longer attended school in Year 10. Although Oliver's plot ends in a slight progression, Oliver expressed having low expectations of Leo's future.

Figure 21.

Graphical representation of school and educational experiences: Oliver



4.1.4.3 Home and parental experience commentary

Oliver's narrative relating to his experiences at home starts relatively stable. This quickly regressed through Leo's primary education, however quickly regressed as Leo progressed through primary school. Oliver described an increase Leo's anxiety around going out (O1.16). A further, sharp regression occurred: Oliver described noticing *'a real difference in his [Leo's] behaviour at home'* (O1.27), where Leo started to *'get a little bit more physical with [his brother]'* (O1.28) and started to *'sort of meltdown'* (O1.27) when returning home from school. This regression continued as Oliver described experiencing difficulties when trying to get Leo to go to school, before reaching *'breaking point'* (O1.43) as a family. The narrative then stabilised as the family continued to experience difficulties with Leo's negative behaviours at home (*'it's physically very difficult as a family at the moment'* (O1.48).

Oliver's narrative appeared progressive when he discussed his ultimate goal of wanting Leo *'to be happy and confident and… achieve what he is potentially able to achieve'* (O2.152). Oliver described his hopes for Leo to understand and control his anxiety, to enable him to socialise outside of the house (*'I'd like to think he'd be secure enough with his anxiety that he would be able to go out'* (O2.124)). The narrative then stabilised in the long-term future. Oliver described possible barriers for Leo, such as being able to live independently (*'I don't think he's got the… life skills to live on his own'* (O2.4), *'to… live on his own somewhere else in the country, I'm not sure that's feasible'* (O2.6)).

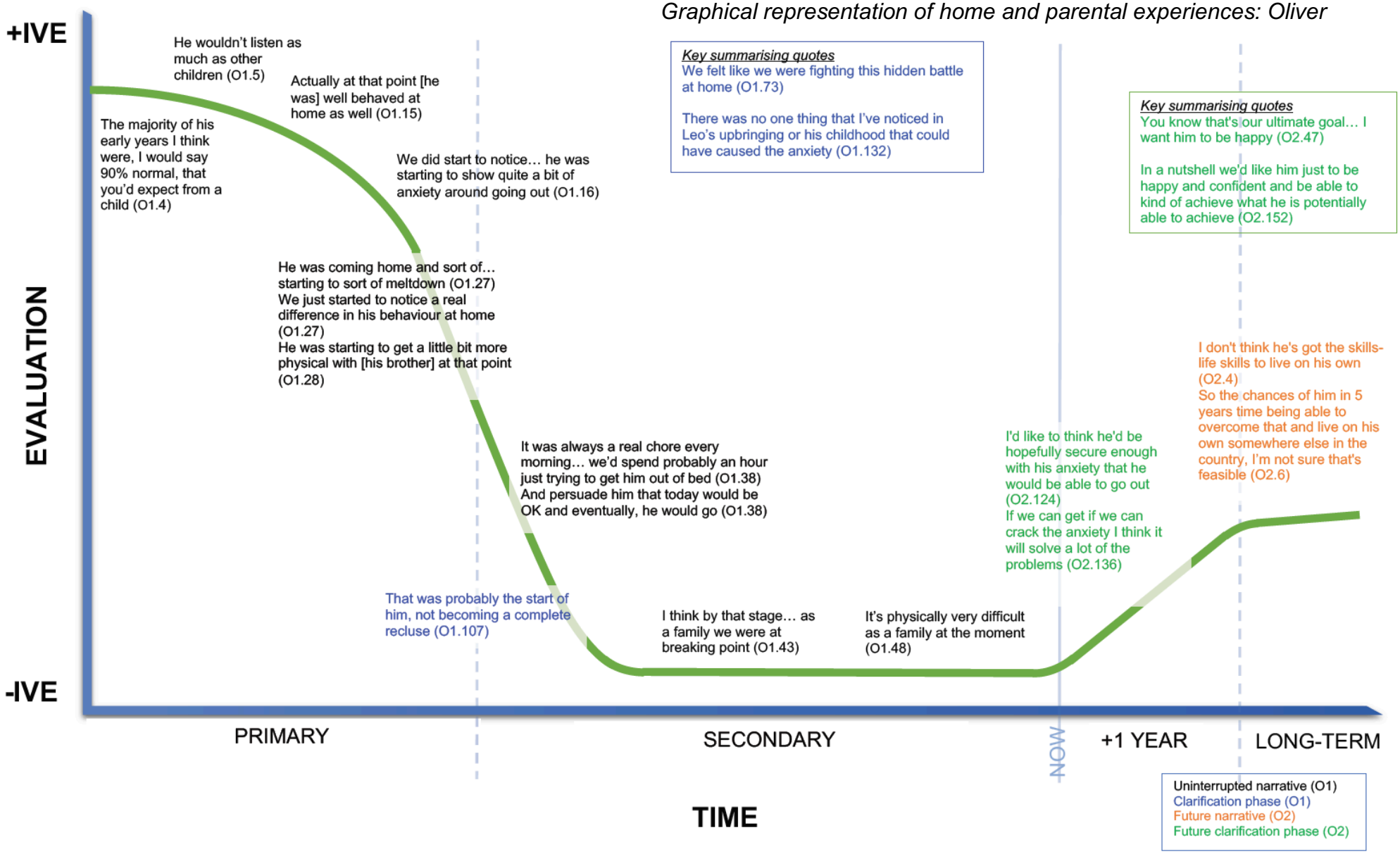
4.1.4.4 Typology reflections

Oliver's narrative appeared to follow a *'romantic comedy'* (Gergen & Gergen, 1986) trajectory, where an initial period of stability is followed by a regressive challenge, before a final progression to a possible happy ending. The initial regression in Oliver's narrative appeared to coincide with Leo's anxiety (*'we did start to notice… he was starting to show quite a bit of anxiety around going out'* (O1.16)), and a deterioration in his behaviours at home. Oliver described feeling as though the family were *'fighting this hidden battle at home'* (O1.73) in this regressive phase. The turning point occurred in the future narrative, when Oliver described his hopes to support Leo to *'crack the anxiety'* (O2.136),

which he hoped will *'solve a lot of the problems'* (O2.136), suggesting a progression towards a positive ending.

Figure 22.

Graphical representation of home and parental experiences: Oliver



4.1.5 Michelle's story (Leo's mother)

Figure 23. displays graphical representation of Michelle's perceptions of Leo's school and educational experience and her perceptions of Leo's future. Figure 24. displays graphical representations of Michelle's perceptions of the home and parental experience and her perceptions of the future in relation to this.

4.1.5.1 School and educational experience commentary

Michelle's narrative relating to her perceptions of Leo's school and educational experience is initially stable as there were never any *'major concerns at school'* (M1.10) during this time. A slight progression occurred in Year 4: Michelle described Leo's positive relationship with his teacher.

A regression followed as Michelle went into school frequently *'because things were not great'* (M1.114). This regression continued through Leo's secondary education. Michelle reflected negatively on Leo's transition (*'He hated school'* (M1.35)), and described his increasing reluctance to attend school (*'He didn't want to go, it would be difficult to get him in to school'* (M1.35), *'Year 9 when it became more and more consistent that he didn't want to go to school'* (M1.61)). This regression coincided with an online incident between Leo and his peers, which Michelle described as a possible *'real galvanising moment'* (M1.153) for Leo's school avoidance.

In Year 9, Michelle suggested that *'the whole thing just complete broke'* (M1.84), until Year 10 where Leo started to school refuse, indicating a further regression. Michelle emphasised concern for the future as this is unknown (*'I actually don't know what the future looks like'* (M2.01)). A turning point occurred prompting a progression in the narrative when Michelle hoped that Leo's needs will be fully understood, to enable him the correct support, thus helping him find *'ways to engage better with education'* (M2.06).

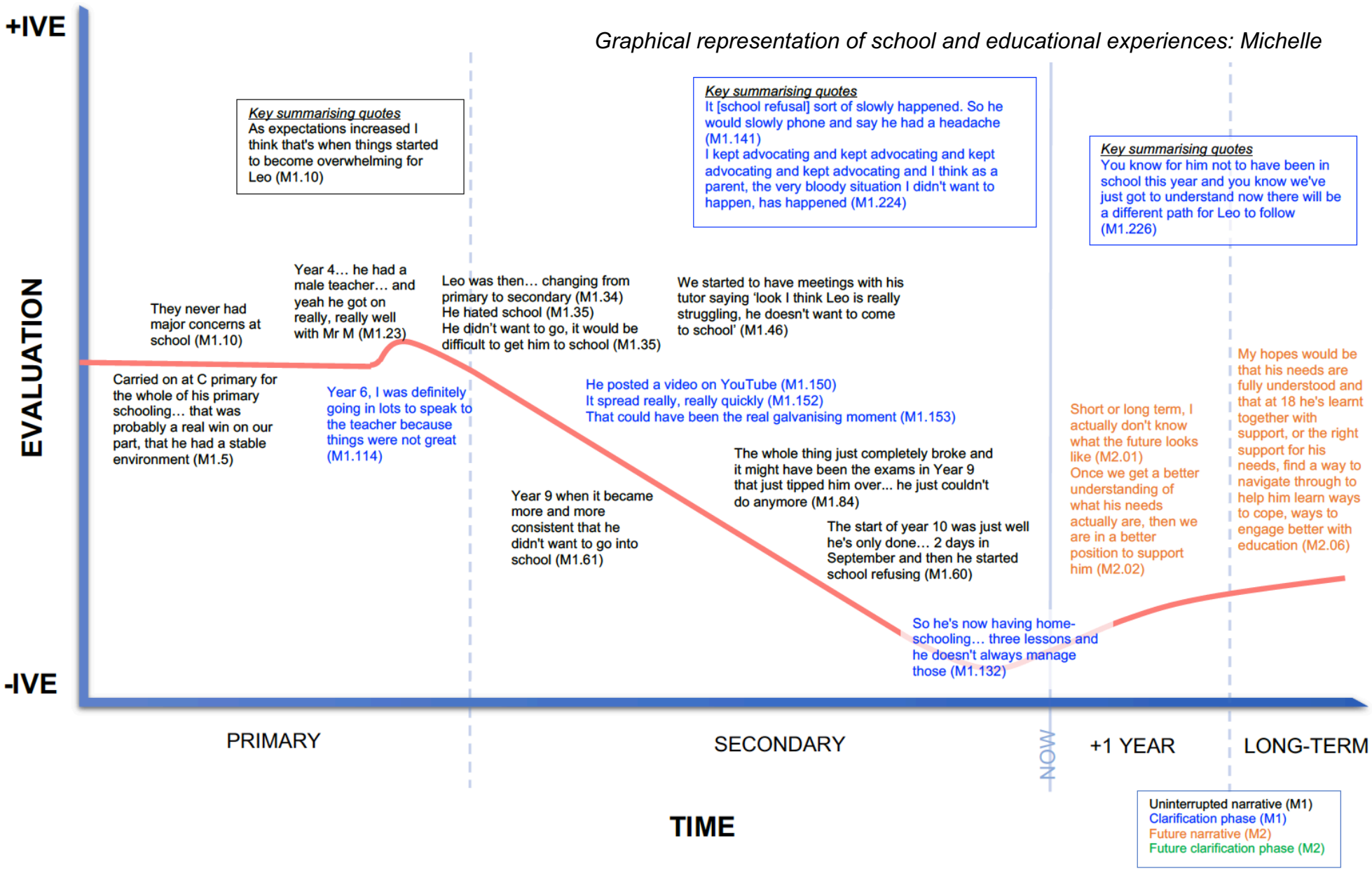
4.1.5.2 Typology reflections

Overall, Michelle's plot line relating to her perceptions of Leo's school and educational experience appeared consistent with a *'romantic comedy'* (Gergen & Gergen, 1986) trajectory; an initial period of stability which is

followed by a regressive phase before a final progression to a potential happy end. The regression coincided with Leo's transition to secondary school, after which a series of challenges occurred throughout Leo's secondary education, such as his lack of desire to attend school (*'He didn't want to go into school'* (M1.61)), exams (*'it might have been the exams in Year 9 that just tipped him over… he just couldn't do anymore'* (M1.84)), leading to his school avoidance in Year 10 ('*he's only done… 2 days in September and then he started school refusing'* (M1.60)). The plot line appeared to progress slightly towards a happier ending, occurring when Michelle appeared to accept the family's future, (*'we've just got to understand now there will be a different path for Leo to follow'* (M2.226)) and her hopes for Leo to re-engage in education, signifying a potential positive ending.

Figure 23.

Graphical representation of school and educational experiences: Michelle



4.1.5.3 Home experience commentary

Michelle's narrative of the home experience started on a regression, as Leo appeared to struggle with the birth of his brother. Michelle was in hospital repeatedly; which Leo may have found *'incredibly difficult'* (M1.19). A regressive tone continued as Leo started *'being quite aggressive'* at home, which Michelle found *'increasingly difficult'* (M1.34). The family then experienced multiple challenges when Leo moved to secondary school, such as Michelle's job change and family illnesses (*'I went back to full-time work'* (M1.107), *'My dad fell really seriously ill'* (M1.108), *'Oliver was also very, very ill'* (M1.109)). Michelle emphasised a regressive tone, describing this time as *'challenging for Leo'* (M1.108).

Michelle described the challenges faced by the family, comparing Leo's behaviours at home and school (*'he wasn't… highlighted as being particularly challenging or of concern to the school… however he's coming home and… I need him to have some support in the school'* (M1.58). The regression continued when Leo's school avoidance worsened, receiving little support from school (*'The challenge would be Oliver would try and get him out the door to school and Leo would be crying and screaming'* (M1.88)). Michelle appeared to be at a loss of what else to do (*'Other than actually pull him out of the house… there was nothing we could do'* (M1.91). As a result, Michelle's own health deteriorated (*'I got ill at that point'* (M1.63), *'I was off for two weeks with stress'* (M1.85)).

The narrative then stabilised as Michelle described her realisation that Leo has *'complex'* (M1.96) needs. The stabilisation continued as Michelle portrayed a negative tone, accepting that the future may look different to what she anticipated (*'I mean what would have been and could have been and should have been is now irrelevant because we hadn't anticipated, nobody had anticipated this. You know… but… this is our reality'* (M2.57)).

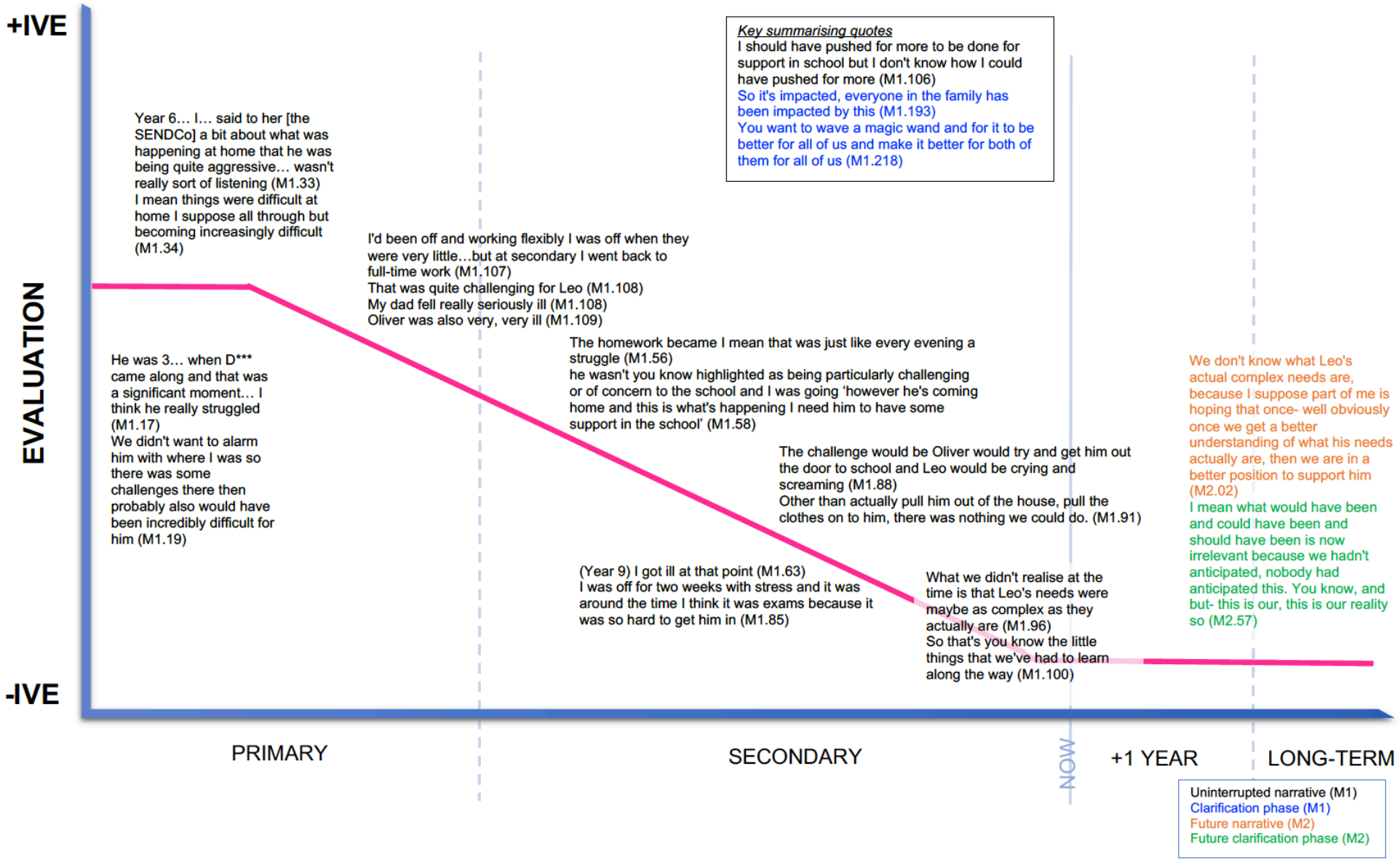
4.1.5.4 Typology reflections

Michelle's plot line appeared to be consistent with a *'tragedy'* (Gergen & Gergen, 1986) trajectory, characterised by a rapid regression following a period of stability or progression. The narrative quickly regressed when Leo

struggled with the birth of his younger brother. The regression continued as the family faced further challenges, as discussed. Stabilisation in the narrative occurred when Michelle described needing to gain further understanding of Leo's needs in order to be *'in a better position to support him'* (M2.02). Michelle indicated her acceptance of the family's reality (*'this is our reality'* (M2.57)), implying an unknown "ending" to the narrative and the possible absence of a bright imagined future.

Figure 24.

Graphical representation of home and parental experiences: Michelle



4.2 Categorical-content analysis: How do the young people understand their experiences of EBSA?

The findings presented in this section followed the categorical-content analysis process outlined by Lieblich et al. (1998). Given the limits here, the analysis was focused on prominent categories that featured within the stories of the young people and the parents; to ensure all participants were as represented as possible in the analysis. Where possible, similar categories were analysed to enable comparisons between the stories. Principal sentences and subcategory tables were created for each participant: an example can be found in appendix Q.

4.2.1 Emma's story

Table 6.

Categorical-content analysis of Emma's 'past' narrative.

Principal sentence	**Category** *Subcategory*
	Aspects of school
Like they are literally bullshit rules and there is no sensible equality in this school because there is literally a patriarchy [hierarchy] in school and it's horrible (E1.89)	*School policies*
There were some teachers that I really liked. Just the teachers who weren't, a 'teacher personality', like they were actually funny and they showed their 'out of school' personality (E1.93)	*Teacher characteristics*
We spoke about migraines and stuff so she was really like sympathetic and she let me put my phone on charge and she would have gotten into a lot of trouble for that so I loved Miss C (E1.32-33)	*Teacher-pupil relationships*
	Young person's experiences
I hated school uniform. It was uncomfortable, I didn't like looking like everyone else did, it was just not me. And then- I don't know, and then I just started to like roll my sleeves up every now and again because obviously you have got a huge ass blazer which is constantly falling down on your arms, but yeah I just decided that I didn't want to look like everyone else (E1.104)	*Young person's behaviour and self-expression at school*

That was scary in the first few months it's just making sure that I woke up at 6:30 and left by 7:30 (E1.113-114)	*Emotions related to school*
The travelling in was horrible. That was also one of the reasons why I stopped attending at one point was like just the stress of literally taking an hour every morning to get there (E1.115)	*School avoidance behaviours*
It was a bit weird like in social like friendship groups. I was always falling out with my friends. But I was like floating around groups of friends like I didn't have a set amount of friends, which still to this day. Like I had a best friend up until literally like 2 months ago, all through year 7, but she just dropped out of my life now (E1.67)	*Friendships*

4.2.1.1 Narrative relating to aspects of school

Emma discussed her views towards her secondary **school's policies**, which she seemed to perceive as unfair by describing them as *'bullshit rules'* (E1.89) with no sense of *'equality'* (E1.89). Emma expanded on this by suggesting inequalities between allowances for staff and pupils: *'she asked me why I had a nose piercing and she had one herself and I was so confused at that'* (E1.107). Emma would have liked a school that was '*halfway*' between her secondary school and the AP she attended, which she suggested would have '*optional*' consequences (E1.110). This is perhaps indicative of Emma wanting to have some responsibility for her own behaviours and to be treated fairly by her teachers.

Emma detailed the **characteristics of teachers**, emphasising interpersonal skills. Emma appeared to like teachers with humanistic approaches who showed their *'out of school' personality'* (E1.93), treating students as individuals as opposed to an *'average student'* (E1.96). Emma suggested this supported her motivation to learn. Contrastingly, she disliked teachers that were *'overly strict'* (E1.108). Emma also described her **relationships with the teachers**, reflecting positively on the empathy shown by one teacher, suggesting a positive relationship. However, by Year 9 Emma perceived teachers to have *'treated me like shit*' (E1.87), which seemed to coincide with a deterioration in Emma's school behaviour and her disengagement from her mainstream secondary school (*'And I was like "I'm not taking that", and that's*

when I started like talking back' (E1.87)). Emma highlighted teachers as a critical aspect of her school experience: *'I think I can make friends anywhere I go but the way that the people… treat me in such situations is more impactful'* (E1.123). Emma emphasised wanting *'equal'* relationships with her teachers.

4.2.1.2 Narrative relating to the young person's experiences

Emma reflected on her **behaviour at secondary school** and how this deteriorated overtime. Initially, she described some low-level behaviours, such as talking. However, by Year 9, she described frequently getting into trouble, attributing this to going against school uniform policy by expressing herself through her appearance. Emma stated that she was *'really set on the fact that I want to look how I want to look'* (E1.41-42). Self-expression and individuality seemed important: Emma suggested that she *'didn't want to look like everyone else'* (E1.104).

Emma briefly described **emotions** she experienced in relation to school. She recalled upsetting key moments in her primary school, such as her last day, and described the lead-up to SATs as *'stressful'* (E1.7). Her transition to secondary school was *'scary'* (E1.14), due to disliking her peers and the time it took her to travel (*'that was scary in the first few months it's just making sure that I woke up at 6:30 and left by 7:30'* (E1.113-114)). Emma attributed her **school avoidance behaviours** to the *'stress'* of travelling into school**:** *'The travelling in was horrible. That was also one of the reasons why I stopped attending at one point was like just the stress of literally taking an hour every morning to get there'* (E1.115), indicating an emotional basis to her school avoidance. Emma also blamed *'really bad migraines'* (E1.20) for her low attendance. Emma's attendance appeared to have lowered gradually at her secondary setting.

Emma talked extensively about her difficulty with **friendships**. Despite describing herself as *'popular'* (E1.15) when she first arrived at mainstream secondary, by Year 9, Emma had *'no friends'* (E1.40), implying a loss of friendships overtime. This lack of friendships is reinforced in phrases such as *'I'm just not close to any of them anymore'* (E1.12-13). Appearing to find it difficult to maintain friendships, Emma reflected on *'floating around groups'*

and not having a *'set amount of friends'* at primary school, *'which is still to this day'* (E1.67). On her move to the AP in Year 10, Emma recalled being *'really upset because I just had no friends'* (E1.79) and having few social interactions (*'I had no friends, like literally no friends. I spoke to nobody'* (E1.81)), suggesting she felt socially isolated.

4.2.2 Leo's story

Table 7.

Categorical-content analysis of Leo's 'past' narrative.

Principal sentence	**Category** *Subcategory*
	Aspects of school
But the hours were really, really stressful and so was the homework. The homework was the biggest thing. That was stressful for me (L1.48)	*School systems and consequences*
Like I couldn't be bothered, so they couldn't be bothered and then I was rude to them I would just get more angry and angry and angrier, and they would just give me harsher punishments (L1.63)	*Teacher characteristics and attitudes*
She had it in for me pretty much… and that just ruined everything. Like I wouldn't go in on the days if I had those lessons because I really couldn't be bothered to deal with her (L1.88-89)	*Teacher-pupil relationships*
	Young person's experiences
I just kept getting in a cycle like that, where my mindset was like 'I can't be bothered any more, I can't be bothered with you shouting at me, I can't be bothered with the work' (L1.45)	*Young person's attitude towards learning and behaviour at school*
I got more stressed like going on in the years because it was getting closer to my GCSEs, I'd get so much more tired and exhausted at the end of the day (L1.8)	*Emotions related to school*
And then that's where it was like all bad because my mindset changed dramatically. And that's probably the main thing, why I didn't want to go to school because my mindset changed. Like drastically, it was horrendous (L1.46)	*School avoidance behaviours*
It was just a cycle, so it would be terrible time at home, terrible time at school, and it was because of school home would be terrible and so it's just a cycle (L1.37)	*Cyclical relationship between school and home*

4.2.2.1 Narrative relating to aspects of school

Leo appeared to perceive the **school systems and consequences** in place as *'strict'* (L1.5) and *'stupid'* (L1.55), when describing the behaviour consequences and the amount of homework. He suggested the behavioural consequences to have impacted his emotions and his behaviour (*'I didn't like it, it was like horrendous. It made me more stressed. So I did get angry… then I'd backchat the teacher'* (L1.63)). Leo also described feeling *'pressure'* (L1.5) about his homework and would *'panic'* (L1.5) if he had not done it. When asked, Leo perceived the homework to have had a significant impact upon him: *'the homework was the biggest thing. That was stressful for me'* (L1.48), implying how aspects of the learning environment influenced his school experience.

Leo discussed his views on the **teachers' characteristics and their attitudes** towards him in secondary school. Leo appeared to describe a reciprocal relationship between his and the teachers' attitudes: *'I couldn't be bothered, so they couldn't be bothered'* (L1.63), implying a sense of disengagement from his school. Leo seemed to suggest that the teachers did not have the capacity or desire to manage his behaviours within the classroom and so would instead implement behavioural consequences (*'I'd just get loads of detentions, get sent to isolation and stuff like that. Because teachers couldn't deal with me'* (L1.43)).

Leo described having mixed **relationships with the teachers**. Where Leo enjoyed his lesson, he described positive, reciprocal relationships with teachers (*'Basically the subjects that I liked and I concentrated in those teachers were really nice to me because I was nice to them pretty much'* (L1.94)). Negative relationships with the teachers appeared to impact on Leo's school attendance: *'she had it in for me pretty much… and that just ruined everything. Like I wouldn't go in on the days if I had those lessons because I really couldn't be bothered to deal with her'* (L1.88-89).

4.2.2.2 Narrative relating to the young person's experiences

Leo described his **attitude towards his learning and his behaviour in school** to change overtime. Leo's behaviour appeared to deteriorate

throughout secondary, resulting in him receiving more behaviour sanctions: '*Teachers would shout at me, I'd get loads of detentions, I wouldn't focus on the work so I would get told off'* (L1.38). Leo related his behaviours to his lack of motivation towards learning, indicated through the repetition of the phrase 'I couldn't be bothered' throughout his narrative. Leo saw this negative attitude as leading to his **school avoidance behaviours**, describing a dramatic change in his mindset as being *'the main thing'* (L1.46) for his non-attendance. Leo appeared to have a deterministic view of his secondary experience: *'I don't think the school expected like the greatest things from me. And then obviously I proved them right'* (L1.53), suggesting he felt pre-judged by his setting.

Leo talked extensively about the **emotions he experienced in relation to his school experience**. He repeatedly used the word 'stressed' when describing his workload and his impending GCSE exams (*'I got more stressed like going on in the years because it was getting closer to my GCSEs*' (L1.8)), suggesting a relationship between his thoughts about exams and his emotions. As Leo's stress levels increased, he appeared to experience more anger (*'It made me more stressed. So I did get angry'* (L1.63)) and became disengaged from his work (*'I was just getting more angry and couldn't be bothered with anything'* (L1.75)). Leo's **school avoidance behaviours** appeared to coincide with his increasing 'stress' levels and the tiredness he experienced as a result of the long school days; *'I'd get so much more tired and exhausted… it was just way too early… and then I'd get shouted at. And I couldn't be bothered to do that so I just wouldn't go'* (L1.8). Additionally, Leo suggested that his school avoidance behaviours were attributable to a cyclical relationship between home and school, indicating a recursive pattern in his attendance behaviours ('*It was just a cycle, so it would be terrible time at home, terrible time at school, and it was because of school, home would be terrible'* (L1.37)). Leo indicated family arguments to be a reason for his non-attendance (*'I would have a good day at school, I'd come home and have… a big argument, then I wouldn't go to school the next day'* (L1.37)).

4.3 Categorical-content analysis: How do the parents of the young people understand their experiences of their child's EBSA?

4.3.1 Victoria's story (Emma's mother)

Table 8.

Categorical-content analysis of Victoria's 'past' narrative.

Principal sentence	**Category** *Subcategory*
	Home and parent experience
And then she started becoming quite secretive and the whole of her personality started to change (V1.89)	*Young person's behaviour at home*
But then the clues are there you see, and because we didn't know anything about stuff, that you know we didn't know until much later what it all meant (V1.9)	*Parent learning about and understanding the young person's needs*
And then of course what happens is who is to blame? Blame the parent, it must be parents' fault so there must be some issue in parenting (V1.202)	*Feeling alone, desperate and blamed as a parent*
	School and external aspects
And she said he spoke to them like human beings rather than pack animals which went a long way (V1.259)	*Teacher characteristics*
but there were all the safety nets there for her, but yet she was falling to the next safety net, to the next safety net (V1.279)	*Involvement from outside agencies*
	Young person's characteristics and experiences
I think friendships groups wise, she struggled a lot in friendship groups… (V1.23)	*Friendships and peer relationships*
And she is very capable and she masks, masks, masks, masks, which I didn't understand what it meant until now. But I think the masking slowly started to slip and the cracks were beginning to get bigger and bigger and bigger (V1.106)	*Anxiety and masking*

So she turned up for two days in September and never went back (V1.129)	*School avoidance behaviours*

4.3.1.1 Narrative relating to the home and parent experience

Victoria reflected on Emma's **behaviour at home**, which appeared to deteriorate overtime (*'the whole of her personality started to change'* (V1.89)). Victoria described Emma's self-harming behaviours recognising these as a sign that Emma was *'struggling'* (V1.95). Emma also acted violently towards Victoria (*'at that point she got really, really violent and started throwing things at me to hurt me'* (V1.239)) and became defiant (*'She started becoming quite defiant and wouldn't come in at certain times'* (V1.119)). A relationship between home and school is implied, as Emma's deteriorating behaviour appeared to correspond with her school avoidance.

Victoria's journey to **understand Emma's needs** seemed a confusing process. This is portrayed in the repetitive language Victoria uses, such as *'I couldn't understand'* (V1.30), *'I didn't realise'* (V1.144) and *'I couldn't quite get my head around'* (V1.274), and her hindsight: *'we didn't know until much later what it all meant'* (V1.9). Victoria emphasised the confusion felt by herself and the professionals supporting Emma when stating *'none of us knew, teachers, us parents… didn't know of Emma's difficulties until they became difficulties'* (V1.210), implying the complexity of Emma's needs.

Victoria appeared to **feel alone in her experiences** of Emma's EBSA, using language such as, *'there was nobody'* (V1.159) and *'nobody else has faced this'* (V1.193). When asked, Victoria also described feeling *'desperation'* and *'fear'* (V1.206). She implied feelings of frustration as a parent, when suggesting that she had **felt blamed** for Emma's EBSA and school behaviours (*'And then of course what happens is who is to blame? Blame the parent, it must be parents' fault'* (V1.202)).

4.3.1.2 Narrative relating to school and external aspects

Victoria implicated **teachers' characteristics** to be important in Emma's educational experience. Victoria appeared to perceive humanistic approaches, such as *'nurturing and compassionate'* teachers, to be suited to

Emma, reflecting on Emma's positive perceptions of being spoken to *'like human beings rather than pack animals'* (V1.259), thus implying the importance of relationships on Emma's experiences. Victoria appeared to relate Emma's negative perceptions of teachers to her sensory needs and social understanding. Emma was described to have difficulty understanding mannerisms and coping with the volume of certain teachers (*'He was kind of really loud. Now for somebody who is quite audio sensitive… she couldn't cope with that at all'* (V1.113-114), implying an interaction between within-child needs and the learning environment.

Victoria reflected on the **involvement of outside agencies** throughout Emma's education. Victoria suggested that the lack of joint approaches between the services negatively impacted Emma's education (*'but there were all the safety nets there for her, but yet she was falling to the next safety net… but… all the way through… we were having multi-agency meetings'* (V1.279)). Towards the end of Victoria's narrative, the value of service involvement is implied. There appeared to be a shift in Victoria's perspective, as a professional became involved who had an understanding of Emma's diagnoses, which Victoria perceived to be the key in supporting Emma moving forward (*'I think it's through school through services with everybody the key pin is somebody like L***, that understands autism and understands female presentation of autism and can get services'* (V1.289)).

4.3.1.3 Narrative relating to the young person's characteristics and experiences

Victoria spoke extensively about how Emma *'always struggled'* (V1.62) with **friendships and peer relationships**. Despite making *'lots of different friends'* (V1.80) in Year 7, Emma's friendships quickly deteriorated, attributing this to arguments over social media (*'Her friendship groups then started getting quite difficult… she would be having massive arguments with people over social media'* (V1.88)). Victoria perceived friendships to be important for Emma's future (*'this is the big crux of it all at the moment because she hasn't got a friendship group'* (V1.256)), worrying that a lack of friendships will negatively impact Emma's mental health (*'I can just see her emotional health going down'* (V1.256)).

Victoria appeared to attribute some of Emma's school avoidance behaviours to Emma's **anxiety** and physical needs. Victoria perceived Emma to have become skilled in **masking** her anxiety (*'she masks so well'* (V1.76)). However, this mask began to slip in secondary, which appeared to coincide with Victoria's description of Emma's negative behaviours at school and her EBSA (*'I think the masking slowly started to slip and the cracks were beginning to get bigger and bigger and bigger'* (V1.106)). Victoria described increases in Emma's anxiety overtime, as Emma had more migraines, which resulted in *'more time off'*, leading to *'that kind of breakdown of everything'* (V1.107), implying a gradual increase in Emma's EBSA.

Victoria implied having difficult experiences identifying Emma's school avoidance behaviours. Distinguishing Emma's migraines from her EBSA appeared challenging: *'I think a good 70% she probably had a migraine and I think the other 30% she just didn't want to go in'* (V1.82). Victoria reflected on the *'clues'* (V1.125) Emma gave before she completely avoided school (*'she… said 'I don't want to go to school'* (V1.125)), which is perhaps indicative of Emma not being heard by Victoria. A pattern of school avoidance set in, identified in hindsight by Victoria; *'in some respects it's easier to stay off then because then you start getting a bit apathetic'* (V1.87).

4.3.2 Oliver's story (Leo's father)

Table 9.

Categorical-content analysis of Oliver's 'past' narrative.

Principal sentence	**Category** *Subcategory*
	Home and parent experience
He was coming home and… starting to sort of meltdown and saying he wasn't going into school ever again and you know we just started to notice a real difference in his behaviour at home (O1.27)	*Young person's behaviours that challenge at home*
I think by that stage the family were- as a family we were at breaking point (O1.43)	*Impact on the family*

It was our first child, as a family, it's a whole learning process, you know, they don't come with an instruction book (O1.5)	*Parent learning about and understanding the young person's needs and behaviours*
But I think that's when the kind of the whole battle starts from there on once you have a diagnosis, then you have to try and do your best for your child to try and get them everything they need… And it's just been a battle ever since really. (O1.45)	*Battle to be heard or understood*
	Young person's characteristics and experiences
It got to the point where we saw his mental health suffering so much that we had a conversation with school and said 'look' you know, they even agreed his mental health's more important at the moment than putting him through that stress to get to school (O1.42)	*Young person's emotional and mental wellbeing*
But I think the older he got, the more likely he was to actually express his anger at school. He'd never be physical, you know, it would never be physical anger, but he would answer back (O1.69)	*Young person's behaviour at school*
It was always a real chore every morning to, we'd spend probably an hour just trying to get him out of bed and to try and persuade him that today would be OK (O1.38)	*School avoidance behaviours*

4.3.2.1 Narrative relating to the home and parent experience

Oliver largely focussed on the **behaviours that Leo presents with at home** that have seemingly changed overtime (*'We just started to notice a real difference in his behaviour at home'* (O1.27)). These behaviours became threatening and violent towards family members as Leo got older (*'Yesterday he was literally hitting Michelle and threatening her with a knife'* (O1.78)), which have **impacted the family** significantly (*'as a family we were at breaking point'* (O1.43)). Oliver reflected very little on school within his narrative, implying that the difficult behaviours at home have taken precedence over Leo's educational experiences.

Oliver described the ***'learning process'*** (O1.5) **he has undertaken to understand Leo's needs and behavioural presentation**. Oliver appeared to have acquired some understanding through Leo's ASD diagnosis, implied through his descriptions of how he understands the behaviours of young

people with ASD (*'a lot of children with autism have that very kind of tunnel vision'* (O1.57)). Confusion and the need for further understanding is implied through Oliver's use of rhetorical questions (*'is there a subject that he particularly doesn't like?'* (O1.20)) and the uncertainty he expressed in relation to Leo's anxiety (*'I don't necessarily know whether he's subliminally picked that up from me or he's inherited it from me possibly. I really don't know with that at all'* (O1.134)).

Oliver appeared to reflect on the difficulties the parents faced to be **heard and understood by others**. The *'hidden battle'* (O1.73) Oliver described, a reoccurring theme throughout the narrative, seemed apparent in varying ways; the length of time it took to get Leo a diagnosis of ASD (*'I mean it took us I think about 4 years to actually get a physical diagnosis of ASD'* (O1.44)) and the ongoing battle to get Leo the correct provision (*'you… do your best for your child to try and get them everything they need… And it's just been a battle ever since really'* (O1.45)). Oliver repeatedly referenced the *'struggle'* to get others to understand their parental experiences due to the differences in Leo's behavioural presentation between environments, people and settings, implying feelings of frustration and not being heard as a parent.

4.3.2.2 Narrative relating to the young person's characteristics and experiences

Leo's **emotional and mental wellbeing** featured significantly. Oliver implied a relationship between Leo's anxiety and school (*'I think probably around Year 5, erm that he was starting to show quite a bit of anxiety around going out or wanting to go to school''* (O1.16)). In secondary school, Oliver alluded to a gradual deterioration in Leo's mental health, which took priority over Leo's education (*'it got to the point where we saw his mental health suffering so much… they [school] even agreed his mental health's more important at the moment than putting him through that stress to get to school'* (O1.42)). This deterioration coincided with Leo's significant reduction in attendance (*'I think probably you can count on one hand the amount of weeks he's been this year'* (O1.41)). Oliver related other emotions, to Leo's school attendance, considering a particular incident between Leo and his peers to be *'a turning point where he [Leo] feared school'* (O1.115). Therefore, Oliver appeared to

perceive mental health and external influences to relate to Leo's reluctance to attend school.

Oliver described a gradual increase in Leo's **school avoidance behaviours** and highlighted the efforts to get Leo in (*'It was always a real chore every morning… to get him out of bed and to try and persuade him that today would be OK. And eventually, he would go'* (O1.38)). Although Oliver alluded to Leo's attendance behaviours being as a result of an overheard conversation (*'I remember Leo kind of overhearing that… and literally I think the next day he'd just gone 'I'm not going to school''* (O1.39)), he appeared to attribute this more to the deterioration in Leo's emotional and mental wellbeing (*'I think it has been a gradual thing and it's just slowly kind of- his anxiety has slowly got worse, his aggression has slowly got worse'* (O1.127)).

Oliver described the changes he noticed in **Leo's behaviour at secondary school**. Leo's anger appeared to increase (*'I think the older he got, the more likely he was to actually express his anger at school'* (O1.69)), impacting on his behaviour at school; Leo would *'start to answer back'* (O1.68) and be rude towards his teachers. Leo's rudeness and negativity towards teachers is also attributed to his ASD. Oliver suggested that Leo did not '*have that kind of handbrake to realise that that's not socially acceptable'* (O1.70). Oliver implied Leo's emotions and behaviours to contribute to his negative attitude towards his education.

4.3.3 Michelle's story (Leo's mother)

Table 10.

Categorical-content analysis of Michelle's 'past' narrative.

Principal sentence	**Category** *Subcategory*
	Home and parent experience
He'd come home and he would completely explode and the explosions became more as he sort of went through schooling they become more and more and bigger and bigger (M1.51)	*Young person's behaviours that challenge at home*

Everyone in the family has been impacted by this (M1.193)	*Impact on the family*
So that's you know the little things that we've had to learn along the way (M1.100)	*Parent learning about and understanding the young person's needs and behaviours*
I think I kept advocating and kept advocating and kept advocating and kept advocating and I think as a parent, the very bloody situation I didn't want to happen, has happened (M1.224)	*Fighting for support*
	Aspects of school
It could have been that 99.9% of the teachers had done really well but the 1% was enough for Leo to feel that he wasn't valued I suppose (M1.184)	*Teacher characteristics, teaching styles and teacher-pupil relationships*
I don't know what they were thinking but they just piled them, I mean the homework was horrendous (M1.54)	*School systems*
	Young person's characteristics and experiences
I don't think in my mind I ever thought he would school refuse to the degree he has, so I think things just became too overwhelming for him (M1.89)	*Anxiety, mental health and overwhelming emotions*
He started to get into more and more detentions and isolation and trouble for speaking out or not waiting his turn or not handing his homework in or whatever and say that would have then also caused anxiety to increase as the expectation increased of him (M1.171)	*Young person's behaviours that challenge at school*
Then I think it just, completely the whole thing just completely broke and it might have been the exams in Year 9 that just tipped him over... he just couldn't do anymore (M1.84)	*School avoidance behaviours*

4.3.3.1 Narrative relating to the home and parent experience

In her narrative, Michelle described Leo's **challenging behaviours** at home. She attributed Leo's aggression to changes within the family, such as illnesses of close family members and changes in Michelle's job role (*'that was quite challenging for Leo I think, more challenging than I would have realised and actually that's when the aggression really started'* (M1.108)). Leo's behaviours worsened in secondary school: Michelle described an increase in Leo's

'explosions' when he came home, which became more frequent and '*bigger*' (M1.51). Michelle implied a significant impact of Leo's behaviours on the family, particularly the behaviour and emotional wellbeing of his younger brother (*'he's becoming more disengaged at school… He's emotionally struggling with it'* (M1.211)) and the parents mental health (*'I'm on anxiety meds and Oliver is'* (M1.202)).

Throughout Michelle's narrative, she discussed her ongoing **learning process** to understanding Leo's needs (*'I think again, we're learning more about his challenges'* (M1.73)). Supporting her understanding, Michelle repeatedly mentioned an author she had read and framed Leo's behaviours around the author's conclusions (*'Which is also Ross Green, all kids do well if they can and if they can't, there's a reason, so he doesn't have the skills to do better, which is then how we need to support him'* (M1.87)). Michelle suggested further understanding of Leo's behaviours is needed to better support him (*'I think that's the way in to help and support Leo is to get what's behind what's causing that'* (M1.240)), implying this lack has led to inappropriate provision.

Michelle described her attempts to **fight for support** for Leo in school. Michelle used repetitive language, suggestive of some frustration in her attempts to advocate for Leo: *'I fought and fought and fought'* (M1.58), *'I kept advocating and kept advocating and kept advocating and kept advocating'* (M1.224). At the end of Michelle's narrative, a resigned tone is noted. Michelle suggested it was *'too little, too late'* (M1.222) when school eventually listened to her and appeared to feel frustration for the outcomes: *'as a parent, the very bloody situation I didn't want to happen, has happened'* (M1.224).

4.3.3.2 Narrative relating to aspects of school

Michelle appeared to attribute Leo's disengagement from education to the **characteristics of teachers** and Leo's **relationships** with them. For example, Michelle perceived Leo to disengage from history due to his poor relationship with the teacher (*'I think Leo and him just didn't see eye to eye'* (M1.168)). Unsuitable teaching styles were also linked to Leo's disengagement, highlighted in Michelle's description of teachers use of consequences to motivate Leo (*'he doesn't work well with the stick'* (M1.173)). Teachers are

implied to have had a significant influence on Leo's school belonging, as Michelle stated *'It could have been that 99.9% of the teachers had done really well but the 1% was enough for Leo to feel that he wasn't valued I suppose'* (M1.184).

For Michelle the **school systems** impacted upon Leo's EBSA. The extent of homework Leo received in Year 7 as *'horrendous'* (M1.54), Michelle placing blame for this on the external pressures faced by the teachers (*'they want to do well in the league tables'* (M1.55)), leading to both teachers and pupils being pushed *'very hard'* (M1.55). When asked about key moments in Leo's education, Michelle attributed Leo's EBSA to the amount of homework (*'I think homework probably was another one'* (M1.223)). Michelle implies the school had inadequate provision to support pupils who have difficulty attending school (*'they put consequences in place, whereas I think they need support in place'* (M1.236)), and emphasised the need for preventative measures (*'This is something that within the system has to change because the school refusal will continue to happen'* (M1.221)).

4.3.3.3 Narrative relating to the young person's characteristics and experiences

Leo's **overwhelming emotions, anxiety and mental health** were implied to have significantly influenced his education. Michelle repeatedly referenced Leo being *'overwhelmed'* and *'stressed'*, perceiving these to have influenced his EBSA (*'I think things just became too overwhelming for him'* (M1.89); *'I'd be saying to Oliver… 'he can't go into school… he's too stressed'* (M1.63)). Michelle also described Leo's anxiety to have been impacted by his learning environment (*'everybody's bumping into him and he's anxious about that'* (M1.142)) and his medication (*'he was very anxious about taking medication'* (M1.143)). Michelle perceived Leo's anxiety to have wider implications for his peer relationships (*'his anxiety prevents him from doing a lot of things I think'* (M1.187)) and his mental health, which seemed to take precedence for Michelle (*'His mental health to me was more important'* (M1.88).

For Michelle, Leo's **behaviours at school become more challenging** as he progressed through education. His attitude towards teachers was perceived

as the main challenge at secondary school (*'maybe Leo's response back is the bit that would have got him into trouble'* (M1.178)), which Michelle attributed to Leo's ASD (*'that's where you start to think but actually a kid without ASD would know that you wouldn't say that back to the teacher'* (M1,175)). She implied an interaction between Leo's challenging behaviours, the school consequences, increased expectations at school and Leo's anxiety (*'he started to get… more detentions and isolation and trouble for speaking out… and so that would have then also caused anxiety to increase as the expectation increased of him'* (M1.171)).

Michelle described the gradual increase of **school avoidance behaviours** within her narrative. Michelle discussed Leo *'disliking school'*, as it became *'difficult'* (M1.35) to get him in. Despite speaking with school (*'we started to have meetings with his tutor saying 'look I think Leo is really struggling, he doesn't want to come to school''* (M1.46)), Leo's school avoidance behaviours increased significantly (*'The start of year 10 was just well he's only done 2 days... then he started school refusing'* (M1.60)). Michelle attributed Leo's EBSA to numerous aspects of Leo's education, as discussed. Michelle also highlighted exam pressures (*'the whole thing just completely broke and it might have been the exams in… Year 9 that just tipped him over... he just couldn't do anymore'* (M1.84)) as significant. Michelle perceived a particular negative social experience to be a *'real galvanising moment'* (M1.153), which when asked, she highlighted as critical in Leo's educational experience (*'I think that incident was critical'* (M1.231)).

4.4 Categorical-content analysis: What are the young person's perceptions of their future?

4.4.1 Emma's story

Table 11.

Categorical-content analysis of Emma's 'future' narrative.

Principal sentence	**Category** *Subcategory*
	Looking to the future
I don't know yet, I'll find out. Maybe, maybe not, we'll just see, we'll see what the environment is like and stuff. I don't know yet (E2.23)	*Uncertainty about the future*
I would have finished my last GCSEs. I would be on my summer break, which would have started last week. And then living my best life (E2.14)	*Academic achievements and further education*
Most likely. Most likely all of them because it's just similar environment (E2.26)	*Barriers to achieving future goals*
	Support needed to reach future goals
Oh there's loads of support people that I can speak to. And I have to meet them today, they are like autism workers and I don't even know, like personal people that you speak to and a team of coaches and stuff that I'm probably going to speak to like twice (laughs). (E2.18)	*Support and provision in an education setting*
I have quite a few people yeah. My boyfriend who I live off, pretty much. And yeah probably my mum. (E2.27)	*Support networks around the young person*
Organisation, which I'm already quite good at anyway, in my opinion. Getting my days, in the upcoming week, getting those sorted and planned and like timings and stuff, I'm alright with that organization for that (E2.07)	*Young person's strengths and skills*

4.4.1.1 Narrative relating to looking to the future

At the time of Emma's 'future' interview, she was about to transition into a new education setting. When asked clarification questions about her future, she appeared to express **uncertainty**, using repeated phrases such as *'I really*

don't know' (E2.02), *'I don't know, we will see'* (E2.23), which is perhaps reflective of this impending transition.

Emma expressed hopes to have **academic achievements and be in education** in the future. She suggested that she would like to sit her GCSEs (*'I would have finished my last GCSEs [in a year's time]'* (E2.14)), enabling her to engage in the further education that she described, such as A levels and university (*'HW: is university something you imagine for yourself?', 'possibly yeah. I don't know yet'* (E2.05)). When asked about the possible barriers to her future, Emma suggested that these may be similar to her previous educational experiences, because her new setting will be a *'similar environment'* (E2.26).

4.4.1.2 Narrative relating to the support needed to reach future goals

When asked, Emma discussed the **support and provisions** that may be in place to support her success in her future education, implying feelings on uncertainty about their effectiveness. Although Emma described there being *'support people'* (E2.18) available to her, she appeared pessimistic about the support they could offer. This seemed based on Emma's previous experiences of support workers, whom she described as *'inconsistent'* (E2.19). Emma expressed that she would like to have a relationship with them, if they are *'nice people'* that *'quickly visit'* her (E2.20).

Emma described the **support networks** she has that may be important to her future. Her existing relationships appeared supportive (*'I have quite a few people yeah. My boyfriend who I live off, pretty much. And yeah probably my mum'* (E2.27)) and she hoped that new and existing friendships could also help her (*'I should have made at least a friend at X College… And then I know quite a few of the A level students, so I should have some friends just from being around the building'* (E2.17)). When prompted, Emma reflected on the support of her **own strengths**, which she suggested are being organised (*'which I'm already quite good at anyway'* (E2.07)), being *'self-disciplined'* (E2.09) which will enable her to engage in her academic work, and being independent (*'I'll sort myself out'* (E2.27)).

4.4.2 Leo's story

Table 12.

Categorical-content analysis of Leo's 'future' narrative.

Principal sentence	**Category** *Subcategory*
	Hopes for the future
Be back in school full-time (L2.7)	*Re-engaging in education*
And hopefully I've passed my GCSEs with like above C's, maybe B's in everything. Well preferably A's but I don't think that's going to happen, so B's is what I'm going for (L2.4)	*Academic achievements and aspirations*
Or even at home because the home affects school as well, like if I get angry with my parents I just say I am not going to school to annoy them. So yeah better home relationships (L2.8)	*Home and peer relationships*
	Support needed to reach future goals
Yeah go back to school and revise for exams because I used to do barely any revision. I do alright but I need to revise more, get my head down at school, actually go to school (L2.6)	*Attending school and working hard*
Less arguing. Maybe understand each other a bit better and the challenges we're facing (L2.18)	*Better relationships at home*
	Barriers to achieving future goals
When it's exams I have a lot so my stress levels go through the roof and when I am in exams, because I get stressed I forget things. So like all the stuff I have learnt I will just forget it in the middle of the exam. I think that will hinder my GCSE scores (L2.20)	*Academic achievements*
Arguments with my family just in general because that really affects me going to school and my work (L2.19)	*Home relationships*

4.4.2.1 Narrative relating to hopes for the future

Leo discussed his hopes to **re-engage in education** in the future. Leo expressed that he would like to *'be back in school full-time'* (L2.7), recognising

that this is necessary for him to complete his GCSEs and go onto further education (*'Preferably uni, doing some sort of maybe engineering or video editing'* (L2.2)). Leo appeared realistic about his future **academic achievements**, having lowered his expectations of his likely grades (*'preferably As but I don't think that's going to happen, so Bs is what I'm going for'* (L2.4)), which may be indicative of his recognition of the impact of his missed education.

Leo's negative relationships at home appeared to be an important influence on his education. Leo hoped that his **relationship with his parents and younger brother** will improve in the future, preventing them from being a barrier to his school engagement (*'because the home affects school… if I get angry with my parents, I just say I am not going to school to annoy them. So yeah, better home relationships'* (L2.8)). Leo also suggested that he would like to have *'a better relationship with my friends in the year above'* (L2.29), implying these also have an influence on his education experience.

4.4.2.2 Narrative relating to the support needed to reach future goals

When asked about the support he may need to achieve his hopes for the future, Leo described how his own actions could support him by **attending school and working hard**. Leo suggested that he needed *'to revise more, get my head down at school, actually go to school'* (L2.6), in order to reach his goals. Leo perceived his personal strengths to be supportive to him passing his GCSE's, describing himself as *'quite determined'* (L2.28). This implies Leo has an internal locus of control when considering his future.

Leo reinforced the need for **better relationships at home**, reflecting a similar narrative to his hopes for the future. He stated that he would like *'less arguing'* and for his family to *'understand each other a bit better and the challenges we're facing'* (L2.18). Leo suggested his parents and friends would support his achievements *('My parents. My friends could probably help me through it a bit'* (L2.23)), implying the importance of relationships to Leo and the significant impact of the systems around him on his education.

4.4.2.3 Narrative relating to barriers to achieving future goals

The importance and impact of **relationships** is again implied in Leo's brief description of the potential barriers he faces to achieving his future goals. When directly asked about possible barriers, Leo suggested, *'arguments with my family… because that really affects me going to school and my work'* (L2.19). Since returning to school, Leo indicated having difficulties with reintegrating with his peers (*'so I've only got- I wouldn't say they are my friends, there's two people who are alright, like they're nice in the year I am in now, year 10'* (L2.9), *'And the rest of them, I just hate them… they were making fun of me last week'* (L2.10)). Given the implied importance of relationships for Leo, his peer relationships may also act as a barrier to his future goals, should these continue negatively and impact his re-integration into school.

Leo also perceived there to be possible barriers to his **academic achievements**, as during exams his *'stress levels go through the roof'*, meaning he can *'forget things'* he has learnt (L2.20). This implies Leo recognised the impact of his own emotions on his academic progress.

4.5 Categorical-content analysis: What are the parent's perceptions of the young person's future?

4.5.1 Victoria's story (Emma's mother)

Table 13.

Categorical-content analysis of Victoria's 'future' narrative.

Principal sentence	**Category** *Subcategory*
	Hopes for the future
I'm kind of hoping that she might get a really good, I don't know what they call them, coaches? tutors? I don't know something like that, that is able to sort of help her (V2.57)	*Young person getting the right support*
I think I am hoping that with the support- understanding and support I think that is the key thing. Understanding of her specifics and also a diagnosis and also so you know what is on offer for her (V2.05)	*Understanding the young person's needs*

I think probably as a parent I have probably got more skilled in being able to advocate on behalf of Emma (V2.08)	*Parent as an advocate for the young person*
	Concerns for the future
I think we might have to look at putting some measures in place to alleviate her anxiety because- and that's another thing with Emma, you don't see the anxiety you know (V2.60)	*Young person's anxiety, triggers and masking behaviours*
They [teachers] probably could perceive certain behaviours as disruptive behaviours because they won't do something as opposed to they can't do something (V2.44-45)	*Not having an understanding of the young person's needs*

4.5.1.1 Narrative relating to hopes for the future

Victoria described her hopes that Emma will **receive the right support** in her future education, achieved through *'understanding'* Emma's specific needs and diagnoses (V2.05). Victoria described her plans to support Emma's education at home, by setting up a *'tutor'* (V2.31-33) and hoped that in setting, Emma will have access to another tutor who will help her (*'I'm kind of hoping that she might get a really good… tutor… that is able to sort of help her* (V2.57)). Victoria also hopes Emma will be able to support herself by recognising when she is *'having difficulties'* (V2.20). Therefore, Victoria implies the need for support and collaboration within the systems, including Emma, to help her get the right support for her future.

Victoria felt further diagnoses would enable more specificity around Emma's needs, meaning others could **understand the *'complex'* needs** Victoria perceives Emma to have (*'knowing that Emma is very complex and for her to succeed long-term in education we need to be quite specific to find out what exactly it is. Because then that will help her A level tutors'* (V2.03)). Victoria implied her hopes for a systemic approach and understanding to support Emma's future, emphasising the importance of whole staff training; *'I think the whole of the staff need to understand. It's no good training the SENCo because the SENCo gets it'* (V2.25).

Victoria described it as her *'job now to be able to* ***advocate on behalf of Emma****'* (V2.46) and support staff's understanding, by keeping open lines of

communication with Emma's new setting (*'I think really its being very open with college'* (V2.63)), and building a *'rapport'* (V2.39) with the staff in order to share her knowledge. With this, it is implied that Victoria perceives her role as powerful in supporting Emma's future.

4.5.1.2 Narrative relating to concerns for the future

Victoria primarily focussed on her concerns regarding Emma's **anxiety and masking behaviours**. Referencing previous experiences, Victoria appeared concerned that Emma *'will mask'* (V2.56) her anxiety, which she perceives would not be noticed by others (*'that's another thing with Emma, you don't see the anxiety'* (V2.60)). Victoria worried that due to Emma's appearance of being able to *'cope'* (V2.10), her new educational setting will place greater *'expectations'* on her (V2.10). Expectations and the *'forthcoming mocks'* (V2.56) were anticipated as possible **triggers** for Emma's anxiety, suggesting the need for preventative measures to help *'alleviate her anxiety'* (V2.60).

Victoria's recent experiences of Emma's new educational setting appeared negative, fuelling concerns for Emma's future. Seeming to have felt unheard by the setting staff, Victoria appeared doubtful that the setting would **understand Emma's needs**, as she felt as though she was *'making up excuses'* for Emma (V2.15). Victoria reflected further concerns that Emma's behaviours would be misinterpreted by staff (*'They [teachers] probably could perceive certain behaviours as disruptive behaviours because they won't do something as opposed to they can't do something'* (V2.44-45)), implying that without understanding from staff, Emma's potential future may be impacted.

4.5.2 Oliver's story (Leo's father)

Table 14.

Categorical-content analysis of Oliver's 'future' narrative.

Principal sentence	**Category** *Subcategory*
	Hopes for the future
I mean ultimately our ultimate goal is for him to self-regulate. Ultimately. If the medication helps him do that and helps him be a little bit more rational then great. (O2.20)	*Young person's self-regulation and managing own mental health*
So I think the only hope we've got of integrating him back into school is to go back into a familiar environment (O2.37)	*Young person re-engaging in education*
I don't want him necessarily to have a huge circle of friends, but I'd like him to have three or four close friends that he's happy to go out and play sports with (O2.123)	*Peers and social experiences*
	Current challenges
I mean certainly from an anxiety point of view, the way his anxiety is at the moment you know he can't even leave the house without us and even with us he sometimes doesn't want to leave the house (O2.5)	*Young person's emotional wellbeing, mental health and self-sufficiency*
I think it's got to the point where without that social interaction he's- he's- I don't think he is feeling himself, I think he knows he's isolated himself to a point where he's kind of lost his identity a little bit (O2.23)	*Peers, social isolation and social anxiety*
He's definitely intelligent enough but he's not put the amount of work in to be able to achieve (O2.99)	*Education, motivation and falling behind*

4.5.2.1 Narrative relating to hopes for the future

Oliver hoped for Leo to be able to **self-regulate and manage his own mental health** in the future, implying this would have wider, positive implications. Oliver indicated having a medicalised view, repeatedly reinforcing the importance of Leo taking medication to support his mental health and emotional regulation (*'our ultimate goal is for him to self-regulate… If the medication helps him do that… then great'* (O2.20)). Oliver also indicated a

systemic understanding of Leo's anxiety, hoping Leo's self-regulation would boost his *'self-esteem'* (O2.28), and enable him to have more social experiences, which Oliver suggested would do Leo's *'self-confidence the world of good'* (O2.60). Such experiences were hoped to help Leo to rebuild the identity Oliver perceived him to have lost (*'I'm hoping when he kind of starts to reintegrate with his friends, he'll become Leo again'* (O2.24)). Oliver reflected further on his hopes for Leo's **relationships with peers**, hoping these would provide Leo with more **social experiences** (*'I'd like him to have three or four close friends that he's happy to go out and play sports with'* (O2.123)).

Oliver hoped that Leo will **re-engage in education**, implying this to be key for Leo's future. For this to be successful, Oliver highlighted Leo's need for consistency, as he emphasised the importance of Leo returning to a *'familiar environment'* (O2.37) and seemed pessimistic about Leo's successful reintegration otherwise (*'I think we'd be flogging a dead horse'* (O2.39)). Oliver had high hopes for Leo's further education, suggesting that Leo's academic strengths would support him to go to university (*'where I would like to see him is at university. Because I think he's bright enough certainly to do a degree of some sort'* (O2.1)).

4.5.2.2 Narrative relating to current challenges

Oliver perceived the current challenges faced by Leo and the family as potential barriers to Leo's future. Oliver's predominant concerns centred around Leo's **emotional wellbeing, his mental health and his self-sufficiency**. Oliver re-emphasised the importance of Leo's medication to manage his anxiety, however indicated that Leo avoids learning how to manage his anxiety (*'It's an avoidance tactic with Leo to confront his anxiety, he'd rather kind of not have to confront that'* (O2.130)), implying that Leo may not be emotionally ready to self-manage his mental health. Oliver reinforced this in his reflections on Leo's maturity levels, perceived as a barrier to Leo's socialisation and independence (*'I think when it comes to maturity I think he's probably, I would say on average a good 2 to 3 years behind his peers with social skills and being able to be sort of self-sufficient'* (O2.3)). Oliver reflected sadness regarding the limitations of Leo's mental health, suggesting it to be

'heart-breaking because you know how bright he is and how amazing he can be but his body and mind are just not allowing him to be that person' (O2.153).

Oliver suggested Leo to be **socially isolated from his peers** (*'I think he knows he's isolated himself to a point where he's kind of lost his identity a little bit'* (O2.23)), resulting in Leo's peer relationships and social experiences to have *'petered off'* (O2.35). Oliver seemed to relate Leo's reluctance to leave the house to his anxiety, using storied examples and descriptions of Leo as *'becoming reclusive'* (O2.139). Oliver appeared to imply Leo to have social anxiety, perceiving this as a current challenge for Leo to overcome.

Oliver implicated Leo's **motivation to engage in his learning** and home tutoring to be a *'big, big issue at the moment'* (O2.92). Despite Leo's academic strengths, Oliver was concerned of the negative impacts of Leo's disengagement on his future academic achievements (*'He's definitely intelligent enough but he's not put the amount of work in to be able to achieve'* (O2.99)). This implied an immediate need to support Leo to re-engage in education.

4.5.3 Michelle's story (Leo's mother)

Table 15.

Categorical-content analysis of Michelle's 'future' narrative.

Principal sentence	**Category** *Subcategory*
	Looking to the future
It makes me feel sad (starts tearing up). Because, short or long term, I actually don't know what the future looks like (M2.01)	*Parent having concerns and feeling uncertain about the future*
I think he would want to be in some form of education. He would want to be in a position where he could socialise. Erm, learn in the subject where he has the greatest interest, so you know (M2.34)	*Young person re-engaging in education*
Once we get a better understanding of what his needs actually are, then we are in a better position to support him (M2.02)	*Young person getting the right support*

If he has teachers who understand him erm and he has the provision and the right environment to learn in that he would be studying something (M2.07)	*Young person being in the right environment*
	Current challenges
It's so tricky because I think, because we don't know what Leo's actual complex needs are (M2.02)	*Not having an understanding of the young person's needs*
I mean his intelligence level is there, but it gets wiped out by this huge anxiety and ability to follow instructions because he gets so anxious (M2.26)	*Young person struggling to manage anxiety, aggression and own behaviours*

4.5.3.1 Narrative relating to looking to the future

Overall, Michelle expressed **concern and uncertainty** about Leo's future, reinforced through her repetition of the word *'unknown'*. Michelle also used rhetorical questions in her narrative: *'how does that then impact his GCSE's? What can hap-? you know where can-? what is the next steps if he doesn't pass his GCSE's?'* (M2.08-09), re-emphasising her uncertainty and indicating a sense of confusion, perhaps reflective of the depth of the challenges the family were facing.

Despite her uncertainty, Michelle described her hopes for Leo to **re-engage in education**. She perceived subjects of Leo's choosing and a sociable environment (*'I think he would want to be in some form of education. He would want to be in a position where he could socialise. Erm, learn in the subject where he has the greatest interest'* (M2.34)) to be important in his engagement. For a successful re-integration, Michelle implied the need for person-centred approaches, emphasising the need for a gradual, slow transition that is child-led (*'It would have to be a very slow reintegration'* (M2.53); *'I think it has to be led by Leo because otherwise I think it can backfire so badly'* (M2.58)).

Michelle highlighted the need for the **right support** and the **right environment to support Leo's future**. Michelle emphasised the importance of understanding Leo's needs to enable the right provisional support (*'Once*

we get a better understanding of what his needs actually are, then we are in a better position to support him' (M2.02)). Michelle's repeated phrases such as *'**right environment**'* and *'engaging environment'*, highlighted the significance of the learning environment for Leo's future education. Michelle reflected on environmental aspects that she hoped will be beneficial for Leo: supportive professionals who can help Leo self-regulate (*'somebody who is able… to say 'hey lets go and get something from reception' because they can see he's… feeling anxious or just needs a break'* (M2.32)) and a *'calm'* and *'safe'* (M2.17) environment that enables Leo to understand his own sensory needs, with the help of external professional involvement to *'help inform what support is then required'* (M2.31).

4.5.3.2 Narrative relating to current challenges

Aligning with her 'past' narrative, Michelle repeatedly emphasised **not having an understanding of Leo's needs**. Michelle repeated phrases such as *'we don't know what Leo's actual complex needs are'* (M2.02), *'we don't understand fully'* ((M2.02), '*we don't truly understand what his challenges are'* (M2.30), implying feelings of confusion and worry for the future. Michelle perceived this as a potential barrier to supporting Leo's future, suggesting that they cannot choose a provision for him (*'It's like how can we choose a school when we don't really understand his needs?'* (M2.23)).

Michelle stated the need to support Leo's mental health, focussing extensively on his current challenges in respect of how to **manage his anxiety, aggression and behaviours**. She identified a relationship between anxiety and behaviours, viewing anxiety as a barrier to Leo's behavioural self-control (*'He becomes so anxious, he doesn't see it, kind of like a cloud forms and so he doesn't see when he's being rude'* (M2.44)). Michelle appeared to draw on a cognitive-behavioural perspective to support her understanding of Leo's anxiety, suggesting that Leo's aggression is his *'fight'* response, and his refusal to follow instructions the *'flight'* response (M2.38).

Chapter 5: Discussion

5.0 Introduction to Chapter 5

This chapter reflects on participant narratives and relates the findings to existing literature and theoretical perspectives. Questions are considered individually, interpretive comparisons are drawn between the stories of the young people and the parents, and then consideration is given to relevant theoretical commentaries. A review of the use of narrative methods is then presented, followed by implications for the Educational Psychology profession and future research.

Table 16.

For readers reference. A table showing the family relationships between participants.

Family	**A**		**B**		
Pseudonym	'Emma'	'Victoria'	'Leo'	'Michelle'	'Oliver'
Parent or young person	Young person	Parent	Young person	Parent	Parent

5.1 Research question 1: The types of stories told by young people and their parents and how they are told

Key interpretations within the narratives in relation to research questions 1a and 1b are considered here. The young people and parent narratives are discussed separately, and comparisons are drawn thereafter in section 5.1.6.

1a) What are the types of stories told by the young people exhibiting EBSA in relation to their experiences and how are these stories told?

1b) What are the types of stories told by the parents of young people exhibiting EBSA in relation to how they understand the young person's experiences and how are these stories told?

5.1.1 The types of stories told by the young people

The characteristics of the narratives told by the young people appeared consistent with *'romantic comedy'* (Gergen & Gergen, 1986). Stability in primary school and Year 7 was followed by regressive phases as a result of multiple challenges faced by the pupils in secondary school. The pupil's narratives implied a potential positive ending when considering the future: Emma and Leo both hoped to re-engage in education and achieve their academic aspirations. Interpretations of the narrative plot lines in relation to existing literature are discussed below.

5.1.2 School and educational experience: Pupil voice

5.1.2.1 Point of regression: Attendance, emotional wellbeing and behaviour deterioration

The young people's EBSA appeared as a gradual process over the course of their secondary education (Gulliford & Miller, 2015; Thambirajah et al., 2008), starting with a key point of regression; a moment in the narrative signalling a movement away from the valued goal. In each case, this occurred in Year 8 at ages 12-13, where the young people's attendance started to decline; as found in research suggesting non-attendance behaviours as likely to occur at key transition ages: 5-6 years and 11-13 years (Pellegrini, 2007). This regression appeared to occur at the point of a deterioration in emotional wellbeing or an increase in the young people's behaviours that challenge within school. Whereas much literature focusses on anxiety as an influence on EBSA (Ek & Eriksson, 2013; Finning et al., 2019) the emotions expressed by Leo in the current study were described as anger and stress, and Emma described feeling scared when she transitioned to secondary, suggesting a range of emotional influences on attendance.

Leo's regression continued further, seen in his description of his deteriorating motivation. Emma discussed increasingly getting into trouble, prompting a regressive phase in her narrative which could be suggestive of a decrease in motivation at school. Decreased motivation and school engagement is said to relate to significant declines in pupil attendance (Lloyd-Jones et al., 2010). The

causes of disengagement are perceived as complex and multifactorial, involving a combination of developmental, home and school-based factors (Lloyd-Jones et al., 2010). Absenteeism and 'school refusal behaviour', referring to all forms of school absence, is suggested to be predicted by externalising behaviours in school (Ingul et al., 2012). Key indicators of 'school refusal behaviour' include aggression, noncompliance and defiance (Kearney, 2006).

The lowest regression point in each narrative occurred when non-attendance peaked in Year 10, in line with literature that has indicated a higher probability for 'school refusal' in adolescents aged 11-17 years (Maric et al., 2012).

5.1.2.2 Point of progression: Looking to the future

Both young people predicted a progressive trajectory for their future. Emma had plans to re-engage in her education in an alternative setting and continue sitting her GCSEs. Leo reflected on the need to re-engage in education so he could sit his GCSEs. Future aspirations are viewed as a motivator to attend school (Shilvock, 2010), suggesting the need to support the academic aspirations of pupils with EBSA. Leo also expressed hopes for better family and peer relationships to support his academic achievements and positive ending, suggesting the significance of Leo's microsystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) on his EBSA and possible future.

5.1.3 The types of stories told by the parents

The parent narratives appeared to have two distinct categories: school and educational experience; and home and parental experience. The 'school' narratives were consistent with a *'romantic saga'* and a *'romantic comedy'* (Gergen & Gergen, 1986). The narratives largely reflected a stable plot line through primary school, followed by a sharp regression shortly after the young person's transition to secondary school. Single or multiple phases of challenge were faced, with an implied positive or stable ending for the three narrators.

The characteristics of the 'home' narratives were reflective of *'romantic comedy'* trajectories (Gergen & Gergen, 1986). A single regressive phase occurred for two of the three parents during primary school, where the young

person's behaviour became more challenging at home. Regressive phases occurred throughout secondary school in all narratives, following repeated challenges for the parents at home. A positive ending is predicted in two of the narratives, however for Michelle, the regressive period stabilises into the future.

5.1.4 School and educational experience: Parent voice

5.1.4.1 Point of regression: Anxiety, behaviours that challenge and social experiences

For Victoria and Oliver, the point of regression in their narratives began after the young people's transition to secondary school. Transition and moving schools may raise difficult emotions (Baker & Bishop, 2015), and can negatively affect the emotional and psychological adjustment of pupils (Rice et al., 2011). Transitions can provoke feelings of unsafety in the complexity of a secondary environment (Ingul et al., 2019) and are an associated risk for the onset of attendance difficulties (Finning et al., 2019).

Victoria and Oliver each describe the anxiety they observed in their children. Victoria attributed Emma's migraines to her anxiety and indicated a pattern of non-attendance to have set in, resulting in a decline in Emma's attendance, echoing suggestions of how patterns of non-attendance establish themselves in EBSA (Thambirajah et al., 2008). Victoria perceived Emma to mask her anxiety until secondary, where both the 'masking' and Emma's behaviour in school appeared to 'slip'. Internalising problems, such as anxiety, are often experienced on a cognitive and emotional level within the individual (McIntosh et al., 2014). Resultingly, they can be more difficult to detect, and therefore left unsupported (McIntosh et al., 2014), which could explain the continued regression in Victoria's narrative.

Leo's anxiety as described by Oliver appeared to precede a deterioration in his mental health, to the point where he refused to attend school entirely in Year 10. Pupils with mental health disorders have shown an increase in SNA in comparison to those without a diagnosis (Lawrence et al., 2019). Internalising mental health conditions are suggested as significant factors in

the severity of SNA (Skedgell & Kearney, 2016), which may account for the parallel decline in Leo's mental health and attendance, as interpreted within Oliver's narrative.

The regression in Oliver's narrative continued when further challenges were faced. Both Michelle and Oliver described a negative peer incident as a significant influence on Leo's EBSA. Social exclusion and peer conflict have been identified by parents to contribute to 'school refusal' (Havik et al., 2014), as well as a fear of bullying (Beckles, 2014; How, 2015).

The regression in Michelle's narrative started at the end of primary school and continued into secondary school, where the gradual process of non-attendance appeared to set in. Michelle indicated that Leo appeared unmotivated to attend school. As explored in section 5.1.2.1, a decrease in pupil motivation can result in a significant decline in attendance (Lloyd-Jones et al., 2010) and is noted to be a maintaining factor in EBSA (West Sussex EPS, 2014). Michelle also perceived exams as a further challenge for Leo, corresponding with research suggesting parents to perceive their children to feel pressure to achieve (Havik et al., 2014).

5.1.4.2 Point of progression: Re-engaging in education and academic achievements

All three parent narratives ended with a predicted positive ending for their children's futures in education. The progression in Victoria's and Michelle's stories reflected their hopes for their children to get the right support in their educational environment, based on a better understanding of the young people's needs. The importance of assessing needs appropriately has been noted (Browne, 2018), to ensure provision is directly supportive to the pupil, providing them with the best opportunities to succeed. Michelle appeared uncertain of Leo's academic future, given her lack of understanding of his perceived complex needs.

All three parents' progressions were indicative of their hopes for their child's re-engagement in education. Victoria and Oliver discussed their children's academic skills supporting them into further education. Whilst the high aspirations are reflective of the parent's perceptions of their child's academic

capabilities, Oliver's expectations for Leo's academic achievements appeared moderated by Leo's missed education and his reluctance to put pressure on Leo to achieve. Gutman & Akerman (2008) suggested various mitigating factors for high or low parental aspirations, such as academic abilities and socio-economic status, however the current findings imply the inclusion of further factors such as school attendance and parental pressure on their children.

5.1.5 Home and parental experience: Parent voice

5.1.5.1 Point of regression: Aggressive behaviours, self-harming and anxiety

A key point of regression appeared to be changes in the young people's behaviours at home. All three parents discussed physically violent behaviours exhibited by the young people and the difficulties experienced when managing such behaviours. For Victoria, these aggressive behaviours followed Emma's self-harming behaviours, which increased along with the violence at home. Victoria attributed Emma's violence towards her to an increase in Emma's anxiety. Pupils and parents have discussed self-harm behaviours as part of their experience of EBSA (Clissold, 2018; Gregory & Purcell, 2014). A systemic review of the literature strengthens this finding, having found associations between school absenteeism and self-harm and suicidal ideation, although this evidence derived from a small number of studies (Epstein et al., 2019). Emma's anxiety could be suggested to have been a risk factor to her self-harming behaviours (Epstein et al., 2019). Further exploration is needed into the associations between anxiety, self-harm and EBSA.

Leo's parents discussed his aggressive behaviours in the home. For Michelle, Leo's aggression appeared to be triggered by changes in the home environment. However, Oliver discussed his perceptions of Leo's social anxiety prior to the physical behaviours observed at home. The parents experienced further challenges in their regressive phases as Leo was not identified as being of concern in school, meaning they received little support. Oliver described feeling as though they were fighting a *'hidden battle'* at home,

with the family reaching *'breaking point'* as his regression stabilised. Michelle faced further challenge in her regression when her own mental health deteriorated. Browne (2018) identified the pressure felt by parents of children with EBSA to manage the emotional and mental health needs of their children within the home, noting a lack of support from school and external agencies. The current study corroborates this further, indicating an impact of this pressure on parental mental health.

5.1.5.2 Point of progression and stability: Looking to the future

A turning point in Oliver's narrative came as he looked to the future, indicative of a potential progression. Oliver described his hopes for Leo to understand and control his anxiety, emphasising this as a solution to a lot of the problems experienced within the family. Despite initial positivity, this was replaced with a sense of concern about Leo's independence skills. Oliver's perceptions of the future appeared to adopt a 'within child' perspective, placing emphasis on Leo's personal development, with less reflection on the influences of the wider systems. Contrastingly, Victoria placed emphasis on her role in supporting her daughter's future: Victoria hoped to skill Emma in becoming an advocate for herself and hoped to advocate for Emma herself. Victoria's initial progression came as she began to listen to Emma, which seemed to influence her perceptions of her role moving forward. Effective advocacy for the needs of vulnerable groups is crucial to supporting positive outcomes (Pona & Hounsell, 2012). Parent advocacy can be encouraged through creating positive home-school links (EEF, 2018), thus improving academic performance, teacher-parent relationships and increasing parental involvement (Grayson, 2013).

Michelle's perceptions of the future ended with a stabilised plot line, reflective of her uncertainty over the future. The turning point occurred with Michelle's realisation of the complexity of Leo's needs and her acceptance of the family's future looking different to how they might have imagined, which implies a possible absence of a bright imagined future. This point has been noted elsewhere in research that has indicated parents fear for the future, questioning both the young person's abilities and the family as a system's abilities to cope and manage as a unit (Browne, 2018).

5.1.6 Comparisons between the stories told by the young people and their parents

5.1.6.1 School and educational experiences

As noted, the stories told by the young people and their parents appeared to follow similar trajectories, reflecting the gradual process of EBSA (Gulliford & Miller, 2015). The regressive phases in the young people's stories contrasted minimally to that of the parents. Young people with SNA are perceived as likely to experience emotional difficulties (Havik et al., 2015). Here, a nuanced difference in discourse regarding emotional aspects of EBSA between parents and young people is evident. The young people described their fear, 'anger' and 'stress' related to school, contrasting to parents using 'anxiety' to describe their children's emotions in this regard. Although much research references anxiety as a contributory factor (Finning et al., 2019), a more complex account of the young people's emotional life was interpreted here, indicative of the varied emotions that may contribute to EBSA. Despite these discrepancies, the regressions within the participants narratives imply the need for early identification and intervention to support the difficult emotional experiences of young people exhibiting EBSA (Ek & Eriksson, 2013), to prevent further deteriorations in their mental health and attendance, as interpreted within the current narratives.

Further similarities across the narratives were noted in the regression phases: young people and parents identified deteriorations in the young person's behaviour and their lack of motivation to attend school. How's (2015) study found pupils suggested that the school systems were not aligned to their motivations to learn, contributing to their SNA. This implies a need for early exploration of the intrinsic academic motivations of young people, to identify supportive strategies and potentially prevent deteriorations in behaviour and attendance (Ingul et al., 2012).

Despite the challenges experienced by the participants, hopes for the future across all narratives contained re-engagement in education and academic aspirations. This does not accord with previous research into the future aspirations of vulnerable groups that has implied prior educational

experiences have a negative influence on pupil's perceptions and aspirations (Daniels & Cole, 2010; Mainwaring & Hallam, 2010). Little research has explored the aspirations of young people who experience EBSA, despite aspiration's potential to contribute to the reintegration and future of pupils (Hart, 2013). Positive psychology (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000) could support advocacy for the use of solution-focussed approaches (Redpath & Harker, 1999) to elicit the aspirations and futures of pupils who experience EBSA, building on their strengths to support their re-engagement and academic achievements. Such approaches have been effective in supporting vulnerable groups (Bond et al., 2013; Kim & Franklin, 2009), by empowering pupils and offering achievable and realistic goals (Corcoran, 2006).

5.1.6.2 Home and parental experiences

Experiences at home were included in all parent narratives as opposed to only a brief reference by one of the young people. The parents 'home' narratives followed a similar trajectory to the school narratives, indicative of parallel experiences between the systems and the complex interplay between bio-psycho-social-cultural factors that are perceived to impact school attendance difficulties (Tonge & Silverman, 2019). This highlights the need to consider the home and parental experience in EBSA, dynamically and holistically (Lyon & Cotler, 2009), to illuminate further areas of support for the pupil and their family.

5.2 Research question 2: Understanding the experiences of EBSA

This section considers the key interpretations within the narratives in relation to research questions 2a and 2b. The findings I interpreted from the narratives of the young people and their parents are presented under the categories and subcategories and are reflected upon in relation to current literature and theoretical perspectives.

2a) How do the young people understand their experiences of EBSA?

2b) How do the parents of the young people understand their experiences of their child's EBSA?

5.2.1 Aspects of the school and broader learning environment

5.2.1.1 School systems and policies

The parents and young people discussed the influence of the school systems and policies on the young person's EBSA. Emma perceived the school policies as unfair and unequal between staff and students, implying feelings of inequality and a possible lack of 'school connectedness'. Defined as feeling accepted, respected and included by aspects of the socio-ecological context of the school environment (Allen et al., 2018), 'school connectedness' is perceived as a significant factor in school attendance difficulties (Kearney, 2008b) and is particularly important in adolescence, where disengagement from school and peers is more likely (O'Brennan & Furlong, 2010). Kearney (2008b) indicated strict disciplinary policies, which pupils may deem as unfair, and poor experiences of feeling valued and respected, can negatively impact pupil's school connectedness.

Leo and Michelle understood pressures within the school systems to impact Leo's EBSA. Michelle suggested external school pressures to have impacted on the academic expectations placed on the pupils. An ecosystemic perspective (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) would argue that, despite being a distal system, the external pressures faced by the school within the exosystem, such as school performance tables referenced by Michelle, interacted with the school microsystem to impact Leo's EBSA. Pressure created by performative systems can lead to stress in teachers (Perryman et al., 2011), which when experienced to a significant degree, has been associated with negative academic and behavioural outcomes for students (Herman et al., 2018; Wentzel, 2010). Leo's stress at the strict school systems resonates with this. Conflicting policies that seek to raise standards while promoting inclusion and supporting SEMH needs (DfE, 2016) can pose a challenge to schools, leading to variations in practice due to individual interpretation (Burton et al., 2009). A lack of resources and understanding of how to support SEMH needs (Paliokosta & Blandford, 2010), adds to this challenge.

5.2.1.2 Teacher characteristics and teacher-pupil relationships

Teacher-related factors were consistently noted across both participant groups, understood to be part of the experiences of EBSA. The young people attributed their disengagement from school to the characteristics of and relationships with teachers. Parental narratives emphasised this, with Michelle and Victoria suggesting humanistic, relational approaches to be important to their children's academic engagement; a point similarly noted in the pupil's narratives.

Positive teacher-pupil relationships, reflecting encouragement, friendliness, fairness and mutual respect, are said to have strong associations with school belonging (Allen et al., 2018; Shochet et al., 2011). Here, Self-Determination Theory (SDT; Ryan & Deci, 2000) can be applied. SDT denotes the importance of relatedness as a basic psychological need, which can support pupil motivation. In this context, it is suggested that the poor relationships with teachers meant the young people's psychological need of relatedness was not met in school, thus negatively impacting their motivation to attend.

Victoria highlighted an interaction between Emma's sensory needs and social understanding and the teacher characteristics. Positive teacher characteristics have been related to academic achievement and cognitive and affective outcomes for pupils (Kyriakides et al., 2009). Characteristics such as being 'strict', 'controlling' and 'unfair' have been referenced by pupils with EBSA experiences (Beckles, 2014; How, 2015; Wilson, 2012). Contrastingly, good communicative and relational skills are suggested to be preferable to older pupils (Bakx et al., 2015). These findings indicate the importance of teacher characteristics on pupil engagement and a further need to explore the interaction between such characteristics and SEN.

5.2.1.3 Lack of collaboration between external agencies

Victoria expressed frustration regarding the lack of collaboration between external agencies supporting Emma. Staff members and other professionals have been suggested by parents to lack understanding of 'school refusal' (Browne, 2018; Havik et al., 2014). Holistic team approaches including students, school staff, parents and health professionals have been strongly

encouraged when supporting pupils with EBSA (Brand & O'Conner, 2004; Finning et al., 2018; Gren-Landell et al., 2015; Kearney & Graczyk, 2014). The knowledge and skills of professionals and a collaborative, consistent approach between these (Baker & Bishop, 2015; Havik et al., 2015), is supportive of increased attendance levels (Nuttall & Woods, 2013). Despite this, Victoria's experiences imply more needs to be done to ensure the efficacy of multi-agency approaches when supporting EBSA.

5.2.2 Home and parental experiences

5.2.2.1 Young people's behaviours at home

Violent and physical behaviours exhibited by the young people were parallel experiences across all parent narratives. Maynard et al., (2015) noted a possible explanation for aggressive behaviours in young people with EBSA being a result of the tension and conflict created by the ineffective efforts of parents attempting to get their children into school. However, the parent's narratives suggested aggressive behaviours to have occurred as a result of various triggers, aside from school attendance, and for some were indicative of a deterioration in the young person's mental wellbeing (see section 5.1.5.1).

Parents are viewed to play a key role in supporting their child's mental wellbeing (O'Reilly et al., 2018). Despite not collecting parental views, which may have uncovered contrasting perspectives, O'Reilly et al., (2018) suggested parents may need external support to develop the necessary skills to support their children's mental health effectively. This is supported in research exploring parental views, which has found parents can experience lower 'parental self-competence' when their child's mental health symptoms become increasingly severe (Preyde et al., 2015). The findings here represent a disparity between the expectations placed on parents and their capacity to support complex mental health issues, resonating with themes in the current study, where parents expressed difficulty understanding their child's needs and frustration at the lack of support they received (discussed in further detail in section 5.2.2.3 and 5.2.2.4).

5.2.2.2 Impact of EBSA on the family

All three parents mentioned the impact of their child's EBSA on the family to varying degrees, appearing more prominent for Michelle and Oliver. Both narrated the far-reaching impact of Leo's EBSA on the parents and whole family, which was felt in their own mental health and changes to employment. Oliver described such experiences to have led the family to breaking point.

EBSA is suggested to impact on family functioning, such as parents being required to leave their job, leading to financial and relational pressures (Sheldon & Epstein, 2002). Further disruptions to functioning can be seen in the mental health needs of siblings, who are more likely to have internalised behaviour disorders and psychopathy if their siblings also experience mental health needs (Barnett & Hunter, 2012). This is reflected in Michelle's narrative, where she attributes a deterioration in the behavioural and emotional wellbeing of Leo's sibling to Leo's EBSA.

Parental mental health has been associated with school refusal (Carless et al., 2015). Parents have been found to experience episodes of anxiety and depression similar to that of their children, which they attributed as a response to their child's EBSA (Browne, 2018). Similar findings have suggested parents of young people with depression to report feelings of worry, anxiety and higher levels of stress (Stapley et al., 2016). Furthermore, Bahali et al., (2011) suggested parents of children with EBSA to have higher levels of anxiety and depression, implying a genetic predisposition to mental health issues as a risk factor for EBSA.

Systems theory (Dallos & Draper, 2005) places family relationships, communication and interaction at the centre of identity development and experience. 'Circularities', defined as repetitive patterns of interaction (Dallos & Draper, 2005), within family relationships become embedded in family functioning, thus establishing homeostasis. In this regard, systems theory would suggest that the EBSA behaviours exhibited by Leo threatened the homeostasis of the family, forcing changes within the system (such as the parental role and family relationships), thus forming a new system maintained by negative family interactions.

5.2.2.3 Understanding the young person's needs

The process of understanding the needs of their child appeared to be confusing and ongoing for all of the parents. Retrospection allowed Victoria to identify 'clues' to help her make sense of Emma's EBSA, whereas Oliver made reference to how he understood Leo's behaviours through his autism diagnosis. This suggests that the application of a medical model can be supportive to parental understanding of EBSA. Harden (2005) supports this notion. Exploring the experiences of 25 parents of young people with mental health needs, Harden (2005) identified a sense of empowerment in parents who actively educated themselves on their children's mental health diagnoses, enabling them to advocate for their children.

Michelle reflected on the need to understand Leo's SENs to positively impact the provision offered to him. Government policy (SEND CoP; DfE, 2015) highlights the importance of schools understanding and responding to the SEN of pupils. The deficit model often adopted when understanding SEN strengthens the perception that teachers lack in specialist SEN knowledge to support pupils with complex needs (Hartley, 2010), which may result in lower levels of teacher self-efficacy; a factor perceived as important to develop inclusive practice (Ekins et al., 2016). Secondary school staff have reported feeling insufficiently prepared to work with pupils with SEMH needs after their teacher training (Axup & Gersch, 2008). Therefore, developing teacher self-efficacy and providing training to staff could encourage a more inclusive understanding of SEN and support the implementation of appropriate provision for EBSA.

5.2.2.4 Feeling blamed, unheard and unsupported

The parents reflected negatively on the support they received for their child's EBSA. Victoria described feeling alone in her experiences and blamed by professionals, similar to the parents in Gregory & Purcell's study (2014). Furthermore, Oliver described a battle to be heard and understood by professionals regarding the experiences at home. This battle appeared similar to the fight Michelle described to get Leo the right provision and support.

As discussed in section 5.2.1.3, emphasis has been placed on the need for collaboration and shared responsibility between school and parents to support school attendance (Finning et al., 2018; Gren-Landell et al., 2015; Kearney & Graczyk, 2014). Research has advocated for schools and service providers to consider reciprocal relationships with families as ethical practice, both valuing and empowering families (Ferreira et al., 2013); a notion reflected in legislative guidance (DfE, 2015; *The Children and Families Act,* 2014). Parental involvement builds a partnership between school and home, supporting agency within each and encouraging shared responsibility (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014). Special attention should be paid to the potential power imbalances within partnership approaches, giving due consideration to the structural and psychological barriers to effective home-school relationships (Christenson, 2004). A key feature of this, according to data here, is for the parent voice to be positioned carefully, and heard.

5.2.3 The young person's individual characteristics and experiences

5.2.3.1 The role of emotional and mental wellbeing

All participants understood emotional and mental wellbeing as part of their EBSA experiences, as discussed in section 5.1.6.1. All participants attributed the young people's emotional experiences to aspects of the school environment. Parents discussed wider implications of 'anxiety' on the young person's mental health, social experiences and their behavioural presentation in school.

Anxiety and mental health needs are noted in previous EBSA literature (Baker & Bishop, 2015; Browne, 2018; Clissold, 2018; Gregory & Purcell, 2014; How, 2015; Orme-Stapleton, 2017; Shilvock, 2010), therefore the current findings add weight to a widely accepted finding within pupil and parent voice literature. Here, the findings highlight the relationship between mental health experiences and environmental factors. Indeed, an individual's social environment has been suggested to influence and be influenced by poor mental health in adolescents (Lamblin et al., 2017). This emphasises the need for early intervention and psychoeducation of SEMH needs for pupils, parents

and school settings, to work preventatively on a systemic level, supporting adolescent emotional and mental wellbeing.

Fear of being bullied has also been found to contribute to EBSA (Baker & Bishop, 2015; Beckles, 2014; Havik et al., 2014; How, 2015), reflected in Oliver's narrative where he suggested Leo to fear school due to possible repercussions from a negative social experience. Positive social relationships are perceived important to emotional wellbeing, self-perceptions and academic performance of adolescents (Wentzel, 2017). Contrastingly, rejection from peer groups can negatively impact these areas and pupil motivation (Wentzel, 2017). Here, it is suggested that the psychological impact of Leo's negative social experience as understood by Oliver, invoked feelings of rejection for Leo, influencing his experiences of relatedness in school in accordance with SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2000), and thus his EBSA.

5.2.3.2 Changes in externalising behaviours at school

Two parents and both young people described deteriorations in the externalised behaviours of the young people throughout secondary school, contrasting the view that externalising behaviours are mainly seen in truants (Vaughn et al., 2013). Michelle and Oliver suggested Leo's behaviour change was due to his increased anger. Michelle extended this further, attributing Leo's externalised behaviours to school consequences, increased expectations at school, Leo's anxiety, as explored in sections 5.2.1.1 and 5.2.3.1, and his autism.

Leo attributed his behaviour deterioration and EBSA to a lack of motivation in school, as discussed in section 5.1.2.1. Disaffected pupils are perceived at risk of lower academic achievement, poor attendance and disruptive behaviours (Wilding, 2015). Skinner et al. (2008) found school environmental aspects such as teacher support and pupil's perceptions of autonomy to decrease disaffection. In this regard, SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2000) would postulate that Leo's lack of motivation, expressed through his externalised behaviours, was a result of the lack of autonomy he felt over his educational experience, thus contributing to his SNA.

Autonomy refers to the need to behave in a way that is consistent with individual values and interests (Wilding, 2015). This resonates with Emma's narrative when she related her externalising behaviours to her reluctance to follow school uniform policy, suggesting the policy did not align to the value she placed on her individuality and self-expression. Identity development is proposed as an important part of adolescence (Hill et al., 2013), and is fostered by supportive learning environments and teacher-related factors (Verhoeven et al., 2018). In this regard, the current findings imply that Emma's externalised behaviours and eventual SNA may have been impacted by the lack of autonomy she felt over her identity and self-expression within her school environment, due to her poor perceptions of the uniform policy and the consequences she received from teachers as a result of not adhering to this.

5.2.3.3 Relationships at home and in school

Relationships were discussed varyingly amongst participants. Leo discussed how he understood the negative cyclical relationship he perceived between school and home to lead him to school avoid.

Here, the exploration of Systems theory (Dallos & Draper, 2005) in section 5.2.2.2 is further extended. Disparities are noted within the participant groups' narratives regarding the relationship between EBSA and family functioning. For Leo, arguments within the home were perceived to impact on his EBSA. Indeed, poor parent-adolescent relationships are understood to influence externalising and internalising problems and adjustment in school for adolescents (Branje, 2018). Parental behaviours are suggested to shape the emotional climate of a family and thus influence the psychosocial development of young people (Schwartz et al., 2012). Therefore, Systems theory (Dallos & Draper, 2005) would support the view that Leo's EBSA behaviours were maintained by negative interactions within the family system. Contrastingly, the parental narratives indicated how EBSA impacted on the family (See section 5.2.2.2). This is suggestive of a bi-directional relationship between EBSA and family functioning; an area for further exploration in future research.

Emma and Victoria discussed the difficulties Emma experienced in her friendships. Support to develop and maintain friendships is suggested to have

increased attendance for pupils exhibiting EBSA (Baker & Bishop, 2015; Gregory & Purcell, 2014; Havik et al., 2014; Nuttall & Woods, 2014), as they can offer pupils a reason to attend school (Baker & Bishop, 2015; Shilvock, 2010; Wilson, 2012).

The importance of positive social relationships has been explored (see section 5.2.3.1) and is extended further here through the theory of belongingness. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Maslow, 1954) depicts belonging to groups as a basic psychological need. Belonging to a peer group is suggested to be supportive to an adolescent's emotional development and their school engagement (Van Ryzin et al., 2009). This implies that a lack of friendships would have opposing effects, decreasing a pupil's sense of belonging within the school environment and consequently their motivation to attend school. Emma's experience highlights how the absence of positive peer relationships may interact with other difficulties, contributing to the pathway to SNA.

5.2.4 Self-Determination Theory, EBSA and adolescent development

As referenced, SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2000) can be applied as a possible explanation for how the participant's understood their experiences of EBSA. Here, its application is explored in further detail.

SDT states that key developments in adolescence, such as identity, as previously mentioned, and agency (Hansen & Jessop, 2017), occur when the social environment is able to satisfy the three basic needs postulated by SDT; autonomy, competence and relatedness (Griffin et al., 2017). Individuals are understood to be motivated by activities and relationships that support these needs, and will avoid activities that pose a threat to them (La Guardia, 2009; Wehmeyer & Shrogen, 2017). Therefore, pupils can become disaffected from their school environment when these psychological needs are not met (Wilding, 2015), thus impacting attendance and disrupting adolescent development (Hansen & Jessop, 2017). Attendance at school is considered vital to holistic development and long-term outcomes (Finning et al., 2019; Thambirajah et al., 2008). Therefore, SDT would emphasise the role of schools to implement systemic strategies to support the autonomy,

competence and relatedness of disaffected pupils (Wilding, 2015). Individual assessment and actioning of pupil voice would ensure strategies are aligned to individual motivation, supporting pupil agency (Atkinson et al., 2019), engagement and overall development.

5.3 Research question 3: Perceptions of the future

This section considers the key interpretations within the narratives in relation to research questions 3a and 3b. The findings I interpreted from the narratives of the young people and their parents are presented under the categories and subcategories and are reflected upon in relation to current literature and theoretical perspectives.

3a) What are the young person's perceptions of their future?

3b) What are the parent's perceptions of the young person's future?

5.3.1 Hopes and perceived barriers for the future

5.3.1.1 Re-engaging in education, academic aspirations and individual resources

The category of the young person's re-engagement in education was prevalent across all participant narratives, suggested by some to be key to future academic success.

Research into the aspirations of vulnerable young people has identified negative educational experiences, such as exclusion, to negatively impact on how young people perceive their future (Daniels & Cole, 2010). Contrastingly in the current findings, the young people's previous educational experiences, which both they and their parents perceived largely as negative, did not appear to dampen their academic aspirations.

Parents and families are perceived important to a young person's aspiration development. Key influences include parental interest, involvement, support and motivation (Flouri, 2006). Similarly, Hattie (2008) suggested parental engagement to be a significant factor in the academic achievements of pupils. Such findings resonate with the narratives of the young people, as both Leo

and Emma suggest their parents as supports to reach their future academic aspirations. Additionally, Victoria implied her motivation to support Emma through her hopes to advocate for Emma, as explored in section 5.1.5.2.

The narratives of the young people highlighted their individual resources and skills as potential support for their future goals. Research has found a correlation between pupil academic self-efficacy and academic performance, finding this to be moderated by goal orientation and motivation (Honicke & Broadbent, 2016). In similar vein, pupil self-perception and their attitude towards school has been found to predict exam taking, suggesting those with more positive self-perceptions and positive attitude towards school to be more likely to take exams (Kintrea et al., 2011). These findings indicate a need to enhance pupil self-efficacy to support academic outcomes. However, they do not take into account systemic influences, inferred within the current findings to impact pupil engagement and motivation in school, and therefore present a linear perspective of the factors that influence academic performance.

5.3.1.2 Understanding the young person's needs and getting the right provision

Two parents, Michelle and Victoria, discussed their hopes and concerns for their children's needs to be understood and met with effective provision in their educational settings; a point also reflected in Emma's narrative. Michelle's concerns appeared to significantly impact her ability to imagine Leo's future.

Pupil and parent voice in EBSA research has highlighted the lack of suitable provision offered by settings (Baker & Bishop, 2015; Browne, 2018; Clissold, 2018), attributed to a lack of understanding of EBSA (Baker & Bishop, 2015). However, mainstream settings would argue this view. Research exploring staff perceptions of supporting EBSA has found themes such as supporting pupil mental health and resilience, providing a key adult, working in partnership with school staff, parents/carers and the pupils, adapting the school systems to meet individual need, providing access to peer support and having emotional support within the staff team to be strategies associated with increased attendance (Finning et al., 2018; Pritchard, 2019). These findings indicate the potential capacity of secondary settings to support EBSA, provided staff are

empowered with the knowledge, skills and resources to support successful reintegration. The contrasts between the pupil/parent voice and the staff voice research imply a need for further exploration into the dichotomy of experiences and perceptions.

5.3.1.3 Emotional regulation and self-management

All parents discussed the impact of the young people's anxiety and mental health on their future and expressed hopes that the young people would learn or get support to manage their mental health and regulate their emotions. Emotional regulation in pupils exhibiting EBSA behaviours was considered in a case-control study: Hughes et al., (2009) found school refusers with a diagnosed anxiety disorder to use less cognitive reappraisal, such as reframing thoughts, and more expressive suppression, referring to hiding or suppressing emotional responses, in comparison to the non-clinical sample. The small sample size and the infancy of the research area mean further research is needed to replicate findings (Hughes et al., 2009). Nevertheless, this is significant data, resonating with themes in the current study, potentially helpful to the issues of external and fixed attribution shown by Emma around her difficult experiences, such as the inequalities she perceived within the school systems (see section 5.2.1.1), for example.

Interventions supporting EBSA aim to reduce a young person's emotional distress and increase their attendance (Elliott & Place, 2019). Cognitive Behavioural Therapeutic (CBT) interventions have been found to be effective in supporting young people with anxiety disorders (James et al., 2015), and EBSA (Maric et al., 2012). In a SLR evaluating the effectiveness of psychosocial interventions for pupils exhibiting EBSA, Maynard et al., (2015) tentatively suggested CBT-based interventions to be effective, however highlighted the need for more rigorous CBT focussed research.

Oliver expressed hope that improvements to Leo's emotional regulation would boost his self-esteem, confidence and in-turn his social experiences. Here, the concept of resilience is applied. Resilience refers to the processes and variables that support the achievement of positive outcomes, despite experiences of adversity (Gough & Gulliford, 2020). Multiple risk and

protective factors are involved in resilience, and the cumulative impact of protective factors means that small changes in a pupil's ecology, such as improved emotional regulation (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005), may lead to enhancements in other areas of functioning (Rutter, 1999), as suggested in Oliver's narrative. Supporting independence skills of pupils with additional needs can promote success at secondary settings and beyond (Smith et al., 2012).

Leo mentioned his concerns that stress may impact him in exams and thus his academic achievements. Research into academic buoyancy, referring to a pupil's ability to overcome academic stress and setbacks associated with school, has supported the view that anxiety plays a pivotal role in academic success (Martin & Marsh, 2008). Those with increased academic buoyancy are implied to be better able to cope with exam-related anxiety, thus supporting academic achievement (Martin & Marsh, 2008). This implies Leo to need further support to manage his stress to build his academic resiliency, enabling him to reach his academic aspirations.

5.4 Methodological issues and limitations in the research

The real-world nature of the current research resulted in a number of ethical and pragmatic challenges arising. The implications of these for current and future research will be discussed below.

5.4.1 Participant sample

The epistemological and ontological position of the research meant generalisability of the findings was not sought. However, limitations within the participant sample are noted. The purposive sample led to a fairly homogenous group being selected, affirmed by the pre-existing relationships between the families and how the second family were recruited into the study. As discussed in section 3.4.5.1, the first family suggested the second family as participants for the study due to their shared experiences of EBSA, thus supporting their recruitment into the research. The assumption here is that the relationship between the families existed due to those shared experiences, meaning it is possible for there to have been commonalities between these.

Therefore, this could have influenced the similarities within the data gathered and thus the conclusions drawn from the data.

Due to the voluntary nature of participant involvement, it could be suggested that parents and young people who felt more confident to share their experiences were more likely to participate. Therefore, their views may differ from others in need. Additionally, the majority of participants had a White-British heritage and a middle-class background; a dominant voice in parental involvement research (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). Diversity in EBSA literature has not been addressed and it is possible different participant groups may bring very different narratives.

The unequal ratio of parents to young people within the participant sample could be argued to give more weighting to the voices of the parents. However, I attempted to account for this by analysing and presenting each participant's narrative individually, maintaining the richness and authenticity of the individual narratives.

Despite these limitations, the participant sample allowed for real-world insight into the experiences of EBSA for two young people and their parents. At the time of the interviews, both young people were exhibiting EBSA behaviours. In this regard, all participants could recall and discuss their experiences, emotions and actions in detail, increasing the richness of the accounts.

5.4.2 Narrative interview in practice

The aim of the research was to elicit the voices of a vulnerable group with experiences of EBSA, which had been under-studied in previous research. The use of narrative methods in this context allowed for rich exploration and insight into how young people and parents understand their individual experiences, and how they perceive the future of the young person.

Despite this, limitations in the use of narrative methods are noted. The narrative interview follows an ideal procedure dictated by rules (Appendix J; Jovchwlovitch & Bauer, 2000) to ensure the narratives elicited are devoid of imposed language by the researcher and represent an authentic account of

participants' experiences. The current research has highlighted two weaknesses to such rules: the distinguishing of boundaries between phases within the interview process; and the interaction of participants' additional needs with the unstructured interview format. During interviews, movements were frequently made between the main narration and questioning phases, resulting in the interview becoming partly led by myself. This was adopted where the narrator's social communication needs appeared to be acting as a barrier to their engagement with the unstructured approach and thus the elicitation of their experiences. I used brief, time-framing prompts (e.g. *'So you said that was primary school then, what about secondary?'*) to overcome such barriers, aiming to reach a compromise between the uninterrupted narrative and questioning phases. In such circumstances, this could arguably redefine the approach taken to a more semi-structured interview format, enriched by narration (Jovchwlovitch & Bauer, 2000).

Further reflections on the data collection process are noted in light of the context of the interviews. The social constructivist epistemology underpinning the current research recognises that the interview location will have impacted on the participants' narratives. Given a choice, most decided to have the interview conducted in the home context and one parent chose a local café. These contexts each posed challenges of consent, anonymity and privacy, all of which I gave extensive consideration prior to the interviews. In the home, issues included the presence of and interruptions by family members. However, the participants appeared at ease and were able to continue with their narratives despite such circumstances. I ensured I paid close attention to the participant's body language and adhered to my ethical duty of recognising when participants had had enough and ensured they were aware they could stop the interview at any time. The parent who interviewed outside of the family home described feeling more comfortable talking about their experiences away from other family members. I felt it ethically important to adhere to the participant's wishes, attempting to maintain anonymity and confidentiality by ensuring our position within the café gave as much privacy as possible.

5.4.3 Narrative analysis

As a novice to narrative approaches, I had to undertake a significant amount of learning throughout the research process, potentially impacting the research. The presented account could have been taken in many directions and as such could have been interpreted in several ways. Despite my reflexivity as a researcher and attempts to adopt a position of neutrality, my own beliefs, experiences and pre-conceived ideas may have influenced the interpretation of the data. Additionally, my interpretations may have accidently sought to complement existing findings due to the focus of the SLR, which explored parent and pupil voices on their experiences of EBSA.

Careful consideration was given to the analysis utilised in the current study, to ensure the participant narratives were best represented. Solely employing a categorical-content analysis has been suggested to neglect other contextual factors that may be important to understanding the participants' stories, potentially disregarding the tone and emotions within the narratives (Lieblich et al., 1998). To address this, I also employed a 'holistic-form' analysis, considering the narratives as a whole, prior to conducting the categorical-content analysis. Context could therefore be considered throughout the analysis process. Furthermore, context was added to the categorical-content analysis by including data extracts within the findings and in the appendices.

Narrative research has been critiqued for appearing chaotic and difficult to clarify theoretically (Howitt, 2010). Whilst NOI allows for the application of theory to support analysis, I made a decision to maintain an inductive approach to the research, being led by the narratives as a whole, as opposed to singling out data to represent categories based on theory. Despite feeling overwhelming at times, the broad analysis allowed for an exploration of the rich content within the narratives, enabling the stories to be explored in numerous ways. Therefore, concordance between the research aims and methods was maintained (Hiles et al., 2017).

5.5 Implications

5.5.1 Educational psychology

The findings can be considered for their potential implications for EP practice. Firstly, the current findings suggested autonomy, relatedness and competence to be a key aspect of EBSA and motivation to attend school. There are indications here that EPs could apply an SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2000) framework to EBSA casework, working collaboratively with the young person, school and home environments to implement strategies to enhance these psychological needs, thus supporting academic engagement (Wilding, 2015), psychological wellbeing and overall development (Ricard & Pelletier, 2016). For example, the current research suggests young people exhibiting EBSA to need support to understand and regulate their emotions, which may improve feelings of competence and autonomy (Zimmerman & Cleary, 2009). In addition to current practice (Atkinson et al., 2012), EPs could deliver therapeutic-based interventions to pupils exhibiting EBSA, specifically focussing on psychoeducation of SEMH needs, emotional regulation, autonomy and competence, reflective of the current findings, aiming to enhance these areas of functioning and support school engagement.

The findings in the current research suggest the pressure on the role of the parent/carer to support a young person's anxiety and mental health at home in EBSA cases. This implies the value for EPs to work with school settings to deliver bespoke support programmes for parents/carers regarding psychoeducation for SEMH needs, EBSA and behaviour management strategies within the home context, drawing upon pre-existing programmes such as the Back2School programme (Lomholt et al., 2020), for example. Additionally, the findings suggest that parents/carers may need support to manage their own mental health and the potential conflict within familial relationships. In extension to current practice, EPs could include an assessment of the family context within their EBSA assessment, with particular focus on these implied aspects of EBSA, to ensure families have access to additional support and external services where necessary.

The current findings imply the importance of parents' views for early identification of EBSA behaviours and to hear and understand their knowledge, expertise and experiences. Families would benefit from having their views heard by school without judgement. EPs have a role in facilitating effective consultations between families and school settings, to enhance positive relationships that empower families (Wagner, 2000). This highlights the importance of creating partnerships around a young person based upon respect and trust (Christenson, 2004; Taylor & Gulliford, 2011) to support parental agency and teacher-parent relationships (Ferreira et al., 2013; Grayson, 2013).

The current findings suggest pupils exhibiting EBSA have aspirations for their future, including re-engagement in education. The 'Preparing for Adulthood' programme (DfE, 2017) advocates the use of pupil voice and person-centred approaches to support the aspirations and futures of young people. In light of this, EPs could use solution-focussed therapeutic approaches (Redpath & Harker, 1999) in EBSA assessments to elicit the young person's strengths and help them develop small, achievable goals based on such strengths (Corcoran, 2006). This approach would enable pupils to progress towards re-engagement in education and achieve their aspirations. This would need to be completed in collaboration with parents/carers and school staff to ensure the best chances of success.

5.5.2 Education settings

A pertinent implication for secondary school settings appears to be the need to enhance school connectedness and relatedness for pupils exhibiting EBSA through peer and teacher-pupil relationships. Allen et al., (2016) suggests using evidence-based strategies to support school connectedness across the five ecosystems perceived as influential on a young person's development. In this work, Allen et al's., (2016) model could be delivered, or enhanced, through implementation of the following key features: assessing and supporting the social and emotional competencies of the young person, such as enhancing coping skills and awareness of mental health needs through psychoeducation; implementing peer support systems, creating increased opportunities for peer

supported learning and encouraging participation in extra-curricular activities/clubs; allowing teachers pastoral time with students to provide personal support and encouraging staff to seek feedback from their students regarding their relationships and rapport. This would aim to serve a protective function, reducing the likelihood of EBSA and support the reintegration of pupils exhibiting EBSA.

As referenced in section 5.5.1, the current findings imply the need to support parental understanding of SEMH needs in EBSA cases. This implication is extended further here by suggesting schools to have a role in supporting parental understanding of such needs early on, to prevent the likelihood of mental health difficulties in adolescents. Research has suggested a lack of adequate parent support programmes to be a barrier to effectively support SEMH needs (Reinke et al., 2011), despite the recognition that parents play a key role in adolescent emotional development (O'Reilly et al., 2018). Therefore, in addition to current practices, schools could offer parenting programmes on a whole-school level, aiming to enhance parental understanding of SEMH needs and promote early intervention.

5.5.3 Local Authorities

The current study raises important implications for Children's Services within LAs, particularly where there are high levels of EBSA. LAs currently collect data on persistent absenteeism, and typically have awareness of EBSA when attendance levels deteriorate significantly, prompting a legal response. Therefore, it may be beneficial for LA's to extend their data collection procedures further to understand the prevalence of EBSA within the local context.

The current findings suggested a lack of knowledge or consistency when supporting pupils exhibiting EBSA. Therefore, the development of a LA initiative to support and prevent cases of EBSA, implemented across education settings, could be useful to provide a consistent approach for families, young people, school staff and other professionals. EPs are well-placed to support the development and dissemination of such an initiative. In

line with government guidance (DfE, 2015), the initiative should follow a graduated response to EBSA, incorporating early identification, assessment and intervention; suggested by the current findings to be necessary in preventing emerging patterns of non-attendance. To enhance professional practice, training across all Children's services supporting the understanding of the onset of EBSA, its prevalence, early identifiable behaviours and the impact of EBSA, may create a more holistic understanding of the issue. A systemic understanding of and response to the multiple aspects and influences on EBSA is important to prevent the placing of blame and responsibility onto individuals/settings, as experienced by the parents in the current study.

The current findings suggest how multi-agency approaches can have minimal impact when supporting young people who exhibit EBSA behaviours, despite literature advocating for their use (Finning et al., 2018; Gren-Landell et al., 2015; Pritchard, 2019). In extension to the previous implication, elements of Kearney's (2016) tiered response to SNA could be used to enhance multi-agency working within an LA. For example, Kearney (2016) recommends having a 'core team' within an LA to support severe SNA behaviours by coordinating efforts between professionals internal and external to the school setting and enhancing communication between the young person, school staff and external professionals (Kearney, 2016). A team of this kind may systemically prevent EBSA behaviours across a LA.

5.5.4 Future research

The focus of the present study on the narratives of secondary-aged pupils and their parents was chosen to explore the views of both groups which have received little focus in published literature, thus contributing to the small evidence-base around EBSA. Further evidence is needed within this area, particularly in relation to the experiences of ethnically diverse groups and those from varied socio-economic backgrounds; a noted limitation within the current research. Therefore, future research should focus on obtaining the views of groups who are underrepresented in EBSA research.

Future research could also focus on early identification of EBSA. The present findings identified potential missed opportunities for early intervention by schools. By adopting a case-study design, future research could obtain the views of key staff members, the young person and their parents/carers, where the young person is experiencing inconsistent patterns of attendance. This research would help to promote early intervention in EBSA and support a wider professional understanding of the phenomenon.

The current study has offered a unique perspective on the parental experiences of EBSA, however further evidence in this area is needed. Future research could explore the home experiences of EBSA in more depth using qualitative designs, focussing on homelife, family interactions and the impact of EBSA on the family unit. This would allow for further understanding of parental and family experiences of EBSA, to ensure families are able to receive beneficial support that fits their unique experience.

Future research could also explore parental and professional relationships in EBSA cases. The current findings have highlighted how parents can feel unsupported and unheard by school and external professionals. Qualitative studies with parents/carers, exploring their experiences with school and external professionals, with a particular focus on helping and hindering factors, would be beneficial. This could support the development of collaboration within multi-agency approaches in EBSA casework in the future.

A final suggestion for future research relates to the future aspirations of pupils who are exhibiting EBSA behaviours. The current findings offer interesting insights into the hopes and the potential barriers for a young person's future. It would be interesting to explore this area in more depth, in order to understand if there are ways in which a young person's aspirations could be utilised positively to motivate them and support their re-engagement in their education. Parent perceptions of the future would also be valuable, given the significant influence of parents on a pupil's academic achievements.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

6.0 The end result: A collaboration

The current research presents my retelling of the stories of the young people and their parents, reflective of my reflexivity as a researcher. The narratives of the participants have been combined with my own views to form a collaborative narrative (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), which strived to ensure interpretations were presented transparently, whilst remaining as close to the experiences of the participants as possible. It is hoped that this research presents an empowering narrative for both young people and parents with EBSA experiences and encourages alternative perspectives on EBSA as a vulnerable group.

6.1 Distinct contribution of the research

The current research has presented an in-depth exploration of the narratives of two young people and three parents with regards to their experiences of EBSA and their perceptions of the young person's future. This has contributed to the small evidence-base around pupil and parent voice in relation to EBSA, by enabling deeper insight into the experiences of those directly affected by the phenomenon. The research gave unique insight into the parental experience of EBSA, giving rich detail regarding the impact of EBSA on home life; an area that has received little attention in previous research.

The research offers a distinct perspective into the constructions of the future, following experiences of challenge. This has important implications for future research and EP practice, suggesting that further insight is necessary to support the aspirations and possible re-integration of young people with EBSA.

The use of narrative in the present study resulted in authentic responses from the participants, reflected within the findings. The unstructured approach offered freedom for the participants, supporting them to explore and make sense of their EBSA experiences. This allowed for rich ideographic data to be

generated that demonstrated the variation within the experiences of EBSA. This supports the notion that whilst there can be similarities within the EBSA experience, we must seek to understand the individual stories to support our depth of understanding of such a complex and challenging phenomenon.

6.2 Summary of the findings

The present study aimed to contribute to the emerging research base exploring the voices of pupils and parents in relation to their individual experiences of EBSA and their perceptions of the young person's future. It is hoped that the research can add a meaningful contribution to the literature regarding EBSA and offer insight into ways to support both parents and young people within the family and school contexts, encouraging the use of preventative, systemic approaches when working with this vulnerable group.

The exploratory research suggested a range of within-child and environmental aspects contributed to the participant's understanding of EBSA. A key point of regression appeared to be after the pupil's transition to secondary school, where they experienced a deterioration in their mental health and emotional wellbeing, indicated by changes in their behaviour at home and within the school setting. A series of challenges for the participants led to a continued regression within the narrative, until the point of non-attendance for both young people.

Key themes were interpreted within the narratives of the young people and parents in relation to their understanding of their experiences of EBSA. These were:

- negative emotions and poor mental health as a result of environmental influences;
- negative perceptions of school systems and influences of the relationships within the school environment, perceived to impact school belonging and motivation;
- the importance and impact of peer and familial relationships;
- parents lacking clarity in relation to their child's needs and EBSA;
- the wider impact of EBSA on family interactions and the home context;

- parents feeling unheard, unsupported and blamed by school and external professionals.

Further key themes were interpreted in relation to the young person's future:

- academic aspirations and hopes to re-engage in education;
- parents and educational settings understanding the needs of the young person to ensure provision is suited to need, with parents hoping to advocate on behalf of the young person as part of this process;
- hopes and concerns for the young people's abilities to emotionally-regulate and self-manage their behaviours;
- hopes for positive peer relationships to support development.

The findings regarding how the young people and parents made sense of their experiences are ultimately reflective of the potentially harmful experiences of EBSA and the perceived optimism that can remain despite such challenges. These accounts portray the severity of EBSA and the ongoing experiences of young people who have become disengaged from their education and families who are attempting to support the young person's education, whilst feeling confused, frustrated and unsupported. The findings indicate that, when given the freedom, time and space to be heard, young people and their parents can identify a range of influential aspects within themselves, their families and the wider school context that have formed their understanding of EBSA. This understanding is significant, not only to their perceptions of their previous experiences, but in relation to how such knowledge and awareness can be supportive of a more positive future. The new knowledge and implications from the current research offer valuable insights into developing practice to support this vulnerable group.

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Appendices

Appendix A. Search terms used in SLR

Database	Search terms
Psyc(INFO)	School refus* OR non-attend* OR phobi* AND voice or experience* OR perspective* OR perception* OR view* OR future* OR hopes OR aspirations
SCOPUS (Elsevier)	school AND refus* OR non-attend* OR phobi* AND voice OR experience* OR perspective* OR perception* OR view* OR future* OR hopes OR aspirations
Web of Science	School refus* OR non-attend* OR phobi* AND voice or experience* or perspective* or perception* or view* or future* or hopes or aspirations
Eric (EBSCO)	School refus* OR non-attend* OR phobi* AND voice or experience* or perspective* or perception* or view* or future* or hopes or aspirations
EThOS *Simple search conducted*	School refusal School non-attendance

Appendix B. Inclusion and exclusion criteria appraisal in SLR

Author/s	Pupil views and/or parent views	Does the study identify participants who have experience of attendance difficulties that are not attributed solely to truancy?	Are the views gathered related to reasons for non-attendance?	Are views analysed separately?	Is the methodology qualitative and/or mixed methods?	Written in English	Conducted in UK	Published after 2009	Included or excluded
Aucott (2014)	✗	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	Not included. Data from teachers was gathered and not analysed entirely separately from parents and pupils' views.
Baker & Bishop (2015)	✓	✓	✓	-	✓	✓	✓	✓	**Included**
Beckles (2014)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	**Included**
Blandin et al (2018)	✓✓	Unable to establish	✓	Unable to establish	✓	✓/✗ (translated)	✗	✓	Not included. Unable to read full-text.
Browne (2018)	✓	✓	✓	-	✓	✓	✓	✓	**Included**

Clissold (2018)	✓✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	**Included**
Gregory & Purcell (2014)	✓✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	**Included**
Havik et al (2014)	✓	✓	✓	-	✓	✓	✓	✓	**Included**
How (2015)	✓	✓	✓	-	✓	✓	✓	✓	**Included**
James (2015)	✓	✓	✓	Data analysis is unclear	✓	✓	✓	✓	Not included. Data analysis of pupil's interviews is very unclear. Researcher experienced difficulty eliciting views of pupils.
Meredew (2011)	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	Not included, focus on perceived control and ways to support rather than gathering views on reasons for non-attendance.
Myhill (2017)	✓	✓	✗	-	✓	✓	✓	✓	Not included, sought parental perceptions regarding their involvement in school refusal, not reasons for non-attendance.
Orme-Stapleton (2017)	✓✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	**Included**

Shilvock (2010)	✓	✓	✓	-	✓	✓	✓	✓	**Included**
Wilson (2012)	✓	✓	✓	-	✓	✓	✓	✓	**Included**

Appendix C. Quality appraisal process for the SLR

Criterion	Baker & Bishop (2015)	Beckles (2014)	Browne (2018)	Clissold (2018)	Gregory & Purcell (2014)	Havik et al (2014)	How (2015)	Orme-Stapleton (2017)	Shilvock (2010)	Wilson (2012)
1 Focus on exploration of reasons for attendance difficulties	**A** Emphasis on exploring pupils lived experiences of extended non-attendance	**A** Explored perspectives of early stage-non attenders (and school staff)	**A** Explored the experiences of parents of young people aged 13-15 years who presented with emotionally based SNA	**B** Explored the constructions of reasons for extended school non-attendance in young people (and parents/carers and educators). As opposed to exploration of experiences of ESNA.	**B** Explored key concerns and experiences of extended non-attenders and their families. Slight focus on whether pupil voice could be examined	**B** Explored the role of school factors in school refusal from parent's perception, rather than exploration of multiple factors	**A** Explored the experiences and perceptions of pupils with persistently low attendance	**A** Explores the individual experiences of children and families who have experienced persistent non-attendance.	**A** Emphasis on exploring views of young people with emotionally based non-attendance	**B** Explored accounts of looked after children who had previously exhibited school refusal behaviour (retrospective)
2 Justification of study and methodology	**A** Clear rationale for study with previous links and brief discussion of previous literature	**A** Clear rationale for study with links to previous literature and explicit gaps identified	**A** Clear rationale for study with links to previous literature and explicit gaps identified	**A** Clear rationale for study with links to previous research	**A** Clear links between previous research and need to emphasise pupil voice	**B** Some links made between previous research, however no mention of parent voice literature	**A** Clear links between previous research and identified gaps in the research	**A** Clear links between previous research and identified gaps in the research	**A** Clear links between previous research and identified gaps in the research	**A** Clear rationale for study with links to previous literature and explicit gaps identified

3 Aims and objectives	**C** Posed guiding questions for research rather than explicit aims	**A** Clearly stated and defined	**A** Clearly stated and defined	**B** Stated research questions but not the aims of the research	**A** Clearly stated and defined	**A** Clearly stated and defined	**A** Clearly stated and defined	**A** Clearly stated and defined	**B** Stated research questions but not aims Objectives of research stated	**A** Clearly stated and defined
4 Clear description of context	**B** Some details provided	**A** Extensive details provided	**A** Extensive details provided	**B** Some details provided	**B** Some details provided	**B** Some details provided	**A** Extensive details provided	**A** Extensive details provided	**A** Extensive details provided	**A** Extensive details provided
5 Description of sample	**B** Clear eligibility criteria Lack of demographic data available	**B** Clear eligibility criteria outlined Lack of demographic data available	**A** Eligibility criteria presented Demographic data presented	**A** Eligibility criteria clearly presented with rationale. Demographic data presented	**C** Demographics of participants not included No clear eligibility criteria	**B** Demographics of participants included No clear eligibility criteria	**B** Unclear initial eligibility criteria for participants Demographic data presented	**B** Eligibility criteria presented Lack of demographic data for families	**A** Eligibility criteria presented Demographic data presented	**A** Eligibility criteria presented Demographic data presented
6 Description of methodology	**A** Clear methodology and description of design of interviews	**A** Clear description of methodology and extracts presented in appendices	**A** Clear description of methodology and description of the design of the interviews	**B** Some details provided for how interviews were completed	**B** Some details provided for how interviews were completed. More detail required for procedure	**B** Some details provided for how interviews were completed. More detail required for procedure.	**A** Clear methodology and description of design of interviews	**A** Clear description of methodology and extracts presented in appendices	**A** Clear description of methodology and extracts presented in appendices	**A** Clear methodology and description of design of research/Grounded Theory

7 Reliability and validity	**C** Implicitly discussed however not explicitly addressed	**A** Explicitly discussed in detail, including reflexivity of researcher	**A** Explicitly discussed in detail, including reflexivity of researcher	**B** Ethical considerations outlined however reliability and validity not explicitly addressed	**C** Implicitly discussed however not explicitly addressed	**B** Some explicit discussion regarding reliability and validity of data	**B** Explicitly discussed in detail, although no reference to reflexivity as researcher	**C** implicitly discussed and does reference position as a researcher, however not explicitly addressed	**A** Explicitly discussed in detail, including reflexivity of researcher	**A** Explicitly discussed in detail, including reflexivity of researcher
8 Rational links between raw data and interpretation	**A** Themes supported by quotes and table with explicit links. Some evidence of process of reducing themes in reference to IPA structure	**A** Explicit description of analysis procedure and tables for examples. Evidence of process of reducing themes. Themes supported by quotes.	**A** Themes supported by quotes and each participant analysed separately for clarity. Clear method of how themes were reduced.	**A** Themes supported by quotes and explicitly linked to data analysis. Evidence of the process for reducing themes.	**B** Themes supported by quotes and table with explicit links. No evidence of process of reducing themes.	**B** Themes supported by quotes and table with explicit links. No evidence of process of reducing themes.	**A** Explicit description of analysis procedure. Evidence of process of reducing themes. Themes supported by quotes.	**A** Themes supported by quotes. Evidence of process of reducing themes.	**A** Explicit description of analysis procedure. Evidence of process of reducing themes. Themes supported by quotes.	**A** Explicit description of analysis procedure. Evidence of process of Grounded Theory Themes supported by quotes and presented in clear tables
Overall grading	**B**	**A**	**A**	**B**	**B**	**B**	**A**	**B**	**A**	**A**

Appendix D. Recruitment letter to school

School of Psychology

Letter to Schools

The University of Nottingham
UNITED KINGDOM · CHINA · MALAYSIA

Doctorate in Applied Educational Psychology

Hearing the voices of school non-attenders and their parents using Narrative Oriented Inquiry

Researcher: Hannah Want

Contact Details: lpxhw3@nottingham.ac.uk

Supervisor: Anthea Gulliford

Supervisor Contact Details: lpaag@nottingham.ac.uk

My name is Hannah Want and I am a student at the University of Nottingham studying for the Doctorate in Applied Educational Psychology. I am currently on placement in Nottingham City Educational Psychology Service. As part of my training I am required to conduct a research project. Within this, I plan to explore how young people who may be reluctant to attend school understand their own behaviours and also how their parents perceive these. I also plan to explore how both the pupil and their parents view the young person's future, what they hope for from this and what they think may act as a barrier to achieve their goals. This letter is being sent to request your consent for your school setting to participate in this study and to provide you with additional details of the purpose of the research.

What is the research about?

The aim of the research is to explore both the experiences of young people who may be reluctant to attend school and their parents. Specifically, I am interested in key events that may have occurred for the young people that may have impacted on their educational experiences and how both they and their parents perceive their future to look in terms of hopes and wishes, the support they have currently to help them and possible barriers for progression.

Who will participate?

Your school has been suggested by a member of Nottingham City Educational Psychology Service to have a pupil that may match the following criteria. However, if any more come to mind do feel free to discuss these further with myself or the designated Educational

Psychologist for your school. If possible, I would like to recruit pupils who meet the following criteria:

- Pupils aged between 11 and 16 years, as school non-attendance is perceived as more likely in secondary settings (Department for Education, 2018).
- Pupils who currently have missed 10% or more of their school sessions. This is in line with the government document on pupil absences (Department for Education, 2018).
- Pupils who are perceived to have an emotional basis for their non-attendance by the Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCo) in the school. This will be defined using Berg et al's (1969) definition:
    - Pupils who experience difficulty attending school;
    - Pupils with emotional upset and complain about symptoms of such, e.g. report feeling ill without this being proven as genuine;
    - Pupils who primarily stay at home with parental knowledge. This is to avoid the possibility of recruiting those who may be defined as 'truants' as per the definition given by Thambirajah, Grandison & De-Hayes (2008).
    - Pupils no known anti-social behaviours (e.g. delinquency).
- Pupils with no additional needs such as a speech and language difficulty that requires professional involvement.
- One parent who has experienced their child's school non-attendance.

What will happen?

Pupils and their parents will be interviewed individually by the researcher on two separate occasions. These will take place at home or in a setting where the pupil feels comfortable. The interviews should last approximately 45 minutes each. The young person and their parent will be asked to talk about events which they feel have impacted on their educational experience in the first interview. In the second interview, they will be asked about their hopes for the future, the support they have to help them achieve their goals and possible barriers that may get in their way. The interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed.

How will the data be kept confidential? Will anyone be identified?

The names of the participants and the school data will be anonymised. Any identifiable data will be left out of transcriptions. All participants will be given a pseudonym. All data will be stored securely by the researcher in line with GDPR. Data will be kept for 25 years after the research has ended and destroyed after this time.

All participants will be safeguarded with the usual protocol. Therefore, should any causes for concern over the safety of the participant or another person arise, the school's safeguarding lead will be contacted by the researcher.

What should I do now?

If you agree to take part and help in the process of identifying young people and their parents to participate in the research, you will be required to contact the researcher, who will follow this letter up with a phone call to either the Head Teacher or the SENCo. After agreement, you will be asked to make contact with the parents of the proposed participant. An

information sheet and a consent form will be distributed to both yourselves and the parents, along with a letter explaining the purpose of the research, which will be in a similar format to this one. Once distributed, I will ask that either the Head Teacher or the SENCo to complete a follow-up phone call to parents to give them an opportunity to ask questions and speak to myself. Should the parents' consent to take part, consent will be gained from both the parent and the young person and collection by the researcher will be arranged.

Next steps

I will follow up this letter with a phone call next week to discuss the research further. In the meantime, if you have any questions please contact me on lpxhw3@nottingham.ac.uk or my research supervisor, Anthea Gulliford, lpaag@nottingham.ac.uk.

Kind Regards,
Hannah Want
Trainee Educational Psychologist
University of Nottingham

Appendix E. Information sheet for young people

School of Psychology

Information Sheet – Young Person

The University of Nottingham
UNITED KINGDOM · CHINA · MALAYSIA

Hearing the voices of school non-attenders and their parents using Narrative Oriented Inquiry

Ethics Approval: S1153

Researcher: Hannah Want

Contact Details: lpxhw3@nottingham.ac.uk

Supervisor: Anthea Gulliford

Supervisor Contact Details: lpaag@nottingham.ac.uk

This is an invitation to take part in a research study on *Hearing the voices of school non-attenders and their parents using Narrative Oriented Inquiry*.

Before you decide if you wish to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully.

If you participate, you will be interviewed individually by myself (the researcher) on two separate occasions. These will take place at home or in a setting where you feel most comfortable. The interviews should last approximately 45 minutes each. You will be asked to talk about events which you feel have impacted on your experience of school and your education in the first interview. In the second interview, you will be asked about your hopes for the future, the support you have around you to help you achieve your goals and things that might make it difficult for you. The interviews will be recorded with a digital recorder, and typed up word-for-word afterwards by the researcher.

Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you do not have to take part if you do not want to. You are free to withdraw at any point during the study. All data collected will be kept confidential and used for the research only. It will be stored safely and securely in line with GDPR.

If you have any questions or concerns, please don't hesitate to ask now. We can also be contacted after your participation at the above email address.

If you have any complaints about the study, please contact:

Stephen Jackson (Chair of Ethics Committee)

stephen.jackson@nottingham.ac.uk

Appendix F. Information sheet for parents

School of Psychology

Information Sheet - Parents

The University of Nottingham
UNITED KINGDOM · CHINA · MALAYSIA

Hearing the voices of school non-attenders and their parents using Narrative Oriented Inquiry

Ethics Approval: S1153

Researcher: Hannah Want

Contact Details: lpxhw3@nottingham.ac.uk

Supervisor: Anthea Gulliford

Supervisor Contact Details: lpaag@nottingham.ac.uk

This is an invitation to take part in a research study on *Hearing the voices of school non-attenders and their parents using Narrative Oriented Inquiry*.

Before you decide if you wish to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully.

If you participate, you will be interviewed individually by myself (the researcher) on two separate occasions. These will take place at home or in a setting where you feel most comfortable. The interviews should last approximately 45 minutes each. You will be asked to talk about events which you feel have impacted on your child's experience of school and their education in the first interview. In the second interview, you will be asked about your hopes for your child's future, the support that you feel they have around them to help them achieve their goals and things that might make it difficult for them. The interviews will be recorded with a digital recorder, and typed up word-for-word afterwards by the researcher.

Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you do not have to take part if you do not want to. You are free to withdraw at any point during the study. All data collected will be kept confidential and used for the research only. It will be stored safely and securely in line with GDPR.

If you have any questions or concerns, please don't hesitate to ask now. We can also be contacted after your participation at the above email address.

If you have any complaints about the study, please contact:

Stephen Jackson (Chair of Ethics Committee)

stephen.jackson@nottingham.ac.uk

Appendix G. Participant consent form

School of Psychology

Consent Form

The University of Nottingham
UNITED KINGDOM · CHINA · MALAYSIA

Doctorate in Applied Educational Psychology

Hearing the voices of school non-attenders and their parents using Narrative Oriented Inquiry

Researcher: Hannah Want lpxhw3@nottingham.ac.uk
Supervisor: Anthea Gulliford lpaag@nottingham.ac.uk

The participant should answer these questions independently. Please circle your responses:

Have you read and understood the Information Sheet?	YES	NO
Have you had the opportunity to ask questions about the study?	YES	NO
Have all your questions been answered satisfactorily (if applicable)?	YES	NO
Do you understand that you are free to withdraw from the study? (at any time and without giving a reason)	YES	NO
I give permission for 'special category personal data', such as my ethnicity, to be collected	YES	NO
I give permission for the written transcript of my interviews from this study to be shared with other researchers provided that my anonymity is completely protected	YES	NO
Do you agree to take part in the study?	YES	NO

"This study has been explained to me to my satisfaction, and I agree to take part. I understand that I am free to withdraw at any time."

Signature of the Participant: Date:

Name (in block capitals)

I have explained the study to the above participant and he/she has agreed to take part.

Signature of researcher: Date:

GDPR: Research Participant Privacy Notice (Included with Consent Form)

Hearing the voices of school non-attenders and their parents using Narrative Oriented Inquiry

Ethics Approval: S1153

Researcher: Hannah Want

Contact Details: lpxhw3@nottingham.ac.uk

Supervisor: Anthea Gulliford

Privacy information for Research Participants

For information about the University's obligations with respect to your data, who you can get in touch with and your rights as a data subject, please visit: www.nottingham.ac.uk/utilities/privacy/privacy.aspx.

Why we collect your personal data

Your personal data is being collected as part of a research project. The researcher is part of a doctorate programme in Applied Educational Psychology, at the University of Nottingham. The purpose of the research is to gather the voices of both school non-attenders and their parents.

Legal basis for processing your personal data under GDPR

The legal basis for processing your personal data on this occasion is in line with GDPR Article 6(1e) processing is necessary for the performance of a task carried out in the public interest. We hope this research will help with meeting the needs of vulnerable pupils, and help education settings, parents and other professionals learn and develop appropriate ways in which to support such pupils.

Where the University receives your personal data from

Some personal data about you will be collected as part of the research, which will be kept confidential. This data will come either from yourself, as the research participant, or from school records.

Special category personal data

We will be collecting some 'special category personal data', in line with GDPR Article 9(2a). We will collect, with your consent, data regarding your racial or ethnic origin.

How long we keep your data

The University may store your data for up to 25 years and for a period of no less than 7 years after the research project finishes. The researchers who gathered or processed the data may also store the data indefinitely and reuse it in future research. Any data stored will be anonymised, meaning that participants will not be identifiable. Any data that might identify a participant will be left out of transcriptions. All participants will be given a 'pseudonym' (a fake name) in the research to protect their identity.

Who we share your data with

Extracts of your data may be disclosed in published works that are posted online for use by the scientific community. Your data may also be stored indefinitely on external data repositories (e.g., the UK Data Archive) and be further processed for archiving purposes in the public interest, or for historical, scientific or statistical purposes. It may also move with the researcher who collected your data to another institution in the future.

Appendix H. Example script for telephone conversation with SENDCo

My name is Hannah Want and I am a Trainee Educational Psychologist at the University of Nottingham, and also work for [insert name] EPS. I am calling regarding a piece of research I am currently completing with pupils who experience difficulty attending school due to emotional reasons.

The name of one of the pupils attending your school had been passed onto me by [insert name], an Educational Psychologist who has had contact with the pupil and their family. [Insert pupil name] and their parents have agreed to take part in the research, and so I am calling you with their permission to make you aware of their participation.

The identity of the young person, their family, your school and any members of staff will be kept completely anonymous. Anything that could identify any of that information will be removed from the records.

You do not need to do anything further, however if you do have any questions either now or at a later date, I'm happy to answer them.

[share contact details with SENDCo and answer any questions]

Appendix I. Narrative Interview guide

*Please note: the delivery of the questions below are likely to vary dependent upon the narrative supplied by the participants.

- Re-visit consent letter and check understanding. Ask participant to explain what they believe they are going to be asked to do and how they believe their information is to be used.
- Remind of right to stop and/or withdraw at any time.
- Remind that they do not have to answer and questions they do not want to.

Session 1: Pupil

1. Life grid and uninterrupted narrative

- Give the life grid template to the young person to support the telling of their story.
- *"I'm interested in hearing about your time in school and up until now. I would like you to tell me as much as possible about it, starting from the time you joined your first school, until where you are now. I would like for key information to be noted on this life grid, which may help you tell me your story. Would you like to write on this yourself or for it to be written for you by me?."*
- Once completed, "*I would like to hear as much as possible started from the time you joined your first school. Do you feel ready to start?"*

Once there is a summary statement and/or a pause signalling the end of the story ask *"is there is anything else they would like to add?"*.

2. Clarification phase to elicit additional material

Clarification questions will be dependent upon the material provided within the uninterrupted narrative. The following example forms can be used:

What does that mean?	I wonder.....
Tell me more about that	How did that make you feel?
Do you want to talk me through.....?	Have we missed anything?
How does this relate to....?	

3. Critical moments

- “I wonder if you feel any of the events you have spoken about played a part in you not attending school?”
- “I wonder if you feel any of the events you spoke about helped you in any way?”

Questions to support the identification of critical moments can include:

- Do you think anything else played a part in your non-attendance?
- Did anything else help you?
- Could anything have prevented that from happening?
- Who/what else played a part in that?
- How did you feel about that?

Check if young person gives consent for their recording to be used at the end of the session.

Session 1: Parent

1. Life grid and uninterrupted narrative

- Give the life grid template to the parent to support the telling of their story.
- *"I'm interested in hearing about how you have viewed your child's time in school, up until now. I would like you to tell me as much as possible about it, starting from the time they joined their first school, until where they are now. I would like for key information to be noted on this life grid, which may help you tell me your story. Would you like to write on this yourself or for it to be written for you by me?"*
- Once completed, *"I would like to hear as much as possible started from the time your child joined their first school. Do you feel ready to start?"*

Once there is a summary statement and/or a pause signalling the end of the story ask, *"is there is anything else they would like to add?"*.

2. Clarification phase to elicit additional material

Clarification questions will be dependent upon the material provided within the uninterrupted narrative. The following example forms can be used:

What does that mean?	I wonder.....
Tell me more about that	How did that make you feel?
Do you want to talk me through.....?	Have we missed anything?
How does this relate to....?	How do you see…?
What were your thoughts at that time?	

3. Critical moments

- *"I wonder if you feel any of the events you have spoken about played a part in your child attending school?"*
- *"I wonder if you feel any of the events you spoke about helped your child in any way?"*
- *"What are the events that you think…", "What do you think when you look back?"*

Questions to support the identification of critical moments can include:

- Do you think anything else played a part in your child's non-attendance?
- Did anything else help them?
- Could anything have prevented that from happening?

- Who/what else played a part in that?
- How do you think your child felt about that?

Check if parent gives consent for their recording to be used at the end of the session.

Session 2: Pupil

1. The Future

Long Term

- Let's imagine you are * years old. Tell me as much as possible about what life might be like for you at *.
- What would you like it to be like?
- What do you not want it to be like?
- How might you feel about…?
- What might have happened between now and then?
- What strengths do you have that might help you get there?
- Who might help you get there?
- What might make it difficult to get there?

Short Term

- Let's imagine you are 1 year older. Tell me as much as possible about what life might be like for you.
- What would you like to be happening?
- What would you not like to be happening?
- How might you feel about…?
- What might have happened between now and then?
- What strengths do you have that might help you get there?
- Who might help you get there?
- What may make it difficult to get there?

Check if young person gives consent for their recording to be used.

Give debrief.

Session 2: Parent

2. The Future

Long Term

- Let's imagine your child is * years old. Tell me as much as possible about what life might be like for them at *.
- What would you want it to be like?
- What do you think they want it to be like?
- What do you not want it to be like?
- What do you think they would not want it to be like?
- How might they feel about…?
- How might you feel about…?
- What might have happened between now and then?
- What strengths do they have that might help them get there?
- Who might help them get there?
- What might make it difficult to get there?

Short Term

- Let's imagine your child is 1 year older. Tell me as much as possible about what life might be like for them.
- What would they like to be happening?
- What would you like to be happening?
- What would they not like to be happening?
- What would you not like to be happening?
- How might they feel about…?
- How might you feel about…?
- What might have happened between now and then?
- What strengths do they have that might help them get there?
- Who might help them get there?
- What may make it difficult to get there?

Check if parent gives consent for their recording to be used.

Give debrief.

Appendix J. Full description of Jovchelovitch & Bauer (2000) interview phases

Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2000

Preparation

The researcher will use the current literature on school refusal to identify gaps which would potentially be filled with narrative inquiry. These will inform the *initial central topic* on which the narrative interview will be based. Exmanent questions will then be formed based on the researcher's interests based on the literature that has been reviewed.

Initiation

The context of the research will be explained to the participant, along with the procedure for the interview. To support the participants understanding of the initial central topic which will be representative of the researcher's interests, a visual aid of a time-line will be adopted that will illustrate the beginning of the participants story up until the present time. In the interview regarding the participants future, this time-line will again be used to elicit where they are now and how far into the future they would like to discuss. The same approach will be adopted in parental interviews. The participants will be able to break down their stories into sections or 'chapters' as they wish.

The introduction of the central topic is hoped to trigger the narration process.

Main narration

The narration will not be interrupted until signalled by the participant that they have ended their story. The participant will then be asked whether they would like to say anything more. Strictly only non-verbal cues will only be used during the narrative to symbolise attentive listening and encouragement to continue the narration. Questions that arise from the researcher will be written down for the next interview phase.

Questioning phase

When the narration has ended, the researcher will then begin to ask questions to the participant. Initial exmanent questions are transformed to immanent questions using the language of the participant to complete the gaps in the study. Why-questions will be avoided during this phase. Questions asked will only reference events mentioned in the story and the topics of the research.

Concluding talk

The tape recorder will be switched off for this phase. Why-questions will be asked within this phase to provide contextual information that may add to the richness of the interpretation of the data. Written notes will be made in this phase.

Appendix K. Research diary extract

Diary Extract 1

Reflections on 'future' interview with Oliver

Medication: Oliver spoke a lot about medication to support Leo in the future. Two main reflections from this:

1) Personal

- I asked wider questions to elicit other ideas about how anxiety could be supported. This may have been too imposing on Oliver's narrative and based on the value I hold for counselling/therapy and my own experiences of this. I may have anticipated answers in relation to therapeutic interventions.
- Leo to be seen by CAMHS in August, but Oliver did not include this as possible support for Leo's anxiety in his future narrative. This may be due to past experiences re. CAMHS.

2) Professional

- As a TEP from an EP background, it is my role as a professional to gain a holistic understanding of needs. Therefore, wider questions are valuable and reflective of my professional position.

Diary Extract 2

Reflections on 'past' interview with Emma

Although E appeared articulate, she seemed to struggle with the format of the interview (it may have been that it was too 'open' for her). I wonder whether this was the case or whether she viewed her previous experiences as unimportant, e.g. primary school was not significant to her narrative, as she didn't perceive it to be 'good or bad'.

As E struggled, I found myself having to offer prompts. I was conscious to keep these to a minimum and use her words where possible. This may have impacted on the narrative due to the possibility of not exploring experiences in further depth.

→ reflect on epistemology relating to reflexivity. Perhaps social constructivist paradigm allows for *some* element of construction in narrative due to interactive nature of interviews.

E appeared more comfortable in clarification stage. This offered more structure and gave her some time to think about her answers.

E told me that something her words don't always come out 'properly'. I wonder if this was a potential barrier for her?

Appendix L. Ethics approval from the University Ethics Committee

The University of Nottingham
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School of Psychology
The University of Nottingham
University Park
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NG7 2RD

tel: +44 (0)115 846 7403 or (0)115 951 4344

SJ/tp

Ref: S1153

Monday 11th March 2019

Dear Hannah and Anthea,

Ethics Committee Review

Thank you for submitting an account of your proposed research **"Hearing the voices of school non-attenders and their parents using Narrative Oriented Inquiry".**

That proposal has now been reviewed and we are pleased to tell you it has met with the Committee's approval.

However:
Please note the following comments from our reviewers;

Reviewer One:

- The researcher states "you are free to withdraw at any point" in the information sheet. I would recommend specifying a deadline for participants to withdraw their data.
- Please include the supervisor's contact details on the documents (e.g., information sheet, letter to parents).
- The researcher should specify that data will be stored in line with GDPR.
- The submission seems to include an information sheet for young people, however, the information sheet for parents is not presented.
- When will audio recordings be deleted? Consider deleting audio recordings following transcription.
- One of the points on the consent form states "I give permission for my data from this study to be shared with other researchers provided that my anonymity is completely protected". The term data here is vague and could refer to the audio recording, which would not be anonymised. I would recommend changing this to 'written transcript of my interview'.

Reviewer Two:

- Approved

Final responsibility for ethical conduct of your research rests with you or your supervisor. The Codes of Practice setting out these responsibilities have been published by the British Psychological Society and the University Research Ethics Committee. If you have any concerns whatever during the conduct of your research then you should consult those Codes of Practice. The Committee should be informed immediately should any participant complaints or adverse events arise during the study.

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Independently of the Ethics Committee procedures, supervisors also have responsibilities for the risk assessment of projects as detailed in the safety pages of the University web site. Ethics Committee approval does not alter, replace, or remove those responsibilities, nor does it certify that they have been met.

Yours sincerely



Professor Stephen Jackson
Chair, Ethics Committee

Appendix M. Debrief for young people

Sometimes talking about your past experiences and thoughts about the future might raise things that you would like to talk to someone about. A list of support options has been provided below:

Samaritans 24hr service offering emotional support	**Website:** • **www.samaritans.org**	**Freephone (UK and Republic of Ireland):** • **116 123 (24 hours)**
Childline If you're under 19 you can confidentially call, email, or chat online about any problem big or small.	Website: • www.childline.org.uk Chat Online: • https://www.childline.org.uk/get-support/1-2-1-counsellor-chat/	Freephone 24h helpline: • 0800 1111
The Mix If you're under 25 you can talk to The Mix for free on the phone, by email or on their webchat. You can also use their phone counselling service, or get more information on support services you might need.	Website: • https://www.themix.org.uk/ Chat Online: • https://www.themix.org.uk/get-support/speak-to-our-team	Freephone: • 0808 808 4994 (13:00-23:00 daily)
Wellness In Mind This is a service for everybody in Nottingham city from people who may want to find out more about mental health for themselves, for friends, family members, or members of their community.	Website: • https://www.wellnessinmind.org/talk-to-us-online/	Freephone (Calls from mobiles may apply): • 0800 561 0073 (7 days per week, 9am – midnight) • If above number does not work, 07825434321.

Appendix N. Debrief for parents

Sometimes talking about child's/family's past experiences and thoughts about the future might raise things that you would like to talk to someone about. A list of support options has been provided below:

Samaritans 24hr service offering emotional support	**Website:** • **www.samaritans.org**	**Freephone (UK and Republic of Ireland):** • **116 123 (24 hours)**
Young Minds Support service for young people and families	Website: • www.youngminds.org.uk	Freephone (parents helpline, Monday to Friday 9.30am – 4pm): • 0808 802 5544
Family Lives You can contact about any family issue, big or small.	Website: • https://www.familylives.org.uk/	Freephone (9am – 9pm, Monday to Friday and 10am – 3pm Saturday and Sunday): • 0808 800 2222
Wellness In Mind This is a service for everybody in Nottingham city from people who may want to find out more about mental health for themselves, for friends, family members, or members of their community.	Website: • https://www.wellnessinmind.org/talk-to-us-online/	Freephone (Calls from mobiles may apply): • 0800 561 0073 (7 days per week, 9am – midnight) • If above number does not work, 07825434321.

Appendix O. Sample transcript

HW: I'm interested in hearing about your time in school and up until now. I would like you to tell me as much as possible about it, starting from the time you joined your first school, until where you are now. I would like for key information to be noted on this life grid. Is there a way that makes sense for you so that I can divide the grid, or do you just want to go for it and then we can make some sense of it as we go along?

L: I think just go for it.

HW: Let's just go for it then. So, where would you like to start?

L: Well the first school I went to was C* Primary. It was- it wasn't the best school in the world like I didn't learn- we didn't learn much.

I think the teachers, some teachers were too friendly, like they didn't teach us enough work.

Erm, and that was like in the second half of primary school so like Year 4, 5 and 6, we didn't- like we did learn work but because it was in like groups of tables and only like the top table would learn stuff you actually needed to know for secondary. So all the other tables would not learn like proper stuff you would need for secondary, so by the time we got there, well me and a lot of my classmates were a bit confused with like all the stuff, mainly because we haven't learnt a lot of it. Especially in maths, well mainly in maths because we didn't know much.

But then when it was secondary after the SATs it was like really stressful because the school hours were 10 past 8 (8:10) till quarter to 5 (4:45) every single day apart from Friday. And sometimes you get like 12 pieces of homework a week or like 10 and it was putting a lot of pressure on me and my parents as well because I'd panic about not doing homework and then they would. And they had like a really strict detention policy as well.

And then it just carried on like that until year 9 when, when I think it was Year 9... yeah Year 9 then I started to just not- like missing the odd day like maybe one day a week or it would be like I've missed a day and then I'd go a week and then I'd miss another day and then it just carried on like that a bit. And then I would go to school for a while and then I would have quite a few days off. So it was a bit patchy in year 9.

And then when it got to year 10, they reduced the hours but I think their consequences became a lot more prominent and I kept getting in trouble with the teachers and I couldn't be bothered to argue with them so I just wouldn't go to school.

And I just - because it- I got more stressed [04:08] like going on in the years because it was getting closer to my GCSEs, I'd get so much more tired and exhausted at the end of the day and I wouldn't want to go in the mornings because it's like quarter past 8 (8:15), I wake up at like ten to 8 (7:50) or something and it was just way too early and like when I get into school I'd be

grumpy or wouldn't focus properly and then I'd get shouted at. And I couldn't be bothered to do that so I just wouldn't go.

And then that kept - I kept on not going and then school was like 'oh wait we need to talk to your parents about this because it's a lot of time being missed' and I used to go into this place called The Hub which was like if I was getting annoyed in lessons or erm, just didn't have the effort to do work or whatever I was angry, then I could go and sit in there and do some work.

[05:08] and then, it just carried on with me missing like 3 days a week. And then the school was like 'right' and I kept saying to my parents that we need to look at home education and they finally did. And then when that started, I didn't want to do it because I didn't realise it would be an hour and 40 minutes of straight work, because I was only used to 45 minutes in one go.

And then that started, and I missed a couple of them but then I finally started doing it and I started getting used to my tutors and then one of them left because somebody else needed her as a tutor. So then I just had one tutor who was really nice called Louise and I still have her but I - I was aiming to go into school for my DT lessons, which are design technology, because I really liked them. And I just really wanted to do it but I couldn't wake up in the mornings, so I wouldn't get in and my parents kept getting angry.

And then, it's got to now pretty much where I've- I'm starting to go in for my drum lessons which is not really a big step but I'm still going into school for my drum lesson and then leaving. But I'm trying to do more of my home education and now it's at the point where I need to be thinking about my GCSEs so I'm going to have to go into school next year, so after the summer holidays I'm going to have to pretty much go to school full time.

[interview continues]

Appendix P. Example of a descriptive and interpretive summary tables that was created for each participant.

Emma: summary table and holistic form analysis

Uninterrupted narrative
Clarification stage
Future narrative
Clarification stage in future narrative

Phase	Summary	Evaluative excerpts	Comments
Beginning (Primary to Year 6)	***School/Education*** Emma did not remember much from primary school and appeared to list key memories for her. Overall, Emma stated that primary 'wasn't bad and it wasn't good', which implied that there are no significant emotions attached to her experiences there. The only feeling Emma discussed was feeling stressed in SATs ***Friendships*** Emma did not reflect much on friendships during her narrative of primary school, however mentioned them briefly as a factor that she considered when choosing a secondary school. During the clarification phase of the interview, Emma reflected further on her friendships throughout primary. These seemed inconsistent for Emma.	***School/Education*** I remember going to nursery and obviously the first few days of nursery being upset when my mum left me (1) We had a teacher who left in year 1 and I liked her (2) (Year 6) I had my own solo in Year 6 in the school play, I remember that, school plays were just fun (6) Then like doing SATs that was such a stressful time (7) I remember being really stressed about SATs (7) (Choosing secondary) I ended up going to OW but I was worried because it was just so far away (10)	***School/Education*** First memories of nursery – feeling upset at separation from Mum Positive memory of teacher Enjoying elements of latter years of primary school Regression: stress in SATs Worry about transition Stability in narrative re. primary school

		Yeah school was alright in primary like it wasn't bad but it wasn't good (66) ***Friendships*** Choosing for secondary schools I found that difficult because I just wanted to go where my best friend went (10) (Year 7 friends) yeah I'm just not close to any of them anymore but that's ok (14) It was a bit weird like in social like friendship groups. I was always falling out with my friends (67) But I was like floating around groups of friends like I didn't have a set amount of friends, which still to this day (67)	 ***Friendships*** Difficulty choosing secondary. Based this on friendship Changes in friendships Difficulties in friendships throughout primary school. Instability in friendships
Middle (Secondary Year 7 to Year 10)	***School/Education*** Emma initially reflected on her transition to secondary school and described this as 'scary' due to the other people who attended. She seemed to reflect positively on the earlier years of secondary overall, stating that she made friends and enjoyed the lessons. Emma noted that her behaviour generally got her into trouble at school and that she frequently received behavioural consequences such as detentions. Emma suggested that her attendance started to reduce in the early years of secondary school and attributed this to her migraines. Emma later reflected that	***School/Education*** (Year 7/8) Yeah moving to OW was scary because I didn't like any of the chavs who went there (14) I made loads of new friends in the beginning of year 7 and 8 to the point where all of my friends who I went to primary school with were like jealous (15) Year 7 and 8 were fun because you got put in literally all of the lessons obviously before you choose your GCSEs (17) Yeah and in year 7 and 8 I did Spanish as well sorry, I forgot to say that. I hated my Spanish teacher, she hated me with a passion (29)	***School/Education*** Scary transition to new school Positive start. Progression in narrative when making new friends at school Enjoying lessons in Year 7 and 8 Not getting along with teacher in Spanish lessons meant behaviour consequences implemented

	she also found the travelling to school 'horrible' and did not want the 'stress' each morning, therefore this was another reason for her to not attend. Emma reflected on her academic enjoyment and strengths, comparing Year 7/8 to Year 9 lessons. Year 9 seemed to be a point in time that things regressed significantly for Emma in school. Emma described wanting to express herself more, which had started towards the end of year 8, and the school systems/behavioural sanctions not allowing this, and that her perceptions of education changed overall. Emma also noted during Year 9 that she seemed to have a change in personality that led to her becoming more aggressive. ***Friendships*** Emma's friendships started off positively when she moved to her secondary school. Emma stated that she made lots of friends, which seemed to negatively impact on her existing friendships, as she perceived her other friends to be 'jealous'. Emma described some of the students at her new setting. She seemed to have a negative view of some characteristics of the pupils and would vocalise these views	And I would literally get detentions every week (30) I was always talking and I always got in trouble because I was talking (18) And I always had detentions (18) I would do my homework but I didn't bring it in and then they don't take any exceptions to that (18) And that's when my attendance started going down because I had really bad migraines (20) That's when I started getting piercings and self-expression and then I got put in isolation at the very end of year 8 (22) It's an hour away on the bus. Getting the right bus, getting off at the right stop (113) And then getting on the bus at the right time, sometimes I would miss walking up to the bus stop and getting on the right buses with my friends and stuff, and then they wouldn't wait for me (113) That was scary in the first few months it's just making sure that I woke up at 6:30 and left by 7:30 (114) The travelling in was horrible. That was also one of the reasons why I stopped attending at one point was like just the stress of literally taking an hour every morning to get there (115)	Regression in narrative. Deterioration in behaviour and not following school rules Regression in narrative. Attendance reducing due to physical illnesses Regression. Emma wanting to express self however school systems against this Reasons for transition to OW being scary. Mainly travelling in and needing to make sure she was catching the right public transport. Travel as reason for less attendance

	at times. This led to Emma having negative relationships with some pupils in school, which got her into trouble.	(Year 9) And I used to be really into geography like in Year 7 I remember I got some good points because I got full marks (24) And then I hated geography in year 9 it was so boring to me (25)	Changes in motivation in some lessons
		Yeah I would say year 7 and 8, it's not that bad for chemistry but when it came into year 9 and 10 I did not understand anything (27) I wasted so much time at OW (37)	Differences in years between lessons
		Year 9 was when I started to get into trouble with like uniform and stuff (38) But year 9 was not that bad. I think I like started to like actually start doing work at the end of the year like in certain subjects like that I was interested in (40)	Changes in Emma's attitude towards school policy re. uniform. Stability towards end of year 9. Emma reflecting on how she began to complete work towards end
		I think it was around Year 9, or like the end of year 9 where I realised that I wanted to move school (46)	End of year 9: wanting to move schools
		In year 9 that's when I started to, I don't know I got more 'woke', I started to realise that we are literally revising for 4 years, 4 years to answer a question about a subject (97)	Realisation for Emma re. education system. Going against her need to be seen as an individual
		I just had a realisation point and then obviously I became a very aggressive person. And then I don't know, I think my personality just did a loop de loop (99)	Change in personality. Brief mention of aggression

		Friendships (Year 7) All of my friends who I went to primary school with were like jealous because they had made like one friend but I was I don't know quite popular but I wasn't popular, popular but I was more popular than them (15) They were a bit annoyed at that because I would go off and make friends and have lunch with other people at school (15) I got in quite a lot of trouble with people, it was only like set people they were like certain people who I didn't like and a lot of people didn't like just because they were bad personalities (102) (In OW) Literally like my one close friend and that's it (122)	***Friendships*** Made lots of friends in Year 7 which impacted negatively on existing friendships Emma disliking other people in setting leading to disagreements and fallouts One positive relationship in OW
End (Year 10 to +1 year and long-term)	***School/Education*** In Year 10, Emma's attendance at school significantly dropped within the first week. Emma described having behavioural consequences within the first week of being at school due to her behaviours and desire to express herself through her appearance. After one particular incident, Emma did not return to school, despite them offering her a reduced timetable.	***School/Education*** (Year 10) Then year 10, I went for like a week (41) Then I was always coming in late to lessons and stuff because I was just getting in trouble for what I was coming to school with like piercings and stuff (42) I was just really set on the fact that I want to look how I want to look and I don't want to take my piercings out. So I was	***School/Education*** Regression Regression in behaviour and consequences. Wanting to be able to express self in school and as such got in trouble

	After 5 months, Emma was given a place at an alternative provision. This represented a stability in the narrative, as Emma disliked the setting due to the other students. Emma felt unable to concentrate due to her environment and her peers within this. As such, Emma began to refuse to attend the setting again and asked to move. At the time of the interview, Emma had been allowed to change provision to a college to complete her GCSEs. This had been a struggle for the family to achieve. ***Future*** Regarding her education, Emma would like to be successful in her GCSE's, some of which she had taken a year early and had worked hard for. Emma felt confident in her abilities to get her GCSE grades. Overall, Emma found the future interview more difficult to engage in. She was due to go for an exam that day and at times seemed pre-occupied with this. In her narrative regarding the long-term, Emma stated that she would like to continue her education and hoped to either go to university or get a well paid job.	really set on it, so I was always in trouble, so I was always late to lesson (42) Then I threw a bit of a fit about that and then started shouting at the scariest teacher and I would never do that because she was so scary. And then never returned after that (43) I didn't end up going to the half days obviously. And then I just school refused for months (46) When I first dropped out of school. Like it was alright for the first week and I was like watching Netflix and lounging around and then after that it just became so tiring to do anything and not fun (80) (AP) And then I got moved into SS after it was like 5 months I think (47) And then I didn't like that and now here I am (48) And then it just became a really s*** environment because I didn't want to speak to anyone, literally (52) And then obviously I'm bored all day and the lessons were just horrible because everyone was constantly shouting and just not listening and like trying to get the teachers attention when there are three people who were like messing about is very, very, very difficult (53) Then I politely let everyone know that I wanted to move school (61)	 Specific event that meant Emma did not return to school again School provision to support attendance. Emma refusing school Boredom once out of school Transition to AP Regression continued. Didn't like AP Lack of peers in new setting. Not positive environment for Emma to be in Environmental factors influencing Emma's education and enjoyment of AP Desire to move schools again

	In the short-term. Emma stated that she would like to finish off her GCSEs. In order to do this, Emma felt that when she goes to college, she would like to be able to keep to herself and retreat off into her own world on her mobile phone when needed. ***Friendships*** Emma did not reflect much on her friendships during Year 10. When she made her transition to the AP, Emma suggested that she found it difficult to make friends and disliked all of the pupils in the setting. Emma reflected on her previous friendships at OW and seemed to have had negative experiences within these. Emma stated that she had some fallings out with people at OW and 'lost' her friendships with others as they 'disappeared'. Emma stated that her relationship with her boyfriend was positive for her. ***Future – friendships*** Emma did not reflect much on friendships as part of her future narrative, however she did state that she hopes to form at least one friendship when she goes to college.	(Now) Then it's been a fight to move to X College as my mum has probably already told you (64) But finally got the ok, I'm going in for my exam, to go in on Thursday (65) (Critical moments) *Erm, teachers. Literally I think just the format of school, well mainstream School is the most impactful, for me at least. Because I think I can make friends anywhere I go but the way that the people teach me, well not even teach me just treat me in such situations is more, impactful (123) ***Future*** Hopefully I should be getting my Art and Photography GCSE and then English language GCSE because I worked my hand off for that (60) Judging the fact that I used to get quite high grades and I was in the top sets for everything apart from maths, like I'm not too concerned about what my GCSEs are going to be like next year in terms of results (86) (Long-term)	Current. Difficulties experienced trying to get Emma in a setting that she would like to go to Critical moments identified ***Future – School/Education*** Emma sat GCSE's early and is hopeful of success Strength: academic success.

		Hopefully the life layout, for the next literally two years will be fine for me, two or three years, possibly still in education/ a job / training to get a higher job, I don't know yet, I really don't know (E2.01) Well my mum may or may not be pushing me to go to University on the low, so possibly (E2.03) I'll probably travel eventually, when I'm like I don't know past the point of education in a gap year I want to travel somewhere nice (E2.06) (Short term) I would have finished my last GCSEs. I would be on my summer break, which would have started last week. And then living my best life (E2.14) But I think it will be a bit easier, because I can just keep to myself on my phone. If worse comes to worst I can plug my earphones in and like independently work so it should be good, it should be good. Should. (E2.26) ***Friendships*** (AP) I didn't like any people there. I had one friend and we're not friends anymore (50) But I had no friends (52) (Year 10/Transition to AP)	Desire to continue in education and get a job she enjoys Influence from parent to go to university Desire to travel Progression in narrative. Plans to do GCSE's Hopes for easier time at X College due to fewer expectations ***Friendships*** Lack of friendships at AP. One person however this friendship was not maintained.

		When I moved school in the first place where I was really upset because I just had no friends (79)	Lack of friendships after transition to AP
		There are just some horrible students at SS who were just so ignorant (126)	Characteristics of students in new setting
		When I stopped going to SS as well like that would have been horrible because I had no friends like literally no friends. I spoke to nobody (81)	No friends made during time at AP
		I have lost all my friends from OW like I have literally got like two friends from OW (71) Then I have fallen out with some people at OW and they have showed their true colours (72)	Regression in friendships at OW and afterwards
		(Now) At the moment they're alright it's all just like old friendships (74)	Maintaining older friendships
		[Friendships] Just disappeared yeah. Because I guess when you don't see them everyday like it's just very little communication (78)	Friendships not maintained from OW
		I'm glad that I have my boyfriend because he has become my best friend now (81)	Reliance on boyfriend currently
		Future (Short term)	***Future – friendships***
		I should have made at least a friend at X College, in lessons at least because I don't think I am in in many lessons with	Hoping to form friendship at college

		the one person that I am friends with already (E2.17) I know quite a few of the A-level students, so I should have some friends just from being around the building (E2.17)	

Appendix Q. Example of a table of principal sentences and subcategories that was created for each participant.

Oliver's Categorical-content analysis (past interview)

Principal sentence	Category Subcategory	Comments
	Home and parent experience	
But he would then just sort of wonder off and just go off and, so we never- could never really relax when we were anywhere because, you know he would never listen (O1.4) Other than the fact that sometimes he wouldn't listen, but I think you know as a parent, I've heard every parent saying you know 'my kids never listen'. Erm, so we didn't really think he was, you know, out of the ordinary really, I guess at that earlier stage (O1.8) **He was coming home and sort of having a- starting to sort of meltdown and saying he wasn't going into school ever again and you know we just started to notice a real difference in his behaviour at home (O1.27)** He was starting to get a little bit more physical with [his brother] at that point (O1.28)	Young person's behaviours that challenge at home	Oliver's narrative largely focuses upon home life and the changes and challenges within the home that have seemingly impacted on the parents and the family unit as a whole. Oliver extensively describes the challenging behaviours that Leo presents with in the home, and how these have seemingly worsened over time as the parents started to 'notice a real difference in his behaviour at home' (O1.27) when Leo was younger. Overtime, these behaviours are suggested to have become more physical and violent. During the narrative, Oliver drew on analogies to reflect his developing understanding of Leo's needs and behavioural presentation, such as the 'coke bottle' analogy he uses to describe how Leo's anger builds at school and is released in the home. Oliver also appears to understand some of Leo's needs through his

A classic example was when Leo was really small actually and we had some friends around and William* was literally a baby in Michelle's Arms and Leo walked up and headbutted William* when he was a baby, you know purposely just went up (O1.29) That's when the kind of you know, the kind of resentment I think sort of started. He tended to be a lot more physical with [his brother] (O1.31) He was expecting something else from someone and that didn't materialise so his world was thrown into complete turmoil, and that presents itself as anger, which ultimately ends up in physical violence (O1.61) Yesterday he was literally hitting Michelle and threatening her with a knife (O1.78) Then it has to kind of get to the point of physicality because he will be hurting William* and we will stand there saying 'get off him! Get off William*, leave him alone' and he just will not (O1.83) And he's then started to learn how to almost embarrass us by saying 'ah you're assaulting me' (O1.84) And I think he's just learnt these little techniques to- to try and embarrass us so to the point where we actually will say 'Oh it's ok Leo, carry on on your PS4'. And he still does that to this day (O1.87)		diagnoses. However, Oliver's use of rhetorical questions ('is there a subject that he particularly doesn't like?' (O1.20), 'where do you go from there?' (O1.90)), may also indicate the confusion he has experienced when seeking to understand Leo's behaviours. Oliver describes the behavioural and coping strategies that the parents have implemented in response to Leo's challenging behaviours. Oliver seems in conflict about some of the strategies they have implemented, stating that some are used as a 'last resort' (O1.79). Oliver suggests that the parents experience difficulties with implementing behaviour strategies, as they find that typically, strategies will not work for Leo, or that at times, Leo can become so 'out of control' (O1.84) that they feel they no longer know how to 'handle the situation' (O1.84). Oliver appears to suggest that the experiences within the home have impacted significantly on the family as a whole, who he describes as being 'at breaking point' (O1.43). Oliver also implies that his own mental health and his role as 'breadwinner' (O1.53) within the family have been impacted by the challenges they have faced as a family, as he suggests that his responsibility to be at home with Leo full-time has led to a deterioration in his business and as a result, his mental health has been affected ('I feel pretty worthless' (O1.52)). Part of the parental experience within Oliver's narrative appeared to be the struggles the parents face to have their experiences be both heard and understood by others. The 'hidden battle' (O1.73) Oliver describes

And Michelle's even sometimes, I've been sat on the sofa and Leo has been stood here and he's been going 'Ah Dad, you're hurting me', and Michelle's in the kitchen and has looked around the corner and I'm nowhere near him, you know, I'm not even in the same room (O1.89) It got to the point where I even remember Michelle and I locking- having to lock ourselves in our own bedroom while he was outside threatening to stab us and slit our throats and trying to kick the door in (O1.92) I think the whole episode with his birthday yesterday and him feeling obvious disappointment about something he had a big meltdown last night and became violent again (O1.95) Because we've never ever once managed to get Leo to do any homework. Ever (O1.122) So, he can be outside even you know sort of in the road talking to a friend absolutely happy as Larry but the moment he stepped over the threshold it's like complete meltdown though (O1.128) I shouldn't say this but actually when he's had his meltdowns, I've said to someone else once and I didn't know whether to call the police or an exorcist it was that bad (O1.130) The first time I think we started to sort of notice Leo was slightly different to other children was at playgroup, before he started nursery (O1.1)		appears to be a continuous theme throughout the narrative, and is apparent on various levels, such as the length of time it took to get Leo a diagnosis of Autism and the ongoing 'battle' to get Leo the correct provision and support ('And it's just been a battle ever since really.' (O1.45)). Oliver also reflects on how others fail to understand their experiences as parents due to Leo's differences in behavioural presentation between environments, people and settings.

It was our first child, as a family, its a whole learning process, you know they don't come with an instruction book (O1.5) So, you know they were just sort of slight observations that we'd made then that he was, not necessarily abnormal but he wouldn't listen as much as other children (O1.5) And I think most parents would probably agree that if a child comes home and starts saying that, you kind of want to know what it is. Possibly something in the school environment that's upset him, or you know a sort of teacher that he doesn't like, is there a subject that he particularly doesn't like? (O1.20) Where a lot of children with autism have that very kind of tunnel vision and you know 'this is the right way to do it and if you deviate from that path then its- (O1.57) And again I think Michelle's probably gone over the analogy of like having a Coke bottle at school and he gets told off and it's like a little shake on the bottle and he gets told off again it's like another shake on the bottle and then when he gets home and you turn the lid off and it just goes completely everywhere you know it gets completely out of control and that's what we felt we were dealing with (O1.74) **And that as a parent is really, really tough to manage because you know where do you go from there? (O1.90)**	Parent learning about and understanding the young person's needs and behaviours	

Again, there was no one thing anything that I've noticed in Leo's upbringing or his childhood that could have caused the anxiety. I don't know, it's just been a real insecurity that he's always had and I don't know where it comes from (O1.132) So I don't necessarily know whether he's subliminally picked that up from me or he's inherited it from me possibly. I really don't know with that at all (O1.134) Michelle and I would try to instil the fact that sometimes you know, you need to understand that people make a mistake and that's life. You know, that will happen in life at some point (O1.24) Sometimes we have to restrain him (O1.47) We now have to lock [Leo's brother] in his room, we give him a key so that he can get out when he needs to but so Leo can't get in (O1.48) I feel almost like I'm a wrestling referee, trying to keep the two apart (O1.48) So, as parents I think we try to manage his expectations to a level where we try and prime him sometimes to say 'look auntie Lisa lives in America, the card might not arrive on time' and we try and obviously manage it, but sometimes it works you know. The majority of the time it doesn't (O1.62)	Behaviour management/coping strategies	

And that's just- you learn as a parent how to manage certain situations and when to learnt to de-escalate situations. And it's sometimes unpredictable (O1.63) We're actually, even though we're skint, thinking about installing CCTV inside the house so we can just show people, or mainly for our own protection and his protection (O1.78) He's 15 now and if the physicality carries on at the level it has been- it's taking two of us now to restrain him and we struggle and we're both pretty strong people and we have started to struggle to restrain him if we need to. I mean it's always a last resort (O1.79) I have just been on a 9-week course and NVR course to help to try and learn to control the situation before it gets to you know that physical restraint point (O1.80) We've done every kind of parenting course we could possibly get onto and none of them work with Leo (O1.82) And that I mean we've had- we called the police- we've had the police here twice because we called them because he was getting so out of control that we felt we couldn't handle the situation anymore (O1.84) I don't want to I don't want to appear as someone who abuses their child but I have to use necessary force when I feel it's necessary, when it's necessary (O1.91)		

And of course as a parent that's the last thing you want to do when it comes to your child but we've have to do that on two separate occasions (O1.93) **I think by that stage the family were- as a family we were at breaking point (O1.43)** But I think what's been the most difficult thing with the- with the whole family is Leo's physical meltdowns where he becomes really violent you know, and that's been really, really difficult. For our safety and for [Leo's brother's] safety and Leo's own safety (O1.46) You know, so in that respect its physically very, very difficult as a family at the moment (O1.48) I think the whole episode with his birthday yesterday and him feeling obvious disappointment about something he had a big meltdown last night and became violent again. And that's what we obviously want to avoid for everyone's safety (O1.95) It's not something I look forward to. Michelle and I both kind of dread school holidays because you think 'oh it's gonna be crisis point again' (O1.49) I think as a family the fact that I've had to sort of close my business down to look after Leo all day, that's just becoming A) a massive financial problem and B) for my mental health its really difficult. Because I don't get any respite at all really (O1.50)	Impact on the family	

For my own sort of wellbeing its tough because I feel pretty worthless (O1.52) I think as a person that was generally the bread winner of the family, and I've built my business up over 17 years, to suddenly kind of not be working is not nice. You know, from a mental point of view for me, it's a horrible thing to have to do (O1.53) I'm not finding it very easy at all, that's for sure (O1.54) And as a parent it's like demoralising because you're thinking 'I'm just trying to get you off him, I'm not trying to hurt you', but Leo would kind of blow it all out of proportion (O1.85) But it you know the more he attacks you the harder it is to kind of not want to retaliate and that's the hardest thing in the world. Sometimes you've just got to walk away (O1.91) It became so stressful for us as parents to keep trying that every single night that we just almost had to throw the towel in and say 'look' you know go into school and say 'we cannot get him to do homework no matter what we do, we cannot get him to do it' (O1.123) Because it had taken us roughly about over 4 years I think from us first going to our GP and saying you know 'we think there's something not quite right with Leo's behaviour and his anxiety and- and strange sort of traits		

that he has'. And yeah I mean it took us I think about 4 years to actually get a physical diagnosis of ASD (O1.44) **But I think that's when the kind of the whole battle starts from there on once you have a diagnosis, then you have to try and do your best for your child to try and get them everything they need… And it's just been a battle ever since really. (O1.45)** I think that's where Michelle and I have really struggled because it's trying to say to people 'look this is what it's like at home' and they say 'what do you mean? He came round to our house the other week and he was a complete angel, his manners were absolutely impeccable, polite, never says a word out of turn', but when he comes home everything, you know, it's just absolute chaos. (O1.66) But he manages to hold it in most of the time at school. I think that's where Michelle and I struggled because we felt like we were fighting this hidden battle at home yet everyone else was saying 'he's a lovely child perfectly well behaved he's fine at school'. And Michelle and I would constantly going to school saying 'yes I understand he's fine at school he comes home and he explodes' (O1.73) We're actually, even though we're skint, thinking about installing CCTV inside the house so we can just show people (O1.78) But at the time you know it's just like, how do you go online and say to people 'I'm sorry my son's got he doesn't quite understand that' and they're not bothered (O1.101)	Battle to be heard or understood	

	School-based factors	
He'd had SATS and the certain- obvious pressure of school work was getting a little bit more increased as they were trying to sort of prepare them for secondary school and year 7. So the workload had increased, not hugely but you know it was heavier than it was (O1.17) The school hours at NFS are, well they used- they were 8 o'clock in the morning until quarter to 5 in the evening. 35. And you know, for a 12-year-old to be doing that, they are long hours (O1.35-36) **The reasoning behind them setting that curriculum and that kind of timing was, I think by the end of their academic year there, they would have crammed in basically an extra year. You know by doing that over four odd years they would have got an extra year's worth of work in, which is fine, but I think- I'm not sure that any 12-year-old has not- Leo certainly didn't have the capacity to deal with that kind of pressure (O1.36-37)**	School pressures	Oliver focussed less on school in comparison to home, however school did still feature in the narrative, particularly after Leo transitioned to secondary school. Oliver reflects on the perceived 'pressure' Leo experienced at school. For Oliver, this pressure occurred around exams at primary school, which at the time, Oliver attributed to an increase in Leo's anxiety ('he was starting to show quite a bit of anxiety (O1.16)… as parents we sort of put that down to the fact that, you know, he'd had SATs' (O1.17)). In secondary school, Oliver appears to reflect on the systemic differences between primary and secondary school, suggesting that Leo did not have the skills to cope with the perceived pressure of the curriculum and how this was taught in his secondary setting.
	Young person's characteristics and experiences	
We couldn't really notice real anger around his anxiety at all (O1.15)	Young person's emotional and mental wellbeing	Leo's own characteristics and experiences also formed part of Oliver's narrative. Oliver discusses Leo's

We did start to notice, I think probably around years 5, erm that he was starting to show quite a bit of anxiety around going out or wanting to go to school (O1.16) It was only sort of, towards the end of year 5 that we noticed that when he was coming home he was starting to get really anxious and starting to say that he didn't really want to go to school and he hated school (O1.19) But I think within about, probably about 5 or 6 weeks we star- started to notice his anxiety again and he was very, very upset by the amount of hours he did at school (O1.33) **But it came to- it got to the point where we saw his mental health suffering so much that we had a conversation with school and said 'look' you know, they even agreed his mental health's more important at the moment than putting him through that stress to get to school and at some point his education can be caught up (O1.42)** And of course he had a complete breakdown that night, he was crying and trembling he was petrified and we just said to Leo, 'you've got to take it offline straight away, take it straight down, apologise to all the kids that have sent you these emails or Snapchats', whatever they were (O1.100) And he will just panic like 'please don't call me ***, please don't call me-' you know because he's still scared of retribution I think. So that's affected him quite a lot and I		emotional and mental wellbeing throughout the narrative, with more focus on this as Leo transitions to secondary school. In primary, Oliver describes not really noticing any anger around Leo's anxiety, implying he makes a connection between the two. However, in the latter primary school years, Oliver suggests that Leo started to become anxious and say that he did not want to go to school. This anxiety appears to become more prominent as Leo transitions to secondary school, when Oliver describes noticing Leo's anxiety in the early stages of Year 7 and his upset at the amount of hours he had to do at school. Oliver alludes to a gradual but significant deterioration in Leo's mental health as he proceeds through secondary school. Although describing a negative social experience as a 'turning point' where he feels Leo 'feared school' (O1.115), Oliver suggests that there was 'no real catalyst' (O1.127) to Leo's EBSA, and that instead it was a gradual worsening of Leo's anxiety and aggression. This appears to reach a point in Year 10 when Oliver describes seeing Leo's 'mental health suffering' (O1.42) in relation to them trying to get him to attend school, and as a result, he stops attending. Oliver seems to seek understanding of Leo's experiences of anxiety through his own experiences, although he is unsure of the specific triggers for Leo. Oliver also describes the changes in Leo's behaviour between primary and secondary school. At primary, he appears to suggest that overall, despite sometimes not listening, Leo's behaviours overall were positive and that his 'school reports were great' (O1.11). However, after

think he's slightly underestimated himself how much it has scared him (O1.104) HW: And for him obviously that it's quite a scary thing to have to have gone through by the sounds of it. DCL: Yeah I mean because he's scared of going- I mean yeah it would have scared me if I'd of had people sending me death threats. And I think for him it was just 'ooh' he didn't want to go out anywhere (O1.106) HW: Is that something that he came home and told you guys about? DCL: Yeah. And we'd obviously gone into school and said to Mr C who's his head of year and said he's really scared (O1.112) So yeah that was I think a certainly a turning point where I felt he feared school (O1.115) But there was no real trigger that I can think of that made him sort of change that dramatically it was kind of a gradual thing (O1.117) No real catalyst that I can think of no. I think it has been a gradual thing and it's just slowly kind of- his anxiety has slowly got worse, his aggression has slowly got worse (O1.127) And he seems quite fear- he's quite frightened of the house, quite fearful of it and he still won't sleep on his own at night without Michelle going in to sleep with him (O1.129)		transitioning to secondary school, despite some initial low-level behaviours, Oliver describes an increase in Leo's anger and how this began to impact on his behaviour at school, as he would 'start to answer back' (O1.68) and be rude towards teachers. Oliver appears to attribute a decline in Leo's behaviours to Leo's increase in anger and his autism, as he suggests that Leo does not 'have that kind of handbrake to realise that that's not socially acceptable' (O1.70). Oliver appears to reflect on the gradual decline in Leo's school attendance throughout the narrative, at times linking this to Leo's anxiety ('he was starting to show quite a bit of anxiety around going out or wanting to go to school' (O1.16), 'he was starting to get really anxious and starting to say that he didn't really want to go to school and he hated school' (O1.19)). Oliver describes the parents efforts to get Leo to attend school, which were inconsistent in terms of their success, until Year 10 when Leo's attendance had hit a point where he has 'not really been' (O1.41). Although Oliver alluded to Leo's attendance behaviours being as a result of an overheard conversation, he appears to attribute more of this to a deterioration in Leo's emotional and mental wellbeing ('I think it has been a gradual thing and it's just slowly kind of- his anxiety has slowly got worse, his aggression has slowly got worse' (O1.127)). Although not mentioned significantly within Oliver's narrative, 'peers' seem to have been a theme worth noting. Oliver describes Leo's peer relationships positively in primary school, however in secondary school, he extensively describes a negative incident that

HW: You've talked about anxiety being underneath that kind of anger, I wonder how you make sense of his anxiety like where it comes from- for you, have you got an understanding of that or? DCL: Erm, I mean I've always had anxiety but I've always kind of lived with it and coped with it, I think. Yeah… I don't really know if I'm perfectly honest I really don't know (O1.131) Again, there was no one thing anything that I've noticed in Leo's upbringing or his childhood that could have caused the anxiety. I don't know, it's just been a real insecurity that he's always had and I don't know where it comes from (O1.132) And he was one of those kids that would just not listen. At all. (O1.2) All we ever got really were good reports of him, you know he played nicely with other kids, happily sharing toys and erm was really bright erm so yeah, there weren't many problems I would say that we noticed at nursery at all (O1.7) his school reports were great, he never seemed to erm you know get told off about anything particularly (O1.11) I remember some of the teachers saying that you know he would be very attentive for the first sort of 15 minutes of a lesson and then he'd start to wonder, his mind would start to wonder (O1.12)	Young person's behaviour at school	Leo experienced with his peers that seemed to have current influence on Leo's socialisation with others and his emotional state ('for me I still think he's very fearful of what happened' (O1.98), 'it certainly stopped him going out to a lot of places where he thought he might see children from [school name]' (O1.107)). Oliver further describes some current fear-led behaviours that Leo presents with that link back to the incident, indicating that the incident has ongoing significance for Oliver. Oliver also discusses Leo's academic strengths throughout the narrative. Oliver reflects on these mainly in Leo's primary schooling, however appears to recognise that Leo's academic ability will carry him through into a positive future, provided he has a good educational grounding. Leo's diagnoses also form part of Oliver's narrative. Describing his autism diagnosis as a 'relief' (O1.44), Oliver seems to use his knowledge of Leo's diagnoses to support his own understanding of Leo, or as an explanation for some of the behaviours Leo presents with.

And that's what it was like at school he'd get told off occasionally, but it was more normal sort of low-level talking (O1.64) I think towards sort of the end I guess it would have been the Year 9 there were occasions when the whole fairness gene would click in and then he'd start to answer back, which he would he never really used to do at school (O1.68) **But I think the older he got, the more likely he was to actually express his anger at school. He'd never be physical, you know, it would never be physical anger, but he would answer back (O1.69)** I mean a prime example and you might have to bleep this out, is he was talking in a lesson and the teacher said to him 'Leo do you mind telling me what you what you just said?' and Leo just turned around and said 'your lesson is shit Sir' because he doesn't have that kind of handbrake to realise that that's not socially acceptable (O1.70) he never really got into trouble or into any fights (O1.97) [after transition to secondary school] I think people were starting to notice his sort of ADHD or ADD. They were saying his attention was sort of wandering in class and he was not paying attention, although his academic results where was really good (O1.121)		

I think probably around year 5, erm that he was starting to show quite a bit of anxiety around going out or wanting to go to school (O1.16) Towards the end of year 5 that we noticed that when he was coming home he was starting to get really anxious and starting to say that he didn't really want to go to school and he hated school (O1.19) **It was always a real chore every morning to, we'd spend probably an hour just trying to get him out of bed and to try and persuade him that today would be OK**. And eventually, he would go (O1.38) But then I remember having a conversation with a friend of ours whose daughter was in the same class as Leo at primary school and she then left to go to a different secondary school and she started to school refuse. And I remember Leo kind of overhearing that and I kind almost think he had a lightbulb moment where he thought 'oh!' (laughs) and literally I think the next day, he'd just gone 'I'm not going to school, I'm not going' and that was it (O1.39) And yeah I mean for- probably about 3 or 4 months we'd manage to kind of get him to go but he'd then have one day at school and one day off and then one day at school and one day off, so it was never consistent (O1.40) **I mean he's basically not really been this year, even though he will say otherwise. But I think probably you**	School avoidance behaviours	

can count on one hand the amount of weeks he's been this year (O1.41) He'd happily play with other children and he was- he was good at sharing toys and everything else seemed normal (O1.3) He played nicely with other kids, happily sharing toys (O1.7) He had a really good friendship group which he's- you know, some of the children from even nursery he's still kind of kept in touch with, even though they live in New Zealand you know he's still sort of friends with some of them (O1.14) He never had a problem with any kind of erm you know peer groups or friendship groups, he was always a- I would say a really well liked child really (O1.14) Leo has his own little YouTube channel and they were playing a game I think it was a Call of Duty game, one of these shooting games on the PS4 or it might have been Fortnite, and he put a clip on of someone throwing a hand grenade into a bunker or whatever it was and then Leo put 'Allah Akbar' voice-over over it, obviously with terrorist connotations and Muslim connotations and put it up on his YouTube channel and within about 2 or 3 minutes of that going live, Leo was basically kind of getting death threats off children at his school, Muslim children at his school	Peers	

saying ‘we're going to kick your head in tomorrow how dare you like do that’ (O1.98) But because there were mentions of terrorism or implications of terrorism then we had to get the police involved so they had to be convinced that Leo wasn't a Muslim terrorist. Which sounds ridiculous I know but obviously that's protocol that's the way the way it has to go. But even to this day now if we have to go to Asda, Leo will say in the car 'Dad please don't call me ***', because that was the name of his YouTube channel and that's how other children will recognise his YouTube name (O1.102-103) **That was probably the start of him not becoming a complete recluse but it certainly stopped him going out to a lot of places where he thought he might see children from [school name] who I think was some of the ones who threatened him (O1.107)** He thought you know he'd get some kind of retribution from some of the kids (O1.111) He went to school and a whole gang of them, Muslim kids, kind of encircled him and you know he said ‘look I'm really sorry I didn't mean any offence’ and Leo sort of managed to kind of talk his way out of it but of course everyone was egging each other on to go and give him a kicking I think (O1.111)		

Actually, in nursery he did really well you know he was a bright- bright child (O1.7) he was again a really bright child. Erm, he always seemed to have a real thirst for knowledge. He has always showed real interest in history, something that you know, he really kind of took to (O1.10) But again, his school reports were, were really good, he was a really high achiever, very bright, always good at all his academic subjects, English and maths. Again, really interested in history and nothing particularly out of the ordinary (O1.18) Erm, and then I think when it got to the end of year 6 and he started in secondary in year 7, he seemed to start ok actually. He- I think he was in the top set for most things. Again very bright, very willing to learn (O1.32) Fortunately, Leo's got a very good retention. So, his memory has always been really, really good which has kind of got him through a lot of his schoolwork (O1.121) And he is a really, really bright child. He's very entrepreneurial so I think he'll end up probably end up working for himself, which is absolutely fine, but he still needs that grounding of a good education to do that. Whether it's academic education or it's an apprenticeship kind of education he needs he still have to have that in life you know (O1.126)	Academic skills	

I guess the first sort of indicators of ADHD. Although he- he never- I don't think he didn't have the hyperactivity (O1.13) I mean it took us I think about 4 years to actually get a physical diagnosis of ASD, and I guess it was a relief I think when we got it (O1.44) but trying to make him understand that sometimes teachers make a mistake or you know it... He doesn't get that. It's very black and white and that is an autistic spectrum disorder I guess (O1.56) And I think that's where he's autism he didn't realise there- the connotations what could happen, you know, he didn't really understand the- [Sighs]. I don't know. He just does some things sometimes impulsively and he didn't quite understand the outcome (O1.99)	Diagnoses	