

Young People and Alternative Provision: Perspectives from participatory-collaborative evaluations in three UK Local Authorities

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Abstract

This paper reports the findings of four separately commissioned evaluations of Alternative Provision (AP) undertaken in three Local Authorities in the UK. The evaluations were specifically predicated on the principles of children's rights and used a combination of qualitative research methods and documentary analysis to elicit the experiences of young people in conjunction with the viewpoints of key stake-holders. Data from each evaluation was gathered over a total period of 6 years. The sites and time scales for each evaluation varied from 6-month authority-wide strategic reviews, a 3-year evaluation of an AP Free School and an evaluation of pupil referrals in a large school partnership. The evaluations involved 200 participant children and young people, 30 managers and stakeholders, 8 parents of non-attending pupils and Local Authority Officers and School Governors. The evaluations report the complexity of needs amongst children and young people; the continuing problem of unsuccessful transitions between key phases/stages of education and the profound consequences of this for young people; assumptions around mainstream reintegration and managed moves; and the curriculum challenges of vocationalism and academic emphasis. While the research data confirms the positive value of multi-agency approaches in AP it also shows a more recent troubling increase in the number of young people now being referred to AP as a consequence of their exposure to performative school cultures.

Key Words: Alternative Provision, evaluation, schools, children and young people

Introduction

The provision of alternative forms of education where mainstream school-based education is considered unsuitable for a child or young person is an established feature of state education in England and the wider UK. The factors governing why and how children and young people find themselves in need of an alternative to mainstream schooling are, however, as extensive as they are complex. In two

reports for the Department for Education and its predecessor the Department for Children, Schools and Families, the range of needs identified for referral to Alternative Provision include the following: those with a Special Educational Need or Disability; young people who are at risk of, or have been permanently excluded from school; school refusal, school phobia and those with poor attendance and record of truancy; young people who have struggled to cope with mainstream settings; young people requiring therapeutic interventions such as those diagnosed with an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), Anxiety & depression or attachment disorder; victims of bullying or crime; those coping with bereavement, children and young people who have long gaps in their education and Looked after Children (Kendall et al, 2007; Taylor, 2012). As a consequence, the field of Alternative Provision (AP) is both wide-ranging and disparate. Typically, AP will encompass public, private and third sector organisations which can include therapeutic independent schools for children with severe behavioural, emotional and social difficulties (BESD); training and vocational programmes in further education colleges; support and training offered by charities, businesses, independent providers and the public sector. In turn, AP programmes may involve a body of students with common needs, or 'bespoke' provision for children and young people through such things as on-line platforms, activities focusing on technical skills such as vehicle maintenance for individuals or small groups of pupils, or work-based learning and vocational education and training (Gutherson et al, 2011; Harper et al, 2011).

While the range of independent provision can be traced not only to the continuing dispersal of Local Authority services in England, it is also indicative of many of the needs described above; and in particular a trend of increasing referrals of young people to AP related to matters of mental wellbeing (Gill, Quilter-Pinner and Swift, 2017, 7). In turn, the past decade has seen the publication of a number of international reports highlighting concerns around the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people in particular: The Children's Society (Layard and Dunn, 2009), the National Institute for Care Excellence (NICE, 2013), the Office for National Statistics (ONS, 2014), the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD; 2015) and UNICEF (2007, 2013, 2016). Despite the varying definitions of child wellbeing in the literature there are a number of common characteristics, and these typically coalesce around the domains of physical,

psychological, cognitive, social and economic well-being (Pollard and Lee, 2003). In its influential survey of child well-being UNICEF(2007) discuss six dimensions of well-being: material well-being, health and safety, educational well-being, family and peer relationships, behaviours and risks, and subjective well-being. On the basis of these dimensions UNICEF conclude that the UK, alongside the USA, has the worst profile of child well-being amongst the world's twenty-one richest countries.

NICE, in turn, identify domains of emotional wellbeing (being happy, confident and not unduly anxious or depressed); psychological wellbeing (involving personal autonomy, problem-solving and resilience, managing emotions and exercising empathy) and social wellbeing (developing positive relationships with others and not exhibiting disruptive, violent or a bullying behaviour) (NICE, 2013). While a small number of studies and government reports have provided a foreground for the variety of available AP and the range of individual needs AP aims to address (Taylor, 2012; Gutherson et al, 2011; Harper et al 2011) much of this has concerned strategy and approach without a more detailed examination of the antecedent causes, subsequent experiences for young people and the responsibilities of schools. Few enquires have then been undertaken in order to better understand how young people arrive in AP and how this is experienced. Amongst the exceptions, research by McCluskey et al (2015) and Pennacchia and Thomson (2016) offer examples where the research of AP in England has been explicitly approached from the perspective of human rights and social justice and in which young people are positioned as the principal informants of the enquiry. The evaluations reported in this paper are predicted on similar critical requirements; principally that children and young people are necessarily considered as 'reliable witnesses' to their own experiences (France 2004, 177). It is in this context of national and international concerns that this paper reports the findings from the evaluations of Alternative Provision in three UK Local Authorities.

Methodology

The research reported in this paper draws on data from separate evaluative case studies of Alternative Provision conducted over a six-year period from 2011-2017. The case studies are based on four commissioned evaluations conducted in three Local Authorities in the UK. The first of these involved a 6-month evaluation of pupil

behaviour and behaviour referrals for a large school partnership in a West Midlands Local Authority, followed by a three-year evaluation of a newly created Free School Alternative Provision Academy in the same Local Authority. Two Local Authority-commissioned evaluations of Alternative Provision were then undertaken; one in a London Borough and one in another Local Authority in the West Midlands, with each of these conducted over a 6-month period and completed in April 2017. Each evaluative case study, although designed and conducted specifically for the intended commissioning body and its participants, contributes to a systematic epistemic analysis of Alternative Provision in a contemporary English context.

Each of the evaluation designs were predicated on the principles of participatory-collaborative evaluation (Scriven, 2003, 23) with the intention of maximising the participation of those most affected by the existing practices and potential outcomes of the evaluation findings. Hence, eliciting the perspectives and viewpoints of children and young people was of primary importance. In this regard account was taken of a number of intersecting rights given to children through the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Article 12 of the UNCRC asserts the right of the child to participate in discussions on issues that may impact on their lives. As Jones (2004, 125) points out, by drawing on young people's 'understandings of the phenomena they observe, measure or are part of, new possibilities are opened up in relation to extending existing knowledge and understanding and improving educational policies and practices. Issues concerned with 'best interest' (article 3) in terms of participation in the project, and the potential for personal 'harm' in relation to 'welfare and development' (article 36) were also considered. It was recognised that exploring experiences and feelings about Alternative Provision can be difficult for some young people and that this would require particular sensitivity from the research team in the conduct of the research project. Amongst the adult participants, each evaluation elicited the viewpoints of key stake-holders, including managers, governors, those with leadership responsibilities and a range of contributory professional roles. Furthermore, in collecting the research data, those involved with a level of 'critical voice' (James and Prout, 1997) would be provided with an assurance that their views would be received confidentially and in a spirit of openness, mutual respect and tolerance. In this sense the evaluations align with the principles of 'fourth generation evaluation' involving

methods and approaches that include those that have been 'previously dismissed as excessively subjective e.g. empathy, participant observation' with clear political and ethical imperatives (Scriven, 2003, 23).

Criterion sampling (Patton, 2002, 243) was adopted where schools with known categories of challenging behaviour had been reported and random and purposive sampling (Merriam 2009; Given 2008, 799) were used in consultation with the commissioning bodies. The research team then negotiated the process of informed pupil/parental consent with each individual school or via the senior Local Authority officer. Issues of access, consent and confidentiality were confirmed with each institution and at the start of each pupil's interview. Interview schedules were designed and subsequently refined, following an initial pilot in sample schools with interviews designed to enable the progressive focussing on key emerging topics and the probing of significant supplementary themes. The young people interviewed were predominantly in the 14–15 age group and were currently attending AP. The samples of young people typically comprised a gender balance of both girls and boys.

Prior to commissioned evaluations, two members of the research group undertook a 12-month study of pupil perceptions of risk. Designed to elicit perceptions of risk from the perspective of children and young people in primary and secondary school settings in two West Midland Authorities in the United Kingdom, the research design employed focus groups to explore the perceptions of children and young people as they approached the end of primary-phase and secondary-phase schooling. Using purposive sampling, seven primary schools, six secondary schools and a community-based centre enabled 14 separate focus groups to be conducted with a total of 97 participants. At the request of the researchers, each participating institution was able to provide a focus group of broadly balanced gender that was representative of the socio-economic background ethnicities and ability ranges with the school (Trotman, 2012). Following the reporting of this study, four separate evaluations were undertaken using multi-stage data collection with a range of participants, including pupils, teachers, teaching assistants, headteachers, AP centre heads, parents and an LA adviser for AP. Data was collected using semi-structured interviews.

The first of the evaluations was commissioned by a Schools Partnership in a large UK Metropolitan Borough for the purpose of establishing reasons for increasing incidents of negative pupil behaviour and behaviour referrals in Years 8 and 9 (ages 13-14) in the Partnership's Secondary Schools. The evaluation comprised the purposive sampling of potential contributing schools identified by the Partnership's management team. Eight contributing schools were identified and were then asked to select students who had been subject to temporary or permanent exclusion from school with the remainder of the interviews comprising pupils from the designated year groups. From the sample schools 49 semi-structured interviews were conducted with 23 girls and 26 boys over a six-month period. From the sample schools 15 boys and 6 girls had either been temporarily or permanently excluded from school. The interviews with young people were further complemented by interviews with 8 members of staff with responsibility for behaviour management in each of the schools.

The second evaluation was commissioned by a newly established Free School Alternative Provision Academy in the same Metropolitan Borough. The aim of the evaluation was to report the development of the Free School from the perspective of its pupils and key participants during the school's first three years of operation. Conducted in two eighteen-month phases, the first phase of the evaluation involved semi-structured interviews with 18 pupils in two stages with 36 interviews in total. Students were selected on the basis of a random sample of the representative female and male population in Years 9 and 10 (ages 14-15) of the participating school. The sample students comprised: 8 boys - 5 Asian British; 2 Black British and 1 Black Other and 10 girls - 5 Asian British; 4 White British and 1 White Polish. A purposive sample of Governors (n=2), school managers (n=2) and teaching staff (n=8) were also interviewed and re-interviewed as part of the first phase interviews totalling 28 in number. Phase two of the evaluation involved 17 semi-structured interviews with a purposive sample of 7 girls - 1 Asian British; 1 Black Other; 4 White British and 1 Polish and 10 Boys - 4 Asian British; 2 Black British; 2 Black Other; 1 White British and 1 White Polish). 6 telephone interviews were conducted with non-attending pupils identified by the school, 3 telephone interviews with parents of non-attending pupils, 5 telephone interviews from 10 parents identified by

the School and 3 face-to-face on-site interviews with the Headteacher and representative members of SMT.

Two further evaluations were commissioned by two Local Authorities to advise on the development of AP as part of their strategic review of educational provision. Of the two Local Authority evaluations, the first of these was conducted in close collaboration with the Senior Education Adviser for Alternative Provision. Conducted in two phases, the first phase involved an online survey of 44 Authority staff with senior leadership responsibilities in primary and secondary schools, Headteachers, Heads of Pupil Referral Units (PRUs). The second phase of the evaluation involved the analysis of contextual policy documentation and semi-structured interviews with a purposive sample of Heads of AP and out of school provision (n=11), Secondary and Primary Headteachers (n=6), young people in AP aged between 12-16 (n=15) and three Chairs of Governors of AP. The second Local Authority evaluation also comprised the analysis of contextual policy documentation with a purposive sample of telephone interviews with Heads of AP.

Interviews were recorded on digital dictaphones and transcribed into hard copy and these were then coded by each member of the research team and cross-referenced to their field notes. All transcripts were made anonymous and pseudonyms allocated to participants to ensure that any quotations used in the final evaluative reports, or subsequent articles, could not be traced to their original source (Alderson and Morrow, 2004).

Data analysis then followed the principles outlined by Stake (1995); an iterative and reflexive process that begins at the outset of the initial interviews and continues throughout all phases of the data collection. The research team then met at regular points throughout the fieldwork to undertake progressive focussing (Parlett and Hamilton, 1976) and subsequent categorisation and moderation of the data. Progressive focussing was employed to enable a systematic reduction of broad categories of data and to ensure 'unique and unpredicted phenomena' were made visible in the analysis (Parlett and Hamilton 1976, 20). Categories were then further refined through a collective critical reading of researcher coding and justification of data interpretation.

This paper then reports four evaluative case studies preceded by an exploratory study of perceptions of risk from the perspective of children and young people in primary and secondary school settings. A 12-month study of pupil perceptions of risk was carried out. Designed to elicit perceptions of risk from the perspective of children and young people in primary and secondary school settings in two West Midland Authorities in the United Kingdom, the research design employed focus groups to explore the perceptions of children and young people as they approached the end of primary-phase and secondary-phase schooling. Involving seven primary schools, six secondary schools and a community-based centre, a total of 97 participants were involved in 14 separate focus group interviews. After the exploratory study, four interrelated evaluation case studies were undertaken with multi-stage data collection, involving pupils, teachers, teaching assistants, headteachers, AP centre heads, parents and an LA adviser for AP. Data was collected using semi-structured interviews; face-to-face with the young people, behaviour coordinators, governors, Headteachers, Senior Management Teams (SMT), a representative of SMT, teaching staff, teaching assistants, and telephone interviews with; non-attending pupils and some parents. Survey method, including online questionnaires, was also employed generating data from headteachers, AP managers and centre heads.

The significant time period of the evaluations combined with the different orientation of the first of these presented a number of challenges for the evaluators in summarising the data. While each study was subject to the data processes described above, the compilation of evaluation data aligned with the principles of an 'inclusive framework' described by Onwuegbuzie and Combs (2010). This they consider to be a means of both guidance and structure for researchers in analysing data (typologies, models, paths, etc) but, moreover, necessary for establishing a common language for 'labeling and describing analysis strategies for the field' while also enabling 'directions for future development of analytical strategies' (Onwuegbuzie and Combs, 2010,398). The outcomes of each evaluation, while freestanding, then also significantly contributed to the design of the subsequent commissions and their configuration as collective case studies (Goddard, 2010).

Discussion and Findings

From the combined data analysis, three significant categories of evaluation were present. The first of these concerns the increasing complexity of needs amongst children and young people as they attempt to navigate their way through school systems, the lifeworld and its bearing on personal wellbeing ; the second concerns the often profound consequences of unsuccessful transitions between key phases/stages of education and progression to employment; and the third concerning assumptions around mainstream reintegration, the so-called 'managed move' and the problematisation of the advocacy for 'restore and return'. In the first category we turn to the issue of complexity.

Complexity of needs

In conducting fieldwork evaluations over a period of six years we are left with little doubt that the lifeworld for children and young people has become increasingly complex to navigate. In attempting to make sense of these contemporary conditions we have been assisted by what has become a prescient account of the concept of 'supercomplexity' advanced by Ronald Barnett, (2000). In his reading of complexity Barnett asserts that there are a number of interrelated phenomena that have arisen out of the confluence of contexts that epitomise a so-called 'global age' and which confront the 'triple challenges' of our understanding, our self-identity and our actions. Amongst these phenomena Barnett points to arrival of an information society, characterised by a compression of time and space; a proliferation of sites of knowledge production and the multiplication of what might be constituted as legitimate knowledge (Barnett, 2000, 257). Amongst these conditions Barnett identifies two further dimensions that have been the subject of significant interest to educational researchers – the effects of performativity and the effects of risk; the former drawing on the work of Jean-Francoise Lyotard (1984) involving the macro-societal pursuit of efficiency and outcomes governed by narrow bureaucratic forms of output and accountability, and the latter in the work of Ulrich Beck's thesis of 'de-bounded' uncontrollable risk, (2002, 41) with consequential feelings of vulnerability. In conditions of supercomplexity, however, the very frameworks in which we orientate ourselves not only become unstable but, moreover, are in themselves fundamentally contested. For Barnett, supercomplexity 'denotes a fragile world'...

...brought on not merely by social and technological change; it is a fragility in the way that we understand the world, in the way in which we understand ourselves and in the ways in which we feel secure about acting in the world.

(Barnett, 2000, 257)

Supercomplexity then offers a useful framework for beginning to both explain and understand some of the antecedent causes of particular behaviours and the significant effects of this on the lives of young people in educational settings. All four evaluations revealed an increase in concerns amongst stakeholders over the range of complex needs amongst children and young people that schools and Alternative providers are now obliged to address. As the following accounts from Headteachers, Governors and pupils bear testimony to:

'We see fight and flight anxiety, we've got bereavement, neglect, lack of parent interaction. It's huge.'

(Primary Headteacher 1)

Governor 1: 'The impression I get that there's an overwhelming demand out there for services for kids with mental health problems.'

Interviewer: 'So for three of you then, the mental health issues are significant?'

Governor 2: 'Huge'

Governor 1: 'In this broadest sense, if you include drugs and alcohol...'

The following examples from a Secondary and a Primary Headteacher, a Head of Service and Head of Centre were indicative of the same concerns:

'A lot of these young people have mental health problems...every week there is a new... a new scenario that has come out with a pupil, a different pupil, a group of students who are worried about their friends so you speak to them and suddenly they disclose that 'ah yeah I've felt like this for 2 or 3 years' and you're like crikey, you're now in year 10, what were the signs, what were the symptoms? And these young people mask them really well.'

'...depression [seems] to be the norm.'

They also highlight the contemporary scope and complexity of Alternative Provision. Transcending an often common perception of AP as shorthand for PRUs for excluded pupils, as the following pupil accounts vividly demonstrate, the reasons for entering Alternative Provision are varied and frequently have powerful underlying histories:

'...when my mom had a baby and he passed away after 5 days and ever since then I was just really depressed and I didn't know what to do. I was insecure and things, I was always telling myself that I didn't want to live anymore.'

(Pupil 1)

[on being bullied]

'...it's like torment, it's not major, it's just torment... in year 6 they diagnosed me with stress migraines and then we knew it was getting a bit much, it was actually physically hurting me...it was all caused through stress, I was being sick... I'd stopped trusting everyone at school, I'd stopped trusting everyone, I got very depressed.'

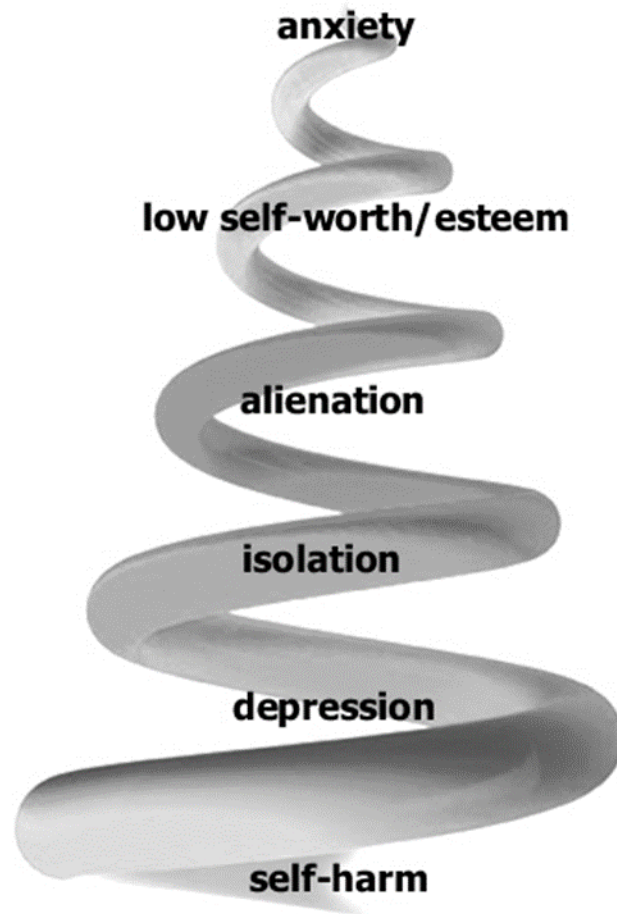
(Pupil 10)

'Well Dad having an affair was probably the main reason I stopped going but then other things.... I was fighting a lot at school, doing drugs...can't really remember now. I was just really stressed all the time.'

(Pupil 7)

While the examples cited above are indicative of a range of socio-cultural factors that affect young people, it is also important to note in the penultimate example the spiral of effects that lead to poor mental health amongst young people and their consequential referral to AP. In our evaluation findings we have found it helpful to express this in the form of a descending and expanding spiral.

Figure 1: A Spiral of Vulnerabilities – Anxiety to Self-Harm



It is in this spiral form that we have been concerned to note both the velocity and amplification of potential mental health concerns for young people from an early onset of anxiety to one of depression and self-harm. It may then be a reasonable assumption that schools are well-positioned to offer appropriate pastoral support for children and young people who find themselves in such circumstances. Our evaluation evidence, however, corroborates a picture of somewhat disturbing policy effects framed by the conditions of supercomplexity, specifically in the domain of performativity, as the following accounts bear testimony to:

'It started in year 7 [age 11] at this school and then, I think it was about in year 10 [age 14] that it got a bit too much; like I couldn't really cope. It was all the lessons and all the revision.'

(Secondary School pupil)

'They're bombarded constantly with 'I'm not good enough', whether it be outside socially and then in school that 'I'm not meeting the national curriculum', 'I'm not meeting that required attainment'. We don't say that to our children but our children know which ones are in the group at the bottom.'

(Primary School Headteacher)

'The majority of students who have behavioural difficulties are from [...] The students that come out of schools in [...] are often girls who are highly anxious and self-harm and that might be to do with the pressures that some schools put on them in terms of academic [attainment]'

(Head of Service)

Hence, from the evaluation data, no matter how well-intentioned schools might be in wishing to safeguard children and young people against detrimental mental health, in the perpetuation of performative cultures they find themselves complicit in the generation of conditions that effectively exacerbate this. From the most recent evaluation case study, the comments from the Head of Service reflects an emerging category of the effects of performative cultures on the well-being of young people and the differences in perception and consequent intervention. In region X, an area of high socio-economic deprivation, referrals to AP are typically categorised in the domain of behaviour and attachment disorders, while in region Y, an area of affluent middle-class households, referrals predominantly relate to either a diagnosed special educational need or as a consequence of performative-related anxiety. From the standpoint of this evaluation, it reveals not only the spiralling effects of performative cultures in various forms of anxiety, low self-esteem, depression, and self-harm as a reason for referral amongst children and young people from middle class households but one which children and young people from less affluent areas are less likely to be considered to be exposed to. Hence, our data in this evaluation corroborates a pathologisation of particular communities of children and young people from working class communities that in turn, lead to forms of differentiated intervention.

Key Stage Transitions

The evaluations revealed common concerns between young people and those responsible for their welfare regarding the processes and quality associated with

transitions from primary to secondary school, between key stages and from secondary school to post-compulsory and employment contexts. In the first of these reported concerns, the disconnect between teacher–pupil relationships previously enjoyed at primary school, and feelings of being ‘lost’, physically and emotionally, within secondary schools were recurrent for a number of pupils. Representing this perspective, one young person reported:

‘... in Year 7 it took me time to settle down, and I don’t think they [teachers] handle it in the right way ... Like they don’t understand you are coming from a primary school to a secondary school, it is a big move, they are still children, they are not mature yet, they are not teenagers yet...’

Some young people described their experiences in ways that we have interpreted as significant affective disturbance. Feelings of being ‘lost’, both in geographical space and in terms of cognitive and affective orientation, were common themes in the interviews.

‘Well it was just really ‘cause I couldn’t cope with mainstream school cause of how big it was, it smelt really weird and it was just like everyone was being really loud and there were tons of people there so it was really busy.’

(Pupil 8)

‘Transition is a huge negative for them, I just think it is the whole... the primary school, the nurturing, small environment, you don’t move around the school going to classrooms and then suddenly you’re put in this big secondary school and it is a case of, you know, you’ve got a lesson there, a lesson there, a lesson there, the noise, the volume, it’s just a very different experience for them.’

(Head of Centre 2)

‘...this young lad was just in the wrong school. He was in a mainstream school and that poor lad just couldn’t cope with everything that a mainstream school was. He couldn’t cope with being in a classroom with 30 pupils, he couldn’t cope with the level of noise in a school of this size, he couldn’t cope with the movement around school, there were so many things that he genuinely couldn’t cope with.’

(Primary Headteacher 2)

‘Even for me now, when I visit all the schools and I go round all the schools, I walk in to some schools and I think ‘whoa, this really is an assault on the senses’. So for a child, who has any of those issues it’s a big no no.’

(Head of Service)

As some respondents observed, problems around transition are not restricted to Key Stage 2/3 (Primary/Secondary). As one respondent noted, the challenges for young people in accommodating increasingly performative challenges are now emerging in relation to Key Stage 1/2 (Infant and Junior) transition:

'We think that, potentially, those years are getting more difficult because the children move from the key stage 1 into key stage 2. In the key stage 1 they're in a more nurturing environment and then they go into key stage 2 and that's where it doesn't suit them. So they either react straight away or they react the following year...'

(Head of Centre 3)

Chiming with other studies of primary–secondary school transition, it seems that when transition is managed badly the effects can negatively impact upon the academic performance, personal well-being and mental health of young people (Zeedyk et al. 2003; McGee et al. 2004). The Key Stage 3 phase of education appears not only to signify entry into the different environment of the secondary school, but for some pupils, these years also represent a period in which the initial traumas of primary–secondary phase transition are amplified, or incrementally condensed. In other words, it is a transition from childhood to adulthood that occurs whilst also dealing with complex patterns of interaction and dependence. Earl (1999), for example, views the middle years of schooling from the perspective of three simultaneous transitions: Adolescents in transition from childhood to adulthood; the world in transition from separate societies to more complex patterns of interaction and dependence; and schools in transition from a style that worked well for most of the twentieth century to one that will prepare students for life in the twenty-first century.

It is evident from our evaluations that for some pupils behavioural problems triggered by school transition are sustained and exacerbated across the transition from primary to secondary schooling and into their later school careers. Echoing the previously noted findings of earlier studies of transition (Galton and Hargreaves, 2002 and Stobart and Stoll, 2010) this comment links with the observations in Jindal-Snape and Foggie's (2008, 5) study of transition in Scotland. In that study, profound anxieties were often experienced by pupils in relation to secondary school timetables

and the perceived dangers of simply getting lost in large and unfamiliar school buildings were noted. Data analysis from our evaluations suggests that negative behaviour is magnified when the emotional effects of transition are inadequately managed. Furthermore, pupil accounts demonstrate that, when left unaddressed, negative effects of transition are carried and amplified across the phase of education to the extent that the negative legacies of failed school transitions have emerged as a recurrent theme in the accounts of young offenders and prisoners' (see Graham, 2014).

Year 10 (the start of Key Stage 4 for 14 year olds) was widely regarded by young people as the year in which past misdemeanours and behaviour histories were to be set aside, in favour of an imagined future, where educational achievements and behaviour would be transformed. Amongst the pupil perspectives in AP PRUs, 'knuckling down' and 'stepping up' were cited by a significant number of pupils as their opportunity to 'make good'. For many pupils Year 10 was seen as a vital entrée into the arena of qualification acquisition and the job market. Ryan's perception of Year 10 was typical of many of the pupil respondents.

'... I know I mess around in Year 9, but like as soon as I hit Year 10 I am going to knuckle down and like concentrate, and like, because it is me and what I have picked is what I have chosen, so like I know what I have picked I can't dislike or like. I can't dislike because it is my choice, so I should be fine because I am going to like subjects I picked on my own.'

Key Stage 4 was then seen as a departure from the formal and mandated curriculum offered at Key Stage 3. The Key Stage 4 General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE), which is the public examination system in England offers some pupil choice of curriculum subject and therefore can represent the promise of a new beginning for improved pupil behaviour, based on a perception that these choices provide an authentic opportunity for pupil autonomy and independence. The considered introduction of choice, opportunity and independence has significant implications for the perceived absence of these characteristics in the Key Stage 3 programme.

Interviews with behaviour coordinators reinforced a lack of realism displayed by some young people with long histories of poor behaviour. They argued that major blockages to learning were embedded and that these effectively prevented change. The young people were seen as being 'saddled with a record', that they had 'learnt

the rhetoric of bad behaviour' and 'played to the peer gallery for too long'. For one coordinator the opportunity for reform was challenged by '13 different subjects, 13 different rooms, 13 different faces'. The point was consistently made that Key Stage 4 requirements would prove overwhelming for some young people and they would return to previous forms of poor behaviour.

Behaviour coordinators identified the Key Stage 3 to 4 transitions as complex and a particular challenge for managing pupil behaviour in relation to academic, emotional, pastoral and biological factors. One behaviour coordinator summarised his perception of 'biological' transitional factors:

'We have also got the sort of biological hormonal factors in terms of Year 9. Again, as I said, it sort of tends to dip into the second half of Year 8 now but it is also thinking about it in terms of their life's span in educational settings. It is almost a midpoint in their life in a secondary school.'

While the challenges around primary-secondary phase transition are widely reported and corroborate our findings, the problematic nature of post 16-progression is also reported in the evaluation data. Specifically, the binary of vocational and academic education would appear to endure from the perspective of both staff and young people in our evaluations. In particular, the issue of narrow academic-vocational pathways was a repeated concern. This was in part the product of a belief amongst some teachers about the inability of young people to cope with the challenges of a so-called 'academic education' and also a predetermination of what was considered to be an 'appropriate' career path. While the narrowing of the so called 'academic' curriculum and associated performance measures at KS4 can be attributed to recent Government shifts in policy, opportunities for a richer vocational education appears to be still somewhat distant.

Throughout the evaluation data we repeatedly encountered the polarisation of academic and vocational pathways with the latter predominantly, although not exclusively, reserved for young people entering from AP. More troublingly for those students orientated towards so-called practical or non-academic routes, the options are typically restricted to enduring gendered stereotyped options of construction and

vehicle mechanics for boys and health and beauty or childcare for girls – as one of the respondents succinctly put it, ‘hair and bricks’:

‘You’ve got places like [...] who offer more practical based...you know, car mechanics, engineering and your typical bricklaying, plastering, hairdressing etc, and it is a more vocational route instead of an academic route. And two or three students really liked the idea of that ‘cause it gives them a chance to be more hands on, more practical.’

(Secondary Headteacher 1)

Taken as a whole, however, responses from young people often illustrate a progressively subtler reading of vocational aspirations, as the responses from these young men and one young woman illustrate:

‘I want to join the army or I want to go into construction – brick laying - for a very big company that my dad works for.’

(Pupil 3)

‘I’d have to like work with my hands. Like do something physical cause I don’t want to sit behind a desk or anything. Electrics course, like fitting electrics in houses, installations and all that.’

(Pupil 5)

‘I tried to apply to Land Rover for an apprenticeship but it was too late so I’m going to do a year of engineering in college, ‘cause that’s what you’re meant to do in Land Rover – and then get an apprenticeship in Land Rover but obviously I’d have a bit of experience of what to do... in Land Rover they’ve got a young women’s apprenticeship which they take young women on cause it’s mainly men that work there.’

(Female Pupil 6)

Interviewer: ‘Where do you see yourself in the future after leaving this? If the engineering college doesn’t work what else are you going to do?’

Female Pupil 6: ‘Hair and beauty.’

This last exchange between interviewer and young person distils both the opportunity and despair within the current and continuing polarisation of vocational-academic education in England. While not intending to denigrate those occupations and those students for whom this will provide aspirational and fulfilling work, it does, however, continue to affirm a long-standing and on-going poverty of occupational and career scope for many young people leaving AP. In this regard initiatives such as that

reported by the female pupil respondent may provide an important illumination of future possibilities for those students whose preference is for active (as opposed to sedentary) and kinaesthetic (as opposed to abstract) work.

Contrasting responses: managed moves and multi-agency approaches

The findings from the evaluations further reveal two contrasting approaches to the framing and response to the behaviours of young people. In one authority the alignment between young people, their behavioural histories and the suitability of their institutional setting was orchestrated through the use of the 'managed moves', in which schools operated a collaborative assessment and decision making panel to 'share' pupils within the school network including AP. While findings from the Local Authority evaluation have pointed to the value of some short-term placements in AP for some young people, in contrast the evaluation data also reveals concerns regarding the efficacy of 'managed moves'. For many of the pupil respondents in the evaluations, details concerning the arrangements for their placement in AP, PRUs or alternative secondary schools were poorly communicated. As a consequence, young people were often either absent from or left unclear about the discussions concerning their immediate future and the duration of attendance in AP. As the following indicative accounts illustrate, the strategy of managed moves is problematic.

Interviewer: 'Have you had any discussions with staff members here about going back to mainstream school?'

Pupil: 'About going back to mainstream, nope, never... that's not even in my head anymore. I'm not even bothered about mainstream school. I would like to go back innit like if I had the chance to I would innit, but I'm not gonna have the chance and I'm.... and even when I do have the chance and I get back into a mainstream school I end up getting kicked out again. Even as much as I try, I just think mainstream is not for me.'

As the Heads of Centre and one Secondary Headteacher expressed the problem:

'...bouncing them around other institutions will make them feel as if they're a real... an oddball, someone who can't settle, they've lost their identity, they want to misbehave because that's the way they're getting treated, they're getting treated with no respect.'

(Secondary Headteacher 1)

'...we know from the data we've looked at that managed moves in the main are failing – and I think we haven't got that process right. So I think where it's worked is where I've been able to say to the schools: 'I'll keep them on dual registration' cause at the end of the day they are worried about registration, about results and things and rightly so in a way.... Now, I have presented students in the past and there's just been tumbleweed. Nobody wants to take them...I've found that I get a better response if I make a phone call and use relationships. Now it shouldn't be about that.'

(Head of Centre 1)

From the parental perspective:

'...this is his third managed move now. At his first school he just didn't seem to settle and once his name was known it was like he was in trouble for absolutely everything. There was a few times where I had to challenge things that they'd accused him of and it was found that he wasn't actually responsible; it was just cause he was there. But because he had made a name for himself that sort of went against him. So he left that school, went to another school – again that didn't work out. I don't know what it is with x... in my personal opinion, he's not academic. He's very capable – and all the teachers will say that he's very capable of doing what he needs to do, he just doesn't do it. He's not the academic type. In subjects such as cooking and science he excels; he's brilliant in those. If you ask him to write anything down, he doesn't like doing that.'

And from the Governor's perspective:

'The secondary school - you might as well be a million miles away; they have a perception of what happens in x [in] the way some of our schools have a perception of what goes on in the PRU. Until you're actually part of the whole system you're not going to understand it and you're not going to be able to support the children effectively.'

(Governor)

Hence, from our evaluation data, aspirations for pupil reintegration into mainstream school and the strategy of the managed moved does not adequately address the complexities of experience and competing interests that surround AP and short-term placements. Criticisms of the 'repair and return' model of AP usage in England have also been reported in Pennacchia and Thomson's (2016) case studies of AP and in this regard our evaluations corroborate their findings that some young people

continue to have profound and unnecessary difficulty in navigating their way through the practices of the managed move and AP.

In contrast to the managed move and 'repair and return', a more positive recurrent theme in the evaluation data from the perspective of the key stake-holders, leaders, managers and governors was the emphasis on multi-agency working. Involving a range of professional and para-professional roles including counsellors, educational psychologists, family support workers, health workers, police community support officers (PCSOs) and social workers were all regarded as essential interrelated professional functions in the work of AP. The following responses were indicative of the expressed views concerning the need for multi-agency approaches:

'...there are some cases where really the family are so dysfunctional that it needs to be multi-agency and we don't necessarily have the support from social services to have the behind-school supporting the family to enable the young people to be successful. So, again, we've tried to do that ourselves, we've actually employed a social worker and that social worker works with some of the families, but then we can't reach all the families.'

(Secondary Head 2)

The respondent observation and comments are also indicative of the challenges around engaging and sustaining multi-professional work. Indeed, the challenges that surround the development of effective multi-professional practice are well documented both in-terms of inter-professional interaction and resource demands (Home Office, 2014; Reeves et al, 2008; Robinson and Cottrell, 2005). Responses from across the range of providers, however, presented an unequivocal desire and demand for relatively modest forms of multi-professional support and care to support some of the vulnerable children and young people. This in turn has further ramifications with regard to the paucity of systematic continuing professional development for teachers and educational professionals and effective interprofessional collaboration in the context of AP.

Conclusion

The reasons why young people find themselves in Alternative Provision are, as our evaluation data demonstrates, both varied and complex. The testimonies of young people have, in particular, shown how the fragility of understanding the world, understanding of self and security about acting in the world are vivid in the lifeworld of young people as they attempt to navigate the supercomplexities of the contemporary social context. In turn, the evaluation data has shown how the early onset of manageable mental health and well-being concerns if left unchecked can spiral into more profound issues of negative self-worth and potential for significant self-harm. While the palpable effects and conditions of 'supercomplexity' are evidentially a more recent phenomenon in the lifeworld of young people, as our findings show, the origins of this often begins early in the educational lifecourse at the end of Primary phase education and with long-term consequences, which for some young people extend into their adult lives. In this regard our evaluation findings corroborate an already existing research literature that identifies significant concerns about stage-related discontinuities in school systems and the holistic development of young people.

As the evaluation data has located continuing weaknesses in the school transition processes between primary and secondary phases, for many young people the transition into work and employment is another problematic area where vocational scope and personal agency have been shown to be significantly restricted. In attempting to address student well-being and the challenges of lifecourse transitions we encountered examples of schools and alternative providers that have committed both a wider professional imagination and financial resource to interprofessional approaches to pupil support. In these instances, schools and providers have articulated their concerns over the significant shortcomings of 'managed moves' practices while 'repair and return' strategies run significant risks of the medicalisation and pathologisation of young people as the perceived objects of necessary treatment. In contrast to the 'managed moves' and 'repair and return' a minority of schools and providers have been quick to recognise the strength and efficacy of interprofessional approaches that draw on a range of professional expertise predicated on a fluency of collaborative shared imperatives of care and wellbeing. It is in this latter domain that there is not only much work to do in the training and

professional accreditation of those working with vulnerable young people in AP but also in the domain of interprofessional cultures and practice.

The commitment of financial resources for AP by senior key stakeholders in the evaluation case studies is then predominantly based on the pursuit of these two approaches to the management of student welfare; either through the movement and placement of young people within school networks, or the rationalisation/creation of centralised AP provision particularly through the English education policy apparatus of the Free School. While this offers some explanation of the absence of resourcing as a key concern amongst individual stakeholders and staff in the interview data, it is also illustrative of the predominant binary in AP of 'repair and return' and 'fresh start' approaches. Although concerns over the negative relationship between school exclusion and AP have only recently become a matter of cross-party ministerial concern (House of Commons Education Committee, July 2018), a number of schools in the evaluation case studies had committed their own modest resources to the development of the sorts of inter-agency strategies described above as an effective means of pre-empting referral to AP. Whether such approaches can be sustained under the current funding regime, however, is highly uncertain. The commitment to funding each of the evaluations by the separate commissioning bodies is nonetheless indicative of the current equivocation surrounding strategy and resourcing of AP. In addition, the attraction of participatory-collaborative evaluation, with its alignment to stakeholders expressed values concerning AP, was in preference to a framework of inspection that was perceived by many to have significant shortcomings with regard to the often unique characteristics of AP.

Amongst the starkest aspects of the evaluations, and the most recent of our evaluation findings, have been the reported effects of performative school cultures on young people. Much has been said in the research literature about Lyotardian performativity and its corrosive effects on profession and school effectiveness, but until recently the claimed effects of performativity on young people has tended to be speculative rather than grounded in empirical studies conducted from the standpoint of human rights and social justice where young people are considered as critical informants and reliable witnesses. In this regard the interviews with young people and adult informants have shown how performative school cultures are now having direct consequential effects on the well-being of young people. Significantly, the

evaluation findings show that these effects are not restricted to young people who struggle with mainstream school contexts or have significant mitigating factors, but now extends to young people for whom the relentless pursuit of performance outcome has resulted in them being cast as performance capital (Trotman and Tucker, 2018) with consequential negative impact on their mental well-being. There is then a manifold range of challenges for alternative providers in meeting the complex individual needs of children and young people in an educational policy context that has directly contributed to consequential negative effects. While English ministerial focus remains firmly on Free School AP as part of a wider policy preoccupation with Free Schools, our evaluation findings point in a different direction. This requires recognition of the damaging effects of unmediated dimensions of supercomplexity for young people; recognition and resourcing of interprofessional strategies in schools and AP; and a tempering of the worst performative aspects of education policy by policy makers.

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